

NWS THIS WEEK

by Michael Giltz



"24": SEASON TWO

"ALIAS": COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

No show on TV is better suited to DVD than "24," the compulsively watchable series that got even better in its second season (\$69.98, Fox). Here, agent Jack Bauer (**Kiefer Sutherland**) is called back into action when terrorists threaten to blow up a nuclear bomb in Los Angeles. The first season may have had a bum twist or two (mainly Jack's wife's amnesia), but this nightmarish second day is even more thrilling.

Lots of extras, including deleted scenes and commentary. "Alias" (\$69.99, Buena Vista) — unexpectedly renewed for a third season — remains a cult TV spy thriller with more twists and turns than any **John Le Carré** novel. The foolishness is carried along by **Jennifer Garner**'s star power (and her sexy costumes).

"RUSSIAN ARK"

The most unexpected art-house hit in years, this one-take stunt by crusty director **Alexander Sokurov** features a dandy of a diplomat who wanders with us through the Hermitage museum in St. Petersburg and — as we pass from room to room — through Russian history, as well (\$29.98, Wellspring). It should be a gimmick, but the movie is hypnotic on its own terms, remarkable for the Herculean effort it took to make it happen, and emotionally moving at the finale. Good extras, including a commentary track by a producer. But what it really needs is a scholar to expound at length on all the references to Russian history that go over the heads of most Western filmgoers.

"SLEEPING BEAUTY": SPECIAL EDITION

It's time to relegate this 1959 snoozer (\$29.99, Disney) to the second (or even third) tier of Disney animated films. The animation is poor, the story is slight, even by fairy tale standards, and the uninteresting characters would only qualify as minor figures in a better film. That said, the finale between the stiff Prince Phillip and the evil Maleficent perks things up a bit and the movie is packaged nicely with a new commentary track featuring animators, the impressive short "Grand Canyon," and more.

"CONFESSIONS OF A DANGEROUS MIND"

You gotta give Miramax credit for trying. They gave this one-time Oscar hopeful about **Chuck Barris** (\$29.99, Miramax) not one but two theatrical releases, hoping audiences would catch up with a critically well-received drama about the game show host/CIA assassin, played by **Sam Rockwell**. Audiences weren't exactly wrong — the movie is more interesting to talk about than to actually see. But if you're a fan of **George Clooney**, it does mark his directorial debut. Includes a Clooney commentary track, a Chuck Barris documentary, deleted scenes and Rockwell's screen test.

"NEIL GAIMAN'S NEVERWHERE"

This may be the year for writer **Nail Gaiman**, who — like **Clive Barker** — skips from genre to genre with ease, whether it's classic graphic novels like "The Sandman," best-selling books like "American Gods" or this BBC miniseries about London Below (\$39.95, A&E), a strange nether region where good battles evil. The budget is not up to Gaiman's imagination (the "Neverwhere" book that he wrote after penning this miniseries is more satisfying), but it gives you a good taste of his black humor and rich imagination. Proof of how esteemed Gaiman is: the legendary **Brian Eno** penned the marvelous score.