



THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE

(continued)

by Martin Grams Jr.

The enormous success of the Sam Spade radio program spawned a comic strip series. A short-lived series of single-page comic strips appeared in the newspapers beginning the summer of 1947, entitled *The Adventures of Sam Spade*. The strip (in color) was authored by artist Lou Fine, and subtitled "The Case of the Box-Car Bandit." The weekly feature was a tie-in with the radio program, and featured the likeness of Howard Duff as Sam Spade. Wildroot also sponsored the comic strip, which only lasted a few months.

On the July 20, 1947 broadcast of the radio series, Effie (played by Lurene Tuttle) rustled about through the newspapers and brought to Sam's attention her discovery of the comic strip, which she saw in the San Francisco Examiner. Sam, of course, isn't getting any residuals or royalties, but shrugs the matter off quickly when Effie prefers a little romance at his desk.



This was not the first time the Sam Spade character appeared in the form of a comic. In 1946, Feature Books (David McKay Publications) issued a comic book (issue #48) adapted from the Dashiell Hammett novel, *The Maltese Falcon*. The artist was Rodlow Willard.

The popularity of the Sam Spade character caused a number of radio cross-overs. On the evening of December 5, 1946, William Spier marked a highlight on

his *Suspense* program when he offered a spooky drama entitled "The House in Cypress Canyon." The tale concerned a real estate agent who invites a friend of his, a detective named "Sam," to listen to a transcription made by a young couple who just purchased their new home. The tale involved a werewolf that howls at night. While the last name of the detective is not given, the actor playing the role is Howard Duff. This was one of William Spier's in-jokes.

Though subject of debate on the world wide web (accessible via the Internet), whether or not it was Sam Spade on that particular *Suspense* episode, the fact remains that Spier arranged for Duff to play the role of a detective named Sam and most likely, to avoid paying royalties for an additional Sam Spade broadcast, avoided

using the "Spade" name during the broadcast. "The House in Cypress Canyon" is now considered by old-time radio fans as one of the 10 best episodes of the *Suspense* program, and one of the 10 most frightening horror radio broadcasts of all time.

Howard Duff did assist other radio programs in spoofing the Sam Spade character on variety/comedy shows. On the October 22, 1947

broadcast of *Philco Radio Time*, starring Bing Crosby, guest Clifton Webb starred as "Clifton Web: Private Face, Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat of Crime." Howard Duff appeared in the middle of the skit as Sam Spade. On the January 24, 1948 broadcast of *Joan Davis Time*, Joan falls asleep, and dreams she is involved with a caper with private detective Sam Spade, also played by Howard

(Continued on Page 3)

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Duff. On the February 10, 1949 broadcast of *Maxwell House Coffee Time*, George Burns and Gracie help Sam Spade, played by Howard Duff, solve the murder of a shady character named Mr. Benson. Comedian Henry Morgan also used a Sam Spade-like bit in his radio program more than once. His character was "Ham Spade, Private Eye" and in one episode, "Ham Spade, Private Orb."

THE YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR CONNECTION

In early 1949, Gil Doud began scripting for the radio program, *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar*. Borrowing a few of the plot lines and motives from episodes of *Sam Spade*, Doud rewrote the stories to fit the *Johnny Dollar* mold. Two episodes from the program's first season on the network, however, scripted by Gil Doud, spoofed the *Maltese Falcon* caper to a tee.

"The Case of the Slow Boat From China," broadcast February 25, 1949, Johnny Dollar, an insurance investigator, visits Singapore to help expedite a shipment of tin, only to meet up with suspicious and shady characters all searching for the mysterious "it." One of the shady individuals sounds like Casper Gutman, and in one scene, Johnny comments that "Your mother must have been frightened by Sydney Greenstreet."

"The Disappearance of Twelve Apex Cabs," broadcast July 24, 1949, definitely contains shades of *The Maltese Falcon*, and the *Sam Spade* radio program. The episode was subtitled, "Who Took the Taxis for a Ride?" Many of the *Sam Spade* radio broadcasts feature a humorous subtitle, courtesy of the script writers. Numerous shady characters are once again in search of a valuable artifact, this time referred to as "The Scarlet Madonna." One of the individuals searching for the artifact, bears resemblance to Sydney Greenstreet's character, and is named "Fat Stuff."

The *Maltese Falcon* formula was reused in "The Commonwealth Tankard," broadcast August 10, 1947. A valuable antique known as "The Commonwealth Tankard" is missing and numerous people are after the same item, resorting to any means to acquire the trinket. Among the suspects is Patience Cromwell, another version of Brigid O'Shaughnessy, who steals the package from Spade.

In "The Cinderella Caper," broadcast September 14, 1947, Spade is hired to escort Ella Pryor, winner of the Cinderella Contest, to the Cinderella costume ball at the Belvedere Ballroom where she will be crowned Miss Cinderella Plastex of 1947. The entire event is hosted by a Shoe Manufacturing Company. At the ball, Spade stumbles upon the murdered body of J.K. Grimm, and Ella turns up missing. A plastic slipper is found at the scene of the crime. Spade, figuring the entire concept is nutty, forgets about the kidnapped girl, and walks away. At his office the next day, the detective finds a classified

in the newspaper, asking for Spade to return the plastic slipper in exchange for the missing girl.

Spade learns that the advertising agency that insured the whole publicity stunt stands to lose a million dollars unless Ella is found before the newspapers catch wind of the kidnapping. Spade visits Ella's house, meets her wicked stepsisters, boyfriend and stepmother and learns they are holding the girl hostage. In the meantime, Effie accidentally leaves the plastic slipper near the heater and the shoe melts, revealing \$50,000 worth of diamonds.

Spade arranges for a representative of the advertising agency, and Ella's evil boyfriend, to visit him late at night in his office to clear the whole matter up. Spade steps aside as the men exchange their differences with gunfire, for the same reason one of them killed J.K. Grimm - ownership of the diamonds. Both men die from their wounds. Ella, no longer a hostage of her evil kin, is shocked by Spade's methods.

ELLA: You didn't kill those people, did you, Mr. Spade?

SPADE: No, but I didn't save them.

ELLA: I'll bet you would have if you could.

SPADE: That's something I have no way of knowing, Sweetheart. It really is.

Sam hands her the diamonds and orders her to leave town quickly and quietly.

Diamonds, naturally, are the motive for murder in numerous episodes. In "The Caper With Eight Diamonds," broadcast November 23, 1947, Professor Raymond Rivers employs Sam to find eight diamonds that were stolen from his laboratory. He was experimenting on staining diamonds, a procedure that would be worth millions - only if his experiment is a success. But the professor won't be able to prove it unless they are recovered. When the professor is found dead the next day, Sam suspects foul play.

DUNDY: Well, the way it looks, Sam, is that the Professor's death was really a suicide.

SPADE: Sure, that's the way it was supposed to look. Only it wasn't. It was murder.

DUNDY: It's always murder. Can't you get mixed up in a simple suicide for once?

After Sam recovers the diamonds, he learns that the Professor's wife had taken out an insurance policy and was his sole heir. She had gotten away with murdering her first husband, and having cashed in on the life insurance once, made a second attempt.

THE DETECTIVE DOESN'T ALWAYS WIN

By 1949, Wildroot continued as sponsor for the program, satisfied with the results for which they were paying, and CBS had another radio program in their prime-time lineup of which they could be proud. But like many successful radio programs, the network was not without complications.

In 1930, Judge Learned Hand suggested in a court ruling that fictional characters, as well as the plot to a

literary property, could be copyrighted. Warner Bros. Studio, having filmed three previous versions of *The Maltese Falcon*, used Hand's ruling as the basis for laying claim to the ownership of the novel, believing it owned all the rights to the story and the characters contained within. Dashiell Hammett and Alfred A. Knopf, the publisher of *The Maltese Falcon*, sold the movie studio the exclusive rights to the story in movies, radio, and television. Naturally, the studio assumed they owned the entire property.

Years later, in 1946, both Hammett and Knopf sold the exclusive right to produce a radio version of the Sam Spade character, to the American Broadcasting Company (transferred to the Columbia Broadcasting System shortly after). After hearing the broadcasts over CBS, Warner Brothers then sued Hammett, Knopf, and the radio network, claiming that they owned the exclusive rights to the Sam Spade character under their prior contract with Hammett.

The studio contended that the radio show was an unauthorized use of the character, and sued the studio under the grounds of copyright infringement. Hammett argued that Warner Bros. had purchased only the motion-picture rights. Since the movie studio would not back down, the case was dragged to court while the radio program continued its weekly course.

Known as "The Sam Spade Case," the studios, Warner Bros. Pictures Inc. and the Columbia Broadcasting System, battled over the ownership to the Sam Spade character for years. The legal heads of CBS were used to handling infringement suits from outside parties, so *Warner Bros. Pictures v. Columbia Broadcasting System* (9th Cir. 1954) 216 F.2d 945, 951 was nothing new to the network.

In 1949, a New York court decided in favor of Warner Bros. Legal council for CBS continued to fight the ruling. In 1954, three years after the radio program ceased broadcast, the Ninth Circuit Court held that Hammett had not granted Warner Bros. the exclusive right to the character of Sam Spade. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals covered a substantial part of the movie and broadcasting industry. "The characters were vehicles for the story told," it said, "and the vehicles did not go with the sale of the story."

DASHIELL HAMMETT INVESTIGATIONS

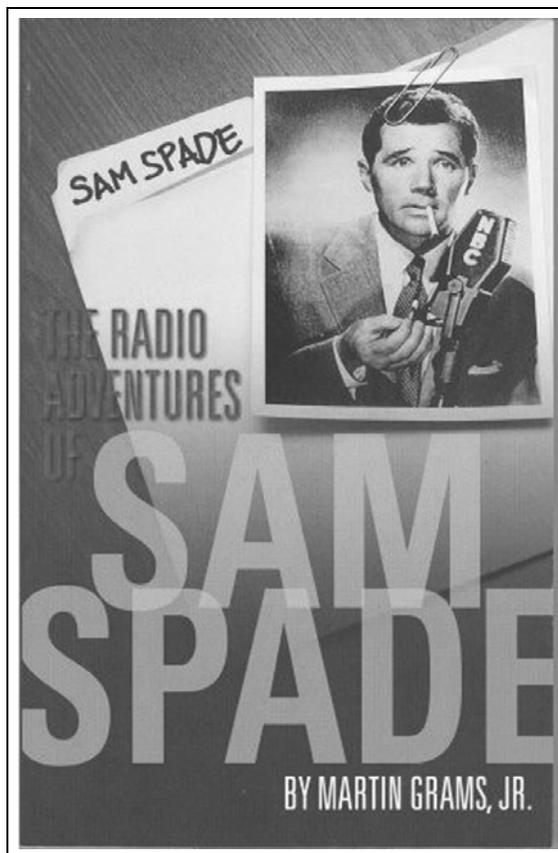
Perceptions changed soon after the end of World War II, with Communism increasingly becoming a focus of American fears and hatred. In 1947, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA), an investigative committee of the United States House of Representatives, held nine days of hearings into alleged Communist propaganda within the Hollywood motion picture industry. The events of the investigation soon spread fear among stage performers, movie actors, screenwriters, directors, and others involved in the entertainment industry. Eventually, more than 300 artists - including directors, radio commentators, actors and particularly screenwriters - were boycotted by the studios. This included Lillian Hellman, who was having a long-term relationship with Dashiell Hammett.

In 1948, Dashiell Hammett became vice-chairman of the Civil Rights Congress, an organization formed in 1946 by a merger of the International Labor Defense and the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties. The Attorney General and the F.B.I. deemed the organization subversive. Suspicion regarding Hammett's loyalties to the United States, and his leanings as a Communist sympathizer earned him suspicion as being a Communist by trade papers and the F.B.I., which began investigating Hammett.

Hammett's name also surfaced before the HCUA, and both CBS and Wildroot, the sponsor for the detective program, became concerned. Under the insistence of William Spier, the script writers began incorporating patriotic messages in the scripts. In "The Bow Window Caper," for example, broadcast November 9, 1947, Sam Spade makes a positive comment about the Constitution,

quoting J. Parnell Thomas, chairman of the HUAC, who was responsible for meeting with film industry executives, intending to expose "subversives" responsible for Communist infiltration of motion pictures.

The Columbia Broadcasting System was getting nervous about Dashiell Hammett's links with pro-Communist groups. Despite inconclusive or questionable evidence, including Hammett's involvement with the Civil Rights Congress, Hammett was too hot for CBS, and network executives decided to cancel *The Adventures of Sam Spade*.



During this time many thousands of Americans were accused of being Communists or communist sympathizers and became the subject of aggressive investigations and questioning before government or private-industry panels, committees and agencies. The primary targets of such suspicions were government employees, those in the entertainment industry, educators and union activists. Many people suffered loss of employment, destruction of their careers, and even imprisonment.

When four Communists related to the organization were arrested, Hammett raised money for their bail bond. When the accused fled, Hammett was subpoenaed in 1951 about their whereabouts. At the hearing, the credibility of the Civil Rights Congress was questioned when the organization presented a denunciation of lynching in the United States, titled *We Charge Genocide*. Hammett, as a member of the CRC, was asked to provide information about the four communists accused of conspiracy. Hammett refused to provide that information, and was imprisoned for five months for contempt of court.

Without skipping a week of broadcasting, Wildroot moved with Duff and the entire cast to the NBC network, under the stipulation that Dashiell Hammett's name be removed from the opening and closing announcer sheets and program credits. Hammett still received his royalty checks as agreed by contract for use of the Sam Spade name, but *Variety* magazine reported that the sponsor was not enthusiastic about Howard Duff, and remained uncertain at the time.

The National Broadcasting Company gave the program the same time slot, Sunday evening from 8 to 8:30 pm, E.S.T. Faithful listeners could tune in at the same day and time to hear their favorite program, but on a different network.

During the NBC run, the sharp wit and dialogue associated with the mystery program was starting to lose its edge. The program started imitating the other mystery detective programs on the air (which they themselves were skimmed-down imitations of what the *Sam Spade* program once was). Spade started driving a car instead of hitching rides on trolleys. He stopped sleeping with and kissing married women. In one episode he actually told a client that he stopped drinking!

Among some of the better episodes of the NBC run was "The Wedding Belle Caper," broadcast January 22, 1950, in which Spade was asked by Betty where he got the key to her apartment. He replied, "Made love to the landlady."

In "The Emerald Eyes Caper," broadcast March 19, 1950, Eileen, a suspect in the case, asks Spade if he knew the difference between right and wrong. He replies, "Well, Eileen . . . it's right for you to be so beautiful, but it's wrong for me to be thinking the thoughts I am."

Spade meets an actress in "The Picture Frame Caper," broadcast April 9, 1950, telling her "I saw your

last picture four times. "Really?" asked Lois. The detective proved it by commenting, "I was tailing a man in the seventh row."

On June 22, 1950, the right-wing journal, *Counterattack*, released a pamphlet-style book naming 151 actors, writers, musicians, broadcast journalists, and others in the context of purported Communist manipulation of the entertainment industry. Some of the 151 were already being denied employment because of their political beliefs, history, or mere association with suspected "subversives"; *Red Channels* effectively placed the rest on the industry blacklist. Howard Duff's name was listed among the 151, on pages 50-51. Among the full bill of particulars as grounds for including him on the list:

- ✓ Reportedly attended a 1948 Thanksgiving Benefit Program for the "Hollywood Ten."
- ✓ Was an unfriendly witness before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947.
- ✓ Reportedly a member of the Committee for the First Amendment.
- ✓ Reportedly a member of the Actors' Committee of the Progressive Citizens of America.
- ✓ Signer of an Amicus Curiae brief appealing to reverse the convictions of Trumbo and Lawson.
- ✓ His association with a radio program "created by Dashiell Hammett."

Even though Howard Duff and Dashiell Hammett never met personally, the damage was already done. The last subversive deed listed under Duff's entry seriously hurt the radio program, and Duff suffered from what author and historian Jim Cox referred to as "guilt by association." Wildroot, the sponsor, decided to execute a clause in their contract, granting them permission to walk away from the series. In a formal letter, the request was placed in writing.

On September 9, 1950, *Billboard* announced that Wildroot was no longer undecided about whether or not to continue sponsorship. The publication reported the sponsor was dumping *Spade* and putting its money into a new series, *Charlie Wild, Private Detective*. (The character named after Wildroot's closing commercial jingle, "Cream Oil Charlie," and the name of the sponsor.)

According to author/historian John Dunning, the report caused an avalanche of mail: 250,000 letters poured in protesting the decision. The sponsor, however, did not care for the feedback of the radio listeners. Duff was taking potshots at politicians on the trail of Communist sympathizers, and the heat was turned up.

The only material on which *Red Channels* based their accusation was trade periodicals, which did not let up. Such gossip sold papers and the American public, especially the entertainment industry, couldn't buy enough of them.

The July 13, 1951 issue of *Hollywood Life* called Dashiell Hammett "one of the most dangerous"

Communists in America, and added, "Hammett is said to be responsible for selling the Red banner to dozens of men and women including actor Howard Duff, alias Sam Spade. Duff is also a member of one or more red fronts, and a definite red sympathizer."

"Well, I wouldn't know if Dashiell Hammett had any affiliation with the Communist Party," Duff said. "I certainly didn't, and a lot of the people in the *Red Channels* book didn't. It was at a time when they were trying to smear liberals. It was typical McCarthy smear stuff. I was in *Red Channels* and Hammett was in contempt of court, so the sponsor and the network, showing their usual great backbone, caved in, and that was it."

Charlie Wild, Private Detective fit the same mold of the *Sam Spade* program, but like the other radio detectives, failed to meet the criteria that made the Spade character (especially in the early Spade broadcasts) different from the rest. The plots were "a routine entry in the private eye meller groove with full complement of stock characters and cliché dialog," according to *Variety* (issues Feb. 27, 1950 and Feb. 26, 1951).

To help launch the new series, which aired on Sunday evenings (beginning September 24, one week after the final *Sam Spade* broadcast), Howard Duff appeared in character on the first broadcast in the form of a vocal telegram, wishing the new hero well in his endeavors. This means Duff's final role in the character of *Sam Spade* was on another detective program!

The format was similar to the *Sam Spade* program, with Charlie dictating his adventures (into a tape recorder). A few weeks after the series premiered, the character of Effie Perrine moved to New York and began assisting Charlie Wild. Lurene Tuttle did not play the role of Effie for this series. The actress was never billed on the air, which remains a mystery to this day. William Spier did not have any involvement with the *Charlie Wild* series, since the program originated from NBC's New York studios, instead of Hollywood.

William Spier applied whatever efforts he could (including gathering fan mail) to encourage NBC to revive the series. *The Adventures of Sam Spade* returned for a brief and final run with Steve Dunne as the detective. The scripts were no where near the caliber of the ABC and early CBS scripts, and to this day, fans of the radio program still insist Duff was the definitive *Sam Spade*. Without a sponsor, NBC did not foot the bill for long, and the program went off the air for good.

At one time Universal Studios even considered the possibility of making a *Sam Spade* movie with Duff in the lead. They succeeded in doing *The Fat Man* with J. Scott Smart and Rock Hudson, but with the investigations associated with the *Sam Spade* program, it's no wonder why the studio never got around to filming a big-screen version.

To imagine that all this and much more came out of a single radio program, based on a fictional detective

glamorized in one novel, three short stories, and the impressive 1941 motion-picture, *The Maltese Falcon*, still boggles the mind. Thankfully, a large number of the radio broadcasts do exist in recorded form and we can still have the opportunity to enjoy one of the most influential radio programs ever broadcast during the golden age of radio.

Martin Grams, Jr. is the author of numerous books on old-time radio including *GANG BUSTERS: The Crime Fighters of American Broadcasting* (2005), *The I Love A Mystery Companion* (2004) and *The Radio Adventures of Sam Spade* (2007).



And lest we forget the great portrayal of Sam Spade in the movies Humphry Bogart.



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by Maletha King

This month we start adding to the tape library with an assortment of shows, one of which is the "Kraft Music Hall" with Bob Burns. Then we have an interesting show called "Living 1948" - really not too different from living 2008.

From there we include a few reels of "One Man's Family", a show that seemed to go on forever. It was truly an adult soap opera that was a great place for many actors to get there start in various roles in the Barbour family. It was a great show by Carlton E. Mores that never had a dull moment. It's interesting to know that he also wrote several other mystery and adventures shows during the same era.

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