‘Dr. Who’ fans emulate their hero at San Jose fantasy convention

By Barbara Wood
Times Tribune staff

The event billed as Timecon 84, Science Fiction Fantasy and Dr. Who Convention and Dark Shadows Festival, but most of the 2,900 who gathered in San Jose Friday were die-hard Dr. Who fans.

Caroline Meier came from Sacramento with two of her four children. Although “Dr. Who,” a British science fiction series, doesn’t show on Sacramento television, Meier is vice-president of the local Dr. Who fan club. Her sister is the president, and there are about 18 other members.

Jeff Johannimann came from San Rafael for the three-day event. He’s been hooked on Dr. Who since college days at Purdue, he said, and has since made a couple of dozen others into Dr. Who fans.

“Dr. Who is more of a hero than Luke Skywalker or Captain Kirk,” Johannimann said. Dr. Who is, he said, “a man of Harpo Marx, Sherlock Holmes and a little Mr. Spock.”

The Dr. Who fans lounged in the lobby of the Saint Claire Hilton, eating Dr. Who’s favorites — Jelly Babes — and wishing they had some of his favorite drink, ginger beer.

Dr. Who can be seen in the Bay Area on Channel 54, KTHE-TV (Ch 54) in San Jose. The doctor is a time-traveler.

Several of the fans dressed as Dr. Who or characters in the show. One of the most authentic costumes belonged to Paul Grover, 24, of Portland, Ore. Grover makes costumes as a trade, so went all out to copy his hero, complete with yards-long hand-knit muffler, knickers, argyle socks and long Edwardian-era coat.

In his pockets, Grover had things such a miniature scale model of Dr. Who’s spaceship, which appears to be a British police box, and a non-working full-size replica of Dr. Who’s sonic screwdriver.

“It’s a chance to become your own hero for the weekend,” he said.

Grover said Dr. Who has been played by six actors, each of whom affected different characteristics. He was emulating number four, Tom Baker. Baker isn’t necessarily his favorite, Grover said, just the one he does best.

Grover said the reason Dr. Who is so popular can be summarized in a quote from Jon Pertwee, the third Dr. Who and the guest of honor at the convention:

“The reason it is so big is because the show has heart.”

Grover, a veteran of three Dr. Who conventions, said fans attend the events for several reasons.

The major reason, he said, is to get a chance to meet the people responsible for the show — the actors, producers and writers. Fans get to share their ideas with the stars during convention sessions, he said.

The conventions are also a way to meet people with similar interests.

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Paul Grover (above) of Portland, Ore. arrived at Timecon, a science fiction fantasy convention being held in San Jose this weekend, dressed exactly as one of the six actors who has played Dr. Who. Grover also built this exact replica of Dr. Who's space ship, which appears to be a British police box.

Similar interests.

"It's a real social thing," he said.

Conventions also offer things like video screenings of Dr. Who episodes that can't usually be seen on local television.

Grover said he and nine other Portland fans left for San Jose at 2 p.m. Thursday. By 10 p.m. Friday night, he was a bit groggy from lack of sleep, but eager to explain the mystique of Dr. Who.

The fans saved expenses by sharing hotel rooms, sometimes fitting nine or more in a room by lining the floor with sleeping bags, he said.

The convention will continue today and Sunday. Admission is $25 for both days or $15 for one day. Registration is open at the San Jose Convention Center from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Events include a costume contest, a fan art show, and talks by Dr. Who producer John Nathan-Turner, Jon Pertwee and Dr. Who's companion, Nicholas Courtney.

"Dark Shadows" star Jonathan Frid, who played Barnabas in the daytime television serial about vampires that ran in the late 1960s, will also speak.

DR. WHO

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