

# Dr. Whomania strikes the area

By Sanford J. Schmidt  
Telegraph Staff Writer

A science fiction television fad from England has created a fantasy world of ringing cash registers for a bookstore in Godfrey.

"It's the craziest thing I've ever seen in my life," said sales clerk Sally Bonnell of Books Unlimited. "These people are in love with Dr. Who."

Dr. Who? That's right, Dr. Who, who has been known to viewers of the British Broadcasting Corp. for over two decades.

However, the Dr. Who craze is new to America and, therefore, to Godfrey.

"I knew this would be hot stuff," said George Deex, who owns the bookstore.

He said he spotted the Dr. Who items at a comics distributorship in Collinsville. He had seen an episode of the television show and recognized a chance for sales. He bought one of each item and quickly sold out.

Dr. Who is a kind of science fiction loan ranger, flying in an "interdimensional" telephone booth, instead of riding a white horse.

Locally, the fantasy show with a touch of humor is seen at 10:30 p.m. Sundays on Channel 9.

Some idea of the show's content can be gleaned from TV Guide's description of the last episode: "Dr. Who (Tom Baker) visits the planet Karn to find that its inhabitants desire his head for the body controlled by Morbiu's brain. (90 min)."

Deex said Americans are watching five Dr. Who episodes combined into a 90-minute show.

There have been five Dr. Who's in Britain, but America is seeing the segments starring Baker, who has become a cult figure among the fans.

Mrs. Bonnell feels the program's popularity can be traced to the fact that the central character is an old-fashioned fictional hero.

"It's been a long time since there's been a hero who was really on the up and up," she said.

A fad is clearly on its way to becoming a full-fledged craze when the followers coin a name for themselves. A Dr. Who fan is now known as a "Whole," just as Star Trek fans before them were known as "Trekkies."

Deex said the Trekkies are a thing of the past. "Star Trek is really on the way down, now," he said.

Dr. Who's current popularity is evidenced by the fact that Deex once did about \$300 in Dr. Who business in one day, just before Christmas.

The Godfrey bookstore has sold hundreds of paperbacks, published by Target Publishing, based on Dr. Who episodes. Such titles as *Dr. Who and the Planet of Evil* line the walls in the Dr. Who section of the store.

Mrs. Bonnell said new paperbacks are ordered each week to keep up with the great appetites of the Wholes.

She said she does not personally watch Dr. Who, because it comes on after her bed time, so it is difficult to determine exactly what her customers

are talking about sometimes. She had to learn what a "Darlek" was and familiarize herself with the ins and outs of "Tardis."

Tardis is a means of travel through time and space. The name is an acronym for Time And Relative Dimensions In Space.

The Tardis equipment used by Dr. Who is somewhat on the blink, so the protagonist often finds himself in random times and places — anywhere from Antarctica to the Planet Karn.

The eager Dr. Who fans gobble up buttons, books, magazines, T-shirts, ball caps, key chains, coin banks and more, even at expensive prices, Mrs. Bonnell said.

A small metal Dr. Who coin bank sells for \$10. A hardbound book, *Dr. Who, a Celebration*, sells for \$17.95.

Mrs. Bonnell said she obtained six copies of the hardback on a Saturday and had sold three by the following Monday.

"A Belleville company obtained rights to print a calendar. We sold a bunch of calendars, even at \$7.95. 'Needless to say, none of the stuff is cheap,' Mrs. Bonnell said.

She said the high cost is partly due to the fact that British companies have production rights for many of the Dr. Who products.

A paperback titled *The Dr. Who Technical Manual* was printed in the United States by Random House and sold for \$3.95. "We sold 150 to 200 of those technical manuals," Mrs. Bonnell said.



GEORGE DEEX, owner of Books Unlimited, displays some of the Dr. Who paraphernalia, which has been selling like hotcakes to fans of the off-beat Public TV show. The bookstore has stocked the items for three months, and sometimes has trouble keeping enough on hand to meet the insatiable demands of 'Wholes,' as the fans of the latest fad call themselves. (Telegraph Photo by Russ Smith)

## Dr. Who convention coming to area

For the rabid Dr. Who fan a rare opportunity is coming to the St. Louis area March 30 and 31 and April 1, when a Dr. Who Convention will be held at the Henry VIII Inn and Lodge, Interstate 70 and Lindbergh St. Louis.

Tickets are available at \$20 each from NADWAS (North American Dr. Who Appreciation Society) at 124 Vandalia St., Collinsville, 62234.

Sponsors plan a visit by Tom Baker, star of Dr. Who, along with a banquet, trivia contest, multi-media show, dealers' booths, costume contest, slide show, panel discussions and more.

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