

Whovians have landed

Fan club idolizes sci-fi star

By James Crampton

If you're interested in time travel and have a passion for jelly-babies, you might consider joining the Whovians.

The Whovians, Winnipeg's first *Dr. Who* fan club, began in the summer of 1987 under the guidance of founding-president Laurie Smith.

"I felt there was a need in Winnipeg for a *Dr. Who* organization because North Dakota already had a large club through their PBS station and I felt we should have one as well," Smith, a 24-year-old data-entry clerk, explained.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves here. Who exactly is *Dr. Who*?

Well, he's the hero of a British science fiction classic televised Friday nights in Winnipeg on Prairie Public Television. The show is about the intergalactic exploits of a character known simply as the Doctor, a Time Lord who hurtles himself and his cohorts through time and space to battle sinister forces. His mode of transportation is the Tardis, a time machine disguised as an old British police telephone box.

The series is currently into its 25th year of production in Britain, although only a few of the recent episodes have been purchased and aired by PPTV. The station, which first started airing the cult classic two and a half years ago, has for the most part aired episodes produced in the 1960s and 1970s.

The best way to describe the Doctor is as a sort of time-travelling Sherlock Holmes and his companions as multiple Dr. Watsons," Smith said.

The Doctor, a scarf-clad alien with two hearts, has been portrayed by seven actors, but the most popular version was played by Thomas Baker, who would try to disarm his enemies by offering them jelly-babies.

"The Doctor isn't particularly violent, and that's what a lot of people like about it," Smith said.

Despite the lead character's non-violent nature, Smith says the show has several other qual-

ities that attract viewers.

"*Dr. Who* appeals to people who like to think," she said. "Unlike a lot of science fiction, there's nuances and subtexts which go on in the plots which are rather difficult to pick up."

The Whovians meet at the Centennial Library's auditorium on the second or third Saturday of each month. The club has a core membership of 15 people but as many as 50 people will attend the

monthly meetings to mingle and trade fan memorabilia, exchange video tapes and take part in improvisational theatre. The next Whovian gathering is on Jan. 21.

Tracy Blow, current president of the Whovians, said that her group, like Trekkies and other groups in science fiction fan-dom, are regarded by many people as being on the fringe of society.

"We have been described as people who haven't been quite ac-

cepted by the mainstream," the 26-year-old MTS operator said.

According to Smith, the public has a narrow view of science fiction fans.

"Fan-dom isn't all — as one writer put it — wonks, wimps and nerds," she said, noting that several astronauts and prominent scientists are involved in science fiction fan-dom.

"Whovians are rampant extroverts."



"The Doctor is a sort of time-travelling Sherlock Holmes," say these Whovians. They are: (clockwise) Alison Conroy, Richard Bowler, J. Garth Wilcox, Colian Stobbe and Laurie Smith.