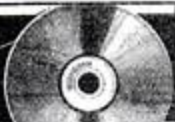


7/22/03

DVDs THIS WEEK

By Michael Giltz



"THE CORNER"

"KINGPIN"

"The Corner" is a triumph for writer **David Simon** ("Homicide," "The Wire") and director **Charles S. Dutton**, who manage to tell the familiar story about the ravages of drugs and make it seem entirely fresh and devastating. They're blessed with a marvelous cast, including the great **Khandi Alexander**. One typical scene from this Emmy-winner for Best Mini-series (\$39.98, HBO): a little boy is struggling with a bicycle and says plaintively to his mom that the tire is flat. She responds flatly and with complete indifference, "What do you want me to do about it?" It'll break your heart. Peek at the other end of the drug trade with "Kingpin" (\$29.99, NBC), the limited-run NBC series about a Mexican crime family, seen here in a "producer's cut" that's slightly more explicit than the broadcast version.

"NICHOLAS NICKLEBY"

"THE LIFE OF DAVID GALE"

Two clunkers here. **Charlie Hunnam** (good in the U.K. version of "Queer as Folk") blands out in the title role of "Nicholas Nickleby" (\$25.98, MGM). But the real blame lies with writer-director **Douglas McGrath**, who manages to make each scene feel as if it's from an entirely different movie, all of them bad. The creators behind "The Life of David Gale" (\$26.98, Universal) were stunned by the ferociously negative reviews for this anti-death penalty story starring **Kevin Spacey** and came up with lots of explanations (Americans don't like to be lectured by foreigners; 9/11 has viewers feeling tough on crime, etc.). But they left out the obvious one: Their movie simply isn't very good. Both films feature audio commentary by their directors and short making-of features.

"UMBERTO D"

"THE HONEYMOON KILLERS"

An old man tries to scrape together an existence in post-war Italy in Vittorio De Sica's painfully sad "Umberto D" (\$29.95, Criterion). The extras include a solid one-hour documentary about the director. The cynical, amoral killing-spree drama "The Honeymoon Killers" (\$29.95, Criterion) shows overweight Martha thrilled to be getting attention from smooth-talker Ray — even if his attentions involve using Martha to commit a string of heartless murders. The extras include a new interview with writer-director **Leonard Kastle** and an essay about the true-crime caper that inspired the film.

"FIDEL: THE UNTOLD STORY"

Estela Bravo's documentary is a loving, albeit informative look at Castro (\$29.95, First Run Features). It tells his story via intriguing historical footage and rosy comments from the likes of **Alice Walker**, **Harry Belafonte** and writer **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**, who says he sends all his books in galley form to Castro, who edits them better than most professionals. Bravo, who reportedly lives a privileged life in Cuba, can barely muster up the slightest criticism of the dictator. Best ironic moment: an early interview with Edward R. Murrow has Castro saying, "When we have fulfilled our promise of good government, I will cut [off] my beard." The beard is still there.

Also out:

The sophomore year of "Felicity" finds the show reaching its peak of enjoyable soapy plotlines (\$59.99, Buena Vista), but the best bits are the extras, including the original unaired pilot, **Keri Russell's** audition and an amusing Emmy parody; don't forget about "Alison Krauss + Union Station Live," which finds bluegrass' most successful group in fine form (\$24.98, Rounder); Steinbeck's "The Red Pony" (1949) has one of the great films scores, courtesy of Aaron Copeland (\$14.98, Artisan); and the Cartwrights ride The Ponderosa in eight episodes from the long-running oater ((\$24.98, Artisan).

Next Tuesday:

The film adaptation of comic hero "Daredevil," starring **J.Lo** honey **Ben Affleck**; **Michael Caine** in "The Quiet American"; and **George Clooney** tackling a somber Soviet sci-fi classic with "Solaris."