

The Wolfe Pack

*The Nero Wolfe
Literary Society*

How Like a God

A Review from Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine (2011)

Curiosities

How Like A God, by Rex Stout (1929)

HERE'S ONE of the most bizarre fiction books ever written: unconventional in structure and in form as well as in premise. I say "fiction book" rather than "novel," because the chapters of *How Like a God* are interwoven with segments of a seemingly unrelated short story, and the threads unite only in the terrifying conclusion.

The short story, printed entirely in italics but otherwise told in conventional third-person narration, is divided into segments lettered *A* through *Q*. These reveal the thoughts of one Mr. Lewis as he ascends a staircase with a pistol in his coat pocket, intending to kill someone in an upstairs room. Lewis's sense of impending doom raises the possibility that perhaps his intent is not murder but rather suicide, or perhaps both.

Alternating between these brief cliffhanger segments are the long chapters I through XVI of a novel, in second-person narration. You are William Barton Sidney. Your entire existence, from childhood through sexual awakening into prosperous middle age, is recounted in these pages. Your life is respectable, normal, prosaic. Yet nobody suspects that you are aware of multiple personalities within your body, and that your head is full of voices.

The final segment *Q* is a chilling climax, revealing Lewis's intended prey (human in visage only), the true relationship between Lewis and Sidney, and the full significance of the novel's title (a quote from *Hamlet*). Can it be coincidence that Brenda Clough's 1997 SF novel *How Like a God* features a telepathic protagonist also named Lewis?

—F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre