

The Maltese Falcon Study Guide

The Maltese Falcon by Dashiell Hammett

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Introduction

Readers who have never picked up Dashiell Hammett's 1930 detective novel *The Maltese Falcon* nor viewed the classic 1941 film adaptation, which follows the novel practically word-for-word, might feel a strong sense of familiarity when they first encounter the story. In this book, Hammett invented the hardboiled private eye genre, introducing many of the elements that readers have come to expect from detective stories: the mysterious, alluring woman whose love may be a trap; the search for an exotic icon that people are willing to kill for; the detective who plays on both sides of the law to find the truth, but who ultimately is driven by a strong moral code; and enough gunplay and beatings to make readers share the detective's sense of danger. Throughout the decades, countless writers have copied Hammett's themes and motifs, seldom able to come anywhere near his near-perfect blend of cynicism and excitement.

Hammett is considered one of those rare writers whose critical esteem has exceeded the small genre in which he wrote. A former detective himself, he wrote about the business with a sharp eye for procedural details, but he also showed a knack for engaging dialogue and understanding of the depths of the human soul. In his lifetime Hammett was considered an excellent detective writer, producing five novels, over eighty short stories, and numerous scripts for Hollywood and radio. Today he is respected as one of America's most important and original authors.

Author Biography

Born in 1894 in Saint Mary's County, Maryland, Samuel Dashiell Hammett grew up in Philadelphia and then Baltimore. He attended the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, dropping out at age fourteen to help his family financially. That led to a series of positions, including store clerk, newsboy, machine operator, and stevedore. Eventually, he became an operative for the Pinkerton Detective Agency, a nationwide franchise.

Hammett served as an ambulance clerk during World War I. During the war, he contracted influenza, which affected his health for the rest of his life. Returning to civilian life, he settled in San Francisco, the city that has become associated with him through his works. Hammett married Josephine Dolan, a nurse he met while recuperating, in 1921. From 1922 to 1926, most of his living was made writing copy for advertisements. He also worked part-time for the Pinkerton agency, when his health allowed.

His first short story was published in 1923. After that, he published detective stories regularly. His first novel, *Red Harvest*, was published in 1929, followed by *The Dain Curse* that same year, and *The Maltese Falcon* the year after. In all, he wrote only a handful of novels, concentrating his efforts on short stories and screenplays. The residual payments from radio and film spin-offs of *The Maltese Falcon* and his 1934 novel *The Thin Man* supported him financially.

In the mid-1930s, Hammett began an affair with famed playwright Lillian Hellman, who was to be his true love for the rest of his life. He divorced Josephine in 1937. He became active in the Communist party in the 1930s, when many other writers did. During World War II, Hammett, despite failing health and severe alcoholism, served as a sergeant in the Aleutian Islands, editing an army newspaper.

When he returned home after the war, his health was ruined, his writing was infrequent, and he was subject to persecution by the country's growing anti-Communist sentiment. In 1951, Hammett went to prison for five months when he refused to testify in a trial against four Communists charged with conspiracy. He was blacklisted and unable to sell his works; in addition, the Internal Revenue Service attached his income to collect back taxes owed. After his release, he taught in New York at the Jefferson School of Social Science. Hammett died of lung cancer in 1961.



Plot Summary

Chapter 1: Spade & Archer

The Maltese Falcon begins when a beautiful woman, who gives her name as "Miss Wonderly," comes into the Spade & Archer Detective Agency and who wants to have a man named Floyd Thursby followed. Miles Archer, one of the partners in the firm, agrees with a lecherous grin to help Miss Wonderly personally.

Chapter 2: Death in the Fog

Sam Spade is phoned in the middle of the night and told that Miles Archer has been shot dead. He goes to the scene of the crime and then phones his secretary, Effie Perine, and tells her to break the news to Archer's widow, Iva. When he returns to his apartment, he is met by two policemen, who ask if he knows anything about the death of Archer or the subsequent shooting of Thursby.

Chapter 3: Three Women

When Spade arrives at his office the next morning, Iva Archer is there. They are having an affair. Effie later tells him that Iva had been out when Effie arrived at her house in the middle of the night. Spade goes to Miss Wonderly's hotel, only to find her gone. There is a message from her when he returns to the office, telling him to come to a different hotel, where she is registered under the name "Leblanc."

Chapter 4: The Black Bird

At her hotel, Spade finds out that she is neither Wonderly nor Leblanc, but Brigid O'Shaughnessy. She acts frightened and begs Spade to help her. She admits to having been untruthful and says she met Thursby in Hong Kong and counted on him for protection against enemies who might try to kill her.

After stopping at his attorney's office to ask how far he can go in refusing to answer the police's questions, Spade returns to his office. There he meets Joel Cairo, who offers him five thousand dollars to find a statue of a bird. Before leaving, Cairo draws a gun to make Spade sit still while he searches the office.

Chapter 5: The Levantine

Spade takes the pistol from Cairo, knocks him unconscious, and then searches his pockets. When Cairo comes to, he asserts that he is still willing to pay five thousand



dollars for the statue. When Spade returns his belongings, Cairo aims the gun at him again and proceeds to search the office.

Chapter 6: The Undersized Shadow

That night, Spade goes to the Geary Theatre, having noted earlier that Cairo had tickets to the show there. He sees a young man following them. He sees the same youth later, on his way to meet Brigid, and loses him. When he mentions having met Cairo, she says that she must talk to him, but not at her place. They take a cab to Spade's apartment for a meeting. When they arrive, Iva Archer is waiting there for Spade and is upset when he says she cannot come upstairs with him.

Chapter 7: G in the Air

Waiting for Cairo, Spade tells Brigid a story about a man who, after a near-death experience, abandoned his wife and children, only to eventually settle down to the same kind of life with the same kind of family. Cairo arrives, and he and Brigid talk about how the black bird was smuggled out of Hong Kong. At one point she slaps him, and Spade intervenes. While he is standing between them, though, the doorbell rings.

At the door are Dundy and Polhaus, the two policemen who interrogated Spade on the night of Archer's murder. Spade refuses to let them in, until they hear Cairo inside screaming for help.

Chapter 8: Horse Feathers

The two detectives find that Cairo has blood on his head. Brigid accuses him of attacking her, and Cairo accuses her and Spade of holding him prisoner. Just as the policemen are about to take everyone to jail, Spade laughs and says that it has all been a joke. His claim that he did it to trick the policemen angers Dundy, who punches him in the jaw. Enraged, Spade refuses to answer any more questions and insists that they leave. Cairo leaves with them.

Chapter 9: Brigid

Alone with Brigid O'Shaughnessy, Spade lies and says the apartment is still being watched by the boy he saw before. He insists that she tell him the truth about what is going on: She reveals some facts about having been to Marmora and Constantinople, but he still accuses her of lying. She pulls him down against her for a long kiss.



Chapter 10: The Belvedere Divan

In the morning, Spade sneaks out before Brigid wakes up and, with the key he found in her purse, goes to her hotel, where he finds a receipt showing that she rented it the month before. Returning with breakfast, he puts the key back before she knows it was gone. He takes her back to her hotel and then goes to Cairo's hotel. Waiting in the lobby, he sits next to the young man who has been tailing him and talks cheerfully. The young man takes a threatening tone, but Spade tells him to tell G. to call him. He then humiliates the young man by bringing the house detective over and asking him, "What do you let these cheap gunmen hang out in your lobby for, with their tools bulging in their clothes?" After the young man has been forced to leave, Cairo comes in and says that he has been interrogated by the police all night but that he stayed with the same story Spade made up in his apartment.

Spade returns to his office and learns that G. has tried to reach him. Brigid is there, afraid because her apartment has been searched. Spade arranges for her to stay with Effie, his secretary.

Chapter 11: The Fat Man

Mr. Gutman calls Spade and tells him to come to his hotel. Iva Archer comes to Spade and says that she sent the police to his apartment, jealous of the other woman she saw. He tells her that lying to the police might be illegal and sends her to his lawyer, Sid Wise.

Gutman is a cheerful fat man who is very interested in finding the black bird. He is amiable, yet unwilling to tell Spade any details about the value of the bird or why it is interesting to so many people. At the end, the friendly conversation turns hostile. Spade stands up, throws his glass down so that it breaks, and shouts that he will not deal with Gutman unless he is told the truth.

Chapter 12: Merry-Go-Round

Spade's attitude in the elevator while leaving Gutman's suite reveals that his anger was just a bluff. He stops at Sid Wise's office and finds out what Iva said about her whereabouts on the night Archer was killed. At the office, Effie says that Brigid never arrived at her house. Spade hunts down the cabdriver who drove her. The cabdriver says that after picking up a newspaper, she asked to be dropped off at the Ferry Building.

Wilmer, the tough young man, is waiting for Spade at his office building. He leads Spade to Gutman's hotel at gunpoint, but before going into the suite, Spade takes his guns away from him.



Chapter 13: The Emperor's Gift

Gutman tells Spade the history of the Maltese falcon: how it was created as a present for Emperor Charles V in 1530 but disappeared in transit, showing up in various places over the course of centuries. He himself came on the trail seventeen years earlier, following it from one place to another, up to a Russian named Kemidov, in Constantinople. Gutman sent Brigid and Thursby to get it from the Russian, and they never brought it back. Spade says that he can get the bird for Gutman in a few days, but while they are talking, Gutman receives a secret message. He drugs Spade's drink, and as Spade loses consciousness, he feels Wilmer kick him in the face.

Chapter 14: La Paloma

Spade returns to his office where Effie tends to his bruise, and he offers to see her cousin, a history professor, about Gutman's tale about the Maltese falcon. He goes around to the hotels and cannot find Brigid or Gutman. At Cairo's hotel he has the house detective let him into the room, where he finds that the piece of the newspaper regarding ship arrivals is missing. Checking against another newspaper, he notes that the ship *La Paloma* is coming from Hong Kong, the last place the search for the falcon stopped. Effie returns to the office and says that she saw *La Paloma* ablaze in the harbor.

Chapter 15: Every Crackpot

Spade has lunch with Detective-sergeant Tom Polhaus and then meets with District Attorney Bryan, who tries out various theories about the murders, including one that has Thursby killed by rivals of the mobster he used to work for. Spade ends the interview by declaring that he will find the killers and give them to the authorities.

Chapter 16: The Third Murder

Spade meets with a prospective new client, talks to his lawyer about the district attorney, and then goes out to find Brigid. When he returns, he tells Effie that Brigid had been to the *La Paloma*, along with Gutman and Cairo. The ship's captain, Jacobi, met with them all in his cabin and then left the ship with them around midnight. As Spade is telling the story, a man comes into the office, staggers a few steps, and then falls to the floor. It is Jacobi, and he has a parcel in his arms that contains the Maltese falcon. At the same time, a call comes from Brigid O'Shaughnessy, who says that she is in trouble and needs Spade's help. Spade takes the package, tells Effie to phone the police about the dead man, but not to mention the falcon or the phone call.



Chapter 17: Saturday Night

Spade checks the parcel at a locker at a bus terminal, mails the key to his post office box, and then goes to Gutman's suite, where he finds Gutman's daughter, Rhea, drugged. He helps her walk around to stay awake, and she tells him that Brigid has been taken to an address in a faraway suburb. He goes to that address and finds it empty and showing no sign that anyone has been there recently. Returning to Gutman's hotel, he finds that Rhea left before the ambulance that he called for her could arrive. He stops to talk to Effie at her house and then returns home. Brigid meets him out on the street, and when he brings her inside his apartment, Gutman, Cairo, and Wilmer are there with guns.

Chapter 18: The Fall Guy

Spade expresses pleasure at seeing them so that he can sell them the falcon. Gutman gives him an envelope with ten thousand dollars in it, which is less than they had talked about, but, as he explains, actual money is worth more than talk. As a condition for selling the falcon, Spade insists that they have to provide a fall guy, so that the police can consider the murders solved. At first, his suggestion that they provide Wilmer is met with derision, but after he explains his case, Gutman and Cairo help him knock Wilmer unconscious.

Chapter 19: The Russian's Hand

Spade has Gutman explain the details about how Thursby and Jacobi were killed. Gutman goes through the envelope with ten thousand dollars, which Brigid has been holding, and only finds nine thousand-dollar bills: Spade takes Brigid into the bathroom and makes her take off all of her clothes, eventually coming to the decision that Gutman has palmed the missing bill in order to make him distrust her. In the meantime, Wilmer escapes.

When morning comes, Effie picks up the falcon at the bus station and brings it to Spade's apartment. Gutman is excited, until he scratches away the black enamel coating and finds out that it is not gold but lead. He comes to the conclusion that the Russian in Constantinople must have substituted a fake bird for the real one, and he extends invitations to Cairo, Brigid, and Spade to join him in going after it. Cairo accepts, and they leave.

Chapter 20: If They Hang You

Spade immediately calls the police and tells them all that he knows about the Maltese falcon, the murders, and the suspects who are escaping. Then he talks with Brigid, explaining that he knows that she must be the one who killed Miles Archer. She tells him that if he loved her, it would not matter, and he admits that he actually might but that



there are too many reasons on the other side of the equation to make love matter much. When the police arrive, they tell Spade that they caught up with the others just as Wilmer was in the process of killing Gutman. Spade turns Brigid O'Shaughnessy over to them.

The next morning, Spade arrives at the office to find that his faithful secretary, Effie, is angry at him for turning on Brigid. When he enters his private office, Iva is there, and the novel ends with his preparing to face her again.



Spade & Archer

Spade & Archer Summary

The Maltese Falcon is the story of detective Sam Spade and the case of a valuable iconic treasure. The quest for this treasure engenders greed, lust and betrayal in 1929's San Francisco.

As the novel begins, private detective Sam Spade's secretary, Effie Perine, announces the arrival of a woman named Miss Wonderly who has come to enlist Spade's services. Spade cannot help but notice how attractive Miss Wonderly is and tries to put the nervous young woman at ease as he listens to her problem.

Miss Wonderly's sister, Corinne, left home in New York to come to San Francisco with a man named Floyd Thursby. The Wonderlys' parents will return from Europe in three weeks, and Miss Wonderly needs to find Corinne and convince her to return to New York before then.

Corinne sent Miss Wonderly a letter announcing what she did but has left no address or any other contact information except a General Address post box in San Francisco. Miss Wonderly waited at the post office for hours but did not see Corinne, only Floyd Thursby, who would not reveal Corinne's location. Floyd has agreed to bring Corinne to Miss Wonderly's hotel this evening and will come alone if Corinne refuses to come.

Spade and Miss Wonderly are interrupted by Miles Archer, Spade's partner, who listens to Spade relate the reason for Miss Wonderly's visit. Spade and Archer determine that Archer will follow Floyd after he meets Miss Wonderly at the hotel this evening. Miss Wonderly pays the men two hundred dollars extra because of the element of violence surrounding Floyd and leaves the office.

Spade & Archer Analysis

In Sam Spade, the author creates one of the most definitive characters in detective fiction. In this chapter, Spade's physical description portrays him as "rather pleasantly like a blond Satan," which implies dual personality elements of good and evil. This foreshadows Spade's inner conflict with his own code and the personal and professional rules that exist outside.



Death in the Fog

Death in the Fog Summary

The ring of the telephone wakes Spade in the middle of the night, and the caller reveals that Miles Archer has been shot and killed. Spade rolls a cigarette as he thinks about the call and listens to the foghorn on Alcatraz. Eventually Spade dresses carefully and calls a cab to take him to the site where Archer's body has been found.

Tom Polhaus, Spade's friend on the police force, relates the situation, and Spade tells Tom that Archer was out this evening trailing Floyd Thursby. Spade does not know any other details. Spade tells Tom he is going to call Archer's wife, Iva, but instead he calls Effie to make the call for him.

Spade returns to his apartment and settles in with a bottle of rum. Less than an hour later Tom Polhaus and a Lieutenant Dundy arrive to question Spade about the murder of Floyd Thursby, who has also been found gunned down this morning. Spade claims that he walked around a bit after leaving the site of Archer's murder and could not have killed Floyd Thursby because he has never even met the man. Eventually Polhaus and Dundy are satisfied with Spade's responses, and Spade undresses and goes back to bed.

Death in the Fog Analysis

The author utilizes a style of short sentences and abrasive dialogue in the novel, which is especially effective in this chapter with the men on their respective official duties. There is a no-nonsense tone of voice, especially in Spade's character, that does not use any more words than necessary, adding an element of mystery as well as shrewdness. The author also uses the fog as a symbol for the mystery surrounding Archer and Thursby's deaths. Both murders are unresolved, without any witnesses or any motives at this point.



Three Women

Three Women Summary

Effie announces that Iva Archer is waiting for Spade when he arrives at his office the next morning. Spade embraces the widow, and she asks him if he killed Archer. Startled by the question, Spade draws back, and Iva suggests that perhaps Spade killed Archer so that Spade could marry Iva. It becomes evident that Spade and Iva have been having an affair, and Spade ushers Iva out of the office as quickly as possible to avoid any speculation.

Spade tells Effie that the police think he killed Thursby, and Effie wants to know if Spade is going to marry Iva. Spade rues the day he ever saw Iva and wishes he could get out of the relationship. Effie muses about whether Iva herself could have killed Archer. Effie went to Iva's home early this morning to relate the news of Archer's death, and Effie could tell that Iva had just arrived home because she kept Effie waiting while she changed clothes. Iva's coat was still warm.

Spade makes the trip to Miss Wonderly's hotel only to find out that she has already checked out. With the help of the house detective, Spade ascertains that Miss Wonderly arrived last week with minimal luggage and made no phone calls. She received only a few pieces of mail. Miss Wonderly left the hotel briefly this morning, returned to pay her bill and left a forwarding address at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

Spade returns to his office to find that Miss Wonderly has called and would like to see him at an apartment at the Coronet building where he is to ask for a Miss LeBlanc. Spade takes the message from Effie's hand and lights the edge and watches the piece of paper curl into ashes.

Three Women Analysis

Spade is at the center of a triangle consisting of three women, Effie Perine, Iva Archer and Miss Wonderly. Each of the women is at least a little bit in love with the handsome detective, but he has little regard for women except as temporary diversions. The author portrays Spade as the strong, silent type appealing to women who need the strength offered by this type of man. Ironically, the women actually have the control over Spade by providing either money or other services that he finds necessary.



The Black Bird

The Black Bird Summary

Spade arrives at Miss Wonderly's apartment. She has a confession to make. The story that Miss Wonderly told Spade and Archer the previous day is not true, and her name is not Miss Wonderly or LeBlanc but Brigid O'Shaughnessy. Brigid is distressed because she feels responsible for Archer's death and asks for Spade's help because she feels her own life may be in danger.

Brigid admits that she has done some really bad things in her life, and she asks Spade to keep the police away from her in the investigation of Archer's murder. Brigid launches into a monologue of desperate pleas for help, and Spade caustically tells her that she is a fine performer. Ultimately, Brigid admits that she met Thursby in Hong Kong and that they came to San Francisco this week because Thursby agreed to protect her. Spade takes five hundred dollars from Brigid for his services. He tells her to pawn her jewelry for more money and says that he will be back later. Spade then visits his attorney, Sid Wise, to determine how he can avoid legal trouble from not answering police questions.

Spade returns to his office, and soon Effie announces the arrival of a man named Joel Cairo, a flamboyant, dapper man with Levantine features. Cairo reveals that he needs Spade's assistance in locating a black statuette of a bird and is acting on behalf of the statuette's owner. He is prepared to pay five thousand dollars for its return. While Spade considers the proposal, Cairo pulls a gun on Spade so that Cairo can search the office.

The Black Bird Analysis

The author describes Joel Cairo as having Levantine features, meaning that he is from the eastern Mediterranean area. This also foreshadows the geographic location of the bird statuette's origin, the country of Malta located in the Mediterranean. Cairo's effeminate, fussy character is in stark contrast to Spade's lean, spare physical presence.



The Levantine

The Levantine Summary

Cairo asks Spade to stand so that he can relieve Spade of any weapons. When Cairo is close enough, Spade overtakes Cairo, knocking him unconscious. Spade proceeds to examine the contents of Cairo's wallet and pockets. Eventually Cairo regains consciousness, and Spade tells Cairo that he does not have the statuette either here or at his apartment, which Cairo admits to having already searched.

Cairo repeats the five-thousand-dollar offer, and Spade accepts the two hundred dollars Cairo has in his wallet as a retainer. Spade clarifies that he is accepting the job to find the statuette, not to commit any murders or burglaries. Spade returns the pistol to Cairo, who immediately points it at Spade declaring his original intentions of searching the office.

The Levantine Analysis

The author writes in a very tongue-in-cheek sarcastic style and even names his characters to symbolize their functions. Cairo is from the Mediterranean area, and his name represents the Egyptian city of the same name. Spade is a private detective hired to turn over facts in order to arrive at solutions, to dig up the truth. Spade's attorney, Sid Wise, is named for his professional wisdom and his ability to provide counsel to his clients.



The Undersized Shadow

The Undersized Shadow Summary

Spade collects his thoughts for a few moments after Cairo's departure and goes about his evening ritual of dinner and stopping at the cigar store. All the while, Spade is aware of a small man of about twenty years of age following him. Having found a theater ticket in Cairo's pocket during his search earlier in the day, Spade goes to the Geary Theatre to find Cairo.

When Cairo finally arrives, Spade points out the young man hiding in the shadows down the street. Cairo is unaware of the man and does not know him. Spade leaves Cairo, returns to his apartment to change clothes and hops a streetcar, noting that the young man is still trailing him. Spade arrives at Brigid's apartment and receives a warm reception from the young woman.

Spade casually mentions that he has met Joel Cairo, and Brigid blanches in surprise. She wants to know what Cairo said about her. Spade reveals that Cairo never mentioned Brigid, only the objective to find the bird statuette. Brigid wants Spade to forego Cairo's offer of five thousand dollars to help her, although she cannot match that sum. She offers her body instead, an offer which Spade considers.

Brigid tells Spade that she must talk to Cairo at another location, and Spade offers his apartment. The two take a cab back to Spade's place. Upon their arrival, Spade sees Iva Archer waiting in her car out front. Iva wants to talk to Spade, accusing him of avoiding her, and Spade sends her away with the hope of talking at another time.

The Undersized Shadow Analysis

Although the author's writing style is spare, he provides some very succinct visual images with his descriptions. For example, when Brigid pleads with Spade to help her instead of Cairo, Spade notes that: "Her eyes were cobalt blue prayers." With only six words, the author is able to convey the depth of Brigid's appeals and pleads for help.

The chapter takes its name from the undersized young man who has been trailing Spade ever since his encounter with Joel Cairo. The addition of this mysterious figure lends an aura of intrigue surrounding the case until facts can be illuminated and the shadow destroyed.



G in the Air

G in the Air Summary

Once inside the apartment, Spade phones the Hotel Belvedere to leave a message for Cairo to return the call. Spade and Brigid settle in to wait for Cairo, and Spade tells Brigid a story about a man who disappeared from his family in Seattle, wandered for awhile and eventually began a new family in the same area. Spade finds it intriguing that the man could adjust to another new life very similar to the old one he abandoned without another thought.

Cairo returns Spade's call and arrives at Spade's apartment where Brigid greets him guardedly. Brigid tells Cairo that she can produce the falcon statuette in a week or less after retrieving it from the place Floyd hid it. Brigid is anxious to be rid of the bird because she fears for her own safety.

Cairo and Brigid argue when Brigid makes innuendoes about Cairo's homosexuality, and Spade intervenes. The doorbell rings. Polhaus and Dundy have returned to question Spade about his relationship with Iva Archer. Spade denies the relationship, and the detectives are about to leave when Cairo's yells for help ring out in the living room. Spade makes way so that Polhaus and Dundy may enter the apartment.

G in the Air Analysis

This chapter gets its name from the letter "G" which Brigid traces in the air with her finger when Cairo asks Brigid what happened to Thursby. This is more foreshadowing about an important character revelation to come. Spade's suspicions about Cairo's homosexuality are confirmed in this chapter when Brigid taunts Cairo about the possibility of the young man in the shadows outside being the one Cairo "had in Constantinople."



Horse Feathers

Horse Feathers Summary

Polhaus and Dundy realize that Cairo is bleeding, and Cairo accuses Brigid of attacking him. She is cowering in a chair, though, and Cairo is pointing a gun at her. Cairo tells the policemen that Spade and Brigid have held him against his will. The situation is all too confusing for the detectives, who threaten to take all of them to the police station for questioning. Spade interrupts to say that the whole situation is a joke. Spade claims that he knew the detectives were at the door and that because he is tired of answering their questions, he urged Cairo and Brigid to play along with the joke.

Dundy does not appreciate Spade's humor and hits Spade in the jaw, which makes Spade refuse to answer any more questions. Seeing that they can get nothing more out of this group and that Cairo does not want to press charges, the detectives exit with Cairo, leaving Spade and Brigid alone in the apartment.

Horse Feathers Analysis

Dundy encapsulates the story that Spade tells about the events of the evening as "Horse Feathers," meaning that the story is not credible. The wounded party, Cairo, does not want to pursue any action against the so-called perpetrators. The author writes Spade at his best in this chapter. He is able to think quickly on his feet to avoid trouble with the police as well as with his clients.



Brigid

Brigid Summary

Spade returns to the apartment still stinging from the blow from Dundy and sits next to Brigid on the sofa. He urges her to continue the story of the falcon statuette. Brigid stalls, saying that it is late, and Spade counters that the young man is still lurking outside. Brigid agrees to stay for awhile, and Spade fixes sandwiches and coffee. While they talk, Brigid opens up about Cairo offering her five hundred pounds to get the falcon away from a Russian man named Kemidov.

Brigid does not reveal the details, but when it became clear to Thursby and Brigid that Cairo intended to go ahead with the plan and cut them out, Thursby and Brigid took the falcon and headed for San Francisco. By the time the pair arrived, Brigid realized that Thursby planned to back out of paying her. That is the reason she sought Spade's help in the first place. Spade does not believe Brigid's story but finds her to be a charming liar and kisses her passionately.

Brigid Analysis

Spade is known in the city to be a lady-killer, and this chapter bears that out with the author's portrayal of Spade's seduction of Brigid. The young man is no longer outside the building, but Spade puts the fear into Brigid so that she will stay. Spade may have met his match in Brigid, however, as she has dressed in a blue satin evening gown, stockings and matching slippers in anticipation of Spade's return to her apartment.

There is a cat-and-mouse game going on between Brigid and Spade. Brigid asks for Spade's help but does not provide accurate information so that he can do his job. Spade is compensated well and decides to enjoy the side trip of a seduction while he waits for Brigid to tell the truth.



The Belvedere Divan

The Belvedere Divan Summary

The next morning Spade is able to retrieve Brigid's apartment key from her coat pocket and leave the building without waking her. Spade proceeds to Brigid's apartment and searches every nook and cranny for a trace of the falcon. He comes up empty handed. His hopes dashed, Spade heads back home, stopping for a few groceries so that he can fix breakfast for Brigid and himself.

After breakfast, Spade and Brigid take a cab back to her apartment building. She goes in alone, and Spade continues on to the Hotel Belvedere to see Cairo. Spotting the young man who has been trailing him, Spade decides to take a seat next to the man as he reads his paper. Out of the corner of his mouth, Spade asks where Cairo is, but the young man is hostile and will not reveal any information. Spade tells the young man to have G call Spade, and the young man does not respond.

Eventually, Spade convinces the hotel detective to kick the young man out of the hotel, and the man leaves vowing revenge. Not long after, Cairo enters the hotel lobby looking wilted and tired from having been at the police station all night. The police continued to question Cairo about the events at Spade's apartment, but Cairo has remained true to Spade's story about the whole situation being a joke.

When Spade arrives at his office, Effie informs him that G has tried to contact him and will try again. Brigid has been waiting for a few hours in Spade's office and tells Spade that her apartment has been ransacked. She is frightened to return. The best solution Spade can devise on the spot is for Brigid to stay at Effie's house until Spade can think of a better plan.

The Belvedere Divan Analysis

The seduction complete, Spade takes one more liberty and lets himself into Brigid's apartment to see if there is any clue to the location of the falcon. Spade and Brigid both are putting up fronts so that their behavior will not be construed as suspicious, but each has an ulterior motive. Spade is duplicitous in that he would profit nicely by turning the falcon over to Cairo, but he maintains the facade that he is helping Brigid. By doing this, he garners some nice personal perks on the side. Spade's true loyalties remain mysterious to the reader. The game continues as Spade agrees to find a safe place for Brigid because of the break-in at her apartment. Brigid does not realize that it is Spade who ransacked the place, and he cannot reveal that he did.



The Fat Man

The Fat Man Summary

As soon as Spade sends Brigid off in a cab, the phone rings in Spade's office. It is Gutman asking Spade to come over to his hotel room. As Spade prepares to leave, Iva Archer enters Spade's office to apologize for sending the police to his apartment out of jealousy for Spade being with Brigid the night before. Spade forgives her for this act but does not believe Iva's story about the night Miles was killed. He sends her to see Sid Wise so that she can answer the police questioning properly.

Sam heads out for the Alexandria Hotel to meet Mr. Gutman. He is met at the suite door by the young man in the shadows. Spade is struck by Gutman's corpulence and pleasant manner. Spade is anxious to talk about the falcon, but Gutman is evasive. Eventually, he and Spade argue, and Spade smashes his glass of liquor against a table.

Spade demands that Gutman make a decision to talk about the falcon by five-thirty this afternoon, or else Spade will not include Gutman in the deal over the elusive falcon. Gutman shows no emotion over the ultimatum, and Spade is escorted out by the surly young man. Spade slams the door on his way out.

The Fat Man Analysis

At last Spade meets the elusive Mr. Gutman whose persona had been shrouded in mystery by Cairo and Brigid. Spade is taken aback when meeting the affable man, and the two could probably be friends under different circumstances. Gutman is named appropriately because the man is hugely obese, and the author describes his physicality with each response he makes.

Soon, though, Spade can detect that Gutman is just testing to find out what Spade knows. He does not want to discard Spade, because the detective may be able to provide further information on the location of the falcon. He also does not want to lose Spade, since Spade has the background and skills to maneuver in the workings of the city of San Francisco.



Merry-Go-Round

Merry-Go-Round Summary

Spade's bravado in Gutman's suite has left him a bit unnerved, and he heads for Sid Wise's office to learn what Iva has revealed about her location on the night Miles was killed. Sid is evasive but eventually reveals that Iva went to Spade's apartment twice that night, went to a late movie and drove around before arriving home right before Effie came to tell her that Miles was dead.

Satisfied that Iva's story is accurate, Spade returns to his office, and Effie is upset that Brigid never made it to Effie's house. Spade is able to find the cab driver who drove Brigid, and the man tells Spade that he pulled over so that Brigid could buy a newspaper. Then, he dropped her at the Ferry Building at her request.

Spade cannot find anything in the newspaper that provides any clues to Brigid's activities, and he heads back to his office. Before Spade can open the door, he is accosted by the young man who has been trailing him. The young man says that Gutman wants to see Spade. He pulls his guns on Spade, who eventually wrestles them away from the young man before entering Gutman's hotel suite.

Merry-Go-Round Analysis

Spade is on a merry-go-round with the women in his life once more, as their activities consume his life at the present. The attitude toward women in the novel is very sexist and demeaning, with the roles of women limited to secretary and mistress. Spade feels no sense of remorse or guilt for his inappropriate behavior and feels that the women are to serve him until their usefulness has run its course. The dialogue Spade uses in context with the women is curt and derogatory, and yet the women are happy to oblige him.

Effie is willing to hide clients and witnesses at her own home. Iva enters into an ill-fated affair, and even Brigid assumes the role of short-order cook at Spade's demands. From a popular culture perspective, the character of Spade has stood the test of time, but the novel would probably be a much different piece of work if it were written today as opposed to 1929.



The Emperor's Gift

The Emperor's Gift Summary

Gutman has decided to comply with Spade's request for information on the falcon and tells the story of the icon's importance. The falcon was made by the Knights of the Templar as a gift for the King of Spain in the year 1530 in exchange for land he provided for their use. The knights were a very wealthy organization and fashioned the falcon out of gold with encrusted jewels.

The falcon never reached the king, and over the years the falcon has been coated with black enamel to protect it from thieves. Eventually the black bird surfaced in Paris and was purchased by a Russian man named Kemidov who lives in Constantinople. Gutman's life purpose is to own the falcon, and he was thrilled to finally know its whereabouts.

Gutman tried to buy the falcon from Kemidov, who would not sell, realizing its value due to Gutman's persistence. Eventually, Gutman hired Thursby and Brigid to get the falcon from Kemidov, but they did not return to Gutman with the object, which has led to Gutman's following the pair to San Francisco.

Spade tells Gutman that he can produce the falcon in a couple of days, and Gutman wants to drink on the deal. Unfortunately, Spade's whiskey is laced with a drug, and the last thing Spade experiences before passing out is the young man kicking him in the head.

The Emperor's Gift Analysis

Throughout the novel the author has been speaking to the theme of greed, but Gutman is the pinnacle of avarice. All along Cairo and Brigid have been driven by the gains to be afforded by the falcon, and now Spade is drawn in when Gutman offers a percentage of the falcon's worth in return for its safe delivery to Gutman.

Gutman admits that he has spent seventeen years in search of the black bird and is single-minded in his drive to acquire it. The author even portrays Gutman as a hugely obese man whose appetites know no bounds so that this lust for the falcon is in character for the man. In contrast, Spade will accept some profit from the situation, but it will not consume his life.



La Paloma

La Paloma Summary

After Spade awakes from his drugged state, he returns to his office where Effie once more tends to his cuts and bruises. Spade shares the story of the falcon with Effie and asks her to visit her cousin at the university to determine the veracity of the tale.

Spade is unable to locate Gutman or Brigid at their respective hotels and asks the hotel detective let him into Cairo's room at the Belvedere. He finds a copy of yesterday's newspaper. Some information has been torn out, and whatever was there must be important. After securing a fresh newspaper, Spade is able to determine that the information Cairo tore out was listings of ships arriving in San Francisco.

The ship La Paloma has arrived from Hong Kong, and since this is the city from which Brigid sailed not too long ago, Spade suspects that there is some significance to its arrival. Spade also receives word that the District Attorney wants to meet with him today, so Spade calls Sid Wise to alert him to possible trouble. Effie returns from the university to say that Gutman's story about the falcon appears to be authentic, according to her cousin. Effie also tells Spade that a ship called the La Paloma is on fire in the harbor.

La Paloma Analysis

This chapter showcases the dialogue style that has come to represent the iconic detectives of this time period. A perfect example is in the conversation between Spade and Luke, the house detective at the Belvedere Hotel. When Spade asks Luke if he can check out Cairo's room, Luke responds, "Can do. You know I'm willing to go all the way with you all the time. But I got a hunch you ain't going all the way with me. What's the honest-to-God on this guy, Sam? You don't have to kick back on me. You know I'm regular."

The author also uses some more subtle literary techniques that readers may overlook, since they are unusual in a novel of this genre. For example, the word paloma means dove or bird in Spanish, and the ship that arrives from Hong Kong carrying the falcon is called La Paloma.



Every Crackpot

Every Crackpot Summary

After having lunch with Polhaus, Spade keeps an appointment with the District Attorney. Spade is unnerved when the Assistant District Attorney and a stenographer also enter the office to witness his statements, but Spade does not reveal any information. The District Attorney poses several theories about who killed Miles and Thursby, including the proposition that gangsters killed Thursby because he had unpaid debts to mob heads in St. Louis and Chicago.

Spade will neither confirm nor deny any of the possibilities brought up and is weary of being questioned by "every crackpot on the city payroll." Spade realizes that in order to extricate himself from the situation he will have to produce the guilty parties himself, and he vows to do that.

Every Crackpot Analysis

Spade is moving to the climax of the plot and also the turning point for his own personal code. Up until this point, Spade addresses his business and personal relationships very casually and is willing to participate in situations in which he may profit without much effort on his part. The meeting with the District Attorney reveals the gravity of the situation in which Spade is embroiled, and Spade determines that he can no longer keep up the casual facade.



The Third Murder

The Third Murder Summary

When Spade can find neither Cairo nor Gutman this morning, he decides to go to his office. Another client is waiting to discuss employee theft. Spade takes the case and gets rid of the man as quickly as possible. Effie reminds Spade that Brigid has still not surfaced, and Spade knows that she had gone to the dock where the La Paloma is. He leaves the office to see if Brigid is still at the dock.

Not long after, Spade returns to the office and shares with Effie that Brigid was indeed at the La Paloma, as were Cairo and Gutman. Apparently Brigid spent some time with the ship's captain, Jacobi, before Cairo, Gutman and Gutman's gunman arrived. A watchman reported that the captain and his four guests left the ship at midnight.

As Spade and Effie discuss the fire aboard the ship, they are interrupted by a tall man asking for Spade. The man falls to the floor clutching a package and dies without another word. Effie quickly locks the door while Spade unwraps the parcel to reveal the coveted Maltese Falcon. As if on cue, Brigid phones Spade and tells him she is in trouble and needs his help. Spade instructs Effie to phone the police to report the dead body, which he suspects is the ship's captain, Jacobi, but he tells her not to bring up the topic of the falcon or the phone call just received from Brigid.

The Third Murder Analysis

At last the fabled falcon appears, and Spade knows that he has the bargaining chip he needs to bring the associated parties to justice. It is not clear whether Jacobi had any part in the falcon's theft or whether he merely transported a package he assumed to be valuable.

Interestingly, Effie still protects Brigid's interests in spite of Brigid's duplicitous nature and suspicious behavior. It is clear that Effie is infatuated with Spade and watches the parade of women marching through his life while she sits on the sideline. She loyally does his bidding, and he treats her poorly and takes her for granted. This is another stereotypical role assigned to women in this period of time in this fictional genre.



Saturday Night

Saturday Night Summary

Spade leaves his office and takes a roundabout way to a bus terminal, where he rents a locker and mails the locker key to his office address. From there, Spade continues to the Alexandria Hotel to find Brigid. Upon arrival, Spade finds not Brigid but Rhea, Gutman's daughter, who has clearly been drugged. Spade walks the young woman around the apartment so that she will not pass out, and Rhea soon confides to Spade that Brigid has been taken to an apartment in Burlingame, a San Francisco suburb.

Spade tucks Rhea into bed, leaves the hotel suite and phones a doctor to come to the young woman's aid. Spade hires a car and driver to get to Burlingame, but the apartment house is empty and dark when he arrives. Realizing that he has been led on a merry chase, Spade returns to Gutman's hotel to find no one there. Apparently, Rhea left before the ambulance arrived to help her.

Spade makes the drive to Effie's house and finds out that Brigid is not there either. Effie confirms that it was Brigid's voice on the phone earlier, and Spade is stumped about how to find her. Effie shares that everything went fine at the police station, and the police confirmed that the dead man is Jacobi.

As Spade reaches the front door of his apartment, Brigid runs up the steps behind him, embraces Spade and tells him she has been waiting for him to return home. Suddenly the living room light is switched on to reveal Gutman, Cairo and Gutman's gunman, who are ready to talk about the falcon.

Saturday Night Analysis

Rhea Gutman appears in the story for the first time and is proof positive that Gutman will stop at nothing in order to gain possession of the falcon. Using Rhea as a ploy to stall Spade so that he may get the falcon before Spade, Gutman shows how reprehensible he is in his quest to further his own greed.

From a historical perspective, the novel is important. It was published just a few months after the Wall Street crash that initiated the Great Depression. The author had no way of knowing how important this story would be during this time period. The American people craved stories that could transport them out of their troubles. This chapter may serve an even greater purpose in that it illuminates the disparity of the love of money versus the love of family, concepts which many people had to address at the time.



The Fall-Guy

The Fall-Guy Summary

Gutman's gunman tries to frisk Spade, who will not tolerate the action. Gutman tells the young man to leave Spade alone. Although the intruders have guns pointed at Spade, they are friendly because they want to relieve Spade of the falcon with as little trouble as possible. Spade lets his visitors know that he is aware that the trip to Burlingame on the pretense of helping Brigid was a game to stall Spade so that the rest of them could get to Jacobi before Spade could.

Spade is anxious to get paid for the falcon and finish the matter, but Gutman hands Spade an envelope with ten thousand dollars in it, which is considerably less than the figure discussed originally. Gutman counters that when he proposed the original figure, he did not show Spade any money. At least the ten thousand dollars is real.

Spade reluctantly accepts the ten thousand dollars on the condition that the group provides a fall guy for the murders of Miles, Thursby and Jacobi. If the police can pin the murders on someone, they will probably consider the case closed, eliminating any further investigation that may shed unwanted light on the falcon and prevent its sale in the near future.

Spade wants to offer up Gutman's gunman, but Gutman protests because the young man is like a son to him. Spade persists, telling Gutman that the District Attorney most likely will not listen to anything that the gunman tells the police about the falcon. The District Attorney needs to have the murders solved and will have no interest in opening another avenue to the case, no matter how intriguing.

Because Gutman's gunman is a mob character just like Thursby, the District Attorney will say that the murders are all mob-related, and there will be no more investigation. Gutman begins to see the value in offering up his gunman. The young man rises and approaches Spade, challenging him to fight it out with their guns.

Spade smiles and reminds the group that killing Spade now will serve no purpose, since Spade is the only one who knows where the falcon is hidden. Spade even suggests handing over Cairo or Brigid as the fall guy, which panics both of them. Spade will not hand over the falcon without a fall guy and knows that the others cannot kill him or even threaten him, so the two factions are at an impasse.

Cairo moves over to Gutman to whisper in his ear, and Spade taunts the young gunman, who erupts in a burst of anger. Spade socks the young man on the jaw, and he passes out on the sofa. This prompts Cairo to attack Spade, who easily overpowers the effeminate Cairo. Spade retrieves the guns dropped in the shuffle and demands that the group agree to offer up the young man as the fall guy. Otherwise, Spade will go to the



police immediately and turn in all of them. Eventually, Gutman agrees, and the fall guy issue is resolved.

The Fall-Guy Analysis

The author continues to weave in literary techniques that make the novel interesting in tone as well as plot. In this chapter, Brigid enters the apartment with Spade and is frightened to see Gutman, Cairo and the gunman pointing guns at her. After her initial fear subsides, Brigid freezes. The author states, "The appearance of Gutman and his companions seemed to have robbed her of that freedom of personal movement and emotion that is animal, leaving her alive, conscious, but quiescent as a plant." This is a much more evocative way of describing Brigid's panic than merely saying that she was so afraid she could hardly breathe.

The motif of homosexuality is also present again in this chapter, with references to Cairo's screams as "a voice shrill with indignation." The tender attention that Cairo shows toward the wounded gunman implies an intimate relationship, and this intimation is reinforced by the dialogue and body language Cairo assumes. The author also provides foreshadowing through Spade's willingness to offer up Brigid as the fall guy. Brigid's shock at this startling revelation will become even greater with upcoming disclosures.



The Russian's Hand

The Russian's Hand Summary

Now that the young gunman is subdued and the issue of the fall guy is settled, Spade wants Gutman, Cairo, Brigid and himself to get their story straight before going to the police. Cairo's loyalty to the young man makes it difficult to choose whether or not to go along with the others, but Spade tells Cairo that he will be given to the police along with the young man should he choose to go against the group.

Gutman tells the story of the events that lead up to the deaths of Thursby and Jacobi. Brigid and Thursby were hired by Gutman to steal the falcon from the Russian but left for America once they obtained it. Gutman and his gunman followed the pair to San Francisco and approached Thursby, who would not give up any information. It became obvious to Gutman that Brigid was the one in control of that pairing, and the young gunman killed Thursby.

Gutman then says that he and Cairo joined forces to find the falcon and learned that Brigid had hidden the falcon with Captain Jacobi of the La Paloma while she took a faster boat to the U.S. When the La Paloma docked in San Francisco, Brigid instructed Jacobi to get the falcon to Spade. Gutman found out about Brigid's plan, and that is why he lured Spade to his hotel suite, drugged his drink and had Brigid call Spade pretending to be in distress.

Unfortunately for Gutman, he was too late in intercepting Jacobi's delivery of the falcon, even though the gunman shot the ship captain several times. Gutman again acknowledges Brigid as having the brains behind the operation and warns Spade to be careful of her motives.

Relatively satisfied, Spade decides to accept the ten thousand dollars, but he finds only nine thousand in the envelope Brigid has been holding. Gutman claims that he does not have the extra thousand, and Spade makes Brigid strip to prove that she is not concealing the missing thousand-dollar bill. The search reveals nothing, and eventually Gutman produces the bill, which he had crumpled and hidden in his vest pocket.

There is nothing left to do now but wait out the night. In the morning, Spade calls Effie and asks her to check the office mail for the terminal locker key. Then, he asks her to retrieve the package and deliver it to Spade's apartment. Effie is happy to oblige and delivers the package shortly before eight o'clock, and Spade hands it over to the effusive Gutman.

With a few scrapes of a knife, Gutman quickly determines that the falcon in his possession is not authentic. It takes the greedy man a few minutes to recover from the shock of this trick, most likely played by the Russian who owned the real Maltese Falcon. Gutman manages to collect himself and vows to head back to Constantinople to



begin the search again. During all this activity, no one notices that the young gunman has awakened and slipped out the door of Spade's apartment.

Gutman tries to get his ten thousand dollars back from Spade, who gives back nine thousand, keeping one thousand for his fees. Gutman is ready to leave the apartment and wants to know how Spade will manage the police without a fall guy. Spade replies that he will manage. Gutman leaves the fake falcon to Brigid, and he and Cairo leave the apartment.

The Russian's Hand Analysis

The Russian's hand has had a far-reaching effect on the quest for the Maltese Falcon, in that he is probably the one who had the fake statuette crafted for this complicated ruse. The story's major theme of greed comes to its climax in this chapter, with each player still trying to outwit the others in an attempt to obtain the falcon with the least amount of money or discomfort invested. Gutman and Cairo renew their partnership and enthusiasm for taking up the quest once more. They leave with the intention of returning to Constantinople.

The role of women is a demeaning one in the novel and is particularly evident in this chapter. When the thousand-dollar bill is missing, Brigid must strip to prove that she is not concealing the money, whereas it is never suggested that any of the men do the same. Brigid is visibly upset at the humiliation, and Spade merely kisses her and defends his actions by saying that it was necessary in order to find out the truth.

Furthermore, when the group is waiting throughout the night, Spade sends Brigid to the kitchen to cook and serve breakfast to all the men. Brigid has a lot of moxie and can manage to out-think her competitors in stealing the falcon, but in some circumstances, the conventional gender roles are not tampered with.



If They Hang You

If They Hang You Summary

Spade calls the police as soon as Gutman and Cairo leave and informs them that Gutman's gunman killed both Thursby and Jacobi. Spade also tells them about the whole Maltese Falcon story and where they can find the escaping Gutman and Cairo. Spade then turns his attentions to Brigid and tells her that he knows that she killed Miles. Brigid reacts with astonishment but eventually admits to the crime.

Brigid wanted Thursby eliminated so that she could have the falcon exclusively. That's why she hired Miles, an act which did not succeed in scaring Thursby. Brigid killed Miles, hoping to pin the murder on Thursby and get rid of him that way. Unfortunately, Gutman's gunman killed Thursby before the police could intervene. Thursby's murder alerted Brigid to Gutman's appearance in town, and that is when Brigid returned to Spade for help.

Spade has no choice but to turn Brigid over to the police. She begs him not to do it, claiming that she loves him. Spade knows that Gutman will implicate both he and Brigid once he is arrested, so Spade's only recourse is to give Brigid up to prove his own innocence. This is a difficult situation for Spade, who does have feelings for Brigid but cannot trust her. That is not a good foundation for a relationship.

Eventually the police arrive at Spade's apartment and confirm that Cairo and the young gunman are in custody. The young man killed Gutman outside the hotel as he was returning this morning. Spade gives up Brigid in addition to the fake falcon and the remaining one-thousand-dollar bill as evidence in the case. When Spade goes into the office, Effie is furious that Spade turned Brigid over to the police. She acts coolly toward him, announcing that Iva Archer is waiting inside.

If They Hang You Analysis

Spade is conflicted between his emotions for Brigid and what his conscience tells him is the right thing to do in the situation. He tells Brigid that she will probably not get the death penalty, and he will be around if she ever gets out of San Quentin prison. Spade says that "if they hang you," he will always remember her.

The author leaves the novel on a hopeful note, revealing that Spade does have a code of honor that he will not violate. Throughout the story, Spade has swayed his allegiance to the party with the most to offer him, but in the end he knows the right thing to do and does it. It would be easy for Spade to fabricate a story to keep Brigid innocent in the eyes of the authorities. His experiences with women have taught him that women come and go, and today's strong feelings could very well be dissipated next week. A man's loyalty to his partner, however, should take precedence over passing emotions any time, and Spade chooses the path of loyalty, another major theme of the novel.



Characters

Iva Archer

Before the novel began, while Miles Archer was still alive, Sam Spade was having an affair with his wife, Iva. After Miles's death, Spade goes to lengths to avoid her. Iva asks Spade if he killed Miles so that he could marry her, an idea that Spade finds humorous. When she sees him with Brigid O'Shaughnessy, Iva becomes jealous and sends the police to his apartment. Spade convinces her that she could be in trouble for giving the police false information, and he sends her to talk to his lawyer for advice, giving him the chance to find out, through the lawyer, what Iva was doing around the time of Miles's death.

Miles Archer

A partner in the Spade and Archer detective agency, Miles, leering wolfishly at Brigid O'Shaughnessy, offers to handle her case personally and is lured to his death because of his lechery. He dies forgetting his better instincts and behaving inappropriately as a detective, letting a pretty girl, Brigid, lure him up a dark alley, where she shoots him. Spade has no fondness for his dead partner, remembering that he "was a louse. I found that out the first week we were in business together and I meant to kick him out as soon as the year was up."

Phil Archer

Phil is the brother of Miles. Although he does not appear in the novel, Phil Archer is instrumental in the plot: When he finds out that Spade was having an affair with Iva, Phil suspects that Spade might have had a motive for killing Miles, and he tells it to the police.

Joel Cairo

Cairo is frequently referred to as "the Levantine," referring to the eastern Mediterranean area he appears to have come from. He is described as effeminate in the way he dresses and in his behavior. From his tender concern for Wilmer and from references to a "boy" he had in Constantinople, it is inferred that Cairo is probably homosexual. He originally hires Spade to find the Maltese falcon, but only after searching Spade's office at gunpoint. From the way that Gutman describes Cairo, it is clear that, when the situation requires it, he can be deadly. In the end, after losing his temper with Gutman, Cairo decides to join Gutman in continuing to travel the globe looking for the falcon.



Ted Christy

Christy, Effie Perine's cousin, is a professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley. Spade sends Effie to him to confirm whether the facts of the falcon story are plausible.

Wilmer Cook

Formally known as Gutman's "secretary," Wilmer is a young man who tries to be tough and intimidating, a facade that Spade through verbal and physical attacks makes difficult to maintain. When Wilmer is trying to act cool in the lobby of Cairo's hotel, Spade points him out to the hotel detective, who asks him to leave. Before entering Gutman's hotel suite, Spade takes Wilmer's guns away from him, telling him, "This will put you in solid with your boss." After convincing Gutman and Cairo that they should give Wilmer up to the police, Spade punches him and knocks him unconscious. Wilmer's hatred for Spade projects out toward other people. There is some indication, from the way that Cairo talks gently to him, that he and Cairo may once have had a romantic relationship, but Wilmer shouts obscenities at him. In the end, the police report that Wilmer killed Gutman, a father figure to him, with multiple shots.

Lieutenant Dundy

Of the two policemen who repeatedly come to visit Spade to find out what he knows about the events related to Miles Archer's death, Dundy is the unsympathetic one, constantly looking for ways to have Spade's detective's license revoked or even to have him arrested.

Mr. Flitcraft

Spade tells Brigid O'Shaughnessy about a case he worked on as a detective in Seattle: Mr. Flitcraft, nearly killed by a falling beam from a skyscraper, ran away from his family to embrace life. After a few years, when the fear of death no longer haunted him, he remarried a similar woman and began a similar life in another nearby town.

Mr. Freed

Mr. Freed works at a desk in the St. Mark's Hotel, where Brigid is registered as Miss Wonderly at the beginning of the novel. He is an acquaintance who gives Spade information and is discreet enough never to mention it to anyone else.



Casper Gutman

Gutman enters the novel as an almost mythical figure, as Cairo and Brigid refer to him in conversation by drawing the first letter of his name in the air, to keep his identity from Spade. When he does meet Spade, Gutman turns out to be a jolly, affable man, taken to frequent exclamations about one aspect or another of Spade's character that he admires. He takes a paternal stance toward Wilmer, the gun-toting youth who works for him, while his own daughter, Rhea, is never seen anywhere near him.

Gutman is obsessed with finding the Maltese falcon, having pursued it across the globe for seventeen years. He is willing to devote still more years toward his quest. In spite of his cheerful demeanor, he is perfectly willing to kill or betray anyone who stands in the way of his quest.

Rhea Gutman

Gutman's beautiful seventeen-year-old daughter only appears in one scene in the book: After Spade has been called to the Alexandria Hotel to help Brigid O'Shaughnessy, he finds Rhea there, allegedly drugged, scratching her own stomach with a pin to keep awake. He later finds out that, after sending him off to a bogus address, she quickly exited the hotel, not drugged at all.

Captain Jacobi

The captain of the ship *La Paloma*, he carried the falcon from Hong Kong for Brigid O'Shaughnessy. When he delivers the bird to Spade's office, he has already been shot several times, and he dies on the office floor.

Miss Leblanc

See Brigid O'Shaughnessy

Luke

Luke is the house detective at the Hotel Belvedere, where Joel Cairo is staying. He keeps Spade informed of Cairo's activities, and when Spade points out that Wilmer is loitering in the hotel lobby, he chases the gunman out.

Brigid O'Shaughnessy

Brigid O'Shaughnessy originally hires Spade and Archer with a phony story about trying to find a man who ran off with her younger sister. She gives them a phony name, Miss Wonderly. Her objective is to have her accomplice in stealing the falcon, Floyd Thursby,



followed. After Thursby and the detective following him, Miles Archer, are shot, she turns to Sam Spade for protection, telling him more and more about the falcon and why it is so valuable, but never fully revealing all that she knows. She is manipulative, telling Spade several times how much she needs him but then disappearing from his protection when she sees a chance to attain the falcon without his help. In the end, Spade finds out that O'Shaughnessy herself killed Miles Archer and, although he believes that he may in fact be in love with her, turns her over to the police.

Effie Perine

Effie is Sam Spade's secretary, confidante, and, in some ways, surrogate lover. She knows enough about Spade's tastes to convince him to talk to Brigid at the start of the story by pointing out how good-looking the potential client is; later, she champions Brigid, telling Spade that her women's intuition has convinced her that Brigid is a good woman; at the end, when she finds out that he has turned Brigid over to the police, she turns against Spade in a way that she has not throughout the book. Spade's interactions with Effie frequently include the kind of physical contact and terms of endearment that people of contemporary society find inappropriate in a business situation.

Tom Polhaus

Polhaus is Spade's friend on the police force, a detective-sergeant. When he and Dundy interrogate Spade, it is Polhaus who asks Spade to behave reasonably, interceding between the two men when they start fighting.

Sam Spade

Spade is the hero of the novel. He is a veteran detective, telling a story at one point about a case he handled several years earlier when he was with a large agency in Seattle. He is defiant toward the law, but careful about just how defiant he can be without endangering his practice, consulting with his lawyer when necessary to make sure that he is not putting himself in legal jeopardy. And he gives clients and potential clients the impression that he is willing to break the law if he has to in order to attain the results they need. As Spade points out late in the book, he finds it good for his reputation as a detective to project this impression of corruptibility.

Spade is cynical in his relations with women. Before the start of the novel, he has been having an affair with Iva Archer, the wife of his partner. When she finds herself free to marry him after Miles Archer's death, Spade makes it clear that he was just toying with her. He is in fact sick of Iva and angry when she manages to catch him alone. He never fully trusts Brigid O'Shaughnessy, forcing her to submit to a strip search in order to see if she has stolen some of the reward he has received for the Maltese falcon. Still, in spite of taking precautions against her possible betrayal, there are clear indications that he is in love with her.



The force that drives Sam Spade is a moral code that is more important than financial gain, power, or love. He has a sense of what is right and what is wrong, regardless of his personal feelings. He does, however, try to hide the fact that he is acting morally, preferring to explain away his actions as good business moves. Turning in Gutman and his crew, for instance, entails giving up the ten thousand dollars that they gave him, but he says that there is no other way to escape culpability in the crimes that they committed. In the end, though, after examining all of the reasons why it is right to send Brigid to jail, he cannot overcome his love for her without pointing out the bedrock moral rule that a man cannot let the murder of his partner go unpunished, even if it was a partner whom he detested.

Floyd Thursby

Thursby never appears in the novel. He is a hoodlum from St. Louis and Chicago, who met Brigid O'Shaughnessy in Hong Kong and helped her steal the Maltese falcon. In San Francisco, she hired Spade and Archer to follow him, assuming that Thursby would either be killed or scared away. He was killed by Wilmer to scare Brigid into giving up the falcon.

Sid Wise

Spade's lawyer is a member of the firm Wise, Merican, and Wise. Several times, Spade consults with him about whether actions he is considering are legal or could be prosecuted. Spade sends Iva Archer to Wise after she has given the police false information, saying that Wise will protect her legally. Later, Spade has Wise tell him what Iva has said.

Miss Wonderly

See Brigid O'Shaughnessy

Social Concerns

In *The Maltese Falcon*, Hammett shifts locale from Red Harvest's (1929) small Western mining town to the cosmopolitan city of San Francisco.

Once more, though, it can be argued that the setting represents Hammett's view of American society. The comparatively smaller cast of characters concentrates and sharpens his view. Effie Perrine is the only decent person in the book, and she is shown as a hopeless romantic idealist, incapable of distinguishing between reality and illusion, between good and evil. The rest of the city is full of misfits, crooks, adulterers, thieves, deviants, and murderers.

Until readers are persuaded to the contrary at the end of the novel, even Sam Spade is less than a desirable character, the prime suspect in the recent murder of his partner in detection, Miles Archer. The single-minded quest for the jewel-encrusted statuette known as the Maltese Falcon might be Hammett's way of propounding his Marxist ideology of American acquisitive greed and the selfishness of capitalist theories of private ownership. For the most part, though, the social criticism of *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse* (1929) has been exchanged for a more universal, existential perspective on contemporary American life.



Themes

Code of Honor

Throughout most of this novel, the protagonist, Sam Spade, seems to be too cynical to hold any deeply held convictions. His love life is defined early on by his affair with Iva Archer, the wife of his business partner, whom he openly detests. Financially, he seems perfectly willing to sell his services to whoever offers him the most money, at one point taking on both Joel Cairo and Brigid O'Shaughnessy as clients, even though their interests clearly conflict. His encounters with the police and the district attorney imply that Spade is more interested in making sure that his business is not disturbed by the events surrounding Miles Archer's death than he is in seeing justice prevail.

And so it is a surprise when, at the end of the novel, Spade's behavior turns out to be directed by a code of honor that he understands clearly and respects. He seems frustrated and a little embarrassed when trying to explain to Brigid O'Shaughnessy why he cannot take the corrupt and easy solution, which would entail accepting the money that he has been given by the criminals and going on to live his life with the woman he loves. Most of his reasons for turning away from the easy solution are based in logic—the police would find out about his involvement in the affair anyway, and he would never be able to fully trust Brigid, no matter how much he might or might not love her. In the end, Spade's decision to turn Brigid in to the police comes down to one basic rule that he cannot bring himself to break: "When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it." Spade's shift in diction, into the "you" perspective, indicates that he believes this to be an absolute law that applies to all cases at all times, regardless of individual circumstances.

Single-Mindedness

Most of the characters in this novel are motivated by the dual interests of greed and self-preservation. Joel Cairo, Brigid O'Shaughnessy, and even Sam Spade himself are intrigued with the untold wealth that is promised to come with the retrieval of the Maltese falcon, so long as the wealth will not come with the price of death or imprisonment. For Casper Gutman, though, the search for the falcon is so personal that it has become his identity. Having devoted the past seventeen years of his life traveling the globe and spending untold money on his quest, Gutman can imagine no other existence. For a moment, on finding that the falcon brought to San Francisco is just a leaden replica, Gutman allows despair to take over his usually cheerful optimism, but almost immediately he gathers his wits about himself and is ready to start off in search of the bird once again.

Although the novel gives little background about Gutman, Hammett makes it clear that his obsession with the falcon is the most important thing in his life by showing how



callously he treats his family and surrogate family. He only seems aware of the existence of his daughter, Rhea, when he is able to use her to distract Spade from getting the falcon before him; he is willing to put Rhea in legal and even physical jeopardy without a second thought. As Gutman explains to Wilmer, after offering to make him the "fall-guy" for the police: "I couldn't be any fonder of you if you were my own son; but—well, by Gad!—if you lose a son it's possible to get another—and there's only one Maltese falcon."

Homosexuality

The Maltese Falcon presents an acknowledgement of homosexuality that is rare in 1920s fiction, especially in mainstream popular fiction. There is no question that Joel Cairo is gay, a fact that is implied frequently throughout the novel, as when Brigid O'Shaughnessy laughingly suggests that the boy outside shadowing them might be "the one you had in Constantinople" or, even more pointedly, when Sam Spade asks Wilmer where Cairo is, referring to him as "the fairy."

Most of the references to Cairo's sexuality are derogatory stereotypes. Hammett describes him as an overly preened dandy, with "slightly plump hips," wearing fawn spats, chamois gloves, and "the fragrance of *chypre*." He gives Cairo dialogue such as "Oh, you big coward" and has him call for help with a "high and thin and shrill" voice. Still, Hammett offsets this offensive caricature by giving Cairo some degree of individual dignity as a criminal: He stands up to an all-night interrogation from the police without cracking, and he decides in the end that his attraction to Wilmer, who must be turned over to the police, is less important than the profit he stands to make from the falcon. Cairo's homosexuality is mocked throughout the novel, but as a man he is taken seriously.

Principal Topics

Ross Macdonald, himself one of the masters of the hard-boiled detective novel and a great admirer of Hammett's, calls *The Maltese Falcon* "a fable of modern man in quest of love and money." Indeed, the falcon — the symbol of the illusory nature of happiness through wealth — has such dominant power over the characters in the novel, including Sam Spade, that they will do anything to possess it.

Love turns out to be equally deceiving; just as the falcon is revealed as a fake, Brigid's love for Sam Spade is shown as false. True love, based on honesty and altruism no longer exists in the modern city; it has been replaced by mere carnal lust as a motivating agent. Miles Archer and Floyd Thursby lust after Brigid; Spade has an affair with Archer's wife and then sleeps with Brigid; Captain Jacobi, one may assume, either hopes for Brigid's favors or delivers the bird in compensation for favors already received. Human relations are shown as less than normal throughout the novel.

While the Continental Op combats the violence in his world with equal or greater amounts of violence, Sam Spade's world is characterized more by deception, and so his



main strategy must be deception. The violence Spade generates is mainly due to frustration over his inability to separate illusion from reality. When he has finally solved the puzzle of the falcon, he can abandon his strategy of pretending to be a crook himself and turn an incredulous Brigid over to the police. His existentialist credo is a contrast of Effie's romantic world view; for Spade, reason and professional ethics conquer the temptations of the flesh and the romantic inclinations of the heart.

The thematic centerpiece of *The Maltese Falcon* is the so-called Flitcraft episode. Spade tells Brigid the story of Flitcraft, a real estate agent, who is almost killed by a falling construction beam on the way home from the office.

This random episode makes Flitcraft realize the chance-based nature of the universe, which is in stark contrast to the order human beings try to impose on their lives. In order to adjust his life to this new insight, he never goes home and wanders aimlessly for several years. Finally, however, no more beams fall near him and he ends up marrying another woman much like his first wife and settling down to a life very similar to the one he had led before he was jolted by the falling beam.

What Spade is trying to explain to an uncomprehending Brigid and to the reader is that one must base one's life and one's behavioral code on rational principles, even though one may now and then become aware of the basic truth — that the world is governed by chance and random events. Finally, although he is exposed to falling beams more often than most people, Spade cannot and must not abandon the professional and personal code on which he has based his existence. He must bring the murderer of his partner to justice, even though his carnal instincts and his awareness of the lack of a rational, moral focus in the universe try to persuade him otherwise. While reason does not rule the world, it creates small oases of order in people who attempt to order their lives according to "reasonable" principles. Thus, a detective must try to detect just as a physician must try to heal, not because of a universal moral imperative, but because they both have chosen to do so. In addition, not finding the killer of one's partner is bad for business, another reasonable motivation. Brigid has chosen the opposite path: Since there are no metaphysical forces which compel moral behavior, it is reasonable for her to be amoral. Thus she cannot see the symbolism of the Flitcraft episode, nor can she see any reason for Spade's turning her over to the police. Ultimately, this is her tragedy and the existential message of *The Maltese Falcon*.



Style

Antihero

While a traditional hero might be counted on to do the right thing for the common good, the protagonist of *The Maltese Falcon*, Sam Spade, responds to every situation by examining what he himself stands to gain from it. Spade is willing to betray his friends, and he has an affair with his business partner's wife. He does not work within the law, but checks in with his lawyer regularly to see how far outside of the law he can go. And he is an untrusting lover, accusing Brigid O'Shaughnessy of duplicity the moment that the falcon is discovered to be fake. Hammett establishes his questionable moral position in the novel's first paragraph, describing him as looking "rather pleasantly like a blond Satan."

In the end, Spade explains to Brigid O'Shaughnessy that his seemingly amoral behavior is just a ruse that he uses to draw criminals to him, which is good for the detective business. He behaves heroically, forsaking the money and the girl who is begging for his support, in favor of a higher ideal. The novel successfully mocks traditional heroic values and at the same time reinforces them.

Metaphor

The Maltese falcon that is at the center of this story is described as being made of gold and jewel encrusted, making it very valuable, with a unique history that makes its value inestimable. Readers never see the real Maltese falcon in the story, but its importance drives the plot ahead. It is a metaphor for Gutman's obsession, Cairo's greed, O'Shaughnessy's duplicity, and Spade's curiosity.

Film director Alfred Hitchcock is said to have coined the phrase "the MacGuffin" to represent the object in a film or novel that all of the characters are seeking. The object can be something of monetary value, like the Maltese falcon, or of strategic value, such as top-secret government documents. Sometimes, novels never even tell readers what is in the briefcase or vial or envelope that is being hunted. The reason that an otherwise irrelevant term like "MacGuffin" is used is that the desired object usually is irrelevant, in and of itself, becoming important only when it is interpreted as a metaphor for the characters' motives and desires.

Historical Context

Prohibition and Gangsters

Sale of alcohol had been illegal in the United States since 1920, when the 18th Amendment was ratified and signed into law. Congress passed the National Prohibition act, also referred to as the Volstead Act, to provide law enforcement agencies with the means to enforce the ban. While the intent of the amendment was to hinder the use and abuse of alcohol, it ended up having the unintended effect of creating a profitable industry for criminals to rise to power.

As federal agents struggled to control the production, sale, and transportation of alcohol, those who were willing to take chances and oppose the law saw great profits. As a result, criminals found it in their best interests to organize their distribution networks to regional chains. Although illegal, liquor became easily available, most notably in "speakeasies," which were underground nightclubs. Profits were high enough to absorb the costs incurred when federal agents raided speakeasies and confiscated or destroyed liquor supplies, and local law enforcement agencies were bribed to make sure that such raids were infrequent.

Each town had its criminal empire. Chicago, for instance, spawned the most famous gangster of the time, Al Capone, who rose to power in 1925. In the next two years, he made 60 million dollars through the sale of liquor alone. Criminal syndicates like Capone's, and dozens of others like it across the land, were manned by low-level foot soldiers and those who patterned themselves after the gangsters. By the late twenties the gangster image was well known in American popular culture. Hammett gives Floyd Thursby, murdered early in *The Maltese Falcon*, the background of a typical gang member of the time. Wilmer Cook, the young henchman for Casper Gutman, clearly patterns his menacing stance after pop culture images of hoodlums of the time, an image that Sam Spade openly mocks.

The Great Depression

The Maltese Falcon was published at a time when America needed escapist literature to deal with the harsh economic realities that had suddenly come crashing down, first on the nation and then on the whole world. During the 1920s, the economy had sailed along at a comfortable rate, with stock prices climbing year by year. In the absence of any major international conflict, the overall mood was one of peace and prosperity. That changed on October 29, 1929, just months before this novel was printed. On that day, known as Black Tuesday, the stock market lost about 12 percent of its value, which, combined with massive losses the day before, started a downward trend that continued for the next three years. By the end of November, investors had lost 100 billion dollars; by mid-1932 the stock market was worth only 11 percent of its value before the crash.

The instability in the market drove America into one of the worst depressions it has ever experienced. Banks and businesses closed, causing ordinary people to lose both their jobs and their savings. Unemployment went from around 6 percent before the crash to nearly 25 percent in the 1930s. The government tried policies meant to stimulate the economy, but real economic growth was stalled until the start of World War II, in 1939, when America provided munitions for the warring countries before being drawn into the conflict itself.



Critical Overview

When *The Maltese Falcon* was first published, Dashiell Hammett was little known outside of the small, specific world of crime fiction. This is the book that changed that and brought his name to the attention of reviewers of literary works. For instance, William Curtis, reviewing the book in *Town & Country*, an upscale leisure publication, admitted, after comparing Hammett to literary figures of the time (including Ernest Hemingway):

I think Mr. Hammett has something quite as definite to say, quite as decided an impetus to give the course of newness in the development of the American tongue, as any man now writing. Of course, he's gone about it the wrong way to attract respectful attention from the proper sources. . . . He has not been picked up by any of the foghorn columnists. He's only a writer of murder mystery stories.

In his review for the *New York Herald Tribune*, Will Cuppy wrote, "This department announces a new and pretty huge enthusiasm, to wit: Dashiell Hammett. Moreover, it would not surprise us one whit if Mr. Hammett should turn out to be the Great American Mystery Writer." The humor magazine *Judge* pronounced the writing in *The Maltese Falcon* to be "better than Hemingway."

By 1934, the novel was so recognized for its literary merit that it was included in the Modern Library collection. Hammett's subsequent novels—*The Glass Key* and *The Thin Man*—were championed by reviewers, but they also found more flaws in them than they did in *The Maltese Falcon*, which remained the high point of his literary output.

Hammett's reputation remained static throughout the 1930s and 1940s, as he went year after year without producing another novel, though interest in *The Maltese Falcon* surged when the film version starring Humphrey Bogart was released in 1941. In the 1950s, Hammett was sent to jail for his association with Communists, and the House Un-American Activities Committee actively worked to keep his works banned from libraries. By the 1960s, though, the anti-Communist hysteria was forgotten, and soon after Hammett's death in 1961 the reading public returned to him. In the early 1980s, in particular, there came a slew of biographies and critical studies of him, firmly ensconcing Hammett's name into the halls of American literature. As the great crime novelist Ross MacDonal took time to observe in his 1981 autobiography, *Self-Portrait: Ceaselessly into the Past*, "I think *The Maltese Falcon*, with its astonishingly imaginative energy persisting undiminished after a third of a century, is tragedy of a new kind, deadpan tragedy."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1



Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of literature and creative writing at two colleges in Illinois. In this essay, Kelly traces the facts that can be deduced about Sam Spade's true personality from his interactions with characters who are not involved in the Maltese falcon caper.

In *The Maltese Falcon*, Dashiell Hammett has produced a detective novel format that is so compelling that it has been done and redone over and over. It is a pattern that any moviegoer or television watcher is familiar with by now: The detective, Sam Spade, finds himself pulled into a web of intrigue surrounding a mysterious, valuable object that brings three murders to his doorstep. Readers follow the story because they want to know who committed the killings and where the valuable black bird is. Keeping them interested is the work that a mystery story is supposed to do. What elevates this book from being a good read to being literature, though, is the interest that Hammett shows in Sam Spade's personality and the way that he provokes readers to wonder about it. In the end, the mystery of the man turns out to be more compelling than any questions about who did what, with what, and how.

Who is Sam Spade? At the end of *The Maltese Falcon*, readers find out that he is not the person that he has pretended to be all along. He proves to be a man driven by a sense of honor, which he has kept hidden throughout, a man who has known the answer to who killed his partner, Miles Archer, but who has kept on pursuing clues anyway, allowing himself to be seduced by Archer's killer, but not so far taken in by love that he is willing to let the woman he loves escape justice. He is a man with an agenda so deeply buried under his placid demeanor that it is very likely that he himself is not aware of it.

In addition to Spade's probable lack of self-awareness, Hammett makes his personality even more difficult to understand with the way that he tells this story. The third-person narrative voice is distant, never allowing access to what Spade really thinks. Readers never enter into his mind. Although Spade's job is to observe the other characters and surmise from their behaviors what they are thinking, he applies no such scrutiny to his own actions. Without access to his thoughts, readers find themselves, at the end of the book, knowing the least about the character that they thought they knew the best.

Deception is a tool in the detective's arsenal. Without access to his thoughts, readers can be deceived just as much as the characters that Spade is trying to fool. For instance, when Spade walks out of the fat man's suite at the end chapter 11, shouting and threatening, readers have no way of knowing that he has not actually lost his cool until the next chapter when he sighs in relief that his posturing has gone so well. He shows similar temper with Lieutenant Dundy and District Attorney Bryan, using the pretense of emotion to leverage the situation. Over the course of the novel, he hides from Brigid O'Shaughnessy what might be the most important fact of all: that he knows, and probably has known from the moment he surveyed the crime scene, that she and only she could have killed Miles Archer.



Of course, this detective story would hardly be worth following through to the end if readers knew early on that Spade had identified O'Shaughnessy as the murderer of his partner and that all of her whispery pleas for his devotion and trust were wasted in the air. It is good for the story to have Spade withhold his knowledge. In the context of the story, though, he never adequately answers why it was better to hold this knowledge back than to tell it to the police and thereby wash his hands of the whole affair. He says that it is his duty to turn in the killer of his partner, and that is what Spade eventually does, but Hammett does not make clear whether that is Spade's intention all along or something that he settles on at the last minute. Spade's ambivalence is understandable—he is, after all, a man in love—but the fact that even he might not know his own intentions combines with Hammett's narrative distance to make Spade the darkest mystery in the book.

The best way to separate Spade's true self from the various bluffs that he goes through to track down the Maltese falcon is to look at how he is with characters who are not even involved with the affair of the black bird. There are few people in the book who do not relate to the search for the falcon, which makes them exceptional when they do appear.

In order of least importance, the first of these characters would be the theater manager who hires Spade in a quick, one-paragraph scene in chapter 16. Spade is in the thick of his search for the falcon, and, in fact, comes into possession of the object of everyone's murderous interests later in that same chapter. But he takes time to listen to the man and accept a retainer from him. This small touch is seldom noticed. The man is so insignificant to the story that Hammett does not even bother to describe him, beyond referring to him as "swart." Still, his significance to understanding Spade's character is great. In taking the man's retainer, Spade makes it clear that, this deeply into the case, with the police pressuring him with jail and the fat man offering him unimaginable riches, he does not expect his life to change much. It might even be unconscious, but Spade behaves as if he sees neither wealth nor jail in his immediate future. This affirms his behavior at the end, when he tells O'Shaughnessy that he would still have turned her in if the falcon had been real, and he had collected his ten thousand dollars.

A more significant indicator of Spade's true psychological state is the story that he tells O'Shaughnessy in chapter 7 about the man named Flitcraft, who, having been nearly hit by a falling girder, abandoned his wife and infant child, traveling the world for a few years before settling down to almost the exact same situation that he left. The story is mostly notable because of its irrelevance to what is going on in Spade's life at the time that he chooses to tell it: He is falling in love and on the verge of finding out about the mystery of a lifetime. It takes a strong man to rein himself in and put the events surrounding him into perspective. Literary critics can debate whether the moral of the story is fatalism (that a man is going to be what his destiny dictates, despite moments of awareness) or freedom (that Flitcraft, shaken by the awareness of death, realized that his former life had been just fine). The important thing is that Spade focuses on this story when he feels the falcon intrigue drawing him in. "I don't think he even knew he had settled back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma," Spade explains to O'Shaughnessy, who is barely listening and certainly not ascribing



any importance to this weird little tale. "But that's the part of it I always liked." As with the episode of the swart man, it seems that, beyond wealth or love, what Spade expects of himself is consistency.

And that is why, in the end, he resigns himself to accepting Iva Archer as a part of his life. The wife of his murdered partner, Iva appears to be involved in the falcon case in some way, but she really is not. She is an independent entity, a constant factor that was in Spade's life before the case started and one that will be there when it is over. When Spade finds out that Iva was not home on the night Miles was shot, he has her story checked out in a roundabout way, having her tell her alibi to his lawyer, who in turn, unethically, tells it to Spade. He still does not seem convinced, but expresses satisfaction that the police will believe it. But Spade's own skepticism of Iva's story is suspicious: If he is not convinced that Iva was where she said she was when Miles was killed, then why is he so certain of Brigid O'Shaughnessy's guilt? Or, conversely, if Spade knows that O'Shaughnessy killed his partner, then why does he show such interest in Iva's whereabouts? Throughout the story, Iva jealously stakes out Spade's apartment and his office, and he tries his best to avoid her. Apparently, though, he is curious about what she does when she is not around to bother him. The man of conviction loses the money and the girl—this is the price of having convictions—but he ends up in the arms of a woman that he claims to detest. This might just be bad luck, but it could also be the fate that Spade, consciously or unconsciously, wants. He might realize that, whatever he does to escape, he, like Flitcraft, will end up with Iva or someone like her.

If Hammett had given more direct access to Spade's thoughts, the story would have been less interesting, and the lead character would certainly have been less compelling. Sam Spade seems to be a complex, interesting man trying to hold onto a simple, uninteresting life, even as he stands in the middle of a hurricane of love and intrigue. Readers do not know what he is thinking; Spade himself might not even know, in any depth, what motivates him. The important thing is that he is so well realized in what he says and does that readers can recognize his fate and accept that it is right for him.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on *The Maltese Falcon*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

The first screen adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon* was the film *Dangerous Female* (1931). It was directed by Roy Del Ruth and stars Ricardo Cortez as Sam Spade and Bebe Daniels as "Ruth Wonderly."

Another adaptation was made in 1936, as *Satan Met a Lady*. Starring Bette Davis and Warren William, this version gives Dashiell Hammett credit for his novel but alters the characters and situations: In it, detective Ted Shayne is hired by Valerie Purvis to locate a ram's horn covered with precious jewels. It was directed by William Dieterle and is available on videocassette from Warner Home Video.

The 1941 film of *The Maltese Falcon* is one of the most influential Hollywood movies ever made, defining the detective picture for generations to come. It is noted for its close adherence to Hammett's original dialogue, its near-perfect casting, and for being the first film in legendary director John Houston's long and distinguished career. Starring Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Sidney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, and Elisha Cook Jr., the film is available on DVD and VHS from Warner.

The 1974 film *The Black Bird* parodied the *The Maltese Falcon*, presenting the son of Sam Spade, who has inherited his father's detective agency and set out on his own quest for the Maltese falcon. The film stars George Segal, Lee Patrick, and Elisha Cook Jr. (from the 1941 version), and was directed by David Giler. It is available on videocassette from Columbia/Tristar.

In the 1982 film *Hammett*, directed by Wim Wenders and produced by Francis Ford Copella, the author becomes involved in investigating the disappearance of a cabaret singer. This fictional story is based in fact and recreates the world in which Hammett lived and traveled. Frederick Forrest plays Hammett. It is available on VHS from Warner.



Topics for Further Study

Research the development of detective work from the 1930s through today. How do the methods of a detective like Sam Spade relate to the methods of detectives today? What are the differences and similarities between the way private detectives conduct their work when compared with public detectives? How has modern forensic study changed the nature of detective work and solving crimes?

Research the history, structure, and work of the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem. Why do you think Hammett chose this organization as part of the motivation for the plot of *The Maltese Falcon*? How likely is it that the order might have given a jewel-encrusted falcon to the Emperor Charles V, as is mentioned in Hammett's novel?

Sam Spade refuses to talk to the District Attorney, saying that he may be forced to testify before a grand jury or even a coroner's jury. Find out the legal status of witnesses before either of these two juries where you live, and prepare a report that outlines what Spade would be in for if either jury were convened in the deaths of Miles Archer and Floyd Thursby.

After Spade, the second most famous American detective of the twentieth century could be Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe. Humphrey Bogart, who played Sam Spade in the acclaimed 1941 film adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon*, also played Marlowe five years later in the adaptation of Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. Watch both movies, and write a comparison/contrast paper about Bogart's acting styles in portraying these two different yet similar characters.



Compare and Contrast

1930: It is considered acceptable and even friendly for an employer like Sam Spade to address an employee like Effie Perine with terms of affection such as "angel" and "precious."

Today: The use of such terms, usually associated with romance, is socially and legally forbidden, as they might be used to pressure an employee into an unwanted relationship.

1930: Steamship passage from Hong Kong to San Francisco can take weeks but is the most common way of travel.

Today: The trip from Hong Kong to San Francisco can be done by jet plane in a matter of hours.

1930: Hotels have house detectives who keep an eye on the guests to make sure that they are not bringing illegal activities into the hotel. Usually, house detectives are retired policemen.

Today: Computerized information systems make it easier for ordinary desk clerks to check background information more thoroughly than house detectives were ever able to do.

1930: Americans think of private detectives as being on the border between legal and illegal activities.

Today: The private eye mythos still appears sometimes on television, but people generally do not believe the job to be as glamorous as it once was presented to be.

What Do I Read Next?

Fans of this book will see an entirely different kind of detective in debonair Nick Charles, the hero of Hammett's next and last novel, *The Thin Man* (1934).

While Sam Spade is a rugged individualist, Hammett's previous detective character, The Continental Op, was a pudgy, nameless operative of the Continental Detective Agency. He is the protagonist of two earlier novels, *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse*, both published in 1929.

Brian Lawson's novel *Chasing Sam Spade* (2002), published by Booklocker Press, presents a man who goes to San Francisco to investigate the murder of his father, only to become wrapped up in a web of intrigue with clues taken from Hammett's novel. The city's atmosphere plays a strong role.

The writer who is most often associated with Hammett is Raymond Chandler, whose stories of Los Angeles detective Phillip Marlowe have a sense of hardboiled fatalism and a verbal style that approaches Hammett's skill. Of the Marlowe books, *The Big Sleep* (1939) is the most popular, possibly because Humphrey Bogart played Marlowe in the 1946 film.

Many crime-novel connoisseurs consider James Ellroy to be the modern-day heir to Hammett and Chandler. Of his novels, *L.A. Confidential* (1997) is often singled out for its seamless storytelling and its dark vision. It tells the story of three policemen involved in a scandal-ridden case in Los Angeles in the 1950s.

Though many literary studies have been made of Hammett's life, a more personal look at him, including family photos, was done by his daughter Jo Hammett in her book *A Daughter Remembers* (2001).

Literary Precedents

The *Maltese Falcon* is considered by most critics to be Hammett's best detective novel, although some literary experts prefer *The Glass Key* (1931). The novel shows the writer at his most original, having abandoned the idolatrous first-person narration of a minor character found in the classic detective story for the more sober, objective third-person perspective. The novel is also more homogeneous, due in part to the fact that it is not nearly as much a product of the amalgamation of several short stories. Abandoning the often gratuitous and numbing violence of *Red Harvest*, Hammett here focuses on deceit and illusion as the dominant factors in modern life.

Stylistically, *The Maltese Falcon* and the next novel *The Glass Key* bear great similarities to the novels and stories of Ernest Hemingway. The terse, short declarative sentences, the lack of authorial and narrative commentary are equal to the best of Hemingway's, and there is still much debate as to who was influenced by whom. It is deplorable that Hammett, due to his need for money to finance his expensive binges, never did write the mainstream novels and stories he had intended to write before the demands of Hollywood and his publishers limited his literary production to detective fiction.



Further Study

Gregory, Sinda, *Private Investigations: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1985.

Coming from outside of the small, specific world of detective fiction, Gregory examines Hammett's novels with the same critical eye that one might apply to the works of Dostoyevsky or John Updike.

Layman, Richard, *Dashiell Hammett: A Descriptive Bibliography*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979.

This book gives a comprehensive, painstakingly assembled survey of Hammett's many novels and stories, with the detailed publication history of each.

Marling, William, "Dashiell Hammett, Copywriter," in *The American Roman Noir: Hammett, Cain, and Chandler*, University of Georgia Press, 1995, pp. 93—147.

Marling's analysis of Hammett, and of *The Maltese Falcon* in particular, fits into a larger context of detective fiction in books and films.

Wolfe, Peter, *Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett*, Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980.

Wolfe approaches the author's life as a mystery, piecing together clues from his writings to create a convincing portrait of the man.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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