

# The Three Musketeers

Alexandre Dumas



## About the author

Alexandre Dumas was one of the most famous French writers of the nineteenth century, best known for the historical novels *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, both written within the space of two years, 1844–45. Dumas was born in France in 1802. His grandfather was a French nobleman, who had settled in Santo Domingo and his paternal grandmother, Marie-Cessette, was an Afro-Caribbean, who had been a black slave in the French colony. Dumas's father was a general in Napoleon's army, but he fell out of favour and after his death in 1806, the family lived in poverty. Dumas wrote constantly, producing a steady stream of plays, novels and short stories. His historical novels made Dumas an enormous fortune, but he spent money faster than he made it. He produced some 250 books with his 73 assistants. Dumas lived as adventurously as the heroes of his books, and there are numerous anecdotes about his way of life. He married his mistress, the actress Ida Ferrier, in 1840, but he soon separated after having spent her entire dowry. Known as 'the King of Paris', Dumas earned lots of money, but spent it right away on friends, art and mistresses. Dumas died of a stroke on 5 December 1870, at Puys, near Dieppe. It is claimed that his last words were, 'I shall never know how it all comes out now,' in which he referred to his unfinished book.

## Summary

The young d'Artagnan travels to Paris with a letter of introduction for Monsieur de Tréville, Captain of the King's Musketeers. At de Tréville's house he meets Athos, Porthos and Aramis, who will become his firm friends. However, before their friendship can be confirmed, they each challenge him to a duel. Fortunately, before any

of the duels can take place, the three musketeers and d'Artagnan are confronted by men from the Cardinal's guards. There is a fight, which the musketeers win and when the King hears about the fight, he makes d'Artagnan one of the King's guards, though not yet a musketeer. Meanwhile, Cardinal Richelieu is planning to trap the Queen and make sure that the King has proof of her infidelity with the English Duke of Buckingham. She has foolishly given the twelve diamond pins, which the King had previously given to her, to the Duke as a sign of her affection. The Cardinal has arranged for Lady de Winter to steal some or all of the pins. She manages to steal two. Thus, Richelieu is sure that when the Queen tries to get the pins back in time for a dinner and dance at which she must wear them, she will not be able to get the full set of twelve. But d'Artagnan and the Duke upset the plan by having two replacement pins made. D'Artagnan takes the diamond pins from London to Paris in time for the dinner. The action then moves on to an account of a civil war. The King and the Cardinal are desperate to take the Protestant Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle and, with the help of the four friends, they succeed. D'Artagnan is summoned to see the Cardinal. He fears for his life but he returns to his friends with a piece of paper, making him a lieutenant in the musketeers.

**Chapters 1–2:** At the age of eighteen, d'Artagnan goes to Paris with a letter of introduction from his father to Monsieur de Tréville, the Captain of the King's Musketeers. On his way, d'Artagnan gets into trouble. At an inn in Meung, a group of men laugh at his horse and he gets into a fight. The letter of introduction is taken from him. When he recovers, he sees one of the men talking to a woman he calls Milady. He tries to catch him, but he falls to the ground. In Paris he meets Monsieur de Tréville. Before they start talking, de Tréville calls three musketeers in, Athos, Porthos and Aramis. Only two arrive, as Athos is very ill. There was a fight between the Cardinal's guards and the King's musketeers. They were taken by surprise, two musketeers were killed and Athos was wounded. D'Artagnan then tells de Tréville about his stolen letter and his desire to become a musketeer. D'Artagnan sees the man from Meung again and runs after him.

**Chapters 3–4:** While pursuing him, he offends three musketeers. First, he collides with Athos, then he jostles Porthos, and finally, he offends Aramis by bringing attention to a lady's handkerchief. He is challenged to

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a duel by each of them. Later, he meets the musketeers and begins dueling with Athos. They are all threatened with arrest by the Cardinal's guards because of a law against dueling. D'Artagnan and the musketeers drive the Cardinal's men away. So, just after his arrival in Paris, d'Artagnan becomes an intimate friend of the three musketeers.

**Chapters 5–6:** The Cardinal organises a dinner and dance and wants the Queen to wear the diamond pins the King had given her as a present. The Queen, however, has given the pins to her lover, the English Duke of Buckingham. The Cardinal, who knows this, has sent Milady to steal at least two of the diamond pins. The Queen, in her desperation, confides in her servant, Constance, who offers to help her by asking d'Artagnan to take a letter to the Duke. On their way to London, the three musketeers are continually attacked by the Cardinal's men, and prevented from completing the journey to England with d'Artagnan.

**Chapters 7–9:** D'Artagnan hands the Queen's letter to the Duke. He discovers two diamond pins are missing and realises that Lady de Winter (Milady) took them. He has two new pins made and gives them to d'Artagnan, who returns to Paris. On the day of the great dinner, the King notices the Queen is not wearing the pins and asks her to put them on. While she gets them, the Cardinal gives the King a box containing two diamond pins. The King expects her to be wearing the remaining ten pins, but she returns with the complete set of twelve. The Cardinal is very angry. Afterwards, the Queen rewards d'Artagnan with a diamond. D'Artagnan finds his three friends, each at the inn where he left them. Porthos is recovering from an injured leg. Aramis is about to join the Church, but d'Artagnan gives him a letter from his love, which makes him change his mind. Athos is sad because his wife turned out to be a bad woman. She is Lady de Winter, otherwise known as Milady.

**Chapters 10–11:** The Cardinal and the King decide to attack the Huguenot city of La Rochelle. While the musketeers are on their way to the city, Athos overhears the Cardinal's conversation with Milady in an inn. He is telling her to go to England and speak to the Duke again and tell him the Cardinal knows of his love affair with the Queen and will reveal the secret if the Duke helps the Huguenots in La Rochelle. The Cardinal says the Duke will die if he supports the Protestants in France. She asks the Cardinal to kill d'Artagnan and Constance. Athos

confronts Milady and takes the Cardinal's permit from her. Athos tries to tell his friends about Milady's plans but there are people listening. He makes a bet with some guards that they can have breakfast at St Gervais Bastion. The losers will pay for a dinner for eight.

**Chapters 12–13:** The four men fight some workmen who have come to the bastion. They take control of the place by propping up dead men to make them seem to be alive, thus confusing the opposing forces. They win the bet. Milady is killed on her arrival in England. The Cardinal learns that she was a murderess and that everything was done under his permit. He rewards d'Artagnan by making him a musketeer.

### The original text

*The Three Musketeers* was published in parts in 1844 in a Parisian magazine called *Siecle*. It became very popular among the French public.

### Background and themes

**Historical context:** The story is set at the beginning of the seventeenth century in France. Alexandre Dumas often mixed historical fact with fantasy. King Louis XIII, Cardinal Richelieu and the Duke of Buckingham were real people, and the fighting between the French Catholics and the Protestant Huguenots did take place. However, many of the characters and plots in the book are products of the author's imagination.

**Friendship and loyalty:** The rallying cry of the musketeers 'One for all, all for one' sums up their relationship. Although very different in character, they form a tightly knit group who rely on each other implicitly.

**Intrigue, action, love and blackmail:** The book is full of swashbuckling action, secret and open love affairs and intrigue. Indeed, it could be described as a pirate adventure on dry land. The scheming Cardinal Richelieu and the evil Milady provide the intrigue.

### Discussion activities

#### Before reading

- 1 **Write, discuss and predict:** Write *FRANCE, THE YEAR 1627* on the board. Tell students that the story takes place in this period. Ask them to make a list of all the things they think will be in the book. Give them the example *swords*. Put the students in small groups and ask them to compare their lists, saying if they agree with each other about what will be in the book or not.

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## Chapters 1–2

### While reading

- 2 **Pair work:** (at the end of page 1) Put the students into pairs and ask them to think about why the men at the inn laughed at d'Artagnan's horse. Then, Student A plays the role of one of the men and Student B the role of d'Artagnan. Student A tells Student B why his horse is so funny, and Student B argues with him.

### After reading

- 3 **Research:** Ask students to look for information on the Internet about the King's musketeers at this time. Get feedback from the whole class and compare this with what they learn about them in Chapter 2.

## Chapters 3–4

### While reading

- 4 **Discuss:** (page 10, after 'd'Artagnan was face to face with de Jussac.') Put the students in small groups and ask them to talk about all the films they have seen which feature classic fights. Ask them to think about the following questions: *Who was the fight between? Where/When did it happen? Why did it happen? Who won the fight?*

### After reading

- 5 **Write, ask and answer:** Write *What did d'Artagnan try to give to Aramis?* on the board and elicit the answer (A handkerchief.) Now tell students to write similar questions about this part. Students then mingle as a group, asking and answering each other's questions.

## Chapters 5–6

### Before reading

- 6 **Guess:** Ask students to guess why the Queen's diamonds are important to the story. Suggest the following ideas: *Did the musketeers take them? Did the Queen sell them? Did the Cardinal give the diamonds to the Queen?*

### While reading

- 7 **Write:** (page 13, after 'There is going to be a great dinner and dance.') Ask students to imagine there is going to be a big important dinner in their country. Put the students in small groups and ask them to make a menu for the big night. Then ask them which important people are going to come and what clothes they will have on.

## Chapters 7–9

### Before reading

- 8 **Guess:** Ask students to guess what will happen when d'Artagnan meets the Duke. *What will d'Artagnan tell the Duke? Will the Duke be happy about it? Will he help d'Artagnan?*

### While reading

- 9 **Role play:** (page 22, after 'Was that a smile on the Queen's face?') Put the students in groups of three. Tell them to act out the conversation between the King, the Queen and the Cardinal. Remind them that the King is angry, the Queen is happy and the Cardinal is afraid and worried.

### After reading

- 10 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *ten, dark room, bed, church, letter, intelligent*. Have the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapters 7–9.

## Chapters 10–11

### Before reading

- 11 **Research:** In groups students find out as much as they can using books and the Internet about the Huguenots in France in this period. Tell them that Cardinal Richelieu really existed and that they should concentrate their research on the battle of La Rochelle in 1627. Get feedback from the whole class and then ask the students to do a piece of writing about this as a follow up.

### After reading

- 12 **Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapters 10–11. Tell them to write it again, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students, who have to identify the mistakes.

## Chapters 12–13

### While reading

- 13 **Discuss:** (page 34, after 'A very bad woman told you these things.') Tell the students there are many books and films in which the bad person is a woman. Put the students in small groups to discuss some of the books and films they know. *What is the name of the book or film? What is the name of the bad person? Why does she do bad things? What bad things does she do? What happens in the end?*

### After reading

- 14 **Write:** Tell the students to imagine they are d'Artagnan. Ask them to write a letter back to his parents telling them what has happened since he left home.
- 15 **Role play:** Put students in groups of four to role play the following scene: Athos, Porthos, Aramis and d'Artagnan meet again after 20 years. They tell each other what they have done.