

"It was really exciting when Hannay was shut in a storeroom and found a cupboard full of explosives." Max, 10



THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS

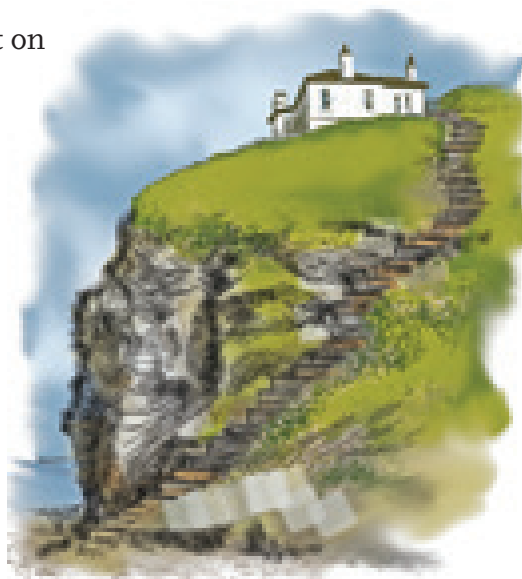
JOHN BUCHAN

'It wouldn't be pleasant sharing my flat with a dead body, but there was nothing else I could do.'

Richard Hannay is bored with life in London. Then he discovers a horrible crime, and finds himself in the middle of a clever and frightening plot. Can he find the proof he needs to save his country from disaster?

When Hannay hides out on the wild Scottish moors, will he escape from the dangerous gang who want to silence him forever? Who can he trust on his journey?

Time is running out for Hannay and his friends. Will he be able to discover the secret of the thirty-nine steps before it is too late?



THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS John Buchan



Retold by Tony Evans
Illustrated by Sarah Wimperis

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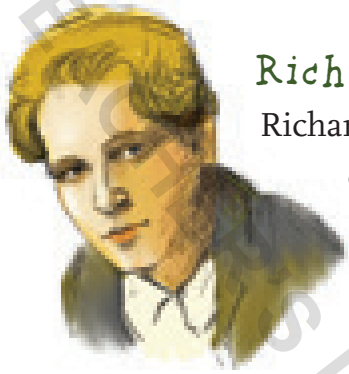
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THE CHARACTERS

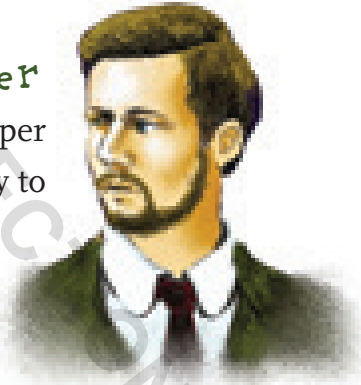


Richard Hannay

Richard Hannay is brave and determined. Can he keep one step ahead of the sinister gang who are trying to find him?

Franklin P. Scudder

An American newspaper reporter who asks Hannay to help him. What alarming secret has he discovered?



The Innkeeper

When Hannay is hiding from his enemies, he asks the innkeeper to give them false information. Will this courageous young man be able to save Hannay from capture?

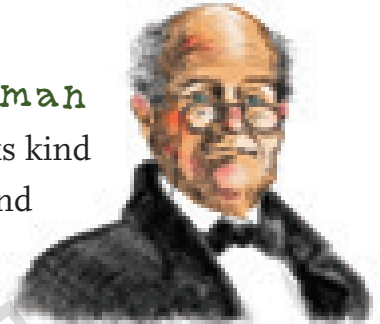


Sir Harry

Sir Harry is friendly and intelligent. He listens to Hannay's strange story, but will he believe it?

The Old Gentleman

The old gentleman looks kind and cheerful. Who is he, and what does he want?



Sir Walter Bullivant

Sir Walter has an important job in the British Government. Can he help Hannay prevent disaster?

General Royer

The General is a senior officer in the French Armed Forces. What is he doing in England? Why is his visit top secret?





THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS

I had only been back in England for three months, and already I was bored and fed up. The weather was miserable, I couldn't get enough exercise in London, and most of the people I met were dull. I decided that if things didn't get better soon, I would go back to my old job as a mining engineer in South Africa. I had made enough money to give up work, but I realised I was not suited to a life of idleness.

That evening I had gone to a music-hall, but it was a silly show and I did not stay long. I got home to my flat – it was in a new block near Portland Place – and was just fitting my key into the door when a man came towards me. I remembered I had seen him before – he lived in one of the flats on the floor above. He was slim, with a short brown beard and small, piercing blue eyes.

'Richard Hannay?' he asked. 'Can I speak to you? May I come in for a minute?'

I could tell that he was nervous about something, so I got my door open and waved my hand to show him inside. He bolted the door himself, then made a dash for my sitting room, looking round to make sure we were alone.

‘I’m very sorry,’ he said. ‘It’s a mighty cheek, but you looked the kind of man who would understand. Say, will you help me, mister?’

‘I’ll listen to you,’ I said. ‘That’s all I’ll promise. Tell me your story, then I’ll decide what to do.’



Well, that set him off on one of the strangest tales I had heard for years. His name was Franklin P. Scudder. He was an American, from Kentucky, and had spent the last few years working as a newspaper reporter in south-eastern Europe. Somewhere on his travels he had discovered a plot to kill the Greek Prime Minister, Constantine Karolides.

‘When he is assassinated, that will mean war,’ Scudder said.

He took out a small black notebook and passed it to me. ‘The whole plot is in here,’ he said. ‘I’ve put down everything.’

I opened the book and flicked through the first few pages – enough to show me that it was written in code. The entries were mainly rows of numbers, with a few words in between. ‘The Black Stone’ was mentioned a few times, and there was something else called ‘The Thirty-Nine Steps’.



Back in time

Britain declared war on Germany and entered the First World War (WWI) on 4th August 1914, the day after Germany had declared war on France. When war broke out John Buchan was ill in bed, and he spent the first few months of the war writing *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. It quickly became a bestseller. Copies were sent to British soldiers in France, and some of them wrote to Buchan saying how much they had enjoyed his adventure story. In 1916 Buchan joined the army and became responsible for the information given to the public about the progress of the war.

Although *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is a work of fiction, Buchan draws upon some of the real events of WWI in his story. The shooting of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife on 28th June 1914 was one of the episodes which helped to plunge Europe into war; in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* it is the assassination of the fictional Greek Prime Minister, Constantine Karolides, which has the same result. The secret

society responsible for Franz Ferdinand's assassination was known as 'The Black Hand', while the spies in Buchan's story are called 'The Black Stone'.

Many people in Britain were anxious about German spies in the years before war broke out. There were lots of books, newspaper serials and plays written in the early twentieth century based on these spy scares, and Buchan's story is amongst the best. Much of its excitement comes from the fact that the villains *and* the police are both on Richard Hannay's trail, and that if he fails it will not just be fatal for himself, but a disaster for Britain. When the story was first published in 1915 the outcome of WWI was still very much in doubt, so Hannay's fictional fears were very real to his readers.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of John Buchan and the world he lived in.