

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Star Trek: The Next Generation - The Complete Third Season (\$139.99; Paramount)

This is the season "Star Trek: TNG" stepped out of the shadow of the original series. Data stopped being a substitute for Spock and became the most fascinating character on the show, thanks to episodes like "The Offspring." Riker became less of a Kirk stand-in and more of a blustering, insecure second-in-command who may not have the right stuff to actually lead ("The Best of Both Worlds, Part I"). The empath Troi became marginally less annoying; attempts to soften the sharp-tongued Picard were lessened; and so on. Of course, no season is perfect. This one also contains "Evolution," the dreadful episode in which the much-hated Wesley's "boy genius" aura reached absurd heights by having him create a new life-form. (On the plus side, it was so bad, it probably led to the character's eventual departure.) Happily, it all climaxes with a season finale involving the Borg that is one of the highlights of the entire series.



Levar Burton

Pearl Harbor Vista Series (\$39.99; Touchstone)

This 4 disc set contains the director's cut of the war epic, which makes this already interminable movie seem even longer. It was supposed to launch Josh Hartnett as a star, but by picking projects like 40 Days and 40 Nights, he may prove incapable of picking good roles. Even those who didn't like the movie can dive into hours and hours of audio commentary and on-the-set diaries that break down the filmmaking process at elaborate length. The highlight is disc four, which dissects the Pearl Harbor sequence from every possible angle.

Brideshead Revisited (\$79.95; Acorn)

I can still remember the Saturday afternoon at college when I rented this entire miniseries. Everyone seemed to be gone for the weekend and rather than fritter away my time, I decided to tackle this landmark BBC miniseries about a World War II soldier's memories of his idyllic days at Oxford and the fading blue-blooded family he became intertwined with. I started watching in mid-afternoon and plowed through almost the entire set. By the end, I was a wreck, mourning the loss of the British aristocracy, the passing of a way of life, and the dissolute collapse of the foppish Sebastian. Jeremy Irons was filming "The French Lieutenant's Woman" at the same time but for he and everyone else, this would be a career peak.

Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius (\$19.95; Paramount)

This cheerful animated flick has a cool, computer-generated look and a delightfully sweet nature: even Jimmy Neutron's dorky best friend can turn his asthma-fighting inhaler into a useful weapon when all the parents of the world are kidnapped by aliens and have to be rescued. It's certainly the equal in its modest way of the far more successful Monsters, Inc. Still, Richard Linklater's bolder Waking Life was cheated out of an Oscar nomination when Jimmy Neutron snuck by to join that movie and the eventual winner Shrek. Why did it happen? Maybe Hollywood's animating community has more geeks than hipsters in its midst — consider it sweet revenge for the nerds, something Jimmy Neutron would heartily support.



Jimmy Neutron

I Love Lucy: Season One Volumes One and Two (\$14.99 each; Paramount)

Okay, every show is different. Some series — like "Mary Tyler Moore," "M*A*S*H" and "Friends" — demand to be seen in complete, season by season packages. Others, like "Burns & Allen" or "The Andy Griffith Show" remain essentially unchanged and can be enjoyed in a greatest hits format. But no show — and certainly not one with as many episodes as "I Love Lucy" — should be put out on DVD in single volume discs that slowly present the series in chronological order. At four episodes a pop, it will take 45 DVDs (at a total cost of \$675!) to release all 180 episodes. Not even Lucille Ball's children would be interested in that! This show demands the very same greatest hits packaging that was so wrong for "Friends." A two-disc set with about 14 of the greatest episodes (the first, the last, the candy factory, the grape-stomping, the John Wayne, the Harpo Marx, the Vitameatavegamin and so on) would be a perennial best-seller.