

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Pearl Harbor (\$29.99; Touchstone)

A film so temperate in portraying all sides of the first sneak attack on American soil that even the Japanese took it to heart. This handsomely packaged two-disc set is loaded with extras, but there's also a Gift Set for \$49.99 that has even more and — if you can wait — on May 14 a four disc set director's cut, which presumably stages the Pearl Harbor attack in real time. Speaking of the director, this is far and away Michael Bay's best movie. Unlike *The Rock*, *Armageddon* and *Bad Boys*, *Pearl Harbor* is a fairly coherent film with action scenes you can (sometimes) follow. The cast is solid and while the movie is by no means good, it is painless hokum. Imagine if Oliver Stone had directed it. Instead of flag-waving patriotism, we'd probably watch FDR callously let the attack proceed without warning his military, just to force the foot-dragging public to support entering the war.



Hollywood did such a soft job on "Pearl Harbor" even Japanese audiences didn't realize that their guys were the baddies.

War movie roundup:

Long before September 11, the promotional blitz around Pearl Harbor prompted all the studios to churn out some of their war movies. Oscar winner *From Here to Eternity* (\$24.95; Columbia TriStar) obviously puts Pearl Harbor to shame and gave the peerless Montgomery Clift one of his best roles as a sensitive rebel. Lesser known gems include tough guy Robert Mitchum directed by Edward Dmytryk in *Anzio* (\$19.95; Columbia TriStar) and three solid entries in the Fox War Classics line: *Halls of Montezuma*, *Wing and a Prayer*, and *Guadalcanal Diary* (\$19.98 each; Fox). But my personal favorite is Steven Spielberg's World War II drama *Empire of the Sun* (\$24.99; Warner Bros.) Some said Spielberg was shamelessly trying to get an Oscar by tackling this movie. But that overlooks how much this brilliant drama resembles his most personal work (a boy separated from his family, an emotional reunion at the finale, etc.). Though he would get the Oscar years later, I still think this is Spielberg's best work as a director, thanks to a tremendous score by John Williams and a great adaptation by Tom Stoppard from the J.G. Ballard novel. Every shot is beautifully composed as he tells the story of a boy held prisoner by the Japanese. And, of course, he coached Christian Bale to one of the greatest performances by a child actor we are ever likely to see. A classic.

Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure/Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (\$19.98 each; MGM)

If all those war movies tire you out, take a breather with one of these comedy classics. *Bill & Ted* succeeds thanks to the dopey charms of Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter, but especially because the movie is ultimately rather sweet-natured (something most other nasty and dumb teen comedies fail to appreciate). *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* pairs Michael Caine and Steve Martin in a tale of shysters to hilarious effect. Director Frank Oz has a marvelous touch with light comedy and it just gets funnier and funnier every time you watch it.

Walt Disney Treasures (32.99 each; Disney)

No studio takes better care of its catalog or repackages it more relentlessly than Disney. That's because from the mid-60s (when Disney himself died) until the mid-80s, the studio was moribund both creatively and financially. All they had was their catalog and they used it wisely — re-releasing their animated gems every seven years and almost single-handedly turning video into a sell-through phenomenon and major source of income for both Disney and the other majors. The nice result for consumers is a steady stream of smartly packaged titles like *Walt Disney Treasures*. Encased in souvenir tin cases, these four titles include *Disneyland USA* (episodes of the TV series set in the theme parks), *Mickey Mouse in Living Color* (26 shorts from 1935 to 1938) and the real treasures *Davy Crockett* (all five episodes of the wildly popular show that aired briefly on "The Wonderful World of Disney") and *Silly Symphonies* (the innovative shorts from 1929 to 1939 that pioneered the techniques Disney would use so well in *Snow White*).

— Michael Giltz