

The Wolfe Pack
The Nero Wolfe
Literary Society

A NERO WOLFE MYSTERY

A&E Isn't Just Crying Wolfe

The Reviews

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS | GENE AMOLE | MARCH 7, 2000

I spent my Sunday night couch potatoing two wonderful television programs. The first was A&E's *The Golden Spiders: A Nero Wolfe Mystery*. The second was USA's *La Femme Nikita*, which one critic described as "zombie-chic." ... Pure fantasy, but I love it. It's darkly stylish and superbly filmed.

But the main attraction Sunday for me was *The Golden Spiders*. I was wary about it because other attempts to put Nero Wolfe mysteries on film have failed miserably.

True, I had always expected a great deal because I had read every one of Rex Todhunter Stout's Nero Wolfe mysteries. Some snotty critics say mysteries aren't literature. "Pfui," as the corpulent detective would say.

If you're a Nero Wolfe fan, you know he lived in an opulent four-story brownstone mansion in New York that he rarely left. Archie Goodwin was his legman. Fritz was his cook. His favorite color was yellow, carried out in his pajamas, the sheets on his bed and the leather upholstery on his massive chair.

You would also know he raised 10,000 orchids in his rooftop greenhouse. He was a gourmand addicted to beer and also was an unapologizing sexist who would never put up with "flummery" from anyone. He solved mysteries by gathering suspects in his office and naming the killer so Inspector Cramer could arrest the culprit.

I went into mourning when Stout died in 1975 at age 88. I couldn't face the prospect of no more Nero Wolfe mysteries. I felt the same way when John McDonald died, leaving me with no more Travis McGee adventures to read. I hated it when the Cold War ended and John LeCarre's master spy, George Smiley, was finally forced into retirement.

When Ronald Reagan said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" I was saying to myself, "Mr. Gorbachev, leave it up!" so we can have more espionage novels. Thank God, Tony Hillerman is still alive.

Sunday night's *Golden Spiders* TV drama refreshed all my Nero Wolfe memories. It was outstanding. Maury Chaykin was the perfect Wolfe. Timothy Hutton was an excellent, wise-cracking Archie Goodwin. Director Bill Duke had each detail of the set precisely accurate.

Now that A&E has produced a perfect Wolfe mystery with 1930s ambience, it would be a rotten, lowdown, dirty shame if the network didn't produce other Wolfe mysteries with the same cast and director.

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There are four people who haven't seen *Survivor*. I don't know who the other three are. I have fallen out of love with CBS. I admired Edward R. Murrow, Eric Sevareid, and those guys who pioneered respectable broadcast journalism.

But "reality" TV doesn't seem real to me. It is concocted phoney-baloney. ...

Forty-one on my system is the A&E network. I can't keep these cable channels straight. I do like A&E, though, particularly since it has launched a Nero Wolfe television series based on the 70 or so mysteries written by Rex Stout. Wolfe is a mountainous, arrogant private detective, and Archie

Goodwin is his smart-alec legman.

I started devouring those stories back in the 1930s and wanted to grow up to be Archie and say things like, "I was so bored I was trying to figure out a third way to cross my legs."

Maury Chaykin is perfect as Wolfe, and Timothy Hutton, who also produces and directs the series, is the ideal Archie. Somehow, they have reproduced with unerring accuracy Wolfe's four-story brownstone mansion at 815 W. 35th St. in New York. There is even an orchid greenhouse on the top floor where Wolfe spends each morning and afternoon.

What wonderful, campy scripts! Every detail is perfect, right down to Archie's two-tone, wingtip shoes and Wolfe's yellow shirts.