

Contemporary 'Count' offers more than swordplay

ERIN LERTEN
Staff Writer

Alexandre Dumas' legacy of swashbuckling tales endures in scores of film and TV adaptations. Thirty-plus versions of "The Three Musketeers" have been made, about 20 of "The Count of Monte Cristo," and two in one year alone (1998) of "The Man in the Iron Mask."

At the same time, the writer's archaic style has lost the readership of many adolescents, and recent movie adaptations have struggled to freshen up his tales of 19th century heroism with kung fu and comedy.

A new version of Dumas' revenge tale "The Count of Monte Cristo" seeks to abandon such campiness in favor of the old-fashioned qualities that once made the writer a childhood favorite: swordplay, hidden treasures, sneering villains and damsels in distress.

Adaptations of "The Count of Monte Cristo" include a 13-hour BBC miniseries from 1964 and an eight-hour French miniseries from 1998, which starred Gerard Depardieu. But short of that sort of time commitment, feature films have to cut significantly from the 1,100-page book. The latest version drops a subplot about the Count's vigilante exploits and eliminates the character of Haidee, another love of the title character.

Makers of the most recent "Count of Monte Cristo" film found that adapting Dumas for a contemporary audience did require more than staying true to the text. To some extent, the gimmick in this film version may be its feminist tilt.

Jim Caviezel stars as Edmond Dantes, a wrongfully imprisoned man who escapes to seek revenge after 13 years and learns that his true love, Mercedes (Dagmara Dominczyk,) has married the man who betrayed him.

Dumas is notorious for his

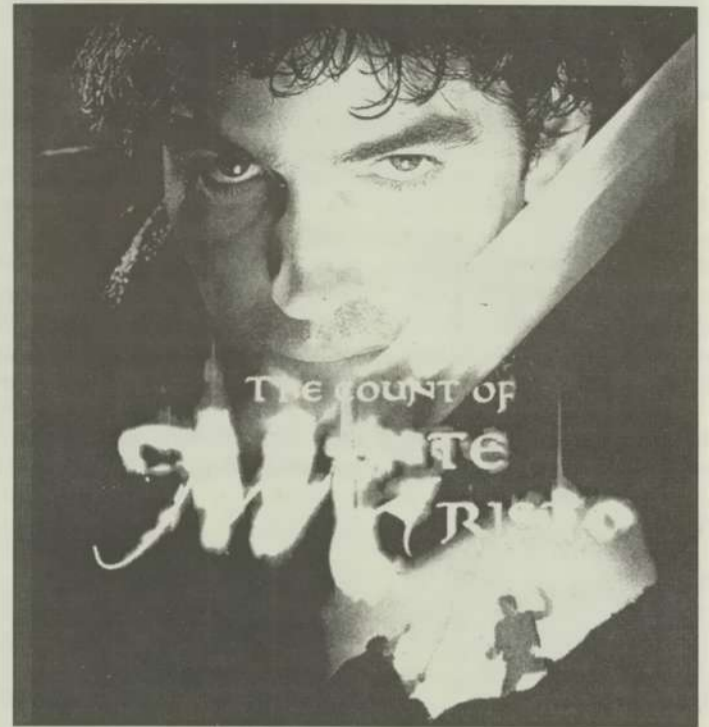
dainty female characters, powerless women who seem like mere prizes for the manly heroes.

Modern moviegoers would chuckle at such a prudish heroine, Dominczyk said in an interview with The Canadian Press, which is why director Kevin Reynolds ("Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves") gave her room to play with the part.

"We had to embellish the romance," Reynolds said in the same interview. "For it to work you had to feel like these two were in love. If you don't, you're not going to feel like he had his heart ripped out or understand his motivation."

Dominczyk said she thought the story of betrayal, revenge and murder also needed a character who embodied purity of heart.

"It's such a dark tale and deals with brutal emotions and the plot is twisted, so Mercedes has to be the relief from all the testosterone," she said. "But she's not an inno-



Internet photo

cent bystander either. . . . She has a backbone."

The movie also features a happier ending than the book, and there are fewer killings -

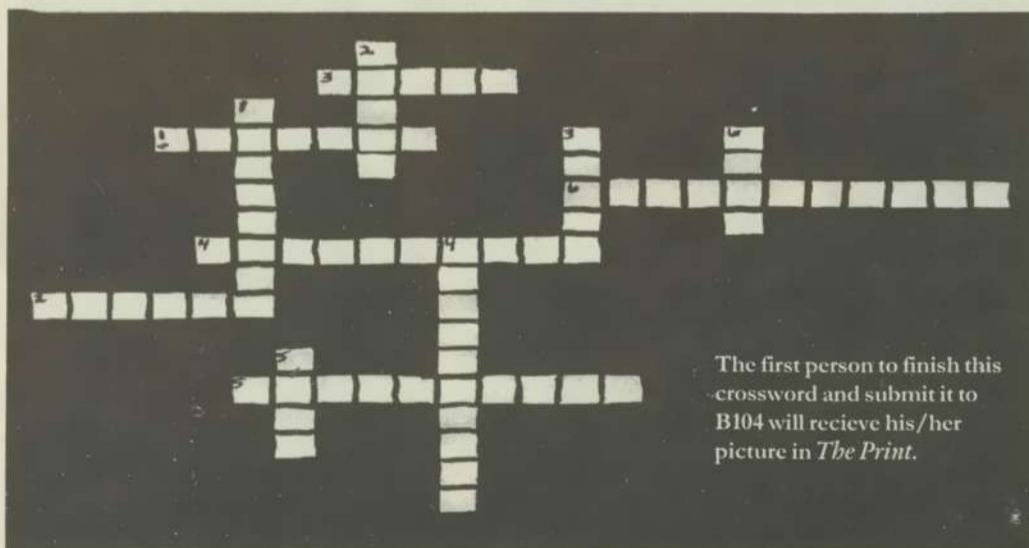
which renders the Edmond character more likable.

"The Count of Monte Cristo" is rated PG-13 and is now playing at theaters everywhere.

Poet's Corner

Oh, happy day when the flowers are in bloom,
When the sky is full of sunshine, no gloom,
Oh, happy day when the wind carries a breeze,
When the ships carry over the seas,
Oh, happy day when it rains to help things grow,
When the children's faces are all aglow,
Oh, happy day when the snow hits the ground,
When children are sleeping oh so sound,
Oh, what a happy day it will be,
When we are asleep in each other's arms just you and me.

Salena De La Cruz



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2. New dean of college services.
3. Color of new public safety uniforms.
4. New club reviewed by Salena De La Cruz.
5. Read your future.
6. Where to sell your stuff.

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1. Volleyball player of the week in issue 3.
2. News editor of *The Print*.
3. Who won the civil war?
4. Well known in the sports department.
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