

Courier News

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When Charles Port was in his 20s, he and his wife were so poor they had to use their families for room and board.  
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# RAINBOW AISLES ALL FORTS?

Take a look into the wacky world of fabulous, freaky Fortean Phenomena and explore the unexplained

by Kelly Miller Hahn

Somewhere between fact and fantasy, Charles Fort discovered a world of mystery in the early 1900s - unusual events whose either ignored or could not explain. For 27 years, Fort wrote about these bizarre occurrences. If a storm cloud filled with rain and fat frogs, if eggplants dropped dead as they opened themselves, if crop circles appeared in a farmer's field, Fort was in the scene to capture the details.

Fort gathered, organized and commented on a wild host of phenomena. UFOs, clouds of living animals, poltergeists, ghosts and psychic phenomena, earthquakes and volcanoes, astronomical mysteries, spontaneous human combustion, disappearing people and much more," says the International Fortean Organization in College Park, Maryland.

Obviously, Fort's readers, fans and followers looked at him hard by calling them mystical happenings. Fortean Phenomena. The term not only encompasses a dedicated researcher, it gave a name to the study of things unexplained.

Today, a handful of organizations follow in Fort's footsteps and investigate. They insist the mysteries continue, and so does human curiosity.

"In this day-and-age, there can be no experts, only people who honestly want to find knowledge and the business of standing," says Bob Rickard, editor of the British publication "Fortean Times." "It's not about hoarding it and scholarship is to."

"Hoarding" means trying to fool the public with a make-believe or set-up mysterious event. And such false accounts have been a problem for Fortean fans for decades. People who see the unknown try to discredit real mysteries by creating false ones.

Even before Fort's time, in the 1830s, journalist Richard Adams Locke pulled what would have been called a Fortean hoax using the "New York Star" newspaper. Locke claimed British

astronomer Sir John Herschel had made "great astronomical discoveries" about the moon using a microscope. The moon looked like a mountain, moon lakes, moon vegetation and moon animals. Not a word was true. Skeptics tried to convince the world that, in 1838, Herschel was on the moon also as a Fortean hoax. But NASA managed to quiet most of that uncertainty.

"Charles Fort once said the business of fooling out to be fooled in people with closed minds," Rickard explains. "But we find more an essential attitude in any age about the strange, and we encourage skepticism."

What are some of the most famous Fortean events? Karpagor in Chicago and Fort in Cheltenham, England, says Paul Servino, also an editor for "Fortean Times."

Experts at INFO the International Fortean Organization have explored the unexplained so much, they've put Fort, a special collection each year. "INFO was created in 1980 and is dedicated to continuing Fort's research," says president and conference chairperson Phyllis Benveniste. She says that people interested in the organization have "intrigued by the baffling and often hilarious unexplained."

As mysterious as it all seems, when it comes to Fort, there's one thing that is relatively certain. There always will be something new and utterly unbelievable to provide

# ORAN LEGENDS: IS THERE FACT BEHIND THE FABLE?

by Lisa M., age 11, La Mirada, California

A legend is a story that is passed on from one generation to the next. It is a story that is so old that no one knows when it was first told. It is a story that is so old that it is almost forgotten.

You've probably heard of a real story. "Thank you very much for your story," said the man. "You've been a great help to me. I'm sure you'll be able to help me in the future." The man was a very old man, and he was very wise. He had lived for many years, and he had seen many things. He had seen the world change, and he had seen the world stay the same.

These stories get passed through e-mail, newspapers and other means of communication. Some legends like the one about devils from something much longer, or from "fairy" that weren't people. With these unexplained complications, someone could say easily, "Oh, it was just a good story."

Although sometimes these stories are fun, like the story of a mysterious pet flower and other, many animals, sometimes they can cause real trouble. Legends and stories are passed on from one generation to the next. It is a story that is so old that it is almost forgotten.

# PLUG IT IN!

Whatzit? Freezone.com has two wacky things, and it's up to you to decide what the wackier result is called. It's freezone.com/tnr/whatzit/

The 1996 movie "Phenomena" starred John Travolta as a man who had super-intelligence and could move things with his mind. - Charles Fort is a real Fort in Kilmorie, County Cork, Ireland.

# MY OPINION

The strangest thing I've ever seen is probably when I was walking past my neighbor's house and saw her saying "oh, the boring!" I started to laugh hysterically and then she heard me, became sad and stopped right there.

- Christina, age 12, Chantilly, Va.

# What is the strangest thing you've ever seen?

I think that the strangest thing I've ever seen was when I was in a car and I saw a car crash. It was very scary and I was very sad.

- Cami, age 11, Pleasant Grove, Utah

I wish at the present festival and I saw a cow-head in the sky. It looked so weird, you would have to see it to believe it.

- Holly, age 14, Eufrata, Ala.

The strangest thing I have ever seen was when I was in a car and I saw a car crash. It was very scary and I was very sad.

- Cami, age 11, Pleasant Grove, Utah

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# PROJECT X

You have been asked to participate in Project X, a group that investigates Fortean phenomena. The answers to your questions will be posted on the Project X website.

1) X - O -

2) X - O -

3) X - O -

4) X - O -

5) O - X -

6) X - O -

7) X - O -

8) X - O -

9) X - O -

10) X - O -

11) X - O -

12) X - O -

13) X - O -