

Barton Fink will leave you stunned

by Ira Nayman

If you enjoy a film that makes you think about it for several hours, talk it over with your friends and think about it for a couple more hours, *Barton Fink* is for you.

If you don't, I hear *Naked Gun II* is still playing somewhere.

Set in mythical 1940s Hollywood, *Barton Fink* is about a Jewish New York intellectual playwright (John Turturro) whose social realist play about fishmongers on Manhattan's Lower East Side is the toast of Broadway. In the wake of his success, he is offered a lucrative job writing motion pictures — an offer he can't refuse.

In his squalid hotel room in Hollywood, Barton finds himself unable to write his first assignment: a wrestling picture for Wallace Beery. He is blocked. With the help of his neighbour in the hotel (John Goodman), a soused former playwright who has been writing screenplays for years, the playwright's secretary and an insistent mosquito, Barton regains his muse.

But he has to go through hell first. *Barton Fink* comes from the unique minds of Joel and Ethan Coen, the creators of *Blood Simple*, *Raising Arizona* and last year's most stunning film, *Miller's Crossing*. As with their previous films, its view of life is bleak, but its style is exhilarating.

The Coen cinematographic signature is marked by unusually extreme close ups (a silver ball falling off a bed and into focus at the forefront of the frame) and innovative camera work (at a couple of points, the camera goes down the hole of a sink). They also excel at creating textures, such as the wallpaper in Barton's room.

In this way, the Coens create unique visual metaphors. The sink



Above: The two Johns head for the john in *Barton Fink*. Top: the film features cameo appearances by Al Franken, Larry 'Bud' Melman and Geddy Lee.

festival of festivals

Barton Fink
directed by Joel Coen
starring John Turturro and John Goodman
Produced by Circle Films

might be a visual pun, representing Barton's life going down the drain; or it could mean we are entering Barton's subconscious.

Another mark of a Coen film is the way objects are introduced in a humorous way, but later take on ominous overtones. For example, the mosquito (along with the peeling wallpaper and creaking bed) starts off being one

Festival OF FESTIVALS



more way of showing how bad the hotel he's staying at is, but in a devastating scene halfway through the film it becomes linked to violence.

The Coen brothers also have the ability to mix humour and shock in single scenes, making it impossible to know whether to laugh or be scared. The climactic scene where Goodman runs down a flaming hallway with a shotgun screaming is both horrifying and hilarious.

The two Johns (Goodman and Turturro) are excellent in roles cast against type: Turturro is introspective and meek; Goodman starts outgoing, but soon develops a manic edge. The acting, though often stylized, is still excellent.

It is understandable that *Barton Fink* won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Festival; the French love movies that poke fun at Hollywood. Don't let the award sway your judgment, however: *Barton Fink* may be the most creative film of the year.

Barton Fink was a gala at the Festival of Festivals. It opens in regular theatres on Friday, September 13.

Europa a captivating film

by Simon Chung

Only rarely is a film so captivating that you remain transfixed long after leaving the cinema.

From beginning to end, Lars von Trier's *Europa* is a masterpiece of lush, hypnotic imagery and wry, deadly humour. Set in a curiously nocturnal Germany of 1946, *Europa* deals with the experiences of Leo, a

festival of festivals

Europa
directed by Lars von Trier
starring Jean-Marc Barr and Barbara Sukowa
Produced by Nordisk Film/WMG/Swedish Film Institute

German-American who arrives in his fatherland to become a sleeping car conductor.

It is never explained exactly why he wishes to be a train conductor, but

hardly anybody cares. Everybody is preoccupied with their own interests: the American general who is intent on rebuilding a country he hardly understands; or Katrina, who may or may not be a member of an anti-American terrorist group which, among other things, blows up train bridges.

Drawing on the elements of the thriller, von Trier subverts its conventions by depicting a world where there are no simply good or bad sides, but a jumble of conflicting interests. What he does take from the thriller is its look — harsh lights and deep shadows that alternately expose and envelope the characters.

Like typical heroes of the genre, Leo finds himself isolated in this landscape. But even here, von Trier has fun with the audience's expectations: his hero resolutely refuses to take sides and is overwhelmed by the events around him.

Technically, the film is a dazzling feast of Brechtian devices: the juxtaposition of black and white images, the innovative use of rear projection and a voice-of-god voiceover by Max von Sydow. At first, these techniques appear little more than showing off, but as the film progresses, they acquire the flavour of a Greek chorus that simultaneously defines and controls the characters.

Visually stunning and thematically multi-layered, *Europa* is likely to be one of the most memorable films you'll ever see.



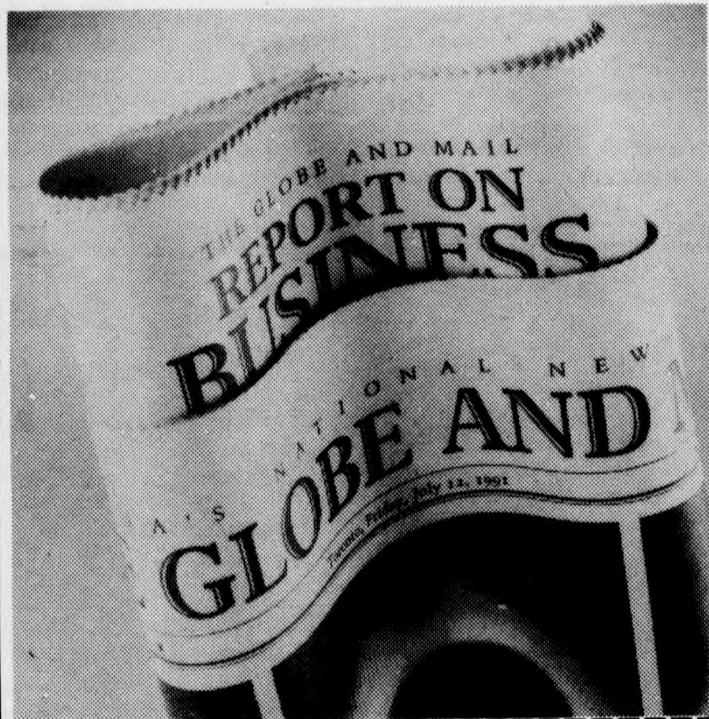
Lars von Trier's piece de resistance, *Europa*, a masterpiece of lush, hypnotic imagery and wry, deadly humour or what?

Whatever the subject, we keep you informed.

Subscribe to The Globe and Mail now at the special student rate of **50% off.**

As a student subscriber, you'll save \$10 when you register for the GREEN LINE - GLOBE AND MAIL INVESTMENT CHALLENGE

- Canada's most challenging and dynamic simulated investment game
- Play and learn the stock market like a pro
- Thousands of dollars in prizes to be won
- For complete information call (416) 663-9181



MAIL TO: The Globe and Mail, Circulation Dept., 444 Front St. W., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 2S9

I want to become a Globe and Mail subscriber. Begin my special-rate subscription for
 13-week term: \$28.28 + \$1.98 GST = \$30.26
 26-week term: \$56.55 + \$3.96 GST = \$60.51

Name _____

University _____ Campus _____

Residence _____ Room # _____ Student I.D. _____

Address _____

City _____ Province _____

Postal Code _____ Phone _____

This address is on campus off campus

Cheque/money order enclosed Visa MasterCard American Express

Charge Card # _____ Expiry Date _____

Signature _____ (required to validate offer) STGA1-74

NOTE: Offer only valid where home delivery is available. Offer expires November 30, 1991

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
THE GLOBE AND MAIL