

DVDs this week

By Michael Giltz

Monsters Inc. (\$29.99; Disney)

This is the first film from Pixar — the creators of *Toy Story*, *Toy Story 2* and *A Bug's Life* — that I would classify as strictly for kids. Adults can certainly enjoy this clever tale of monsters creating an energy source for their world by scaring the bejeezus out of kiddies in ours. But it doesn't have the heft, the complexity or the emotional punch of those three modern classics. On the plus side, it finally garnered an Academy Award for composer Randy Newman, who has written a number of legendary scores, including *The Natural* and *Ragtime*. In true Oscar fashion, they finally gave him the nod for a theme song that is one of his least memorable creations.



'MONSTERS, INC.'

The Civil War (\$129.98; PBS)

Ken Burns doesn't seem to know or care that his landmark documentaries have been so poorly served on video and now DVD. *Baseball* and *Jazz* were both packaged in bulky cases that made renting them orevn lugging the sets over to a friend's house a near-impossible task. *The Civil War*, perhaps his greatest work, is finally packaged in a slim case. But like the others, it remains wildly overpriced. Are these brilliant documentaries worth every penny? Of course. But PBS would make just as much money — and probably more — if they followed the trend of DVD and delivered more of these specials for less cost. (See "24" below.) Besides, isn't PBS partially funded by the government with a mandate to educate? Precious few teachers or students could afford this.

24 — Season One (\$59.98; Fox)



SUTHERLAND

The most gripping show of last season is given sterling treatment on DVD. By sterling I don't mean tons of extras. I mean a nicely packaged set made available soon after the first run of the show and at a very affordable price. If you missed "24," you missed a humdinger. So, no excuses.

Koyaanisqatsi/Powaqqatsi (\$29.98; MGM)

One of my favorite films, *Koyaanisqatsi* is also one of the most influential films of the last 20 years. (Second only to *Blade Runner*, I'd say.) A nearly wordless look at man and nature, it turns late-night traffic and bustling pedestrians into works of art. You can see its mark on literally thousands of commercials, music videos and feature films. It became a box-office smash worldwide for the same reason action flicks do so well overseas — there's no dialogue to translate, so anyone anywhere in the world can follow the "story" easily. It also contains a great, propulsive score by Philip Glass.

D.W. Griffith — Years of Discovery 1909-1913 (\$39.99; Image)/Tabu (\$29.99; Image)

It's amazing, really. These 22 one- and two-reelers by the legendary Griffith were seen in the early 1900s and then dropped out of sight. Only academics and historians had access to them and even then only sporadically. But DVD has brought them to us all — it's a privilege and a treat to be able to savor them now. If video stores bred directors like Quentin Tarantino (who feasted on the Hong Kong flicks and camp classics that were their bread and butter), then imagine what talent will come of age with classics like these at their fingertips. Also just out is *Tabu*, another difficult-to-see classic that marked the meeting of two great minds — Murnau and Flaherty. Remarkably, their collaboration actually produced a terrific film.

Further Tales of the City (\$44.98; Showtime)

It's been a sad decline for the movies based on Armistead Maupin's ode to San Francisco. The landmark first miniseries (due out early next year on DVD) aired on PBS to record ratings and universal raves. But they caved to political pressure and refused to fund a sequel. That delay, along with a change in director, made "More Tales" decidedly less inspiring. "Further Tales" is a step down yet again, which is why it aired on Showtime without garnering any attention at all. But the cast is so marvelous — Laura Linney, Olympia Dukakis, et al. — and the spirit so engaging, it's still worthwhile for hardcore fans.