

## Hero's Journey Analysis – "NORTH BY NORTHWEST"

### ORDINARY WORLD

New York office workers leaving an office building

THORNHILL (Cary Grant dictates to his secretary  
Advertising executive  
He's heading to the Plaza  
She has to follow him

She's got to send a box of chocolates for his girlfriend  
(I think – it's not clear)

He steals the cab from a guy  
Lies – says that he has a sick woman  
He deals in lies

He's due to go to the theatre with his mother that night  
She tells him his agenda for the next day

IS THIS A SIGN OF HIS NEED?  
He's still a child?  
No mention of a father ever

Gets out of cab  
Gives her a message to call his mother  
Then remembers that she won't be able to call his mother  
But it's too late – she's gone

5:13  
He tells the guys he's meeting that his mother's at an  
apartment with no phone  
He has to send her a telegram  
He calls BOY!

As the BOY announces they are looking for "George Kaplan"

Two heavies look on

CALL TO ADVENTURE  
He can't dictate the telegram to him  
He has to go with the boy

The Two Heavies grab him and tell him they have to go  
with him – they have a gun pointed at his heart

It's clearly a case of mistaken identity – they think he  
is George Kaplan.

6:55

He doesn't want to go with them – REFUSAL

A very clear case of an UNWILLING HERO

Could he stop at a drug store and call to tell his friends he's being kidnapped?

He tries to escape but the doors are locked - REFUSAL

CROSSING THE FIRST THRESHOLD

They arrive at an estate marked as Townsend

7:54

He is led into a Library

Door is locked

There is a phone

Mail says Lester Townsend

TESTS, ALLIES & ENEMIES

Townsend (James Mason) comes in - ENEMY

Draws the curtains

Turns on the light

Not what he was expecting - a little taller, more polished

His Secretary, Leonard (Vincent Price) comes in - ENEMY

Thornhill says he's not Kaplan

11:01

How much does he know and how much he wants for it

He wants to give him a chance of surviving the evening

He gives a start

This is serious - we are playing for the ultimate STAKES

12:02

Is told that he - ie Kaplan - has been in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Boston

Staying in Room 796 at the Plaza

Due in Chicago

And Rapid Falls, South Dakota

Will he co-operate?

No - because he can't - REFUSAL

He's offered a drink

Tries to break free

They force a huge glass of alcohol down him

This is almost an INITIATION ceremony

14:08

ORDEAL

He's drunk

They force him into a car on the edge of a cliff

He suddenly comes to when he sees the cliff

Pushes the guy out of the car

Drives onto the cliff edge

One wheel over the edge

Then off down the mountain

Struggling to maintain concentration

Nearly runs into a bunch of cars

Gets chased by a POLICE car

16:27

Stops to avoid hitting a cyclist

Police car runs into the back of him

Brought into the police station

Tells them he was kidnapped

17:27

Car was reported as stolen

REWARD

He is allowed one call

Policeman calls for him

He gets his mother

He's at Glen Cove police station

Phone call a bit boring – nothing is advanced

But the fact that he calls his MOTHER is reminder of his

NEED – he's still, in his 40s, turning to his mother

He needs to become a MAN

They interview him

Establish that he's been drinking

He tries to go to sleep on the table

TEST

He's in court

His lawyer (Ed Platt) tells the story to the court

Even he doesn't appear to believe it

Judge says they are going to find out if it's true

21:38

They come to the Townsend mansion

Same housekeeper

Mr Townsend is not there  
Mrs Townsend

He shows them the couch  
Says there'll be stains – there aren't any  
Points to the liquor cabinet – there is no liquor  
Mrs Townsend comes in and says that they were worried  
about him  
He has never met this woman before in his life  
She said he was too pissed

The name George Kaplan doesn't mean anything to her  
Her husband is addressing the United Nations this  
afternoon

They won't be calling her husband

25:25  
They drive off

The gardener is one of the thugs that kidnapped him  
So it won't end here

He goes in with his MOTHER to the Plaza  
He calls on the phone to room 796 – Mr Kaplan's room  
He hasn't answered his phone in 2 days

He gives his mother \$50 to go get the key to Kaplan's  
room – maid says it hasn't been slept in

27:34  
They go into the room  
Picture of Townsend on the desk

Kaplan has dandruff  
He calls for the Housekeeper

She has never seen Kaplan before  
Someone comes to the door – VALET  
Has a suit that has been pressed for him  
He hasn't seen Kaplan either

So noone in the hotel has actually seen Kaplan  
He tries on Kaplan's suit jacket  
He's much taller than Kaplan

The phone rings  
30:29  
One of the thugs from last night  
This confirms to them that he is Kaplan  
Where did the call come from?  
Made from the lobby!!!

He has to get out quickly  
 Mother still doesn't believe him

31:43

They get in the lift with him and his mother  
 She says you aren't really trying to kill my son are you?  
 They laugh, the whole lift laughs - REWARD  
 He gets the ladies out first and makes a break for it  
 The thugs follow in another taxi

33:13

He goes to the United Nations General Assembly building  
 Asks to see Lester Townsend  
 He's from Unipo  
 Says he's George Kaplan

Thugs arrive in chase

Mr Townsend comes to see him  
 But it's not the same guy

Was he at home last night?  
 No, he stayed in town  
 Mrs Townsend is dead  
 The house is closed up  
 Only the Gardner and his wife live there

ORDEAL

He shows him the picture of his Mr Townsend  
 The real Mr Townsend gets a knife in his back from the  
 thug  
 36:45

Poor old Thornhill looks like he's the killer  
 Call the police!

Now he's in deep strife  
 Picture of him with the knife is on the front page of the  
 newspaper  
 He can't rely on the Police any more - always a key  
 element of any thriller  
 37:50

A group of individuals (FBI) discuss the situation  
 How can Thornhill be mistaken for Kaplan when there is no  
 Kaplan?  
 MENTOR - the Professor - says they'll do nothing  
 Because this enhances the ruse they created to help  
 protect their agent  
 They can't rescue Thornhill without jeopardising the  
 operation  
 Goodbye, Mr Thornhill, whoever you are

Raise the STAKES – Thornhill is on his own

Grand Central Station

40:20

He calls his mother

Explains that he can't go to the police

Drunk driver, thief and murderer

He's going to catch a train rather than a plane because  
if anyone recognises him he can jump off

This is exposition

The drama is held up so he can tell us why he's not going  
to the police and why he's not taking a plane

But, again, he's turning to his mother

Rather than a wife, girlfriend or buddy

He tries to buy a ticket

But the guy has a picture of him in front of him

But Thornhill is gone

He jumps the gate

Gets onto the train

Runs into EVE KENDALL (Eva Marie Saint) – CALL TO  
ADVENTURE

They do a little dance

Police come

And she gives them a bum steer

He says it was for parking tickets

She walks off

Conductors on the train are moving through asking  
questions

He comes out of the toilet

He's got his sunglasses on

He hides all the newspapers showing his face

44:49

APPROACH

He finds Eva Marie Saint in the dining car

Sits opposite her

Some romantic interest on her part it seems

Recognise me

Something about my face

Nice face

Honest women frighten him

When he meets an attractive woman he has to begin  
pretending that he doesn't want to make love to her

Why would he pretend? Maybe they'd like the idea

She's 26 and single  
Says she's an industrial designer

He lies about who he is  
But she knows he's Thornhill  
It's going to be a long night  
And she doesn't like the book she's started  
She pulls out a cigarette – code for sex  
She sexily blows out the match  
He has his own matches

THIS IS A VERY GOOD SCENE

She invites him to her car 3901

The train stops  
Police are coming to search the train

He heads to her room

50:33

She lies on the couch  
As he hides in the hidden bed

They ask her about the guy she was sitting with

They say they'll be in the Observation Car  
They leave  
And she opens his bed  
His glasses are broken

Why are you so good to me?  
Shall I climb up and tell you why?

Shot of train

53:10

She wants him to stay with her in Chicago  
He's worried about her  
I'm a big girl  
Yes, and in all the right places

They kiss  
Says he's good with words  
Can make them do whatever he wants  
Sell people things they don't need

Porter comes in  
Thornhill waits in the washroom  
She has miniature shaving brush and razor  
56:20

They resume kissing  
 One bed  
 It means you're going to sleep on the floor  
 The look in her eyes suggests something

The porter takes a message gives it to someone

What do I do with him in the morning? Says the note  
 It's "Townsend" and his secretary, Leonard  
 Eve is a SHAPESHIFTER

In Chicago, Thornhill is dressed as a Red cap to evade  
 the police  
 58:56

She is going to make the phone call to Kaplan for him  
 because it would be suspicious for a Red Cap to make it

Townsend and Leonard walking off near them

They find a Red Cap in his underwear  
 But he is counting his money so Thornhill has made it  
 worth his while

He shaves using the miniatures in the washroom  
 1:00:54

She makes the phone call  
 The Secretary is receiving the call a few booths down

Thornhill emerges  
 Kaplan is to meet him at Prairie Stop  
 Get on the Greyhound bus

What's the matter?  
 You seem tense.  
 Will we see each other  
 She's evasive  
 Clearly she is having second thoughts about entrapping  
 him

1:03:38  
 ORDEAL  
 Famous scene  
 The bus stops in the middle of nowhere  
 Thornhill gets out  
 Car comes but doesn't stop  
 Another car – same thing  
 A truck goes past  
 Another car comes out of one of the farm roads – guy gets  
 out of the car. Stands by the road.  
 1:06:54



They stand opposite one another  
Thornhill approaches him  
Is he supposed to be meeting someone?  
Waiting to be picked up by bus  
Says it's funny about the crop dusting plane  
It's dusting crops where there ain't no crops

The plane approaches him  
He dives  
1:08:58

It makes another passes and fires guns

He runs out to flag down a car  
But it doesn't stop

The plane comes around again  
1:09:49  
He starts running - famous shot  
It fires at him  
He runs into the corn to hide  
It makes a pass

It comes around again  
And trails chemicals over him  
Forcing him out

He sees a truck  
Makes a run for it  
Plane comes around again  
Truck beeps  
He falls under the truck  
It runs over him  
The plane runs into the tanker

Cars stop  
As they look on  
He steals a pickup truck  
1:12:51

In Chicago  
Police look at the pickup truck which we can identify  
because it has a fridge in the back

He goes to the Ambassador East hotel  
Guy says Kaplan checked out  
Forwarding address Rapid City  
Left at 7 this morning  
He now knows that Eve deceived him  
Because she called him here at 9

REWARD

He sees her  
 She goes to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
 Gets her room number 463  
 Comes up to see her  
 There's no getting rid of me is there  
 Double meaning

#### REWARD

She runs and hugs him  
 He holds off

The paper says two killed in crop duster plane crash  
 He questions her  
 He says he's staying with her now

She gets a call  
 Takes a note  
 Puts it in her bag  
 He invites her to have dinner with him  
 She asks him to leave right now – REFUSAL  
 She says there won't be anything more between them  
 He won't accept it

After dinner he says he'll go  
 She says OK – but he has to get a Valet to press his suit  
 He calls – it will take 20 mins

Now what can a man do with his clothes off for 20 mins?  
 How does a girl like you get to be a girl like you?  
 Ever kill a man?

This is a romantic interlude but it's laced with tension  
 He doesn't know whether he can trust this SHAPESHIFTER  
 He says he'll take a shower  
 Sounds like he is  
 But he's watching as she grabs a coat and leaves

He checks the pad she wrote the note down on  
 Runs a pencil across the impression  
 1212 N Michigan

He heads to an Art Auction  
 And "Townsend" is stroking her neck  
 1:22:34

Thornhill looks on

#### ORDEAL

Bold APPROACH  
 He confronts the three of them

He was in her room

Townsend withdraws his hand from Eve  
Mr Van Damme

He believes that Thornhill is with the FBI

Are you going to ask her to kiss me death  
She goes to hit him

She's crying

He says he's going to go to the police  
The Gardner thug is there waiting for him  
They have all the exits covered

So he starts participating in the bid  
1:27:00

He bids less than has been bid  
Creates a ruckus

ORDEAL

They call for the police – which is what he wants  
He punches a guy to make sure he'll get arrested

The Professor figure is there watching  
He leaves

And so he evades the thug

The Professor makes a phone call  
1:30:24

The cops drive him to the station  
He says they've hit the jackpot  
Chicago police capture UN killer

They are going to the airport  
He wants to go to the station

They arrive at the airport  
1:32:19

NORTHWEST is on the terminal  
The Professor arrives to collect his ticket  
And Thornhill

He is FBI, CIA, ONI  
Knows he's no killer

THE ROAD HOME

They are going to Mt Rushmore

Van Damme ("Townsend" will be there)  
 Importer Exporter - of govt secrets  
 They are trying to investigate him  
 He has a place near there  
 Believe he will try to leave the country

Thornhill talks about the "treacherous tramp"

#### CALL TO ADVENTURE

Wants him to keep being Kaplan for the next 24 hours

We can't hear a lot of the next bit of conversation  
 because of the noise of the plane

He says no he won't do it  
 He has a mother, two ex-wives, a bartender who are  
 depending on him

The Two ex-wives is significant - a sign he hasn't grown  
 up

#### REFUSAL

#### MEETING WITH MENTOR

Says that Eve is one of their agents - she is doing what  
 she has to do to stay alive

#### CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

He is now looking up at the figures on Mr Rushmore

The MENTOR says that Eve falling for Thornhill has  
 compromised her position with Van Damme - it's his  
 responsibility to restore things

1:38:13

Eve, Van Damme and Leonard arrive  
 Café at Mt Rushmore  
 He grabs a coffee  
 Says he won't talk to her  
 Thornhill tells VD that he knows where he's leaving from,  
 at what time and where he's going

His price? He wants the girl. He wants her to get what's  
 coming to her. If they do that he will look the other  
 way.

She says shes' going back to the house  
 They start to leave with her  
 He grabs her  
 She says stay away from me  
 She pulls a gun and shoots him

Runs off  
Drives off

Leonard watches  
Professor says he's not good – critically wounded

They drive off in the ambulance  
Thornhill gets up  
RESURRECTION

He is changed now

Eve is there  
1:43:22

REWARD  
She asked if she could see him again  
She wanted to apologise  
He understands – all in the line of duty

She says she met Van Damme  
Fell in love  
Eventually Professor approached her with details  
She was uniquely placed to help  
She kisses him

BARP of the HORN  
THE ROAD HOME

He says that after Van Damme leaves  
They'll catch up  
He finds out that she is going with Van Damme  
She cries and runs off  
Thornhill doesn't want her to go  
Professor says she has to – to continue their work

ORDEAL  
Trooper punches him

Professor brings him clothes  
His room is locked  
Says he's begun to forget Eve already  
She'll be gone in an hour  
He asks for a drink  
Professor goes to get it  
He thinks he can leave  
But the door is locked  
He goes out the window

He comes in through the window  
Stop! Says the girl

Then she sees him. Stop

1:51:34

RESURRECTION

He arrives at VD's home

Spectacular

Thornhill climbs up to it

The lights of a landing strip blink

TICKING CLOCK

A car arrives

The Gardener thug

The housekeeper is there

Eve is with VD

Thornhill climbs up

Eve is crying, apologising for jeopardising VD

They have 10 minutes because of fog

Leonard asks for privacy

Starts to tell Van Damme about his doubts about Eve

Says VD must have doubts otherwise he would have told her about the microfilm in the little statue they bought at auction.

Thornhill tries to attract Eve's attention with a stone

THE ROAD HOME

Leonard (Vincent Price) says it was too neat

Leonard fires a gun at Van Damme

Blanks

Now Van Damme knows

Says he's going to dispose of her from a great height

The stakes are high now

He writes a note to Eve on his cigarette packet – which he introduced on the train

The plane arrives

Thornhill tosses the match book down

Leonard sees it

Picks it up  
Puts it on the table

She finds the matchbook  
Goes up to the room

Thornhill explains the situation

Leonard comes to get her

Housekeeper sees Thornhill reflected in the TV  
Pulls a gun on Thornhill

Eve walks to the plane  
Expecting Thornhill to rescue  
Keeps turning back

Hear gun shots

Comes to rescue her

Eve grabs microfilm  
He drives up in car

Thornhill says he was held for 5 mins  
Until he realised it was that same silly gun

They get away

But then find themselves on top of the Mt Rushmore  
statues

RESURRECTION

They are hanging  
She asks about his two former wives  
They felt he led too dull a life

Her shoe breaks  
She falls  
He comes down to her

Leonard and the Gardener come after them  
2:07:55

Gardner leaps at Thornhill

They tumble down

Has a knife at his throat  
Pushes him over the edge

Then Leonard pushes Eve over  
She's hanging

Thornhill grabs her  
They are losing their grip  
Help!

Leonard comes and stands on Thornhill's fingers

Someone shoots Leonard  
He topples off

It's the professor and the state trooper  
Eve is reaching for Thornhill  
Can't make it

SHARING THE ELIXIR

Then we dissolve to he's pulling her to the top bed of  
bunk on the train

Come along Mrs Thornhill

The train enters a tunnel – shorthand for sex

THE END

#### SUMMARY:

I do love this film and it is one of the classics – the spectacular settings, the great dialogue, the intriguing storyline. However, it probably doesn't wholly work at the emotional level. Even as a thriller, something prevents you from thinking that he is ever really in jeopardy. It's all so stylised. But it's more about the lack of emotional development of the Hero.

There is a very short Ordinary World sequence here – almost immediately we cross the first threshold – and while this means we are immediately off on the ride, the disadvantage is that we don't really understand Thornhill's need. Yeah, he's a mummy's boy but I still don't feel like he has a great emotional distance to travel and it's not clear what happens in the film to alter him. Meeting a pretty woman? I'm sure all his ex-wives were pretty. Enjoyable ride but not emotionally satisfying.