

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Luis Alvarez

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Luis Alvarez was the second-born of four children. His father, Walter Alvarez, was a physician and researcher, while his mother, Harriet Alvarez, had trained as a schoolteacher. In fact, Luis's mother taught him at home for his second grade year. As a child, Luis often accompanied his father to his research laboratory. While he wasn't very interested in his father's medical experiments, he was fascinated by the lab's electrical equipment. He learned how to use many of the smaller tools.

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2. b'

Luis Alvarez attended the University of Chicago, where he studied cosmic rays with a famous physicist named Arthur Compton. A cosmic ray is a tiny particle just a fragment of an atom that has a large amount of energy. These energetic particles can travel very fast, nearly at the speed of light. Cosmic rays originate from outside the solar system, though scientists have not yet determined their exact source. Many scientists suspect that cosmic rays are created by star explosions.

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3. b'

In the 1960s, Alvarez used cosmic rays to scan an Egyptian pyramid for hidden chambers. Although he didn't find any, he proved the technique's effectiveness. In 2017, scientists used the same technique to scan the Great Pyramid of Giza. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world, this pyramid was constructed over 4,000 years ago. This time, the cosmic rays revealed a chamber that no one had known about. However, what the chamber was used for remains a mystery.

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4. b'

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Luis Alvarez's son Walter Alvarez was a geologist. One day, Walter showed his father an interesting rock that he had chiseled from an Italian mountain gorge. The rock had a half-inch layer of clay in the middle. Walter explained that the clay layer in the rock had been laid down 65 million years ago and it was seen not just in Italy, but throughout the world. Luis Alvarez thought this was astounding, and he had the clay analyzed. It turned out to contain a huge amount of iridium, which is an element that is plentiful in space but rare on Earth.

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5. b'

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The Alvarazes concluded that the clay's iridium came from a giant asteroid. According to their Alvarez hypothesis, the asteroid had crashed into Earth and wiped out the dinosaurs. Many people thought this idea was incorrect. They said it was more likely that the dinosaurs disappeared gradually rather than all at once. As for the iridium in the clay, some argued that it didn't necessarily come from space. Since iridium is also found in volcanoes, they proposed that it was laid down as the result of a volcanic explosion. Despite the arguments, the Alvarazes never backed down. In 1991, a gigantic crater was discovered off the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. This crater served as strong evidence for the asteroid collision. Today, the Alvarez impact theory is largely accepted.

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