



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Big Lebowski

The success of *Fargo* put to rest a long-held myth about the Coen Brothers: that their films were strictly esoteric or enigmatic. This belief seems to be based partly on the way their earlier films are rich in strands that can't easily be assimilated into a conventional narrative pattern – the stray hats in *Miller's Crossing*, the blatantly formal play of circles in *The Hudsucker Proxy* – and partly on the frustrating impression that there is always less to the Coens' work than meets the eye. Every film up until then seemed flawed by the sense that the brothers were being wilfully cavalier, refusing to play their genre games by the rules or, conceivably, just not trying hard enough. Their new film gives some credence to that interpretation: it could almost be subtitled 'In Praise of Goofing Off'.

The Big Lebowski serves as a reminder that the Coens are nothing more enigmatic than this: the most purely ludic of contemporary American filmmakers. Played entirely for laughs – at the expense of the audience and of the detective genre – the film warns us from the start not to expect any of its narrative threads to lead anywhere. With a title echoing *The Big Sleep*, we're in for a Raymond Chandler-style entertainment, a labyrinthine route followed solely for the diversions encountered along the way. The story enables us to enjoy a whole catalogue of narrative dead ends, cruel gags and bravura character routines.

The Coens get the jump on us from the opening sequence: the drawling voice-over by the Stranger, a Will Rogers-like philosopher cowboy, makes us expect a Western; but the tumbleweed we see rolls straight into early '90s LA, an urban wild frontier even more untamed than in Chandler's day, and consequently demanding a rougher and readier Marlowe. We're told Jeff Bridges' superannuated slacker is 'the man for his time and place', and is consequently several degrees of weathered somnolence beyond even Elliott Gould in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*. The Dude is on a doomed, albeit humble, quest from the start – to be paid back for his rug, ruined by debt collectors. But he's also out to answer the question posed by his millionaire namesake: 'What makes a man, Mr Lebowski?' It's a pointed question in a universe which classifies the Dude as effectively a non-person – out of step with a culture of cool, malicious surface, in which he's effectively castrated by the loss of his car.

The Big Lebowski echoes such '70s neo-Chandlerian thrillers as *Cutter's Way* and Arthur Penn's *Night Moves*, which also recycles *The Big Sleep*'s wayward-nymphet opening premise. Like Penn's detective hero, the Dude will learn that the deeper you work your way into a labyrinth, the less likely you are to get anywhere. But the Coens actually defuse the paranoid implications of the plot complexities, making sinister machinations look like nothing more than obstacles devised to waste the Dude's leisure time. Sent in search of the other Lebowski's missing porn-star wife, the Dude will work his way into a world not so much of evil as of bizarre, misguided pretension. En route he encounters Lebowski's daughter Maude (Julianne Moore), an artist who does her work suspended in mid-air, and the sinister German nihilist Uli (Peter Stormare), whose prime weapon is a live marmot and whose most menacing threat is to 'squishh' the Dude's 'Johnnson'.

The Coens seem also to have extended their crime reading to novels by and about '70s survivors. The hip jokiness suggests Kinky Friedman (*The Love Song of J. Edgar Hoover, God Bless John Wayne*), or the cultivated weariness of the novels of James Crumley (*Mexican Tree Duck*), in which action is measured not in plot points but in the amount of time spent recovering from benders. The convoluted plot seems designed purely to accommodate its various cameos and acid-inflected nightmare routines, such as a flashy but leaden Busby Berkeley spoof with Julianne Moore as avenging Valkyrie. The range of acting turns is rich, if wayward, with such Coen regulars as Steve Buscemi and John Turturro pointedly reappearing as if to remind us whose film we're watching. Best of all, in a memorably unctuous cameo, is Philip Seymour Hoffman from *Boogie Nights*, the best character actor find in years. Less plausible are the ludicrous 'moderns': Moore's clipped-voiced practitioner of 'vaginal art'; a hyper arch David Thewlis, and Peter Stormare's hissing heavy. But these characters help to flesh out the Coens' vigorously unglamorous portrait of LA. The Dude shuttles between the dreary nether regions – a bowling milieu all the drabber for such touches of tawdry flash as Turturro's purple-lurex lane shark – and the privileged enclaves where everything is phoney, where even the afar secrets that once surrounded Chandler's Sternwood mansion no longer frighten.

Within this world, the Dude – a '70s activist with The Seattle Seven and signatory of the 'Port Huron Statement,' functions as a resilient lapsed idealist, the old counter-culture dreams now regarded as period jokes. He is laudable not for his moral integrity as such, but because deeply ingrained inertia makes him impervious to corruption. He's an aesthetic dissident honourably out of step with LA zeitgeist, he listens to Captain Beefheart and, in a neat reversal of stereotype, recoils when a black cab driver plays The Eagles.

The casting of Jeff Bridges slyly capitalises on his image as Hollywood's last good guy, an actor who can convincingly and affably embody nonconformist righteousness. He makes a wonderfully calibrated double act with John Goodman's irascible Vietnam veteran converted to Judaism – a perfect character pairing for what looks like prime sitcom material. That might be finally what this is – a *Seinfeld*-style 'film about nothing', or about nothing more than the in-jokes that make the Coens giggle (the Dude, by all accounts, is based on a real-life acquaintance of theirs, one Jeff 'the Dude' Dowd, who really was a member of the activist group The Seattle Seven). But then, to make a film this thick with non-sequiturs, this defiantly slight, looks like a heroic act in contemporary US cinema. *The Big Lebowski* is at once utterly inconsequential and a blow for a cinematic slacker aesthetic. Its moral payoff is that, like Marlowe, the Dude finally stays the same – he doesn't need to be redeemed, brought into line with the world he inhabits. Likewise, the Coens, flouting the genre rules and gleefully pursuing their own amusement reserve the right to stay their ineffable, not remotely enigmatic selves.

Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, May 1998

THE BIG LEBOWSKI

Director: Joel Coen
Production Companies:
PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, Working Title Films
Executive Producers: Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner
Producer: Ethan Coen
Co-producer: John Cameron
Executive in Charge of Production: Jane Frazer
Production Supervisor: Gilly Ruben
Production Co-ordinator: Gregg Edler
Unit Production Manager: John Cameron
Location Manager: Robert Graf
Post-production Supervisor: Charlie Vogel
1st Assistant Director: Jeff Rafner
Key 2nd Assistant Director: Conte Mark Matal
2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Donald Murphy
Script Supervisor: T. Kukowinski
CASTING: John Lyons
Associate Casting: Wendy Weidman
Screenplay: Ethan Coen, Joel Coen
Director of Photography: Roger Deakins
Aerial Cameraman: Ron Goodman
Camera Operator: Ted Morris
Visual Effects Supervisor: Janek Sirrs
Visual Effects: Computer Film Company
Mechanical Effects Designer: Peter Chesney
Graphic Designer: Bradford Richardson
Editors: Roderick Jaynes, Tricia Cooke
Big Associate Editor: David Diliberto
Production Designer: Rick Heinrichs
Art Director: John Dexter
Set Designer: Mariko Braswell
Set Decorator: Chris Spellman
Storyboard Artist: J. Todd Anderson
Costume Designer: Mary Zophres
Costume Supervisor: Pam Withers
Make-up Supervisor: Jean Black
Make-up for Mr Jeff Bridges: Edouard Henriques
Hairstylist: Daniel Curet
Title Sequence / 'Gutterball' Titles Design/Production:
Balsmeyer & Everett Inc
Opticals: John Alagna, Effects House, János Pilenyi, Cineric Inc
Music: Carter Burwell
Orchestrations: Carter Burwell, Sonny Kompanek
Music Supervisor: Happy Walters
Executive in Charge of Music for PFE: Dawn Solér
Music Co-ordinators: Spring Aspers, Manish Raval, Tom Wolfe
Music Contractor: Emile Charlap
Music Editor: Todd Kasow
Associate Music Editor: Missy Cohen
Music Engineer: Michael Farrow
Musical Archivist: T-Bone Burnett
Choreography: Bill Landrum, Jacqui Landrum
Sound Mixer: Allan Byer
Re-recording Mixers: Michael Barry, Skip Lievsay
Supervising Sound Editor: Skip Lievsay
Dialogue Editors: Magdaline Volaitis, Rick Freeman
Giggles/Howls/Marmots: William Preston Robertson
Effects Editor: Lewis Goldstein
ADR Editor: Kenton Jakub

Supervisor Foley: Ben Cheah
Foley Artist: Marko Costanzo
Foley Mixer: Bruce Pross
Foley Editors: Jennifer Ralston, Frank Kern
Stunt Co-ordinator: Jery Hewitt
Stunts: Jennifer Lamb, Vince Deadrick Jr, Lloyd Catlett
Baby Wranglers: Pattie Cooke, Eileen Sullivan
Animals: Animal Actors of Hollywood

Cast

Jeff Bridges (*Jeffrey Lebowski, 'The Dude'*)
John Goodman (*Walter Sobchak*)
Julianne Moore (*Maude Lebowski*)
Steve Buscemi (*Donny*)
David Huddleston (*The Big Lebowski*)
Philip Seymour Hoffman (*Brandt*)
Tara Reid (*Bunny Lebowski*)
Philip Moon, Mark Pellegrino (*Treehorn thugs*)
Peter Stormare (*Uli, nihilist*)
Flea, Torsten Voges (*nihilists*)
Jimmie Dale Gilmore (*Smokey*)
Jack Kehler (*Dude's landlord*)
John Turturro (*Jesus Quintana*)
James G. Hoosier (*Quintana's partner*)
Carlos Leon, Terrance Burton (*Maude's thugs*)
Richard Gant (*older cop*)
Christian Clemenson (*younger cop*)
Dom Irrera (*Tony the chauffeur*)
Gérard L'Heureux (*Lebowski's chauffeur*)
David Thewlis (*Knox Harrington*)
Lu Elrod (*coffee shop waitress*)
Michael Gomez (*auto circus cop*)
Peter Siragusa (*Gary the bartender*)
Sam Elliott (*the stranger*)
Marshall Manesh (*doctor*)
Harry Bugin (*Arthur Digby Sellers*)
Jesse Flanagan (*little Larry Sellers*)
Irene Olga López (*Pilar*)
Luis Colina (*Corvette owner*)
Ben Gazzara (*Jackie Treehorn*)
Leon Russom (*Malibu police chief*)
Ajgie Kirkland (*cab driver*)
Jon Polito (*private snoop*)
Aimee Mann (*nihilist woman*)
Jerry Haleva (*Saddam*)
Jennifer Lamb (*pancake waitress*)
Warren David Keith (*Francis Donnelly, funeral director*)
Holly Copeland, Karen Christenberry, Natalie Webb, Julie Bond,
Kim Yates, Elizabeth A. Eaton, Lori Jo Birdsell, Kelly Sheerin,
Kiva Dawson, Lisa C. Boltauzer, Alison Simpson, Lindsay Fellenbaum,
Melissa Aggeles, Katherine Slay, Jennifer S. Garrett, Danielle Nicole Parish,
Jennifer Strovass, Jamie Green, Caitlin McLean, Michelle E. Swanson,
Laurel Kitten, Joelle Martinec, Amy Tinkham, Mary Lee, Sandra Plazinic,
Bree Turner, Carrie Macy, Jacqui Landrum, Martina Volpp,
Danielle Marcus Janssen, Wendy Braun, Amy Warren,
Michelle Rudy-Mirkovich (*dancers*)

USA/UK 1998©
117 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Thelma and Louise

Sun 1 Aug 18:00; Sat 14 Aug 20:35; Sat 28 Aug 20:20

Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice

Mon 2 Aug 20:40; Fri 13 Aug 20:45; Wed 18 Aug 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by Julie Lobalzo Wright, University of Warwick); Mon 23 Aug 14:30

Bright Star

Tue 3 Aug 20:30; Fri 27 Aug 17:50; Mon 30 Aug 18:10

Boyz N the Hood

Wed 4 Aug 17:45 (+ pre-recorded intro by film critic Leila Latif);
Mon 9 Aug 20:50

Les Demoiselles de Rochefort (The Young Ladies of Rochefort)

Thu 5 Aug 17:50; Thu 26 Aug 17:40

The Big Lebowski

Fri 6 Aug 20:45; Mon 16 Aug 20:50; Wed 25 Aug 14:15

Only Angels Have Wings

Sat 7 Aug 12:00; Tue 24 Aug 14:15; Tue 31 Aug 20:30

A Farewell to Arms

Sun 8 Aug 12:20; Fri 20 Aug 14:30; Wed 25 Aug 18:00
(+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large)

Matewan

Tue 10 Aug 14:15; Sun 15 Aug 18:20; Sat 21 Aug 12:20

Cutter's Way

Wed 11 Aug 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large); Tue 17 Aug 14:30; Fri 20 Aug 20:50; Fri 27 Aug 20:50

The New World

Thu 12 Aug 14:30; Sun 22 Aug 12:00

Big Wednesday

Thu 19 Aug 17:50; Sun 29 Aug 18:10