

reel reviews

★ ★ ½ *Raising Arizona* Plaza

The filmmaking duo of Joel and Ethan Coen made quite a splash in 1985 with the release of their first feature film. Called *Blood Simple*, the low-budget thriller was praised for its inventive camera-work and ghoulish sense of humor.

Now, with *Raising Arizona*, the Coen brothers have tackled a full-fledged comedy employing dry wit and broad satirical jibes. Unfortunately, the humor is usually as flat as the land they filmed in.

But it's not for lack of trying. The direction by Joel Coen is involving, the screwball cast of characters are odd, but appealing, and the script is quite inventive.

The story concerns H.I. (Nicholas Cage), a frequent visitor to the state penitentiary who has a particular fondness for convenience

stores. He is booked and sent to prison so often that H.I. actually falls in love with a policewoman named Ed (Holly Hunter).

They marry, move into a trailer, gaze at sunsets and wait expectantly for the onset of their "child-bearing years." Tragically, Ed (short for Edwina) is barren and their hopes are dashed. Because of H.I.'s extensive prison record, the couple is unable to adopt and they become frantic with desire.

Soon thereafter, the press is filled with news about the birth of quintuplets to the wife of Nathan Arizona, a local patio furniture mogul. Reasoning that he has "more than he can handle," H.I. and Ed decide to steal one of the babies and raise him as their own.

All goes well and they are happy. However, their tranquility is soon shattered by such problems as H.I.'s lewd boss, the arrival of two old buddies who just escaped from prison and an ominous bounty hunter search-

ing for the Arizona's missing baby.

The Coens avoided quite a few pitfalls when making this movie: They restrained themselves from using the Arizona baby as cute comic relief or putting him in danger to win our sympathy.

Unfortunately, they also avoided putting their offbeat characters into funny situations. When the Coen brothers do build up a comedic sequence — such as a holdup that escalates into an hilarious romp — *Raising Arizona* is very funny indeed.

But, more often than not, the events taking place are relatively serious and the overwhelming strangeness of the characters is the only comedic element for us to hold on to.

Raising Arizona is about blue collar workers with white collar dreams. The world the Coens create for them is mundane reality — tilted ever so slightly. And we laugh — but ever so slightly.
By Michael Giltz