

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Made (\$24.98; Artisan)

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Vaughn (left) and Favreau.

I was no fan of *Swingers*; after the fifth refrain of "You're money!" I wanted a stiff drink as much as they wanted chicks. The subsequent movies of Vince Vaughn and writer/star Jon Favreau showed they don't have very good taste in other people's material. So this low-key story of two old friends — would-be mobsters on their first big assignment — caught me totally by surprise. Their obvious chemistry is well-used, with Vaughn an annoying know-it-all and Favreau a quick-to-anger schmuck with a stripper girlfriend. These two are so comfortable together it's only a matter of time before they give in and do one of two things: a Hope-Crosby take-off or a romantic comedy as lovers.

The Road Home (\$29.95; Columbia TriStar)

This simple story of love between a schoolteacher and a beautiful young woman (Zhang Ziyi of *Crouching Tiger*) is the latest strong effort of director Zhang Yimou. There's an unnecessary and sentimental framing device of a funeral, but the central story is compellingly simple. Has any director ever so thoroughly retooled himself as Yimou? He made his name with gorgeous, polished gems like *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Ju Dou*, culminating in the glossy brilliance of *Shanghai Triad*, a movie so lush in its production values it would shame most Hollywood studios. But Yimou has reinvented himself in the tradition of the Italian neo-realists, using hand-held cameras to film among the unsuspecting populace of China — creating brilliant dramas with exceptional immediacy like *The Story of Qiu Ju*, *To Live and Not One Less*. He is a major talent and this latest effort is a lesser but still worthy addition to his credits.

What's Eating Gilbert Grape (\$24.99; Paramount)

Director Lasse Halstrom has blanded out and Leonardo DiCaprio has been momentarily hamstrung by too much commercial success. (He'll recover.) But Johnny Depp fulfilled every promise he shows here. In this tale of a small-town nobody with a mentally challenged brother, two girlfriends (one of whom is married), and a very big mother, Depp is soulful and remarkably restrained. Best of all, Depp has great taste in projects (the hardest part of staying on top and the least-appreciated). Among his many quirky but rewarding movies since this gem are *Ed Wood*, *Dead Man*, *Don Juan De Marco*, *Danny Brasca*, *Before Night Falls*, *Sleepy Hollow*, and *Blow*.



Depp (right) and DiCaprio.

Willow (\$26.98; Fox)

Looking forward to *Lord of the Rings*? So am I, but this unenchanted stab at fantasy proves how hard it is to capture that genre on film. In fact, *Willow* is a painful reminder that except for *The Princess Bride* and the *Conan* movies, you'd have to go back to the stop-motion flicks of Ray Harryhausen (*Jason and the Argonauts*, etc.), to find a live-action fantasy film worth watching twice. (Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* and *The Dark Crystal* are a different breed closer to animated movies.) Val Kilmer is a fine scoundrel but director Ron Howard's sincere effort falls far, far short.

Lady For a Day and Regeneration (\$24.99 each; Image)

Director Frank Capra put his name on the map with this charmer about an apple seller who's been telling her daughter she's a high society dame. When the kid comes to town with her fiancé, the entire city seems to conspire to make the old lady's fantasy story come true...if only for one day. Capra would enjoy the even greater triumph *It Happened One Night* the following year, but this comedy already showed his tremendous talent for flawless casting and grand entertainment. On the flipside is director Raoul Walsh's early gangster flick with the compelling Rock-cliffe Fellowes as an Irish thug. In this one, the entire city seems to conspire to grind down his spirit.

— Michael Giltz