

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Training Day (\$26.98; Warner Bros.)

Forthright actors playing bad is one great way to get an Oscar nod. This film about a very corrupt cop (a chest-pounding Denzel Washington) and the rookie (an excellent Ethan Hawke) assigned to work with him is compelling until it goes off the rails. The rookie's decision on whether to stand up to his superior provides enough drama, but they threw in a third act involving honor among thieves and an elaborate (and unnecessary) scam/frame up. Director Antoine Fuqua does a great job keeping static scenes set in a car seem alive with tension and Washington and Hawke trade jabs more thrillingly than anything you'll see in *Alli*. Flawed but fun.



WASHINGTON

Oz: The Complete First Season (\$64.98; HBO)



FONTANA

Like "The Sopranos" boxed sets, this is overpriced — but the show is so good most fans won't mind. Tom Fontana's masterpiece is a grim, compelling look at a maximum-security prison. Usually, movies about war or other pressure cooker settings make viewers think, "How would I react in that situation?" It's hard to imagine any viewer doing anything but saying a silent prayer they'll never be in Oz. A tremendous cast (over 30 strong), and gripping storylines, even though later seasons would have so many killings you'd think Oz would be shut

down by now. A special nod to the directors, with kudos to the talented Darnell Martin, who helmed the pilot.

Strictly Ballroom (\$29.99; Buena Vista)

Going to see movies all the time can be a trying business, especially in the "down" periods when studios release mostly dreck. That's why the screenings of *Strictly Ballroom* were like manna from heaven in early '92. This bright, silly comedy about competitive ballroom dancers came out of nowhere to win over critics and be a *Full Monty*-like crowd pleaser. Since dashing lead Paul Mercurio hasn't done a thing since, everyone was clearly right to focus on the manic, voluble director Baz Luhrmann. No one suspected his hyper-kinetic visuals here would seem staid by the time of *Moulin Rouge*. But anyone who can find room for a Doris Day gem like "Perhaps Perhaps Perhaps" deserves free rein.

Samurai Jack — The Premiere Movie (\$19.98; Hanna Barbera)

A smashing Cartoon Channel hit, "Samurai Jack" is a visually striking, austere series about a warrior thrown into a future where the evil Aku holds sway. Jack vows to defeat his enemy and return home and goes about his task stolidly. (Some episodes, you'll swear you hear more dialogue during the commercials than during the show.) That severe tone is matched by graphics that are compellingly jagged and storylines that are unforgiving in their dourness. Of course, that makes it all great fun. It's no surprise there is already an animated feature film and live action spin-off in the works.



SAMURAI JACK

Angels & Insects (\$19.98; MGM)



THOMAS

Director Philip Haas has never been a favorite of mine, but his adaptation of A. S. Byatt's novella is compelling. It's a Victorian-era drama about sexual intrigue with Mark Rylance, Patsy Kensit and Kristin Scott Thomas in a very tangled web indeed. Thomas has the flashy part, but it was Rylance I couldn't forget: he never seemed to do a thing, but I couldn't take my eyes off his performance. Who was he? The answer, of course, is that he is a notable stage actor in the UK, who went on to be the artistic director at the Globe (modeled after Shakespeare's theater) and can be currently seen in "Cymbeline."