

# Britain's Dr. Who Captivates Fans in U.S.

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HOLYOKE, Mass. — The convoy of rainbow-colored vehicles that was to bring the traveling "Dr. Who" exhibition to the parking lot at the Ingleside Shopping Mall was several hours late. About 30 fans who had turned up early one recent stormy afternoon to greet this latest spinoff of their favorite, BBC-produced, science-fiction television show were not about to leave. They were certain that Dr. Who, interplanetary voyager and champion of good over evil, would not let them down.

Toward early evening, the convoy rolled in. "Anyone who helps set up gets in free," shouted Brian Sloman, the BBC representative who has started a two-year, 181-city roadshow around the United States as a publicity tour.

"Dr. Who," carried on most public television stations across the country, is quietly scooping up a growing following of dedicated fans. They are forming clubs, attending special festivals and conferences, manning fund drives for their station, lobbying to make sure the program stays on the air and creating a subculture of like-minded folk who call themselves Whovians.

John Nathan-Turner, the producer of "Dr. Who," said that since Nov. 23, 1963, when the British Broadcasting Corporation broadcast the opening episode, the series had become a national institution in Britain and now had an estimated 110 million viewers in 60 countries around the world.

## A Lone Ranger in Space

What is the appeal of the show? An informal survey of the fans at the Ingleside Mall suggested it lies in a combination of clever, witty and unpredictable science-fiction scripts coupled with a wide range of story lines. It is also family entertainment that appeals to all ages.

Dr. Who is a sort of intergalactic Lone Ranger. He is the power of decency wrapped in hi-tech clothing, charging about the universe outwitting the forces of evil and arriving at places that lie in the future and those that are buried in the distant past.

The Dr. Who Fan Club of America, which has headquarters in Denver, says it has 50,000 members and its own publication, a quarterly called The Whovian Times.

Membership is increasing by about 400 a month, according to the club's founder and organizer, Ron Katz. "We just seem to keep growing and growing," he said.

## 8,000 Show Up in New York

In addition there are dozens of small independent clubs like the Union of Traken, a 40-member Dr. Who club organized last year specifically for teen-agers by Joe Spiegel, a 15-year-old in Stamford, Conn. Members meet at the local public library once a month to chat about recent episodes and swap tapes.

On Long Island, where members of Dr. Who clubs are mostly young adults, fans favor pool parties and

cabarets. Lionheart Television International, the United States distributor of the program, estimates that there are now 250,000 regular viewers nationwide.

Then there are thousands of unfiliated fans who have been pouring into the festivals and conferences and showing up at special exhibitions like the one at the Ingleside Mall. When that same convoy went to New York and parked near Central Park one weekend in June it attracted 8,000 people, according to Mr. Sloman.

Norman Rubenstein, a conference organizer and merchandiser, now gets as many as 7,000 adults and children at the three-day Thanksgiving Dr. Who conventions he has been

holding in Chicago each November since 1982.

Last year he started organizing similar gatherings in Philadelphia, New Brunswick, N.J., and Madison, Wis. Sales of Dr. Who merchandise under license from the BBC — mugs, pendants, T-shirts, bumper stickers and posters — have been increasing. Mr. Rubenstein said he grossed about

\$250,000 in 1985, up from \$50,000 in 1983 when he started selling the items.

Mr. Rubenstein and Mr. Katz are now the only official American licensees, the number having been strictly limited by the BBC after unauthorized merchandise started flooding the market.

## A Fund-Raiser for TV

Smaller manifestations of devotion include a cart of Dr. Who paperbacks that Eileen Sheridan, coordinator of children's services at Bridgeport, Conn., has set up at her office so adults can quietly borrow the latest.

Dr. Who has also become a major fund-raiser for public television stations. Two weeks ago a three-and-a-half-hour showing of Dr. Who episodes on Channel 21 out of Garden City, L.I., brought in \$7,636, the largest sum the station has raised on a

Five Dr. Who's: Tom Baker, Peter Davison, Jon Pertwee, Patrick Troughton, William Hartnell. Below, Colin Baker, who has role now, and roadshow.



The New York Times/Joe Wrinn



single theme in one evening. Fan club volunteers manned the telephones.

Fans, who have been likened to the sort of people who were attracted to "Star Trek" and who include June Havoc, share certain traits. "They are gentle, well-behaved people," Mr. Sloman said.

He noted that although the traveling exhibition had been on the road since May, with about 100,000 people passing through, only one tiny knob on the control panel of the model of the doctor's spacecraft had been stolen.

"That's surprisingly little vandalism," he said.

"They're thinking people," added Joe Spiegel, the teen-ager, coming from "taffie," or technologically involved, families.

## Back to the Saturday Serials

"Even the evil people are kind of nice and Dr. Who deals with them in a nonviolent way, outsmarting them instead of attacking them," said Frances Murphy, a wheelchair repairer from Mansion, Mass., who had come to the exhibition with three other ardent fans — her husband, Bruce, an oil-burner technician, and their two children, Jennifer, 6 years old, and Raymond, 5.

Shelby Peck, 52, a fifth-grade teacher from Torrington, Conn., who had driven all the way to Holyoke to see the exhibition, said, "It takes me back to the Saturday afternoon movie serials I saw as a kid."

For the professionals there are further charms. "What could be better than beautiful British voices emitting from monstrous shells," Miss Havoc said.

"And the fun of seeing props made out of inner tubes, old shoes or hot water bottles. It's so inventive. There are miracles within miracles. I can't remember loving something as a steady diet for a very long time." ■