

The Wolfe Pack
The Nero Wolfe
Literary Society

A NERO WOLFE MYSTERY

A&E's new series brings top talent to television

The Reviews

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A wolf is on the prowl. Nero Wolfe.

The corpulent private investigator joins the ranks of A&E's original drama series. The series premieres April 22 at 8 p.m. Viewers may remember Wolfe from the movie *The Golden Spiders: A Nero Wolfe Mystery*, which aired on A&E last year. The movie was so successful that the network decided to create a weekly drama series based on the eccentric detective.

Wolfe (Maury Chaykin) is not the typical private investigator. He weighs a "seventh of a ton," thinks women are hysterical creatures and refuses to leave his house on business. Wolfe's refusal to venture into the streets leads him to hire a cadre of investigators. Wolfe's right-hand man is Archie Goodwin (Timothy Hutton). The charming Archie does the dirty work, but doesn't receive much of the credit. He is a fast-talking charmer, the perfect match for the arrogant genius Wolfe. Wolfe may never leave the confines of his wood-paneled study, but he alone can piece together the various bits of information collected by Archie to deduce who committed the crime.

The drama is based on Rex Stout's series of 73 novels featuring Wolfe. The first, *Fer-de-Lance*, was published in 1934. Stout published the final installment one month before he died in 1975. Wolfe fans were delighted when, a decade later, another Nero Wolfe story was discovered and published. *Death Times Three* was the seventy-third and final Wolfe mystery.

The two-hour series premiere, *The Doorbell Rang*, begins with a woman complaining that the Federal Bureau of Investigation is harassing her.

Apparently she has upset J. Edgar Hoover by purchasing hundreds of copies of a book that criticized the bureau. She distributed the book to every influential person she knew. FBI agents are ordered to follow her and try to find some dirt that Hoover can use against her. After Wolfe agrees to accept her case, he and Archie soon discover that the agents may be involved in a murder.

As usual, Archie finds himself in numerous scrapes as he tries to solve the case and appease the distrustful Inspector Cramer. These run-ins with the police are nothing compared to what happens in the second episode.

Champagne for One is a two-part episode that finds Archie at the center of a young society girl's death. Archie is asked to take a sick friend's place at a society ball. Little does he know that this small favor will place him in the middle of a murder. Was Archie set up? He battles with the police to find the answer. But only Wolfe has the audacity to bring all the suspects into his home and re-create the scene of the crime before declaring who is the murderer.

Hutton has gathered a talented repertory of character actors. Bill Smitrovich reprises his role as Inspector Cramer. The rest of the revolving cast includes Saul Rubinek, James Tolkan, Deborah Monk, Ron Rifkin and Francine Swift. Viewers will see many of the same actors portray different roles in the various episodes.

The series expertly captures the vibrancy of the 1940s and 1950s. The swing jazz music that plays throughout every episode keeps the tone light and playful, while keeping the action moving at a quick pace. The dialogue is sharp and witty, reminiscent of 1940s films such as *His Girl Friday*.

Chaykin's size and deep growl are the perfect embodiment of Wolfe.

After having a successful film career, some may be surprised that Hutton has signed on to a television series. Hutton has found a series of which he can be proud. Hutton has found a series of which he can be proud. Most actors would kill to be a part of such a witty and classy production.