

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Mulholland Drive (\$32.98; Universal)

It's amazing to me this entertaining movie was rejected by ABC as the pilot for a series. The tale of a starlet (a terrific Naomi Watts) who stumbles through the seamy side of Hollywood is handled with style, verve and a sophistication perfect for network TV. (In other words, it seems more explicit than it actually is.) Granted, I wouldn't want to watch five years of it. (We all remember what happened to "Twin Peaks" after just a dozen episodes.) But surely a miniseries — say 12 hours in total — could air during the summer, get massive amounts of press, win awards, maybe get good ratings and certainly be repackaged and resold around the world thanks to the selling power of David Lynch. The surreal 20 minutes or so that Lynch tacked on to turn this into a feature film is of course utter nonsense.



LYNCH

Shackleton — Collector's Edition (\$49.95; A&E)



BRANAGH

This nicely underplayed miniseries stars Kenneth Branagh as the most successful failure in history. (While war builds in Europe, Shackleton and his men are trapped in ice before reaching the South Pole. Simply keeping each and every one of them alive becomes his great triumph.) Aply directed by Charles Sturridge ("Brideshead Revisited"), the 3 hour, 20-minute movie feels trim and forceful. However, it doesn't quite capture the sheer lunacy of their situation. Best to sample the A&E bio of Shackleton and two-hour documentary "Antarctica: A Frozen History" for context before tackling the main event.

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Spy Game (\$26.98; Universal)

Director Tony Scott delivers another genial drama (though my friends who insist he is more talented than brother Ridley are crazy). Here, Robert Redford is a spook on his last day at the CIA when he finds out his protégé (Brad Pitt) is due for execution in a Chinese prison. The higher-ups won't lift a finger because Pitt was acting alone and they don't want to endanger trade. The fun comes from watching Redford outfox his younger colleagues and in flashbacks when he shows Pitt how to trail a mark, chat in a café while keeping tabs on everyone in the room and talk his way into any building (not a big challenge when you look like Redford or Pitt). Silly but smart and what nostalgia: ah, for the old days, when spies really knew how to spy.

No Man's Land (\$26.98; MGM)

This over-praised drama is about two enemies — a Serb and a Bosnian — trapped in a trench during hostilities who become media darlings while lunging at each other's throat. It's caustic, but not as satiric or caustic as it imagines. Still, the central dilemma has an inevitable power: will they kill each other rather than simply walk away to their respective sides? Naturally, it's a commentary on the futility of war in general. But the real frustration is remembering it robbed the far superior *Amelie* of the Best Foreign Film Oscar.

Father Ted — the Second Season (\$34.98; BBC)

Cher is apparently a big fan (she's quoted calling this "the most hysterical show I ever saw"). But anyone expecting sacrilege in this amusing comedy about Catholic priests on a small Irish island will be sorely disappointed. Yes, Father Ted may find himself rigging a church raffle (for the good of the parish, mind you) or struggling through Lent, but he and the dimwitted but lovable Dougal are warmly human throughout. The more Catholic you are, the more you'll enjoy it.

Serendipity (\$29.99; Miramax)

John Cusack deserves all the hits he can get. But his generally excellent taste proves shaky in this so-so romantic comedy about two people who meet and have a magical few hours together in New York and then spend the next few years dating others and wondering if they let true love slip away. If you're wondering whether Cusack and costar Kate Beckinsale get together in the end, this is the movie for you.