

# Lesson 20: The Triassic

After the Great Dying, Earth was quiet. Most of the Permian world was gone. But the planet was not dead. A few survivors remained in a devastated landscape, and over millions of years, those survivors would rebuild a living world, different from what came before, and in some ways more extraordinary. The **Triassic** Period, from about 252 to 201 million years ago, was the age of recovery. And out of that recovery rose an animal that would dominate the next 160 million years: the dinosaur.

The survivors of the Great Dying included a group of reptiles called **archosaurs**. From this group, two great lineages would eventually emerge: pterosaurs, the first flying vertebrates, and **dinosaurs**. The earliest dinosaurs were small and quick, nothing like the giants that would follow. Their key advantage was posture. A dinosaur's legs were positioned directly beneath its body, like a dog's or a bird's. This made them **bipedal** in many cases, walking upright on two legs, freeing the arms, and gave them a more efficient, less tiring stride. In a recovering world where efficiency mattered, this was a decisive edge.

Each species fills a **niche**, a role in the ecosystem defined by what it eats, where it lives, and how it interacts with other species. After the Great Dying, countless niches were empty. Dinosaurs, with their efficient bodies and adaptable diets, filled niche after niche as the world recovered. Early mammals also appeared during the Triassic, tiny, fur-covered, nocturnal creatures that hid carefully in the dinosaurs' shadow. They would wait a very long time for their opportunity.

The Triassic was the opening chapter of the **Mesozoic Era**, the Age of Reptiles, which would last for nearly 190 million years. It was a time of rebirth and reinvention. The survivors of catastrophe had inherited a changed world, and they were making it their own. The stage was being set for something spectacular.