

Wile E Coyote has had a long history of chasing the Road Runner. But how often, if ever, did the coyote successfully catch the bird, and what does that tell us about the legacy of this iconic duo.

Hi I'm Eddache-

[Freeze - "Eddache" "Cartoonius Cuckius"]

-and in 1949 Michael Maltese and Chuck Jones created the Looney Tunes cartoon "Fast and Furry-ous", no not that one, this one. This introduced us to Road Runner and the Coyote, originally named Don Coyote, and was only really planned to be a one-off short, a twist to the classic cat and mouse dynamic and something of a parody. But when the short proved to be popular, more was made and established a lot of the rules these shorts would follow. The tunnel paintings, silent characters who would only communicate with signs or the occasional "beep beep", and that the Coyote will never catch the Road Runner. But like the laws of gravity, rules are meant to be broken. Also known as crimes, which are hella cool... (sirens) uh oh.

But first, let me clarify what I mean by "catch". It's not just grab the bird because you could cage it with no hands and that would be a catch, but you could grab the bird while it continues running which would not be a catch. So in this instance "catch" means - through the Coyote's direct intervention, either intentional or accidental, the Road Runner is held captive by the Coyote and it does not escape unless there is another intervention, such as the Coyote's invention backfiring. Because it's not kidnapping if you don't do it right! (sirens) Oh god-dammit!

So pull up a pile of bird seed and let's tuck in to Chuck!

CHUCK SEASON

From 1949 to 1964 Chuck Jones made 24 Road Runner cartoons. During his tenure, he created the 9 Disciplines, the rules that the Road Runner cartoons would follow.

These rules weren't strictly followed, even the principal writer, Michael Maltese, had never heard of these rules and feels they were kinda made up after the fact.

But it does at least show that there was thought put into how the characters should behave to elevate it beyond just another predator vs prey cartoon. Like how Wile E Coyote is not an idiot, he's a super genius after all. He can catch burmese tigers, just not Road Runners. It's usually his gadgets that let him down which if you've ever had a laptop break down you know that feeling. It's like Basil Fawlty getting angry at his car for breaking down, it's very human.

Chuck Jones shorts are like very quick sketch shows. They don't take one invention and mess around with all the different ways it could play out. Once it fails, it's onto the next thing. This makes the episodes very quickfire and energetic but they all kinda blend into one another.

But were there any captures? Well there's this bit where the Road Runner is caught inside a cannon and gets fired out, which feels a bit tenuous to call a capture. Then there's this moment he's cornered on a cliff edge and this moment where he's stuck on a bridge which has fallen away leaving him behind. Possibly stuck, therefore a technically caught, but as the

cliff edge example shows, the Road Runner has a flexible relationship with gravity, so this may be a bit of a stretch.

As the episodes go on, they do eventually start to show multiple jokes with the same trap premise. But they also start repeating a lot of jokes, a sign that things were starting to go awry.

Theaters were closing as TV was on the rise, so in 1962, a tv pilot was made called The Road Runner Show. This would grow the 6 minute shorts to a full 26 minutes. The pilot was not picked up and was instead repackaged as the theatrical special, The Adventures Of The Road Runner. Here we see the Coyote speak, and it feels wrong. This isn't the first time he spoke, he's been pitted against Bugs Bunny on a few occasions. But maybe that works against the wisecracking wabbit, but here it's jarring and only really serves to pad out the special. It seems like a lot was gambled on the tv pilot because ultimately the special was cut up into individual shorts and the Warner Bros Animation Studio got closed down in 1963, marking the end of the golden age of Looney Tunes. At the same time, a new animation production company formed, and this is where things get a bit ugly.

CRY ME LARRIVA

Friz Freleng was one of the best cartoon directors renowned for his sense of comedy timing. His company DFE was hired in 1964 to take over the Looney Tunes cartoons, easily identified by this abstract intro sequence.

But given that Friz Freleng was able to take Tweety, a Bob Clampett creation, reinvent him, *and* win an Oscar for it - then the Road Runner cartoons seem to be in the best possible hands. So they didn't do them.

The first couple of episodes were just sections cut out of The Adventures Of The Road Runner special by Chuck Jones. Three more were made in house, including one by Friz Freleng that finally pitted Road Runner against Speed Gonzalez in a race. But all the jokes are just repeats from previous shorts, it's so disappointing. And it gets worse when it doesn't tell you who wins the race! Maybe that's a future video idea.. I'll add it to the list.

The remaining shorts were subcontracted to Format Films and were directed by Rudy Larriva to form "The Larriva Eleven".

Repeating jokes, cut corners, missing sound effects. Clearly suffering from a huge budget cut and a lot of Chuck Jones' list of disciplines were ignored. Which is reflected in the number of capture close calls.

There's a grab but it doesn't stop the Road Runner. There's this fight cloud and the bird getting cornered here which may tenuously count? But there's one stand out definite and that's Solid Tin Coyote. The Coyote takes some junk, a repeat from a previous short, and builds a big Coyote robot out of it. Then after a couple of tries, he does it! He successfully catches the Road Runner! But the robot eats him instead.

These shorts were eventually all cut up for The Road Runner Show, later merging into the Bugs Bunny and Road Runner Show. While they consisted mostly of repeats, in between the shorts were these very quick bumpers, newly animated bridging segments, but these provide some new captures!

Here, the Coyote grabs the bird, he's got him! But! Clearly the Coyote learned nothing about the materialising qualities of his tunnel paintings as anything he draws seems to come to life. Why not just eat the drawing of the Road Runner?!

Anyway, in another one, it's very quick, but this robot grabs the bird! Another capture, clearly robots are the way forward, except they're never programmed what to do after that've caught the bird.

There's this kinda role reversal one where the Road Runner dressed as the Coyote tramples the Coyote dressed as the Road Runner. Not really a catch but worth a mention.

These have their moments of course, but they clearly lacked that Chuck Jones quality. So in the 1970s, Chuck came back

CHUCK-O-VISION

Chuck Jones returned to direct some short Road Runner cartoons for The Electric Company. These were made to be more educational to help with reading so there isn't really any chasing but he does at least lay a finger on the Road Runner.

This was followed by a couple of Bugs Bunny TV specials: Looney Christmas Tales and Bugs Bunny's Bustin' Out All Over, I'll go fetch the mop and bucket, which included two Road Runner shorts.

In Soup Or Sonic, Wile E Coyote finally catches the Road Runner properly, but this catch has a catch. The Coyote accidentally shrunk himself down small and is actually unable to do anything about it. This is often cited as the only time the Coyote has officially caught the Road Runner but we know its not the first, and it won't be the last.

Chuck Jones directed 1994's Chariots Of Fur. There's no captures other than this giant mouse. Chuck was 82 when he made this, and he only took the job in the hopes they'll never hire him again, to make way for younger animators. This was the final Road Runner cartoon he ever made.

So the Road Runner got lucky, but his luck is about to Road Run out.

THE CAMEO SHOW

From the 80s to the mid-90s, there wasn't much new Road Runner material, the characters being moved to the sidelines making just cameo appearances.

In Who Framed Roger Rabbit, they briefly appear in this elevator sequence but moreso at the end. And there's this! They- They're hugging?! I didn't account for this! The Coyote has his arm around the Road Runner- Does that count?! Does that count, I don't know!

In 1990 Tiny Toon Adventures put Wile E Coyote and Road Runner into the roles of teachers for their protégés Calamity Coyote and Little Beeper. They also chase each other but appear to be friends most of the time. I'm not focussing on the Tiny Toon versions of the characters,

but Calamity does manage to catch Little Beeper by having Fifi the skunk, the Pepe Le Pew stand in, catch the bird for him.

As for the mentors, there's this brief part where they both fail. But that's really it.

Except for the Tiny Toons movie "How I Spent My Vacation"

Years of subverting expectations by escaping harm has now led to the subversion being the Road Runner actually getting harmed.

It happens in Animaniacs.

And in Taz-Mania.

It's really the era of humiliation for the speedster. And it gets worse for him.

There's this advert for the re-run compilation show, the Acme Hour on Cartoon Network and this happens.

Bloody hell, the lad has bloody done it!

It's arguably non-canon, a non-Acme alternate universe but there it is.

Speaking of commercials-

Throughout the years, Wile E Coyote and Road Runner have featured in a bunch of TV ads, from cars to Pepsi to... the constitution??

In this advert for Honey Nut Cheerios, Road Runner gets cornered by the Coyote, until he's interrupted by... wait, what's this guy's name? Buzz Bee? That's his name? Buzz Bee? The sound he makes and what he is? That's like naming the bird on Corn Flakes something like Cockle Cock.

Anyway, we've seen the Road Runner get cornered like this before and be fine, but Billy Bob Bee finds it necessary to intervene so, I think that counts!

Now a wise man once said, y'all ready for this?

COME ON AND SLAM!

Space Jam - No captures.

Back In Action - No captures.

Little Go Beep - Grabs at one point, but doesn't stop. No captures.

Whizzard Of Ow - No captures.

Wait, that's it?!

YEP

Oh ok.

In Space Jam, there's only one brief chase and at one point Road Runner is in a neck brace, and in Back In Action, Wile E stops chasing the Road Runner to target the main characters instead - so because it breaks the formula to, well, play basket-the-ball, it doesn't give them a lot they can actually do.

There's the shorts too but a lot was banking on the success of Back In Action to revive interest in more theatrical shorts. But when it came out as a massive bust, I'll go fetch the mop and bucket, the shorts were scrapped, leading to the dark night of the soul known as the 2000s.

2000: A SPARSE ODDYSSEY

The 2000s were a bleak time for Road Runner material. In Baby Looney Tunes, they hardly appear. There's no chasing or injuries, just songs. Which is probably worse.

There were a series of officially made Webtoons created, some featuring the pair. It's very rough but in one short, Wile E Coyote takes Road Runner to court - and wins! So, I guess that probably counts too! Now Road Runner is a wanted criminal! Yeah, fuck the police! (Sirens) Err, I mean let's have sex with the police! (More sirens) Oh no that's worse.

Then there's, Loonatics Unleashed... eeesh. They rebrand the Looney Tunes to be dark and edgy but still safe for kids, in a future where everyone is anime now. The edgelord descendants, Tech E Coyote and Rev Runner are now part of the crime fighting team and pretty much friends, so there's no chasing or catching, except there is this one catch soooo- They acknowledge the ancestral rivalry, but that's basically it.

Oh, I guess I should mention Seth MacFarlane's Cavalcade of Cartoon Comedy since the comments will probably tell me I missed it. Uh, yeah, he catches the Road Runner. But it's a parody, not officially made by Warner Bros, so it doesn't count. This concludes the mention of Seth MacFarlane's Cavalcade of Cartoon Comedy.

But then, 2010 to 2014, we finally get another batch of theatrical shorts, this time in 3D. And they want you to know they're in 3D. Whereas in the originals, they could have the punchline happen off screen. Here they have to show off the 3D so it's constantly like whoa whoooooa whooooooa! These are a lot of fun, they do a great job at being faithful to the originals. But he doesn't catch the Road Runner, so they can burn in a fire. Goddammit!

So the coyote and the bird were a cartoon without a show. Until-

STAY LOONEY TUNED

In 2011, The Looney Tunes Show takes the classic cast of characters and puts them into an animated sitcom. It is jarring to see them personality changed into this very dry and often awkward tone, but it has some outstanding moments and seems to have gathered a newfound appreciation lately.

Wile E Coyote and Road Runner appear as wrap-around segments aka filler. This is also CGI similar to the 2010 3D ones, but with a way lower budget much like the "Larriva Eleven" and no 3D much like the "Larriva Eleven".

We get a close call and a close encounter, but he keeps running so they don't count.

At one point, during this balancing bridge short, the Road Runner openly jumps into the Coyote's arms. I didn't account for this either, willfully letting yourself get caught! I guess as the Coyote blew up the bridge, it is his intervention in a way so yes!

In the last of these shorts, Wile E successfully catches the Road Runner in a trap! It works! It actually works! He can't get into the trap to, you know, eat the bird. Did you know the Road Runner has canonically eaten the Coyote? Twice? The bird is a monster and needs to be stopped.

The characters pop up a couple of times in show itself but just as cameo spots.

The Looney Tunes Show was followed by Wabbit, later renamed to New Looney Tunes. Not to be confused with Looney Tunes Cartoons. Except it is confusing because this has a more confusing naming system than the Fast and Furious. Not not that one, this one!

Anyway, Wile E can talk and only chases after the Road Runner on a couple of occasions. No captures but he gets dragged around at one point. The vocalisations really highlight how giving the Coyote a voice really adds nothing to the comic violence.

Speaking of comics, I'm not going to go through all the comics because, well, there's a lot. But one thing I want to mention is during the DC Meets Looney Tunes series, Wile E Coyote hires DC's gritty and violent bounty hunter Lobo to go after the Road Runner. It's so realistic and gruesome but it kinda works. I like it! They also do a short comic more in Looney Tunes style and here Lobo catches the bird! But gets sued for damaging intellectual property.

And lastly, in 2020, Looney Tunes Cartoons. These are actually still in production but as at time of recording there have been 9 shorts so far. In Cactus If You Can, he catches the Road Runner in the suck of the vacuum but gets hit by cacti instead. In Climate Control, he traps the Road Runner in ice but slips off before he can grab him. In Time Out he manages to time freeze the Road Runner, but either can't move him or can't keep him still. And in Multiply & Conquer, he works with clones of himself on an elaborate trap and it actually works! They get him! But they then fight among themselves who gets to eat him, letting the Road Runner get away.

CONCLUSION CONFUSION

Looking at the history of Road Runner is to look at the history of Looney Tunes, their ups and downs. Will Space Jam 2 be the shot of a special secret stuff they need for yet another comeback? We will wait and see.

After 70+ years of Road Runner cartoons, I can confirm he has been caught by the Coyote 13 times, plus a further 6 occasions depending how much you want to stretch technicalities.

Solid Tin Coyote

Soup Or Sonic

Road Runner show bumpers x2

Honey Nut Cheerios advert

Acme Hour advert

Webtoon (Judge Granny/Inherit the Windbag)

Looney Tunes Show shorts x2 (Heartbreak Bridge & Shut Your Trap)

Looney Tunes Cartoons x4 (Cactus If You Can, Climate Control, Multiply & Conquer & Time Out)

Zippering Along

Scrambled Aches

Fastest With The Mostest

Boulder Wham

Chaser On The Rocks

Roger Rabbit

That's more than I expected and that number rapidly increased the more modern we got. I think that's because, like I said before, we're so used to the Road Runner getting away all the time that now the subversion is he actually gets caught more often than in the originals. But we've also seen that the shorts work better under more restrictions, while still

experimenting with the formula. From Chuck Jones's disciplines, to exploring one gimmick in various ways, to new and exciting animation styles.

So maybe Wile E Coyote should never catch the Road Runner. After all, the chase is more fun than the goal.

Like this police chase, they'll never catch me- [falls] [sign] -aaaah, my legs!!