

DVDs this week 7/12

Akira: The Special Edition (\$39.98; Pioneer)

This anime landmark has never been a favorite of mine, but compared to "Final Fantasy: The Spirit Within," it truly is the Citizen Kane of apocalyptic cartoons. In Japan, society is spinning out of control. Our heroes are young people in a motorcycle gang that violently clash with rival groups. They stumble onto a bizarre government plot to mutate children into powerful weapons that can harness the forces of Akira, a force which seems half-destroying power and half-righteous wind that can sweep away the old ways. It's a gorgeous looking movie, with striking set pieces like those motorcycle battles and some elaborate psychic show-downs — even if it all feels like a teenager's take on nihilism rather than the real deal. This new edition is special, though: beautifully packaged in a nice tin case, with a second DVD devoted to the expected extras, including more than 4,500 production stills and interviews with the principals involved.



Ed Harris: Spot on

self-absorption and an early death. But Harris crafts some fine performances and his passion comes through in the audio commentary. Worthwhile, in the good sense of the word.

Pollock (\$24.95; Columbia TriStar)

It's great to see a wide audience embrace a labor of love with as much intensity as the people involved. I wouldn't say Ed Harris was born to play painter Jackson Pollock — he's too good an actor to limit by suggesting the need for destiny. But he certainly was the right person to get it made. Pollock's life was a little too classically Hollywood to completely engage me — early obscurity, meteoric success thanks to a woman (Marcia Gay Harden) who sacrificed her own career to make it happen, followed by drunken

Cane Toads: An Unnatural History (\$24.95; First Run Features)

These fat, poisonous little creatures were introduced into Australia in 1935 to attack the Greyback beetle, a pest destroying sugar crops. Sadly, the beetle could fly and the cane toad couldn't, making them useless as a natural deterrent. Happily, the cane toads weren't bothered by proving useless and went on to reproduce at a frantic rate (one male and female can churn out 40,000 eggs) and seem poised to take over the entire continent. This cheeky film breaks a lot of documentary rules à la Errol Morris and clearly has fun at the expense of the people it interviews. But those Aussies are an odd bunch — extolling the virtues of cane toads as pets, or obsessively doing all they can to wipe this plague off the face of the earth.

The Shootist (\$29.99; Paramount)

Sometimes a great artist's career ends on just the right note. Actor Peter Sellers just missed out on this by following his brilliant turn in **Being There** with the woeful comedy **The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu**. Director John Huston did it with **The Dead**, his moving adaptation of James Joyce starring his daughter Angelica. John Wayne also got it right with **The Shootist**, the tale of an aging gunfighter that poignantly dovetailed with his own battle against cancer. Surrounded by stellar talent (Lauren Bacall, Ron Howard, Jimmy Stewart), Wayne took his final bow with stoic dignity, guns blazing. Also just out is **Hatari!** (\$29.99; Paramount), Wayne's nostalgic team-up with Howard Hawks that strives for the manly humor of another era to little effect. Better is **Paint Your Wagon**, the Lerner & Loewe musical in which Clint Eastwood croaks out a few numbers. He would really nail his singing for **Honkytonk Man**, but this isn't the lumbering warhorse it looks like.

La Cage Aux Folles (\$19.98; MGM)

Miramax is suddenly on a remake jag, planning English language versions of recent foreign films like **"With a Friend Like Harry"** (which would work if they drop the slasher finale and keep it believable) and **"The Closet,"** a French farce about a man who pretends to be gay to protect his job. Surely they hope to mimic the success of the blockbusters **"Three Men and a Cradle,"** which remade **"Three Men and a Cradle"** and **"The Birdcage,"** which remade this silly trifle. It's proven surprisingly durable: a Broadway version was a giant smash and produced the anthem "I Am What I Am" and the Hollywood spin on it with Robin Williams and Nathan Lane made buckets of money. You wouldn't suspect such a long life for the shaky original (itself based on a play), but it has an innocent goofy charm and a certain unintentional zip because it was made in the '70s, long before anyone imagined gays could be anything but amusingly fey.

— Michael Giltz