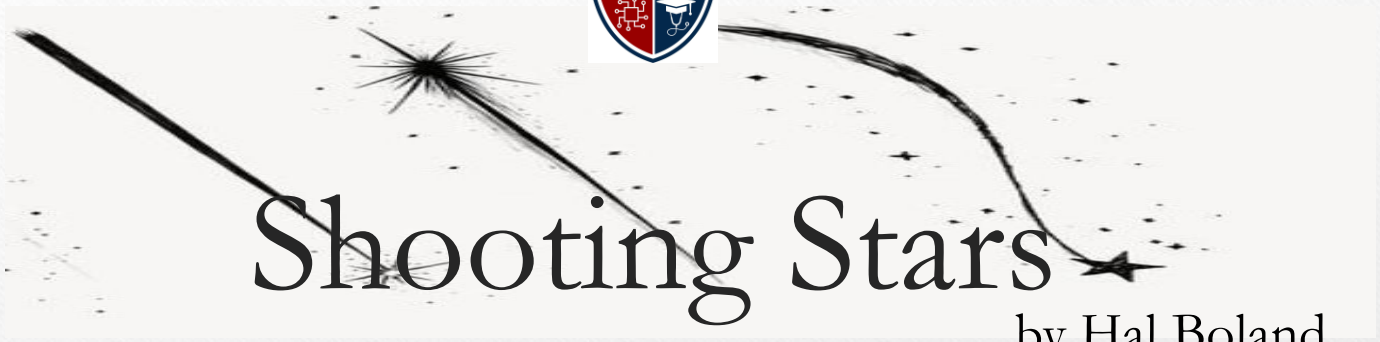


Shooting Stars

by Hal Boland

English – Part I

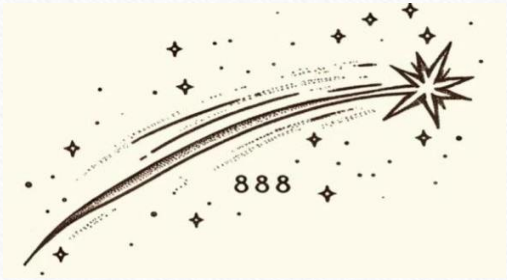
Ms. Hafsa

About the Writer

- Born in Sterling, Nebraska, USA
- Naturalist (studied animals and plants)
- Reporter for Denver Post and Brooklyn Times
- Wrote documentary film scripts, radio scripts, and non-fiction
- Honored by the National Audubon Society (Hal Borland Trail in Connecticut)
- His essay Shooting Stars shows fascination with nature & clear reporting style

Questions

- Define meteors?
- When do the biggest meteor showers occur?
- Describe the most unusual meteor shower ever reported.
- Give the reason of attributing so much value to meteorites
- Explain the effect of the largest meteorite that fell to earth?
- Why do you think scientists collect meteorites? What is it about meteors that stirs the imagination?
- Describe the difference between a scientific explanation and an explanation offered by a legend or myth?
- Can scientists learn something from legends or myths?



Text

Most clear, dark nights you can see a shooting star, as we call it, if you keep looking. Those shooting stars are meteors. They are points of light that suddenly appear in the sky, like distant stars, race across the darkness, usually towards the horizon, and disappear.

For a long time, nobody knew what a meteor was but finally those who studied stars and the sky decided that a meteor was a piece of a comet that exploded long ago. Those pieces are still wandering about the universe in huge, looping paths that follow the original comet's orbit. There are uncounted pieces of such comets out there in the depths of space. Periodically clusters of them come close to the earth's orbit, or path around the sun. Most meteors are small, probably only a few inches in diameter, but when they enter the earth's atmosphere the friction makes them white-hot. Then they look big as stars streaking across the darkness.

Text

There are half a dozen meteor showers each year. Each is named after the constellation from which it appears to come. The biggest of all, the Perseids, named for the constellation of Perseus, occurs on the 10th, 11th, and 12th of August. The next largest, the Leonidas, named for the constellation of Leo, comes on the nights of November 14, 15, and 16. Another, the Andromedids, which is not quite so big, comes from November 17 to 23. There are other meteor showers in December, January, April, May, and July, but none of them is as big as those in August and November.

While-reading

What are shooting stars?

Text

Most people watching meteors will be satisfied if they see ten or twenty in an hour of watching. On special occasions, however, the meteors seem to come in droves. The most remarkable meteor shower 1 ever heard of was seen by a distinguished astronomer, Professor Denison Olmstead, of New Haven, Connecticut, on the night of November 12, 1833. He was watching the Leonidas, which seem to come from directly overhead and race downward toward the horizon in all directions. He reported that meteors fell "like flakes of snow. " He estimated that he saw 240, 000 meteors in nine hours that night. He also revealed that they ranged in size from mere streaks of light to "globes of the moon's diameter. " If he had not been a notable astronomer whose accuracy was beyond question, such statements would seem ridiculous. But there is no reason to doubt what he reported. He had seen one of the most unusual meteor showers ever reported. What he watched should be called a meteor storm rather than a mere shower.

Activity

- Search about meteors and their origins
- Search names of famous meteors in history