AS YOU TRIVIA freaks know, Sam Spade, in Dashiell Hammett’s “The Maltese Falcon,” lunched often at John’s Grill on Ellis. Then why is it an item that the new owner of the Grill, having purchased it from Mike Cawley, is Gus Konstantinides? Right! Because in the book, The Fat Man talks about “a Greek dealer, Charlaosis Konstantinides, who found the bird” — the falcon — “in an obscure shop in Paris” — the two Konstantinides are not related, so far as is known.

Now that you have your attention, at last, Falcon Freak Robert Pettit challenges trivia players to repeat the last line from the Bogart-Lorre-Greenstreet film. The usual answer is “The stuff that dreams are made of,” uttered by Spade as Brigid O’Shaughnessy is led off to jail, but right after that, as the film fades, Detective Sergeant Polhaus, played by Ward Bond, says “huh?” — “All of you who said “Huh?” in the first place, head of the class.

Stalking Sam Spade

by FRITZ LEIBER

London has its Sherlock Holmes, permanently installed at 221 B Baker Street. Paris has Matagot: New York, Nero Wolfe; Los Angeles, Philip Marlowe.

San Francisco’s immortal detective is Sam Spade, forever in residence at his comfortable old apartment of Geary and Hyde and his dusty office at Sutter and Montgomery. Sometimes he hooved the ten blocks between the two, sometimes he called a cab; but most often he took the Geary flyer.

It is the late 1920s, forty years before George became one-way; the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges hadn’t been built.

There were sepia photographs of Francisco in the 1920’s, including one at the beach.

Ellis, wood-paneled, walled with stained-glass windows — where Spade phoned his secretary Effie Perine, has become one of Big John’s, where it was staying at the Hotel Belvedere.

Dashiell Hammett had in mind either the St. Francis or the Mark Hopkins. Maybe the latter, because Brigid later moves to the Coronet apartments on California.

No question but one of the hotels is real — the Palace near the end of Geary. It must be today’s Sheraton-Palace. Spade has lunch there alone, and later a solo breaking after having been fed knockout drops and kicked in the head.

Most of the other restaurants in the book are real, too, like John’s Grill, where Spade ate chops, a baked potato, and sliced tomatoes before taking a hired car down to the Maltese Falcon.

The effeminate Gutman and his client, abiding by the rules.

That first “up” almost certainly means up in an elevator, or by stairs. Spade, forever in residence at his apartment where Spade sparred with Detective Sergeant Iva Archer and the gunpunk, dickered with them about the falcon and finally found it was a fake; the apartment where he took Brigid to bed and turned her over to the police; where he first heard the news of his partner Miles Archer’s chilly death in the fog.

Which brings us up to the last locale, the one most often discussed, the place where Archer got his and started The Maltese Falcon moving; the blind end of Burritt Street just west of the overpass where Bush Street roofs stock.

You can still rest your hands on the coping and look down into Stockton and see what Spade saw: “An automobile popped out of the tunnel beneath him with a roaring whish, as if it had been blown out from under an alley.”

And you can walk west a few steps to where the sign says “Burritt Street” and walk down that alley to his blind end.

The one thing that’s gone since Hammett’s day is the gap between two store fronts on Stockton, which had a white railing at the top and at the bottom a billboard, against which Archer’s body lodged after running down the little dirt hill. It was the gap now occupied by the newer north end of the McAlpin Apartments.

Later on in the story, that was and still is the most famous spot in The Falcon. A few years ago some Falcon fans tried to get permission to put a brass plaque: “Burritt road. Here Brigid O’Shaughnessy shot Miles Archer.” The permission didn’t come through, but it’s still a nice idea.

Hammett himself lived in San Francisco in the 1920s and 30s, and most of his important writing here. And at first he also worked as a detective for Pinkerton’s, which was then at 879 Market, in the Flood Building.

And it was in San Francisco that Hammett enjoyed (to quote his thirty-year friend Lillian Hellman) the life that was “nice and free and 1920s bohemian: the girl on Pine Street and the other on Grant Street, and good San Francisco food in cheap restaurants, and dago red wine.” (Prohibition, of course).

And it’s here that Sam Spade, troubled by his relationships with Effie and Brigid and Iva Archer and a mysterious girl, and sniffing for crime and adventure and profit and danger, roam the hilly streets that aren’t grazed by the fog so often these days.