

# The Prisoner of Zenda

Anthony Hope



## About the author

Anthony Hope Hawkins was born on 9 February 1863 in London, England. He was educated at Marlborough Collage and at Balliol College, Oxford. He was a model student and classic all-rounder, emerging from Oxford with first-class degrees in the classics, philosophy and ancient history. In 1887 he was called to the Bar, where he worked as a junior barrister for H. H. Asquith, the Liberal politician and future Prime Minister.

Hope maintained a great interest in politics throughout his life. In 1892 he stood for Parliament as a Liberal candidate in South Bucks, but was not elected. He enjoyed the company of politicians, and joined a political club, whose members included Winston Churchill and Lloyd George.

Some of his contemporaries thought Hope could have been Lord Chancellor if *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894) had not got in the way.

Hawkins lived with his widowed father while pursuing his career in law and writing. Hope published around thirty fictional works in his lifetime, but it was *The Prisoner of Zenda* that made him famous, enabling him to give up law, and become a full-time writer and literary man. Hope was an efficient and quick writer. The first draft of *The Prisoner of Zenda* and its sequel, *Rupert of Hentzau* (1898) were completed in just a month.

In 1903 Hope was returning from a lecture tour in the States, when he met 18-year-old American, Elizabeth Somerville. They fell in love and were married in the summer of that year. They had two sons and a daughter and lived in rural Surrey. Hope was knighted in 1919 for his work during the First World War, when he worked for the Ministry of Information and wrote

pamphlets to offset German propaganda. He died of throat cancer in 1933.

## Summary

This novel is about the adventures of a young English gentleman, Rudolf Rassendyll, in the fictional European kingdom of Ruritania.

**Chapter 1:** Rudolf Rassendyll decides to visit Ruritania to watch the coronation of King Rudolf the Fifth in the capital city, Strelsau. Rassendyll makes his way to Zenda, a small town in favour of Duke Michael, the King's brother.

**Chapter 2:** Rassendyll meets the King's men, Colonel Sapt and Fritz von Tarlenheim in the forest of Zenda. He meets the King as well and discovers that they look extremely alike. They get on well and have a meal together on the night before the coronation. Unfortunately the King is drugged by his evil brother, Duke Michael, who wants the throne for himself.

**Chapter 3:** Colonel Sapt persuades Rassendyll to impersonate the King so that the coronation can take place; there he meets the King's betrothed, Princess Flavia.

**Chapter 4:** With the coronation successfully accomplished in Strelsau, Rassendyll and Sapt return to where they had left the real King, only to find out that Duke Michael has him imprisoned in the castle of Zenda. It becomes Rassendyll's task to continue acting as king.

**Chapter 5:** Sapt and Fritz thinks that the real King is still alive as only three of Michael's famous Six – a Frenchman (de Gautet), a Belgian (Bersonin) and an Englishman (Detchard) – are in Strelsau. They think the other three – the Ruritaniens (Lauengram, Krafstein and Rupert Hentzau) – are guarding the King at Zenda. Rassendyll meets Michael and three of the famous Six while he is paying Flavia a visit.

**Chapter 6:** Rassendyll receives a letter from Antoinette de Mauban, Michael's French mistress. She doesn't want Michael to become king and marry Flavia. Rassendyll meets Antoinette at a summerhouse, where he is nearly killed by the three of the famous Six. Rassendyll uses a tea table in the summerhouse to protect himself and manages to escape.

**Chapter 7:** Rassendyll is told to ask Flavia to marry him. He finds it hard to play this part as he himself is falling in love with her. After he finds out that Flavia is in love with him and not with the real King, he tries to tell Flavia the

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truth, but Sapt interrupts just in time. Rassendyll decides to attack Michael at Zenda and free the King. He asks Marshal Strakencz to protect Flavia while he is 'going hunting a wild pig'.

**Chapter 8:** Rupert Hentzau comes to see Rassendyll to deliver a message from Michael. At the end of the meeting Hentzau tries to kill him; Rassendyll is wounded. Michael's forest guard, Johann, falls into a trap which Rassendyll has set, and tells him about the Duke's plans and the pipe called 'the Path to Heaven', which has been built to hide the King's body.

**Chapter 9:** Flavia comes to see Rassendyll when she hears he is wounded. Johann brings the news of the real King growing thin and ill, so Rassendyll, Sapt, Fritz and six men set out for the Castle of Zenda to rescue the King. Johann's brother, Lauengram, Krafstein and three of the King's men are killed in the fight. Rassendyll and Michael need to seem friendly in public, so Rassendyll gives out an order that no more private fighting is allowed in the future. The Chief of the Strelsau Police comes to Zenda at the request of the British ambassador, trying to find where Rudolf Rassendyll is. Rassendyll, acting as king, immediately sends him back to Strelsau.

**Chapter 10:** Rassendyll learns that Rupert Hentzau is interested in Antoinette de Mauban and that he would turn against Duke Michael. Hentzau suggests that Rassendyll and he kill both Michael and the King in order to be with the women they love. Rassendyll makes a plan for a second attempt to free the real King because Rassendyll learns that the King is very sick, and also because he has been forced to fix the date for the wedding, which is only two weeks ahead.

**Chapter 11:** Rassendyll's plan goes awry as Hentzau goes to Antoinette de Mauban's room to seduce her that night. Michael comes to her room and is killed. Rassendyll manages to kill de Gautet, Bersonin and Detchard, but both Rassendyll and the real King are wounded.

**Chapter 12:** Rassendyll has a chance to kill Hentzau from behind, but he does nothing. Hentzau escapes into the forest of Zenda, and Rassendyll follows although he is tired and wounded. He wants to fight like a man, but Hentzau flees when he saw Fritz riding towards them. When Flavia finds Rassendyll in the forest, he tells her that he's not the King.

**Chapter 13:** The King is restored to his throne, and he is grateful to Rassendyll. They, however, have to make sure that the duplicity remains a secret from the people of Ruritania. Rassendyll and Flavia must part. Rassendyll goes back to England and lives quietly there. Only once a year he meets Fritz, who brings a red rose and a message from Flavia.

### Background and themes

*The Prisoner of Zenda* was first published in April 1894, and received immediate acclaim as an exciting, adventurous romance. Three film versions of the story have been made, in 1937, 1952 and 1979, and hundreds of thousands of copies of the book have been sold.

*The Prisoner of Zenda* was published towards the end of the Victorian era which stretched from the Coronation of Queen Victoria in 1837 to her death in 1901. The Victorian age was a time of great change. The Industrial Revolution brought about the rapid development of industry, railways, commerce and engineering. Along with this came revolutionary scientific theories which shocked many people. Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859, put forward the theory of evolution, and so questioned the Christian beliefs that had been dominant until then. Many wealthy Victorian families also felt threatened by the rise of the new class of rich factory owners, who capitalized on the poor, particularly women and children. These unsettling social developments forced writers to react against the romanticism of early novelists and turn their attention to realistic portrayals of social problems and relationships. Authors such as Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley and William Makepeace Thackeray stirred the Victorian conscience with their in-depth observations of social plight. However, as the century drew to a close, another group of young novelists reacted against the realism. Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad tried to bring back the spirit of romance into the novel. They achieved this by setting their stories in exotic places, and by developing their themes through action-packed, adventurous plots. Novels became shorter, faster and more appealing to the general public. Robert Louis Stevenson paved the way with his racy tales of adventure in *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886).

*The Prisoner of Zenda* is a swashbuckling tale of honour and chivalry. It became an immediate bestseller when it was published, and was read and enjoyed by all sections

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of society. A friend of Hope's, A. E. Mason, wrote of the novel, 'the debonair chivalry of its hero, the fresh, vivid narration and the tenderness of the love story more than took the town by storm.' Robert Louis Stevenson, abroad in Samoa, began a letter to Hope which was found unfinished, on his desk after he died. He praised the novel as 'a very spirited and gallant little book.' Shortly after the book was published, Hope was invited to dinner with the newly-appointed Prime Minister, Lord Roseberry, where great interest was shown in the politics of Ruritania – the mythical, central European country where the adventure takes place.

**Mistaken identity:** The main theme that runs through the book is the age-old fascination with mistaken identity. Rudolf Rassendyll has the same startling red hair and looks as the King of Ruritania. The public accept him as the same person, the enemy knows he is not the king but is unable to display their knowledge for fear of giving away the fact that they have kidnapped the real king. Flavia, the king's intended, falls in love with Rudolf, thinking he is the king who has suddenly become a person she can love.

**Love and honour:** The other major theme running through the book is the conflict between love and honour. Our hero must choose between his love for the real king's intended bride, and his honour and loyalty to the king. Rudolf has the opportunity to leave the king languishing towards certain death in the Castle of Zenda, whilst he takes his place as King of Ruritania. But honour and chivalry are the foundations of life in the romantic mythical country. Rudolf Rassendyll was warmly welcomed by the Victorians, as a hero who gives the impression of being indolent and uncaring, but who becomes a fearless fighter when events demand it. By the end of the book the English gentleman has displayed qualities fit for a king, and shown the real king the way to behave.

## Discussion activities

### Chapter 1

#### Before reading

- 1 **Discuss:** Talk about the chapter headings. Divide the class into small groups. Students write down as many types of books as they can think of, e.g. historical, crime, adventure, etc. then, without letting them know the title, write all the chapter headings from the reader on the board. Groups decide what type of book this is and report their thoughts and reasons to the class.

- 2 **Discuss:** Put students into pairs. Have them read the Introduction and ask and answer the following questions:
  - a What is the name of the book that has some of the same characters as *The Prisoner of Zenda*?
  - b What did Anthony Hope do before he was an author?
  - c How long after Hope left Oxford was *The Prisoner of Zenda* published?
  - d How old was Hope when he died?
  - e What is *The Heart of Princess Osra* about?
  - f Why did he become Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins?

#### After reading

- 3 **Describe:** Have students work in pairs to describe Rudolf Rassendyll. They could list the information they've got from Chapter 1. When they are ready, ask pairs to report to the class. Ask them what they think of him. Have them write down what they talked about and keep it for later (Activity 20).
- 4 **Discuss:** Have students imagine that they are like Rudolf Rassendyll, i.e. a young, well-educated, rich person from a good family. Start a whole-class discussion by asking the following question: *What would you like to do if you had six months to do anything you like?* Encourage them to give reasons why they want to do this.
- 5 **Discuss:** Put students into pairs or small groups. Have them discuss the following questions: *Rassendyll says to his brother's wife, 'opportunities are duties.' What do you think he means by this? Do you think this idea will be important to the story?*

## Chapter 2

### Before reading

- 6 **Discuss:** Talk about castles. Remind them that Rassendyll is planning to walk around in Zenda and see the famous castle there. Put students into small groups. Ask them to think what the castle looks like. Encourage them to use the new vocabulary. Groups can write a short description of the castle or draw a picture. If some groups finished earlier than other groups, ask them to talk about the castles in their country.

#### After reading

- 7 **Discuss:** Have students work in pairs to discuss the following: *Sapt says to Rassendyll, 'As a man grows old he believes more and more in chance. Chances sent you here.' Do you believe in chance? Do you think chance has had an effect on your life?* Later, ask pairs to share their stories with the rest of the class.
- 8 **Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Give each group the name of one of the characters in the book. Students write down as many adjectives as they can think of to describe this person. Groups read their words to the rest of the class who must guess the character. Groups then write down what they think of their character so far.

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## Chapter 3

### Before reading

- 9 Guess:** Give students a list of words from Chapter 3, e.g. cellar, train, people in Strelsau, Marshal, Chancellor, church, ceremony, crown, palace, etc. Then, put students into small groups, and have them guess what happens in this chapter. Ask each group to share their guesses with the rest of the class.

### After reading

- 10 Discuss:** Remind students that when the procession went into the Old Town, Marshal Strakencz ordered the guards to be close to the King (Rassendyll). But Rassendyll refused to do so in order to let the people see that the King trusts them. Elicit the answers to the following questions: *Do you think it's wise? What are the good/bad points of this?* Students can discuss in small groups.
- 11 Discuss:** Put students into pairs. Have them ask and answer the following questions: *Have you ever pretended to be someone else? What do you think would be the most difficult part if you were in Rassendyll's place?*

## Chapter 4

### Before reading

- 12 Guess:** Draw students' attention to the title of Chapter 4, *The secret of a Cellar*. Ask them to guess what the secret of a cellar is. Have them think what happened in the cellar while Rassendyll was at the coronation ceremony.

### After reading

- 13 Guess:** Remind students that Rassendyll and Sapt see Duke Michael and Max Holf on the way to the cellar. Rassendyll says he has reason to know Max Holf well afterwards. Have students guess what this reason could be.
- 14 Role play:** Have students work in pairs to role play the following conversation. One student is Duke Michael, the other a messenger telling Michael that the real king has been discovered at the lodge. Have them think about the emotions of Michael and this messenger in advance, so that they can think about what tone of voice to use for the role play.

## Chapter 5

### Before reading

- 15 Discuss:** Put students into pairs or small groups. Elicit the answers to the following questions: *Now Rassendyll has to continue acting as king. What kind of difficulty will he have? If you had to act as king, what would be the most enjoyable/difficult part?*

### After reading

- 16 Discuss:** Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss the following: *How do you think Rudolf and Flavia feel about each other? Why do you think so? Find the sentences that support your opinion.*

## Chapter 6

### Before reading

- 17 Write:** Have students go over the description of Michael's famous Six. Write a grid (6 rows × 3 columns) on the board so that the students can use the same format. Number 1–6 in the left-hand column. Ask students to put the names in the second column and the information in the third. Note that they still don't know the names of the three Ruritians, so they can leave them blank.

### After reading

- 18 Write (continue):** Now that students know about the three Ruritians of Michael's famous Six, have them complete the table they started in Activity 17.
- 19 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Have them discuss the following questions. When they are ready, ask each group to report to the class.
- *Why do you think Antoinette de Mauban tells Rassendyll about Michael's plans?*
  - *Which person, do you think, shows himself/herself to be the most honourable in this chapter?*
- 20 Discuss:** Have students go back to the note they kept in Activity 3. Put students into the same pairs and elicit the answers to the following question: *What do you think of Rassendyll now, compared with what you thought of him in Chapter 1?*
- 21 Describe:** Have students work in small groups. Ask each group to decide on a scene in these chapters that they thought was special in some way – exciting, romantic, silly, etc. The groups then form a tableau – creating a still picture of that scene. The other groups guess what is happening.

## Chapter 7

### Before reading

- 22 Retell:** Put students into pairs, and have them recount what has happened in Chapter 6.

### After reading

- 23 Project:** Divide the class into small groups. Ask them to write one of the following newspaper articles:
- a report about the King's marriage
  - a story about the King going to hunt a wild pig
- Encourage them to include some additional information, such as a short biography or background information on the King and Princess Flavia, family history, the venue of the wedding, the Castle of Tarlenheim, wild pigs, etc.



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- 24 Discuss:** Remind students that Rassendyll says, 'Every movement we made was, and had to be, quite public,' and that he finds it very annoying. Elicit the answers to the following questions: *Would you like to be famous? What are the good/bad points?* Students can discuss in pairs or small groups.

## Chapter 8

### Before reading

- 25 Discuss:** In the last chapter, Rassendyll nearly told Flavia he was not the King. Have a whole-class discussion about the following questions: *If Rassendyll had told her the truth then, what would have happened? What do you think Flavia's reaction would be? What do you think Sapt's reaction would be?*

### After reading

- 26 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Have them discuss why Johann fell into the trap. Ask each group to share their opinions with the rest of the class.
- 27 Role play:** Have students work in pairs to act out the following conversation. Student A is Johann, Student B is Rassendyll. Discuss the King's life in the Castle of Zenda, and Michael's plans for the King.

## Chapter 9

### Before reading

- 28 Discuss:** Now that we know where the King is and what Michael's plans are. Ask students to come up with ideas of how to save the King. They can discuss in pairs or small groups.

### After reading

- 29 Write:** Put students into small groups. Have them write the official reports on the wound the King received while hunting 'wild pigs'. Make sure that it sounds very serious. When they are ready, ask students to read out the reports, or make a classroom-display so that everyone can see other students' work.
- 30 Discuss:** Have students write down or discuss in pairs: *What qualities make Rassendyll seem like a king?*

## Chapter 10

### Before reading

- 31 Discuss:** Talk about Antoinette de Mauban and Rudolf Rassendyll. Tell students that they have something in common. Ask them to think what it is. Students could discuss in pairs or small groups.

### After reading

- 32 Role play:** Put students into groups of three. Have them act out the conversation among Rassendyll, Sapt and Fritz, discussing Rassendyll's plan. Each time Rassendyll talks about a part of the plan, Sapt or Fritz should respond with comments, questions, and/or confirmation. Students could write their script in

advance if they want to. Give them sufficient time to work on it. Walk around the classroom to monitor each group, and help them if needed.

## Chapter 11

### Before reading

- 33 Predict:** Have students work in pairs to discuss what will happen in this chapter. Then ask each pair to share their ideas with the rest of the class.

### After reading

- 34 Retell:** Put students into small groups. Have them retell the story in the order of what happened.
- 35 Role play:** Have students work in groups of three. Student A plays the part of Rupert Hentzau, Student B Duke Michael, and Student C Antoinette de Mauban. Have them act out the scene where Michael finds Rupert with Antoinette.

## Chapter 12

### Before reading

- 36 Discuss:** Have a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: *Do you think the King is dead? What will happen next?*

### After reading

- 37 Role play:** Put students into pairs and have them role play the following: Two servants who were in the castle on the night Duke Michael died talk about what they saw.

## Chapter 13

### Before reading

- 38 Discuss:** Ask students to retell what happened at the end of the last chapter. Discuss what Flavia might say or do when she becomes conscious again.

### After reading

- 39 Discuss:** Now we know that Flavia has decided to stay in Ruritania and becomes the wife of the real King. Ask students if they think she did the right thing or not. They could discuss in pairs or small groups first, and then ask them to share their opinions with the rest of the class.
- 40 Role play:** Have students work in pairs. One student takes the part of Rassendyll, the other of his brother. Have a conversation where Rassendyll describes Ruritania and his brother asks questions.
- 41 Project:** As a whole class activity, brainstorm ideas for what should be included in a wanted/missing person poster. Write ideas on the board. Collect together some missing/wanted person posters and show the class. Have students check to see if they have missed anything out. Students work in pairs and design a 'wanted' or 'missing' poster for Rassendyll or the King. Display the work afterwards.