



Hammett

Joe Gores

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From Chinatown's dark alleys to the fog-shrouded Golden Gate, crooked politicians ran San Francisco. To Hammett, retired Pinkerton detective and struggling writer, it was all just grist to his fictional mill. Until the night his pal walked into a baseball bat. Then Hammett hung up his typewriter, put on his gumshoes and went out into the brawling, swaggering city to find the brutal murderer.

Hammett Details

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From Reader Review Hammett for online ebook

Ann Sloan says

When I discovered this novel, I jumped on it. I don't know how I missed it. I very much enjoy humorous mysteries; I have read 32 Cadillacs and a couple of Joe Gores's other DKA novels. This book was no disappointment; Gores is a masterful novelist. If Hammett has any appeal to you, read this book.

Gores wrote that "I didn't start out to be a mystery writer." <http://www.mysterynet.com/books/testi...>

It is lucky for us that that is what he became.

Joe Gores was a three-time Edgar Award winner, and only one of three authors (the other two being Donald E. Westlake and William L. DeAndrea) to receive Edgars in three separate categories. He was recognized for his novels Hammett, Spade & Archer (the 2009 prequel to Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*) and his Edgar Award-winning or -nominated works, such as *A Time of Predators*, *32 Cadillacs* and *Come Morning*.

In his web posting, "Why I Write Mysteries," he relates:

In 1955, Stanford University refused me a Master's Degree in English Literature because my proposed Thesis was on the novels of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald. "Since these novels are not literature," they said, "obviously graduate theses cannot be written about them." That is, if fiction is fun to read, it is mere escapist fare.

[I] discovered that the mystery is the only fiction genre that lets you write anything you want while demanding a form that makes you tell a story people want to read.

So I write my mysteries for pleasure, mine and I hope yours, and for money.

I think that this prejudice against mysteries has declined, although not completely. In a teaching job interview not too long ago, I was asked what novel had I read recently that I had enjoyed. The title that popped into my mind, out of all the books I had read in the past few weeks, was a mystery. Interestingly, the interviewer knew the book, and we talked about it. Later, I thought that maybe I should have mentioned another book because, well, is mystery literature? It is, as far as I am concerned!

Gores explains much better than I can the appeal of the type of mystery I prefer:

The opening line of "Gone Girl" [a short story Ross Macdonald wrote, featuring an early incarnation of private eye Lew Archer. The piece was written in the 1950s.] was 'I was tooling home from the Mexican border in a light blue convertible and a dark blue mood,'" Gores recalls. "And I thought 'My God, that is the way I want to write! . . . That kind of tightness, that kind of directness, no nonsense, no navelgazing. You are in there to create vivid characters who are doing extremely interesting things and that's it.'"

<http://alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/m...>

I have little patience for the type of mystery that involves the detective's personal life. As I mentioned in another blog, this refers to such writers as Sarah Paretsky, Rita Mae Brown, and Sue Grafton. Unfortunately, this seems to be a fault of women mystery writers. But I generalize...

Hammett is excellent. I could have been reading Dashiell himself. The setting, the plot, the dialogue, the prose – all tone-perfect. Hammett, when published in 1975, was well-received as a fictionalized version of the adventures of Samuel Dashiell Hammett. Wim Wenders directed the movie version in 1982, which I'll have to try to find. Decades later, Gores still felt he had "unfinished business" with the author, so in 1999, he asked Hammett's daughter, Jo Marshall, if the family would consider a new book based on *The Maltese Falcon*.

Although Marshall first said no, she had a change of heart. As her daughter Julie Rivett puts it, the family felt that Gores was the right guy to take up her grandfather's story. "He's walked the walk as well as talked the talk. He knows as well as anyone where those characters came from," she said.

Gores released *Spade & Archer*, a prequel novel that explains how Spade came to seek the falcon statue that is perhaps the greatest MacGuffin in detective fiction. It is both a love letter to the original work and a satisfying read for Falcon fans that circles back to where Gores's own hard-boiled history—and the

genre's—began: with an appreciation for the finely written line, and a nose for trouble. I haven't read this book; I intend to. The reviews I read were very positive.

Gores, who had been working on a new DKA novel, died 50 years after Hammett's death, to the day. RIP, Joe Gores, and thanks for all the books.

Andrew says

Gores takes the real life Dashiell Hammett - ex-PI and crime writer - and creates a fictional scenario where he is embroiled in murder, child prostitution, police corruption, and gangland revenge. The novel works well - the life of Hammett is skilfully and effectively woven into the plot, although equally you need no knowledge of Hammett to enjoy the book. Ultimately it's a passable and entertaining pulp crime thriller and good for a quick read if no more than that.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

A cracking good read. Having devoured all of Hammett's actual fiction that I could lay hands on, my personal "bar" for this book was set pretty high. Joe Gores met my expectations. He handles the noir idiom extremely well, and the story is as well-written as any of Hammett's own. The twists in the tale caught me unawares. If I have one complaint, it is that Goodie just sort of vanishes, but then she's only the secondary "girl", rather like Effie in the Maltese Falcon--there to fetch and carry when needed (or at least make coffee and provide a phone) and then vanish when her task is over.

Published in 1975, we are thus saved the graphic violence that might have been included had it been published recently. *I'm not kidding myself; the stories published in the original **Black Mask** were pretty darn graphic sometimes. But good writing doesn't actually need it, and Gores knew that.*

My copy included an Afterword by the author that rather went out of its way to explain things, present the author's credentials as "a detective, not a writer" etc., which rather took the shine off things for me. If you have to explain your purpose, you haven't achieved it. The book could have stood on its own merit without that.

Dan says

An alternate history that suggests that Dashiell Hammett's ideas for some of his mystery novels (The Maltese Falcon, The Glass Key) came not from his imagination, but from his own experiences before he became a mystery writer while he was working for the Pinkerton agency. Gores's historical and social details of the San Francisco setting are very good. Moreover, the style of the writing is very similar to that Hammett used in his own works.

Ronald Roseborough says

This book brings Dashiell Hammett back to life. It is a rich portrayal of the man in both his roles as a writer of mysteries and a detective/Pinkerton operative who investigated and helped solve real crimes. The story takes place in the streets of San Francisco, where Hammett plied his trade. If you have read and enjoyed Hammett's works, *The Dain Curse*, *The Maltese Falcon*, etc. you will be enthralled by Gores working Hammett's real life with this fictional story of California in the rip roaring Twenties.

Perry Whitford says

Before he was a novelist writing about private investigators, Dashiell Hammett actually was a private investigator for nigh on ten years. Before he was a novelist inspired by Dashiell Hammett, Joe Gores was a private investigator for just over ten years, a career move that he says was inspired by reading Dashiell Hammett.

Who better then to write a novel where the protagonist is Dashiell Hammett, where we get to see him as both a novelist and a private investigator?

Gores dates the story to 1928, a pivotal year for Hammett where he had just decided to become a full-time writer and was on the verge of finishing and publishing both *The Dain Curse* and his most famous and enduring work, *The Maltese Falcon*.

The setting is of course San Francisco, and it's lovingly recreated by Gores, including depictions of where Hammett really lived and the streets and alleys that he used for locations in his own novels.

The cast includes all the staples of a Hammett novel, from femme fatales to vain, corrupt businessmen, policemen and city officials. The plot is suitably labyrinthine and almost incomprehensible, vice and hypocrisy go hand in hand as the murders stack up.

Throughout it all Hammett stands alone just like Sam Spade or the Continental Op, as the lone man of honour, with the strength to conquer his own weaknesses and avoid the "evil".

As you would expect from a more contemporary book, the "evil" is more graphically represented than in the source material - although some of Hammett's stuff reads pretty blood-thirsty even now - and I think I caught flashes of the movie *Chinatown* in here too.

A worthy tribute to the progenitor of hard-boiled detective fiction, which has given me the urge to read Hammett again.

Patrick DiJusto says

What would happen if Dashiell Hammett was pulled back into the detective business while trying to write "The Maltese Falcon"? Gores re-creates San Francisco of the 1920s, where the town is run by the cops, the crooks, and the big rich, and everything is for sale.

Jared Shipley says

Joe Gores' admiration for Dashiell Hammett became a staple in his career, having also written a prequel to *The Maltese Falcon*. This admiration is appropriate given that Gores, just like Hammett, was a private detective turned author in San Francisco. In the afterword of "Hammett", Gores makes a point in how Hammett turned the pulp detective story from taboo entertainment in *Black Mask* magazine, into serious literature, a feat that has baffled critics and writers since. Hammett was unlike other pulp writers in that he was an investigator learning how to write, instead of a writer learning how to investigate. Gores knows of this struggle and makes it his protagonist's inner struggle throughout the book. An admirable tribute to the noir legend, but not without its faults.

Gores crafts a complex and relevant mystery surrounding political corruption in 1928. The story is exquisitely crafted, and the last fifty pages contain more twists than a 1950s dance hall. I was in awe.

However, "Hammett" suffers from the same problem that the other Gores novel I've read, "Cases", suffers from. The prose is so deeply detailed that it slows the pace of the story almost to a halt. Every once in a while comes a scene gripping enough that it flies by, but soon after Gores spends unnecessary time describing clothes of characters or writing much too lofty descriptions of their looks and actions.

Hammett as the protagonist of this fictional story is interesting, but ultimately, distracting. Gores periodically goes off on tangents with factual anecdotes of Hammett's childhood, all of which do not help in his investigation. I was waiting for Hammett to find something in his writing that became a key to helping him solve the case, but it never came. This makes the idea of Hammett the retired detective as protagonist irrelevant, and the novel, I think, would benefit more by Hammett working as a writer/detective rather than simply a former detective thrown back into his old profession.

Overall, I admire Joe Gores, but haven't yet read a novel of his that I've felt is on the same level as his inspirations. This novel is worth reading for fans of well-crafted mystery stories. However, the work of Hammett himself takes precedent, and I don't think even Joe Gores would disagree.

Wilson Lanue says

This book - which I prefer to Hammett's own work - is a grand specimen of the one-last-job retired-crime-fighter trope, featuring America's founding noir writer as the retiree. Clear-headed and straightforward in language (which Hammett wasn't), it is written by yet another retired P.I., with respect for both the myth and the reality of American crime. Entertaining and twisty enough for crime fans without being artificial about it.

Its eye toward California's bizarre early-20th-century history makes it something of a more upbeat Chinatown.

David says

As Gore uses Hammett as his main character in 1928 at a time when he was mostly a writer but not too far removed from detecting.

As I had just finished reading Nolan's book that uses Hammett as a character I decided this was a good follow up.

I liked this, nothing rang false to me and I look forward to reading Gore's other book I have.

Nancy says

Mercifully, this book does not contain any mystery-solving cats, brownie or cornbread recipes, or contemporary cliches. It is an old-fashioned, noir-ish, hard-boiled detective novel. And, I loved it.

I've enjoyed Dashiell Hammett's books, been intrigued by his relationship with Lillian Hellman, and am sorry that I am not better informed about his life. The fictional Hammett in Joe Gores' book was an interesting man whose character contained light, dark and every shade of gray. I loved his intelligence, his slight vulnerability, and his rock-solid moral core.

The book also gives us a wonderful sense of a vibrant and very corrupt California in the 1920's. I can't help but smile thinking of the detective/hero taking the streetcar instead of driving as he goes on dates or meets a contact in his investigation. What fun to time travel in this manner.

Gabriel says

I have to say, so far, more Mickey Spillane than Dashiell Hammett-- the cop kicking the rapist's testicles in so hard that his spinal column breaks being exhibit A. Also, I know that I'm deficient as regards attention (Doctor told me so), but this book loses me every couple of pages. What happened? What?

Not necessarily a bad thing, but not what I was expecting at all.

The Nouvelle Vague, incredibly enthused by low-budget American filmmaking precisely because it so often

contravened established rules, and thereby opened new windows onto what could be effected by cinema, they then adopted as aesthetic decisions what had been either necessities or mistakes on the part of their American heroes. I see this novel possibly being like those Americans.

But then, it could just be inept.

Ed says

Gores is a good writer in the spirit of Hammett. An ambitious undertaking casting Hammett as the detective, and it works o.k. It's helpful if you've read Hammett's Continental Op. stories and they get referenced by Gores throughout the tale. A pretty good read.
