

## **Films related to Dashiell Hammett**

To recommend just two films as essential viewing from the selection below I would list *The Maltese Falcon* and *Heat* with the first film as the classic embodiment of Hammett's detective and the second as the contemporary police version of the same essential character.

### **The Thin Man** (1934) Directed by W.S. Van Dyke

While the book was published in 1932 near the end of Hammett's writing career, the gentleman, 'amateur' detective of the story, Nick Charles, harks back to the earlier era of Sherlock Holmes and the suave gentleman-detectives.

### **The Maltese Falcon** (1941) directed by John Huston

Taut and focussed; this film with Humphrey Bogart in the lead role is the film that crystallized how the hard-boiled detective should be played and the milieu he inhabited.

### **Murder, My Sweet** (1944) (also known as **Farewell, My Lovely**) directed by Edward Dmytryk

I have not seen this film, but it is regarded as one the best adaptations of Chandler's work. See the Internet Movie Database:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037101/>

### **The Big Sleep** (1946) directed by Howard Hawks

With Bogart as Sam Spade in the *Maltese Falcon* and here as Philip Marlowe in the *Big Sleep*, it is in fact hard to tell the difference between the two private eyes. The hardboiled detective crystallised in fiction by Hammett has been taken by Chandler and will be used again by many others.

### **Chinatown** (1967) directed by Roman Polanski

This film showed that the private detective did not fade and die in the forties. The script by Robert Towne is recognised as outstanding. It's the double intertwining back stories that add the depth to the film.

**Harper** (1966) directed by Jack Smight

This private detective is called Lew Harper. He's living in the hippie era of the swinging sixties but he still has the private detective's suit on and his manners, attitude and investigative technique come from the hardboiled era.

**Bullitt** (1968) directed by Peter Yates

While Hammett's hero was a private eye who was happy to talk, Bullitt is a stoical cop, but his dedication in the face of corruption is the same as Sam Spade's and Philip Marlowe's

**Dirty Harry** (1971) directed by Don Siegal

This film was the first of a set with Detective Harry Callaghan as the isolated cop who knows what needs to be done to get the job done. It moved the cop film toward the gunplay and action 'shoot 'em up' that is prevalent in cinema today.

**The Long Goodbye** (1973) directed by Robert Altman

A more laid back approach to portraying the role of Philip Marlowe than earlier films but still he still has the same need to find out the truth and his integrity is based on his honesty.

**Farewell, My Lovely** (1975) directed Dick Richards

*Farewell, My lovely* keeps to the tone and style of Chandler's book and to the style and pace of the private detective films of the 1940's. As such it seems a little antiquated in its approach.

**Hammett** (1982) directed by Wim Wenders

Having not seen this film since its release I don't have any comment about it, but it gets a good review on the internet movie database.

<http://poll.imdb.com/title/tt0085640/>

**Witness** (1985) directed by Peter Weir

In this world there is city of urban crime and the countryside is a peaceful idyll. The cop experiences a world, the peaceful life of the Amish where he might lay down his gun, but this can never be his true calling. His job is to protect society not become part of it.

**Die Hard** (1988) Directed by John McTiernan

A lone cop trapped in a single building who has to fight a determined ruthless gang. *The House in Turk Street* is one of the fledging stories that implicitly contributed to this kind of action blockbuster.

**Miller's Crossing** (1990) directed by Joel Coen

*Miller's Crossing* is a loose adaptation of Hammett's *Red Harvest*. This film was very well received critically and is often mentioned to me as a good, even great film by the Coen brothers. What I find I don't like about *Miller's Crossing* is that it is too stylish and too cinematic. These may be odd things to find fault with but I prefer the direct, no-nonsense, simple style of the earlier hardboiled films such as the *Big Sleep* and the *Maltese Falcon*.

**Last Man Standing** (1996) directed by Walter Hill

Akira Kurosawa, the renowned Japanese director loosely based his film *Yojimbo* (1961), on the Continental Op novel, *Red Harvest*. Walter Hill has taken this samurai film and put it back into the American setting of Hammett's book. I feel that *Last Man Standing*

is deeply flawed as a film. It's well shot, well directed and well cast, but has become too simplistic in terms of its character and plotting.

**Heat (1995)** directed by Michael Mann

Here it is Al Pacino as the hardboiled detective who has to solve the crime and Robert DeNiro as the equally implacable arch-villain. The steel of the Hammett detective has been moved contemporary Los Angeles, with the addition of some blockbuster action.

**No Good Deed** (2002) Directed by Bob Rafelson

A direct adaptation of *The House in Turk Street*. It is very flawed and these failures are interesting to consider. What went wrong?

**Hostage** (2005) directed by Florent Emilio Siri

A very recent example of a story situation that could have grown from the model provided by the *House in Turk Street*: The villains have the upper hand and the determination of an isolated ingenious cop is the key to reversing this situation.

**Silver City** (2005) directed by John Sayles

From the following summary it seems plain that the just released, *Silver City*, is a story that has a hard-boiled legacy: "When politician Dickie Pilager (Cooper) goes fishing for an election promo and reels in a body, discredited journalist-turned-private investigator Danny O'Brien (Huston) is assigned to prevent further campaign embarrassments. But his curiosity about the corpse sets him defiantly on the trail of greed, corruption and lethal secrets." It might be interesting to watch this latest film to see how well and how much the private eye of the 1920's has lasted up until 2005.