

FURTHER REVIEW

COYOTE HITS PAYDIRT

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Our old friend Wile E. Coyote is in the news again. After having decided to lawyer up and sue the Acme Company that caused him so much bad luck and pain over the years, Wile E. ran into an even bigger, more powerful foe: Warner Bros. Discovery, which ignored praise for his filmed lawsuit and trial and shelved the project in 2023 — all for a corporate tax write-off.

But now the film is in other — hopefully, wiser — hands and will be released nationally. Perhaps the public will flock to theaters and the Coyote will finally hit paydirt.

Or, maybe he'll hit the regular kind of dirt. We'll have to see the movie to find out ...

A ZOMBIE PROJECT RISES FROM THE DEAD

In February 1990, the New Yorker magazine ran a story by humorist Ian Frazier that outlined a lawsuit the hard-luck Looney Tunes character Wile E. Coyote filed against the allegedly evil Acme Corporation. That story was included in a 1996 collected book of Frazier's stories.

Nearly three decades later, in August 2018, Warner Bros. decided to make a feature-length animated film that covered that same territory. Chris McKay, director and editor of three seasons of "Robot Chicken" and director of the 2017 film "The Lego Batman Movie," headed up the project.

McKay hired Dave Green — who had directed "Earth to Echo" in 2014 and "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows" in 2016 — to direct.

Eventually, McKay dropped out of the project and Chris DeFaria — director of 2021's "Tom & Jerry" — and "Guardians of the Galaxy" and "Superman" writer/producer James Gunn were hired as producers.

By that time, "Coyote vs. Acme" had become a mix of live action and animation, a la "Roger Rabbit." The movie was filmed in 2022 and was scheduled for release in July 2023.

The completed film tested well with audiences, but by that time, AT&T had spun off Warner Bros. to merge with



Dave Green



Chris DeFaria



James Gunn

Discovery, Inc. The new company announced it would shelve "Coyote vs. Acme" and take its

production costs of \$30 million as a tax write-off. The film's place on the 2023 release schedule was taken over by "Barbie."

The move was met with angry backlash from the filmmaking team. Green said, "I am beyond proud of the final product, and beyond devastated by WB's decision. But in the spirit of Wile E. Coyote, resilience and persistence win the day."

Four days later, Warner Bros. Discovery announced it had reversed its decision and put "Coyote vs. Acme" up for bids from other distributors.

Warner Bros. Discovery was reportedly seeking between \$75 and \$80 million for the film. Netflix reportedly offered less than half the film's original cost. Paramount and Amazon also made unsuccessful bids. Sony and Apple declined to bid.

It wasn't until March 2025 that Ketchup Entertainment — which, in 2022, had bought distribution rights to Warner Bros.' previous animated film, "The Day the Earth Blew Up" — successfully bought the rights to "Coyote vs. Acme" for \$50 million.

"Coyote vs. Acme" will finally be released Friday, Aug. 28, 2026.

'CANCEL CULTURE' AT WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY

Attorney David Zaslav began work for NBC in the 1980s and helped launch CNBC and MSNBC. He became CEO of Discovery in 2006 and, when that company merged with Warner Bros., became CEO of the combined Warner Bros. Discovery in 2022.

He achieved notoriety in his first year in that job by canceling a number of pricey film projects — as production was wrapping up or had ended — in order to give his firm enormous tax write-offs. In addition to "Coyote vs. Acme," that included ...



The Day the Earth Blew Up

PLANNED RELEASE: 2022 or 2023
COST: \$15 million

Had been aimed to release on HBO Max. Was sold to Ketchup Entertainment and released in March 2025.



Batgirl

PLANNED RELEASE: 2022 or 2023
COST: \$90 million

Featured Leslie Grace, J.K. Simmons, Brendon Fraser and Michael Keaton. Was shelved before post-production was completed.



Scoob! Holiday Haunt

PLANNED RELEASE: December 2022
COST: \$40 million

Prequel to the 2020 film "Scoob!" had been planned for release on HBO Max.

WILE E. COYOTE'S COURTROOM DRAMA

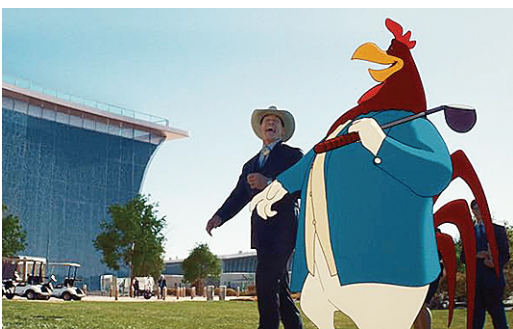
Will Forte plays the Coyote's lawyer, Kevin Avery. Avery and his niece, Paige, are named after Warner Bros. director Tex Avery. The character of Dottie Jones is named after Chuck Jones, director of the first Coyote and Road Runner cartoons. Tyrone Maltese is named after Michael Maltese, who wrote most of the Road Runner cartoons in the 1940s and 1950s.



Three-time Emmy Award-winning voice actor Eric Bauza was hired to provide the voices for several Looney Tunes characters: Tweety, Foghorn Leghorn, Porky Pig, Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, Elmer Fudd and others. He does not provide the voice of Wile E. Coyote: True to his persona in the classic Road Runner cartoons, Wile E. is a totally silent character.



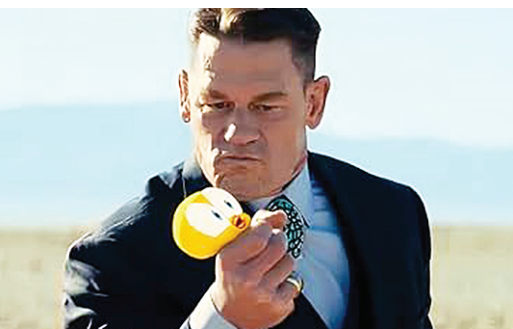
Most of the film's outdoor scenes were filmed in and around Albuquerque, New Mexico. Film Office director Amber Dodson wrote that the production would "showcase our beautiful city as an already iconic location and setting in the Looney cartoons." For added irony: The state bird of New Mexico is the Greater Roadrunner.



The film's 3D animators worked closely with a team of 2D artists, who guided them with drawn poses and expressions of the characters. Editor Carsten Kurpanek explained that "artists would do line drawings of key poses over a rough edit," which were then used as reference for visual effects and animation. The animation team called this process "sketchviz."



The film's teasers leaned into the tax write-off controversy, but blaming Acme for the delay. The first teaser — released on Tax Day, April 15 — featured Wile E. hanging in the air before holding up a sign that said "Happy Tax Day" and "Check Your Write-Offs" before falling to his doom. Later ads included the line "The Movie Acme Doesn't Want You to See."



Within 24 hours after its release, the film's first full-length trailer received 25.6 million online views. That set a record for most views for a trailer for an independent family film release. The final trailer, released during the San Diego Comic-Con, featured John Cena as an Acme lawyer threatening Tweety and Porky Pig showing up for a "pants-less modeling" audition.