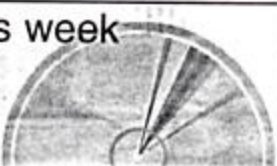


DVDs this week



The Woody Allen Collection, Set 2 (MGM; \$83.96)

The first Woody Allen collection was bursting with worthwhile films, ranging from slapdash comedies like *Bananas* to the classics *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*. Set 2 skips over his brilliant middle period (my favorite era of Woody) and plumbs his problematic later work. You get the archly whimsical *Alice* (with a grotesque ending that one wishes were satirical but isn't); the



Woody Allen: Boxed

middling *Shadows and Fog*, with John Cusack doing a fine imitation of Allen he would perfect in their next collaboration; the twice-filmed *September*; Gena Rowlands' strong turn in the better-than-you-remember *Another Woman*; and — just when you've given up hope — the towering masterpiece *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, which is obviously worth the price of the entire boxed set. (But if you're any sort of movie buff you already own it already.) No extras, not even the first version of *September* or audio commentary

from Allen. He's probably too busy making more movies.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Columbia TriStar; \$27.96)

This is a rare — perhaps unique — action film that plays better for adults than teenagers. Repeated viewings let you appreciate the mournful score by Tan Dun, the deceptively simple screenplay that is filled with complex characters, and the masterful performances by all involved but especially Michelle Yeoh. Among the many silly charges laid against *Crouching Tiger* was that it offered nothing new to fans of chop-socky — anyone familiar with the films of Tsui Hark and others had seen martial arts tinged with fantasy for years. True, but what they hadn't seen was a martial arts movie with an emotional punch as strong as its fighting one. A classic.

The Muppet Movie (Columbia TriStar; \$19.95)

Jim Henson's first Muppet movie is still the best, a real charmer that could put a smile on the face of any Grinch (and comparing it to that monstrosity reminds you what a pleasure real family films can be). It's joined by *The Muppets Take Manhattan* and soon a number of Kermit and the gang's other movies, most of which are enjoyable but none of which can equal the original. Now if only they'd get around to releasing classic episodes from TV's "The Muppet Show" and "Jim Henson's Storyteller."

Pixote (New Yorker Video; \$29.95)

There's a land rush feel to DVDs right now. You get the idea every studio is churning out titles to claim shelf space while the boom times are still on. (One estimate is that 5,000 new movies will be released on DVD this year.) In some cases that means dreck from the major studios. On the positive side is New Yorker Video, which seems determined to release as many of its foreign films on DVD as soon as possible. Hector Babenco's classic drama about homeless children on the streets of Brazil is part of their latest batch, which also includes Fellini's *City of Women*, and Isabelle Huppert's early triumph in *Loulou*.

Platoon (MGM; \$24.98)

Some classic albums — say, Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* — have been released on CD five, six or seven different times, each version promising to be the definitive one until the next one comes out. The same is happening with DVDs, with this Special Edition of *Platoon* superseding an earlier take. With someone like director Oliver Stone, who can always find something interesting to say, it's a welcome event. Also out is a Special Edition of the solid muckraker *Salvador*, a movie made when James Woods could do no wrong.

X — The Man With The X-Ray Eyes (MGM; \$14.95)

Actor Ray Milland had fallen far: 18 years earlier he'd won an Oscar for *The Lost Weekend*. Now he was schlepping around for Roger Corman. But Corman spotted talent on the way up (Jack Nicholson, et al) and on the way down. He made great use of Milland in this memorable tale of a doctor who develops a serum for X-ray vision that's a little too effective. Corman even offers a fun audio commentary (Woody could learn a lesson). Part of a series of Midnight Movies that also includes the classic Corman take on *The Pit and the Pendulum* starring Vincent Price.

— Michael Giltz