

The doctor's in — this time on Fox

By KATE O'HARE
Special to the Register

On May 14, one of science fiction's most beloved characters lives again. And no, it's not

James T. Kirk.

It's Who ... Doctor Who.

Says Paul McGann, the eighth actor to take on the role of an alien with 12 lives who calls himself "the Doctor": "Actually, Sylvester McCoy, who was the seventh incarnation, after we'd shot this pilot, remarked to me one day, 'You do realize, of course, you could turn out to be the George Lazenby of Time Lords.' That could have been it. Two hours, that was it."

Confused? Don't worry; all will be made clear. Though the "Doctor Who" series, produced by Britain's BBC, has been running since 1963 (making it the longest-running sci-fi series), the producers of its latest revival know that not everyone in North America has been following the Doctor's exploits.

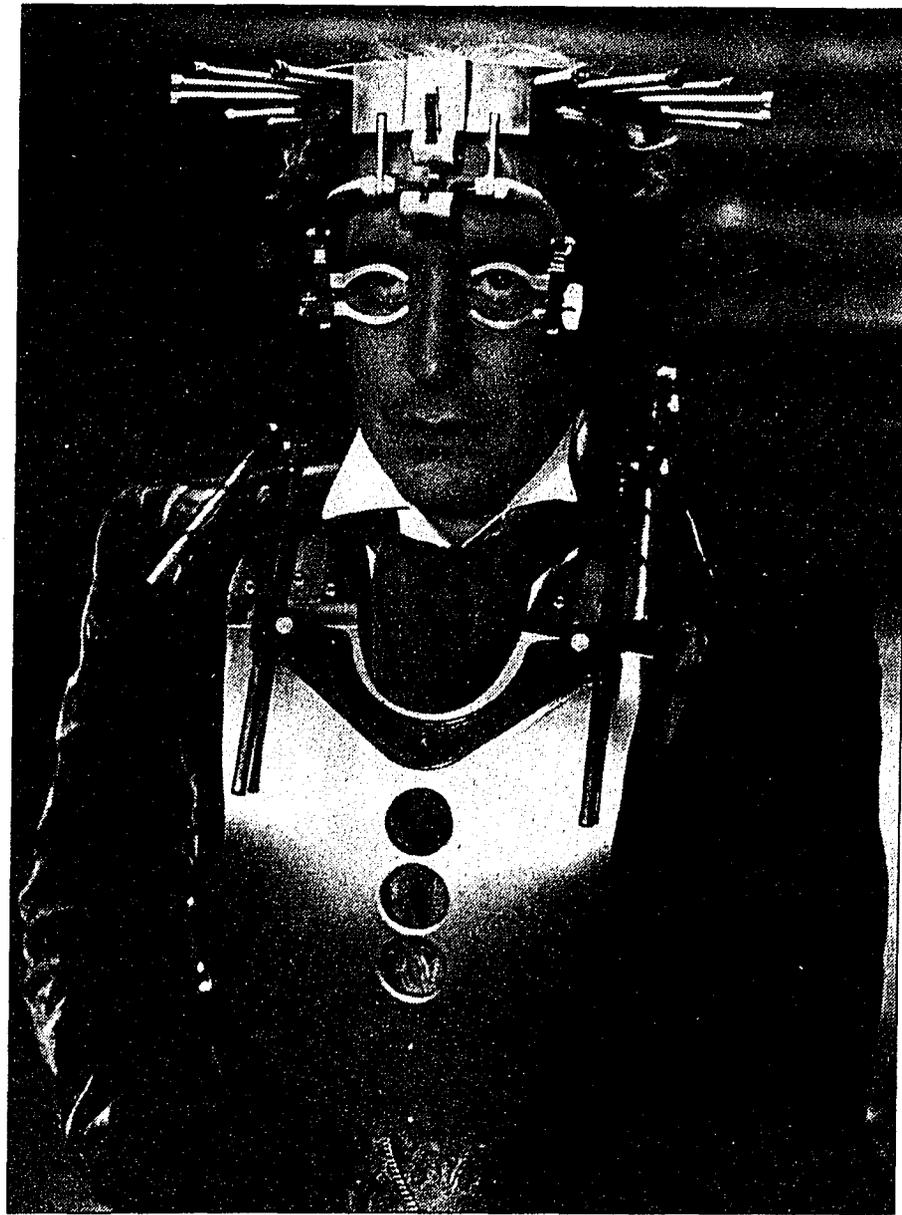
When "Doctor Who" airs as a two-hour movie Tuesday on Fox, care is taken to give the uninitiated enough information to follow the story. Hard-core fans will recognize familiar elements while being surprised at a couple of new ones.

In the film, a pilot for a series from BBC Worldwide and Universal, the Doctor is on a mission for his fellow Time Lords, a race of humanoid aliens from the planet Gallifrey, who travel through space and time in a TARDIS (Time and Relative Dimension in Space).

Usually, Time Lords watch but don't touch, but not the Doctor. Although his TARDIS' camouflage mechanism is broken — leaving it frozen as a 1960s blue British police box — he fights evil across the galaxy. His chief nemesis is the megalomaniac Master.

And, having soft spots in his two hearts for humans, the Doctor spends an inordinate amount of time saving Earth.

He has gone through seven regenerations: William Hartnell (1963), Patrick Troughton (1966), Jon Pertwee (1970), Tom Baker (1974), Peter Davi-



son (1982), Colin Baker (1984) and Sylvester McCoy (1987-89).

"Doctor Who" lives again primarily through the efforts of producer Philip Segal, a dedicated Whovian (as the fans are called) who believed he could take the mythology of the show and bring it to a wider audience.

For Segal, the only choice for the Doctor was Paul McGann, best known to American audiences for his roles in "Alien 3" and "The Three Musketeers."

As the film opens, the Doctor (still played by Sylvester McCoy) is transporting the essence of the Master, who has used up his lives, home for internment. Determined to sur-

DOCTOR WHO

8 p.m. Tuesday on KTTV

vive, the Master causes the TARDIS to malfunction and make an emergency landing in San Francisco. As the Doctor emerges, he is caught in the crossfire of gang warfare.

While the Doctor is operated on by cardiac surgeon Grace Holloway (Daphne Ashbrook), who doesn't know he has two hearts, the Master steals the body of the ambulance attendant (Eric Roberts). His goal is to take the TARDIS and the Doctor's body, thus acquiring the Doctor's regenerations.

The Doctor dies on the table and is trundled to the morgue, which is where McGann comes

◀ **DOCTOR,**
DOCTOR: Paul McGann takes over the role of the renegade time traveler.



▲ **CALL ME**
MASTER: Eric Roberts stars as the evil force who threatens to destroy the world.



▲ **RELUCTANT**
COMPANION: Daphne Ashbrook stars as Dr. Grace Holloway.

in (with a curly wig over his brush cut), in the series' most stylish regeneration sequence.

For McGann, joining a show he watched while he was "in nappies" is daunting: "Particularly for a Brit, playing this part has the sensation of a top posting overseas."

And he's in for the long haul. "I signed on the dotted line. If it goes, it goes with me."

The same may not be true for Segal, who has other production commitments.

"I don't think I necessarily saved 'Doctor Who.' I just drove enough people crazy enough to understand that it deserved to come back. I was just thrilled that I had the chance to do it."