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THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE

by Martin Grams Jr.

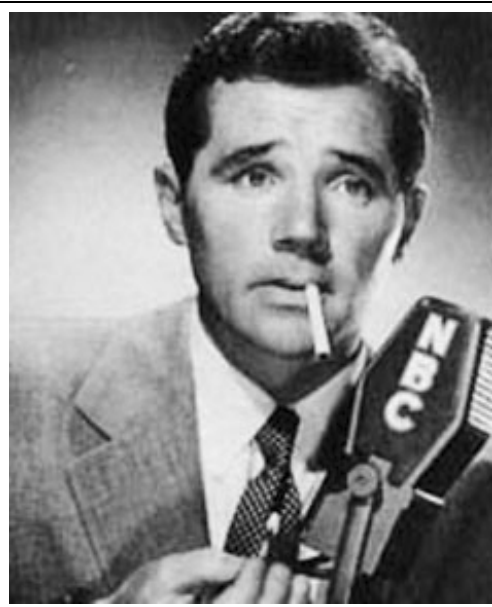
When Dashiell Hammett's *The Adventures of Sam Spade* made its debut over CBS in August of 1946, personable Howard Duff, a comparative unknown in Hollywood circles, was assigned the title role. The selection of young Duff for the hard-hitting detective was perfect casting, his success was immediate, and Hollywood began predicting important things to come for this new personality.

Prior to *The Adventures of Sam Spade*, the famed Hammett detective appeared in character on three prior occasions, all of them were adaptations of motion-picture version of *The Maltese Falcon* (not an adaptation of the novel). The first was *The Lux Radio Theatre*, broadcast February 8, 1943. The hour-long radio broadcast featured a cast completely different from the film. Edward G. Robinson, best known for playing "tough guys" in Warner Bros. gangster pictures, played the role of Sam Spade. Laird Cregar played the role of Casper Gutman.

The second adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon* was on the September 20, 1943 broadcast of *The Lady Esther Screen Guild Theater*. Broadcast in a thirty-minute time slot, this dramatization featured four actors reprising their film roles for this abridged version: Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade, Peter Lorre as Joel Cairo, Sydney Greenstreet as Casper Gutman, and Mary Astor as Brigid O'Shaughnessy.

The third adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon* was on the July 3, 1946 broadcast of *Academy Award Theatre*. Broadcast in a thirty-minute time slot, this version featured Humphrey Bogart, Sydney Greenstreet and Mary Astor reprising their film roles. Coincidentally, this dramatization was broadcast over the CBS radio network, just nine days before the ABC network premiered *The Adventures of Sam Spade*.

Howard Duff was born in Bremerton, Washington, August 24, 1913. He originally wanted to be a cartoonist, until he was cast in the leading male role in *Trelawney of the Wells* at the Roosevelt High School in Seattle. He heard the applause and decided then and there that he wanted to be an actor. Graduating from Roosevelt High School, the hopeful actor joined the Seattle Repertory Theater.



Duff served with the U.S. Army from March 1941 to November 1945. During his stint in service, "Private Howard Duff" was interviewed as a guest feature on the December 22, 1942 broadcast of *The Pepsodent Show*, starring Bob Hope. During the war years, Duff acted in supporting roles on various programs such as *Wings to Victory* and *One Night Stand*, and more importantly, served as the AFRS

announcer for radio broadcasts re-edited for troops stationed overseas. There are numerous recordings that exist with Howard Duff serving as both the announcer and host of such radio programs as *Your Hit Parade*, *Duffy's Tavern* and *The Telephone Hour*.

Attached to the Armed Forces Radio Service branch, he spent six months covering Saipan, Guam and Iwo Jima, working with AFRS radio stations in those areas as

(Continued on Page 3)

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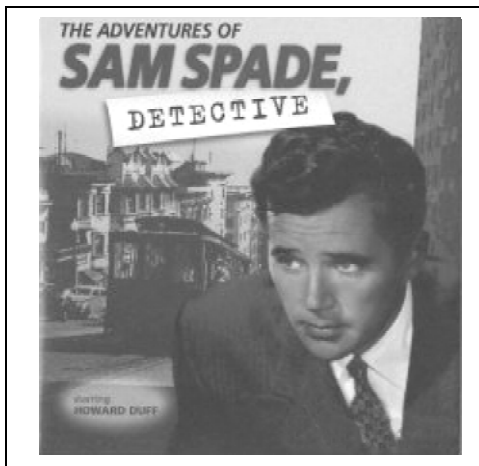
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33rd Friends of Old-time Radio Convention, Oct 23 – 26, 2008 Holiday Inn, Newark, NJ; For info: Jay Hickerson, 27436 Desert Rose Ct, Leesburg, FL 34748 (352) 727-6731, JayHick@aol.com, web site: <http://www.fotr.net>

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a news correspondent. By 1945, he was a staff sergeant when discharged. Among Duff's radio credits was the January 8, 1946 broadcast of *Theater of Romance*, in which he was cast in three supporting roles in a dramatization of "The Corsican Brothers," the first Hollywood broadcast to feature Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. after five years of military service.

His big break came in the spring of 1946. William Spier, producer/director of the CBS radio program, *Suspense*, was involved in bringing Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade character to the airwaves. Spier was looking for that perfect voice - the persona who could best



represent the character he had in mind.

"The most memorable moment of my life came when I was at my lowest spirit," Duff recalled in a column for the *National Enquirer* in 1957. "It was right after World War II, and, like a million other guys, I was back home with an honorable discharge and no job. I wanted to be an actor. Day after day, I made the rounds of radio studios and always received the standard brush-off. Eating regularly became a problem for me."

"Then one day, when I was discouraged, disgusted and hungry, I dropped into a producer's office to try out for a role on a forth-coming radio program about the adventures of a tough private detective," Duff continued. "There must have been at least 100 other guys jammed in that office waiting to read for the Sam Spade role. I even recognized a few famous faces in the crowd, and it threw me into even a greater melancholy. By the time my turn came I was feeling real mean, and about as low as a patrolman's instep. When they handed me the script and told me to go ahead, I delivered the lines in a half-snarling, half-bored manner like a guy reading a grocery list. I put no punch into my delivery because I just didn't care any more about getting a job as an actor."

Spier was not initially impressed with Duff's performance, but his wife, Kay Thompson, became so enthralled with Duff's interpretation of the Sam Spade character that she continued to rally for Duff to her husband, until he relented. "Two days later, the producer of the Sam Spade show phoned me," Duff recalled. "'You've got the job,' he told me, 'You sound just the

way we want Sam Spade to sound. You're a natural for him.' Becoming Sam Spade, private eye, for radio fame, was the greatest moment in my life. It just goes to prove that luck can happen to a guy when he least expects it."

Dashiell Hammett, the creator of the fictional private eye, received royalty checks for the use of his character, but had no direct involvement with the series except the lending of his name in the opening and closing credits.

The audition episode was entitled "Sam Spade and the Walls of Jericho," and the origin dates back as early as June 29, 1944, when Jo Eisinger's story "The Walls Came Tumbling Down" was dramatized on radio's *Suspense*, also directed by William Spier. Keenan Wynn plays a newspaper columnist investigating the murder of a priest, which concludes with the discovery of an elusive painting worth a small fortune. Ala *The Maltese Falcon*, Eisinger's story was adapted for *Suspense* by Robert Tallman.

Almost two years later, an audition record was made for *The Adventures of Sam Spade* (dated May 1, 1946) and Howard Duff played the title role. Bob Tallman and Jo Eisinger co-wrote the script for the *Sam Spade* audition, and changed the lead from a newspaper reporter to a private detective. Later that same year, a feature-length movie of the same name was released in theaters with Lee Bowman as the investigating reporter.

The audition record cinched a sponsor, Wildroot Hair Tonic, and a network, the American Broadcasting Company. The recording was never broadcast on the air, leaving the radio audience and fans to this day wondering just what the plot was, and the opportunity to hear Howard Duff make his dramatic appearance as Sam Spade. Both the audition record and the first few broadcasts of the series gave no air credit for the writers. Spier intended to convince the network, ABC, that Dashiell Hammett was personally involved with the episodes, since the contract between Spier and Hammett stated the author's name would be employed in the epigraphs each week.

Of the 13 episodes broadcast on ABC, seven were Bob Tallman - Jo Eisinger originals; the remaining six were adaptations of Hammett's short stories. Tallman and Eisinger never received writing credit for any of the ABC broadcasts.

The 13 episodes broadcast over the ABC network were perhaps some of the best of the series. The plots were clever and intricate. Spade's clients had little ethics and when the situation called for desperate means, Spade threw his good intentions out the window.

The premiere broadcast, "Sam and the Guiana Sovereign," was an original script by Tallman and Eisinger, and played much like *The Maltese Falcon* with a cast of shady characters, stooping to betrayal and murder to gain possession of a valuable artifact.

Shortly after newspapers report the murder and robbery of Bernard F. Gilmore, Sam finds himself hired by Gilmore's business partner, Emil Tonescu, to find the

Guiana Sovereign that was stolen from the dead man. The Sovereign has sentimental value, according to Tonescu, who wishes to have it returned. Naturally, Sam meets enough suspects to fill a tabloid, only to discover that Gilmore is alive and well, in hiding. He survived the murder attempt, with a gunshot wound, and preferred to remain in hiding when he learns that his assailant was Cara Kenbrook, a former business partner in Trinidad. Before Sam learns of Cara Kenbrook's involvement, Tonescu is murdered by Gilmore, and Sam discovers all the motives - including blackmail.

Sam's methods are unorthodox, as revealed when he pushes the corpse of Tonescu into a closet, cleaning the scene of the crime to baffle the police, and drinking rum and Coke and a shot while on duty.

There were a few lines scratched out of the script, including one where Sam takes Lina's money to exchange for helping return the coin to her, even though he was hired by Tonescu to do the same. There is a similar scene in which Sam took Brigid O'Shaughnessy's money in *The Maltese Falcon*. Another deleted scene was when Effie asks about the thousand dollars he earned on the case, and Sam explains that he lost it all on a horse race.

The second broadcast of the series, "Sam and the Farewell Murders," broadcast July 19, 1946, was the first of many episodes adapted from a Dashiell Hammett story. Though Hammett had no participation in the radio productions, many of his short stories were adapted (or in some cases the plots were lifted) from short stories already published in magazines and periodicals.

This episode, adapted from "The Farewell Murder" (originally published in the February 1930 issue of *Black Mask*), concerns Miriam Farewell, who hires Sam to visit her father-in-law, the great, wealthy Carter P. Farewell, whose life has been threatened in a poison pen letter. After one failed murder attempt, she fears the culprit will try again. The lead suspect is Farewell's English neighbor, Captain Sherry, who was drummed out of the Army years ago because Mr. Farewell's shady business ventures financially hurt Sherry. When the old man is found murdered, the police are unable to pin the crime on Captain Sherry.

Spade and Miriam visit the hotel where Sherry is staying, only to find him dead from a bullet to the head, and Dolph, Miriam's husband, with a gun in his hand. While Spade phones Lt. Dundy, Dolph jumps out the window, taking his own life. Dundy arrives at the scene and Spade explains how Dolph didn't jump out the window - he was pushed by Miriam when Spade was on the phone in the other room. She planned the death of her father-in-law so she could collect her inheritance, and attempted to cover her tracks with a second murder. In this broadcast, Spade romantically kisses Miriam, a married woman, who was still married to Dolph.

On August 6, 1946, Dashiell Hammett's short story, "Two Sharp Knives," was adapted for the *Sam Spade*

program. William Spier, having produced and directed two previous adaptations of the short story for the December 22, 1942 and June 7, 1945 broadcasts of *Suspense*, offered a different take on the mystery classic.

Rather than play the story straight from beginning to the end, Tallman and Eisinger presented a "flashback" episode concerning a chapter of Spade's life, before getting into the private detective business. When an old friend named Wally, dies in Spade's office, Spade recounts to Effie his past as a detective lieutenant in a mid-west state, where Wally was the mastermind behind a murder and a large payoff. The flashback story was the adaptation of the "Two Sharp Knives" tale, suggesting Sam solved crimes before going into private practice.

In "Zig Zags of Treachery," broadcast August 23, 1946, Spade recounts his caper to Effie from a hospital bed. This was the only episode of the thirteen ABC broadcasts to feature Spade dictating his caper from a clinic, while recovering from his wounds. Spade, however, would dictate his adventures from a hospital bed more than once throughout the series.

Two references to *The Maltese Falcon* is featured in "Sam and the Scythian Tiara," broadcast August 30, 1946. Sam is hired by Mr. Main to deliver a package of "extreme value." When Sam asks why Main chose him, the client replies, "I've had you thoroughly investigated, Mr. Spade. I know of your part in the affair of the Guiana Sovereign, the Maltese Falcon, and the Aelfric Bibles. I think I can trust you." Another reference to the *Maltese Falcon* is revealed when Sam initially describes Maria: ". . . she was talking to the sultriest looking dame I had seen since Brigid O'Shaughnessy."

At the end of the caper, Maria Gungen deliberately shoots a man in cold blood. Having witnessed her as a victim of heartbreak, Sam lies to protect her, claiming he saw her shoot the villain in self-defense. "He was reaching for his gun when you shot him," he confesses. Maria tries to argue with Spade but he reminds her, "Remember that, sweetheart. He was reaching for his gun."

In "The Corporation Murders," broadcast September 6, 1946, the City Commissioner revokes Spade's license (he threatened the same action in the *Falcon* novel), and the detective seeks out the murderer of Mr. and Mrs. Desmond, so he can get his license back. This episode marks the first of many mentions of Sid Weiss, Sam's lawyer. Weiss is mentioned in *The Maltese Falcon*, but never appears in character, only as a voice on the phone.

On September 13 and 20, 1946, the two-part "The Dot Marlow Caper" offered Sam's first glance of "Tinsel Town" when he visits Hollywood to help solve a murder. Along the way, he meets celebrities that were written in as a tip of the hat to real-life actors. Sigrid Lindstrom was a play on Ingrid Bergman, and Gino Lupa was a play on Ida Lupino. Years after this episode was broadcast, Howard Duff would marry Ida Lupino. The mention of

Gino Lupa, however, was only a coincidence - not an inside joke.

The final broadcast of the ABC series was "The Gutting of Couffignal," broadcast October 4, 1946. In the original story, a White Russian general leads a military-style operation to rob the cream of California society, who were gathered on an isolated island for a wedding. Though this story features more action than mystery, Spade's character is put to the test when he confronts a princess, who tempts him with a percentage of the profits. Spade turns her down, preaching the honesty of his profession.

"Let me straighten this out for you, Princess," he explains. "I'm a detective because I happen to like the work. I could find other work that pays better. Even a hundred dollars more a month would be \$1,200 a year. Say 25 or 30 grand between now and my 60th birthday. I'm passing that honest 30 grand up because I like my work and want to do it as well as I can. Otherwise, there's no sense to it. You can't weigh that against any sum of money. I can't imagine a pleasanter future than twenty-some years more of the work I'm doing. I'm not going to blow it up."

When the Princess laughs at the wounded detective, she teases him about his honest virtues. "One crutch is broken. You can't even hobble. You pretend you'll shoot me. But you won't. If I attacked you - yes. But not if I just go. You know you won't shoot me. You'll wish you could. But you won't. You'll see." When she attempts to leave the room, Spade shoots her in the back (she only suffers a flesh wound). He reminded her that earlier in the day, when he had a wounded leg, he stole the crutches from a crippled boy because he felt he needed them more than the seven-year-old. Apparently she misjudged his ethics;

GENERAL: You have no Russian sentiment, my dear. Sir, this is Princess Pleshkov. My dear, may I present an American detective - Sam Spade.

SPADE: License number 137596!

PRINCESS: How interesting! In this country I thought only our convicts had numbers . . .

Just one year after his "Sam Spade" debut, Howard Duff found himself under personal contract to Mark Hellinger, movie producer. His first screen role as "Soldier" in Hellinger's production of *Brute Force*, had rated him star material from critics throughout the country. He received on-screen credit as "radio's Sam Spade." Even when Duff was given offers for movie roles, he never gave up the radio gig, often making long trips to multiple studios so he could juggle both acting mediums.

(To be continued next month)

RETURN WITH US NOW...

From the Desk of the Editor by Carol Tiffany



Happy 2008 to one and all! Your editor apologizes to all of you for the late January issue of your newsletter. It appears that my computer took a bit of a holiday during the latter part of December, causing much consternation and frustration on the part of yours truly. Things are finally back on track, however, and we should be starting the New Year on a positive note.

We will be presenting several multi-part articles this Spring, starting with Martin Grams' *SAM SPADE* piece which starts in this issue. We will also be continuing with Dick Williamson's challenging OTR crosswords in every issue with sufficient space.

One of the unusual things about Old Time Radio shows was the fact that most shows had one and only one sponsor, which was closely identified with that particular program. Many shows included references to the sponsor in the scripts for the show and the sponsors became part of the storyline or, as demonstrated in Danny Godwin's article in this issue, the butt of jokes. This symbiotic, and highly beneficial to both sides, relationship was part of what made OTR unique.

We are still in need of articles and other items (especially *SHORT* ones) for inclusion in the Newsletter, so if you have a little time and an idea, please write it down and submit it. In the meantime,
Good Listening to All...



New in the Tape and CD Libraries by Maletha King

It's the new year and since we're making plans for the future with our new year's resolutions, how about some shows about the future? This month we're adding to the CD library with "Flash Gordon" and "Tom Corbett Space Cadet" shows. Of course these show were aimed at the kids, but they turn out to be fun for all and should bring back some fond memories.

Next were adding show from a great series, "The Old Gold Comedy Hour". This one is sure to be a crowd "pleaser".

Rexall Takes Merciless Ribbing On NBC Comedy

"What's a Rexall?" --- "Frankie Remley"

by Danny Godwin

This article is an example of a sponsor who was the victim of constant joking on the program it sponsored--- yet had enough of a sense of humor to continue sponsoring it without any hurt feelings. What makes this program/sponsor relationship unique--- Arthur Godfrey and Henry Morgan weren't involved with this program.



When *Rexall* signed on to sponsor NBC's *PHIL HARRIS ALICE FAYE SHOW* in 1948, the drug store chain would be involved with one of the funniest and most unpredictable situation comedies of radio's golden age. As with most half hour radio programs, there were 3 commercials on each broadcast. There were 2 serious commercials for *Rexall* at the beginning and end of the program. These commercials featured the "*Rexall Family Druggist*," as he described the services and products each *Rexall Drug Store* provided. These commercials were informative and uneventful. It was during the program's story where *Rexall* would get a merciless ribbing from the program's cast.

The program starred Phil Harris as he portrayed himself (the same character he played on *THE JACK BENNY PROGRAM*). He was the bandleader of a group of misfits that would make Spike Jones & The City Slickers look like the New York Philharmonic. Phil (the character) had a large ego and was impressed with his curly hair and dimples. Alice Faye, Phil's wife on the

program (and in real life), portrayed herself as a retired movie star, who gave up her career to be a housewife and mother. Although she loved Phil, Alice would put him in his place when he needed it. Making life more complicated than usual was Frankie Remley (played by Elliott Lewis), Phil's "**best friend(?)**" Remley played the guitar on the band. His ideas would get Phil into constant trouble with Alice, the sponsor, and the human race in general. To make matters worse, Remley didn't mind stabbing his best friend in the back for his own personal gain. Julius, the deliver boy (played by Walter Tetley), admired Alice very much, but didn't share that same warmhearted feeling for Phil. Since he had this hostility inside his small frame, Julius didn't mind embarrassing and humiliating Phil and Remley when he had the chance to do so. Willie Faye, Alice's brother (played by Robert North), was another thorn in Phil's side. He was a nerd-like accountant who kept a very close watch on Alice's finances. Willie irritated Phil no end, especially when he greeted him with, "**Gooooood morning, Philip.**" Rounding out the cast was Mr. Scott (played by Gale Gordon), who was in charge of *Rexall's* sponsorship of the program. Among any of the major characters listed, the name *Rexall* would be raked among the coals on every broadcast.

In order to keep going without interruption, the middle commercial was blended into the story line. The radio listeners never knew what would be said about the beleaguered drug store chain--- but they did know it would be funny. For example, the scene was in Mr. Scott's office. Earlier on the broadcast, Scott ordered Phil to fire Remley from his band. On this particular scene, Phil and Remley tried to get the *Rexall* boss to reconsider. Unknown to Scott, Remley paid Julius \$20 to come in and give him a rousing endorsement. Although he was paid the money, Julius had a double cross in mind. When he entered the office, Julius tried to butter Scott up with his "**admiration(?)**" for *Rexall*. Although he said he was too young to "**smoke them,**" Julius stated, "**My father have been smoking Rexalls for nigh on to 20 years.**" Needless to say, smoking *Rexalls* didn't impress Scott. He informed Julius that *Rexall* made drug products. Intentionally misunderstanding what Scott said, Julius then confused *Rexall* for a brand of car. He stated, "**My mother won't drive anything else but a Rexall.**" When Scott began to add up what was going on, Julius took great delight in exposing the master plan. The *Rexall* boss ordered Remley to leave his office immediately--- and if Phil didn't leave behind him, **he** would be fired, too.

This is a sample of the humorous abuse *Rexall* received on *THE PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW*. Since it sponsored the program for 2 seasons, the *Rexall* people didn't mind the humorous comments made about the drug store chain. With the sensitive nature of some sponsors, *Rexall* deserves a medal for being a good sport.

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