



The Thirty-Nine Steps

John Buchan

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The Thirty-Nine Steps by John Buchan The Thirty-Nine Steps is an adventure novel by the Scottish author John Buchan. It first appeared as a serial in Blackwood's Magazine in August and September 1915 before being published in book form in October that year by William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh. It is the first of five novels featuring Richard Hannay, an all-action hero with a stiff upper lip and a miraculous knack for getting himself out of sticky situations. The novel is set during May and June 1914; war was evident in Europe, Richard Hannay the protagonist and narrator, an expatriate Scot, returns to his new home, a flat in London, after a long stay in Rhodesia, in order to begin a new life. One night he is buttonholed by a stranger, a well-travelled American, who claims to be in fear for his life. The man appears to know of an anarchist plot to destabilise Europe, beginning with a plan to assassinate the Greek Premier, Constantine Karolides, during his forthcoming visit to London. The man reveals his name to be Franklin P. Scudder, a freelance spy, and remarks that he is dead, which holds Hannay's attention. Scudder explains that he has faked his own death in order to avert suspicion. Scudder claims to be following a ring of German spies called the Black Stone who are trying to steal British plans for the outbreak of war. Hannay lets Scudder hide in his flat, and sure enough the next day another man is discovered having apparently committed suicide in the same building. Four days later Hannay returns home to find Scudder dead with a knife through his heart.

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