



The Count of Monte Cristo

Alexandre Dumas



About the author

Alexandre Dumas (1802–1870) is probably the most widely read of all French writers, best known for *The Three Musketeers* and for this story, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a close second. These two world famous books were both written in the same year, 1844, and translated into English two years later.

As a child Dumas loved adventure stories and this love came through later in his own writing. He first became famous in literary circles with his play *Henry III and His Court*, which was first performed in 1829. He went on to write over 1200 books, although many of these were the result of his writing factory, where writing apprentices worked to flesh out his ideas. Nevertheless, nearly all are clearly the result of his imagination and sense of storyline.

Dumas made a huge amount of money during his life but spent it all, on a country estate which he called Monte Cristo, on mistresses and on less successful businesses than writing.

Summary

Edmond Dantes is on the verge of adult life. He has just been made captain of a ship and is about to marry his beautiful fiancée, Mercedes. But he has enemies who envy him. And he has been foolish. At the dying request of the previous captain of his ship, the *Pharaoh*, he has carried a letter to the exiled Napoleon who has in turn given him a letter addressed to someone in Paris.

Edmond's enemies denounce him to the local judge, Villefort, who recognises the name on the letter as his father's and is terrified that he will be linked with plots against the monarch. He sends Edmond to the Chateau d'If, a prison where men go and never return.

After some time he makes contact with another prisoner, Faria, who has made a secret pathway under the prison. They meet regularly. Faria teaches Edmond about many things, and tells him about the Spada treasure on the island of Monte Cristo.

Faria dies and Edmond sees his chance. He changes places with the dead Faria, is thrown into the sea and rescued by a smuggling ship. He finally makes it to Monte Cristo and finds the treasure.

He returns to Marseilles a rich man, to find Mercedes at the home of his dying father. The novel ends happily, with Edmond and Mercedes sailing out of the harbour on his new boat.

Chapters 1–3: It is 1815. First Officer Edmond Dantes brings the *Pharaoh* back to the port of Marseilles. The captain of the ship, Leclerc, has died on board. Obeying Leclerc's last order, Edmond has stopped at the island of Elba, where Napoleon is, and brought a letter that he must take to Paris. Morrel, the owner of the ship, makes Edmond captain and gives him a month to marry Mercedes, his beautiful fiancée, and go to Paris. Danglars, a fellow seaman, and Caderousse, Edmond's neighbour, are jealous of Edmond's success. So Danglars makes a plan. He writes a letter to Judge Villefort saying that Edmond is working for Napoleon's cause. On the day of his wedding, Edmond is taken by soldiers to see Villefort.

Chapters 4–6: Villefort soon finds that Edmond was only foolishly loyal to his captain and decides to let him go. But just as Edmond is about to leave, the judge sees that the letter is addressed to Noirtier, his own father. Terrified, Villefort burns the letter and promises Edmond to set him free later but has him taken to the Chateau d'If, a prison on an island near the port of Marseilles. Stunned, Edmond insists on seeing the governor, and is soon taken to the dark cells underground. Some time later, a visit of the chief officer of prisons brings Edmond some hope. But the prison book says that Edmond is a dangerous follower of Napoleon and the officer orders that nothing be done about him.

Chapters 7–9: Weeks pass. One evening Edmond hears noises behind the wall of his cell and tries to make a hole in the wall. On the other side is Faria, a prisoner who is trying to dig his way out of the prison. Faria is a wise man and becomes Edmond's mentor. Edmond learns a lot from him. But Faria is ill and knows he will die. He tells Edmond about a treasure hidden on the island of Monte Cristo. It is the treasure of the Spada family, which has been hidden there since Cesare Borgia tried to seize it. The



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directions to get to it have come down to Faria through his friend, Prince Spada, who never found them hidden inside a family prayer book. After Spada's death, Faria had accidentally found the paper and set it on fire, but had been able to reconstruct the text. This had been just when Faria had had to abandon Italy due to the dream he shared with Napoleon and for which he was put in prison – the dream of making Italy one country.

Chapters 10–12: Time passes and Edmond keeps learning from Faria. After some time, Faria gets worse and dies. Edmond realises that only dead men leave the prison. He carries Faria's body to his own bed, covers him with his bedclothes, and takes Faria's place in the cloth bag that will soon be taken away. The guards tie a stone to his feet and throw him to the sea. Using Faria's knife Edmond frees himself from bag and stone. He is later rescued by the *Young Amelia*, starts working on board, and sails past the island of Monte Cristo. After a short stay in Livorno, the *Young Amelia* has to sail to Monte Cristo for a meeting with other smugglers.

Chapters 13–15: After the meeting Edmond explores the island and pretends to have an accident and be unable to move. The captain is reluctant to leave him there, but finally agrees to come for him a week later. Edmond finds the treasure. He keeps a few gold rings and hides the treasure again. Back in Livorno, he tells the captain of the *Young Amelia* that he has inherited a small fortune, gives presents to the crew and goes to Genoa. There he buys a small boat. He sails on his own to the island and hides the treasure in a secret compartment on the boat. Thence he heads to Marseilles, where he is welcomed at the Customs as a rich man. He arrives at his home just before his father dies, and leaves Marseilles with Mercedes.

Background and themes

Dumas grew up in France at the time of Napoleon's rise to pre-eminence in Europe. In the year of Dumas's birth, Napoleon was made Consul for life, and eight years later the French Empire reached its furthest extent. The soon-to-come massing of enemies, however, led to his abdication and exile to Elba in 1814. But he was still popular in France and in 1815 he re-conquered the country in a matter of days. 100 days later, his final defeat at the battle of Waterloo led to his permanent exile on the island of St Helena where he died in 1821.

Society and justice: In this version the novel explores the idea of human justice, unfair punishment and final reward. The main characters are clear-cut heroes or villains and the reader is led to expect fate or divine justice to redress the unfairness of human society.

Power and powerlessness are also explored in both the consequences for citizens of political struggle and the treatment of individuals in line with their fortune.

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–3

Before reading

- Puzzle:** Give students a copy of the following text. In groups or as homework they solve the puzzle:
In these chapters you are going to meet Danglars, Morrel and Caderousse.
 - One is the owner of the Pharaoh, the ship where Edmond Dantes is First Officer; another is the seaman in charge of the goods on the ship; the third is Edmond's father's neighbour.
 - One of the men asks Edmond's father for money; another speaks with Edmond about Napoleon; the third man doesn't like to take orders from Edmond.
 - We know that the owner of the ship likes Edmond and makes him captain.
 - We also know that the man who asks Edmond's father for money doesn't work on the Pharaoh; that Danglars and Caderousse tell the government lies about Edmond.
 - We don't know where Danglars lives.

Students find the answers to these questions:
What do Danglars, Morrel and Caderousse do in these chapters?
Who is the seaman?
Who is the neighbour?
Who is the owner of the Pharaoh?

If necessary, help students to make a chart (see Answer key) to help them to work out the answers.

After reading

- Check:** Check students' answers to activity 1.
- Discuss:** Ask students: *How old are Edmond and Danglars? Do you think age is one of the reasons why Danglars doesn't like Edmond? Do people like working with younger people as their boss? What other reasons may he have for hating him?*
- Research and artwork:** Students use the map on page viii. They estimate the approximate number of kilometres that the *Pharaoh* sailed under Edmond's orders. They draw the route on the map and search the Internet for pictures to make an illustrated version of it. The maps are displayed on the walls of the classroom.
- Role play:** Divide the students into groups of four. They take the roles of Mercedes, Edmond's father, Danglars and Caderousse and role play the conversation they have immediately after the soldiers take Edmond.



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Chapters 4–6

Before reading

- 6 **Write:** Tell students: *What do you think European prisons were like in the early nineteenth century? Look at the cover of the book. Write a paragraph describing how you imagine the inside of the Chateau d'If and the prisoners' lives.*

After reading

- 7 **Check and research:** Students compare their ideas in activity 6 to the description in the book. They may search the Internet for videos or images of the film or any other picture of the prison.
- 8 **Discuss:** Remind students of the following line from this section '*On a ship, the last request of an officer is an order.*' Ask them what the last request of Edmond's captain was (to take a secret letter) and remind them that taking the letter was against the law. Then divide the students into small groups to discuss this question: *Is it right to break the law if you are obeying an order?*
- 9 **Artwork:** Divide the class into four groups. Each makes a drawing for a four-picture strip cartoon of this section. They draw Edmond and Villefort, Edmond on the boat with the soldiers, Edmond in his room at the Chateau d'If and Edmond with the chief officer of prisons. They can write a 2-sentence caption or two bubbles with the characters' words or thoughts in each picture. The cartoon must be a brief synthesis of the section.
- 10 **Write and role play:** Ask students: *Do you think Villefort really planned to let Edmond go later that evening?* Students write and role play an episode in which Villefort decides to send Edmond to the Chateau d'If. The text may be a monologue or a dialogue with a character that the students create.

Chapters 7–9

Before reading

- 11 **Guess:** Tell students: *In this section Edmond needs to make a sharp tool. What do you think he needs it for? How he can make it if he only has a bed, a table, a chair and a water pot?*

After reading

- 12 **Discuss:** Tell students: *Imagine you are Edmond. What would you like from Faria, his knowledge or his information about the treasure? Is knowledge more valuable than money? Why? Does it depend on the circumstances?*
- 13 **Artwork:** Students work in pairs. Tell them: *Make a plan of Edmond's room and write what is around it. Include the door, the window, the narrow room, the courtyard, the open pathway, the rock and the governor's house.* Pairs compare their plans and discuss how they think Edmond could escape from there.

- 14 **Research:** Students search the Internet for the scene in the film in which Faria gives Edmond the map and dies (you can alternatively role play the scene in class). They compare it to the same events in the book and make notes of the details in the book that aren't in the film. Using the information in the book, students rewrite this segment of the film and act it out.

Chapters 10–12

Before reading

- 15 **Guess:** Tell students: *These are lines from this section: 'The old man has gone to look for his treasure. I hope that he has a good journey!' (page 27). What do you think is happening? How do you think what is happening will help Edmond to escape?*

After reading

- 16 **Discuss:** Remind students of Edmond's words when he sees Faria's body in a bag – '*Alone! I am alone again!*' (page 28) – and have them debate this question: *Why do we cry when somebody that we love dies? Do we cry for his/her death or do we cry for our loneliness?*
- 17 **Write:** Students write the story that Edmond told the Captain of the *Young Amelia* about how he lost his ship in the storm. They vote for the best story.
- 18 **Group work:** Students read the last two sections of Chapter 12 and draw the route of the *Young Amelia* on the map they made in activity 4 or on the map on page viii. Then they discuss whether Edmond's trips on the *Young Amelia* covered more kilometres than his return from Civitavecchia on the *Pharaoh*.
- 19 **Artwork:** Students look at the pictures in the book and read page 34, and design a WANTED poster offering a reward.

Chapters 13–15

Before reading

- 20 **Group work:** Students read the headings of the chapters and predict how the story will end: how Edmond finds the treasure and takes it out of the island, how he goes back to Marseilles and what he does there.

After reading

- 21 **Write:** Students write a different version of Chapter 15, in which all is a dream and Edmond awakes, still at the Chateau d'If. Students discuss how the idea of 'justice' in the book becomes different with this different ending.
- 22 **Discuss:** Divide the class into two groups and have them debate the following: *Edmond should share his treasure with the men on the Young Amelia, who saved his life and took him to the island.*

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.