

CHAT
(LONDON)
15 JULY 1989

IS E.T.

FOR REAL?

This week world experts gather in London to find out...

Visitors from outer space are the stuff science fiction is made of. But, every year, hundreds of people in Britain report sightings of UFOs — unidentified flying objects — and not all of these mystery apparitions can be explained away.

This weekend, 200 experts from all over the world are gathering in London for the International UFO Congress — the most serious worldwide bid so far to explain the inexplicable.

Sightings range from bright lights in the sky to the traditional little green men who step out of flying saucers and invite astonished Earthlings aboard for tea and cakes. Some sound like a joke but, for the people involved, the experience is no laughing matter.

Dynasty's Fallon may not have been the only person to be lured into an alien spaceship on a deserted road. Many Americans have come forward and claimed real-life close encounters.

American Whitley Strieber wrote a few years back about how he found himself inside a strange spaceship: 'To all appearances, I have had an elaborate personal encounter with intelligent non-human beings. But who could they be and where have they come from? This is the question which is puzzling the experts in London and they'll be studying many more strange stories of visitors from space.'

BIZARRE GOINGS-ON

Some of the UFOs could, in reality, be top-secret military aircraft and satellites, but officials will always deny they exist. Others are a figment of vivid imaginations. And some are due to freak weather conditions.

Last year, 885 cases were reported to the British Unidentified Flying Object Research Association, which works closely with police and air-traffic controllers to explain bizarre goings-on in the sky. And the Ministry of Defence, which also investigates UFOs, reported 400 cases last year — 250 more than the year before.

Even hard-to-convince experts can't find simple explanations for some of these sightings. Jenny Randles, Britain's only full-time UFOlogist, says that, out of the 885 sightings last year, 848 were not really UFOs.

For instance, in Lancashire, two ambulance men and three police officers noticed a dazzling light in the sky and were convinced it was a UFO. It turned out to be caused by a rapid change in temperature. 'They were grateful when we explained what had caused it,' Jenny says.

But what about the ones that Jenny and other experts can't find any explanation for? 'There are 37 from last year which, after all our investigations, are UFOs — unidentified flying objects.'

So, if the thought of flying saucers sets your head spinning, you are not alone. 'Anyone would be foolish to dismiss it,' Jenny says.

MYSTERIES OF SPACE

The following bizarre occurrences are just the tip of a vast, unexplored area scientists are still trying to understand — the mysteries of space. Is there anyone out there who knows the answers?

● Did this year's American space shuttle Discovery discover more than it intended? Experts believe the space shuttle flight in March may have had an unexpected encounter. According to American radio hams, the pilot was heard to say to NASA ground control: 'Houston, this is Discovery. We still have the alien spacecraft under observation.' Then it's claimed Discovery lost power and UFO observers say this could mean the other-worldly rocket had looked into its controls. NASA won't admit anything strange happened — they always deny UFO reports.

● When East Anglian schoolboy Peter Topham looked out of his bedroom window one night he couldn't believe what he saw. He swears the flashing red, green and purple lights in the nearby field came from a flying saucer. The next day he went to look at the place where he'd seen it land and found a 100ft-wide

circle where the crops had been flattened. The 'landing site' was still there when a UFO expert visited two weeks later.

● A group of journalists and travel agents were puzzled by the bizarre apparition they encountered this year. As they looked out of the plane window over Sardinia, they noticed multicoloured bright lights flash past. The strange lights vanished and suddenly reappeared in a blaze of colour. Some believe it could have been the Northern Lights — but they are never seen so far south. The truth is no one really knows what caused it.

IAN THOMAS

5 FANTASTIC ALIEN FACTS...

1. Therapy sessions are given to Americans who claim they have met aliens.
2. Surveys show that 1 in 5 Britons and 3 in 5 Americans believe in flying saucers.
3. The first flying saucer was seen in the 1940s near Mount Rainier, in Washington State, USA, by Kenneth Arnold. But, long before that, cave dwellers left drawings of strange objects visiting Earth.
4. People who claim to have encountered beings from other planets say they speak in croaky, garbled voices.
5. Space visitors, it's claimed, often reassure Earthlings by saying: 'We don't want to harm you.'