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DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

The Fast and the Furious (\$26.98; Universal)

Director John Waters complains that there aren't any good B movies anymore: they're all being made by major studios on big budgets. Stupid B flicks are now the mainstay of the summer season, so how can a schlockmeister in Wisconsin compete? Exhibit



Vin Diesel

number A in proving Waters right is *The Fast and the Furious*, a seamy drama that rips the lid of LA street racing, the dangerous, decadent practice in which out of control youths risk life and limb in a reckless disregard of posted speeding limits. Vin Diesel glowers convincingly as the good-hearted leader of one gang and Paul Walker is actually pretty good as the cute but conflicted undercover cop who feels bad about betraying his new buddies. This was such a big hit that the main failing of big budget B movies is clear: a peddler like Roger Corman would have already had two sequels and a rip-off in theaters by now.

Sound and Fury (\$24.95; Docudrama)

If your deaf child could get an operation and having their hearing restored, would you do it? It seems an obvious question, until this penetrating documentary shows how some people in the deaf community view being hearing impaired as a gift rather than a burden.

Mad Max — Special Edition (\$19.98; MGM)

I saw the Americanized version of *Mad Max* and remembered it as a somewhat sleazy, cheap exploitation flick. It didn't help that I saw the sequel first, for *The Road Warrior* is one of the great action films of all time. It seemed puzzling that the original (starring Mel Gibson) had been a hit, much less spawned such a superior sequel. Well, this edition restores the original Aussie soundtrack (apparently the voices had been dubbed for fear we'd get confused, mate) and the result is a textbook example of how bad dubbing can ruin a film. This is actually a terrific film, a very worthy beginning to the still superior sequel.

Jeeves & Wooster — The Complete Third Season (\$39.95; A&E)

Forgive me. In an earlier review of *Jeeves & Wooster*, I idiotically referred to Jeeves as a butler. In fact, he is a valet, a far superior and far more important role in a great home than butler, which can apparently be accomplished by an Tom, Dick or Harry of the lower classes. A valet is a gentleman's gentleman and none came better than Jeeves, the unflappable star of numerous comic novels by P.G. Wodehouse. Jeeves is always getting his hapless boss Wooster out of jams and it's difficult to imagine anyone capturing their brand of whimsy better than Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie. Obviously Andrew Lloyd Webber didn't get it right on Broadway with his musical *By Jeeves*. The valet himself would likely have recommended a more appropriate setting (such as Off Broadway with its lower ticket prices). Context is all, isn't it?

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension (\$19.98; MGM)

Rarely does a film set out to be a cult classic and actually succeed. Usually, these things must happen more organically, with a movie that has every intention of conquering the world being so quirky and offbeat that it doesn't wow the masses but does become the passionate domain of those in the know. That's exactly what happened with director W.D. Richter's comic classic. I have the feeling they expected to sell action figure dolls and make three or four sequels. But nothing this goofily odd could ever hope to be more than beloved by the special few. It has a crazy plot about a hero and his band of geniuses that defeat an alien invasion masterminded by John Lithgow. "Laugh while you can, monkey boy!" is just one of Lithgow's many hilarious lines.

Upstairs, Downstairs — The Complete Second Season (\$79.95; A&E)

The first season of this terrifically entertaining British drama made my best of the year list — not because of any bells and whistles but just because it was put out on DVD at a fairly reasonable price and is so much fun. The second season maintains the high standards of the first, though series creators Jean Marsh and the incomparable Eileen Atkins would be swayed by success and the passion of fans into pushing their luck a few more seasons than was necessary. ("Fawlty Towers" remains the standard for showing the good judgment in giving people less than they demand.) As I mentioned in my roundup, this is ideal viewing after watching Robert Altman's *Gosford Park*, especially since Atkins has a plum role in that film.