

950-year-old alien with
two hearts lands in S.F!
Only time will tell his fate

DOCTOR WHO

By Bill Mann
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

"Doctor Who" has always seemed the strangest of paradoxes, by American TV standards, anyway: a low-tech sci-fi show. The BBC-produced series has run on PBS for 20-plus years (it was first produced in 1963), which is remarkable because we Yanks generally like our sci-fi shows with flashy special effects and bells and whistles. Forget character development — show us cool-looking explosions in space. "Doctor Who," the longest-running sci-fi series in history, had little of that: It often looked like it was filmed in a BBC broom closet.

But, starting Tuesday night on Fox, The Doctor has gone North American and high-tech. And fittingly, the latest "Doctor Who" adventure — the first in seven years since the series was discarded by the BBC — is set right here in San Francisco, on New Year's Eve 1999.

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Yee Jee Tso, Daphne Ashbrook and Paul McGann keep an eye out for the wicked time traveler, *The Master*.



Paul McGann plays the eighth Doctor Who in the high-tech Fox movie based on the low-tech, long-running BBC series with the international cult following.

Doctor Who's television movie

Just don't squint too hard trying to spot the Transamerica Pyramid or the Bay Bridge. This splashy Fox movie (airing Tuesday at 8 p.m. on Channel 2) was filmed up the coast in reduced-overhead Vancouver. Right, just like "Rumble in the Bronx." Still, at \$5 million, this is one of Fox's most expensive projects ever.

The movie introduces us to the eighth Doctor Who, handsome young Brit actor Paul McGann ("Alien 3"). With his mane of blond hair and Victorian dress, McGann reminds one a bit of another Who — lead singer Roger Daltry circa "Tommy." The seventh Doctor, British actor Sylvester McCoy, hands off the baton in this latest installment. It should be explained at this point that Doctor Who is an alien being, a 950-year-old time traveler who recasts himself in different human forms. McCoy — this Who's on first — is at least 50 pounds heavier and far less hirsute

than his successor, McGann.

The show has a considerable international cult following, though I've only tuned in the series on occasion during the past 20 years on the way to commercial destinations. And the first hour of Tuesday's new Fox movie will be bewildering to us non-Whovians, with all its knowing insider dialogue about the Eye of Harmony and the TARDIS and such. So Fox has slyly front-loaded this movie, with most of its flashy special effects coming in the first hour.

In Tuesday's Whodunit, the Doctor's laboratory/time machine, the TARDIS — it's disguised as an old London police call box — lands smack in the middle of a gang fight in S.F.'s Chinatown. McCoy steps out of the TARDIS and — bang — catches a bullet. Some welcome to The City.

He's raced to S.F. General by a young street kid (played by Vancouver actor Yee Jee Tso, a regular on Fox's "Sliders"), where a beautiful young cardiologist, Dr. Grace Holloway (played by "Hooperman's" Daphne Ashbrook), tries to re-start his heart. Actually, Doctor Who has two hearts, and one is still beating, but how would the doctor know *that*?

Doctor Who, helped by Dr. Holloway, soon regains his identity — just in time to realize that another Time Traveler, his evil nemesis The Master (played by Julia Rob-

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Doctor Who's television movie

erts' sibling, Eric) is trying to destroy the world at the millennium, on the stroke of midnight. Is all this a bit contrived-sounding? Oh, just a tad.

Fictional San Francisco TV anchors on "Channel 7" report that strange things are happening with the Earth's gravitational field. "The Russian and Napa rivers are both flooding." (Doesn't this sometimes happen around Dec. 31 anyway?)

It's all because that time-travelin' troublemaker, The Master, has opened the Eye of Harmony inside

the TARDIS, and it will soon suck the world into it like bath water running down a drain.

By now we're dazed and confused — which reminds me ... McGann also looks a bit like Led Zep's Robert Plant. And when the ultimate battle between Good (Who) and Evil (Roberts) inside the TARDIS concludes with a TKO for The Doctor, you're left asking yourself this question: You mean there are people who have actually managed to follow this stuff for 30-odd years?

There's time traveling ... and then there's time frittering.

And if this contrived Fox movie gets ratings Tuesday, it becomes a weekly series again — and probably runs into the next millennium. Boo, Who.