

"This is a fun, adventurous story about boats and spies, with some very exciting parts." Milly, 10



THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS

ERSKINE CHILDERS

'It seems pretty clear to me that sooner or later we'll be at war with Germany, whether we like it or not'

Carruthers is looking forward to a relaxing holiday when he sets off for the Baltic Sea. Instead he finds himself at the centre of a complicated and deadly plot.

Will Carruthers and his friend Arthur Davies discover why the sinister and mysterious Herr Dollman is so interested in their little yacht, the *Dulcibella*? What does Clara Dollman know about her father's plans?

Some secret scheme has brought Commander von Brüning of the Imperial German Navy to the East Frisian Islands. Can Carruthers and Davies solve the riddle of the sands?



THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS

Erskine Childers



Retold by Tony Evans
Illustrated by Sarah Wimperis

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THE CHARACTERS

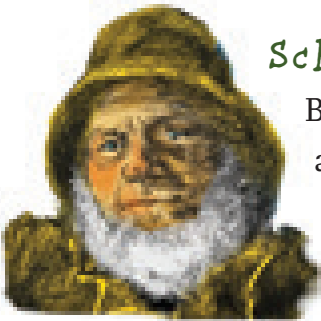
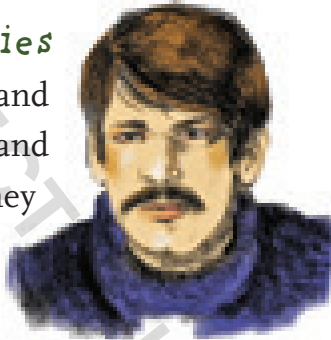


Carruthers

Carruthers is a lively, intelligent young man with an important job in London. How will he cope when his sailing holiday turns into a dangerous and exciting adventure?

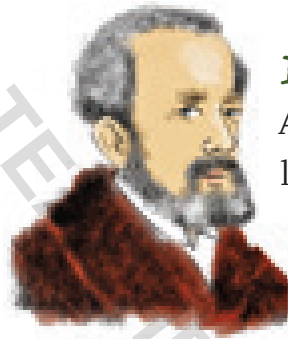
Arthur Davies

Arthur Davies is honest, brave and a skilful sailor. What will he and Carruthers discover when they explore the North German coast?



Schiffer Bartels

Bartels is the friendly captain of a small cargo ship. Will Davies listen to his good advice?

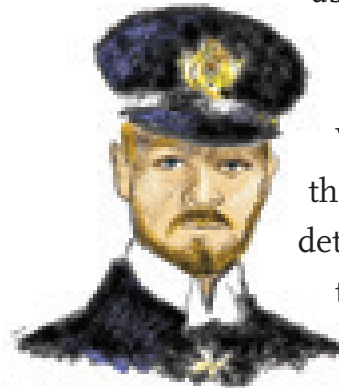
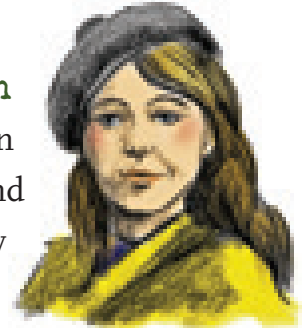


Herr Dollman

A wealthy man who owns a luxurious sailing barge. Why is he so interested in Davies and Carruthers?

Clara Dollman

Herr Dollman's daughter. When danger threatens she is calm and confident. What does she know about the riddle?

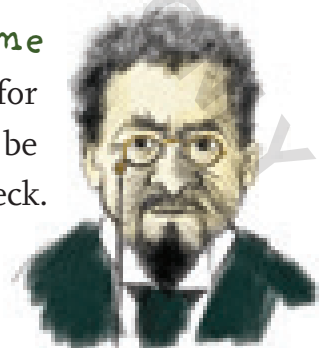


Commander von Brüning

Von Brüning is an officer in the Imperial German Navy. He is determined and clever. What is he trying to hide?

Herr Böhme

Böhme is an engineer, working for von Brüning. He is supposed to be salvaging gold from an ancient wreck. Can Carruthers and Davies find out what he is really doing?





THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS

As my train approached Flensburg station at ten o'clock in the evening, I thought about the long journey I had made across Holland and Germany and smiled. Two days ago, on 24th September, I had been stuck in London, with four weeks' holiday due from my Foreign Office job and nowhere to go. Few of my friends had remained in town, and my club and my favourite restaurants had been half-empty and dull.

Then I had received an unexpected telegram from Arthur Davies, who had been a student at Oxford with me. We had both left university three years ago, in 1899. He was yachting in the Baltic Sea, and had invited me to join him on board the *Dulcibella* – partly because I spoke German very well. Rather rashly I agreed. True, it was late in the season, but a yachting trip should be very relaxing. I packed my best blazer and white flannels, and as an afterthought – fortunately, as it turned out – an old pair of hard-wearing trousers and a thick woollen sweater, just in case.

I was delighted to see that Davies was waiting for me on the platform at Flensburg. I recognised him straight away: his pleasant blue eyes, honest expression and brisk, impulsive movements were very familiar to me.

‘It’s awfully good of you to come, Carruthers,’ he said.

‘Not at all – it’s very good of you to ask me.’

There was a moment’s awkwardness between us, perhaps because Davies realised that I was staring at his clothes. Instead of the smart yachting suit that I had expected to see, he was wearing a scruffy tweed jacket, muddy brown shoes and stained trousers.

I began to wonder what I had let myself in for. I let Davies lead the way, and a few minutes later we reached the harbour. He stopped suddenly and put down the bags he was carrying. There seemed to be no yacht nearby, and I was about to speak when Davies pointed to a boat moored at a pontoon opposite us.

‘That’s her – the *Dulcibella*. Only seven tons, but as strongly built as you could wish for. She’ll



go almost anywhere. Just the thing for sailing in these waters, or the North Sea come to that.’

One look at the vessel made me forget all thoughts of fancy yachting clothes. My blazer would have to stay in my bag!

The *Dulcibella* was just over thirty feet long and nine in beam. The cabin roof looked low, and the deck was rough and grey. However, even I could see that she was very well equipped. The deck fittings were large and solid, and the anchor chain seemed massive enough for a boat twice the size. There was a tall central mast, and a much smaller one at the stern – which made the yacht a ‘yaw’, as Davies later explained to me.

- The original book has two short sections at the end, an epilogue and postscript. Like the introduction, these discuss Carruthers' story – and the German invasion plans – as if they were true.

Back in time

Two of the themes of *The Riddle of the Sands* – concerns about the growing strength of the Imperial Germany Navy, and fears about a possible German invasion of England – would have been very familiar to Erskine Childers' readers when the story was first published in 1903. The German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, wanted the German navy to be as large as that of Great Britain, and many British people saw this ambition as a threat.

The rivalry and lack of trust between Britain and Germany that eventually helped to cause the First World War was already well established by 1903. Germany's victory over France in 1870 (the Franco-Prussian

War) made people worry about what would happen if the powerful German army should ever reach England. Erskine Childers' book, although a work of fiction, convinced many in Britain that more needed to be done to improve the nation's defences.

Erskine Childers' own life was as exciting as his adventure stories. He sailed a small yacht in the North Sea and the Baltic, and his description of the voyage of the *Dulcibella* is based on his own experiences. When the First World War broke out in 1914 he flew in seaplanes as a navigator and observer. He also served in the navy, and was awarded the DSC (Distinguished Service Cross). After the war Childers became involved in the complicated and often dangerous world of Irish politics, with tragic consequences – he was executed by firing squad in 1922.

