



**"SPIRITED AWAY"
"CASTLE IN THE SKY"
"KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE"**

One of the pleasing triumphs at this year's Oscars was **Hayao Miyazaki's** brilliant "Spirited Away" winning Best Animated Film. It (\$29.99, Disney) tells the story of a little girl who wanders into an abandoned amusement park with her parents. They're turned into pigs and she's trapped in a fantasy world, forced to work at a bathhouse that caters to an endless parade of gods while trying to figure out how to rescue her folks. It has the comforting outlines of a classic fairy tale, but this movie is so completely Japanese in its sensibility that it's also weirder and more original than the last 10 Disney cartoons combined. Beautifully drawn, it's a great introduction to Miyazaki, one of the world's great animators. Disney has also released two of his very good earlier works -- "Castle in the Sky" (1986), a tale about a princess from a floating city, and "Kiki's Delivery Service" (1989), about a witch-in-training. They're all much better than "Princess Mononoke," the bland 1999 eco-saga that was Miyazaki's first movie to get a wide release here. And avoid Fox's "My Neighbor Totoro" (1993), a cropped edition without any extras.

"THE SINGING DETECTIVE"

In the United Kingdom, writer **Dennis Potter** is a TV giant -- sort of a combination of **Steven Bochco**, **Aaron Sorkin** and Orson Welles -- and "The Singing Detective" (1986) is one of the major reasons why (\$59.98, Warner Bros.). A legendary, six-part miniseries, it stars **Michael Gambon** as a mystery novelist suffering from a dreadful skin disease (as did Potter). Suffering from high fevers, the writer is stuck in a delirium when not haranguing the staff. We see glimpses of his childhood alongside the details of a new crime he's concocting to keep himself from going mad. Did I mention how major characters often break into song, lip-synching old classics in elaborate musical numbers? I'm not finished watching it yet, but after years of anticipation, it's living up to the high standards of "Pennies From Heaven" (Potter's other masterpiece). Brilliant, bitter and bold.

"DRUMLINE"

A cocky new kid (a very appealing **Nick Cannon**) joins the college marching band in this enjoyably predictable comedy drama (\$27.98, Fox). It's no more formulaic than a million Judy Garland-**Mickey Rooney** musicals and just as fun once you relax and accept it for what it is. Will he learn to fit into the band? Will the girl he fancies fall for him? Will the tough musical instructor (**Oriando Jones** from those annoying 7-Up commercials, but quite good here) ever stop giving him a hard time? Will they win the big competition? If you don't know the answers, you'll like this amiable flick even more than I did.

"RABBIT-PROOF FENCE"

This solid, fact-based drama from director **Phillip Noyce** (\$29.99, Disney) is about three aboriginal girls are forcibly dragged away from their families because they're half white -- the girls are therefore considered "too good" to be raised by aboriginals, but too "low" to be treated as equals to whites. They're placed in camps where they're trained to be servants for whites. The girls escape and travel literally thousands of miles to get home, evading capture every step of the way. Quietly gripping, it's aided tremendously by a terrific **Peter Gabriel** score.

"FAMILY GUY": VOL. 1 (SEASONS ONE AND TWO)

A scabrously funny sitcom, "Family Guy" (\$49.98, Fox) is probably the most patently offensive show since "South Park" and before that "All in the Family." If you weren't offended, you weren't watching. And you probably weren't watching, since Fox moved this hand grenade of a cartoon around the schedule so frequently that even creator **Seth McFarlane** probably couldn't keep track of it. Here you get about half of the entire run of the show (28 episodes), showing the Griffin family (including a murderous baby and a talking dog that's the only voice of reason) in all its sad glory. It's not fair to McFarlane, but the show is actually more fun since it didn't become a pop cultural phenom a la "The Simpsons." But, hey, cult classic is a pretty great way to go too, isn't it?