



"Death of a Salesman"

This TV adaptation was primarily a triumph for Dustin Hoffman, who gave his own little-guy stamp to schleppey Willy Loman (\$24.99, Image). But who can forget the indelible impression made by John Malkovich as his slobbering son? This is mostly a record of their stage production — and such affairs are neither fish nor fowl. They try to make use of close-ups and other freedoms provided by the camera, but they don't truly re-imagine the play as a filmed work. In general, it would work best if they just placed the camera in the eighth row center of a theater and let us know what people with great seats saw on opening night. That rarely happens, of course, but this is still a fine record of great performances.

"Free Willy": 10th Anniversary Edition

The story of a boy and his whale, with two sequels (\$19.98 each movie, Warner Bros.), this is harmless fare for kids and the adults who have to sit through it, though the charm is long gone by the time you've watched both sequels. Still, they missed a great opportunity to tell the full, Dickensian adventures of the real Willy in a making-of documentary — a story about media obsession and how people who don't focus on large environmental issues can become passionately involved in the plight of one poor creature.

"Lupin the 3rd"

Lupin — a smash hit character in Japan — is a globe-trotting thief with a busty female rival/love interest, a bumbling cop on his tail, and a ready quip on his tongue (\$24.98, Pioneer). These six animated episodes are loopy fun, like a blast from the spy flicks of the '60s without the Austin Powers need to mock what was pretty fun in the first place. It has cool characters, a great theme song and just the right tone of adult attitude (glimpses of nudity keep this one definitely out of reach for the little ones). Think of it as "Speed Racer" with humor and at least the possibility of sex.

"Smothered: The Censorship Struggles of the Smothers Brothers" **"BaadAsssss Cinema"**

The Smothers Brothers were once cutting-edge comics with a radical agenda. Their anti-Vietnam attitude turned a seemingly innocuous variety show into a controversial smash with the siblings butting heads with network censors even more than they did with each other onstage. This fine documentary gives them their due, but it's no insult to say this 90-minute affair would have been a smashing extra on a compilation boxed set, but is a little pricey on its own.

The same is even more true of the short but fun "BaadAsssss Cinema," which is less than an hour in length and even less appropriate for peddling on its own (\$24.95 each, Docurama).

"Stories to Remember: Noah's Ark" **"Stories to Remember: My First DVD"** **"SpongeBob SquarePants: Tales From the Deep"**

"Stories to Remember" are a series of titles with minimal, but evocative animation that retell classic tales with celebrity readings by the likes of Susan Sarandon. All are safe bets for parents of infants to 5 year olds, but "Noah's Ark," read by James Earl Jones (\$14.98, Light Year) is the keeper, thanks to a propulsive score by Stewart Copeland.

The real gem is "My First DVD," a collection of four short compilations of songs for kids sung by the likes of Arlo Guthrie and especially Judy Collins, who does great work on a series of poems set to music (\$19.98, Light Year).

Older, more antic kids can dive into the latest "SpongeBob" compilation (\$19.99, Paramount). You can tell yourself you're just trying to keep them company. But admit it — that nerdy SpongeBob is the funniest character since PeeWee Herman.