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## **Strangers on a Train (1951)** **Directed by Alfred Hitchcock**

### **Cast**

Farley Granger as Guy Haines  
Ruth Roman as Anne Morton  
Robert Walker as Bruno Anthony  
Leo G. Carroll as Senator Morton  
Patricia Hitchcock as Barbara Morton  
Laura Elliott as Miriam Joyce Haines  
Marion Lorne as Mrs. Anthony  
Jonathan Hale as Mr. Anthony  
Norma Varden as Mrs. Cunningham  
John Brown as Professor Collins  
Robert Gist as Detective Hennessey

### **Credits**

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock  
Produced by Alfred Hitchcock  
Written by Raymond Chandler  
Whitfield Cook  
Czenzi Ormonde

Cinematography Robert Burks

Distributed by Warner Bros  
Release Date June 30, 1951  
Budget \$1.2 Million  
Box Office \$7,000,000

***Strangers on a Train*** is an American psychological crime thriller film produced and directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and based on the 1950 novel of the same name by Patricia Highsmith. It was shot in

the autumn of 1950 and released by Warner Bros. on June 30, 1951. The film stars Farley Granger, Ruth Roman, and Robert Walker, and features Leo G. Carroll, Patricia Hitchcock, and Laura Elliott. The film is number 32 on AFI's *100 Years ... 100 Thrills*.

The story concerns two strangers who meet on a train, a young tennis player and a charming psychopath. The psychopath suggests that because they each want to "get rid" of someone, they should "exchange" murders, and that way neither will get caught. The first murder is committed; then the psychopath tries to force the tennis player to complete the bargain.

## Strangers on a Train

Strangers on a Train was released in 1951 as yet another masterpiece to add to Alfred Hitchcock's repertoire. It tells the story of two strangers who meet on a train. Guy Haines is a professional tennis player and is currently romancing the senator's daughter, Anne, while awaiting a divorce from his wife, Miriam. Bruno Anthony is a mystery. All one knows about him after their first encounter is that he hates his father and is slightly psychotic. After all, after knowing Guy for a short while Bruno begins telling him of a plan to exchange, or 'crisscross', murders. Basically, Bruno would kill Guy's unfaithful wife and in turn Guy would murder Bruno's father. This brings about the main theme in the film: double crossing.



Throughout the movie there is plenty of evidence supporting this theme shown through dialogue, plot twists and images. From the moment the film starts the audience is shown a series of train tracks, all interconnecting and crossing over one another. The crossed tennis rackets on Guy Haines' lighter is just another symbolic reference to the film's main theme. Further images providing evidence of said theme –also known as doppelgänger- is the two double drinks Bruno orders on the train, Miriam's murder being reflected in her glasses, and a cameo where Hitchcock is shown carrying a double bass.

Shortly after an aggressive encounter with his wife, Miriam turns up dead, having been strangled to death. Guy is given the news by none other than Bruno, who now wants Guy to fulfill his part of the bargain. It is then when the double crossing theme comes back into play, this time larger than before. Guy does not wish to kill Bruno's father, therefore double-crossing Bruno. This betrayal leads Bruno to haunt Guy, who is now the lead suspect in his wife's murder.

Another interesting aspect of the film to look at is the complex character of Bruno Anthony. Although one knows that he is an extremely unstable individual, it is interesting to compare the positive and negative things added to the life of Guy Haines after Bruno's entry. The audience knows after the two's first encounter that Guy has a secret desire for his wife to meet an untimely death so that he can be free to marry the senator's daughter. Looking at his encounter with Bruno after Guy's return to Metcalf he is presented with Bruno's token from the murder: Miriam's glasses. Guy's reaction is both one of terror and relief, proving that Bruno has indeed done him a favor, although not everything is exactly as planned. Now Guy is an accomplice, whether he wants to be or not. Bruno's obsessive behavior towards Guy Haines, as well as Bruno's situation at home provides the audience with evidence of possible homosexual undertones, an interesting aspect added to the already complicated character of Bruno Anthony. In fact, it seems that Bruno Anthony is the alter ego of Guy Haines –a doppelganger, if you like- once again returning to the film's major theme of doubles.



As one continues to examine the two major characters in this film, it can be said that both men share a common view: both of their fantasies depends on a belief in the unnatural and bizarre. Hitchcock has a tendency in his films to add an element of bizarre into the world of his protagonist while continuing to keep them real and believable as a person, a difficult thing to do. An interesting scene to look at is the dissolve between Guy's murderous anger after exclaiming "I could strangle her!" into the phone which changes into a close-up of Bruno's hands after a manicure. This shot shows the audience Guy's desires and Bruno's capability to fulfill them.

In Hitchcock films, the acclaimed director often chooses to explore the moral and emotional evolution of a character. Guy gradually realizes that even after the death of Miriam he is still not free. Instead he is faced with three options: kill Bruno's father, allow himself to be arrested for his wife's murder or somehow prove Bruno is the real killer. Through further analysis, it is evident that Guy is as much at fault as other characters. His use of Anne as an aid to help himself up the political ladder is similar to Miriam's use of Guy's tennis playing to get herself out of her boring town. In the same way, Bruno killing Miriam was just the same as Guy killing her: all the consequences, both good and bad, were the same for Guy either way.



However, no matter how you look at it the main obsession of this film is double crossing. Bruno's title for the swapping of murders (crisscross) is emphasized by the overlapping train tracks. The interesting part of this imagery is that it is purely foreshadowing. The audience does not yet know what is to come as these train tracks are merely an opening shot, becoming symbolic only after further plot

development. During the final scene Hitchcock manages to turn a friendly ride into an object of terror as the carousel spins out of control. This symbolizes the deadly circulator of Guy and Bruno's relationship. This suggests that everything has come full circle. And through this, all parallels between Guy and Bruno are stripped away.

The ending of the film provides Guy with a new dignity and the audience with an entertaining and thrilling film about the consequences which come from double crossing. Strangers on a Train is yet more proof of Alfred Hitchcock's immense talents as a director confident in his own choices and capable of creating piece after piece of art.

*Retrieved from <http://www.listology.com/story/analysis-strangers-train>*



4. How does Guy's lighter become the catalyst to advance the plot?

5. Is Bruno a sympathetic character? Why or why not?

6. Why does Barbara become a potential victim to Bruno's obsessions and evil intentions?

7. What is the significance of Bruno dining with a lie on his lips? How does it negate the idea of the death-bed confession? Or that Bruno is weak?

## Discussion Questions

1. How does the ideas of “criss-cross” (Bruno’s description of his murder plans) appear in the images of the film’s opening sequence at the train station?
2. To what degree could Bruno be seen as a manifestation of Guy’s repressed fears and desires?
3. How does Hitchcock use familiar settings to build suspense? Consider the music store, the amusement park, the merry-go-round. What is the significance of the murder taking place on “Magic Isle” that is approached through the Tunnel of Love?



4. What is the significance of Bruno helping the blind man across the road?

5. How does the clever editing of the tennis match and Bruno's struggle to retrieve the lighter contribute to the film's suspense?

6. Why does Bruno so often emerge from a shadow to haunt Guy? How do these shot's contribute to the film's theme?

7. How does Hitchcock use the "everyman" to advance his plot and tell his story? Did you see any of that in "North by Northwest" last semester?