

AVDVDs

Everything old is new again on DVD

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USA TODAY

Not all the new releases in the video store are new. Every week, a slew of older titles and classic films make their way to shelves. Here's a look at the latest batch:

Advise & Consent (1962)

The president's nominee for secretary of state, played by Henry Fonda, is thought by some to have a communist past. The Senate holds confirmation hearings, and four decades ago, such give-and-take at least had the veneer of civility.

BACK STORY: Or did it? A subplot involves one senator blackmailing another with a homosexual past. That explains why Otto Preminger's adaptation of Allen Drury's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel is the first Hollywood film to have a gay-bar scene. Among the director's best, the film was shot in Washington, D.C., and one party scene features local social elites as extras. Burgess Meredith is a standout as an addled witness, and Charles Laughton, in his final film, oozes cornpone as a Southern senator.

EXTRAS, EXTRAS: Commentary by film historian Drew Caspar.



Microcosmos (1996)

This time, the tagline really nailed the movie: "It's *Jurassic Park* in your own backyard."

BACK STORY: Maybe it is an insult to insects to claim that this French documentary, which is even better than the same producer's Oscar-nominated *Winged Migration*, humanizes them. But micro-cameras get so intimate with the little buggers that we can discern their facial details, just as we could with that hapless creature in the finale of *The Fly*. Here, no one yells "help me, help me," although a dung beetle that pushes a boulder up a mountain (from his perspective, anyway) looks like he could use a hand. Especially since he's doing it back-

ward. The result is a purely sensory experience with sparse narration, and the surround soundtrack is so clean that you can hear the propeller sound of insect wings whirring. A subtle score helps. Love that soft xylophone.



Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow (1963)

The '64 foreign-film Oscar winner, directed by Vittorio De Sica, is

a Sophia Loren-Marcello Mastroianni three-part anthology famed for Loren's striptease in one segment. Specializing in DVDs of significant Italian releases, the newly formed NoShame has also just released the full 208-minute version of *Boccaccio '70* (1962, unrated, \$30), including the Mario Monicelli-directed segment that never played in U.S. theatres. Helming the other three: De Sica, Federico Fellini and Luchino Visconti.

The Big Red One (1980)

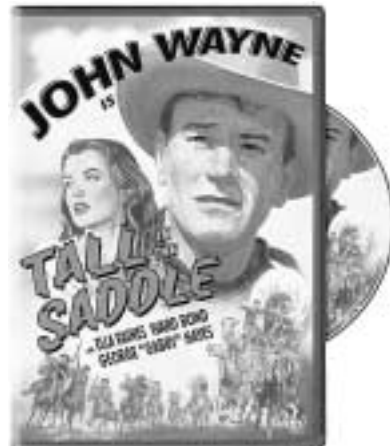
Director Samuel Fuller's Second World War dream project has been reconstructed closer to his wishes, turning a minor but solid film of 113 minutes into a lumpier epic of grand ambition running 45 more. The result comes and goes, with clunky narration and a lacklustre supporting cast offset by Lee Marvin's bedrock lead and many effective scenes. Bountiful two-DVD extras.

LOOKING FORWARD TO: The release June 7 of Fuller's 1955 Tokyo-based crime drama *House of Bamboo*.

Tall in the Saddle (1944)

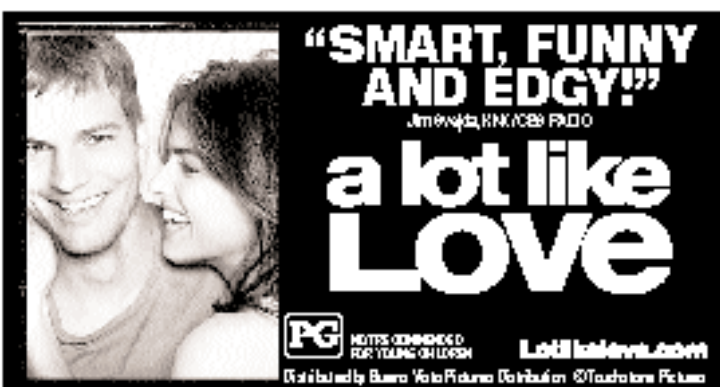
Into town on a stagecoach ride John Wayne and Gabby Hayes (contrasting approaches to masculinity). Before long, a callow punk tries cheating the Duke at poker. Not wise.

BACK STORY: This fast RKO Western has two of the most attractive '40s actresses who didn't become big stars: Ladylike Audrey



Long is dominated by her aunt, and Ella Raines is the contrast, a tomboy in jeans who gives as much as she gets. I love seeing Wayne and off-screen pal Ward Bond in a memorable brawl, Hollywood's most notorious right-wingers in a punch-out. The script is by Saddle's featured player and Wayne-pic fixture Paul Fix, who, for whatever reason, later played a bartender in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*.

EXTRAS, EXTRAS: Trailers for new-to-DVD Wayne mediocrities, although one is for John Ford's exemplary (but not-on-DVD) *Fort Apache*.



MUSIC DVDS



The Stranglers

Live '78, SF
Target | MVD

This vintage slice of post-punk is the latest title in MVD's continuing quest to reissue all the classic Target videos on DVD in 5.1 sound. And certainly there's no quibbling with the historic value of this title, which captures the original Stranglers lineup of Hugh Cornwell, J.J. Burnel, Jet Black and Dave Greenfield on their debut U.S. tour. But there are other things you could quibble over. Like the fact that the set was shot in grainy B&W and then subjected to the sort of cheesy public-TV post-production ("Hey, let's put some flames behind them!") common to public-access airwaves of the era. Or that it's only about 20 minutes long and has just six songs (with a seventh over the credits). Or that none of those songs is Peaches. All that said, if you're a fan, you'll dig it anyway. If not, you might want to get a grip on yourself.

★★★

> Darryl Sterdan