KINONIK

SCARLET STREET (1945)

Directed by Fritz Lang

WEDNESDAY January 7th 7PM

SATURDAY MATINEE January 10th 2PM

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Fritz Lang's **Scarlet Street** (1945) opens our first quarter of 2026 with a deceptively simple premise: an ordinary man makes one bad decision.

Christopher Cross is a cashier. Middle-aged, unhappily married, dreams of being a painter. Edward G. Robinson plays him with devastating ordinariness; this isn't Little Caesar or a tough guy, just a man who's accepted that his life will never be what he wanted. Then he meets a woman who changes everything. One lie leads to another. One bad choice compounds. The noir universe sets its hook and won't let go.

This is Lang at his most merciless. He arrived in Hollywood in 1934 after fleeing Nazi Germany, bringing with him a filmmaker's understanding of how systems destroy people. In **Metropolis** (1927), it was industrial capitalism. In **M** (1931), mob justice versus state power. In **Scarlet Street**, it's something quieter and more devastating: the ordinary cruelty of circumstance and delusion.

Lang shot this immediately after **The Woman in the Window** (1944) - same three leads (Robinson, Joan Bennett, Dan Duryea), same noir pessimism, but darker. Woman in the Window gave its protagonist an escape hatch. **Scarlet Street** offers none. It's one of the bleakest endings in American noir, and it resonates precisely because Chris isn't a gangster or a monster. He's just a man who wanted something, reached for it, and discovered that the legal system that processes him does not see him. The state doesn't care about justice; it cares about having someone to punish. And when the system decides you're guilty, the truth becomes irrelevant.

Throughout this next series we'll examine how systems manufacture criminality and force complicity. **Scarlet Street** shows the individual scale: one man, ordinary circumstances, total annihilation. I promise it won’t all be so grim.