

DVDs THIS WEEK

by Michael Giltz



"Spider-Man" (\$28.96)

This summer smash has aged poorly in just a few months. After the sweet thrills of watching Peter Parker (a terrific Tobey Maguire) revel in his powers, the Columbia Tri-Star DVD thuds to earth with the dull villain GreenGoblin (Willem Dafoe in a thankless, hammy role).

Maybe the sequel will be better, but Spidey was always short on good villains. Lots of good extras, including Maguire's elaborate "screen test" to convince the studio he could pull it off.

"Malcolm in the Middle" Season One (\$39.98)

"Baretta" Season One (\$39.98)

"Malcolm" is a very good sitcom, but looking again at first season reminds you of what a classic the Fox show promised to be. Few shows are ever this witty, fresh and engaging.

Can the show ever be this great again? "Baretta" was never great, but the DVD from Universal reveals it had an offbeat charm that gave Robert Blake his best role since "In Cold Blood."

"The Sum of All Fears" (\$19.95)

In the latest edition of "The New Biographical Dictionary of Film" (\$35 from Knopf and worth every penny), critic David Thomson mocks Ben Affleck by describing him as "criminally lucky" to have had the career he's had. Nothing in Paramount's DVD of "The Sum of All Fears" would change that charge, given how remarkably dull it and Affleck are, despite a timely story of terrorists nuking a major city.

Also depressing: It was joylessly directed by Phil Alden Robinson, who once upon a time made lovely films like "Field of Dreams" but hadn't made a feature since 1992's "Sneakers." Why can't this man get more work?

"War and Remembrance" (\$129.98)

"Shaka Zulu" (\$79.95)

"The Lost World" (\$39.95)

I miss the miniseries, that one-time staple of network TV. Events like "War and Remembrance" were sprawling affairs. It lasted 15 hours and cost \$150 million, and it wasn't nearly as good as "The Winds of War," but it was so massive, we felt obliged to watch. Wasn't it our duty?

"Shaka Zulu" is an independent miniseries in 10 parts (not the movie starring Michael Caine from '64) that aired in syndication over and over again throughout the '80s. Nowadays, they almost never make miniseries, so we simply pretend two-part movies like A & E's "The Lost World" (starring Bob Hoskins) are the real deal and make do. It's silly fun, but it's certainly not a miniseries.

Halloween Roundup

"Eight Legged Freaks" (\$26.98, Warner Bros.) was a noble attempt to capture the spirit of drive-in schlock films. But smart folk will prefer "Séance on a Wet Afternoon" (\$29.95, HVE), the disturbing tale of a medium that kidnaps a child so she can "find" him again.

Hard-core devotees will appreciate "The Dan Curtis Macabre Collection" (\$49.98, MPI), some pretty good versions of classic horror tales, two of them starring Jack Palance. But Curtis is best known for creating Barnabas Collins, who menaces throughout 40 episodes on "Dark Shadows Collection Three" (\$59.98, MPI).

Even Barnabas might have thought twice before matching wits with the vamps in the modern classic "Near Dark" (\$29.98, Anchor Bay), given the deluxe treatment it deserves. "Gremlins" (\$19.98, Warner Bros.) is still a clever treat and its sequel "Gremlins 2: A New Batch" (\$19.98, Warner Bros.) a wild satire that was dismissed at the time.

You could always watch "Carrie" (\$19.98, MGM) to see how poorly this shoddy Brian DePalma flick has aged.

But for the perfect mix of silliness and scares (OK, just silliness), you can't do better than "Godzilla: The Ultimate Collection" (\$39.98, Classic Media/Sony Music Entertainment), which has four Godzilla movies (including "Godzilla vs. Mothra") and one Rodan monster flick for a terrific price.