And the blades go round (again)

by Ofb23

Summary

First let me explain... one morning I woke from a dream with a vision of d'Artagnan as a helicopter pilot, (it was a pleasant dream) and the basis of this story plotted out. A couple of weeks, and a couple of drafts later and it turned into this. Basically a modern AU stealing the characters from the Musketeers but little else, and d'Artagnan flies a helicopter.

Notes

Modern AU bearing little similarity with the plot of any of The Musketeers. You have been warned!

See the end of the work for more notes.
much. Like this morning. D’Artagnan was sat, his leg protesting his position on the floor as he stared at his platoon photo and remembered exactly why he didn’t touch the boxes. That the memories were still raw, still painful, a wound that had barely scabbed over that bled with the slightest pressure.

The text was a summons for an early flight. It broke through the pain, allowed him a legitimate reason to stuff the memories back into the box, to hide the photos from view.

The directive gave him little time to shower and make himself presentable. The sharp suit, his current uniform, was very different from the army fatigues, the gun he was required to wear more familiar. The dagger and back up gun strapped to his legs weren’t required but were comforting and familiar. He glanced in the mirror once, assessing the black smudges under red-rimmed eyes, sharp cheekbones a reminder of the bare fridge. He tried for a bland smile, watching his reflection grin mockingly back.

The low, sprawling Musketeer building, named after the avenue it stood on, reflected the bright morning sun in its glass and steel design, and d’Artagnan kept his sunglasses on as he paid the cabbie and walked towards the hangers at the side of the building. He spent an enjoyable fifteen minutes waking up his baby, the twin engine, black and chrome helicopter that he didn’t, of course, own, but made his current situation much more pleasant. He glanced down at his phone when it beeped, a summoning to the boss’s office. He lingered a few moments more, polishing the already gleaming fuselage before dragging himself away. He liked flying; the elite of the population he flew he cared less about.

The meeting rooms were a two minute walk from the hangers, five minutes for him, and he griped under his breath about making the cripple walk to the meeting point when the clients could just as easily meet him at the hanger. Of course, his comfort was far below the needs of the clients, as had been pointed out time and again throughout training.

He reached the door and took a moment to compose himself, straightening the already straight tie and sneaking a first glimpse at the clients. Three men, one standing at the window looking out on the industrial park beyond, brown hair curling at the collar of his dark grey suit. Two were sitting down, large frames filling small, uncomfortable looking, armchairs chatting easily. He knocked as he walked in, his eyes drawn to the man standing by the window who turned on him with a cold, hard glare.

‘Who are you?’ The voice was snobbish, clipped to the point of rudeness. A tone he was certainly growing used to.

D’Artagnan didn’t blink, unconsciously pulling himself up to his full height. ‘Your pilot.’

‘No, you’re not.’ Came the instant reply. Cool blue eyes regarded him in stony silence for a moment. ‘Where’s Richards?’

D’Artagnan shrugged insolently, knowing he shouldn’t react but not able to stop the answer anyway. Military life had done its best to knock his impetuous nature, but as his captain had constantly griped, it had never completely succeeded ‘How should I know?’

‘Go away.’

‘Athos!’ The critical tone was enough to tear the man’s cold gaze from d’Artagnan, who hadn’t bothered to break eye contact till then. He might always be at a physical disadvantage now, but he would never turn away from danger.
The man who had spoken was on the closest armchair, though he stood as he talked. He was taller, slighter, warm eyes and an easy smile contrasting sharply with the coldness of his companion. He wore a suit, but whereas the first man’s was well worn, even a little scruffy around the edges, this one was clearly high end, tailored. D’Artagnan could only spectate as a silent conversation followed the reproach, till Athos sighed and stalked past him to the door.

The third man, sat in silence till then, unfolded his large frame, stepped forward in his departure. ‘Sorry ’bout that.’ He offered. He was bigger in every respect from the other two: height, muscle and smile; his suit well made, the bright blue contrasting with his dark skin. He automatically noted that the cut of all three suits made to accommodate the weapons at their hips, much like his own. ‘Athos doesn’t do well with change. He didn’t mean to be rude.’

D’Artagnan looked over at the departing back, allowing the sceptical look on his face though he didn’t bother commenting. He pulled the sleeves of his own jet black suit straight, running fingers over sharp creases. He wasn’t paid to form an opinion. Out loud, anyway.

‘I’m Aramis. He’s Porthos. The other one you know is Athos.’ Introductions made, the second man looked expectantly at d’Artagnan.

‘Fine. I’ll be ready to fly in 15 minutes.’ D’Artagnan knew he was being rude, but hadn’t been ready to be dismissed so early in the morning by a client. He’d flown many of the countries elite in the last month, and whilst many ignored him, or took to bossing him around none had been quite so rude. He turned away from the scrutiny of Aramis’s look to walk out, hiding a wince as pain flared in his wasted leg at the sharp turn. He wasn’t there to care, though, or to ask questions, or to chat with the ridiculously rich, and private clients. He was there to fly, he had been told on his first day, and that suited him just fine.

D’Artagnan didn’t often feel small. He had always been lean, even the specialist training in the army had only wrapped whip thin muscle around a tall frame. So often underestimated, he had surprised many with his strength and speed, and had never been beaten in a fight. Back when he had been fully functioning anyway. In the presence of his new clients, he suddenly felt smaller and he didn’t appreciate the feeling.

He had clocked the three who he had been ordered to fly around as military from the off, easy when you had spent a decade in the company of such men. They were all older than him, and as he watched them cross the tarmac towards his helicopter, he could see they had lost nothing of their military bearing.

‘Mr d’Artagnan.’ Aramis, who appeared to be the peacemaker of the group, hailed him in a friendly tone as they drew closer. He could guess what they had spent the last fifteen minutes doing.

‘Just d’Artagnan.’ He corrected, handing out the safety packs and watching them being placed on with practiced hands. As he had guessed, this wasn’t the first time they had been in a helicopter. He pulled open the door for the three men, the whirr of the rotors above ruffling hair.

‘Ok, just d’Artagnan.’ The smile didn’t change. ‘You know we’re fellow employees, not clients?’

D’Artagnan simply raised an eyebrow, wondering what difference it made, though it explained why they weren’t acting like his normal clientele, who usually insisted on d’Artagnan clipping on the safety packs for them even if they were perfectly capable. ‘You don’t have to open doors for us.’ The larger man, Porthos, answered the non-question.
It took a moment before d’Artagnan nodded, though it took longer still to translate to movement, to let go of the door and move around to his side of the helicopter, letting them get in and sort themselves out. He was well drilled in his duties, after all.

If he cared, he might have wondered what the three men did for the company. The Musketeers was a small, private firm catering for the private and security needs of the country’s elite. Of course, he wasn’t paid to ask questions. An early morning text, a change of flight schedule, d’Artagnan was there to fly, and only fly.

Running through the safety talk by rote, they were up in the air exactly 3 minutes later, cleared by air traffic control to take a path across the city, close but not quite over the city airport. D’Artagnan felt the familiar rush of adrenaline and excitement as he turned the helicopter south, relishing the sights before him in the large front windows. It made the job bearable, a reason to get up in the morning. An old colleague had persuaded him to get his helicopter pilot’s license years ago, and d’Artagnan knew he wasn’t being melodramatic when he thought it had probably saved his life.

His helicopter could hold five guests comfortably, but with the three men it felt crowded. Beside him Athos sat, no longer glaring but pale and holding onto his chair with a white knuckled grip. He appeared a little green and d’Artagnan felt the urge to hand him a sick bag, wondering if it was the flight or general travel sickness that was the problem. It wouldn’t be the first time someone had puked on a flight, and d’Artagnan did not relish the thought of the lingering smell or the clean up.

Behind him Aramis and Porthos were chatting, the easy going banter and occasional dig coming through on the shared radio. D’Artagnan mostly ignored it, let the words wash over him as he enjoyed the sights of the city spread before him. Athos was silent save for an occasional grunt when a question was aimed at him, but he mostly stared fixedly out of the window at a single point on the horizon.

Soon they were past the city, the view breaking into smaller suburbs, then surrounding villages before the grounds became mainly green; rolling hills, small copses of trees, a large river breaking up the fields. The shadow of the helicopter marked their way on the ground, the clear blue skies heralding the first proper day of summer. D’Artagnan was glad for his sunglasses though the windows were all heavily tinted.

‘Did we pull you away from another flight?’ It took a moment to realise that the question had been aimed at him, Aramis attempting to pull him into the conversation during a lull.

D’Artagnan replied in the negative. ‘I wasn’t due in till later.’

‘Sorry for the early morning then.’

D’Artagnan didn’t feel the need to tell him he had been up far earlier.

‘Army?’

‘Used to be.’

‘Medical discharge?’

Not a miracle observation. The limp was difficult to hide, after all.

‘You’ve not been with the company long.’

Suppressing irritation at the questions, d’Artagnan checked his first, rather rude answer, and attempted to play nice. After all, Aramis appeared to be just trying to be friendly. ‘A month.’
D’Artagnan confirmed. ‘What do you do?’ he added, trying to get the conversation away from himself.

‘We’re personal investigators.’

‘I didn’t know the company had personal investigators.’

‘The musketeers provide for all the security needs of their clients.’

D’Artagnan glanced in the mirror at Aramis, eyebrow raised as he asked ‘especially when they don’t want the police involved?’

Aramis grinned, clapping him on the shoulder. ‘Exactly.’ Feeling eyes on him, d’Artagnan looked over at Athos, looking away first from the intense look he found fixed his way.

Fifteen minutes after leaving the city, surrounded by endless countryside on all sides, d’Artagnan could just make out the beginnings of a large estate, their destination according to the co-ordinates he had received. Wrapped in a formidable brick wall enclosing manicured lawns and white marble fountains, a long sweeping driveway extended the half a mile from gates to house. In the last month d’Artagnan had visited many such estates, but they still stunned him.

The house itself was red brick, set out in a horseshoe design, the “H” marking his landing pad on the flat roof of the right arm. Four stories high, at least a dozen windows per arm; d’Artagnan wondered how many bathrooms such a house had. His flat would fit in one half of what looked like a stable block, situated to the left of the main house.

Automatically checking for obstacles and people, d’Artagnan couldn’t see anyone about, not even a gardener amongst the impressive flower beds. There were no cars visible on the sweeping driveway. Every large estate he visited there was always people about, cars parked in front of the house, workers hurrying about the place. Large estates meant people to manage it, work it, keep it ticking over as the owners enjoyed themselves. This place felt abandoned.

He landed dead centre on the red H, touching down with barely a bump, surprised when no one came out to greet them. There was usually some stiff looking major-domo ready to greet their employer home.

Recovering as soon as the feet were firmly settled on the roof, Athos turned to him, still using the radio mike as the engines shut down. ‘Stay here. We won’t be long.’

D’Artagnan nodded, automatically going through the checks as he shut down the engines, ignoring them as they got out and made their way to the entrance to the house. He did notice that all three of the men seemed to share his feeling of the house, pulling guns from their holsters as they walked to the door.

He got out to stretch his legs, walking around to check the helicopter still gleamed, wishing he had thought to fill a travel mug with coffee. He had no idea how long he would be here, and it felt a long time since breakfast. Checking his watch, d’Artagnan realised that it had been a long time since breakfast, and that as all he’d eaten was an apple, no wonder he was hungry. He’d been up for 6 hours already. Digging into a compartment under his seat he unearthed a bottle of water and cereal bar, and was just unscrewing the lid when the distinctive sound of automatic gunfire sounded somewhere below.
The flash back was instant, transporting him to another country, another roof, Taliban fighters targeting his platoon as they ran a daring mission to rescue Afghan children caught in the crossfire, the thump of bodies falling as they all wondered who had betrayed their secret task. He shook his head hard, dislodging the sensation of stinging gravel scraping his skin, concentrating on staying in the here and now. He gripped the gun two handed, wondering how it had got there, listening as the auto fire stopped, silence for only a moment until the distinctive pop pop of multiple hand guns filled the air, followed immediately by another short burst of automatic fire.

D’Artagnan restarted the helicopter’s engine on slow, automatically clocking the fuel level as way above half as the giant rotors built up to a gentle speed above him. He climbed back out, uncertain whether he should stay with the helicopter, a quick getaway if it was needed, or go and investigate and...

And what, his traitorous mind prodded, help? He was a cripple now, he couldn’t even run and the three men who he had just flown here were obviously all more than capable of handling themselves.

His instinct, though, was to follow the sounds of the gunfight below, never one to run away from a fight. The sounds of a door opening below decided his next move. From his perch on the roof he watched two men run towards the stable building. They were both heavily armed, obviously wishing to escape under the ruckus from the house, running with one eye over their shoulder as if expecting a pursuit. D’Artagnan sighted them, shooting the one with the machine gun first, not hesitating as he turned to the second, shooting him before he could realise the direction of the shot. Screams of pain filled the air as the sounds of gun fire continued unabated from the house. The three men he had flown here might all be perfectly capable, but if two men could escape whilst the gunfight carried on inside, d’Artagnan knew they had to be severely outnumbered.

D’Artagnan locked the helicopter doors, stopping anyone who might think of stealing his baby for an escape, turning to the door off the roof. Cautiously opening it, he entered in as much of a crouch as he could manage, checking right and left before leaning over the bannister of the stairs and sighting below. Whilst he might not be much help down below, he could at least stop anyone who tried to use another escape route.

The sounds were louder here, gunfire echoing up the enclosed stairway, the entryway to the house four flights below. He could hear indistinct shouts, cries, calls and wondered what on earth was going on, even as there were sounds of footfall on the stairs below. Placing himself back to a corner, d’Artagnan had the advantage from above to see a sharply dressed man, hair slicked back with so much gel his hair looked like an oil slick, hand gun and briefcase in hand as he started up the stairs. He sighted on the oily man but didn’t fire, waiting for a better angle. The man paid no attention upwards, watching over his shoulder instead, especially as the door below banged open again. Two floors above, d’Artagnan saw his pursuer before he did, Porthos trying to get a clean shot on the oily man even as he took the stairs two at a time, closing the gap. D’Artagnan had the perfect perch to watch oil man slow almost to a stop on the third landing, sighting down on Porthos with the handgun, a clear shot on an unsuspecting Porthos as he rounded the corner half a flight below. D’Artagnan beat him to it, shooting the oily man through the centre of his ugly green tie, watching the crisp white shirt beneath turn a clashing red as he crumpled to the ground. Porthos rounded the stairs, sparing the oily man a single look before looking up at d’Artagnan with a single, appreciative nod. D’Artagnan kept his gun trained downwards as Porthos took hold of the briefcase, briefly glancing at the contents, his face a curious picture of resignation and disgust. Whatever was in the suitcase was obviously a disappointment, as Porthos threw the case down. ‘Stay here, keep the exit clean.’ Porthos threw over his shoulder at d’Artagnan as he bounded back down the stairs.

Heart rate racing, breath coming in excited bursts, d’Artagnan felt the familiar rush of adrenaline
singing in his veins. Flying gave him a lift, but it was nothing like this, nothing like being part of the action, being part of a team.

His heart slowed, adrenaline rapidly depleting as cold reality took hold again. This wasn’t his team. The three men were strangers. This wasn’t like the photo he had held just that morning, the smiling group of lads he had been to hell with. He ruthlessly pushed away the sudden grief of the brutal reminder of all that he had lost that day in Afghanistan. Not just the physical loss, but the members of his unit, his friends. The men he had gone through training with. The men he had joked with, bantered with, trained with, lived with, ate with. The camaraderie, the trust, the companionship, the feeling of belonging. His identity.

This was just a pilot job. He was a nobody, there just to fly rich people around. He was never going to be part of something like that again. And, he savagely reminded himself, even as he kept a watch for more people on the stairs, it was better that way. He didn’t think he could survive the loss again.

The gunfire eventually slowed and finally stopped. D’Artagnan waiting in the silence, wondering what company protocol was if the three men he was meant to be flying back to HQ died. He didn’t remember that being covered in the handbook.

Below, the door banged opening, echoing in the stairwell. From his perch above, d’Artagnan had the advantage of being able to watch the three men start up the stairs, seeing no sign of any injuries on any of them. Given the sounds of the mini war below, that seemed nothing short of a miracle. Guessing they would want to fly as soon as they could, and knowing it would take him longer to walk back to the helicopter, d’Artagnan started back outside, tucking his gun back safely in its holster.

He was just getting to his door when he suddenly found himself being turned harshly around, flung bodily against the hard metal casing of his helicopter, head bouncing off the fusillade under the strength of the attack, a forearm pressed against his windpipe, spittle covering his face as a furious Athos pinned him to the helicopter. ‘You set us up!’

He would have loved to reply that Athos really didn’t mean that much to him, but air was a commodity he currently didn’t have access to.

‘You set us up and we walked into an ambush!’

‘Athos!’ Aramis sounded horrified though d’Artagnan noticed he didn’t try and get Athos off of him.

The accusing stare left his, locking on Aramis. ‘Two years, never had a problem, and his first day of work we fly into that.’

‘Why would he fly us here himself?’

‘To make sure we were at the right place at exactly the right time. Someone paid him to bring us here.’

‘Why would he save my life?’ Ah, there was the third of the trio, sounding far too calm for d’Artagnan’s liking, seeing as he now had black spots dancing mesmerisingly in his vision.

‘Let him go.’ Aramis, d’Artagnan abstractedly realised, could sound as cold, and as deadly as Athos when he wanted.

‘Athos.’ Porthos didn’t sound commanding, he sounded mildly exasperated. ‘Even if you’re right,
you kill him you’ll be the one in jail. And I don’t fancy coming to visit you every Tuesday.’

‘Athos!’

Whether it was Porthos’s calming words or Aramis’s commanding tone, the pressure finally relented on his throat and d’Artagnan automatically sucked in air, gasping in relief, choking on the sudden rush of oxygen, as his lungs fought desperately to drag it in. Without Athos’s forearm pressing him into the helicopter body, he sunk bonelessly to the ground, the need for air blanketing even the pain in his leg as it went from under him.

‘He sold us out.’

Athos’s shadow still loomed over him, but he didn’t sound so certain now. D’Artagnan thought about trying to stand but the need for air was taking too much of his attention to accomplish such a task. ‘He saved your life?’ he heard Athos add almost as an after thought. D’Artagnan had wondered when Athos would hear that, or was going to comment on it. ‘When?’

D’Artagnan finally looked up, watching the trio silhouetted by the bright sky behind them, massaging his throat where it felt like it was still being crushed.

‘In the stairwell, going after the third shooter with the briefcase. The one we thought might be drugs. Didn’t even see him stop and point at me till I looked up. Would have been too late to take a shot myself, but I didn’t need to.’

Athos looked down at d’Artagnan with a long, unreadable look before turning and stalking away. Aramis crouched down, reaching out to presumably look at his throat, but d’Artagnan had had enough. He blocked the arm long before it could reach his throat. ‘Don’t touch me.’ His voice sounded gruff.

‘I was just going to.’

‘Touch me and I’ll break your arm.’

Something in either his voice or his tone convinced Aramis to stop. He held up his hands in a placating manner as he rose gracefully back to his feet.

For a moment, no one spoke, the only noise, d’Artagnan realised, was his own breathing, loud in his ears, and the slow turn of the rotors above him.

‘Why are there two bodies down there?’ Athos’s voice startled him, not because he spoke, but because it wasn’t hard and accusing. D’Artagnan remembered the two men he’d shot; it felt like a long time ago though in reality they had only been there twenty minutes at most.

Three people again turned to stare down at him. ‘They were running away from the fire fight and they were armed.’ D’Artagnan finally said, coughing slightly when the words caught in his abused throat. He cleared it before adding ‘seemed the prudent thing to do.’

Aramis turned to Athos with a clear “see!” look.

Athos just shot him a withering one back and turned back to the entrance to the house.

‘Where’re you going?’ Porthos asked, back to mildly exasperated.

‘Maybe they’ve got something on them that will identify who they were and why they wanted us dead. Be ready to fly in five minutes.’ Athos replied from the door.
‘You just tried to strangle our pilot!’ Aramis yelled after him.

Athos paused, hand on the handle, for a moment studying d’Artagnan across the roof. ‘Seeing as none of us can fly, you better make sure he’s all right then.’ He said to Aramis. His voice was back to its snobbish best. ‘We need to get back to the city as fast as possible.’

‘Right.’ Aramis rolled his eyes as he and Porthos looked down on d’Artagnan. ‘think you can fly?’ He asked all business like.

‘You’ve already seen him in a bad mood, and I’m sure you don’t want a repeat.’ D’Artagnan wondered if they were all crazy, as Porthos laughed at his own joke.

The flight back was five minutes quicker than the flight out. D’Artagnan didn’t want to be in the helicopter any longer than he had to be with the three crazy men. He had demanded they all sit in the back, well away from him, even though it upset the weight distribution. He might have found the sight of them all crammed on the back seat funny at any other time. The flight was silent, and d’Artagnan guessed that Athos hadn’t completely decided to trust him as he quickly shut down any attempt to ask what he had found on the other two bodies.

D’Artagnan concentrated on flying, not caring that he was going faster, and taking sharper turns than he needed too, especially when he realised that Athos was an even worse passenger in the back of the helicopter than in the front, and looked moments away from vomiting the entire trip back.

He had never been so happy to land back at base, or to see the back of three passengers. And that included Mrs Thistlewaite and her five poodles, one of which had slobbered on his shoulder and licked at his ear the entire ride. Ignoring any attempts from Aramis and Porthos to speak in favour of shutting down the helicopter, Athos actually came to his aid, clearly relieved to be back on stable land he dragged the other two away to business before they could bother him too long.

D’Artagnan felt exhausted though it was barely noon, and he clocked out straight from the helicopter pad, arriving home ten minutes later. He paid the cab and hurried inside, his limp more pronounced as his leg protested everything that it had been put through. His throat competed with his leg for intensity of pain, and he found swallowing the ibuprofen more difficult than normal. He showered, but the steam wasn’t as much as a relief that he had hoped, his throat still feeling like glass had been dragged over it.

He dressed in old tracksuit bottoms and a loose neck t-shirt, completing the look with a zip up hoodie instead of his favourite sweater, not wanting the feel of anything near his neck. He caught sight of himself in the mirror as he hung up the used towel, almost disappointed that there was only a slight red mark on his neck to show what had happened. It didn’t seem enough.

He dug out a couple of bags of frozen peas from the freezer, not to eat but because he had long established their usefulness as ice packs. Collapsing on the sofa, surrounded by the debris of the box he had been attempting to unpack that morning, he settled one bag on his ankle where the worst pain in his leg was, and one across his throat, the ice a welcome relief, the rest of him feeling utterly spent.

He awoke to a dark apartment and a banging on the door. He sat up, dislodging the now warm bags of veg as the knock came again, loud enough to make one of his neighbour’s yell at the noise. For the sake of his rent he limped to the door, feeling achy and stiff and like he’d gone ten rounds in the ring in the mess.
Pulling open the door he obviously startled the knocker, who grinned brightly at him as he took in d’Artagnan in one long look. ‘You look like shit.’ Aramis concluded.

‘No thanks to your friend.’ His voice sounded even worse if possible, and all three men stood on the landing outside his door winced at the sound.

‘Yes, about that.’ Aramis said, none too subtly looking at Athos.

Athos cleared his throat, clearly uncomfortable at either being the centre of attention, or that it was clearly exactly what Aramis expected of him. ‘Yes, about that.’ He sounded even snobbier when he was embarrassed, d’Artagnan noted. ‘I… um… I wanted to apologise.’

D’Artagnan, who wasn’t feeling the slightest bit generous or that he owed them anything simply stared impassively at him.

Athos fidgeted under the gaze. ‘Yes, well, I’m sorry I jumped to conclusions. The wrong conclusions as it turned out.’

D’Artagnan was mildly proud that he didn’t add a “no shit” in there, but he managed to stay silent, watching the man shift again. ‘I was wrong, and I shouldn’t have… tried to strangle you… so… um. Sorry. Again.’

Possibly the most uncomfortable apology d’Artagnan had ever witnessed. ‘Fine.’ D’Artagnan said, not finding it within him to absolve the man of any guilt he might be feeling. His throat was currently on fire. He went to shut the door but found it blocked by a large foot.

‘We ordered dinner.’ Porthos told him, using his bulk far more gently than d’Artagnan would have imagined him capable to gain access to the flat. ‘Thought it was the least we could do in the circumstances.’

‘The least you could do is leave me alone.’ D’Artagnan told him irritably, but was roundly ignored.

‘Hope you like Chinese. Aramis thought the soup would be alright, if your throat was bad.’ Porthos carried on, making his way into the kitchen, followed by Aramis.

Athos took half a step in and stopped. D’Artagnan was too stunned by the sudden invasion of his space to do anything but watch as Porthos dumped the bags he had been carrying on the side in the kitchen then started going through the cupboards presumably looking for plates.

‘Do you know you haven’t got any crockery?’ he asked after looking in all three cupboards and drawers in the poky little kitchen.

‘I haven’t unpacked.’ D’Artagnan didn’t care that he sounded belligerent, they were invading his home.

‘You’ve lived here a month.’ Aramis commented, starting to empty cartons out of the bags onto the table.

‘So?’

Aramis looked up at him, then looked pointedly round the empty kitchen. ‘doesn’t look like you live here at all.’

‘Why are you here?’ D’Artagnan felt as weary as his voice suddenly sounded.
A clearing of a throat made him look round at Athos, who was still stood uncomfortably in the doorway. ‘We thought it only right that you should have all the details of today. And, also, because I really did want to apologise.’ He said softly, meeting and holding d’Artagnan’s look, the pleading softening the hard lines of his face.

D’Artagnan sighed, but finally stepped out of the way, shutting the door behind Athos as he moved towards the kitchen.

They ate at the table as it happened to come with four chairs and he only had the one sofa. D’Artagnan didn’t feel it necessary to mention it was the first time he’d even sat in one of the chairs. There was a ton of food, most of which was soon eaten, though d’Artagnan found he had to be grateful for Aramis’s thoughtfulness, as the noodle soup slipped much easier down his throat than anything else. He didn’t realise how hungry he was until he started to eat.

Talk was mostly put aside in favour of eating, but as that reached a natural conclusion, d’Artagnan noticed the others looking around in undisguised interest. ‘so, what did happen today?’ he asked, rather than wait for them to comment more on his empty flat. He noticed with interest as Athos shifted uncomfortably again, studying the egg fried rice he was eating intently.

‘Seems our regular pilot had a reason not to be there today.’ Porthos told him.

‘The pilot you’ve had for 2 years?’ D’Artagnan asked, trying for innocent enquiry and failing, not just because his voice sounded like he’d swallowed crushed glass. Aramis hid his smile behind a mouthful of food, though Athos still glowered at him.

‘Richards, it turns out, likes to gamble.’ Porthos continued.

‘A lot.’ Aramis added.

‘Ran up a huge bill with a well-known gang leader that he couldn’t pay.’

‘So, when he was offered money to fly us into an ambush he took it.’

‘we’ve recently managed to disrupt several trading routes for this gang.’ Porthos added as an aside.

‘They never do take kindly to having their profit margins decreased.’ Aramis agreed.

‘However,’ Porthos continued the tale, ‘he was also meant to come with us. seems the gang leader had had enough and planned to kill him as well.’

‘The guy on the stairs.’ D’Artagnan guessed.

Porthos nodded at the observation. ‘Two more of the gang thugs were trying to finish the job when we arrived at Richards’ place.’ He added.

‘We saved his life so that he can spend it rotting in jail.’ Aramis sat back looking satisfied.

‘And we managed to arrest a few more gang members as well.’ Porthos reminded him.

‘Not a bad day at all, really.’ Aramis concluded with a nod.

D’Artagnan had been looking back and forth between Aramis and Porthos as they spoke like he was following a tennis match. ‘Do they do that often?’ he asked Athos.

‘All the time.’
'And' Aramis continued over the aside, ‘you helped us. if you hadn’t been there, well…I think today might have turned out a lot differently. So, thank you.’

‘Thank you.’ Porthos echoed.

The two looked at Athos, who met d’Artagnan’s eye. ‘Yes, thank you.’

D’Artagnan couldn’t help it, he rolled his eyes as he laughed slightly. ‘You’re all crazy.’ He concluded.

‘Oh, we spoke to Treville.’ Porthos spoke casually, though he had just named the big boss of the security division, grinning broadly when d’Artagnan looked his way. D’Artagnan narrowed his eyes in suspicion. ‘You’re our new regular pilot.’

‘Oh no!’

‘Oh yes.’ Porthos said with glee.

Porthos and Aramis laughed at the glare d’Artagnan turned on them all, though it was Athos’s smile that really took him by surprise. ‘Welcome to the team.’

End Notes

if you got this far, thank you for taking the time to read this, I would appreciate hearing your thoughts and comments!

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