

The Traditions of Pfennig Halbpennig

In order to follow the complexities of the plot of 'The Grand Duke' there are some traditions of Pfennig Halbpennig which it would be helpful to understand first.

The Statutory Duel - the subtitle of the piece

A previous ruler of Pfennig Halbpennig a century earlier who had a dislike of the bloodshed caused by the fighting of duels, passed a simple Act stating that if any two quarrelled, they were to settle the dispute by the drawing of cards and not by using such things as pistols or swords.

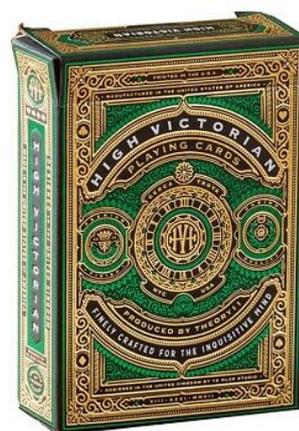
The rule was that whoever drew the lowest card would be declared 'legally dead'. The winner then adopted the losers' position with all of its advantages, functions and obligations (including debts and care of relations).

The device is used twice in the story - to deal with Ludwig's revelation of the plot to the Grand Duke's private detective, and as a means for the Grand Duke to disappear and avoid being blown up by the conspirators.

A slight complication with all of this is that the laws of Pfennig Halbpennig last for 100 years and that time limit is only 24 hours away.

When Ernest and Ludwig 'fight' it is so that the loser can be denounced as the leader of the conspiracy, (but cannot be punished because he is dead) and the winner can 'reveal all' to the Duke and receive a pardon for doing so. The worry obviously is that 24 hours later when the 'dead' man returns to life - he will be at risk. However, the notary points out that death expunges crime and thus the loser would come to life again with a clean slate - hence the statutory duel proceeds. Ludwig wins the duel on both occasions and it is, of course, of huge significance that in his one day as Grand Duke - he passes the Act again - thus leaving his opponents - Ernest and Rudolph 'dead'

But the big question is - do they know whether an Ace counts high or low?



Eating a Sausage Roll

Ernest Dummkopf's troop is involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the miserly and unpopular Grand Duke Rudolph by blowing him up.

Obviously plans need to be discussed, but they have to be very careful not to reveal them to the 'wrong' people. So they have devised a secret sign - eating a sausage roll indicates involvement in the plot and hence that a conversation is safe. This explains the comments at the wedding party when a number of them complain of an onslaught to their digestions from greasy pastry.

This is also the background to the horror of the company that Ludwig spoke openly about the plot to a 'chap' who had eaten three sausage rolls - but turned out to be the Grand Duke's private detective.



Priority of Contracts

Dramatic contracts take priority over marriage contracts - which explains why Julia feels able to step in as Ludwig's intended when he wins the duel and becomes the Grand Duke since she has the company contract to play lead roles. This casts aside Lisa, who had been betrothed to Ludwig and whose wedding was to be celebrated that day.



The Town Square Houses

The houses in the market place of Speisesaal belong to The Grand Duke and thus rents are paid to him. However, the drains which were installed at the time of Charlemagne needed replacing and the miserly Duke was not keen to do this. The houses did not let because people did not want to live with the attendant drainage problems. To overcome this without spending money, the Duke issued a decree that all 'love episodes between affectionate couples' had to take place in the Square every Monday, Wednesday and Friday when the band was not playing. The incidence of such 'entertainment' meant that the houses were let with a 50% increase in rents and the sale of opera glasses (a Grand Ducal monopoly) received an enormous boost.



As a brief additional explanation - there is a tradition in the performing of this show in terms of accents which stems from the fact that for the first run of the show, the soprano Ilka Palmay was brought in to play Julia - she having a strong Hungarian accent. Gilbert's topsy-turvy managing of this was to give the 'Bavarian' acting troop English accents and the 'English actress' - Julia a German one. We shall see what transpires with this performance!

