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DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Me You Them (\$29.95; Columbia TriStar)

Here is a real gem, a Brazilian comedy-drama vaguely inspired by real events that was nominated for the Best Foreign Film Oscar and deserved to win. In it, the earthy Regina Case stars as Darlene, a pregnant woman in rural Brazil who seems at a loose end until a much older neighbor offers to marry her. He proves to be a lazy bum, but Darlene is far more resourceful than he imagines. Slowly pulled into her orbit is her husband's cousin, which results in the birth of another child that - just like the first one - is clearly not his. This awkward arrangement is thrown off by a third man — handsome drifter Darlene also takes in. Suddenly everyone is jealous of everyone else. You can't imagine anyone agreeing to a moment of this farcical home life, but Darlene is such a force of nature and so matter-of-fact about doing what makes her happy (however unconventional) that you don't doubt the movie for a moment. Romantic, slyly funny, and wise about human behavior, *Me You Them* is a quirky, memorable delight with a great performance by Case.

It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (\$19.98; MGM)

Here's why *Rat Race* - the recent all-star comedy - was such a bad idea. It didn't work in 1963 for the usually ponderous director Stanley Kramer and it won't work today. Why did anyone think endless cameos of comedy stars would be inherently entertaining? At least instead of *Rat Race*'s second bananas, this shockingly long epic (around 2 and a half hours) featured genuine legends like Milton Berle, Sid Caesar, Terry-Thomas and Jonathan Winters. You're far better off buying one of Caesar's collections of skits from the TV series "Your Show of Shows."



Terry-Thomas

Though his targets were generally art fare and more high-lutin cinema, this is one movie he could have skewered so well.

Thunderbirds Set 1 and Set 2 (\$39.95 each; A&E)

The next cartoon craze could be a Taiwanese martial-arts puppet show called "Thunder Force." But to keep your kids on the cutting edge, you should buy them the classic British show that inspired it: "Thunderbirds." A mid-60s series about International Rescue, a top-secret group dedicated to providing aid anywhere in the world (or space), "Thunderbirds" is a major cultural icon in the UK but virtually unknown here. After years of wondering whether the show was kitschy fun, dated, or genuinely thrilling, it's nice to find out "Thunderbirds" is all of these things at once. And don't think the puppetry action will make its special effects outdated - in fact, the hand-crafted, detailed and witty set designs make the action scenes more convincing and thrilling in its way than most of the digital action scenes from *Pearl Harbor*.

The Neverending Story (\$19.98; Warner Bros.)

This 1984 fantasy is the oddball movie in director Wolfgang Petersen's otherwise testosterone-driven career. It's also in many respects his most successful - it did so well overseas (though modestly in the States) that there were two sequels, and an animated series. It's based on the book by Michael Endo — a runaway international bestseller enjoyed, like Harry Potter, by adults as much as kids — about a lonely boy who escapes to a magical world via reading. It's no *Wizard of Oz* and has the vaguely anonymous air of a European co-production, but the special effects have a hand-made feel that's appealing in this day of cold-blooded CGI effects.

Salesman (\$39.95; Criterion)

One of the nice things about a small company like Criterion is glimpsing when someone there becomes obsessed by an artist and does everything they can to bring that person's work to a wider audience. Obviously someone at Criterion became enamored - or simply finally got the rights - to release some of the major works of documentary filmmakers the Maysles brothers on DVD. First came *Gimme Shelter*, the blackly gripping Rolling Stones concert film (in which Tina Turner appears for only a few minutes but steals the show). Then came the gothic comedy of Big Edie and Little Edie in the voyeuristic *Grey Gardens*. Now comes their 1968 masterpiece *Salesman*, an hilarious, sad look at door-to-door Bible salesmen. They are three very different, major works by these artists and are all essential for one simple reason: they're brilliant, penetrating, entertaining classics. Here's hoping someone at Criterion gets obsessed with Errol Morris and makes his brilliant documentaries available too.

— Michael Giltz