

## TV Preview

# Who's on Fox? Yes Indeed.

## The Good Doctor Might Just Steal Home

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He has two hearts and 13 lives, he flits around the galaxy in a flying phone booth and he's half-human on his mother's side. Who is he? Exactly. He is Who—Doctor Who, hero of a BBC fantasy series that first materialized in 1963, ran for 20 years and was imported by many public TV stations here.

Doctor Who is a man whose time has come and keeps coming; now the Fox network is trying to revive him for a new series, starting with a two-hour movie pilot, "Doctor Who," tonight at 8 on Channel 5. As opposed to the old BBC show, a basically tacky-looking thing shot in a TV studio, the new movie, filmed mostly in British Columbia, is splashy and spectacular, with a certain Jules Verney quality to it.

It's certainly got more wit and zip than most of the things that go thunk in the night on Fox.

The closer we get to the end of the 20th century, the more pop culture is dominated



In the nick of time: Paul McGann as the eighth incarnation of Doctor Who.

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by science fiction, fantasy, horror stories and tall tales about mythological beings—not to mention a proliferation of those ridiculous dial-a-psychic services. Perhaps the 19th century ended with some of the

See TV PREVIEW, E6, Col. 5

# Return of 'Doctor Who'

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## TV PREVIEW, From E1

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same otherworldly preoccupations. Let's ask Bob Dole about that. No, no, no; we're not going to indulge in that cheap, David Letterman kind of joke.

Set in San Francisco on Dec. 30 and 31, 1999, "Doctor Who" is actually *about* the pell-mell lurch toward century's end. While Earthlings are distracted by the arrival of the new millennium, a monstrous villain called the Master picks our fine planet as a place to hide and make mischief.

The dastardly Master has stowed away, in ghastly form, aboard the Doctor's spaceship, which is known as Tardis and is disguised, for some reason, as the kind of street-corner phone booth once used by British bobbies to call headquarters.

Unfortunately for the Doctor, he dies about 20 minutes into the movie. Who dies? Precisely. But not to worry—too much—because the Doc has 13 lives, remember, and he's only on his seventh. He expires an old geezer but he is regenerated as a much younger man determined to find the Master and put a stop to his apocalyptic shenanigans.

If the Doctor doesn't clobber the Master before the clock strikes 12 on New Year's Eve, the good planet Earth will be sucked into the Eye of Harmony, which sits aboard the Doctor's spaceship, and be turned inside out. In other words, cease to exist. The good news is all your credit-card debt will be wiped out. The bad news is, so will you.

"Please," says the frantic Who, "I need a beryllium atomic clock!" It

just so happens there's one about to be dedicated in San Francisco. With the help of a beautiful surgeon named Grace, the Doctor pursues the Master and vice versa. Mr. Master starts out as a glob of slimy pus, oozing through keyholes and such, until he slips into the body of a dozing paramedic. It seems the paramedic snores and, lying there with his mouth open, he's a sitting doc, er, duck. Let this be a warning to all who snore.

Old Doc Who is played by Sylvester McCoy, the seventh and final actor to play the Doctor in the BBC series (the idea of Who dying and regenerating was invented so that different actors could assume the role). When Who is reborn in younger form, the part passes to amiable Paul McGann. Daphne Ashbrook gracefully plays Grace and Yee Jee Tso engagingly plays Chang Lee, a young gang member recruited by the Master. Eric Roberts is the paramedic whose body the Master appropriates.

The plot may sound 'ridiculously complicated, but it all pretty much boils down to the perpetual war between good and evil. Matthew Jacobs's script has lots of bright, fetching touches, and director Geoffrey Sax keeps things whirling so speedily that disbelief is easily suspended. Some of the special effects and editing tricks are true dazzlers.

Daffy though it be, "Doctor Who" dabbles in matters of time, space and mortality in ways that aren't completely superficial. The Doctor's goal, he says, is "to hold back death," and if Who doesn't do it, who will?