

pregnant. The unhappy couple can't adopt because of Hi's prison record, so they kidnap one of Nathan and Florence Arizona's celebrated quintuplets. That night, Hi dreams of "a huge, 300-pound, leather-clad . . . man with all the powers of hell at his command."

"I didn't know if he was a dream or a vision," Hi intones in a narration. "But I feared that I myself had unleashed him . . . for he was the Fury That Would Be . . . as soon as Florence Arizona found her little Nathan gone." That same night, a pair of convicts, Evelle and Gale Snopes, in an astonishing birth-like sequence, pop out of the mud and sewage outside their prison and pay Hi and Ed a visit. Pursued by Lenny, the Biker from Hell, they, in turn, grab Nathan Jr. away from his would-be parents.

At this juncture, the movie shifts into high gear, the Coens packing it full of chases and multiple pyrotechnics. The result is a comedy that combines Frank Capra sweetness with Steven Spielberg action and pacing—*It Happened One Night* meets *Sugarland Express*. Or, as director Joel Coen summarizes his film: "It has all the basic elements of popular contemporary moviemaking—babies, Harley Davidsons and high explosives."

Joel is single and has no plans to have children; Ethan is recently married but doesn't count children in his immediate future either. They have no little nieces and nephews. "We just make it up," says Joel.

Indeed, the characters in their films speak with an exaggerated twang not indigenous to any town in Arizona, much less Tempe, where the story is set. "That's what happens," says Ethan, "when you don't do research." So why Arizona? "We like the title," continues Ethan. "It sounds better than *Raising Utah*."

As can be gathered, to talk to the Coens is to become their straight man. The brothers are very serious about their craft, but completely *unserious* about analyzing it. Asked about directors who have influenced him, Joel replies, "All our favorite directors are named Frank. Frank Capra, Frank Zappa, Frank Coppola."

Joel is the director, he says, because he's taller and older. He is also more loquacious than the more reserved Ethan, who usually adds his comments to his brother's. The Coens laugh easily, share the same pack of Camel Lights and finish each other's sentences. Although they look quite different (longer-haired Joel wears jeans and resembles a handsome Joey Ramone; Ethan wears wire-rims and looks more prep-pie), their voices are hard to distinguish on the phone. Raimi says, "They're definitely two parts of the same mold."

RAISING CAIN (IN ARIZONA)



In *Raising Arizona* everybody's after poor little rich boy Nathan Arizona Jr. (top). First, he's kidnapped by Hi and Edwina (middle); then it's the Snopes Brothers (bottom left), a pair of escaped cons, who are being tracked by a mysterious Biker from Hell (bottom right). What's the film about? Say the Coens: "Parenting."