



By Gary Mitchell

LOWDOWN DEALINGS IN THE LOW COUNTRIES

THE MUSKETEERS GO DUTCH

1635. Officer of the King's musketeers D'Artagnan was surprised to find arch-rival Cardinal Richelieu already within the audience chamber.

"Your Eminence", he greeted, bowed, carefully noted the map spread out on the table...

▲▲ *His Majesty will be here shortly." Though old, the wily Cardinal had lost none of his acumen. "Ah, sire", he bowed to his sovereign, King Louis XIII, though in reality, it was he who held the keys to the kingdom.*

"D'Artagnan!" cried the King, ignoring his minister. "We have a mission for you. This war across Europe ... it's as if it's been going on for thirty years".

"An excellent name for it, sire", D'Artagnan suggested.

"And we need to end it", the Cardinal gruffed. "Spain is becoming too powerful. This Spanish and Hapsburg alliance is a disaster for France".

"Do we not have allies?" D'Artagnan wondered why he was being let into the realms of grand strategy. "The Swedish? The Dutch?"

"Sustained by our money", the King expressed his displeasure.

"Which is where you come in", the Cardinal outlined the mission.

Alexandre Dumas' *Three Musketeers* have been buckling their swash now for well over a hundred years - including a recent 'lacepunk' movie (complete with airships) and a BBC

TV post-watershed adaptation. This new adventure takes place in between the two Dumas novels, *The Three Musketeers* and *Twenty Years After*.

We'll skip over how d'Artagnan manages to persuade Aramis out of retirement in a monastery, Porthos from his wealthy mistress, and Athos from recent retirement to his country mansion. Probably, wine and the prospect of reliving the adventure of the 'good old days' would be enough (it seems to work at most wargames clubs). However, being older, the Musketeers might just now be inconspicuous enough to be able to cross the Spanish Netherlands (modern day Belgium) with-

out detection, with a secret payment for the Dutch to keep them in the war against the hated paella-eating, sangria-drinking hombres from south of the Pyrenees.

SCENARIO

The musketeers and their party are disguised as 'Parisian silk traders' (sic), and have a wagon loaded with goodies, including a secret compartment in which the gold is hidden. This is pulled by horses. As well as our four mounted heroes, there should be four 'servants', who are actually musketeers in disguise.

Now, whatever rules you use, the famous 'Four Musketeers' will be rated 'Good', other four musketeers ratings will be randomly generated - now we come to the rub. The other musketeers aren't all they seem. Dice before play to obtain the rating for each (and keep secret - or get a GM to assign):

1, 2 = Someone wants you to fail! The character supplied is a 'poor fighter'.

3, 4 = They were looking for volunteers, weren't they? The character supplied is an 'average fighter'.

5 = The fighter supplied is a 'good fighter', a grizzled veteran who has a personal reason to hate the Spanish (maybe his girlfriend went off with a bullfighter?).

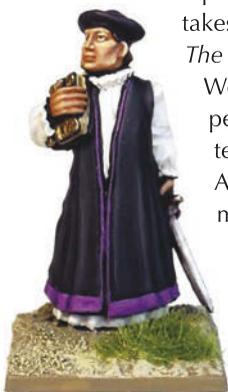
6 = On the way, it turns out that this musketeer isn't all he seems. He is, in fact, a girl in disguise (almost certainly to be played by Kiera Knightley)!

If you rolled a 6, roll again:

1,2 = She's a tough secret agent of the Cardinal's, placed to keep an eye on the gold. Count as a 'good fighter', the equal of any musketeer.

3,4 = She's a genuine 'Marianne' tomboy. Tough, but will only count as an 'average fighter', the plucky girl who wants to kick bad guys' butt.

5,6 = She's a complete 'dollymop'. She will just stand around screeching in a fight; only joined up to find her 'true love', Jean Forgeron ('John Smith'). Laughter all around; this is a name frequently given to maidens by musketeers wishing to maintain their anonymity on the morning after the night before, the cads!



A local priest.



All will be armed with a sword, pistol, and musket. Having decided your team, set up your wagon and escort at one side of the table. You have to get across, long side to long side, to the safety of some friendly Dutch troops. There should be a road to follow (that doesn't speed movement of the slow wagon), and assorted seventeenth-century terrain – woods, a farm, but very few hedges, as it's all pre-enclosure.

If that sounds simple, it's not. Someone has blabbed about the musketeers' mission, deliberately or otherwise! Depending on how many players you have, the following teams can be deployed to try and seize the gold for their own nefarious purposes. Who knows – they might even team up to share the spoils.

1. THE GANGSTERS. A bunch of Parisian cutthroats and brigands – 'land pirates', if you will – led by the dastardly (and ironically-named) François Hollande. He will count as a 'good fighter' and will be armed with sword and a brace of pistols. With him will be his lady, the femme fatale Carla Bruni (rated 'good'), armed with a brace of pistols and a dagger. They will have with them 1D6 +1 minions, rated 'average', armed with muskets, swords and a pistol (each). All will be on foot. They will start on the left of the line of march, 2D6 inches along, and arrive on Turn 1 plus 1D5.
2. THE IMPERIALISTS. The hated Spanish led by their ruthless commander, Don Fernando Torres. He will count as a 'good fighter' and will be armed with sword and a brace of pistols. With him will be 1D6 troopers, rated 'good', armed with muskets, swords and a pistol (each). All will be mounted. They will start on the right of the line of march, 2D6 inches along, and arrive on Turn 1 plus 1D5.
3. THE RENEGADE DUTCH. Not the 'good' Dutch, but a group of renegades, hoping to steal the gold and retire to the anonymous fleshpots of Amsterdam. They are led by their ruthless commander, Hertz van Rental. He will count as a 'good fighter' and will be armed with sword and a brace of pistols. With him will be 1D6 troopers, rated 'good', armed with muskets, swords and a pistol (each). All will be mounted. They will start on the left of the line of march, 4D6 inches along, and arrive on Turn 1 plus 1D5.
4. LOCAL VILLAGERS. 1D6 peasants, all armed with 'improvized peasant weapons', plus two 'dollymops'. Dice for their skills (as above, for the 'grunt' musketeers). They will start in the centre of the table and be on foot, and will probably wait until the other groups have killed each other before making a move.
5. THE GOOD DUTCH. The 'cavalry coming over the hill', concerned by the musketeers' late arrival. N.B. They will only appear if there is a spare player. They are led by the swashbuckling Commander 'Iron' Robbin van Persie. He will count as a 'good fighter' and will be armed with sword and a brace of pistols. With him will be 1D6 +1 troopers, rated 'good', armed with muskets, swords and a pistol (each). All will be mounted. They will start on the right of the line of march, 4D6 inches along, and arrive on Turn 1 plus 1D5 +3.



The dastardly Hertz van Rental.

And that's pretty much it! Whatever rules you use, allow for female distraction to add to the flavour of the game; maybe deduct one in close combat, but give a movement bonus to allow for male distraction and hesitation? But – do remember – the female of the species is deadlier than the male!

RULES AND FIGURES

We're clearly talking about a skirmish game, here, so any set of 'Pirate' or 'Renaissance' skirmish rules to your preference will suffice (Richard Bradley of Tyneside Wargames Club has a generous free set of 'Pike and Shot' rules, at <http://tinyurl.com/qhb7yvt>). Greg Hallam's *And One For All* from Eureka Miniatures supports their excellent 28mm range, and aims to recreate the feel of the swashbuckling Dick Lester films of the 1970s by encouraging you to perform swashbuckling 'actions': <http://tinyurl.com/p3lvh3>. Eureka also provide campaign and supplement rules to keep the adventure going, and Redoubt Enterprises also do an excellent range of miniatures in the same scale.

Another free set is 'Gold, Swashbucklers and Pirates' (at <http://tinyurl.com/mqtqoqy>), which are rules for 'historical gang warfare'; they're pretty easy to grasp and can be humorous. *Cutlass!* from Black Scorpion (<http://tinyurl.com/olnu6nr>) would also be suitable, as would *Once Upon A Time In The West Country* and *Witchfinder General*. The latter has a supernatural component (useful for a literary 'fantasy'), and can accommodate 40-60 figures per side. *Flashing Steel* (like the 'Flashing Blade' TV series I remember from my boyhood) from Ganesha Games is also highly rated; with up to fifteen-a-side, it has a campaign and game generator. The new Osprey pirate set, *On The Seven Seas*, also looks to be useable for small actions, and *Donnybrook* (an Irish word for a bar fight) from The League Of Augsburg is a rules set that also comes recommended, but are relatively pricey. Nice artwork though. **WS&S**

So, off you go – "All for one and one for all!"

Models by Wargames Foundry and Warlord Games.