



The Prisoner Of Zenda

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The Prisoner Of Zenda Details

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Author : Anthony Hope

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From Reader Review The Prisoner Of Zenda for online ebook

Bev says

The Prisoner of Zenda is a fun little tale of adventure and derring-do written at the turn of the century (the 19th century, that is) by Anthony Hope. It is a well-known tale. There is danger to a famous personage (in this case, the King of Ruritania) and there just happens to be a distant cousin who looks exactly like him on the spot who can fill in and help out. There have been many a book and many a film based on this idea (Danny Kaye starred in perhaps five different versions of this sort of thing), but told right it makes for a good story. Fortunately, Anthony Hope tells it right.

In Zenda we have Rudolf Rassendyll, an English gentleman whose family has distant ("wrong side of the blanket") ties to the royal family of Ruritania. These ties are evidenced by the red hair and straight nose which shows up every couple of generations...and which our hero, Rudolf, of course, displays. At the beginning of the novel, Rudolf is being chastised by his sister-in-law for not doing anything. He is a younger son who, in these days before two world wars will so change everything, has enough of a competence that he doesn't have to do anything. To please her, he says that he will, in six months, take up a post as an attache to an ambassador. In the meantime, the subject of Ruritania has come up and he decides that he will take a vacation to that land of his distant kin.

Quite by chance, he finds himself at the same inn as the soon to be crowned King and it is remarked how similar they are in feature--save that the King is now clean-shaven and Rudolf sports a mustache and an "imperial" (beard, presume). When trouble enters the picture and it becomes apparent that the King's half-brother is plotting to take over the kingdom, Rudolf bravely offers his services to foil the plot. This plot begins with drugged wine which so incapacitates the King that it seems he won't be able to attend his own coronation--that is the opening that "Black Michael" is waiting for. Rudolf agrees to impersonate the King at the coronation ceremony and afterward to help protect the monarch. The plot takes many twists and turns--involving the kidnapping of the King, a longer impersonation than planned, and many swordfights and midnight chases. Things are made all the more difficult when Rudolf falls in love with the King's intended, Princess Flavia.

This is an old-fashioned tale about when men were men and loyalty meant something. It is also a great story of the triumph of good over evil. In today's world, it may seem a little overwrought and dramatic, but there's nothing wrong with a good, solid story of good men and good deeds. Oh, and don't forget the good women. We have one who risks her life to aid and warn those loyal to the King and we have Princess Flavia who is willing to deny herself her one true love in order to do her duty to her people and fulfill her own brand of loyalty. A very stirring tale on all counts. Four stars.

Sarah Sammis says

The Prisoner of Zenda is one of those books I've been meaning to read for about twenty years. Over the

Thanksgiving holiday I finally took the time to read this classic adventure written by Anthony Hope in 1894.

The Prisoner of Zenda brings the fairy tale of Mark Twain's The Prince and the Pauper (1888) and Pudd'nhead Wilson (1893-4) into the adventure genre for adults. Anthony Hope's story of a king kidnapped on the eve of his coronation and his English cousin who takes his place is derring-do at its best.

Sure the story has been done over and over again but that's because the story is so entertaining. It was written at a time before two world wars forever altered the map of Europe. Ruritania exists in a time when it was possible to still imagine tiny kingdoms and principalities tucked among the better known countries. Think of Ruritania existing along side the duchy of Luxembourg and the principality of Monaco.

The hero and narrator of Zenda is twenty-nine year Rudolf Rassendyll who shares a name and certain physical features with soon to be crowned Rudolph IV of Ruritania. Unfortunately for all those involved, Rudolph IV is an idiot and easily falls prey to a plot to take the crown away from him and possibly end his life. To keep things in check while the king can be found and rescued, Rudolf Rassendyll must play the king.

Throughout the narrative Rassendyll gives amusing commentary on politics and the responsibilities of leadership. All the while he is putting himself in harms way both in his portrayal of the king and in trying to rescue Rudolph IV.

I am releasing the copy I read soon through BookCrossing as it came to me from another member. I will however be keeping my eyes out for a nice hardback edition for my personal collection.

Mahmut Homsî says

I Like this kind of novels ...
but I didn't like the conclusion,
I wish the king were killed and the hero were married to the princess

The love depends on the personality cos' even if u are not the king .. I'll love u :)
and that is the message between rudolf and the princess but unfortunately they weren't married ..

Liberty says

Wow. What an incredible book! Much better than I ever expected. It is the story of a man who is devoted to following his duty, no matter the cost, even to the woman he loves. Webster describes Duty as: *“That which a person owes to another; that which a person is bound, by any natural, moral or legal obligation, to pay, do or perform. Obedience to princes, magistrates and the laws is the duty of every citizen and subject; obedience, respect and kindness to parents are duties of children; fidelity to friends is a duty; reverence, obedience and prayer to God are indispensable duties...”*

This is a theme that runs through the entire story, causing pain at times but in the end, though it might not be thought so by some, it has its *true* rewards. I have seen the 1937 film adaptation many times, and I was very surprised at how well it stuck to the book. The voices of the actors were well implanted in my mind and

helped immensely to the enjoyment of the book. It contains a wonderful variety Adventure and Romance, Humour and Drama, all one after the other. Definitely a book I would read again and recommend!

Gerry says

Having been disappointed by a couple of recent reads, I thought I would revisit a book from many years ago, one that I thoroughly enjoyed at that time. And my re-read was not to disappoint for 'The Prisoner of Zenda' is just as fresh and thrilling now as it was then. And one can always reflect back to the 1937 and 1952 film versions when Ronald Colman, Douglas Fairbanks Jr, C Aubrey Smith, Madeleine Carroll and others (1937) and Stewart Granger, James Mason, Deborah Kerr and the rest (1952) swashbuckled across our screens.

Obviously the story does not change from that which Anthony Hope Hawkins, for thus he was called, wrote the novel in 1894. It centres on the fictional country of Ruritania which our hero Rudolf Rassendyll decides to visit to see the coronation of the King. He had been languishing in London before deciding to go abroad for some adventure but he told family and friends that he was going to the Tyrol where he would travel around and record his experiences for posterity.

Once in Ruritania he discovers that he has an almost identical likeness to the King, who he meets by accident when strolling through the forest. Once this has happened the action begins thick and fast as the King becomes drunk on the eve of the coronation and is unfit to attend his coronation. Colonel Sapt, to preserve the monarchy under his King, persuades Rudolf to take his place for the coronation ceremony before returning to the lodge where the King was recovering so that their roles could be reversed - and nobody would be the wiser.

But Sapt, and his right-hand man Fritz, reckon without the intervention of Black Michael, the King's brother, who wishes the throne and the lovely Princess Flavia for himself. But once the coronation ruse is carried out successfully, Sapt and Rudolf find that the King has been captured by his rivals and imprisoned in the Castle of Zenda. So there is nothing to do but continue with the hoax until a satisfactory conclusion could be reached.

Unfortunately Flavia gets embroiled in the mix and Rudolf falls madly in love with her - and vice versa, which is a surprise considering that she previously felt that the King was not worth the effort. She found the new King, who she did not realise was an imposter, considerably changed and was charmed by him - a pity for her that it was in fact Rudolph.

The novel keeps the pace going all through with adventure and excitement mounting as the two parties vie for control of the country and for the hand of the fair Flavia. Rudolph in particular suffers for his love and for his conscience, as he wishes to do the right thing to get the King back on the throne. He is beaten up and attacked more than once but his cunning, aided by Colonel Sapt and his confederates, eventually get the better of Black Michael and his main co-conspirator Rupert of Hentzau, the latter who escapes and lives to fight another day.

Throughout the whole saga, the love affair of Rudolph and Flavia simmers and in a heart-rending ending, Rudolph restores the King to the throne and is obliged to forsake his love and return to London where he

keeps his exploits to himself despite the efforts of his friends to discover where he has been and what he has been up to.

Meanwhile back in Ruritania, Flavia has to accept that it is her duty to support the (real) King and she remains loyal to her liege despite her undying love for the departed Rudolf.

The story is just as lively and thrilling today as it has always been and as I have not seen the 1979 version of the film, I must look it up on You Tube to see how it compares.

Alex says

Prisoner of Zenda (1894) is a little slip of a book: its influence is heavier than its pages. Filmed numerous times, including (as El pointed out) once when it was called Dave and had Kevin Kline in it, and another time when it played out in the background of a Bojack Horseman episode.

And it was the major influence on Nabokov's Pale Fire, which basically amounts to an extended trippy metafictional cover of the same story. (Here's more on the similarities, if you need convincing.)

The story: what, you haven't seen Dave? What's your problem, that movie is awesome. Fine: the king is incapacitated and a normal guy who happens to look just like him is convinced to stand in for him. And then there's some buckling of swashes, and this terrific villain, Rupert Hentzau, who very nearly runs off with the story. (You can see Hope itching to switch to him, and in fact he wrote a sequel called Rupert of Hentzau that I wouldn't be against reading myself.)

It's a great plot, executed well and leanly; this might not be the world's heaviest book, but you could certainly do a lot worse with your weekend.

Ahmed says

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Robert says

I was almost immediately reminded of The 39 Steps when I started this book. Both open with a 1st Person account of the protagonist lacking occupation and being idle just before the action begins and both betray unpleasant attitudes, too. Buchan's Hannay is much worse in this regard than Hope's Rudolf: Hannay is racist, sexist, Imperialist, arrogant and frankly unlikeable. Rudolf, however, makes one fairly mild sexist remark. There are differences, though: Hannay is bored of being idle whereas Rudolf would happily be idle for the rest of his life... None of this really matters beyond chapter one of either book, though. It's interesting to compare with Thomas Hardy. He was contemporary with both Hope and Buchan - but look at the views

espoused about women, class, education and social mobility there! Perhaps the lesson is that 'frillers are not the place to look for advanced social attitudes. Because this is most definitely a Victorian 'friller!

Get through the first couple of chapters full of expository set-up and this fairly zips along and is far too short to get bogged down in. Adventure, romance, fictional European Kingdom, sword fights, tragedy...it's all here.

Great fun. I would gladly pick up the sequel...

Jan-Maat says

Getting myself a library card for the first time in years has enabled me to binge on lightweight adventures it seems. I don't remember seeing one of the several film versions of this, though that's not saying much, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence and all that. Lying in bed last night, reading the last few pages of this book it seemed so clearly related to *A Princess of Mars* and at least two other books I've munched down recently. That connection this morning, even after coffee, seems cloudy and obscure which is perhaps a sign that this review needs a beer before it can reach a satisfactory conclusion.

But anyway, in case you have never heard of this story before, it was written towards the end of the nineteenth century, the author was a practising barrister (not to be confused with a barista) which is to say a lawyer with the right of audience before the courts (view spoiler) anyway he was getting bored, tried to stand for Parliament but not enough people voted for him, so he tried again to write a novel, this time achieving a breakthrough success with this one. As you might expect from the author's background the story he wrote has nothing to do with the law nor with conventional politics.

The story concerns a wealthy young Englishman called Rudolf whose appearance is indistinguishable from that of another young man called Rudolf who just so happens to be the heir to the kingdom of Ruritania and who is due to be crowned king. Naturally Prince Rudolf has a wicked younger brother called Black Michael (on account of his wicked heart), both men desire to marry their cousin, the beautiful princess Flavia. Michael has at least one devilish and dastardly plot in hand to prevent the coronation of Prince Rudolf (view spoiler), enter stage right not Prince Rudolf who decides to go on holiday to Ruritania and ends up having a swashbuckling adventure thrown in with the cost of his train fare(view spoiler).

In common with the above mentioned *Mars* book, but also *The Lost World*, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* or *King Solomon's Mines* we can observe that adventure doesn't happen here (view spoiler) it has to happen out 'there', 'here' life is regular, organised, it has the grind of daily obligations, everything conspires to make you yawn, job, marriage, even breakfast - but contrast you might think of *Sherlock Holmes* which has a contrary ideological basis - in those stories adventure happens everywhere because of the universal tendency of the human heart to criminal acts. In time the adventure novel will develop and adventures will happen 'here' to, those stories play with the idea that 'here' is safe and show instead that under the calm, rational surface of everyday life are teeming conspiracies and black hearted deeds. At this stage however the known world is safe and therefore boring, the author needs to invent a fantastical and exciting place where adventure can happen, not Mars, a south-American plateau, under the earth's surface but in this case Ruritania, a German speaking kingdom that you can reach by train from Dresden.

There buckles will be swashed, although we are in the age of firearms, our heroes and the villains prefer to use swords and cudgels (view spoiler) presumably because they are more chivalric. And obviously it is all

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Henry Avila says

Rudolf Rassendyll, an Englishman, takes a vacation to Ruritania, don't look on a map to find it, you won't. Set in the 1890's. A new king, is to be crowned, in this Eastern European nation. Rudolf is curious to see his distant cousin, and look alike, Rudolf the Fifth (a century old family affair, was the cause of this connection). The traveler, decides to explore a Ruritanian forest, on foot. Getting sleepy, he lies down and falls into a slumber. Imagine when the King, while hunting with his entourage, discovers the visitor! The monarch, has a big laugh and makes plans to trick his older, half brother, by a morganatic marriage, Black Michael. This man hates King Rudolf, believing that, he deserves the throne. Not the alcoholic brother. Bringing the relative to his nearby hunting lodge, his majesty, gives him wine, numerous toasts follow, to this and that and before long, slips under the table (a drugged wine bottle from Michael also, seems redundant). The commoner, is more prudent, staying in his chair. His brother kidnaps the King, when left alone, with the help of Rupert, his henchman. Becoming the Prisoner of Zenda, a castle fortress. There is a little problem, tomorrow, the coronation! No worry, Mr. Rassendyll, will impersonate his royal cousin. It's not going to be easy, fooling Michael, Flavia, the King's future bride and the rest, until the monarch is rescued. In the meantime, the Englishman, begins to love Princess Flavia and she, him!

K.J. Charles says

Rereading this for the 400th time in prep for writing my own version for Riptide's Queered Classics series. This time, I read it from the perspective that the narrator is a lying SOB. It's amazing how well it lends itself to that.

Brilliant book though, with flashes of utter genius in the writing, along with all the expected flaws of Victorian pulp.

Thus he vanished--reckless and wary, graceful and graceless, handsome, debonair, vile, and unconquered.

Purrrrrr.

Clare Cannon says

What a great story, a brief but epic adventure. Perhaps some may be tempted to rate it lower because it is not the standard rose-coloured fairytale, but I don't think that is fair. The adventure is fun: a monarchy, a feud, a capture, a farce and a fight, but it is the heroic romance which makes it truly great.

Zenda shows the antithesis of Twilight's selfish, obsessive love. There's a paragraph in my Twilight review

which is apt here:

"One of the most serious issues in *Twilight* is the glorification of obsessive love, an intensely emotional experience which is more important than life itself, yours or anyone's... and marriage is presented as a commitment based on this intense feeling of desire, when a person is so essential to your happiness that you can't live without them... Yet, in the real world, people do live, and what's more, they really learn to love, sometimes giving up a love they might feel because it's not right (for example, the person is married to someone else), or many times learning to love a person once feelings have faded, or rather, have deepened and matured..."

Zenda shows this second type of love, and it is beautiful. It is no sappy love story, but it is beautiful.

After finishing it - and yes, there were tears in my eyes - I had the following thoughts. There is something eternal about real love. Selfish love dies in the moment: once taken it is used up and gone. Real love transcends the moment to live forever, so even if it is not fulfilled here and now it is true and remains forever. And perhaps we can only know how well we love if we are willing - should the need arise - to give it up. Because this type of love has had to transform every selfish part in it.

There are some people that life asks, like this, to give everything. There are others who are asked to give everything by loving those alongside them with their defects and limitations and responsibilities. The first are not more tragic, perhaps they love even more. Both are heroic.

And there is a kind of heartache that actually helps you learn to love, for it expands the heart and pulls it out of itself. We shouldn't fear this kind of heartache, because it lets you discover something more beautiful than you've known before.

The last paragraphs in *Zenda* are beautiful, though perhaps not too well appreciated in our time. As noble as they are, they are still very human, and yet to see the human side of his struggle only makes it more beautiful, for it is more real.

(view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

www.GoodReadingGuide.com *an online catalogue of recommended reading*

El says

As it starts getting really cold outdoors, and as the snow starts to come down and actually stick, I always seem to get the urge to read a good, swashbuckling novel. Swords. Trickery. Escapades. Love affairs. These are the things that keep me warm as the weather changes. A big mug of hot tea and an adventure story are all I really ask.

This year the best choice was *The Prisoner of Zenda*. Surprisingly as I read and began to understand the plot, the first thing to come to mind was the 1993 film with Kevin Kline, *Dave*. Remember the one? The president of the US is knocked out of commission by a stroke or something and while he's in a coma, a layman who strongly resembles him is put in his place to avoid a huge international scandal. Except the story here doesn't involve Kevin Kline exactly.

This story features an imaginary land, Ruritania. King Rudolf is abducted before really taking the throne, and the layman here is the king's far-removed cousin, also named Rudolf. They share the name but also their looks, and Cousin Rudolf is put in the throne in the king's place to try to fix the situation. After all, who has balls big enough to really say, "No, *wait!* That's not the King! I know this because I have drugged him and have hidden him in a remote town called Zenda! *crickets chirp* Oh, shit..." So obviously the abductor(s) aren't gonna say a thing. And it's up to Cousin Rudolf to save the day.

And of course there are some sword fights and some dashing young men and women with heaving bosoms. (Okay, the last bit is strongly implied. I do not believe the phrase "heaving bosoms" was included in the actual text.) All in all this was a fun little read, lots of adventure, just like I had hoped. There was certainly more adventure than there was in *Dave*. But unlike in the movie, Rudolf and Princess Flavia do not sing that one really annoying song from *Annie*.

The Rags of Time says

The Prisoner of Zenda is a classic story taking place in the fictional German state "Ruritania"—a word which has come to be a generic term for "small fictional country in Europe which saved the writer the trouble of too much research", so well-known was Anthony Hope's story once. I should probably state up front that I love fictional places; countries, cities, stately homes, the occasional uninhabited island... You name it. That I would sooner or later have to visit Ruritania was obviously inevitable.

The basic story is what I like to call the "Two Peas In A Pod"-plot. You've encountered it before—in Mark Twain's *The Prince and The Pauper*, Dumas' *The Man in the Iron Mask*, the film *Dave*... You've surely encountered it in some form before. The idea is that you have two people so incredibly alike that they can switch places and none will be the wiser. In this case, the reason is a common ancestor and obviously very dominant genes, and the result is that Rudolf Rassendyll and King Rudolf of Ruritania look exactly the same. Due to sinister plots and intrigues, Rassendyll is forced to take the king's place while he is imprisoned in the castle of Zenda. This leads to romantic entanglements when the king's future wife and cousin Flavia suddenly finds herself liking Rudolf a lot more than she ever did before, and swashbuckling adventure as the king must be saved and put safely back on the throne.

Rassendyll isn't a bad sort of character – he's reasonably likeable and not insufferably goody-two-shoes. He's not splendidly charismatic either – the major star of the book is without a doubt the utterly despicable and dashing handsome villain Rupert of Henzau who kills and kisses with the same flair and splendid lack of remorse. Flavia is nice and not a nitwit at all; she doesn't actually require saving even once, mostly because she behaves perfectly reasonably (take note, modern writers!). There are sword-fights and moat-swimming and the occasional witty verbal exchange so I can't complain. I also find the description of Rudolf's life as a royal fairly realistic in the peculiar mix of power and circumscription.

The plot is obviously over the top ridiculous and the book is clearly not written yesterday, but it mostly shows in a rather charming way. Vintage, rather than mouldy. I especially love the very period realistic touches, such as when Rudolf goes on a swimming mission at night and describes his dress as: "I was covered with a large cloak, and under this I wore a warm, tight-fitting woollen jersey, a pair of knickerbockers, thick stockings, and light canvas shoes. I had rubbed myself with oil, and I carried a large flask of whisky." Take that, Jason Bourne!

To sum up; a classic swashbuckling adventure that still entertains after all these years and is a must for lovers of the genre.

Hussam H Aql says

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Teal says

I'm staying with 4 stars, for old times' sake. This Victorian-era novel delighted me as a child, back before the invention of the "Young Adult" genre, when I read anything I could get my hands on.

It had been years since I last re-read it, so it held some surprises for me this time around. There's a zest and verve to the writing that's perfect for a swashbuckling adventure novel. Our hero, Rudolf Rassendyl, is more of a rogue than I remembered -- sexual adventures are even hinted at. *gasp* Somebody pass me the smelling salts!

It's difficult for me to imagine anyone coming to this book as an adult, today, and being willing to cut it much slack. It's very much a product of its time -- but then, it's a rare book that isn't. Rudolph, as a handsome, wealthy young British aristocrat, without a title but with plenty of means to indulge his whims, is oblivious white male privilege personified. Yes, a true Victorian hero -- with all the self-satisfaction that implies. His love for the Princess Flavia is insta, and there's plenty of noble forbearance, manly bonding through barely repressed emotions, and stiff-upper-lipping.

And then there's Rupert of Hentzau. He starts out as a minor villain in the story, appearing on page for the first time only at the halfway mark, but then proceeds to steal the author's attention and reduce the main villain to pretty much an afterthought in the reader's mind.

He steals Rudolph's attention as well. Rudolph simply cannot help admiring Rupert's handsomeness, his youthful figure, his thick curly hair, his insolent smile, his dauntless courage, his free spirit, his physical grace, his irrepressible humor in the face of danger. Princess Flavia *who?*

It's such an amusing case of an author being seduced by his own creation. Unsurprisingly, the sequel to this book is -- wait for it -- Rupert of Hentzau.

Such fun. :) Seriously flawed from the modern standpoint, but I sure was lucky to have found this book when I was a kid.

Kimbolimbo says

This book was actually better than I thought it was going to be. There was a lot of fighting and a bit of romance. I think I will look for the sequels. While the men are a bit feminine that doesn't stop them from fighting and killing to defend the women they love. There is great talk of honor and loyalty which are some of my favorite topics. Read this, it is fast and fun.

Sanjay Gautam says

It was not an interesting read, though it seemed to be at first. I started with some expectations but I soon realized I am going to be bored. Yet I kept reading; and did not stop till I finished the novel. Now, my reactions about the book are not all positive. The premise of the book, as seemed to me, was unrealistic but plausible. But it was not this that upset me - it was the shallow characterization done by the author.

The characters were shallow, and uninspiring. Anthony Hope never tried to give any depth to the characters in the book, and there were no great characters that I could relate to. But these problems came to my notice when I was already half-way through the book. So I decided to finish the book and see what happens in the end. My endeavor remained unrewarded.

It was the constant tension between the hero and the antagonist in the story, that kept me moving forward; and is the only reason I am giving this book two stars.
