

AGGIE life

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Coen brothers' direction, production adds bizarre humor to true story behind *Fargo*

By Rachel Barry
THE BATTALION



Only in an area of the country where Paul Bunyan merits a statue and his blue ox is the namesake of a motel could a pair of gifted brothers find home to one of the best films they ever made.

Joel and Ethan Coen have found inspiration from a true story of murder in the Midwest and once again combined their efforts in the off-

beat film making for which they are known. The result is the devilishly fun to watch *Fargo*.

Fargo is a dark retelling of a husband's plan to collect ransom on his wife after he has her kidnapped by two crooks whose trigger-happy hands turn a simple scam into one bloody

blunder after another.

The plot follows the suit of the Coen brothers' knack for taking a seemingly ordinary string of events and turning them into a delicious array of bizarre characters and fascinating backdrops.

The beauty of *Fargo* is its realistic presentation. The absence of fancy camera angles, slick editing and big-name actors make the reality of the film extremely easy to grasp.

The recurring use of endless, snow-covered landscapes and blurred horizons gives the sense of being in the middle of nowhere and creates an atmosphere that is perfectly fitting for the strange turn of events that fill *Fargo*.

The Coen brothers have shown through their 1987 film *Raising Arizona* and now *Fargo* that they have a way of taking stereotypes and extracting the quirky characteristics of the people that truly make them unique.

Frances McDormand stands out in the cast where it seems that lobotomies and barbiturates are required to get into character.

Her portrayal of the pregnant, grease hungry police officer, Marge, is the most entertaining performance in the film.

W.H. Macy as the dimwitted husband whose bad planning and simplistic belief that everything will work out in the end are charming, and even sympathetic at times.

Not everyone will get the jokes or appreciate the rich characters and no-frills



Steve Buscemi and Peter Stormare (above) play two thugs hired to abduct a woman in *Fargo*. Frances McDormand (left) plays Police Chief Marge Gunderson.

camera work.

Inevitably, some people go to the movies to be filled with a couple of hours of eye candy and have no patience for anything but the easy-to-swallow

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content of the majority of movies made today. These people will be disappointed and baffled by *Fargo*.

Filled with random interjections of story lines, *Fargo* will leave the strictly

plot-trained viewer spending too much time trying to figure out the meaning of these "extras" and not enough time appreciating their placement in the script. They add that realistic, uneven flow that makes *Fargo* easy to identify with.

The Coen brothers have escaped the tragic and common curse of the mainstream and have been able to attract the big budgets to otherwise small budget-type scripts.

Perhaps the best quality of the Coen brothers is that they have the ability to satisfy half of the audience and leave the other half scratching their heads, trying to figure out what they just watched.



Race the Sun's story shows positive movies still exist



By Amber Clark
THE BATTALION

Who says you can't make a wholesome and positive movie anymore? *Race the Sun*, free of sex and violence, sends a strong message about self-esteem among today's youth. OK, so there's some foul language, but remember we're dealing with teenagers here.

Based on true events, *Race the Sun* tells the story of a Hawaiian high school science team that races their solar-powered car across Australia.

Prompted to attend a local science fair by their new teacher Sandra Beecher (Halle Berry), the students quickly find themselves in a shoving match with the preppy students from a

wealthy high school.

Rather than seeking revenge through fighting, the lolo set out to prove their worth by beating the preppies at their own game—solar car racing. Combining individual design, computer, math and mechanical skills, with the aid of their skeptical shop

teacher Frank Macki (James Belushi), the team designs the "Cockroach."

With energy-efficient ingenuity and the persistent support of Ms. Beecher, the kids beat the preppies by mere seconds in the local solar-powered car competition. Their win guarantees them a slot in the international car race, a 2700-kilometer trek across Australia.

Despite feeling outclassed, the constant ridicule of the competitors provides the motivation for the Hawaiian students to remain in the race. During the journey, the team faces unforeseen challenges, from heatstroke and giant dust storms to personal and cultural conflict.

Berry's portrayal of Beecher

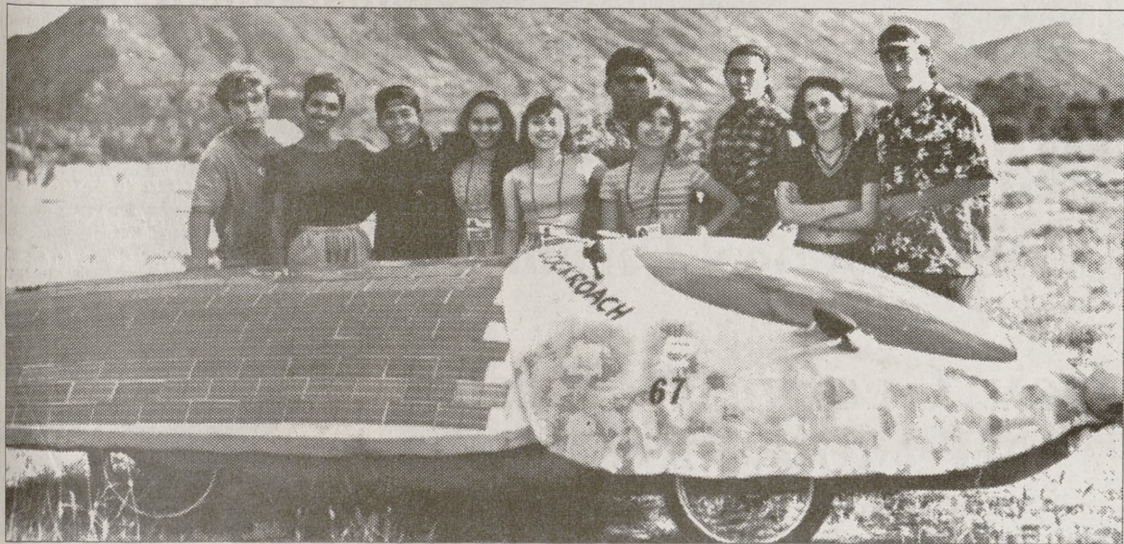
reflects the teacher's inner insecurities, caused by a failed marriage, while remaining emotionally strong for the sake of her students.

Mr. Macki, the teacher who possesses as little faith in the students as everyone else in the community, is of course won over by the students' persistence and spirit.

Belushi is clearly strong in his seemingly secondary role. The performance proves vital to the message of the film, as seen in Belushi's believable transformation from cynic to cheerleader.

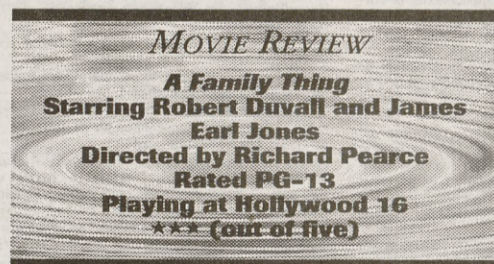
Perhaps the best of the young cast is Casey Affleck as team captain Daniel Webster. Daniel, the token white among the assorted native and Asian, represents the outcast within the outcasts. Affleck convincingly portrays a 17-year-old who realizes his social position while also recognizing his potential as a brilliant design artist.

The story of *Race the Sun* may seem a bit predictable, but the film provides an ending that is not quite what the audience expects. The message and intent are clear. After all, life really isn't about whether you win or lose, but what you learn.



Halle Berry (second from left) and James Belushi (far right) help high school kids in *Race the Sun*.

A Family Thing's good story offers a warm fuzzy to viewers



By Wes Swift
THE BATTALION

A Family Thing rolls through its two hours midway between a powerful drama and frolicking comedy, leaving viewers with a warm fuzzy larger than James Earl Jones' laugh.

The film stars Robert Duvall as Earl Pilcher, an Arkansas native who learns that his redneck pedigree isn't as pure as he thought when he finds a letter from his late mother.

The letter says Earl's real mother was a black woman who was raped by his father. When he was born, Earl was taken by his father's wife after his real mother died giving birth.

Earl also learns he has a brother, Raymond (Jones), in Chicago, and he sets out to find him and discover his roots.

The film provides for some extraordinary interaction between Duvall and Jones, who make the most of their scenes.

Duvall plays the saddle-leather tough Earl with a blend of Southern rigidity and fish-out-of-water confusion, like a man whose world has been turned upside down.

Jones is heartwarming as the sensitive Raymond, who balances a bitter past with a confusing present.

The trademark boom is absent from Jones voice and is replaced with an occasional stutter, which Jones pulls off beautifully.

The best scenes come when Jones and Duvall are left alone to pull off their own brand of odd couple playfulness.

In one scene, Earl and Raymond end up wrestling on a vacant lot near Raymond's home. The chuckles end, however, when Earl snipes at Raymond that he isn't afraid "of any nigger on the street."

The film plays like this through much of its two hours, flipping between goofy comedy and tense drama.

Audiences switch between earnest chuckles and whispering "Uh-oh!" about as quickly as the scenes change.

This flip-flopping shouldn't be seen as a hindrance, though. The gamut of emotions makes the film much more real.

One cannot expect that this situation would

be handled in a purely humorous manner in the real world; neither could out and out rage be totally expected. Remember, this is a movie about family.

The best scene comes when Earl and Raymond are told about the former's birth by Aunt T., the matriarch of the family who was there on the night of the birth and the death of the brothers' mother.

The writing and dialogue come off warm and genteel, pushed along by Duvall and Jones. The story doesn't feel over-the-top and emerges as believable and sincere.

The only drawback to the film is that the pairing of Duvall and Jones begs for a more dramatic script.

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The actors' talent is not wasted, but audiences have to wonder what might have been had the pair been placed in a more dramatic setting while confronting the same issues (maybe *White Man's Burden*).

Nevertheless, audiences will leave *A Family Thing* with a warm, fuzzy sensation from two brilliant actors with some brilliant scenes.



James Earl Jones and Robert Duvall star in *A Family Thing*.