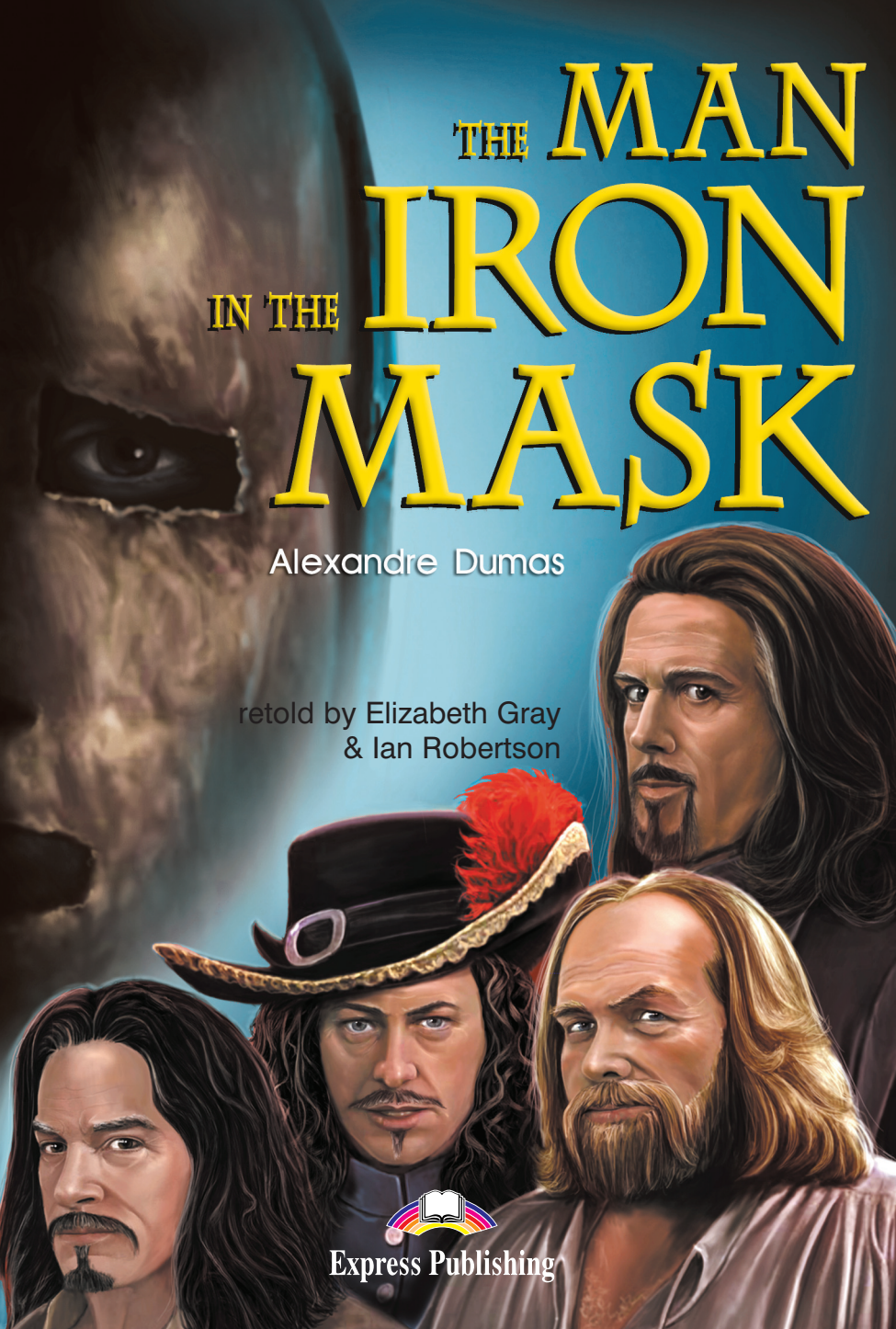
THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Alexandre Dumas

retold by Elizabeth Gray
& Ian Robertson



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Chapter 1

Hunger in Paris

My name is D'Artagnan. I was once Captain of the King's Guard for the present King, Louis XIV, and before that, for his father, Louis XIII.

You may have heard of my three friends, Athos, Aramis and Porthos. We were all Musketeers, which means we were trained to use a musket, a kind of gun. But our favourite weapon was always the sword. To win a fight with a sword, you have to use your brain, and at the same time, move quickly and cleverly on your feet. In the old days, when we were young, some people said that a whole army could not beat us.

It was my job to serve kings, not judge them, but there are times in every man's life when he has to make an important decision, a decision that will not only change his life but the history of the world. I am going to tell you the story of how I came to make such a decision.

My story begins in the early summer of 1667. Louis XIV was on the throne of France, with his wife, the Queen Marie Therese, at his side. His mother, Anna of Austria also lived with him at court, and in a way I felt responsible for the safety of them all, although my first duty was to the King.

France was at war with Spain over the Spanish Netherlands. War is a hungry master. It needs money to make cannons and guns and to buy food for its armies. So, all the money and food that should have been used to feed the poor of France was going to the war.

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I had been to Paris to see how bad the situation was. What I saw there made me sick. People were dying of hunger. Children were lying in the streets, too weak to cry, too weak even to hold out their hand for a piece of bread or an apple. They were just waiting to die. Those who still had strength were breaking into shops and stealing whatever they could. It was the job of my Musketeers to protect the shopkeepers, but many of my men felt bad about fighting the poor. Their job was also getting more and more difficult, as the people became hungrier and hungrier.

The Palace at Versailles is not far from Paris, but it is a long way from the suffering of the people. As I walked into the gardens, and down the steps past the fountains, I saw the King. Or, should I say, I saw the King's party, some twenty or thirty men and women, beautifully dressed, wearing their fine wigs, which were long, curled and well-powdered. At the Palace it was just another day of pleasure. The King was playing a game with some of the courtiers, while the ladies stood in a circle watching.

The game they were playing is called *boules*. A small wooden ball is thrown some distance from the players. Then, each player throws a metal ball to try to get as close to the wooden ball as possible. The player who gets his ball closest to the wooden one wins.

Louis slowly lifted his arm and threw his last ball into the air. As the ball hit the ground, the King shouted,

"Have I won?"

It was clear to everybody that he hadn't, but no one said a word.

A young courtier went up to the group of balls and stood with his back to the King. He bent down, as if to see more clearly who had won, and without being seen, pushed the King's ball with his foot so that it was now closest to the wooden ball.

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THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

Should D'Artagnan keep his promise and protect the headstrong and selfish King Louis or should he do what was right for France and put Philippe on the throne? But will Philippe really be a better King than Louis? Alexander Dumas' thrilling tale of one man's struggle with his conscience takes us into 17th century France and examines the lives of people in power and those at their mercy.

COMPONENTS:

- **Reader**
- **Activity Book**
- **Teacher's Book**
- **Audio CD**

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4 Level 5

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ISBN 978-1-84325-667-0

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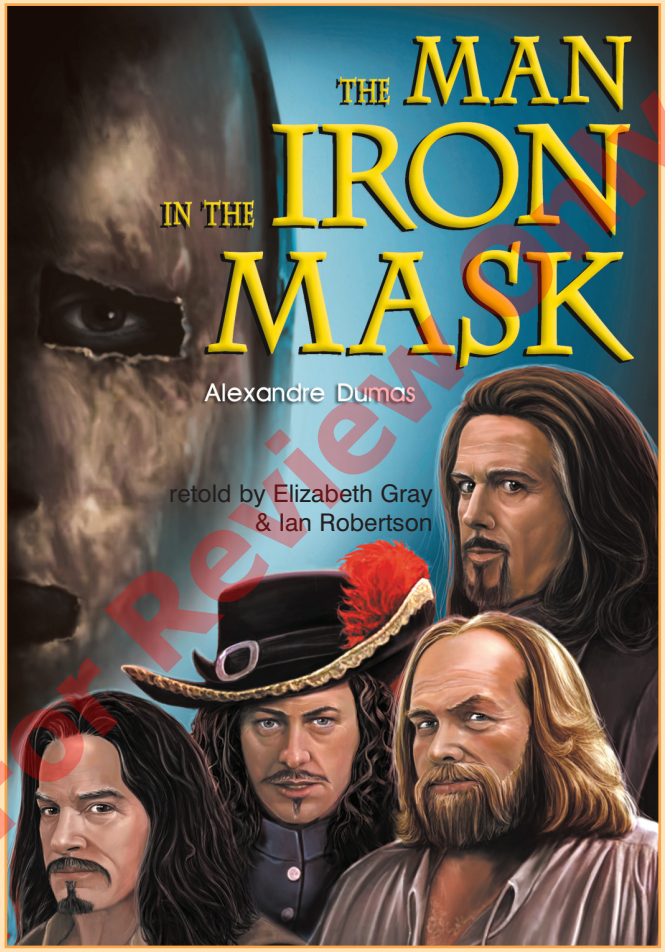
Activity Book



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Lesson 6
Chapter 6

A Visit to the King's Tailor

I. Listening

Listen to the recording and circle the correct answer.

1 When the carriage reached me, I made a ..... for it to stop.
A wave **B** sign **C** signal

2 The lady looked at me with some surprise when I took off my own hat and asked if I could ..... hers.
A borrow **B** have **C** wear

3 "Please, my dear sir, do not ..... her.
A injure **B** brother **C** bother

4 His ..... were like butterflies, fluttering over a flower.
A evenings **B** eyelids **C** eyebrows

5 "You have at last come to have me make a ..... for you."
A suit **B** coat **C** jacket

6 I ..... thirty gold louis onto the table.
A shook **B** poured **C** waved

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II. Comprehension questions

1 What was D'Artagnan thinking when he left his friends at Blois?
2 Why did D'Artagnan think the driver of the carriage had been in the war?
3 Why did D'Artagnan borrow the lady's clothes?
4 Why did D'Artagnan blush?
5 Who was Percerin making suits for?
6 Why did Percerin say *"genius is a curse not a blessing"*?
7 What did Fouquet mean when he said that their heads would be grinning down on the people from the gates of the city?
8 Why was Fouquet annoyed with Percerin?

III. Topics for discussion

1 Do you think it is wise to pick up strangers? Why? If not, why not?
2 What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of being somebody's favourite, e.g. a teacher's?
3 What do you think happened after D'Artagnan left Fouquet and Percerin together? Do you think Percerin told Fouquet what D'Artagnan wanted?

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IV. Activities

A i) ***Work in pairs. The following extract is from a dialogue between D'Artagnan (D) and the Countess de la Vallière (V). Fill in the missing words and then look at page 57 of the story to check your answers.***

D: I don't know how to thank you, **1)** ..... .

V: I only hope I did the **2)** ..... thing. Although I **3)** ..... say you don't look like a traitor.

D: I'd like to **4)** ..... I am not, Countess.

V: You'd like to think you are not. Well, I hope you are not going to put your **5)** ..... through my heart. That would be most **6)** ..... . So who are you, sir?

D: I am **7)** ..... of the King's Guard at the Palace, D'Artagnan at your **8)** ....., My Lady.

V: At the Palace? Monsier D'Artagnan! It is indeed a **9)** ..... to meet you at last. How very **10)** ..... this day has been. My **11)** ..... has told me so much about you in her letters.

D: Is that so?

V: In fact, she talks about very little else, apart from the King who seems to have taken a **12)** ..... to her. More's the pity!

ii) ***Work with a partner. One of you is D'Artagnan and the other is the Countess. Learn your part from the dialogue in Ex. A i) by heart and practise it at home. Act it out in the next lesson.***

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B ***You are Louise and you are living at court. Write a letter to your mother telling her how you feel about life at the palace, the King and D'Artagnan. Use the plan below.***

Plan – Informal letter

Dear Mother,

Introduction

Paragraph 1: Ask about health of family, news of home.

↓

Main Body

Paragraphs 2 – 3: Describing life at court and what it is like to be the King's favourite. Louise's feelings for D'Artagnan.

↓

Conclusion

Paragraph 4: Closing remarks: *I miss being at home with my family, and feel so lonely here in spite of all the people who live here.*

Your loving daughter,

Louise

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ISBN 978-1-84325-668-7

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