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Dashiell Hammett

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Dashiell Hammett

Red Harvest / The Dain Curse / The Maltese Falcon / The Glass Key / The Thin Man Dashiell Hammett Complete in one volume, the five books that created the modern American crime novel

In a few years of extraordinary creative energy, Dashiell Hammett invented the modern American crime novel. In the words of Raymond Chandler, "Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse.... He put these people down on paper as they were, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes."

The five novels that Hammett published between 1929 and 1934, collected here in one volume, have become part of modern American culture, creating archetypal characters and establishing the ground rules and characteristic tone for a whole tradition of hardboiled writing. Drawing on his own experiences as a Pinkerton detective, Hammett gave a harshly realistic edge to novels that were at the same time infused with a spirit of romantic adventure. His lean and deliberately simplified prose won admiration from such contemporaries as Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner.

Each novel is distinct in mood and structure. *Red Harvest* (1929) epitomizes the violence and momentum of his *Black Mask* stories about the anonymous detective the Continental Op, in a raucous and nightmarish evocation of political corruption and gang warfare in a western mining town. In *The Dain Curse* (1929) the Op returns in a more melodramatic tale involving jewel theft, drugs, and a religious cult. With *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) and its protagonist Sam Spade, Hammett achieved his most enduring popular success, a tightly constructed quest story shot through with a sense of disillusionment and the arbitrariness of personal destiny. *The Glass Key* (1931) is a further exploration of city politics at their most scurrilous. His last novel was *The Thin Man* (1934), a ruefully comic tale paying homage to the traditional mystery form and featuring Nick and Nora Charles, the sophisticated inebriates who would enjoy a long afterlife in the movies.

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