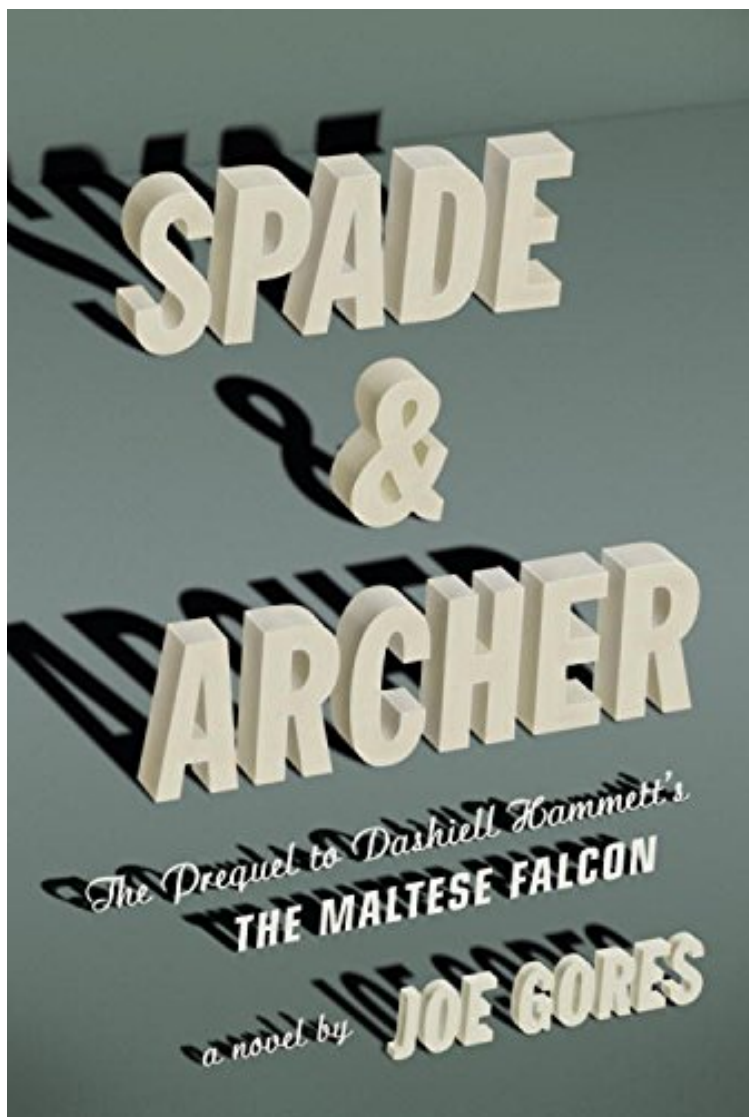


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Spade Archer: The Prequel to Dashiell Hammett's The Maltese Falcon



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA wonderfully dark, pitch-perfect noir prequel to The Maltese Falcon, featuring Dashiell Hammetts beloved detective, Sam Spade.Its 1921seven years before Sam Spade will solve the famous case of the Maltese Falcon. Hes just set up his own agency in San Francisco and he gets off to a quick start, working cases (he doesnt do domestic) and hiring a bright young secretary named Effie Perrine. When hes hired by a prominent San Francisco banker to find his missing son, Spade gets the break hes been looking for. He spends the next few years dealing with booze runners, waterfront thugs, banking swindlers, gold smugglers, and bumbling cops. He brings in Miles Archer as a partner to help bolster the agency,

though it was Archer who stole his girl while he was fighting in World War I. All along, Spade will tangle with an enigmatic villain who holds a long-standing grudge against Spade. And, of course, hell fall in lovethough it wont turn out for the best. It never does with dames.From the Trade Paperback edition.ExtraitSpade's Last CaseIt was thirteen minutes short of midnight. Drizzle glinted through the wind-danced lights on the edge of the Tacoma Municipal Dock. A man a few years shy of thirty stood in a narrow aisle between two tall stacks of crated cargo, almost invisible in a black hooded rain slicker. He had a long bony jaw, a flexible mouth, a jutting chin. His nose was hooked. He was six feet tall, with broad, steeply sloping shoulders.He stayed in the shadows while the scant dozen passengers disembarked from the wooden-hulled steam-powered passenger ferry Virginia V, just in from Seattle via the Colvos Passage. His cigarette was cupped in one palm as if to shield it from the rain, or perhaps to conceal its glowing ember from watching eyes.The watcher stiffened when the last person off the Virginia V was a solid, broad-shouldered man in his late thirties, dressed in a brown woolen suit. His red heavy-jawed face was made for joviality, but his small brown eyes were wary, constantly moving.The passenger went quickly along the dock toward a narrow passageway that led to the city street beyond. The watcher, well behind, ambled after him. The first man had started through the passageway when he was jumped by two bulky, shadowy figures. There were grunts of effort, curses, the sound of blows, the scrape of leather soles on wet cobbles as the men struggled.The watcher announced his arrival by jamming his lighted cigarette into the eye of one attacker. The man screamed, stumbled unevenly away holding a hand over his eye. The second attacker broke free and fled."Lo, Miles."Miles Archer, holding a handkerchief to his bloodied nose, said thickly through the bunched-up cloth, "Uh... thanks, Sam." "Wobblies?" asked Sam Spade. "Wobblies. Who else?"They went down the passageway toward the street. Archer was limping. He had the thick neck and slightly soft middle of an athletic man going to seed."They finally made you as undercover for Burns?" "Took 'em long enough," Archer bragged. He looked over at Spade. "Back with Continental, huh? Uh...?how'd you find me?" "Wasn't looking. Was staked out for a redheaded paper hanger out of Victoria." "I saw him miss the ferry in Seattle." Spade nodded, put a smile on his face that did not touch his eyes. "Belated congratulations on your marriage, Miles." "Yeah, uh, thanks, Sam." Something sly and delighted seemed suddenly to dance in Archer's heavy, coarse voice. "We're living over in Spokane so's she can keep working at Graham's Bookstore, even though I'm down here most of the time. Tough on the little lady, but what can she do?" Spade was at a table set for afternoon tea when the fortyish matron entered from Spokane's Sprague Avenue. The Davenport Hotel's vast Spanish-patio-style lobby was elegant, with a mezzanine above and, on the ground floor, an always-burning wood fireplace. When the woman paused in the doorway he stood. His powerful, conical, almost bearlike body kept his gray woolen suit coat from fitting well.She crossed to him. She had wide-set judging eyes and a small, disapproving mouth. "I am Mrs. Hazel Cahill. And you are..." He gave a slight, almost elegant bow. "Samuel Spade." Mrs. Cahill set her Spanish-leather handbag on one of the chairs, stripped off her kidskin gloves, and slid them through the bag's carrying straps. Her movements were measured. She turned slightly so Spade's thick-fingered hands could remove her coat.She sat. She did not thank him. She said, "Three o'clock last Monday afternoon he and two other men came from this hotel, laughing about their golf scores. My husband, Theodore, and I just moved here from Tacoma a month ago, and it's been five years, but I know what I saw." "I didn't say you didn't." "Theodore does. Constantly." Her head shake danced carefully marcelled curls under her narrow-brimmed hat. "You men always stick together." Spade nodded with seeming indifference. "Theodore and he were great cronies-golf and tennis, drinks at the club. When he abandoned poor Eleanor five years ago and didn't turn up dead Theodore called him the one who got away. Eleanor is my best friend. She never remarried." The skylight in the high vaulted ceiling laid a slanted bar of pale afternoon sunlight across one corner of their table. Spade's raised brows, which peaked slightly above his yellow-gray eyes, encouraged confidences. "Did Eleanor's husband recognize you?" "No. And only when they were past did I recognize him, from his voice-a distinctive tenor I'd always found irritating." She pursed thin lips and something like malice gleamed in her eyes. "Of course I immediately called Eleanor in Tacoma to tell her I had seen her missing husband here in Spokane." "And she believed you. Even if your husband doesn't." "My husband never believes me." "If the man's here I'll find him." After she had gone Spade remained, rolled and smoked three cigarettes in quick succession, muttered aloud, "What the hell?" and left the hotel.John Graham's Bookstore was on the corner of Sprague Avenue and West First Avenue, hard by the Davenport Hotel. Spade entered with long strides, slowed as if looking for a particular volume on the crowded shelves. There were a half dozen browsers and an almost pleasant smell of old books in the air.Graham himself, a thin bespectacled man with a trim white mustache and wings

of silver hair swept back from either side of his face, was ringing up a sale on the front register. A female clerk was selling a customer a book halfway down the store. Spade went that way, his eyes hooded. The clerk was a blonde of about his age, pretty verging on beautiful, with an oval face, blue eyes, and a moist red mouth. Her silk-striped woolen rep dress, too fashionable for a shopgirl to wear to work, clung to an exquisite body. The big round blue eyes lit up when she saw Spade. She hurried her sale to just short of rudeness, came up to Spade, raised her face for his kiss. Instead, he put an arm around her shoulders, turned her slightly, kissed her on the cheek. "You didn't tell me you were in town!" she exclaimed in a slightly hurt voice. "Just for the day," he lied easily. "On a case." "And you came into Graham's for old time's sake," she said. "Because we met here." In that light her eyes looked almost violet. "That first time, you came in to get a book and instead you got..." -she opened her arms wide- "me!" Spade grunted. "Just as a rental." "That's a nasty thing to say to a girl, Sam." "Not a girl anymore. Not Ida Nolan anymore." "What did you expect? You ran off to be a hero in France." His eyes hardened between down-drawn brows. He said in a sarcastic voice, "I love you, Sam. I'll wait for you, Sam." "I got lonely." "And married Miles Archer three months after I left." "Miles was here. Miles was eager to marry me. Miles-" "I saw Miles in Tacoma a couple of nights ago," Spade said. "He thanked me." She said almost cautiously, "For what?" "Going into the army. Leaving him an open field." "He isn't due back from Tacoma until tomorrow..." "I'm booked on the four oh five stage to Seattle." "To hell with you, Sam Spade," Iva Archer said viciously. The engines growled and shook; white water boiled up around the stern of the Eliza Anderson as she backed away from the ramshackle Victoria, British Columbia, slip. Fog, wet as rain, already had swept most of the passengers off the darkening deck into the cabin for their three-hour trip down Puget Sound to Seattle. A dark-haired man just shy of forty turned from the coffee urn with a steaming mug in one hand. He had a trim mustache over a wide mouth, narrow, amused eyes under level brows, a strong jaw, a small faded scar on his left cheek. Before exiting he set down his coffee and cinched up the belt of his ulster. Sam Spade, who had been leaning against the bulkhead midcabin, sauntered out after him. Moisture immediately beaded Spade's woolen knit cap, the turned-up collar of his mackinaw. The man was standing at the rail, mug in hand, staring down at the wind-tossed water. A glow came into Spade's eyes. His upper lip twitched in what could have been a smile. He leaned on the railing beside the other man. "Mr. Flitcraft, I presume?" The man dropped his mug overboard. Charles Pierce slid warily through the doorway like a cat entering a strange room. He relaxed fractionally when he saw a bottle of Johnnie Walker whiskey and two glasses on a tray on the table. Spade was at the sink running water into a pitcher. The room was simple, comfortable, homey, with a private bath. "I want to get this over with," said Pierce in a high, clear voice. "Not that I have anything to feel guilty about." They touched glasses. Spade said, "Success to crime." "There's no crime involved here. Nothing like that." Without obvious irony Spade said, "Five years ago, in 1916, a man named Robert Flitcraft did a flit in Tacoma. Before leaving his real estate office to go to luncheon, he made an engagement for a round of golf at four o'clock that afternoon. He didn't keep the engagement. Nobody ever saw him again." Pierce downed half his drink. Spade's hands had been rolling a cigarette. He lit it, looked through the drifting smoke with candid eyes. "The police got nowhere. Flitcraft's wife came to our Seattle office. She said she and her husband were on good terms, said they had two boys, five and three, said he drove a new Packard, said he had a successful real estate business and a net worth of two hundred thousand dollars. I was assigned to the case. I could find no secret vices, no other woman, no hidden bank accounts, no sign Flitcraft had been putting his affairs in order. He vanished with no more than fifty bucks in his pocket. He was just gone, like your lap when you stand up." "What he did makes perfect sense! He-" "When I went into the army in nineteen seventeen he was still missing. Last week his wife came in to tell us a friend of hers had seen him here in Spokane." Spade rubbed his jutting chin as if checking his shave. "Now we have Charles Pierce living in a Spokane suburb with his wife of two years and an infant son. He sells new cars, nets twenty-five thousand a year, belongs to the country club, plays golf most afternoons at four o'clock during the season. His wife doesn't look like Flitcraft's wife, but they're more alike than different. Afternoon bridge, salad recipes..." Pierce was fidgeting. "What are you getting at?" "I was sent here to find and identify the man our informant thought was Flitcraft. I've done that. Charles Pierce is Robert Flitcraft. No definite instructions beyond that, but there's the bigamy question. Wife here, wife in Tacoma. Kids from both marriages..." For the first time Spade addressed Pierce directly as Flitcraft. "Of course since you left your first wife extremely well fixed you could claim you thought that after all this time she would have divorced you in absentia-" "I was on my way to lunch." He paused. "A steel beam fell from a new office building and hit the sidewalk right beside me." "A beam." Spade's voice was without inflection. "A chip of concrete flew up..." His hand

absently touched the faint scar on his left cheek. "I was more shocked than scared. I was a good husband, a good father, I was doing everything right, and none of it meant a damned thing if a beam could fall off a building and kill me." "As if someone had taken the lid off life and let you see how it really worked?" Spade pinched his lower lip, frowned, drew his brows together. "No logic, no fairness, only chance." His frown disappeared. "Sure. By getting in step with what you thought was life you got out of step with real life." "You do get it! I decided that if my life was merely a collection of random incidents, I would live it randomly. That afternoon I went to Seattle, caught a boat to San Francisco. For the next few years I wandered around and finally ended up back in the Northwest. I got a chance to buy into an auto dealership here in Spokane, met my wife, got married, had a son..." He grinned almost sheepishly. "I like the climate." "Three things not in my report," said Spade. Ralph Dudley, resident supervisor of Continental's Seattle office, was in his seventies, fifty years on the job, white of mustache, pink of face. His kindly eyes behind rimless spectacles were misleading; they never changed expression, not even when he sent his ops out to face danger, sometimes death. "First item," said Spade. "Nobody's said so, but before Flitcraft disappeared Mrs. Cahill made a play for him. An affair wouldn't have fit in with his view of what the good citizen-husband-father did so he turned her down. She didn't like that. So when she spotted him in Spokane she couldn't wait to try and make as much trouble for him as she could." Dudley said in mild-voiced skepticism, "I see." "Second item. Flitcraft was afraid his first wife wouldn't get what he did. She didn't. She just figures he played a dirty trick on her so she's going to get a quiet divorce." Merriment lit his face. "Flitcraft doesn't get it either. He adjusted to falling beams. When no more beams fell he adjusted back again." "You mentioned three things, Spade." "Flitcraft is my last case." Dudley turned his swivel chair to stare out the window. Half a dozen mosquito-fleet ferries were churning their various ways across Elliott Bay between the Seattle waterfront and the distant irregular green rectangle of Blake Island. Dudley told the window, "In nineteen seventeen you couldn't wait for us to get into the war. Disregarding my direct order, you went over the border to enlist in the First Canadian Division." He turned to look at Spade. "While training in England you took up competitive pistol shooting. You made some records." "The pistol made the records. All I did was point it and make it go bang," said Spade. "Eight-shot thirty-eight Webley-Fosbery automatic revolver. Only three hundred of them ever got made because they jammed in combat, but they were so accurate on the firing range they got banned from competition shooting." Dudley went on coldly as if Spade hadn't spoken. "You were assigned to the Seventh Battalion of the Second Infantry Brigade and saw action in the trenches of the Lens-Arras sector of France. You were wounded. You got a medal. Upon your return, against my better judgment, I took you back." His voice took on a nasty edge. "A competitive pistol shot, a war hero, and suddenly you don't like guns. Suddenly you're quitting the detective trade. Do you mind telling me why? Or have you just lost your stomach for real man's work?" Spade stood. He did not offer his hand. "I think if you need to use a gun you're doing a lousy job as a detective. As for resigning, I don't like the work here much since the war. Too much head knocking, not enough door knocking. And who says I'm quitting the detective trade?"

From the Hardcover edition.

Revue de presse

Gores delivers the streets gritty, the action hard-boiled and the feel of late-night mist seeping into your bones. . . . Hammett would have approved. San Francisco Chronicle

A welcome addition to the Sam Spade legend. Free Lance-Star

Gores is far and away the best candidate to pull off such a risky endeavor . . . [He] knows Falcon forward and backward . . . Spade Archer [is] never less than entertaining. Los Angeles Times

A prequel that honors and enhances the legendary volume it enshrines. . . . This novel feels pre-aged more than dated as vintage Hammett often does to today's readers. . . . This is a very fine novel. Respectful, but too mindful of the source to be reverent

Spade Archer exalts Dashiell Hammett, codifies his life's work and decorously affirms the master's serious intent. James Ellroy

A respectable piece of work. . . . [Gores] captures Hammett's razor-sharp dialogue and his lovingly detailed portraits of the streets of San Francisco. Washington Post

Book World

Gores's voice is a pleasure. If it isn't seamless ventriloquism, it's the sound of a writer professing his love for the master who came before. Newsday

Absorbing. . . . Readers with an appetite for Hammett can feed it with this new novel . . . A fine re-imagining. Cleveland Plain Dealer

Gores does a bang-up job . . . [He] knits together a clever and appropriate back story for the iconic detective that makes for a nifty period potboiler all on its own. Rocky Mountain News

[Gores] is a master storyteller and fun to follow down the fog-bound streets of San Francisco. . . . [Spade Archer] engages and flows with creepy atmosphere, crisp dialogue and multiple plots, one drawn from Hammett's Pinkerton days, spinning like plates on poles. Dallas Morning News

No one understands Dashiell Hammett better than Joe Gores, and no one but Joe Gores could have produced such a masterful and faithful rendering of the prequel to *The Maltese Falcon*. Spade Archer stands on its own as a taut,

engrossing existential crime saga set in San Francisco's vibrant 1920s, and as an evocation of Hammett's style and plots is a triumph. Gores' wondrous talent shines and the shadow it casts of Hammett is smiling. James Grady, seventy-nine years after *The Maltese Falcon* was first published, the other (gum)shoe drops. Its called *Spade Archer* and it's fabulous. Michael Harvey: It took guts for Joe Gores to attempt a prequel to one of the great American novels. Guts or nuts, had to be one or the other. Lesser writers have attempted to ape Hammett's style and come off like mannered tough guys wearing their big brothers' double-breasted suits, but Gores manages to be both true to Hammett's vision and true to his own considerable gifts. *Spade Archer* is a triumph: intricately plotted, deft and strongly written, and perhaps most exciting, he shows us Sam Spade at the beginning of his career, deepening our appreciation of the character. I loved it. Robert Ferrigno: I was amazed at Joe Gores' *Spade Archer*. He's got Hammett's style down, and the story he tells is every bit as engrossing as anything Hammett ever wrote. I adored it. Joe R. Lansdale