

DVDs THIS WEEK

By Michael Giltz




Everyone knows the names of the cast of "Cheers."

"CHEERS": COMPLETE SECOND SEASON

"FRASIER": COMPLETE SECOND SEASON

One sign of a truly great sitcom is that your attention doesn't wander when an episode focuses on one of the secondary characters. That certainly was true of "Cheers." For example, when Carla's hairy ex-husband Nick Tortelli showed up, the show was every bit as hilarious as when it focused on the love-hate torment of Sam and Diane. The same is true for "Frasier," which mines laughs from the travails of Niles, Daphne, Martin and Roz just as easily as from the pompous Frasier Crane (\$49.99 each, Paramount).

"BABYLON 5": COMPLETE FOURTH SEASON

"WISEGUY: MEL PROFITT"

"Babylon 5" still ranks as one of the most audacious shows in TV history. It was designed from the start to tell one long story that would climax in the fifth season. In other words, viewers got no truly satisfying conclusion to any one season or episode, because it was all building up to the grand finale. And what were the chances it would last exactly five seasons? It did, and this set brings you one step closer to the end (\$99.98, Warner Bros.). "Wiseguy," on the other hand, benefited from self-contained story lines that lasted roughly half a season, with **Kevin Spacey's** magnetic turn as Mel Profitt ranking as the low-rated show's high point (\$59.99, Studio Works).

"IKIRU"

Director Akira Kurosawa's name instantly brings to mind sweeping Shakespearean epics. But many feel his masterpiece is 1952's "Ikiru" (\$39.95, Criterion), a poignant, slow-moving study of a civil servant who is dying. No one will be surprised that Criterion does it proud, with two extensive documentaries and a scholarly commentary track. But the company's HVE line deserves more attention as it releases famed Japanese titles less familiar to Westerners, like director Kinji Fukasaku's 1968 yakuza thriller "Blackmail Is My Life" (\$29.95, HVE), a tale of young punks who foolishly try to blackmail business associates of a major crime boss. It's great fun and ripe for remake.

"OUT OF TIME"

Good guy **Denzel Washington** isn't so noble as a Florida lawman who gets duped but good by a pretty girl. Mining his misfit side, Washington stars in this low-key noir with the moral lawmen should consider — never, never "borrow" drug money from the office safe to pay off a nice lady's medical bills.

Also out:

The gunfight at the OK Corral inspired any number of great films, including John Ford's 1946 "**My Darling Clementine**," starring Henry Fonda (\$19.99, Fox); Spencer Tracy was such a brilliant actor, nobody questioned him when he insisted on playing the lead in 1941's "**Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**" (\$19.98, Warner Bros.) without elaborate makeup — he'd simply suggest the beast within us all, while Frederic March used every prosthetic trick in the book in his Oscar-winning performance in the 1932 version also included; few actors wore a dress as amusingly as Cary Grant in Howard Hawks' 1949 spoof "**I Was a Male War Bride**" (\$14.98, Fox); and maybe joining the "**Family Business**" (\$49.98, Showtime) isn't so bad when that business is the adult film industry, as shown in this truly out-there reality show.

Out next week:

The French mystery drama "**Swimming Pool**"; and lots of complete first seasons from TV, namely the goofy "**Green Acres**," the campy "**Lost in Space**" and HBO's "**Curb Your Enthusiasm**."