

# **The Maltese Falcon Film Summary**

## **The Maltese Falcon by John Huston**

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## Context

*The Maltese Falcon* is the story of a famous treasure - a Golden Falcon encrusted with rare jewels, a gift from the Knights Templar of Malta to Charles V of Spain. Over the centuries, the treasure disappeared, and different groups have been searching for it ever since.

Gutman is one of the many people searching for the valuable treasure, and he is willing to do anything to get it. He has hired Cairo, Brigid and others to help him. Sam becomes involved when Brigid comes to him and his partner, acting as if she's scared of being hurt by the man.

After Sam's partner is murdered while following Brigid and her partner, Sam tries to find out the truth about the events. When he finally does find out that Brigid is behind many of the problems, he is angry and threatens to leave her rotting in jail.

*The Maltese Falcon* is the first film directed by John Huston. Although no one expected much from the young director, he proved himself with his talent and successfully helped develop a new genre - the now-stereotypical private-eye film. He also almost single-handedly helped skyrocket Humphrey Bogart's career to "superstardom."

Humphrey Bogart was already famous for many of his previous films, but Bogart got a true push to the top when he became the world's most famous private eye and womanizer. Eventually, Bogart became the King of Hollywood, loved by women, grudgingly admired by men and recognized everywhere he went.

Mary Astor got into show business after her father pushed her to enter a beauty contest and some Hollywood professionals noticed her. After appearing in *Beau Brummel* as Lady Margery Alvaney with the already-famous John Barrymore, Astor became extremely popular. In this film, she shows her marvelous skills by portraying the seemingly innocent, yet very guilty, Brigid O'Shaughnessy.

Sydney Greenstreet also got his start in *The Maltese Falcon*. His earlier work included roles on stage in *Sherlock Holmes* in 1902 and moving from musical comedies to Shakespeare over the years. This, his film debut, won him an Oscar nomination, and he acted in twenty-four more films in less than ten years.

Peter Lorre is recognizable as a rising star, paired with Sydney Greenstreet in both this film and *Casablanca* (1942). Lorre starred in such films as *Crime and Punishment* (1935) and several Mr. Moto films during the 1930s. Lorre and Greenstreet add a comedic touch while making their imposing presence felt.

*The Maltese Falcon* received three Academy Award nominations: Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Sydney Greenstreet; Best Picture for Hal B. Wallis; and Best Writing, Screenplay for John Huston.



# Summary and Analysis

As *The Maltese Falcon* begins, the audience learns a little about the Golden Falcon through a running story on the screen. In 1539, the Knights Templar of Malta paid tribute to Charles V of Spain by sending him a Golden Falcon encrusted with rare jewels. When pirates captured the ship, however, the Maltese Falcon was lost, and its whereabouts remain a mystery until the present time (1941).

The story then moves to San Francisco, where Sam Spade, a private detective, meets with a beautiful, young client - Miss Wonderly. The woman is from New York and is looking for her sister, who she believes is with a man named Floyd. Miss Wonderly explains that she is trying to find her sister before her parents get home. She had sent word to her sister, but she never heard from her. Then she received a letter that said that her sister didn't want to see her.

Sam's partner, Miles Archer, enters, and Sam and Miles tell Miss Wonderly that they will take care of the situation. Miss Wonderly is terrified of the man she believes is with her sister, though, and she believes he might kill her sister. Miss Wonderly gives them a roll of cash, and they agree to help her. That night, Miles is shot while following Miss Wonderly. The phone rings in Sam's office, and he learns that Miles is dead. Sam then rings Effie, his secretary, and asks her to break the news gently to Miles's wife.

When Sam arrives at the scene of Miles's murder, he finds the investigators taking photographs of Miles. Tom, one of the investigators, has some money on him, but Sam refuses to give information. When Sam calls Miss Wonderly, he finds that she has checked out of her hotel already.

Sam returns home, but his doorbell rings a few minutes later. Detective Lieutenant Dundy comes in with his partner, and they ask about his gun. They want to know about the client, and they know that Sam didn't really go to see Miles's wife. They begin to interrogate him, and they say that Thursby, the guy Miles was following, was shot four times in the back. The next day, the murders are all over the papers.

When Sam goes to his office the next morning, Effie tells Sam that Miles's wife, Iva, is in the office. She is crying, and then they embrace and kiss. Iva asks if Sam killed Miles, but he tells her that he would never do such a thing. She hopes that he will be kind to her, but he sends her away for now.

Effie comes in, and Sam tells her that Iva thinks they'll get married now. Effie tells him that Iva had been home only a few minutes when Effie arrived the night before. The phone rings, and Miss Wonderly gives him an address. As he leaves, Sam tells Effie to have all the names on the business's materials changed to Samuel Spade instead of Spade & Archer.

Sam walks into a hotel room see Miss Wonderly, who tells him that the story she told the detectives the previous day wasn't true. She was lying to protect herself. She also



tells him that her real name is Brigid O'Shaughnessy. Sam tells her that he and his partner didn't believe her story in the first place, and she begs him not to reveal her to the police. She still won't tell him the truth now and begs him to trust and help her.

Brigid finally tells Sam that she met Thursby in the Orient and assures Sam that she didn't kill anyone. She explains that Thursby was once a bodyguard and was always heavily armed. She believes his enemies killed Thursby, but Sam still doesn't know what she wants and doesn't trust her. Finally, he asks for all her money, and she unwillingly gives it to him so that he won't tell the police about her.

When Sam returns to his office, the names on the office doors are already being changed. After a few moments, Mr. Joel Cairo comes in and asks about the link between Archer and Thursby's death. Cairo is looking for a valuable collectible bird and is willing to pay \$500 for it.

Effie buzzes in to say that she is leaving, and then Cairo pulls a gun on Sam and begins searching the office. Sam knocks Cairo out, takes the gun and begins going through Cairo's wallet. Sam wants all the information, but Cairo does not want to share information with Sam about his plans. Cairo believes that Sam already knows where the bird is, and Cairo tells Sam where he's staying. Then Sam returns the gun, which Cairo proceeds to pull so that he can once again try to search the office.

The audience then sees Sam leaving the office and being followed by another man. Sam ducks out of the way and gets into a cab. The other man sees him, though, and follows. Sam arrives at Brigid's apartment and tells her that she's not really the schoolgirl that she pretends to be. After Sam mentions Cairo, Brigid asks what they discussed. She offers to buy him in any way she can, and he kisses her. He asks her to give him more information, and she says she wants to see Cairo. She agrees to meet Cairo at Sam's place.

Cairo arrives at Sam's hotel and promises to get \$5,000 quickly during banking hours so that he can get the falcon back. Brigid assures him that she'll have the bird again in a week. It is now hidden where Thursby left it. She's afraid to do anything but turn the bird over to someone else. She says that the "Fat Man" is in town.

Brigid slaps Cairo, who tries to pull a gun on her until Sam stops him. The police arrive to see Sam, and he won't let them inside. There is shouting inside, and the police hurry inside despite Sam. Cairo accuses Brigid of attacking him. Sam gives a good story to the police, so that Cairo cannot complain against Sam.

After everyone leaves, Sam waits to hear Brigid's story. She tells him that the falcon is black and shiny, but she doesn't know why it's so important. She was offered 500 pounds if she would help Cairo, Thursby and the "Fat Man." Cairo planned to desert them, so she and Thursby did the same to him and stole the falcon.

By the time Brigid and Thursby arrived in San Francisco, she found that Thursby didn't want to split the profits in half. Sam knows she's lying, and he asks for the truth. She



becomes downcast, and feeling sorry for her, Sam leans down to kiss her while the audience sees a man waiting outside the building watching the window.

The next morning, Sam calls Cairo from the lobby and spots the man from the street there. Sam sits down next to him and asks where Cairo is hiding. Sam meets with Luke, the hotel security man, a few minutes later, and Sam asks why the guy is hanging out in the lobby. Luke sends the man away, and then Cairo walks in.

Sam returns to his office and finds a message from a Mr. Gutman. Brigid then runs inside the office and tells him that somebody has broken into her apartment during the night. Sam asks Effie to put her up and warns them not to be followed. Iva then comes in and tells Sam that she called the police the night before. He warns her to come up with a good story before the police arrive. He also asks her about the night Miles was murdered, but she lies and says that she was home.

Mr. Gutman calls, and Sam goes to meet him. Gutman asks whether Sam likes to talk, and Sam assures him that he enjoys it. Sam gets right to the point to talk about the black bird. Gutman explains that the black bird is worth a fortune. Sam refuses to give any information about Brigid or the bird unless he knows more about the bird. Sam gives Gutman until 5:00 p.m. to make up his mind about his position.

Sam then visits the District Attorney and tells him that he's not sure who killed Miles and Thursby. Sam is tired of being accused of participating in the murders. Sam wants to get the murderers, but he can't work with the police to do that. The District Attorney agrees to give Sam some time to investigate. Gutman's henchman is waiting outside and takes Sam to Gutman.

As Sam and the henchman walk down the hall, Sam steals the guns from the man. Gutman prepares to apologize, but Sam wants to know more about the black bird. Gutman explains that the Order of the Knights Templar was unbelievably wealthy, and the knights offered to pay a tribute to Charles V to ensure their safety. The ship carrying the tribute was commandeered, and since then, the bird has appeared around the world over the years, even though it was covered with black enamel to disguise it. Someone found it, but he was later killed for it.

For the past seventeen years, Gutman has been trying to find the bird. Gutman wants to know how soon he can obtain the bird, and he offers \$25,000 now and \$25,000 later. Sam seems skeptical. Suddenly, Sam becomes groggy. He tries to walk away but falls to the ground, and Joel, Gutman and the henchman leave together.

Later, Sam wakes up after the drugs wear off and finds himself in a darkened room. He washes his face and calls Effie. He asks to talk to Brigid, but he learns that she never showed up at Effie's. He tells Effie to go to the office until she hears from him again. Sam then begins to search the apartment and comes across a piece in the shipping news that has been marked. The story announces a boat arriving from the Orient that evening. He figures that this is a good lead and decides to follow it to find Brigid and discover the truth behind his partner's death.



At the shipyard, this same ship Sam read about in the newspaper is on fire. Sam asks the captain about Brigid and is assured that everyone got off the ship in time. When he goes back to the office, Sam tells Effie everything, and then a man bursts in, drops a package and collapses. Effie locks the door, and they find that the man was shot several times.

Sam opens the package, and they have the bird. The phone rings, and Brigid says she is in danger. Effie tells Sam to go, and he wants her to call the police about the matter. He takes the bundle and warns her to keep the door locked. The dead man is Captain Jacobi, the master of the ship.

Sam leaves the bundle with the clerk at the hotel. He then puts the tag in an envelope and mails it to a P.O. box. Sam gets a ride to a remote location. No one is there, so he leaves. When he returns to the city, he calls Effie and tells her to get some rest. When Sam arrives home, Brigid is waiting for him down the street.

When Sam and Brigid enter his room, Gutman's henchman is hiding behind the door, and Gutman and Joel are waiting. They all sit down to talk. Gutman offers \$10,000 for the bird, but Sam is not satisfied with the amount. They discuss who the fall guy will be, and Sam doesn't want to be it. He believes that Wilmer, Gutman's henchman, should be the fall guy, but Gutman feels that Wilmer is like his own son.

Sam encourages everyone by telling them that he can convince the D.A. to convict Wilmer with no problem. Gutman tells Wilmer to back off as he begins to threaten Sam, since they need Sam alive to get the falcon. Gutman then suggests that Cairo would make a great fall guy. Sam considers Brigid but mentions that she doesn't fit the bill of being a fall guy.

Sam reminds Gutman and the others that he has already taken guns from all of them. Wilmer goes to hit Sam, but Gutman stops him. Brigid picks up the gun and hands it to Sam while they move the unconscious Wilmer out of the way. Finally, Gutman agrees to let Wilmer be the fall guy.

Sam asks for all the information so that he can cover the holes in the story. He learns that Thursby wanted to be loyal to Brigid, so Wilmer killed him. Jacobi was killed because he was bringing the bird to Brigid. Brigid, Jacobi and the falcon disappeared at the ship, but Wilmer started the fire while looking for the bird. Gutman and the others found the bird, Jacobi and Brigid at her apartment. Jacobi was shot but then ran off, and they found out from Brigid that she sent Jacobi to Sam's office.

After Gutman finishes the story, Wilmer wakes up and comes out, and Gutman apologizes that they have to get rid of him. Gutman explains that he can always get another son, but there is only one Maltese Falcon. Once again he proves that greed, for him, is stronger than any other emotion, and he's willing to sacrifice Wilmer's life for it.

Gutman insists on holding the envelope full of money and shows Sam that one bill is gone now that Brigid has been holding the envelope for awhile. Sam accuses Gutman



of having found the falcon already and pawned it. Gutman agrees to give Sam \$10,000 right now until he can obtain more later.

Sam then calls Effie and tells her where to go to pick up the falcon. She is to bring it to Gutman's apartment after picking it up. Finally, the doorbell rings, and Effie arrives with the package. After Effie leaves, Sam hands Gutman the package. Gutman rips open the package and is thrilled to see the falcon again after seventeen years. He inspects the falcon carefully and makes sure that it is the real falcon as everyone gathers around and watches closely. Gutman becomes livid when he discovers that the falcon is made of lead - a fake falcon.

Brigid exclaims that this is the one she was supposed to pick up. Cairo then screams at Gutman for being so stupid as to let anyone know the value of the bird. After the initial shock, Gutman begins to laugh. He plans to continue the search for the falcon. Gutman suddenly looks up and notices that Wilmer has disappeared. Sam stands in the office and refuses to give Gutman the \$10,000 back. Sam finally agrees to take only \$1,000 for his time. Gutman invites Sam along to find the real falcon, but Sam doesn't want to go. Sam then calls the police and reports all the information about the murders and Gutman and Cairo's location.

Brigid begins crying, and then he demands information from her. She admits to telling Thursby that he was being followed. Then Sam explains that Miles could not have been killed by Thursby and accuses her of killing Miles. She wanted Thursby to kill Miles and one or both of them to die. Later, she went back to Sam to have a new protector.

Sam explains that Brigid shouldn't get a whole lot of time in prison. He expects her to get a life sentence so that she can get out in twenty years. She thinks he is kidding at first, but he wants her to take the fall. She is upset that he doesn't love her, but he claims that he doesn't want to play the sap for her. Brigid falls on the couch, crying.

As Sam sits beside her, he explains that he has to do something about his partner being killed. By letting the killer get away, he's hurting detectives everywhere. Sam can't be sure that he can trust her or that she can trust him. On the other side of the argument, Sam and Brigid simply have the fact that they love each other. He won't help her since she counted on him to take the fall for her. Brigid realizes that had the falcon been real, they wouldn't be having this conversation.

As Sam and Brigid kiss, the doorbell rings, and Tom arrives. Sam reports that Brigid killed Miles, and they all remain silent during his story. One of the men asks about the falcon, and Sam reports that it's the stuff dreams are made of. He takes the falcon with him as he watches the police take Brigid away.





# Characters

## Sam Spade, played by Humphrey Bogart

### Description

Sam Spade is a successful investigator who hits on every woman he meets, including women who cause him trouble. Brigid is just one of those women. Sam gets involved with her when she comes to his office begging for help, and he and his partner agree to help her. Although Sam often seems completely self-centered, he does become very upset when his partner is murdered while he is keeping an eye on Brigid and her colleague. Sam then goes on a hunt for his partner's killer and finds himself lost in an intricate plot to find the Maltese Falcon, a priceless treasure.

Sam spends much of the film trying to extricate himself from the web of lies in which he has landed. He finally discovers that Brigid is not trustworthy, but at that point, it is almost too late. Eventually, he unravels all the events, and once everyone else escapes, he pins the crime on Brigid.

### Analysis

Once again, Humphrey Bogart plays the stereotypical combination of private investigator and womanizer. Although this role may seem similar to every other role he's ever played, Bogart does a good job of making this character different from other characters with a slightly different twist on the personality.

Sam spends his time trying to get to the truth of the situation while keeping everyone at arm's length. As much as he tries to stay out of the problems, he becomes extremely involved when he finds that he can make many thousands of dollars from his involvement. He covers his tracks carefully, though, so that he can pin the problems on the other people involved.

## Brigid O'Shaughnessy, played by Mary Astor

### Description

Brigid is a sneaky young woman who comes to Sam for help. She first says her sister is missing. Then, her partner is killed, and she claims that she is terrified. When Sam gets more involved in the situation, he discovers that she is in on the plot as well. He no longer trusts her, but he stays close so that he can make some money.

Brigid tries to play coy with Sam so that he will feel sorry for her, but it doesn't work. When it finally comes down to it, Sam pins the crime on Brigid so that he will not get into



trouble. She ends up going to jail with his promise that he'll visit her when he can make it.

### **Analysis**

Brigid is a liar and a thief. She helps Gutman steal the falcon, but she wants more than her fair share of the profits. When Gutman discovers her plans and those of her partners, he chases them down and tries to have them killed.

Brigid lies to Sam while trying to seduce him so that she can secure her safety. Despite her best efforts, she can't save herself from facing justice. Instead, she is sent to jail by Sam while he spends the money he received from Gutman.

## **Joel Cairo, played by Peter Lorre**

### **Description**

Joel Cairo is Gutman's helper. Cairo is short and seems to have an inferiority complex. He spends his time trying to prove that he is just as good as everyone else, especially Sam.

### **Analysis**

Cairo is a slick and slimy villain whose role is purely that of the antagonist.

## **Kasper Gutman, played by Sydney Greenstreet**

### **Description**

Kasper Gutman is a wealthy man who is obsessively searching for the Maltese Falcon. He has spent years looking for it, and he is practically salivating knowing that he's about to have it in his possession. Gutman is the mastermind behind the scheme to recover the falcon. He has located it and convinced Brigid and her colleague to carry it overseas for him. She decides that they should steal it though, and he almost loses it to her plan.

Gutman cares little for anyone, even Wilmer, whom he has practically raised. Gutman is willing to sacrifice anything to get the falcon. After he discovers that the falcon is a fake, he becomes extremely angry but quickly recovers so that he can continue his search immediately.

### **Analysis**

Gutman is a powerful man, and he has been searching for the falcon for years. Every time he thinks he gets close, he finds that it's just out of his grasp. Finally, he believes



that he has the falcon, but he is having trouble getting it from Brigid. He is willing to do anything to find it, including murdering people. When he finally receives the falcon, it turns out that it's a fake. He is frustrated, but he refuses to give up and sets out to find the falcon again. He is ruthless and persistent.

## **Wilmer Cook, played by Elisha Cook, Jr.**

### **Description**

Wilmer Cook is one of Gutman's accomplices. He has been like a son to Gutman, but he is a very difficult person to get along with. At one point, Sam has Gutman convinced that Wilmer should take the fall for the crime. Before the police can get there, though, Wilmer escapes, to Gutman's excitement.

### **Analysis**

Wilmer is a young, cruel man. He is angry about everything, and he wants to be a thief as well. Gutman has trained Wilmer well, and Wilmer makes sure that he can live to see another day by escaping as quickly as possible.

## **Effie Perine, played by Lee Patrick**

### **Description**

Effie is Sam's beautiful secretary, who is always willing to help Sam when he's in a bind. She brings him the falcon after he leaves it hidden in a post office box.

### **Analysis**

Effie is a kind woman who happily obeys anything Sam says. She is a great help when times become difficult.

## **Det. Lt. Dundy, played by Barton MacLane**

### **Description**

Det. Lt. Dundy works with the police in the city. Sam takes information to him when he can, and Dundy also shares his information. Together, they fight crime in the city while Sam remains immune from arrest when he is involved in suspicious plots.

## **Analysis**

Dundy tries to uphold the law for the most part, but he does overlook Sam's escapades into the underworld to do it.



# Themes

## Greed

Greed is a primary theme in *The Maltese Falcon*. All the action in the film centers around the greed that Gutman and the others have concerning the falcon. Gutman has stolen and had people killed just to get his hands on the treasure. Now the action has moved to where Sam lives, and he is involved as well.

Over the centuries, hundreds of lives have been lost in the search for the falcon. The jewels on it alone are priceless, much less the gold bird itself and its history. Brigid comes to Sam for help when she realizes that she's in over her head; she still has a few tricks up her sleeve, though. She is trying to steal the bird from Gutman, but he finds out and has her followed.

Finally, the falcon arrives in Gutman's room after Sam's secretary picks it up. They decide to pin the crime on Wilmer as Gutman opens the package. However, the falcon is not real, and Wilmer escapes. Gutman and Cairo rush out to satisfy their insatiable greed as Sam makes sure the murders are pinned on Brigid.

## Truth versus Lies

One of the intriguing things about this film is that it takes a viewer almost the entire time to figure out the true circumstances behind what's going on. Everyone seems somewhat guilty, and all are corrupt. Knowing the truth means digging through the layers of lies told by a variety of sources.

When the audience finally realizes that Brigid is not the kind, sweet woman she pretends to be, we are left wondering the actual circumstances surrounding the murders. Eventually, she begins to tell parts of the truth, and Sam digs even deeper after meeting Cairo and Gutman.

When the truth finally comes out, there are few surprises, but there is the issue of pinning the crimes on someone. Since Brigid is available, Sam helps back up the fact that she is guilty. He may care for her, but he'd rather have her in jail than him.

## Loyalty to a Partner

Sam's partner is murdered at the beginning of the film. After that, Sam quits trusting Brigid, but he keeps her close so that he can find out what's really going on. The terrible news is heartbreaking. They have been partners for years, and Sam remains loyal to him even in death. There are many types of loyalty, but Sam seems to focus on the loyalty that makes him want to find the killer or killers after his partner's death.

Apparently, during his partner's life, he cheated with his partner's wife and treated his partner terribly.

With the knowledge that Sam can make some money, Sam tries to discover the truth. It's hard to know whether Sam's motives are pure, but even if they're not, he at least shows some loyalty to his partner by solving the crime.

## Style and Cinematography

*The Maltese Falcon* is a wonderful, old-fashioned mystery film. The audience learns from the beginning that many things in the lives of the characters are not as they seem. For example, although Sam is close to his partner, he is even closer to his partner's lovely wife.

The film uses black and white to its advantage. The darkness helps to make different scenes difficult to discern, which adds to the mystery. The characters are almost disguised in these scenes, and viewers really get involved with the plot and the action as a result.

Special shots are also used to make the film more interesting. As the camera pans across empty streets or zooms in on the terrified face of Brigid, viewers are easily able to understand the setting of the story and the emotions of the characters.

# Motifs

## The Perfect Crime

Is the perfect crime an impossibility or can it be achieved? According to *The Maltese Falcon*, there is no way to know. Gutman has been chasing the falcon for years, and he is finally convinced he has it when Brigid and her partner try to betray him. He cannot deal with losing the falcon again. His plans, though, consistently go astray. Certainly the theft of the falcon is no perfect crime.

Gutman figures that he has finally pulled off the perfect crime once he has found the falcon, not a small accomplishment, and created a plan to obtain it. After traveling halfway around the world, he discovers that he has trusted the wrong people, and they may now cost him the falcon.

Finally, Gutman gets the falcon that was stolen only to discover that it is a fake. Although he is terribly disappointed, he refuses to give up. He knows that someday the falcon will be his. Gutman may not have pulled off the perfect crime yet, but he has no plans of admitting failure anytime soon.

## Desperate Search

Viewers are drawn in by a desperate search. The moment Brigid enters Sam's office, the characters engage in a huge chase. Sam's partner tries to follow Brigid and her partner so that he can keep her safe, but both men are murdered. When Brigid returns to see Sam, she begins to give him more information about the situation. She has been holding back on him, and she is forced to tell the truth to come out ahead in the chase.

Finally, both Brigid and Sam chase Gutman, who is desperately searching for the falcon. When Gutman finally finds the falcon, though, Brigid sends it away with the ship captain, who brings it to Sam before falling dead in the office. Finally, everyone gets together to take a look at the falcon. Their desperate search comes to a sad end when they discover at last that this falcon is a fake.

## Light versus Dark

Light and dark are generally symbolic of good and bad. They can also represent truth and falsehood. In this film, light and dark usually represent the latter. From the beginning of the film, there are many dark, dimly lit scenes where viewers have difficulty discerning events. When there are finally some brighter scenes at the end of the film, the audience realizes that the truth is finally coming out. In the room where everyone gathers - Gutman, Brigid, Cairo, Wilmer and Sam - the audience finally starts hearing what's really going on. These scenes are much brighter as the truth is finally being revealed.



Light versus dark is such a common motif that most moviegoers can easily pick it out. This helps make the film more appealing to many viewers because they can quickly understand some of the intricacies of the plot and the filming.

# Symbols

## The Maltese Falcon

The Maltese Falcon was originally created by the Knights Templar for the Spanish King. They created the bird and encrusted it with precious jewels. Over the years, it was stolen numerous times, and eventually, it was painted black to camouflage it. Gutman has been searching for the bird for years and believes that he has finally found it as this film begins.

The Maltese Falcon represents the dangerous world of materialism and greed. Many men have died over the years trying to either obtain or keep the falcon. Gutman is just one of the many, and now he believes that he has finally found the falcon. He is willing to do anything to hang onto it.

The falcon's priceless worth keeps Gutman and the others fighting over it until they discover the truth, that they have been tricked. Rather than finding a priceless piece, these thieves have found only junk.

## Partner's Death

At the beginning of the film, Brigid comes to Sam's office and begs him and his partner to help her. She tells them that she is being followed, and she's scared of what may happen to her. They sympathize, and Sam's partner follows her to keep her safe. He is killed, though, and Sam is on the hunt for his murderer.

The partner's death helps the viewer see the loyalty between the partners. Although Sam obviously did not treat his partner very well during his life, especially since he had an affair with the man's wife, he does care that he was killed and will not rest until he brings the murderer to justice.

In a film all about greed, wealth and materialism, Sam's loyalty to his partner is a refreshing symbol of honesty and purity. For this reason alone, viewers can have some hope for the future after witnessing the travesties of the past.

## Doors

Throughout *The Maltese Falcon*, many doors are opened, including physical, mental and emotional doors. As each one opens, it generally reveals a surprise about one of the characters or the overall situation surrounding the Maltese Falcon and the killings.

One example of a physical door is when Sam opens the door to Gutman's apartment and finds Brigid there. Although he is already suspicious of her, he realizes that she is

part of the scheme as well and begins trying to figure out how she is connected and how this can work to his advantage.

Additionally, the audience sees emotional doors opened as Brigid and Sam interact. Although they care for each other, he is angry that she would try to use this to frame him. Instead, he is harsh with her as she pleads for mercy. He tells her that he'll visit her in prison, but that is her only hope.



## Essay Questions

Relate the history of the Maltese Falcon. How is the theme of greed exemplified by this story?

Why is Brigid scared?

What happens to Sam's partner?

How does Sam obtain information about what's going on in the city?

How long has Gutman been trying to find the falcon? Why does he continue to search?

Who brings the falcon to Sam? Why does this person have the falcon?

Why does Sam start working for Gutman?

How does Sam get the falcon to Gutman?

What do they discover about the falcon at the end of the film?

On whom does Sam pin the crimes?