

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Absolutely Fabulous: Complete Series 4 (\$34.98; BBC Video)

"Sin is in." It's a delicious campaign slogan for the new batch of "AbFab" episodes some five years after they called it quits. But that zinger is misleading. This isn't the same raunchy, horror-fest that we remember. To creator-star Jennifer Saunders' credit, Edina and Patsy are five years older and their "hijinks" are distinctively less funny. Pathetic, actually. They always were, really. But the passage of time — as demonstrated in the finale "Menopause" — is taking its toll. That's all a bit weighty for a show that is mostly silly fun. Yet there is a bitter tone throughout these six shows that makes this season of "AbFab" less enjoyable in a way that seems almost admirable. Dressing up to go to a Marilyn Manson concert? In the past, that would have seemed absurd and silly. Now, it's just embarrassing. Lots of good extras, including the one-off special "Mirrorball" that brought all the actors together for a different show.



SAUNDERS

Roughnecks — Starship Troopers Chronicles: The Hydora Campaign/The Tophet Campaign (\$24.95 each; Columbia TriStar)

In some homes, this must be the most anticipated DVD release of the year because these later episodes of the Saturday morning series have been delayed repeatedly. Finally, they're available and fans should be thrilled. Who knows what possessed the powers-that-be to greenlight a stern, computer-animated spin-off from Paul Verhoeven's satirical film? But the results are top-notch. The animation looks very cool and you know you're not in Pokemon territory when the credit sequence features the voice of JFK. Each DVD strings together a number of episodes to tell an entire battle in the war against the bugs. The tone is dour (with flashes of humor), the action exciting and the characters have distinctive personalities. It proves that all the flop computer-generated movie "Final Fantasy" lacked was imagination.

O (\$24.99; Trimark)

This telling of "Othello" — set against the backdrop of a private school and its star basketball player Odin (a solid Mekhi Phifer) — was delayed and delayed because tragic real-life violence at high schools made it too timely for comfort. It might have benefited greatly, since Julia Stiles and Josh Hartnett became big stars during the time it sat on the shelf. But this ambitious, stolid drama by director Tim Blake Nelson never catches fire enough dramatically (even though Hartnett plays poisonous Iago quite well) to excite either serious fans or their teen audience. The DVD has many extras, including one wildly unexpected bonus: the second DVD features an entire silent film version of "Othello" starring the great Emil Jannings. Is it too much to hope some "Teen Beat" fanatic drawn by Hartnett will become engrossed in the real deal?



PHIFER

A Troll in Central Park/Thumbelina/Ferngully: The Last Rainforest (\$19.98 each; 20th Century Fox)

Animation pioneer Don Bluth is a sad case. He worked at Disney in the 70s, when anyone could see the studio was squandering its great legacy by turning out dreck (when it bothered to churn out anything at all). Bluth lobbied for change and finally quit in disgust in 1979 to go it alone. His early films included triumphs like "The Secret of N.I.M.H.," "An American Tail," and "The Land Before Time." So where's the sad part? Bluth's departure and quick success was key in waking up Disney and getting the studio to reenergize its animation division. They poured money and attention onto new films and raised the studio's success to unparalleled heights. Bluth, despite his early success, has struggled on his own to finance what are very expensive films. "Troll" and "Thumbelina" are the result: compromised works of lesser quality because he simply didn't have the money to do them right. The most commercially successful of these three movies — the okay "Ferngully" — has nothing to do with Bluth at all. If Disney had any sense of history and obligation, it would bring Bluth back and fund his next project.