

'Visions' honors British TV sci-fi

By Anthony DeBartolo
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Debi Smolinske, co-chairwoman of Visions '93, a British television sci-fi/fantasy convention held this weekend in Rosemont, was explaining the fourth annual event's theme to a non-fan reporter.

"We're celebrating 30 years of 'Doctor Who,' 15 years of 'Blake's 7,' 10 years of 'Robin of Sherwood' and 6½ years of 'Red Dwarf,'" she said.

"Blake who? Robin who? Red who?" he asked. "The Doctor I've heard of."

"That's part of the problem," she said. "Most of these shows are kind of hard to see."

Nonetheless, by the convention's close on Sunday, more than 1,500 fans were expected to gather at the Hyatt Regency

O'Hare, and as one devotee put it: "Get together and talk about things other people think you're crazy talking about. You know, visio-perception refractoscopes and gyro-cosmic stabilators."

And they came from everywhere, said Bob McLaughlin, chairman of the event. "About half are local, the rest are from around the country."

"It doesn't rival the annual Star Trek convention they hold in Los Angeles, that brings in 15,000 people," McLaughlin said. "But for a fan-run organization, we're going pretty good."

Among the weekend's activities — besides inspecting a merchandise room where you could buy anything but gyro-cosmic stabilators — were a costume ball, art show, even



Photo for the Tribune by Rod Lamkey Jr.

Among those at Visions '93 sci-fi convention in Rosemont, were (from left) Colin Baker, Peter Davison and Sophie Aldred.

an acting workshop.

Also scheduled was a memorabilia charity auction to benefit Lambs Farm, the Libertyville residence and training

facility for the mentally and physically challenged, and the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Northern Illinois, which does it best to fulfill the wishes of

critically ill children.

But the convention's main attractions were the 27 British actors, writers and directors brought in for the daily panel discussions and autographs.

Among them, Colin Baker (the 6th Doctor Who), Jeremy Bulloch (Robin's Edward of Wickham) and Christopher Barry, the director of 40 "Doctor Who" episodes who voluntarily provided an answer to last week's most-asked question: Where were you when Kennedy was assassinated?

"We were shooting the show's second episode that day," he said. "You can imagine our feelings. We had to hype ourselves up to finish the show, but we did."

It's the attempt to escape such real-life violence, and the uncertainty of sometimes not knowing who the bad guys in life actually are, that has made "Doctor Who" a cult classic, Barry believes. "It's good versus evil. Everything is black and white."

"And the Doctor abhors violence," Barry said. "He uses his wits to defeat his enemies."