

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

The Simpsons Season Two (\$49.98; Fox)

This is the season "The Simpsons" was saved from itself. An immediate smash hit on Sunday nights, the show was switched by Fox to Thursdays at 8 opposite the blockbuster sitcom "The Cosby Show." And thank God. "The Simpsons" — like Tarantino or God — seemed to be everywhere in 1989. It did well against "Cosby" but not near the numbers it did the first year, turning the animated classic from a pop cultural juggernaut to an almost below-the-radar hit. The show would appear in the Top 20 or 30 for years to come, but it didn't dominate the airwaves, letting the writers and voice cast go on to create some of the most subversive and funny half hours on television.



MR. HOMER SIMPSON

Hopscotch (\$29.95; Criterion)

Movies given the Criterion treatment are almost always critically acclaimed works or cult favorites that deserve to be considered classics. Sure the occasional *Armageddon* sneaks in (hey, Criterion has to pay the bills, you know). But by and large its stamp of approval is given sparingly and with good reason. *Hopscotch* isn't the joke that *Armageddon* is, but it is surely the most unexpected addition to the canon in a while. An amusing little caper, it tells about an aging C.I.A. agent (the shambling Walter Matthau) shunted aside thanks to politics. He publishes a memoir revealing the secrets of virtually every spook agency in the world, making him a target for everyone from his old bosses to the KGB. Glenda Jackson plays the woman who gives him succor and shelter. They made a great team, having previously paired off in *House Calls*.

Reservoir Dogs: Special Edition (\$26.98; Artisan)/Pulp Fiction Collector's Edition/Jackie Brown Collector's Edition (\$29.99 each; Miramax)



TARANTINO

Here's a shocker: Quentin Tarantino has been out of the spotlight so long, we actually miss the guy. That would have been heard to believe five years ago when he was virtually omnipresent. Just as surprising is the fact that all three of his features come bursting with extras, but without the *de rigueur* commentary track. It must be hard to say no in the first flush of fame, but Tarantino seems to have learned the trick. As for the movies, *Reservoir Dogs* is a gem; *Pulp Fiction* has a brilliant first act, a clever structure, and some serious flaws, but deserves its landmark status; and *Jackie Brown* — like its star Pam Grier — looks better and better with the passing of time.

Iris (\$29.99; Miramax)

With Ronald Reagan reportedly unable to recognize his wife Nancy and Charlton Heston announcing poignantly (if rather enigmatically) that he is exhibiting Alzheimer's-like symptoms, the timing is sadly right for *Iris*. This quietly ambitious drama shows author Iris Murdoch in the throes of that terrible illness while flashing back to her young romance with devoted husband John Bayley. The movie mostly sidesteps Murdoch's bisexuality (it's based on his memoir, after all) and doesn't really give you any sense of Murdoch the artist. But Judi Dench gives a bewildered stare and you're lost. Kate Winslet and Jim Broadbent are also strong, but the real find here is Hugh Bonneville who plays the young Bayley; he resembles Broadbent to a stunning degree and seems to have just as much talent to boot.

The Fluffer (\$29.95; First Run Features)

This witty little drama is like *Boogie Nights* set in the gay porn industry. Our hero is Sean (Michael Cunio), a young cameraman obsessed with gay-for-pay porn star Johnny Rebel. Sean gets the break of a lifetime when he becomes Johnny's "fluffer," an assistant hired to stimulate the star before the camera is rolling. This sounds titillating, but writer and co-director Wash West has more serious aims. The movie is assured if low budget (the sound is especially weak), with unexpected twists that turn it from a sly comedy into a sad and seedy drama. It's hard to tell if Scott Gurney as Johnny is an actor with a limited range or merely playing an actor with a limited range. But Cunio is spot-on: not since Hugh Grant blushed his way into stardom has an actor managed to remain so sheepishly charming for an entire film.