

# The Language of Film

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**Film:** The Maltese Falcon (1941)

**Director:** John Houston

**Stars:** Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, Peter Lorre

**Genre:** Crime, Mystery, Film Noir

**Run time:** 1hr 40min

**Rated:** A

**Rating:** 3/5

## The Maltese Falcon (1941)



The Maltese Falcon (1941) is adapted from Dashiell Hammett's novel and sees John Houston take his directional debut in this black and white film noir classic.

Private investigator Sam Spade and his partner Miles Archer are asked to find a woman's missing sister. Sam's partner is quickly **bumped off** during the investigation and a straight forward missing person case quickly turns into a double homicide, in which Sam himself has become a suspect as we find out he has been having **an affair** with Mile's wife. All this happens without even a mention of the golden falcon described so dramatically in the opening credits, until another visitor to the detectives' offices, Joel Cairo, arrives seeking the services of Sam Spade. So **ensues** the investigation to find the murderer and also discover the **whereabouts** of this valuable bird.

Humphrey Bogart plays the tough **wise-cracking** San Francisco **private dic**, Sam Spade, whose only **scruples** are to get to the bottom of the case. A street smart detective on **pally** terms with the police, who is able to mix it with the gangsters and still finds time to play hard and fast with the ladies. But Bogart is more than ably assisted throughout by a supporting cast that includes Mary Astor as the femme

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fatale Brigid O'Shaughnessy, who switches between the fragile and needy to the manipulative and even violent in **a heartbeat**. Sydney Greensheet plays Kasper Gutman "the fat man" gangster head behind the search for the Maltese Falcon; he is like a cross between Orson Wells and Alfred Hitchcock all rolled into one with his gentrified but underhanded negotiations. Then there is Peter Lorre who puts in a fantastically **kooky** performance as Joel Cairo setting the bar high for the devious, conniving villain.

Widely considered a masterpiece and one of the earliest examples of film noir it is often placed at the top of film polls and was part of the first group of films to be put in the US National Film Registry for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." It put Humphrey Bogart on the Hollywood map and its caricature performances continue to massively influence filmmakers.

## Similar films:

Dr. No (1962): Dir: Terence Young; Stars: Sean Connery, Ursula Andress

## Exercises:

### A. Questions True or False:

1. The film is by experienced director John Houston? T/F?
2. Sam Spade works for the police department? T/F?
3. Sam is a potential suspect for the murder? T/F?
4. Joel Cairo is looking for the golden falcon statue? T/F?
5. Sam is a morally correct citizen? T/F
6. The film is considered of historical importance? T/F?

### B. Vocabulary / Phrases Match

- |                  |                              |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. bumped off    | a. a second                  |
| 2. an affair     | b. friendly                  |
| 3. ensues        | c. joking                    |
| 4. whereabouts   | d. private detective         |
| 5. wise-cracking | e. extramarital relationship |
| 6. private dic   | f. strange                   |
| 7. scruples      | g. place                     |
| 8. pally         | h. killed                    |
| 9. a heartbeat   | i. morals                    |
| 10. kooky        | j. follows                   |

### C. Discussion Questions:

1. What can you see in the picture?
2. Do you like black and white photography?
3. Why would someone want to hire a private detective?
4. Why are some antiques so valuable?
5. What films do you think are "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant"?



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## Listening Gap Fill

### The Maltese Falcon (1941)

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Private investigator Sam Spade and his partner Miles Archer are asked to find a woman's missing sister. Sam's partner is quickly bumped off during the 2. \_\_\_\_\_ and a straight forward missing person case quickly turns into a double homicide, in which Sam himself has become a suspect as we find out he has been having an affair with Miles' wife. All this happens without even a mention of the golden falcon described so dramatically in the opening credits, until another visitor to the detectives' offices, Joel Cairo, arrives seeking the services of Sam Spade. So ensues the investigation to find the murderer and also discover the whereabouts of this valuable bird.

Humphrey Bogart plays the tough wise-cracking San Francisco private detective, Sam Spade, whose only scruples are to get to the bottom of the case. A street smart detective on palmy terms with the police, who is able to mix it with the 3. \_\_\_\_\_ and still finds time to play hard and fast with the ladies. But Bogart is more than ably assisted throughout by a 4. \_\_\_\_\_ that includes Mary Astor as the femme fatale Brigid O'Shaughnessy, who switches between the fragile and needy to the manipulative and even violent in a heartbeat. Sydney Greenstreet plays Kasper Gutman "the fat man" gangster head behind the search for the Maltese Falcon; he is like a cross between Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock, all rolled into one, with his genteel but underhanded 5. \_\_\_\_\_. Then there is Peter Lorre who puts in a fantastically kooky performance as Joel Cairo setting the bar high for the devious, conniving villain.

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