

The UFO Clans Gather

Some of the participants slipped out to watch a rerun of an old *Star Trek* episode. But most of the 350 delegates were more dedicated. After all, what brought them together last week in Fort Smith, Ark., was the world's first "serious" international UFO conference. It was also the first such gathering attended by U.S. official representatives.

As usual, the believers lambasted the Air Force and other authorities for suppressing UFO reports. Astronomer J. Allen Hynek of Northwestern University, the ranking UFO investigator and author of the recent book, *The UFO Experience*, accused the Air Force of "pigeonholing every UFO sighting as either conventional aircraft, balloons or natural phenomena in order to produce statistics showing a low number of unexplained cases."

Perhaps. But the conference heard little new evidence to shake skeptics, presumably including the observers from the Federal Aviation Administration and the North American Air Defense Command. Before repeating the tale of his brief "capture" by a spacecraft that landed near Pascagoula, Miss., in 1973, Fisherman Charles Hickson prudently refused to go through with a promised polygraph examination. On one thing the conferees did agree: in the future the squabbling UFO groups—the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO) and the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP)—will pool their findings and allow Hynek's new Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Ill., to act as a worldwide data bank. The irrepressible Hynek seemed equal to the honor. Declaring that far too much time has already been wasted trying to convince nonbelievers of the reality of UFOs, he said, "We need to stop arguing the existence of the eggs and get down to cooking the omelet."