

North by Northwest (1959)

Roger Thornhill, a twice-divorced Madison Avenue advertising executive (Cary Grant), is mistaken for "George Kaplan" when he summons a hotel bellhop who is paging Kaplan, and is kidnapped by Valerian (Adam Williams) and Licht (Robert Ellenstein). The two take him to the house of Lester Townsend on Long Island. There he is interrogated by a man he assumes to be Townsend, but who is actually foreign spy Phillip Vandamm (James Mason). Thornhill repeatedly denies he is Kaplan, but Vandamm refuses to believe his men picked up the wrong man. He orders his right-hand man Leonard (Martin Landau) to get rid of him.

Thornhill is forced to drink bourbon in an attempt to stage a fatal road accident. However, he pushes one thug out of the car and drives off. After a perilous drive, he is arrested for drunk driving. He is unable to get the police, the judge, or even his mother (Jessie Royce Landis) to believe what happened to him, especially when a woman at Townsend's residence says he got drunk at her dinner party; she also remarks that Lester Townsend is a United Nations diplomat.

Thornhill and his mother go to Kaplan's hotel room, but cannot find anyone there who has seen him. While in the room, Thornhill answers the phone; it is one of Vandamm's henchmen. Narrowly avoiding recapture, Thornhill takes a taxi to the General Assembly building of the United Nations, where Townsend is due to deliver a speech. Thornhill meets Townsend face to face and is surprised to find that the diplomat is not the man who interrogated him, and Townsend expresses surprise that anybody else has been living in his house. Before they can talk any more, Valerian throws a knife, striking Townsend in the back. He falls forward, dead, into Thornhill's arms. Without thinking, Thornhill removes the knife, making it appear to onlookers that he is the killer. He flees.

Knowing that Kaplan has a reservation at a Chicago hotel the next day, Thornhill sneaks onto the 20th Century Limited. On board, he meets Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint), who hides Thornhill from policemen searching the train. She asks about his personalized matchbooks with the initials ROT; he says the O stands for nothing. They flirt, but are interrupted by police officers boarding the train. Unbeknownst to Thornhill, Eve is working with Vandamm and Leonard, who are in another compartment. Upon arriving in Chicago, Thornhill borrows a porter's uniform and carries Eve's luggage through the crowd, eluding police. Eve (who is revealed to be Vandamm's lover) lies to Thornhill, telling him she has arranged a meeting with Kaplan. She gives him directions to the place.

Thornhill travels by bus to an isolated crossroads, with flat countryside all around and only scarce traffic. Another man is dropped off at the bus stop, but turns out to be unconnected to Thornhill; the man leaves on a bus after observing that a nearby biplane is "dusting crops where there ain't no crops." Moments later, the plane turns toward Thornhill. To his terror, it dives at him, passing him at an altitude of only a few feet, forcing him to throw himself to the ground; immediately after that, someone on the plane opens fire on Thornhill with an automatic weapon, just missing him. This process is repeated several times. Thornhill flees to the cover of a cornfield, but the plane dusts it with pesticide, forcing him out. Desperate, Thornhill steps in front of a speeding gasoline tank truck, making it stop. The plane crashes into the tank truck and explodes. When passing drivers stop to see what is going on, Thornhill steals a pickup truck and drives back to Chicago.

Thornhill returns to the hotel, where he is surprised to learn that Kaplan had already checked out when Eve claimed to have spoken to him. Suspicious, he goes to Eve's room to question her. She lets him get cleaned up as she leaves. From the impression of a message written on a notepad, Thornhill learns her destination: an art auction. There, he finds Vandamm, Leonard, and Eve. Vandamm purchases a pre-Columbian Tarascan statue and departs. Thornhill tries to follow, only to

find all exits covered by Vandamm's men. He escapes from them by placing nonsensical bids, making such a nuisance of himself that the police have to be called to remove him.

Thornhill tries to remain safely in police custody and identifies himself as a wanted fugitive, but the officers are ordered to take him to Midway Airport instead of a police station. He meets the Professor (Leo G. Carroll), an American spymaster who is after Vandamm. The Professor reveals that George Kaplan does not exist: he was invented to distract Vandamm from the real government agent — Eve, who was already in a relationship with Vandamm when alerted by the Professor to Vandamm's espionage activity. As Eve's life is now in danger, Thornhill agrees to help the Professor in order to protect her.

They fly to Rapid City, South Dakota, where Thornhill (now pretending to be Kaplan) meets Eve and Vandamm in a crowded cafeteria at the base of Mount Rushmore. He offers to let Vandamm leave the country in exchange for Eve, but is turned down. When he tries to keep her from leaving, Eve shoots Thornhill and flees. He is taken away in an ambulance. At a secluded spot, however, he emerges unharmed, having been shot with blanks. To his dismay, he learns that, having proven her loyalty and made herself a fugitive, Eve will accompany Vandamm out of the country that night. To keep him from interfering further, Thornhill is locked in a hospital room.

Thornhill manages to escape and goes to Vandamm's mountainside home, slipping inside undetected. He learns that the Tarascan statue contains secrets on microfilm. While Eve is out of the room, Leonard fires the gun she used at Vandamm, demonstrating how the shooting was faked. Vandamm decides to throw Eve out of the airplane when they are flying over water. Thornhill manages to warn her by writing a note inside one of his ROT matchbooks and dropping it where she can find it.

On the way to the airplane, Eve grabs the statue and joins Thornhill. Leonard and Valerian chase them across the top of the Mount Rushmore monument. Valerian lunges at the pair, but falls to his death. Eve slips and clings desperately to the steep mountainside. Thornhill grabs her hand, while precariously holding on with his other hand. Leonard appears and treads on his hand. They are saved when the Professor has a police marksman shoot Leonard, whose lifeless body falls off the mountain, and Vandamm is arrested.

The scene transitions from Thornhill pulling Eve up to safety on Mount Rushmore to him pulling her, now his wife, onto an upper bunk on a train. The final shot shows their train speeding into a tunnel.

Cast

Cary Grant	as	Roger O. Thornhill
Eva Marie Saint	as	Eve Kendall
James Mason	as	Phillip Vandamm
Jessie Royce Landis	as	Clara Thornhill
Leo G. Carroll	as	The Professor
Josephine Hutchinson	as	Mrs. Townsend
Philip Ober	as	Lester Townsend
Martin Landau	as	Leonard
Adam Williams	as	Valerian
Edward Platt	as	Victor Larrabee
Robert Ellenstein	as	Licht
Les Tremayne	as	the Auctioneer

Philip Coolidge	as	Dr. Cross
Patrick McVey	as	Sergeant Flamm - Chicago Policeman
Edward Binns	as	Captain Junket

Memorable quotes (with notes on difficult vocabulary)

Eve Kendall: [*Hanging by their fingers from Mount Rushmore*] What happened with your first two marriages?

Roger Thornhill: My wives divorced me.

Eve Kendall: Why?

Roger Thornhill: They said I led too dull a life.

They said I led too dull a life = Dicevano che conducevo una vita troppo monotona

Eve Kendall: I tipped the steward five dollars to seat you here if you should come in.

Roger Thornhill: Is that a proposition?

Eve Kendall: I never discuss love on an empty stomach.

Roger Thornhill: You've already eaten!

Eve Kendall: But you haven't.

to tip = dare la mancia a

Roger Thornhill: Now you listen to me, I'm an advertising man, not a red herring. I've got a job, a secretary, a mother, two ex-wives and several bartenders that depend upon me, and I don't intend to disappoint them all by getting myself "slightly" killed.

red herring = elemento di disturbo, distrazione; (qui) nullafacente

Roger Thornhill: No. No, Mother, I have not been drinking. No. No. These two men, they poured a whole bottle of bourbon into me. No, they didn't give me a chaser.

chaser = alcolico più o meno forte di quello che si è appena bevuto; (qui) bicchiere della staffa

Man at Prairie Crossing: That's funny, that plane's dustin' crops where there ain't no crops.

to dust crops = irrorare di pesticidi; **crops** = colture

Roger Thornhill: In the world of advertising, there's no such thing as a lie. There's only expedient exaggeration.

expedient = opportuno, di comodo

[*Thornhill is wearing sunglasses to hide his identity*]

Ticket Seller: Something wrong with your eyes?

Roger Thornhill: Yes, they're sensitive to questions.

sensitive to questions = (qui) sensibili ai ficcanaso

Roger Thornhill: The moment I meet an attractive woman, I have to start pretending I have no desire to make love to her.

Eve Kendall: What makes you think you have to conceal it?

Roger Thornhill: She might find the idea objectionable.

Eve Kendall: Then again, she might not.

to conceal = nascondere; **to find the idea objectionable** = trovare qualcosa da ridire

Eve Kendall: I want you to do a favor for me. A big, big favor.

Roger Thornhill: Name it.

Eve Kendall: I want you to leave right now, stay far away from me, and don't come near me again. We're not going to get involved. Last night was last night, and it's all there was, and it's all there is. There isn't going to be anything more between us. So please. Goodbye, good luck, no conversation, just leave.

to get involved = avere una storia

Phillip Vandamm: What possessed you to come blundering in here like this? Could it be an overpowering interest in art?

Roger Thornhill: Yes, the art of survival.

Eve Kendall: He followed me here from the hotel.

Leonard: He was in your room?

Roger Thornhill: Sure. Isn't everybody?

to blunder in = intromettersi; **overpowering** = insopprimibile

Leonard: You must have had some doubts about her yourself. You still do.

Phillip Vandamm: Rubbish.

Leonard: Why else would you have decided not to tell her that our little treasure here has a belly full of microfilm?

Phillip Vandamm: You seem to be trying to fill mine with rotten apples.

Leonard: Sometimes the truth does taste like a mouthful of worms.

Phillip Vandamm: The truth? I've heard nothing but innuendos.

Leonard: Call it my woman's intuition, if you will. But I've never trusted neatness. Neatness is always the result of deliberate planning.

belly = pancia; **innuendo** = insinuazione; **neatness** = (qui) cose pulite, lineari

The Professor: If I thought there was any chance of changing your mind, I'd talk about Miss Kendall, of whom you so obviously disapprove.

Roger Thornhill: Yes, for using sex like some people use a flyswatter.

flyswatter = paletta per le mosche

Roger Thornhill: When we get out of this, you can ride the train with me again.

Eve Kendall: Is that a proposition?

Roger Thornhill: It's a proposal, sweetie!

proposition = proposta; **proposal** = proposta di matrimonio; **sweetie** = tesoro

Phillip Vandamm: Seems to me you fellows could stand a little less training from the F.B.I. and a little more from the Actor's Studio.

to stand = (qui) sopportare

Larry Wade: [*Referring to the drinks*] We've gotten a head start here, Mr. Thornhill.

Roger Thornhill: That won't last long.

to get a head start = partire in vantaggio

Roger Thornhill: How do we know it's not a fake? It looks like a fake.

Bidder: Well, one thing we know. You're no fake. You are a genuine idiot.

fake = falso

Roger Thornhill: Seven parking tickets.

parking ticket = multa per sosta vietata

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