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BLUE COLLAR (1978)

Directed by Paul Schrader

WEDNESDAY September 16th 7PM

SATURDAY September 19th 2PM / 7PM

16mm LPP Open-Matte



Coupla weeks ago a film reached theaters that Warner Bros. Discovery had tried to erase. Coyote vs. Acme — in which Wile E. Coyote sues the corporation whose exploding, misfiring products have maimed him for seventy years — was finished, tested well, and shelved for a thirty-million-dollar tax write-off, worth more to the conglomerate as a loss than as a movie.

Hold that in mind, because Paul Schrader's **Blue Collar** is that gag played in three layers.

First on screen: Zeke, Jerry, and Smokey — Richard Pryor, Harvey Keitel, Yaphet Kotto — are Detroit autoworkers who rob their own union out of ordinary desperation. They come away with something worse than a small haul: a ledger which would damn the union as a criminal operation and no one to sell it to who isn't already part of what it indicts. A box of dynamite stamped ACME, right?

Second in the making. Directing for the first time off the success of Taxi Driver, Schrader got three combustible men into one film by meeting each alone and promising each he was the star. "Three bulls into a china shop," he admitted later. “You can't blame the bulls when things start getting wrecked." By the third day it was open war: a gun pulled, an ashtray flung into the lens, fists, a weaponized chair. He built this weird contraption, primed it himself, and it went off in his hands. He suffered a breakdown on set and quit the business for a while.

Third, and this is what the film is actually about: the worker whose every tool is sold to him by the company and built to fail. That is the Coyote's entire existence — infinite effort, elaborate schemes, each device ordered from the catalog and each one detonating in his own face. It's also the American shop floor as **Blue Collar** sees it, where every screw you turn turns against you. And it looks a lot like a chart of productivity versus wages since 1971.

The Coyote always gets up, opens the fresh catalog, and tries again. But **Blue Collar** is the gag played once, by people who don't get up — three men reaching for the lever, and the long moment after, when they understand the lever was wired to the floor beneath their feet.

Screening from an exceptional 16mm open-matte print, sourced from an Australian collector: vibrant, saturated, and absolutely of its moment. If you’re curious about what interior light felt like in the 70s and 80s, this might just be an ideal reference.