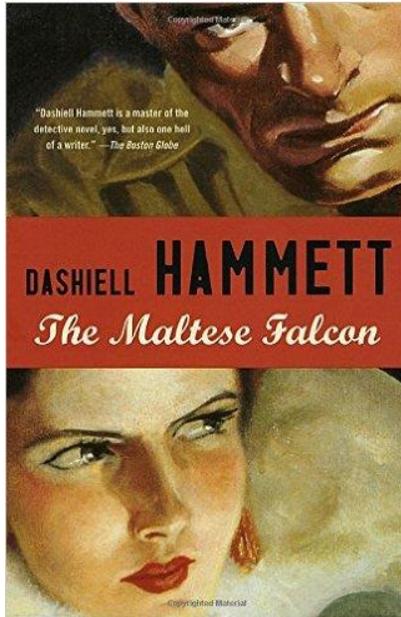


SPOTLIGHT

November 18, 2016



E-Readers make for perfect travel reading. Lightweight, no matter how many books you've downloaded, and backlit so you don't have to disturb those around you on the plane with the overhead lamp; even someone like me, who typically prefers the feel of paper, can see the advantage.

And when I travel, I like to read novels set in my destination. This summer I went to San Francisco and downloaded Dashiell Hammett's classic *The Maltese Falcon* from the public library's Overdrive collection.

At first I found it to be a difficult book to get into. Every scene with private dick Sam Spade felt clichéd and Hammett had a penchant for minute visual details which can be tedious at times. However, when I considered that Sam Spade, along with Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, became the blueprints for the "hard-boiled detective," it suddenly became a fun study. Likewise, the plethora of details fell into place with everything becoming a potential clue, the observations of a skilled investigator.

As for getting a sense of San Francisco, it is important to note that *The Maltese Falcon* was written in 1929, even before there was a Golden Gate Bridge. This is to say that it may be hard to recognize modern day San Francisco in this story. However, it does suggest, rather provocatively, that San Francisco is a city with a layer of grime beneath its clean façade. As a tourist, it would be easy to believe that San Francisco is a quaint city with its lightly coloured Victorian and Edwardian row housing. But Hammett implies that there are secrets in the fog, around the next curve of a winding street, just waiting to be discovered. In other words, far more interesting if one dares to go looking.

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John Mutford, Public Services Librarian