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| |  | | --- | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | [John Denvir](http://docs.google.com/articles/john_denvir.htm)       |  | | --- | | **Read other reviews:**  [Michael Asimow](http://docs.google.com/manthere_asimow.htm)  [Internet Movie Database](http://www.us.imdb.com/Title?0243133)  [All Movie Guide](http://allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=A246226) |     Law schools tell us that law requires certainty, but lawyers know that the practice of law thrives on uncertainty. Lawyers revel in ambiguity because it gives license to their creativity. | |  | | --- | | **Loveable Sleaze**  by John Denvir  The Coen brothers have created another entry in the Hollywood Sleazy Lawyers Hall of Fame. His name is Freddie Reidenschnieder (Tony Shaloub) and he proudly stands against almost every ethical precept the legal profession cherishes. He's avaricious, has little respect for facts, and thinks his client's guilt or innocence irrelevant. The audience loves him-and so do lawyers.  That the general public should enjoy Freddie is no surprise, since we are told that the public dislikes lawyers. But that lawyers also should find Freddie somehow attractive is more surprising. Yet no less an authority than PJ's own Michael Asimow refers to Freddie as a "loveable sleaze." Why might that be?  First, I think Freddie catches a truth about the self-image of lawyers, which is often ignored. Good lawyers know that they aren't selfless pilgrims on a quest for objective truth; they know themselves to be Tricksters, putting out whatever version of the truth that best serves their clients' interests. Freddie says out loud what the profession only admits by indirection-the spin is the thing. Therefore, "truth" is always a product to be constructed, not a fact to be discovered. Even the facts are constructed.  Law schools tell us that law requires certainty, but lawyers know that the practice of law thrives on uncertainty. Lawyers revel in ambiguity because it gives license to their creativity. Old Christopher Columbus Langdell tried to convince us that law is a science with its own rigorous methodology. Freddie knows it's a narrative art, more like that of a screenwriter than a natural scientist.  Another reason lawyers might admire Freddie is that he's having such a good time practicing his profession. He knows he's a performer and he can't wait for show time. For him law is more an aesthetic endeavor than a moral or ethical one. Regardless of the innocence or guilt of the defendant, it's the performance that counts. From an aesthetic viewpoint, there's greater joy in freeing a guilty man than an innocent one. Anyone can do the latter, but getting a "not guilty" for a guilty client is law's version of a 360-degree under-the-basket slam-dunk.  The third reason why lawyers love Freddie is because they know he's really only a fictional character; he doesn't exist is real life. Little of what is really important in law takes place in the courtroom before the jury. Most law, including criminal trials, is one long negotiation that seldom ends up before the jury. And even the mythical Freddie-like performance of O.J. Simpson's dream team turns out in reality to have more to do with the fact-driven science of jury selection than high flights of rhetoric. Most lawyers, good lawyers, spend their days ferreting out facts through endless interrogatories rather than destroying witnesses with withering cross-examinations. Let's face it: "bureaucratic" is probably a more apt term than "aesthetic" to describe the daily routine of the legal profession.  And, of course, there are always the moral quandaries that Freddie ignores, but which real lawyers have to face. Freddie doesn't care about ethics, but real-life lawyers do. They don't really like it when good people go to jail or bad people go free.  "Punching cows" is hard, dirty, low-paying work. Still, I'll bet that doesn't stop "real" cowboys from enjoying a John Wayne movie once in a while.  Posted January 11, 2002 |   **Would you like to comment on this article? Please submit your comments** [**here.**](http://docs.google.com/submit-comments.htm) |  |  | | --- | | [Top of page](#gjdgxs) |  |  | | --- | | [Home](http://docs.google.com/index.html) | [Silver Screen](http://docs.google.com/silver_screen.htm) | [Small Screen](http://docs.google.com/smallscreen/small_screen.htm) | [News & Views](http://docs.google.com/newsnviews.htm) | | |