



# The Coen Brothers: The Story of Two American Filmmakers

*Josh Levine*

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Everything you wanted to know about the direction of Fargo, The Big Lebowski, and Barton Fink. A terrified woman plunges a knife through the hand of her pursuer. A leftwing playwright turns to the woman in his bed, only to find a river of blood. A baby, abandoned in the middle of the highway, smiles happily. A professional killer stuffs his partner into a woodchipper while a pregnant cop pulls her gun. Welcome to the world of the Coen Brothers. With the smash success of Fargo (winner of two major Academy Awards), the filmmaking team of Joel and Ethan Coen finally received their deserved recognition. But well before that the two brothers were writing and directing terrific films — from the film-noir thriller Blood Simple, to the comedy Raising Arizona, to the gangster epic Miller's Crossing, to the bizarre Barton Fink. With each film they have surprised fans and critics alike, always refusing to repeat themselves or compromise their independence. Their upcoming George Clooney film, O Brother, Where Art Thou?, due out in October 2000, is one of the most highly anticipated films of the year. While still in their early twenties, Joel and Ethan Coen raised the money for their first film — by knocking on the doors of the wealthy in their native Minnesota. Starring an unknown actress named Frances McDormand (who would later become Joel's wife), it was an art-house hit and allowed the brothers to make Raising Arizona with Nicolas Cage and another Coen brothers discovery, Holly Hunter. But despite their high reputation, the brothers would not make another financially successful picture for years. Were their films just too offbeat and intellectual? And then came Fargo. Here is the story of how two middle-class Minnesota boys have come to write, shoot, and direct some of the most gruesome, exhilarating, and funny films of our time.

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