

# DVDs this week

## By Michael Giltz

### Friends — The Complete Second Season (\$69.98; Warner)

Remarkably, "Friends" has joined "Law & Order" as one of the rarest of shows — a series that hits a new peak of popularity after many years on the air. In truth, the quality has slipped; the cast should have called it a day after the season in which Chandler and Monica had a secret relationship. But who can blame them? This look back at the second season proves what a remarkably solid show it's been. But after becoming Number One for the very first time during its eighth season and garnering Emmy nominations for cast members who have deserved it all along, who among us could blame them for trying to do it one more time? Who knows, when Season Nine comes out on DVD, they may actually be able to trumpet it as "The One That Finally Won the Emmy For Best Comedy."



ANISTON

### Red Beard (\$39.95; Criterion)

Film Forum is having a popular hit on its hand with a series devoted to Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune. Film Forum is repeating many of the movies they've shown because of huge demand. Surely one of the biggest finds for those who only know the samurai movies was the team's last film together — *Red Beard*. Like so many of their movies, this one was imitated in the West. Criterion has an excellent version of it, along with numerous other Kurosawa/Mifune films. Go see them at Film Forum and then make sure you buy the Criterion editions of *Rashomon*, *The Hidden Fortress*, *Seven Samurai*, *Yojimbo*, its superior sequel *Sanjuro* and *High and Low*, among others. You'll be tremendously entertained while discovering the original inspirations for TV's "Dr. Kildare," *Star Wars*, *Go*, *The Magnificent Seven*, Clint Eastwood's spaghetti westerns and countless other films.

### Poirot — The Complete Collection (\$59.95; A&E)

This is by no means the "complete" Poirot. It includes four A&E movies featuring Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot as embodied by the brilliant David Suchet. They first aired in 2000 and 2001, while Suchet has been playing Poirot in hour-long episodes and feature length movies since 1989. None of this detracts from Suchet's marvelously eccentric performance or from the puzzles Christie poses.

### Outer Limits: The Original Series — The Complete First Season (\$79.96; MGM)

In 1963, ABC was desperate to duplicate the success CBS was having with the smash hit "The Twilight Zone." The result was "The Outer Limits," an anthology show which always stood in the shadow of Rod Serling's masterpiece (and ran for less than two years). However, like any anthology, there were some terrific episodes — including one that starred William Shatner as an astronaut on a fly-by of Venus. The name of the mission? Project Vulcan: (Ooooh, spooky.) To its credit, "The Outer Limits" also managed to come up with an opening credit sequence ("There is nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture.") just as legendary as Serling's. This fine collection gathers all 32 episodes from the first season.

### Star Trek: The Next Generation — The Complete Fourth Season (\$139.99; Paramount)

Every "Star Trek" fan will want to own Seasons Four and Five, the heart of this series and the reason why many people consider "ST: TNG" better than the original. But for me, Season Four is a disappointment. It begins with the conclusion to "The Best of Both Worlds," arguably the greatest two episodes on this or any "Star Trek" series. The Borg attack Earth and Picard leads the forces of the Federation into battle. They fend off the Borg (for now) but the vast majority of the fleet is crippled or destroyed. Suddenly, Earth is vulnerable to attack, the Klingons are undergoing civil war, and the Borg may return at any moment. In other words, everything has changed. This season has terrific episodes, but there are only passing references to the dramatic changes in the fortunes of the Federation. Their mission seems to have changed not a whit either: They're still boldly going into space instead of serving as military protection for Earth. The season opener takes your breath away by upending every expectation you have. The rest of the series is very good indeed, but never lives up to what might have been.