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HUFF
POST

ENTERTAINMENT

DVDs: Is Tom Hanks the Most Popular Star of All Time?

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A final batch of new and upcoming releases before choosing the best DVDs and BluRays of 2013. Here goes....



BIG 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

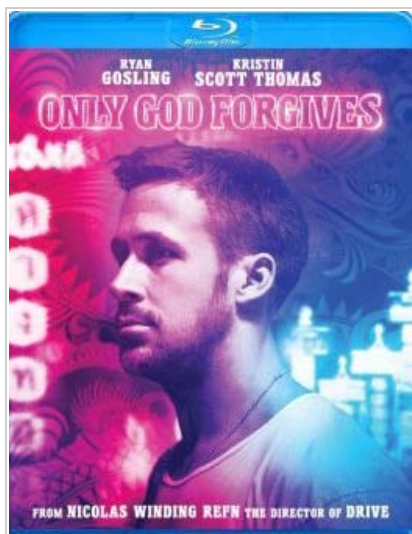
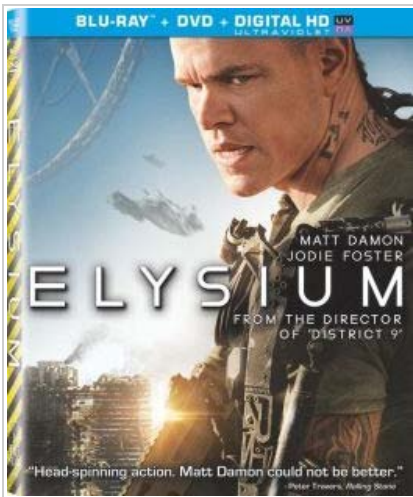
(\$19.99 BluRay/DVD; FOX) -- Is Tom Hanks the most popular actor in history? Look at his list of movies and their remarkable box office success on IMDB or The Numbers. You can slice the numbers a lot of ways. And of course you can't really compare actors from the last few decades with actors from the studio heyday. Clark Gable. Bette Davis. Humphrey Bogart. A lot of stars had lengthy careers with many box office hits -- if we could look at ticket sales, we could start to better compare different eras, though again you'd keep in mind that the population has exploded. So box office is a rough estimate, sure, even if you adjust for inflation (which I don't). But by some estimates Hanks has the all-time worldwide box office

total. \$8.2 billion and counting. Daniel Radcliffe is #2 with \$6.5 billion, thanks to one franchise of course. (Give Robert Downey Jr. a few years and a few more *Iron Man*/*Avengers* and he'll be #1. Harrison Ford used to have bragging rights thanks to both *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*. No, don't bring up Hugo Weaving; he's not the leading man/main draw in *Matrix* and *LOTR*. Ditto Ian McKellen.) But here's why I think Hanks is unquestionably one of the most durable and appealing stars of all time and arguably the most popular. He's starred in 18 films that have grossed more than \$100 million at the North American box office, beginning with *Big* -- just out in a 25th anniversary edition and as delightful as ever -- right up to *Captain Phillips* from this summer. His new movie, *Saving Mr. Banks*, might possibly be his 19th one to do it. That's 25 years of remarkable consistency; 25 years of making critical and commercially successful films and only five of them come from a franchise (*Toy Story* and the *Da Vinci* movies). Tom Cruise has 15 to 17 movies that have grossed more than \$100 million in North America, depending on how you score cameos and small supporting roles in movies like *Austin Powers In Goldmember* and *Tropic Thunder* (I wouldn't count either, just as I don't count Hanks doing minor voice work on *The Simpsons Movie*.) In this era where movies enjoy \$100 million opening weekends, this record will surely fall someday, as will his perch atop the all-time list. But what an amazing run. He achieved it with comedies and dramas, period pieces and contemporary romances, serious Oscar contenders and popcorn fare. He's done it for 25 years, along with success as a producer (multiple TV projects like *Band Of Brothers*) and directing himself. And he doesn't do it by playing safe: recent films include *Cloud Atlas*, *Larry Crowne*, the black war comedy *Charlie Wilson's War*, *The Ladykillers*, *The Bonfire Of The Vanities* and *Joe Versus The Volcano* (a personal favorite and a career

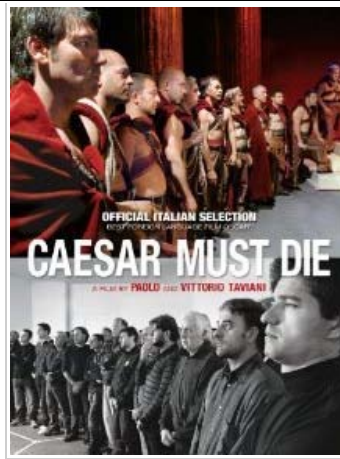
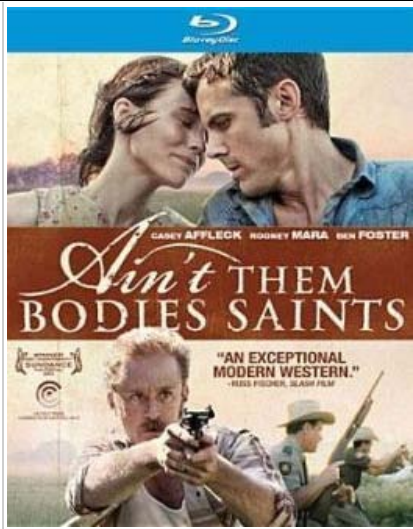
high for Meg Ryan.) Those are all films that didn't work commercially and got mixed reviews. But they're just as important to his success as his hits, since Hanks doesn't have a formula.

Surely Jimmy Stewart was a durable star in his era, breaking through in 1938 and gracefully bowing out of the big screen more than 30 years later. Hanks -- often called the Jimmy Stewart of our day -- is still firing on all cylinders and could keep going for another decade or two as a leading man without breaking a sweat. If you're having a debate on the most popular/most enduring/most successful movie star of all time, Tom Hanks has to be in the mix.

He broke through with *Splash* and made *Bachelor Party* far funnier than it deserved to be. But it was *Big* that made Hanks an Oscar-nominated star of the first order. It was the first time a female director helmed a \$100 million grossing movie and all credit to Penny Marshall, who like Hanks made the leap from TV. It's his best feature, by far, and still a key role in his career. Playing a boy trapped in a man's body, Hanks has a goofy nature, a sweet disposition and a safe sexiness that would serve him well in the decades to come. If you want to know why Hanks deserves such acclaim and the laurel of "most popular movie star of all time," start right here.



ELYSIUM (\$40.99
BluRay/DVD out
December 17; TriStar)
**THE ANGELS'
SHARE** (\$24.99
DVD; IFC)
KICK-ASS 2 (\$34.99
BluRay/DVD out
December 17;
Universal)
**ONLY GOD
FORGIVES** (\$34.99
BluRay; Anchor Bay)
**AIN'T THEM
BODIES SAINTS**
(\$29.99 BluRay out
December 17; IFC)
**CAESAR
MUST DIE**
(\$29.99
DVD out



December 24; Adopt Films)
THE HUNT (\$29.99 BluRay; Magnolia)
FRANCES HA (\$39.99



BluRay/DVD; Criterion)
SISTER -- (\$29.95 DVD out December 31; Adopt Films) --

Like Tom Hanks, Matt Damon has proven a very interesting movie star, an actor who popularized

one of the most successful and smart franchises in recent memory (the Bourne films, which

unquestionably served as the template for the revitalized James Bond franchise as well). But he's also consistently chosen very interesting projects mixed in with the blockbuster hopefuls that keep him bankable. Case in point was signing on to this dystopian sci-fi movie with Damon trapped in a future where the 1% live literally in the clouds and the rest of us scrounge for survival on the scorched surface of the earth. Damon ain't having that. It's not as successful as Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* and poor Jodie Foster just looks silly spouting French (so we know she's evil?) in space. But Damon grounds *Elysium* nicely until the action takes over and obliterates any actual drama.

Ken Loach is deservedly known as a committed director of politically committed works,

movies that embody his ideals and hopes for social justice by telling tales like the brilliant *The Wind That Shakes The Barley* (a look at the inexorable cycle of violence), *Bread And Roses* (a look at Latina maids trying to organize) and so on. But this obscures his overall desire to tell tales, to portray people in all their complicated glory, whether it's the alcoholic romantic of *My Name Is Joe*, the mess of a mother in *Ladybird, Ladybird* or sports-centric movies like the very amusing *Looking For Eric*. This is all embodied in *The Angels' Share*, which depicts a man who just avoids prison, makes lots of mistakes but vows to make a better life for his newborn son and thinks whiskey might just be the answer. The people are flawed, funny, hapless and sweet. Loach never judges or excuses these characters and this comic drama is as good an introduction to any for Loach the filmmaker as opposed to Loach the activist, the role that has dominated his perception for too long.

Kick-Ass was a surprisingly successful black comedy that got a lot of mileage out of showing little kids creating genuine mayhem a la vigilante super heroes. It was always an oddball project but Nicolas Cage had great fun riffing on the TV *Batman* and Aaron Taylor-Johnson is a genuine talent. They should have left well enough alone because the lucky mix of surprise and violence doesn't gel in *Kick-Ass 2*, the sequel that no one was asking for.

Speaking of unexpected humor, critics and audiences seemed bemused by this over-the-top drama and found it "laughable," not apparently realizing that director Nicolas Winding Refn is clearly in on the joke and *Only God Forgives* is supposed to be funny in a Lynchian vein. Ryan Gosling is a drug-smuggler with a mother of Oedipal greatness thanks to Kristin Scott-Thomas who wants him to kill, kill, kill to avenge his brother. Let the reappraisal and cult status begin now. Great title by the way.

Casey Affleck needs a big success to turn him into a bankable star. Meanwhile, he just keeps on making quirky, dark very satisfying indie films like *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, an offbeat crime drama with Affleck escaped from jail and determined to reunite with his love Rooney Mara. Can you blame him? Add this to his distinctive resume that includes the brutal *The Killer Inside Me*, *Gerry*, *The Last Kiss* and other off-the-beaten-track movies. Too bad he wasn't working when noir ruled.

I just saw a brilliant live production of *Julius Caesar* with an all-female cast and set in a prison. So I am definitely primed for this Taviani Brothers movie which features an all-male cast doing Julius Caesar in a prison, with performing the play having unexpected repercussions. Unlike the female version, *Caesar Must Die* has a lot more drama beyond what Shakespeare wrote. It's one of the best reviewed movies of the year and is Italy's nominee for Best Foreign Film at the Oscars.

Speaking of acclaim *The Hunt* has it in spades. It's directed by the fascinating talent Thomas Vinterberg, who has been one to watch since *Festen* burst onto the international scene. Mads Mikkelsen is a quiet school teacher whose life is dramatically upended when he's accused of molesting a student. Here we see with devastating accuracy how even an accusation can destroy someone forever. Mikkelsen won the Best Actor Award at Cannes and like *Caesar Must Die*, it is the Danish entry for Best Foreign Film.

Frances Ha is the latest collaboration between director Noah Baumbach and his wife/co-screenwriter Greta Gerwig, who also starred in Bambauch's *Greenberg*. What this film captures very well is the friendship between two women. There's no man to fight over and any jealousy is the very natural jealousy of two people where one is getting ahead and the other is trying to figure out her life, not the cattiness that dominate so many films about women. It feels natural, observant and real, with moments of awkward humor and genuine sadness and a general air of spontaneity that is refreshing. No wonder it's being released by Criterion, which also offers a raft of extras ranging from Sarah Polley talking with Gerwig to Baumbach talking with the many talented behind the scenes artists who worked on the filme. This one will age well.

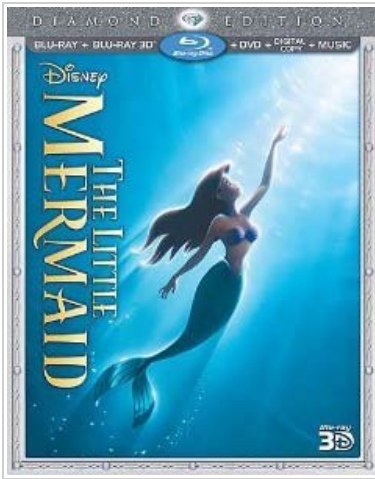
Lea Seydoux has received more attention than ever for her work on *Blue Is The Warmest Color*. But she's clearly no flash in the pan, with numerous acclaimed films gaining

international recognition. Switzerland even submitted *Sister* as its entry for Best Foreign Film last year and Seydoux is a key reason why. She stars in this initially amusing but ultimately piercing film about a little boy who tries to win his sister's affection by stealing from rich guests staying at the ski lodge they live near. This is why God made DVDs, so you can catch up with an actor's body of work after discovering them.



MARTIN SCORSESE'S WORLD CINEMA PROJECT (\$124.95 BluRay/DVD -- Martin Scorsese is second to none when it comes to film preservation and a serious push to introducing audiences to all sorts of films, from silent shorts to the great works of cinema from around the world. Hence his World Cinema Project, which does just that for international films. Now he's working with Criterion to make sure these restored movies reach as many people as possible. This first of what will hopefully be many volumes, includes six films from 1936 to 1981, from Senegal to South Korea. They're all

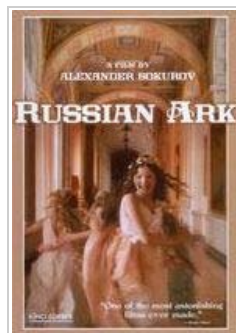
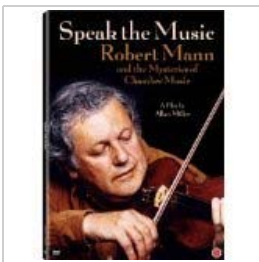
presented with impeccable care, including new introductions from Scorsese explaining why these movies are important to him personally and cinema in general. You know all rage for online studies via university? Your education in world cinema's lesser known offerings has just begun and you'll enjoy it a lot more than that intro to physics.

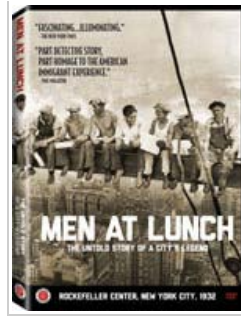
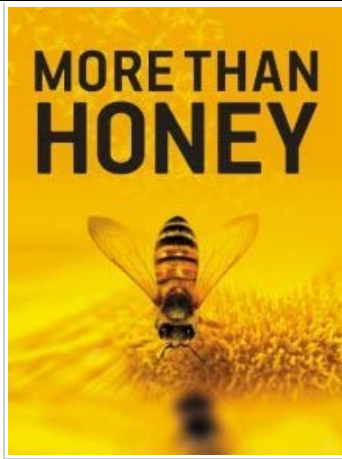


THE LITTLE MERMAID DIAMOND

EDITION (\$29.99 BluRay/DVD; Disney) -- You can mark Disney's renaissance from *The Fox and the Hound* (when they started to show signs of life) or *The Great Mouse Detective* (my personal pick for an exclamation of "they're back!"). But everyone agrees and rightly so that *The Little Mermaid* is the first out of the park masterpiece of its second golden age and a key film in the overall renaissance of animation that extended throughout Hollywood and the world. Reason number one is that it boasts a score by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman, who became one of the all-time great composers of musicals. But it's also the rich animation, terrific voice work and a script that is smart and modern

without ever including dated contemporary slang (something Dreamworks Animation should have learned a long time ago). It's been packaged and repackaged many times but Disney always presents their film library with care. If you don't own it, don't hesitate. If you have a recent version, you probably don't need to bother. But if you watch it again, it won't take more than a few minutes to realize we may be coming up on its 25th anniversary but this looks as good as ever.





SPEAK THE MUSIC (\$24.99 DVD; First Run Features)

MORE THAN HONEY (\$329.95 DVD out December 24; Kino Lorber)

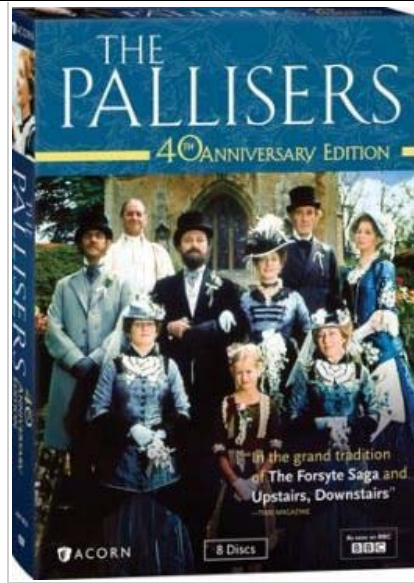
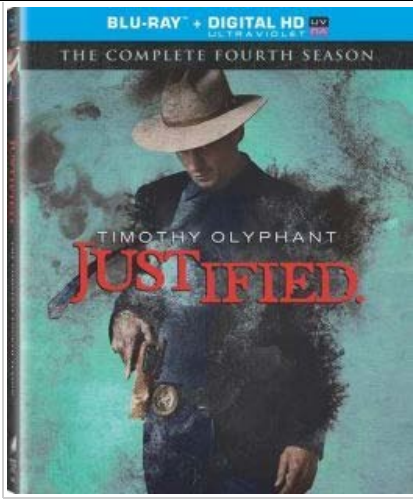
RUSSIAN ARK (\$29.99 DVD; Kino Lorber)

MEN AT LUNCH (\$24.95 DVD; First Run Features) -- Four documentaries worth tackling and gifting to those who prefer their movies with a little fact rather than fiction. *Speak The Music* is an engaging, fascinating look at Robert Mann, a legend in the classical music world and the founder of the Juilliard String Quartet. Now 93 years old, he's still fiery and fun, coaching the brightest new talents on violin while sharing his stories from a rich and varied career, from his childhood to the vagaries of life in a string quartet. (It ain't all wine and roses; in fact, it's rarely wine and roses.) Essential for fans of classical music.

More Than Honey is an in-depth look at the bee and why it's disappearing. Narrated by John Hurt, this is a visually stunning and non-polemical look at a vexing, indeed frightening phenomenon in nature.

Russian Ark is a grand stunt of a film, a tour through the Hermitage in Russia done in one long take. It shouldn't work and you wouldn't want anyone else to do anything like it again, but it maintains a tension amidst the beauty and splendor of what's on display, combined with actors and set pieces that take us through history as well as the museum. One of a kind, truly.

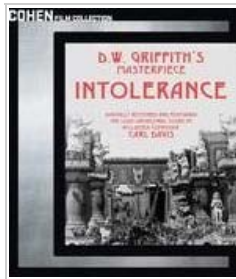
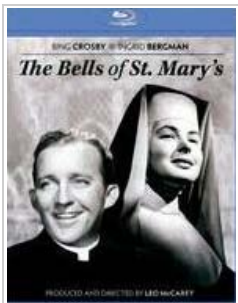
Finally, there's *Men At Lunch*. I live in Long Island City, Queens, and there's a trunk that drives around sporting a huge sculpture depicting that famous photograph depicting construction workers on break high on a beam of the partially built Rockefeller Center. So I'm as primed for anyone to see this new documentary about exactly who those guys were and how the photo was taken and what's happened to them since. Nothing earth-shaking, but an amusing side journey nonetheless.



JUSTIFIED FOURTH SEASON (\$65.99 BluRay; Sony)

THE PALLISERS 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION (\$99.99 DVD; Acorn) -- The late Elmore Leonard had the intense pleasure of seeing one of his works turned into the very fun TV series *Justified*. Starring Timothy Olyphant, it captures Leonard's distinctive blend of violence, offbeat humor and memorable characters better than anyone else. They still haven't matched the peak of Season Two but it's definitely fun and Olyphant is one of the best crime fighters on TV.

The Pallisers is one of the many high-falutin' soap operas that aired on PBS. The intelligentsia may have frowned upon daytime soaps and certainly didn't stoop to *Peyton Place* and the like. But add a British accent and a stately home, and they're suckers for "quality drama" (the quotes are to make fun of this distinction between art and *Dallas*, not to critique the show. Mind you, these British soaps had impeccable source material (in this case the novels by Trollope) and casts to die for: it's hard not to have fun when stars Susan Hampshire and Philip Latham are joined by the likes of Jeremy Irons, Derek Jacobi, Penelope Keith and Anthony Andrews.



THE BELLS OF ST. MARY'S (\$29.99 BluRay; Olive/Paramount)

INTOLERANCE (\$49.99 BluRay; Cohen)

A LETTER TO THREE WIVES (\$24.99 BluRay; FOX)

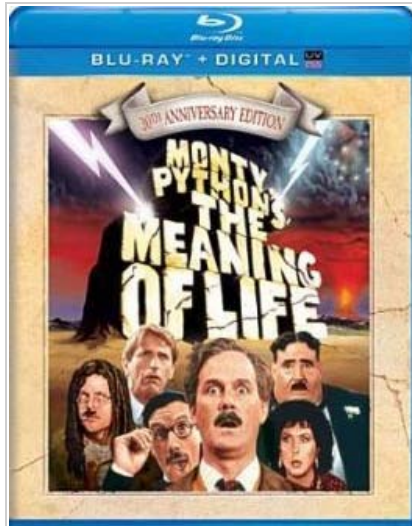
SHACK OUT ON 101 (\$29.99 BluRay; Olive/Paramount)

MONTY PYTHON'S THE MEANING OF LIFE (\$19.99 BluRay; Universal)

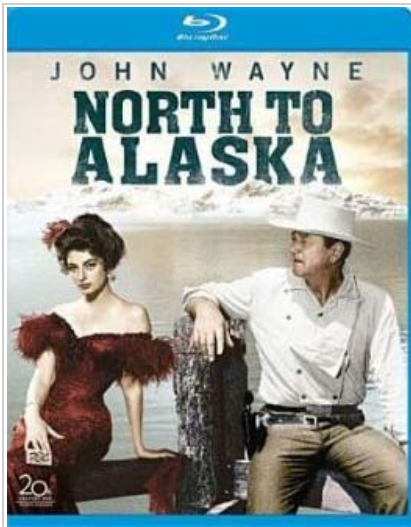
NORTH TO ALASKA (\$24.99 BluRay; Fox)
DESK SET (\$24.99 BluRay; FOX) -- It's the holidays, so what better time to savor Bing Crosby as a priest and Ingrid Bergman as a nun in the delightful comic



drama *The Bells Of St. Mary's*. A Christmas pageant scene makes this ideal seasonal viewing, even though it's not centered around the holiday as such. It belongs on the short list of truly great sequels, thanks to being a follow-up to *Going My Way*. Crosby won the Oscar for *Going My Way* and both movies were monster box office hits so only God knows why they didn't make a third film about the affable Father O'Malley.



D.W.



Griffith made the hateful, remarkably racist but technically innovative movie *Birth Of A Nation*, a film that perverted history to make heroes of the KKK and distort the Civil War. In an attempt to make amends, Griffith created this centuries-spanning epic that looked at the damage intolerance has wrought throughout history. If any good can be said about *Birth*, surely it is that it gave birth to *Intolerance*, an equally stunning work, which finds Griffith at the height of his power. It's a pity not to see it on the big screen first, but this BluRay is surely as good as anyone ever saw it when the movie first came out.

A Letter To Three Wives is pure Hollywood melodrama delivered with class by Joseph L.

Mankiewicz and a cast that includes Ann Sothern, Linda Darnell and Jeanne Crain, the three wives who discover a friend has run off with one of their husbands. A woman's picture through and through and an Oscar nominee for Best Picture.

Shack Out On 101 is a genuine B movie that shows a young Elia Kazan making the most of a very modest budget. It's a nutty tale of a waitress who realizes her business is a hotbed of spies, but it's beautifully shot and features crackerjack talent like Lee Marvin and Terry Moore. This is why people love B movies and it's rare enough to still be a genuine find for most.

Anyone who knows Monty Python are performing in London next summer (anyone got a spare ticket?) surely has already seen this swan song for the movies. *The Meaning Of Life* is a return to their sketch roots, with not even a hint of an overall plot. Like most such compilations, the result is varied. But the high points are many, including the gross-out diner eating a wafer-thin mint and the Catholic family with literally hordes of children that refuses contraception and sings "Every Sperm Is Sacred." One of the happiest memories of my life is showing that one to my very Catholic mother, having her laugh and be shocked but amused...and then hours later hearing her hum the song without realizing where the tune came from.

Surely by now you realize John Wayne was a versatile star. No, he didn't disappear into roles but he could tackle everything from the vengeful racist in *The Searchers* to the romantic hero in *The Quiet Man*. Comedy was within his range as well, as seen in *North To Alaska*, an offbeat tale about a gold prospector who goes to Seattle to fetch the fiancée of his partner. When the gal is already married, he drags back another woman instead but of course they fall in love on the way. Nutty.

Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn were one of the great movie duos though honestly about half their films aren't great. This is one of the good-not-great ones, though their charm elevates the material tremendously. In *Desk Set*, Hepburn is the head of research at a major network and any kids watching the movie will surely wonder why people call up this research team and ask them questions like "Who are the seven dwarfs?" (Why don't they just google it, the kids will ask.) Tracy comes in with computers, a modern innovation that will make the gals obsolete. Or so he thinks. Sparks fly, of course and no one does that better than these two. I don't turn to it often, but if it comes on TV or someone else pulls out the title, I can't stop watching. They're that good together.

Most titles listed here will be available in multiple formats and in multiple combinations, including DVD, Blu-ray, digital download, video on demand, streaming and the like. The format listed is the format provided for review, not all the formats available. It is often the most expensive version with the most extras. Do check individual titles for availability in all their various guises and price points.

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