

= The 39 Steps ( 2008 film ) =

The 39 Steps is a 2008 British television adventure thriller feature @-@ length adaptation of the John Buchan novel The Thirty @-@ Nine Steps produced by the BBC . It was written by Lizzie Mickery , directed by James Hawes , and filmed on location in Scotland , starring Rupert Penry @-@ Jones , Lydia Leonard , David Haig , Eddie Marsan , and Patrick Malahide . Following three screen versions of the novel and a 1977 television adaptation of The Three Hostages , Penry @-@ Jones became the fifth actor to portray Hannay on screen . This adaptation is set on the eve of the First World War and sees mining engineer Richard Hannay caught up in an espionage conspiracy following the death of a British spy in his flat .

The single drama was first shown on BBC One and BBC HD on 28 December 2008 as part of BBC One 's Christmas 2008 line @-@ up , and it was the most watched programme of the day . Compared to Alfred Hitchcock 's 1935 film , it received mostly negative reviews from the press . The production was criticised for its historical inaccuracies , particularly its use of anachronistic props .

= = Plot = =

The story starts on 28 June 1914 ; Richard Hannay ( Rupert Penry @-@ Jones ) , a mining engineer and an intelligence officer during the Second Boer War , is in London following his recent return from Africa , finding England " cliquey " , " class @-@ bound " and " deathly , deathly dull " . Evading German spies ( Werner Daehn and Peter Stark ) , Scudder ( Eddie Marsan ) pushes himself into Hannay 's flat and reveals himself to be a betrayed freelance British Secret Service Bureau agent , who has been on the trail of a German espionage ring with headquarters in Scotland . He has heard rumours of a plot to assassinate a high @-@ ranking European royal , which could lead to war . Believing he will soon be killed , he hands Hannay a notebook to pass to Captain Kell of the Secret Service Bureau . While Hannay answers the door , Scudder is shot by one of the German spies seeking his notebook who has entered the flat via a back door . The police arrive , and Hannay is arrested for murder before escaping .

Unable to contact Kell , Hannay flicks through the notebook , finding it contains pages of code using Roman numerals . He finds a map in the back and takes a train to Scotland to prove Scudder right , attempting to decipher the code en route . Finding out Archduke Ferdinand has been assassinated , Hannay reaches Scotland and leaves the train to escape the police . He stays in a barn overnight , where he deciphers the code in the notebook ( except a section in double code ) , which reveals the Germans want to destroy the Royal Navy so that they could invade the country , starting a war . Chased by the police , the Germans and machine @-@ gun @-@ fire from a biplane , he encounters brother and sister Harry and Victoria Sinclair , a prospective Member of Parliament and a suffragette respectively ( Patrick Kennedy and Lydia Leonard ) , who believe him to be a Liberal spokesman . At a political rally in a nearby town ( Culross ) where Hannay meets Sir George Sinclair , Harry and Victoria 's uncle ( David Haig ) , Victoria aids Hannay 's attempt to escape , before they are captured by the Germans . With the notebook missing from Hannay 's pocket , they are taken to Longkeep Castle ( Dumbarton Castle ) , the headquarters of the German espionage ring , where they are imprisoned by Professor Fisher ( Patrick Malahide ) . Sir George arrives as they are captured and inquires about them while they are held in another room . After he leaves they are bound and gagged and placed in the cellar . They escape and return to where they were captured to look for the notebook , which Victoria reveals she had picked from Hannay 's pocket and hidden . They stay overnight in an inn , where Hannay details the contents of the notebook to Victoria .

In the morning , they escape to Harry 's house , where Victoria unsuccessfully attempts to contact Captain Kell . Hannay , alone , meets with Sir George , who sits on the defence committee . Hannay reveals the contents of the notebook , leading to Sir George disclosing that a meeting of the National Committee of Defence is being held the next day at Stirling Castle to unveil new naval plans , matching part of the double code . Later , Hannay and Victoria kiss , and the next morning he sees her leaving with a man , whom he recalls seeing previously on the train and at the rally . With the notebook missing and finding out that Victoria disconnected the call she made to the Secret

Service Bureau before it was connected , Hannay goes to Stirling Castle , believing Victoria to be a traitor . There , Victoria reveals she works for the Secret Service Bureau and he meets Kell ( Alex Jennings ) and Wakeham , the man Victoria left with earlier ( Steven Elder ) , who reveal they used Hannay to distract the Germans and sent Victoria to keep an eye on him . Hannay deduces that Sir George is the traitor , as he should have heard them when he was at Fisher 's House , and , with his photographic memory , has escaped with the naval plans memorised . To identify his rendezvous point with the Germans , they crack the remaining code , referring to the room they were previously imprisoned in at Longkeep Castle , and discover " 39 steps " written in the notebook by Scudder using invisible ink . At the Castle , Hannay and Victoria find 39 steps leading to a loch . A shoot @-@ out ensues , and a German U @-@ boat surfaces in the loch . Fisher , the Germans and Sir George fail to get to the U @-@ boat before it submerges , and surrender .

Together by the loch , Hannay and Victoria kiss before she is hit by a bullet fired by a surviving gunman , falls into the loch and disappears . The story concludes four months later , after the declaration of the First World War , when Hannay , in a British Army officer 's uniform , is waiting to meet someone at St Pancras Station . Harry appears , saying that Victoria wanted to say goodbye , and Hannay sees her in the distance . In reply to Hannay 's bewilderment , Harry tells him , " top secret , old man . " Victoria disappears behind a luggage trolley and Harry tells Hannay she 'll see him after the war .

= = Production = =

Announced by the BBC in August 2008 , filming began in September 2008 for a first broadcast at Christmas . Penry @-@ Jones , who had previously worked on the spy drama Spooks , took the lead role , with the screenplay written by Lizzie Mickery ( co @-@ writer of the dramas The State Within and Messiah ) , produced by Lynn Horsford ( Boy A , The Mark of Cain ) and directed by James Hawes ( Fanny Hill , Merlin , Doctor Who ) . Penry @-@ Jones became the fifth actor to play Hannay on screen , preceded by Robert Donat , Kenneth More , Barry Foster , and Robert Powell .

At the time of the announcement , Horsford said : " With this adaptation we wanted to stay faithful to the spirit and period of the book , but asked the writer Lizzie to feel free to re @-@ imagine it for a modern audience more familiar with James Bond and Jason Bourne . " The production was set around the eve of the First World War and retained other elements from the book , including having the 39 steps refer to steps to a departure point , but according to The Times ' thriller critic it has " a style that gives more than a nod to the grittier James Bond of Daniel Craig " . A piece in The Observer stated that Mickery was " braced for complaints this Christmas from fans of previous screen portrayals " , after basing her plot on the original book rather than the films . Differences from the book include the introduction of romance for Hannay , through suffragette and spy Victoria Sinclair , played by Lydia Leonard , and , according to Serena Davies of The Daily Telegraph , " a plot with so many twists and turns you almost need a degree in espionage to follow it " .

Penry @-@ Jones read the book and saw the other versions of the film , but said that Hitchcock 's 1959 film North by Northwest was " more of a template for me than any version of The 39 Steps " . Explaining why he took on the part , he said to Tim Oglethorpe of the Daily Record :

Part of the appeal was the cars , I 'm a bit of a buff ... And I said ? jokingly , of course ? that I wouldn 't be in The 39 Steps unless the action included the famous chase scene in which Hannay is pursued by a biplane . I 've always wanted to be chased by a plane like Cary Grant in the movie North by Northwest and I was just delighted when it happened in our version of Steps .

He also said prior to broadcast that , depending on the reception , " They 'd like to do more if they can . I definitely would . "

Filming took place on location in Scotland . Locations used included the area around West Register Street in Edinburgh for the London scenes at the start of the film , Bo 'ness railway station , Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum for the interior scenes of St Pancras railway station , Glasgow City Chambers , Culross , Stirling Castle , Dumbarton Castle , the highlands of Argyll and Loch Katrine , used for the finale .

The production was shot using 35 mm film rather than high @-@ definition cameras . Hawes told

Matthew Bell of Broadcast that :

Film is absolutely right for this project . It has scale , big exterior locations and that 's something that still challenges HD .... The HD cameras available to us on our budget are still vulnerable in difficult weather conditions [ encountered during filming ] . There 's no doubt that what we 've got on 35mm is just so much more detailed . It has so much more depth of field and richness than we could have got on HD .

The adaptation was originally planned to be broadcast on BBC One on Boxing Day , but was later moved to a Sunday night slot on 28 December . It was simulcast in high @-@ definition on BBC HD .

= = = Artistic licence and historical inaccuracies = = =

Some artistic licence was used to find the appropriate props . Cars used included a 1924 Morris Oxford , a 1926 Darracq , and a 1927 Wolseley , previously used in the 1960s series Dr Finlay 's Casebook . Willie Bennie , who sourced the vehicles , told the Daily Record :

I knew they were wanting to include car chases to make the drama much more exciting to watch . The only trouble was that the cars around this era weren 't very fast .

The biplane that chased Hannay was a 1916 Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a , his apartment was in an Art Deco building and 1950s rail carriages were being pulled by a steam engine built in 1927 .

Ben Stephenson , Head of Drama Commissioning at the BBC , told The Daily Telegraph in reply to complaints about the inaccuracies :

The question is : for the seven million people who watched it , did it feel authentic , did it create a sense of period ? ... We were creating a realistic world within a world ? a world of damsels and heroes and a huge amount of excitement . That , for me , is the priority . Did it create that world ? It absolutely did . That 's not to say that we don 't work increasingly hard to get everything right . But it 's hard to get all the details right when it 's a 21st century drama , never mind anything earlier .

= = Reception = =

Overnight viewing figures estimated that the programme was seen by 7 @.@ 3 million viewers ( 28 % audience share ) on 28 December 2008 , against a Top Gear : Vietnam Special on BBC Two . It was the most watched programme of the day .

The adaptation received mostly negative reviews from the press , believing it did not match up to Hitchcock 's 1935 film version ( as predicted by Micky ) . Sam Wollaston of The Guardian felt that the romance scene between Hannay and Victoria ( when they stay overnight in an inn ) was " one of the silliest ever " and felt that after the final scene at the loch and the concluding scene : " It 's all very silly .... It doesn 't have the pace , the moodiness or the wit . " Damien Love of Sunday Herald felt the " tepid pace " was set by the casting of Penry @-@ Jones , and that he " has a style reminiscent of the young Roger Moore , but without the vital , animating spark of self @-@ deprecation . As Hannay , Penry @-@ Jones is not at his best , and more reminiscent of a well @-@ stuffed armchair on wheels . " Mick Hume of The Times said " The overall effect was to turn Buchan 's blood and thunder tale into a pallid politically correct Enid Blyton story " , and The Independent 's Robert Hanks concluded his review by saying that " By the end , my impression was that several pages of the plot must have been eaten by a dog , or a bored actor , and the director had decided , sod it , nobody 's going to keep watching this long . Which I wouldn 't have if I wasn 't being paid . "

The adaptation did receive some positive comments however . In The Sunday Times , A. A. Gill praised Penry @-@ Jones and said that it was " racily paced " and was " the closest to the original [ the book ] and by far and away the most convincing " . Roz Laws of the Sunday Mercury also commented on Penry @-@ Jones , saying that he " proved to be just as good a spy in 1914 as he was in Spooks , only more dashing " and Alison Graham of the Radio Times , in her ' pick of the day ' piece , said that Penry @-@ Jones is " just perfect as John Buchan 's hero " and commented that Victoria ( Leonard ) was " a splendid suffragette " . Alasdair McKay of The Herald said " it was all

rather spiffing and well @-@ mannered " .

Articles in the Daily Mail and The Daily Telegraph reported on the inaccuracies in the drama , including the 1916 biplane and the submarine rising in a freshwater loch , and 24 viewers complained to the corporation .

= = Home media = =

The adaptation was released on Region 2 DVD on 2 February 2009 and Region 1 DVD on 2 March 2010 .