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BIG TROUBLE. Directed by John Cassavetes. Produced (uncredited) by Michael Lobell. Screenplay by "Warren Bogle" (Andrew Bergman). Released by Columbia Pictures.

The direction of *Big Trouble* is credited to John Cassavetes, but except for the unprogrammed mugging of Peter Falk and the seemingly impromptu and over-extended graduation sequence at the end, there is little of the improvisational feel of a Cassavetian excavation of acting psyches. *Big Trouble* reportedly had big trouble all the way through production to its belated release by a very reluctant studio. Andrew Bergman came up with the idea as an intended follow-up to the success of the Alan Arkin-Peter Falk vehicle, *The In-Laws*. After being taken off his own project, Bergman retained the screenplay credit under the old W. C. Fields pseudonym "Warren Bogle." Somewhere along the line Elaine May brought her satiric gifts to bear, possibly on the film's bizarre parody of Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*. (I still remember her uncanny mimicry in *Enter Laughing* of Stanwyck's emotionally throaty delivery.)

As might be expected, the resultant concoction is a structural mess, but there are more than a few big laughs along the way. Alan Arkin gets most of them with an uproarious low-comedy reaction to a swig of Falk's best "sardine wine" from

Norway and a reprise of the crutches-on-the-train gambit from *Double Indemnity*. With the Arkin character, you at least know vaguely where he's coming from. Peter Falk and Beverly D'Angelo are, by contrast, chameleon-like in their crazy schemes to enlist Arkin's insurance salesman in a double-indemnity scam with a bogus corpse. Falk is very much the addled adventurer he was in *The In-Laws*, but without the laugh-getting CIA connection. Richard Libertini, so memorable in *The In-Laws* as a Central American tyrant, is less prominent here as a crooked coroner with one darkly hilarious line about Falk's alleged condition: "The arteries around his heart have a hard-on."

Arkin and his wife (Valerie Curtin) confront a comparatively realistic problem in having to find the money to send their three Mozart-loving musical sons to Yale simultaneously. But this situation is very lightly sketched, with some weak anti-inherited-wealth jokes at the expense of Arkin's boss, a filthy rich Yale insurance company president (Robert Stack) who refuses to use his influence to get Arkin's sons music scholarships. Terrorists are injected into the plot rather stupidly and harmlessly to contrive a completely unconvincing happy ending, but by then this failed farce has run out of comic steam. Still, I see much worse stuff being released every week with great enthusiasm and fanfare. ■