



and exploitation of a race of sentient salamanders. The salamanders (the newts) are discovered on a South Pacific island by a ship captain in 1926. Not having any children of his own, the captain immediately takes the newts under his wing. This action leads him to set up a partnership company that allows him to spread

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the newts to other islands and give them tools to protect themselves in exchange for pearls, which the newts provide to the captain. The story finally shifts into high gear upon the death of the captain. The partner of the company immediately begins selling the newts themselves as the ultimate undersea engineers. At this relatively early point in the book the ending became painfully obvious to me. Normally, I would have been upset for the conclusion being so transparent, but Capek did such an excellent job cataloging humanity's inane behaviour that the book remained a pleasure to read. Even after the inevitable conclusion was reached I found that I had no sympathy for the human race. The human beings collective stupidity made the bed that they now must lie in.

Overall, this is one of the strongest novels I have read in a long time. The reason for this was the realism with which the individual characters, the societies, and even the national governments behave. Capek obviously understood the human race very well when he wrote this novel. The actions of all the characters and governments follow an all too believable sequence. Also, the newts themselves were well thought out by Capek. Their physical characteristics, social structure, and behaviour are very reasonable and consistent. This made their actions very easy to predict. I am just glad that the newts were a fiction created by Capek.

2. I have good news for you and bad news for you. Don't worry--I am not telling you anything you didn't already know, but I am going to make it official. The good news is that America won in Vietnam. Now I know that is what Richard Nixon was telling us. But if memory serves me, Nixon shot his credibility over certain other things that were going on in his life at the time. In fact, when Nixon said we won Vietnam he was really lying--one of the things he did best--because he didn't know it at the time. (I guess there always was that dual question with Nixon of what did he know and

w\_h\_e\_n\_d\_i\_d\_h\_e\_k\_n\_o\_w\_i\_t? But in this case I think we can be certain he thought we had lost because he said we had won. Do you follow me?)

Now I know what you are going to ask. Didn't the government of South Vietnam have to grab up all the gold and stuff they could carry and fly out in helicopters and try to start new lives as television evangelists? The answer is, "Yup!" That one particular government lost. It was America that won? But didn't Ho Chi Minh's minions take over the whole country? Yup again. Didn't all of Vietnam go Communist? Yup again. And I will tell you something else. The Domino Theory was also proven true. What we didn't realize at the time is that capitalists can afford bigger dominoes. Day by day, Communist ideology is crumbling in Hanoi. You can rent government vehicles for weddings and hire government photographers to photograph the wedding. The July 23 U. S. N\_e\_w\_s & \_W\_o\_r\_l\_d \_R\_e\_p\_o\_r\_t talked about this and had a photo from the Miss Hanoi beauty pageant. They have picked up some of our worst habits! They want

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to get into international markets and they want their old war buddies, the Americans, to help them. I suppose they can always put some force behind their request by threatening to go Communist. But in a lot of ways they are economically where Japan was in 1947 and are asking for much the same sort of assistance as we gave the Japanese. Now tell me again we you think won the Vietnam War.

Now the bad news. The economic giants of the world in another couple of years are going to be the United States, Japan, and a single economic unit in Europe which many people believe is going to be led by Germany. Not East Germany or West Germany, but Germany. Grab somebody from 1940, bring him forward in time some fifty years, tell him that, then ask him who he thinks must have won World War II.

3. Donald Wollheim, founder and publisher of DAW books, has died after a long illness. He was 76, and is survived by his wife, Betsy and their daughter, Elsie, both involved with DAW books. A leader of the Futurians in the 30's, he was founder of FAPA, the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. He edited *Stirring Science Stories* and *Cosmic Stories*, edited the SF line at Ace for 20 years, (during which time he brought out the uncopyrighted (but legal due

to a technicality) version of Lord of the Rings; he later legitimized it and paid the Tolkien estate royalties; he was also responsible for the Ace Doubles and Terry Carr's Ace Specials series). He started his own imprint in 1972 and published, among other things, his "Best SF of the Year" anthology until this year.

He was also a wonderful, friendly and open person who was never too busy to sit and talk. He loved SF, he loved his family and he loved Fandom, which was his extended family.

Don Wollheim, along with the Ballantines, were instrumental in making the field of Science Fiction a viable part of publishing. Don did his part to also make it good with the Ace Science Fiction series and his commitment to publishing what was different and good. About two years ago he suffered a stroke and never really recovered, doing what he could from his bed with the help of his family. He's been relieved of the suffering, but we've lost one of the important people who made SF and fandom good and special.

[The preceding was provided by Chuq Von Rospach.]

Mark Leeper  
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The defense of morals is the battle-cry which best rallies stupidity against change.

-- Alfred North Whitehead

## AVALON

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: A loving portrait of a Jewish family in post-World-War-II Baltimore makes A\_v\_a\_l\_o\_n one of Barry Levinson's best films to date. Levinson has a real talent for dialogue and for creating memorable

characters. This is a film to be enjoyed more than once.  
Rating: +3.

Barry Levinson has made such diverse films as T\_h\_e\_N\_a\_t\_u\_r\_a\_l; G\_o\_o\_d\_M\_o\_r\_n\_i\_n\_g, V\_i\_e\_t\_n\_a\_m; and R\_a\_i\_n\_M\_a\_n. But he chronically returns to his native Baltimore to tell the stories of the people he knew when he was growing up. His first film was the excellent D\_i\_n\_e\_r. T\_i\_n\_M\_e\_n was set in part in the same Baltimore diner, though the story was a cut below his first film. A\_v\_a\_l\_o\_n is a very different Baltimore story and rivals T\_h\_e\_N\_a\_t\_u\_r\_a\_l as Levinson's best work. A\_v\_a\_l\_o\_n follows the fortunes of an immigrant Jewish family in the years following World War II. Central to the story is a grandfather-grandson relationship, very probably based on Levinson's relationship with his own grandfather. The portrait of the family is at once realistic and endearing. This is not so much a story with a single conflict that is resolved in the end, but more a chronicle told in episodes.

As the film opens, we are in the mind and memory of Sam Krichinsky as he is remembering and relating to his grandchildren how he came to the United States in 1914 and settled in the beautiful city of Baltimore. He arrived on July 4th and he is telling the story before dinner on Thanksgiving. As the family history progresses, it returns again and again to what the family was doing on those two holidays. The story is seen very much through the eyes of young Michael Kaye, Sam's grandson. Levinson's Baltimore films all have excellent dialogue which is at the same time believable and surprisingly entertaining. Just simple family chit-chat in Levinson's hands becomes both revealing and endearing. Michael's father Jules is a salesman who is mugged in front of Michael. To keep Jules entertained as he is recovering his cousin buys the family's first television set. This leads to a whole new career of selling first televisions, then appliances at discount. The success brings tragedy--at least as far as Michael is concerned: the family moves to the suburbs. Soon conflicts arise that seem serious to the family, but which clearly seem petty and minor to the viewer.

Armin Mueller-Stahl (who played a suspected Nazi in T\_h\_e\_M\_u\_s\_i\_c\_B\_o\_x) plays the patriarchal Sam Krichinsky. His son Jules is played by Aidan Quinn. And Jules's son Michael is played by Elijah Wood. Elizabeth Perkins and Joan Plowright help to round out the cast in this loving scrapbook of the life of a family. This is certainly one of the most moving and best films this year. I give it a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

JACOB'S LADDER  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: Eerie Gordian knot of a horror film requires a lot of thought, but finally pays off in the car on the way home from the theater. Give it a chance to sink in. Murky photography used to even better advantage than in F\_l\_a\_t\_l\_i\_n\_e\_r\_s. (Do not read the spoiler note at the end of this review if you have not seen the film.) Rating: +2 (-4 to +4).

Within the space of a few short months Bruce Joel Rubin has had two films he has written released. Each deals with death. G\_h\_o\_s\_t had a few heavy horror moments but they were counter-acted by a lot of lighter and more pleasant moments. "Pleasant," however, is not a term applicable to any single sequence in J\_a\_c\_o\_b's\_L\_a\_d\_d\_e\_r. While it probably has the more intelligent and demanding story, J\_a\_c\_o\_b's\_L\_a\_d\_d\_e\_r is a Gordian knot of unpleasant concepts. It is a story of disturbing horror requiring some effort and detective work to come to any consistent interpretation and then open to multiple interpretations. This is one weird movie.

It is October 6, 1971, and a company of American soldiers in Vietnam is getting ready to move into battle. Suddenly something is going very wrong. Some of the men are convulsing; others are running around fighting as if an enemy, whom we do not see, is right there on top of them. One of the soldiers, Jacob (played by Tim Robbins), is bayoneted in the stomach and left for dead. Flash forward several years and Jacob is a postman living in a surrealistically squalid New York City. Sights that the audience finds ugly or even terrifying seem commonplace in Jacob's everyday existence. But things are happening that are not commonplace for Jacob. Something is stalking Jacob, or perhaps someone who can call up faceless demons. And, as if that were not enough, the world seems to be deteriorating and people are mutating in some mysterious ways that only Jacob sees. Jacob is even a little unstuck in time as images from the past flood on him as if they are the present.

This is an unpleasant and uncomfortable horror film to sit through, be warned. It improves a great deal on thinking about it afterward. Just as is true with many of the individual scenes of this film, so too when the entire film is over we are tantalizingly unsure of exactly what we have seen and how it is to be interpreted. Adrian Lyne, who directed

F\_l\_a\_s\_h\_d\_a\_n\_c\_e, F\_a\_t\_a\_l\_A\_t\_t\_r\_a\_c\_t\_i\_o\_n, and 9-1/2  
W\_e\_e\_k\_s, photographed this film in

murky, muted colors, much as F\_l\_a\_t\_l\_i\_n\_e\_r\_s was photographer, but his visual style picks out the squalid and the disturbing. Murky colors are an intelligent ploy to get around audience insistence on color photography but still have mood effects that one usually can get only with monochrome. I rated this film a low +1 leaving the theater, but it

improves greatly on reflection and at this point I would rate it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [SPOILER ON NEXT PAGE]

Jacobs Ladder

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\*\*\*\*\*HEAVY SPOILER WARNING\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*ONLY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SEEN THE FILM\*\*\*\*\*

As early as when Jacob is dropped off at the locked subway station, I started thinking this was a re-working of Ambrose Bierce's "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." I left the theater assuming that was correct. However, that would imply that the entire future is fictional. But Jacob's entire knowledge of The Ladder is from the future. Yet Jacob has already seen the convulsions that are explained only by The Ladder. If the convulsions are real, we must interpret The Ladder as real. If The Ladder is real then some of the future is really happening also. Suddenly the story is less like the Bierce and much more like C a r n v a l o f S o u l s, where the soul survives and assumes it is still alive and the living take it for a living soul. The faceless demons could even be a direct borrowing of the carnival dead in C a r n i v a l o f S o u l s. Well, if you're going to borrow, borrow from the best.

REVERSAL OF FORTUNE  
A film review by Mark R. Leeper  
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Capsule review: Famous lawyer Alan Dershowitz defends Claus von Bulow in this adaptation of Dershowitz's book. While none of the characters is anyone you would really want to know or even deal with, some of the re-assessment of what appears initially to be an "open and shut" case is reminiscent of  T\_ w\_ e\_ l\_ v\_ e\_ A\_ n\_ g\_ r\_ y\_ M\_ e\_ n\_. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4).

There is an old exchange where one person says, "The rich are different from us." And the other person responds, "Yes, they have more money."  R\_ e\_ v\_ e\_ r\_ s\_ a\_ l\_ o\_ f\_ F\_ o\_ r\_ t\_ u\_ n\_ e gives us glimpses into quite a few things but one is the lifestyles of the very rich. What we see is less than totally inviting. In  R\_ e\_ v\_ e\_ r\_ s\_ a\_ l\_ o\_ f\_ F\_ o\_ r\_ t\_ u\_ n\_ e our first impressions of Claus von Bulow play off all our prejudices against the European aristocracy. He is cultured, cold, emotionless, and calculating. He seems a marble statue that has been granted the power of speech. In a sense he is the damsel-in-distress of this piece. As the film begins he has already been found guilty of the attempted murder of his wife Sunny. To avoid going to prison he gets trial lawyer and professor of law Alan



Dershowitz to defend him. Of course, as a matter of record Dershowitz did successfully appeal the conviction and in a retrial had von Bulow acquitted of the charges.  R e v e r s a l o f F o r t u n e, based on Dershowitz's own book, is the story of how Alan Dershowitz defended the impassive Claus von Bulow.

The film also gives us a view into Dershowitz's unorthodox defense procedures. He turns his house into a workshop with teams in each room researching the legal ramifications of a different piece of evidence against von Bulow. The teams even have sweatshirts labeled with the piece of evidence they are working on. Dershowitz may be bragging about the completeness of his approach but, in fact, one may wonder at the fairness of expending this magnitude of resource in a legal action. Dershowitz moralizes why he should take the case even if von Bulow is so likely guilty, but the audience never works up the respect for him and his methods that it has for the dramatized Clarence Darrow in  I n h e r i t  t h e W i n d or the dramatized Louis Nizer in  A C a s e o f  L i b e l. His causes are not so noble and his fees are higher. As unflattering as this film was to Claus, whose only moments of humanity seem to be when he is having fun with his own ghoulish image in the press,  R e v e r s a l o f  F o r t u n e is far less flattering to Sunny. This daughter of the idle rich is shown to have been mostly dead already by his own actions. She is totally idle and self-indulgent. Her hours out of bed, which number only six a day, are a constant struggle to pass through the system every drug she can lay her shaking hands on. Regardless of anything Claus did, we are led to believe that death or near-death was the expected and

logical result of an incredibly self-destructive lifestyle. If she was really as portrayed, one wonders how she survived as long as she did.

In addition to Dershowitz's moralizing, there is one more piece of moralizing that is irritating in the film. The film pokes fun at von Bulow's patronizing, if well-intentioned, attitude toward Dershowitz being Jewish. Yet several times the camera takes opportunities to remind us that Dershowitz is not just a lawyer, he is a  J e w i s h lawyer. Camera angles are chosen to show a painting on a Jewish theme in Dershowitz's office or to show a menorah in his home. The camera is

just as hung up on religion as is von Bulow.

Of the three stars, Glenn Close as Sunny von Bulow has top billing and got the least screen time. She does, however, narrate the story in spite of the fact that it makes little sense to have a narrator who is speaking from a coma and who was less than a clear thinker even before her coma. Some attention has been paid to Jeremy Irons's performance as Claus, though I have always thought it is easier to be convincingly weird than to be convincingly normal.

On the whole, R\_e\_v\_e\_r\_s\_a\_l\_o\_f\_F\_o\_r\_t\_u\_n\_e panders a bit too much to the fans of crime "docudramas." But it is told with wit and subtlety. I would give it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.