

LAST EXTINCTION

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What killed the mammoths? Near the end of the last ice age 13,000 years ago, these mighty beasts disappeared from North America together with some 35 other groups of mammals, including mastodons, giant ground sloths, saber-tooth cats, lions, and even camels. For four decades, debate has raged over the cause of their abrupt demise. In *Last Extinction*, NOVA presents an exclusive in-depth investigation of a bold and controversial new hypothesis which suggests that a massive impact from space could be the culprit. According to the theory, an incoming comet broke up over North America in a devastating series of explosions, kindling widespread forest fires and wiping out plants, animals, and prehistoric people. The evidence comes from a mysterious “black mat” layer discovered at more than fifty sites across the continent. The black mat contains exotic materials — including rare microscopic “nanodiamonds” — that are claimed to be the signature of an extraterrestrial impact. But other scholars question the evidence and argue that ancient hunters armed with a lethal stone weapon, “the Clovis spear point,” drove the giant beasts into oblivion. Still others believe the unstable climate at the end of the Ice Age was responsible. NOVA explores the dramatic new evidence of a cosmic explosion and the possibility that all three explanations may be correct— that mammoths and mastodons already stressed by human “overkill” and climate change may have delivered a fiery coup-de-grace as devastation swept across the continent.

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CREDITS

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