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Sunday

Here come the Sci-Fi world's 'Whovians' and Joel Ossar

Editor's note: Joel Ossar, the subject of this story, will be one of the participants at Imaginecon III, a science fiction conference to be held at KSU March 2-4.

By CAROL WRIGHT
Contributing Writer

TARDIS:

A. The name bestowed upon a gladiator who's always late for battle.

B. The scientific term for tar.

C. A British police call box.

Gallifrey:

A. A duke.

B. A planet occupied by Time Lords.

C. A small town in Ohio.

Sonic screwdriver:

A. What might be served in an Aggieville bar by the year 1999.

B. A tool that helps one escape from Daleks, Cybermen and other life-threatening creatures.

C. Beats me.

If you chose C., B. and B., then you are 100 percent correct.

Congratulations! You definitely know "Doctor Who" trivia.

Entertaining. Spontaneous. Educational. Clever. These are just a few words some people use to describe "Doctor Who."

"Doctor Who" is no ordinary doc.

That is why fellow "Whovians" are fascinated by this science fiction

television and book character.

More than 750 years old, "Doctor Who" is kept alive by two hearts and has a constant body temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Although he is a renegade Time Lord and not human, he acts human, unlike the other stuffy Time Lords who are pompous and unsympathetic toward all life forms. His main mission is to combat evil and promote justice throughout the galaxies.

How he travels depends on where his mode of transportation takes him. That transportation is the TARDIS (Time And Relative Dimensions In Space), a stolen spacecraft that is actually a British police call box painted

blue. With the TARDIS, "Doctor Who" never knows exactly where he'll land or in what century he will be in due to a faulty mechanism in the steering, a frequent source of irritation for him. In turn, his frustration sometimes takes its toll on his companions who come along for the adventurous ride, most notably "Sarah Jane Smith," a freelance journalist with a vulnerable, yet risk-taking disposition.

So, like "Superman," "James Bond" or "Sherlock Holmes," "Doctor Who" is seen as a hero to people who watch the television series or read about him in books.

Joel Ossar, 1900 Rockhill Rd., has

been intrigued by "Doctor Who" for a long time. A student attending Manhattan Middle School, Joel, 13, was introduced to "Doctor Who" (a.k.a. "The Doctor") by his 16-year-old brother, Jacob, when the program began airing on PBS in the 1970s. The first episode was originally broadcast on BBC in November, 1963. And, Joel explained, for 20 years it has kept many a British fan glued to the telly.

Now that the program is becoming more familiar to American children, teenagers, college students, parents and grandparents, they are hooked, too, and have been spreading the word.

"One of my brother's friends told

him about it, then my brother told me," Joel said, referring to the "Doctor Who" series. "We watched the first couple of episodes until the program shown several nights a week was changed from 6 p.m. to 11:30 p.m."

Bad timing or not, Joel and Jacob still try to see as many episodes as possible. It wasn't long before their mother, Naomi, began viewing the show with her family.

"We saw 'The Creature From the Pit.' It must have been over Christmas break," Naomi recalled. "Since we didn't have any other

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pressing matters, it was kind of fun. The episode was stretched out over four days, and I looked forward to it. They'd throw the guy in the pit and you'd have to wait until the next day to see if he survived the fall."

If by chance Joel happens to miss several episodes, he usually can make them up by reading his collection of some 30 "Doctor Who" books, which are written by different authors. From "The Day of The Daleks" or "The Masque of Mandragora," to "The Talons of Weng-Chiang" and "The Revenge of The Cybermen," Joel has probably read them all.

If Joel ever gets tired of books, which is highly unlikely, he can always borrow from his friends or take pride in his other "Doctor Who" memorabilia—"Doctor Who" magazines, colorful posters and photos, "Doctor Who" Marvel comic books (rare collector's items of which only four have been published), an "Intern Who" sign, technical manuals and other mementoes.

Because it's difficult to find many "Doctor Who" items in Manhattan, Joel occasionally shops out of town or attends science fiction-fantasy conventions that carry a lot of the "Doctor Who" trivia.

"I get most of it in Topeka," he said, "Kansas City probably has more. I save up my money and buy as many books as I can. The Target Books published by W.H. Allen & Co. are harder to get. They're down to \$2.50 each (for a paperback copy). I also go to conventions. 'Doctor Who' is more popular on the East Coast because there are more people selling 'Doctor Who' stuff. Some stores sell 'Doctor Who' photographs. There's also a 'Doctor Who' game. I've never seen the actual contents of the game. There are also T-shirts, a computer game and 'K9' models (K9 is "Doctor Who's" robotic dog.)

"There's more than this," Joel emphasized, referring to his collection and other paraphernalia he would like to own someday. "If I had a lot of money, then I could get more. Money is the root of all 'Doctor Who' stuff."

"Just what is it about 'Doctor Who' that would make Joel want to collect so much about him?

"That depends. Which 'Doctor Who'? There's five, soon to be a sixth," Joel pointed out. "There have been six incarnations of 'Doctor Who'. Each doctor was one kind of person as to how each actor (in the television series) played the role."

Performing the role of the original No. One "Doctor Who" was the late William Hartnell. The first doctor portraying Hartnell was Richard Hurndall. Patrick Troughton played "Doctor Who" No. Two, Jon Pertwee,

the third doctor, Tom Baker, the fourth and Peter Davison, the fifth doctor.

It's too early to predict how the sixth doctor, acted by Colin Baker (not related to Tom Baker), will execute his role. But Joel said that one of his favorite doctors has been Tom Baker, known on the series for his flashy smile, big eyes, curly brown hair and large nose. Joel was impressed not only by Baker's acting, but by his style of dress—the floppy hat, the flowing 20-foot long tartan scarf, the coat with lots of pockets, his black boots and checkered vest.

"Each doctor wore a different costume," Joel mentioned. "Like the third doctor wore an opera cape, and Davison wore a cricket outfit with a stalk of celery pinned to his lapel. I read an interview where he said he was looking forward to what the celery stalk meant. But Baker's really different. He's more spontaneous and believable. I think the reason why is most of the time (when acting) he didn't know what was going on. He ad-libbed a lot. He carried out his role well."

Much to Joel's disappointment, there are some critics of "Doctor Who" that say how the show is a flop of science fiction glitz. From a recent article in Time magazine, Joel said that the author made the fans appear like they were "freaks" with nothing better to do than watch "scarifying monsters" and "cut-rate special effects, something like 'Star Wars' as conceived by Monty Python."

"Doctor Who," Joel said, is not intended to be like "Star Wars" or "Star Trek."

"The special effects in 'Doctor Who' really aren't very good, but the show has a low budget. It has to be done very quickly. The background shots aren't bad at all. Most of it's done very well, especially the costumes."

Joel realizes that there are people who don't get into science fiction because they either find it "silly" or perhaps too complex. A lot of people, he said, think that science fiction books, like "Doctor Who," should not be classified as literature.

"People don't really spend enough time with it. I know people who have watched one part of a 'Doctor Who' episode, and they don't like it because they haven't seen enough of it. But if you know what's going on, you can get to like it. It's not really an acquired taste, but you have to give it a chance."

"The 'Doctor Who' episodes would give people a chance to enjoy themselves," he continued. "It teaches you a lot about history and events. There was an episode, 'Pyramids of Mars,' which ended up with some possible cause of the Great Fire of Condon."

"Even if you know that's not exact-



Joel Ossar

Staff photo

ly what happened, it might have if you think about it. It inspires you to think about what (lead up to) certain events in history."

To further his interest in science fiction, Joel is a member of StarRiders, Kansas State University's science fiction club. And one event he's looking forward to is Imaginecon III, the science fiction-fantasy convention sponsored by StarRiders for the past two years. Many activities are planned for Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with registration time set for 5 p.m. Friday in front of the K-State Union Ballroom.

A highlight of the convention is the costume judging contest. For the contest, Joel wants to come dressed as, who else, but "Doctor Who," of course.

"I'm still trying to perfect my costume. And it'll take me awhile

before I can do that," he said. "I have to find just the right pair of pants and right vest. I have to get the right scarf (he has one that averages out to be 7 feet long) and the right hatband."

While Joel is interested in science fiction, he also has other hobbies. A guitarist, Joel performs in his rock group, "Anonymous." He enjoys art and has been thinking of developing more ideas for a children's story he tentatively titled "Gullible's Travels."

As far as Joel is concerned, he'll never become bored with the 750-year-old Time Lord who's always discovering something new about life.

To Joel, "Doctor Who" is ageless. "I doubt it if I'll get bored," he said with a smile. "There's a lot I haven't read or seen yet. It's not the kind of thing you grow out of. It grows with you."