

THE MALTESE FALCON BY DASHIELL HAMMETT



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Classic Fiction, Mystery

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As good as the movie, which is saying a great deal

By Robert James

"The Maltese Falcon" is better known to most of the public these days from the movie -- which is as close to a perfect adaptation as any movie has ever gotten. The novel is just as wonderful, if not more. There is a certain muscular quality to Hammett's prose that is mirrored by Huston's graphics, but Hammett has to be read to see what marvelous sentences he constructed. There are a few significant differences from the movie: Sam Spade in the book is described as a "blond Satan," and the heroic quality that Humphrey Bogart projected is darker in the novel. There is a long story, told while Brigid and Sam wait, about a man named Flitcraft who disappears; the story is central to understanding Sam's view of humanity. And there is Gutman's daughter, who is cut completely from the film. There are other minor differences, but taken all in all, the movie served the book well. Fans of the movie will love the novel, and fans of the mystery and detective genre who haven't read Dashiell Hammett are missing the genesis of the hard-boiled detective. An outstanding read!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

For those that don't know ,considered the best crime story of the 20th century

By Alan

What can one say that has not already been said ,it's voted the greatest detective story of the 20th century.short ,crisp dialogue(note,it should be writing,not dialogue,but Hammet wrote in such a style that it's as if he's writing for talking pictures,before talking pictures were even made).in the continental op stories(which for some insane reason no one has ever put together the complete stories into 1book, or,Canon, like father Brown, or Sherlock Holmes which to this day, I will never,never understand why!) Hammett speaks to the reader "I did this","this happened to me"style ,so the reader gets caught up and identifies him/her self with the op, in the falcon "Sam (his name is dashiell Samuel Hammett ,we know him as Dashiell ,or Dash Hammett ,when he was a detective ,his friends called him Sam) did this,or that, so you can't get into his head and anticipate his plans or moves at all! It's interesting that Bogart, or Coburn look nothing like the characters in the books,but become impossible to believe that anyone else could be those characters,that's fascinating to me! Line's like "the gungel (slang at the time,for passive homosexual)and "the boy in Cairo" that Bridget(a woman) "could not make" implying that Joel could,quite daring at the time and amazingly snuck past the censorship of the time when the movie was released. Bogart was on a roll with the falcon and (possibly the next best crime story of the 20th century) the big sleep! I still wonder how much influence Hammetts style had on the Dragnet radio show in its own way...

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Entertaining, but showing its age

By doc peterson

Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* is classic noir: the hard-nosed detective with his own code of ethics, a variety of bad-guys and of course, a woman in distress, the original femme fatale. These elements of the book I enjoyed, even if I struggled with not hearing Bogart, Lorre and Greenstreet in my head reading dialogue. But oh, what dialogue! Terse, concise, snappy dialogue that one associates with the genre.

The story itself was a bit convoluted, which I enjoyed. Sam Spade, the detective hired to recover the Maltese Falcon rarely gets a straight answer, and Hammett is stingy with clues to help the reader along. Instead, I found myself simply hanging on, trying to piece together who did what to whom and who to trust - a similar situation Spade finds himself in. Apparently this isn't to every reader's taste - I thought it worked well and moved the plot along at a rapid pace.

The story does show its age. Not only through the ubiquitous cigarettes Spade (and others) burn through and the copious amount of alcohol consumed, but especially in the way in which Spade treats and reacts to women - truly the 1930s were a time of "men's men" and clearly a full generation before second wave feminism. Taken at face value as a product of its time, however, to edit this out would be to rob the story (and characters) of its flavour.

I pride myself at being able to piece together a mystery - or at the very least have some sort of a handle on it. Not so here - reading Hammett was similar to being tumbled around by a wave - you have no sense of direction, you feel helpless in its grip, and you are running out of oxygen - the best you can do is continue to hold your breath and wait for the wave to break. Likewise Hammett kept me holding my breath and waiting for the final "who dunnit" until literally the last page.

While I can't say I will rush to read more by him, I was certainly impressed with his storytelling. Recommended.

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