

1/13/02

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Buffy the Vampire Slayer — The Complete First Season (\$39.98; Fox)

Critically acclaimed, more adoring press coverage than shows with five times its ratings, regular appearances on "best of the year" lists and still I don't think this exceptional show (starring Sarah Michelle Gellar) has been given its due. Those of you who don't get it either haven't watched it or simply tuned in for a few minutes, saw some slimy monsters and turned it off. As many have pointed out, it's actually a very clever, sharply written coming of age tale where young people must deal with responsibility and where their actions have consequences.



GELLAR

Which completely ignores how witty, bracingly fun and emotionally poignant this landmark show can be. Watching the first eight episodes only demonstrates how nimble Joss Whedon's creation was from the start.

Tron (\$29.99; Disney)

Disney often fell flat on its face when it tried to be hipper than the room (it took a tiny outside company like Pixar to let them pull that trick off). Remember its woeful attempt at a *Star Wars*-type movie with *The Black Hole*? But *Tron* is a respectable stab at being cutting edge, with nifty visuals that show what it was like to be trapped inside a computer long before Microsoft and endless rebooting proved how widespread that nightmare would be. It was also touted as the latest film that would finally turn Jeff Bridges into a superstar. More attempts would follow but Bridges would have to settle for simply being a great actor. Lots of fun extras for those, like me, who overlooked the drama and enjoyed this movie for the glorified video game it was.

Roots — 25th Anniversary Edition (\$59.98; Warner Bros.)



ASNER

This epic blockbuster has not, sadly, aged very well. But like a ramshackle old building, it deserves landmark status for its place in history, if not for any lasting aesthetic appeal. Quite simply, our standards for realism have far outstripped this well-meaning look at slavery. The settings, for example, are notably cheap, barely better than one of those colonial village reenactments that cater to tourists. The sense of play-acting is also overwhelming — when a whip lashes out at a slave, the sound effect is appropriately ferocious but the actual props are clearly

flimsy affairs that wouldn't hurt a fly. So why was it so overwhelming at the time? The casting, I think. The black actors — LeVar Burton, John Amos, Cicely Tyson and so on — are uniformly excellent. But the white actors are key. The roles of slave-owners are played by TV icons like Ed Asner and Robert Reed. The mostly white audience watching at the time surely wanted to identify with slaves like Kunta Kinte. But seeing Lou Grant as a ship captain transporting slaves and Mr. Brady as a slave owner surely forced them to identify with the people they'd rather have dismissed as cruel, distant characters.

The Sixth Sense (\$29.99; Hollywood)

Enough already! This fine film was given an excellent DVD debut, jam-packed with numerous extras that would satisfy any fan. Releasing an even more deluxe edition (deluxer?) so soon is simply unfair. What possible justification could there be? Unlike, say, the recent Bootleg cut of *Almost Famous*, the director was clearly very available and helped make that first DVD a superior release. So there's no reason for going back so soon and adding extras except to squeeze out a few more bucks from hard-core fans. Yes, this edition has more extras. No, I won't bother describing how good or bad they are compared to the first batch of extras; neither will I detail exactly what is and isn't included in each version. Who's got the time for such nit-picking?

Newsies (\$29.99; Disney)

James Bond sings! Okay, I'm getting a bit ahead of myself. Christian Bale is simply one of the names being bandied about to replace Pierce Brosnan in the 21st Bond film. But if Bale became Bond, I believe he would be the first one to have also appeared in a musical. I won't count Sean Connery's moving warbling at the climax of *The Man Who Would Be King*. *Newsies* isn't a very good musical, but there is a certain old-fashioned charm to this story of turn-of-the-century (i.e. 1900s) newsboys going on strike for better working conditions.