

RURITANIA
by Paul Wimssett

Adapted from *The Prisoner of Zenda* by Anthony Hope

Cast

Historian: An Oxbridge type, who never seems to stand still. He may have been born providing commentary on past events, which may have been alarming, to say the least.

Prince Michael: The scheming Prince, intend on gaining control of the Crown. Absolutely unscrupulous but not evil as such.

Princess Antoinette: She doesn't like Prince Michael, she is a charming soul, aware that being a Princess is a huge responsibility.

George and Bertram: Idle rich friends of Rudolf. George is a bit more intelligent than Bertram.

Rudolf: The King's Double, very thoughtful, articulate and would like to be a hero.

Fritz and Sapt: Two of the King's ministers. Sapt is a Colonel so his walk should reflect that.

King: Played by the same actor as Rudolf, he isn't a stuffy King, more of a Prince really, is a lot more regal than Rudolf.

Algrin: Wine expert, quite fun-loving.

Flavia: Younger than Antoinette and less serious. Dotes on Rudolf.

SCENE 1: Prison of Zenda

HISTORIAN: The blemishes of an honorable Royal line are a delicate subject. In the year 1733, there was a certain Prince, later called Rudolf III of Ruritania. He stayed a couple of months in England. However he left under a cloud. He fought a battle with some nobleman. He received a severe wound and was smuggled off to Ruritania. The nobleman died six months later. However during being treated Rudolf III struck up a relationship with his wife, the Countess Amelia, who bore him a son. Back in Ruritania, Rudolf became King and that should have been the end of the matter. Except what happened in Zenda Castle, Ruritania, 1901.

(**HISTORIAN** *exits*)

(**PRINCE MICHAEL** *and* **PRINCESS ANTOINETTE** *enter*)

MICHAEL: How dare my father do such a thing!! Rudolf of all people! So called King Rudolf! Not exactly tripping off the tongue.

ANTOINETTE: Darling Michael, calm yourself down. You should support the wishes of your dear departed father.

MICHAEL: My dear departed father was an idiot! I sorry Antoinette, I know you pretended to like him.

ANTOINETTE: I did like him!

MICHAEL: Prince Rudolf is a numbskull! He is not fit to be King!

ANTOINETTE: Not fit...

MICHAEL: Do you what my father said on his deathbed? That I'll only be King if Prince Rudolf should die before me. What do you think that means?

ANTOINETTE: I suppose it means...well... (*Her voice trails off.*)

MICHAEL: I'll tell you all what it means. It means that Prince Rudolf must die.

END OF SCENE

Scene 2: Rassendyll House.

(GEORGE and BERTRAM are sitting.)

GEORGE: (*Reading newspaper*) She's leaving Paris tomorrow.

BERTRAM: I knew that. Such a high flyer.

(RUDOLF enters.)

RUDOLF: I would be better if I knew who you were talking about.

GEORGE: Antoinette Mauban

BERTRAM: *De* Mauban.

RUDOLF: Ah, the famous princess! Where's she going?

BERTRAM: Nobody knows. By the way, George, did you meet the Duke of Strelsau?

GEORGE: Black Michael wasn't he? What about him?

BERTRAM: Well it says he, he had a thing about Princess Antoinette.

RUDOLF: I would like to go to Ruritania. It's one of those tiny European Kingdoms isn't it?

GEORGE: Yes, it's beautiful.

RUDOLF: Zenda's the capital isn't it?

GEORGE: No, that's a popular misconception.
Strelsau's the capital.

BERTRAM: You might bump into Antoinette on the way. I wonder where she is now?

SCENE 3: Strelsau Palace.

(PRINCESS FLAVIA is talking to FRITZ.)

FLAVIA: I wonder where she's gone?

FRITZ: I wouldn't pass her if she was finding someone else, Princess Flavia.

SAPT: (*enters*) Look, weren't we talking about Black Michael?

FRITZ: It's too late for him now, Sapt. Rudolf is King now.

(KING enters. He is RUDOLF without a moustache.)

KING: My ears are burning.

FRITZ: We were just discussing your brother, your majesty.

KING: He still has Zenda.

SAPT: That won't satisfy him though. I feel he's plotting something.

FLAVIA: Oh! This sounds exciting!

KING: Hopefully not too exciting.

FRITZ: We mentioned Michael's wife as well.

KING: Antoinette coming to her senses?

SAPT: Well if anyone knows what's going on in Michael's mind, it's Antoinette.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 4: On the train to Strelsau

(Train sounds. RUDOLF is sitting down. ANTOINETTE is sitting opposite. They don't notice each other. Other people are also sitting there.)

TICKET INSPECTOR: *(enters)* Billets, sil vous plait!

(Everyone shows their tickets. INSPECTOR clips them. ANTOINETTE notices RUDOLF and is shocked. INSPECTOR exits.)

RUDOLF: Something wrong?

ANTOINETTE: No, no.

RUDOLF: Where are you going?

ANTOINETTE: Back to Strelsau.

RUDOLF: Me too. I'm sorry but you look slightly familiar.

ANTOINETTE: That's probably because I am Princess Antoinette of Ruritania.

RUDOLF: *(Embarrassed)* Ah, ah. That'd probably explain it. *(Pause.)* What are you doing here?

ANTOINETTE: Well I had a row with my husband, Duke Michael and I felt I had to get away. And now I'm going back.

RUDOLF: Oh yes. I've seen Duke Michael in the paper. I know Michael.

ANTOINETTE: We know Duke Michael. He has always lived among us.

RUDOLF: And who will be King though?

ANTOINETTE: Prince Rudolf. He is a bit of a stranger. Lives abroad.

RUDOLF: As a soldier or a student?

ANTOINETTE: A bit of both, really. Not one in ten citizens know him by sight.

RUDOLF: So when's he going to be crowned?

ANTOINETTE: Next Wednesday.

PERSON 1: Myself, I hate Prince Michael!

ANTOINETTE: And then there is the Princess Flavia.

PERSON 1: Yes, Black Michael had a thing for her, but Prince Rudolf took her.

RUDOLF: No wonder he was upset. But of course he ended up with you.

ANTOINETTE: Got the worst deal you mean?

RUDOLF (*Shocked*) Certainly not. So what does this Prince Rudolf look like?

ANTOINETTE: Funny you should say that...

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 5: Strelsau Palace

(FRITZ and SAPT are on stage. ANTOINETTE enters.)

FRITZ: So who do you want to us to see?

ANTOINETTE: Wait here. *(She exits.)*

SAPT: Is this the right time for games?

FRITZ: You don't want to discuss the economic status of Ruritania again.

SAPT: No, I'm fed up with talking about cuckoo clocks.

(RUDOLF enters.)

FRITZ: Your majesty. You look a bit different if I may say so.

RUDOLF: I'm not his majesty.

ANTOINETTE: *(Enters)* No he's not. But he is Rudolf. Rudolf Rassendyll. An Englishman.

SAPT: Rassendyll, Rassendyll. One of the...let me see...one of the Burlesdons?

RUDOLF: My brother is Lord Burlesdon, yes.

SAPT: *(Glance at FRITZ)* You know the story, don't you, Fritz?

FRITZ: He certainly does have the look of King Rudolf, Sapt.

SAPT: (*Examines RUDOLF's face in detail.*) Certainly? If you shaved his moustache they would be identical.

FRITZ: Oh, we haven't introduced ourselves, have we? I am Fritz von Tarlenheim and he (*refers to SAPT*) is Colonel Sapt. We are both in the service of King Rudolf.

RUDOLF: (*Looks around*) So, this is all the King's. (*Notices the decoration*) Red roses?

SAPT: That would be the red rose of the Epsbergs.

RUDOLF: Oh, like the Tudor rose.

FRITZ: I think you mean your House of York. Sorry, sorry. You can be a bit too expert on royal matters.

RUDOLF: If you forgive me gentlemen, your highness, I did want to look around Strelsau.

KING (*off, pre-recorded*) I'm sorry, but I think we have need of you.

END OF SCENE

Scene 6: Outside the Wine Cellar

ALGRIN: Where is that Black Michael?

MICHAEL: (*enters*) What did you call me, Algrin?

ALGRIN: Nothing, Prince Michael, nothing.

MICHAEL: Algrin, you old fool. I'm requiring a certain kind of wine.

ALGRIN: I make several types as you know. Can you be a bit more specific?

MICHAEL: One strong enough to keep a man asleep for a day or two.

ALGRIN: Hang on, I'll see what I can find. (*Comes back with small barrel.*) Here we are, speciality de la maison.

MICHAEL: What?

ALGRIN: Speciality of the house. It's Red Thunder 1896.

MICHAEL: And it definitely causes long periods of unconsciousness?

ALGRIN: Definitely. But don't get it on any paintwork.

MICHAEL: (*Takes case.*) Thank you, Algrin. But you will forget this visit ever took place.

ALGRIN: Don't worry after the... (*hiccup*) ...I never remember anything.

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 7: Strelsau Palace

(**KING** is reading a book.)

KING: I'm not sure about this at all. It's strange but I should be grateful to have a backup plan against Michael but...*(skips through book)* Oh, I can't get into this. *(Lays book aside.)*

(Knock at door.)

KING: Enter.

ANNOUNCER: His Royal Highness, Prince Michael is here, your majesty.

KING: Announce him for me.

ANNOUNCER: *(announces)* His Royal Highness, Prince Michael is here, your majesty!

(He exits, MICHAEL enters.)

MICHAEL: Rudy, how are you? I've come to say sorry.

KING: What are you apologizing for?

MICHAEL: I was feeling resentful of you. Having spent most of my time being the King in waiting, you being abroad I've got used to the idea of being King.

KING: Thank you, that means a lot.

MICHAEL: It's all over then. Come to the Zenda Castle tomorrow to have a pre-coronation drink.

KING: 7 pm. Now if you excuse me, urgent matters of state. *(He exits)*

MICHAEL: Probably those clocks again...

ANTOINETTE: *(Enters)* Rudolf, I...

MICHAEL: Ah, Antoinette, I wondered what happened to you.

(ANTOINETTE tries to escape but MICHAEL has got her)

ANTOINETTE: Let me go, Michael!

MICHAEL: No, I've got you now. So you went to London to visit the Queen, and now you're at the mercy of the King.

ANTOINETTE: King! Pah!

MICHAEL: Pah! That word is not suitable for a Princess. I'm taking you to Zenda.

ANTOINETTE: You may think you're clever but we've...

MICHAEL: We've what?

ANTOINETTE *(Bites her lip.)* Nothing.

MICHAEL: Exactly. With my brother drugged the coronation will be ruined and will have to take over.

END OF SCENE

INTERMISSION

Scene 7: Zenda Prison

(MICHAEL and KING are on stage.)

MICHAEL: So, Rudolf, your coronation is tomorrow. Nervous?

KING: Not at all. I must say Michael you're being awfully understanding. A bit too much.

MICHAEL: I'm sure I don't know what you mean. Maybe we should have the drink I promised. I have a superb red you could try. *(Offers it)* I'm afraid I don't like red wine.

KING: I'm not that keen, but ok. *(Takes it.)*

MICHAEL: To you! For as long as you reign!

KING: *(Drinks)* Oh Michael!

MICHAEL: Yes Rudolf?

KING: What a beautiful wine. Could I possibly have another?

MICHAEL: *(Shocked)* Are you sure it's so nice?

KING: Michael, it's brilliant. I must go.

MICHAEL: Come on have another. It's a '96.

KING: No thank you. You know, I've misjudged you.
(*Gives Michael glass.*)

(*He exits*)

MICHAEL: Damnation! (*Throws a glass across the stage*) How could it not work?

(**ALDRIN** *enters nervously.*)

ALDRIN: Something wrong?

MICHAEL: Yes! Yes there's something wrong! Your drink didn't work!

ALGRIN: Of course it works! Anyone who drinks that will fall asleep in the hour.

MICHAEL: I'm telling you it was useless, Algrin.
(*Realizes what ALGRIN said*) In the hour...

ALGRIN: In the hour...

(**MICHAEL** *puts his hand to his face and removes it. He is smiling.*)

MICHAEL: Do please excuse me. What fine wines you have!

(**MICHAEL** *exits.*)

ALGRIN: That's very unlike Black Michael.

MICHAEL (*Off*) I heard that!

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 9: Strelsau Palace

(RUDOLF is playing fish with SAPT.)

RUDOLF: Have you got the two of acorns?

SAPT: No, consider the deck.

(RUDOLF takes a card from the deck.)

RUDOLF: Look, why can't I leave Ruritania?

SAPT: It's just insurance for us. It means nothing.

(FRITZ hurries in)

FRITZ: Sapt! Something's wrong with the King! I think he's in a coma!

(FRITZ exits. SAPT knocks the table over as he exits.)

RUDOLF: Means nothing, he says. Just insurance he says. *(Begins to pick up the cards.)*

(Pause. FRITZ and SAPT enter. RUDOLF doesn't notice them.)

FRITZ: Look, the coronation is today. We've got no choice.

SAPT: But he doesn't even sound like a Ruritanian.

FRITZ: I know, we must train him.

(RUDOLF notices them. He stands up.)

RUDOLF: I know what I have to do.

FRITZ: First the moustache, then the clothes.

RUDOLF: You must tell me all about myself, as well. Well, all about King Rudolf.

SAPT: And we haven't got a moment to lose!

(They all exit.)

END OF SCENE

Scene 10: Ballroom

(A lot of people are drinking and socialising.)

ANNOUNCER: Pray silence for your new King, King Rudolf of Ruritania!

(RUDOLF enters dressed as the king. He talks to people generally.)

RUDOLF: Nice to meet you. Ze weather is very clement is not? Und what do you do? *(etc.)*

(MICHAEL and ALGRIN are revealed in the crowd. He notices RUDOLF.)

MICHAEL: What's going on?

ALGRIN: I don't know. The drink should have worked by now.

MICHAEL: I knew your drink didn't work.

ALGRIN: It did! It was out for hours the other week!
(New thought) Maybe Princess Antoinette knows about it?

MICHAEL: Princess Antoinette! You may be right for once, Algrin.

(They exit.)

(FRITZ and SAPT also are revealed in the crowd.)

FRITZ: He's going quite well so far.

SAPT: Yes, the coronation went quite well.

FRITZ: I only hope the proper King is all right.
Otherwise...

SAPT: Otherwise what? Are you saying we replace this Mr Rassendyll with the King for ever?

FRITZ: I don't know what we should do.

END OF SCENE

Scene 11: Zenda Prison

(ANTOINETTE is attached by clasps to a prison wall. MICHAEL enters.)

MICHAEL: What's happening? Why haven't I been able to drug Rudolf?

ANTOINETTE: Well, I might as well tell you know. The coronation has taken place. You see, Prince Rudolf has a double.

MICHAEL: A double! A double! Dumkopf! Why didn't I think of that? I must capture the real King immediately!

(He exits.)

(Blackout. The sound of window being smashed. Lights on. ANTOINETTE is still attached to the wall. RUDOLF is pushed onstage. He is still unconscious, and so falls to the floor.)

MICHAEL: *(enters)* Get in there! You will never be King now. Thank you Antoinette.

ANTOINETTE: Don't thank me.

MICHAEL: Another few hours and he'll be back with us. But then it'll be too late as I'll expose the coronation as a fraud. And then I'll make my own coronation.

(He exits.)

ANTOINETTE: Why does he have to explain the plot like that?

END OF SCENE

Scene 11: Outside Zenda

FRITZ: Are you sure he's in there, the King?

SAPT: I know it seems rather obvious but it's the only lead we've got.

(Enter RUDOLF, dressed in normal clothes)

RUDOLF: Do you know what you're doing?

SAPT: Don't worry, we planning this by military tactics. Synchronise watches.

FRITZ: Er, I haven't got a watch.

SAPT: Ok, scrub that bit. *(Points to a window.)* Did you see a movement there?

RUDOLF: Have we been spotted?

FRITZ: Get down!

SAPT: No, it looks like a prison cell.

ANTOINETTE *(Off):* Help! Help!

SAPT: It's Antoinette. *(Louder)* Have you been kidnapped?

FRITZ: Shh! Let's get nearer.

(They move upstage.)

ANTOINETTE: The King is here. He's still out of it.

FRITZ: That's good news, with him (*refers to RUDOLF*) being here.

SAPT: (*Puzzled*) Why, Fritz?

FRITZ: (*Also puzzled*) I don't know. I don't know why I said that.

RUDOLF: Come on!

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 13: Zenda Dungeon.

(ANTOINETTE is still attached to the wall. A dummy, representing the KING lies on the floor.)

(There is a hacking noise)

FRITZ: Shh!

SAPT: I can't do this silently...

(Part of a wall collapses, and FRITZ, SAPT, and RUDOLF enter)

FRITZ: *(examining wall)* Not a bad job, even I say so myself.

SAPT: Quick get the King!

(RUDOLF gets the KING.)

RUDOLF: I hope I remember which one is me.

SAPT: Is this any time for jokes? Let's get out of here.

(They make to go.)

ANTOINETTE: What about me?

FRITZ: Sorry you're highness. *(He tries to undo her clasps)* These are tricky.

SAPT: Quickly! I can hear someone approaching...

(Footsteps are heard off.)

MICHAEL: *(Off)* Svines. *(We hear the jangling of keys.)* Stop or I'll fire. *(Gunshot.)*

(FRITZ helps SAPT with the clasps and ANTOINETTE is released.)

FRITZ: Move! Move!

(MICHAEL enters holding a gun. ANTOINETTE pretends to still be attached to the wall.)

MICHAEL: Going somewhere?

FRITZ: Well, we were.

MICHAEL: Not so clever now are we?

(He has reached ANTOINETTE who puts her foot out. MICHAEL trips over, allowing FRITZ and SAPT to attack him.)

FRITZ: Quick, Rudolf, Antoinette. Get out of here.

(RUDOLF (carrying the King) and ANTOINETTE exit through the broken wall. MICHAEL falls to the floor)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 14: The Palace of Strelsau

(**RUDOLF, FRITZ, SAPT, ANTOINETTE** all look to the left. **FLAVIA** enters right, exits to the left.)

FLAVIA: (off) Darling, I've missed you.

KING (off, prerecorded) I've missed you too, Flavia. Thank you for all your help, Rudolf Rassendyll.

RUDOLF: I'm only glad that you're back on the throne.

KING: Not half as glad as me. I'd like to thank Fritz von Tarlenheim and Colonel Sapt.

FRITZ: No need to thank us.

SAPT: We're just doing our job.

RUDOLF: There's still quite a lot of Ruritania to see. Such a beautiful country. I do love the Black Forest.

SAPT: I'm glad you like it.

RUDOLF: I hope to see you in London soon.

ANTOINETTE: I can't help feeling sorry for Michael. He's the one who stayed here all these years. I know it looked like he turned bad but...

SAPT: Too much heart, Antoinette. He's betrayed his country and so he'll stay in Zenda for a very long time.

ANTOINETTE: His beloved Zenda...

RUDOLF: Goodbye to you all. (He is about to go and then looks off to where the KING is) I wonder if there was any truth to those rumors.

(He exits. ANTOINETTE, SAPT and FRITZ follows.)

(HISTORIAN enters)

HISTORIAN: Some said the Prisoner of Zenda was dead; some said that he vanished yet was still alive, some that more that was to be known than was known. Indeed the blemishes of an honorable royal line are a delicate subject.

END OF SCENE

CURTAIN CALL