

...RISE OF THE COMIC GIRL

WHEN Victoria Ellesley first started going to comic book conventions she was the only woman there.

But now an increasing number of women are getting into the superhero and villain filled genre.

At the San Diego Comic-Con convention, held earlier this month, 40 per cent of the 130,000 visitors were female – thought to be the highest proportion in the event's four-decade history. The UK comic convention Kapow!, now in its second year, has had a steadily building female attendance at its London event.

Victoria works at Ace Comics, which has stores in Colchester and Southend and says in the 13 years she has been there, she has seen a sharp rise in female comic book fans.

She says: "TV shows like *Twilight*, *Buffy*, *Angel* and *True Blood* and have all helped get women into buying the comic book versions.

"When *Buffy* ended, they continued series eight in the comic book and a lot of women started

By **LOUISE HOWESON**

louise.howeson@nqe.com

buying it to find out what happened next. It becomes very addictive.

"In the shop we've seen around a 10 per cent increase in female customers in the last few years and it seems to be rising."

Victoria, who met her husband Colin while working at the shop, has been a regular at comic conventions over the years.

She says: "When I first started going to conventions I was the only women there. They would all look shocked to see a woman and even more shocked when they realised I knew about comics! Now there are more and more women going because they are interested in comics.

"I have been to quite a few comic conventions in Bristol Comic Expo and London MCM Expo. I haven't been to Kapow! yet, but I really want to. I have a young son James who is two and I want to take him

when he's a bit older."

Victoria, 34, was fascinated by the idea of superheroes as a child.

She says: "I was obsessed with Wonder Woman and there are lots of photos of me dressed up as her as a child. As a teenager I loved *Buffy* and *Angel* which got me into buying comics. I like comics because they are a form of escapism, I think that's the reason most people like them."

So what are her favourite comics?

Victoria, who lives in Colchester, says: "I have always loved *X-men* comics and also the *Punisher* who is a sort of anti-hero."

Despite the rise in popularity Victoria believes the genre is niche.

She says: "I have friends who will happily go and watch a film like the *Avengers* at the cinema but laugh when I present them with a comic book.

"Comics are so interesting. They are collectable and the art work is amazing.

Log on to www.acecomics.co.uk for more details.



■ Niche market – Victoria Ellesley, inset, loves comics

Comics are interesting and the artwork amazing

Gazette competition

WIN Hi-Tec trainers

PROUD British brand and Southend-based sport and outdoor company, Hi-Tec, has joined forces with the Gazette to offer 20 lucky readers the chance to get sporty this summer with a pair of R111 trainers. Available in both men's and women's styles, in a range of colours, these superb Hi-Tec trainers are

ideal for those budding sportsmen and women, inspired by this summer's Games.

They are lightweight, instantly comfortable and made with a breathable, supportive upper and an outsole that offers traction and durability. To be in with a chance of winning, answer the following question:

Where are Hi-Tec UK's offices located?

To enter by phone, call 0901 360 0838 and leave your answer and details when prompted, or text 80360 starting with TRAINERS, leave a space, followed by your answer, name and contact details. Or post your entry to

Gazette Hi-Tec competition, Newspaper House, Chester Hall Lane, Basildon, Essex SS14 3BL.

For more information on Hi-Tec Sports please visit www.hi-tec.com



Calls cost no more than £1.02 per minute from a BT landline. Calls from mobiles and some other networks may cost more. Texts cost £1 plus your normal operator text charge. Telephone and text voting lines are open today and close on July 29 at 11.59pm.

Usual Newsquest Essex Limited terms and conditions apply, copies available on request. For full terms visit www.newsquest.co.uk/terms. Service provided by Newsquest Media Group.

PREPARE FOR INVASION

AN army of comic book characters will descend on Colchester next month. No need to run in fear though, it's all in aid of the annual Invasion Colchester event. People dressed as comic book, sci-fi and fantasy characters will invade the town centre on Saturday, August 18, from 10am to 4.30pm.

The event will raise money for the Invicta Foundation, Colchester Community Voluntary Services and the Colchester Hospitals Charity. Visit www.invasioncolchester.co.uk and further details.

CATWOMAN ON PROWL

INTEREST in the genre has been sparked further with the release of the movie *The Dark Knight Rises* last Friday. It features Anne Hathaway as the feisty character Selina Kyle, who is the alter-ego of Catwoman.

The much-anticipated film is based on the DC Comics character Batman and is the third instalment in Christopher Nolan's Batman film series. It is the sequel to *Batman Begins* in 2005 and the *Dark Knight* in 2008.

BLOOD Psi

ANDY Winter, from Southend, is a comic book writer best known for creating *Hero Killers*, with artist Declan Shalvey. It won the Eagle Award for favourite British black and white comicbook of 2006. The latest comic creation by Andy and Declan is *Blood Psi* which was published by Moonface Press. The comic is available from www.moonfacepress.com, price £2.20 plus p&p.

