

AVS THIS WEEK

By Michael Giltz



"Glengarry Glen Ross"

This stogy but entertaining adaptation of the David Mamet play (\$26.98; Artisan) has a terrific cast, including Al Pacino, Ed Harris, Kevin Spacey, Alec Baldwin (who at the time was such a big star, his cameo got third billing) and Jack Lemmon in his last great film performance. It's a pity they didn't include his commentary track from the laser disc, but the DVD does include a tribute to him and numerous other extras.

"Reign of Fire"

What more could you want from a movie about dragons taking over the world than this grim bit of silliness (\$29.99; Touchstone)? You've got some nifty-looking dragons (rarely seen, which adds to their mystique and the B-movie atmosphere); a slightly sinister Matthew McConaughey as an outsider; and Christian Bale as a stern, bewhiskered leader who unintentionally set free the dragons as a little boy and now simply wants to keep a band of refugees alive as long as possible. Bale is a convincing action hero and would make a dangerously tough James Bond once Pierce Brosnan retires.

"Margaret Cho — The Notorious C.H.O."

Stand-up comic Margaret Cho increasingly seems like the true heir to Richard Pryor. Shocking and shockingly funny, this film (\$19.98; Wellspring) doesn't have the overarching story of falling in a sitcom that powered "I'm the One That I Want" — it's just very, very funny about everything from 9/11 to gay sex. Big bonus: an interview with Cho's mom (who isn't that different from Cho's hilarious impersonation) and a director's commentary done by Cho in the persona of her mother.

"The Heroic Trio"

Miramax has the rights to a slew of Hong Kong action flicks, and it's been screwing them up repeatedly. Just like its many Jackie Chan titles, they've put out the comic book fantasy "The Heroic Trio" (\$29.99; Miramax) — starring Michelle Yeoh of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" — in a slightly shortened version that is dubbed. Since Americans hate dubbed movies (and with good reason), it's a bizarre decision — especially since DVDs make it easy as pie to provide captions in three or four languages with ease. Include dubbed as an option if you must, but why make it the only option?

Harvey Weinstein can hardly claim to be a champion of foreign films as long as he continues this horrid practice. Maybe he'll realize it's a mistake after the dubbed "Pinochio," starring Roberto Benigni, flops when it opens Christmas Day.

"New Tale of Zatoichi"

"On the Road" / "The Fugitive"

To see how it's done right, check out the three latest Zatoichi flicks (\$19.95 each; Home Vision Entertainment). A blind swordsman and an iconic figure in Japan akin to Robin Hood, Zatoichi's new movies are in color and tremendous fun. Any fan of Kurosawa's "Yojimbo" should snatch these up.

"Beckett on Film: The Tragedies of Shakespeare"

Beckett on film? It sounds like a joke. But this tremendous project (\$149.95; Blue Angel) convinced major directors like Atom Egoyan, Anthony Minghella and Neil Jordan to team with major actors and film every single Beckett work, no matter how short or unlikely. The result is entirely engrossing and beautifully packaged on four DVDs, with highlights from John Hurt and Julianne Moore. Equally pricey is a boxed set of five Shakespearean tragedies (\$149.99; Ambrose) taped for the BBC from 1978 to 1983. Unlike the Beckett, these are merely stage plays recorded for television. Some great work from Derek Jacobi and others, but given its source, this is far too expensive.

"The Forsyte Saga"

This superior "Masterpiece Theatre" miniseries just ended its run on PBS. It's a fine adaptation (\$59.95; Acorn) of the sprawling novel about an aristocratic British family. (Is there any other sort? Not on "Masterpiece Theatre.") Damien Lewis of "Band of Brothers" is a standout as the soulless Soames Forsyte, but he's ably supported by Rupert Graves and our vote for the next James Bond: Ioan Gruffudd of "Horatio Hornblower."