

*The Wolfe Pack*

*The Nero Wolfe  
Literary Society*



**REVIEW**

***The Rex Stout Reader***

***(Introduction by Otto Penzler)***

***Carroll & Graf (ISBN: 0-7867-1862-5)***

***Reviewed by Theodore Feit February 1, 2007***

Nero Wolfe fans beware: this volume contains two novels and a short story that preceded Rex Stout's creation of the armchair detective.

*Her Forbidden Knight*, Stout's first novel, was serialized in 1913, and not published in book form until 1997.

*A Prize for Princes*, his third, was serialized in 1914 and published in book form in 1985.

It wasn't till 1934 that Nero Wolfe was born, but not before Stout had authored other novels, honing his craft. The two novels in this volume are a product of the times, heavily influenced by 19th century writing and the demands of the reading public of the times. Much of the writing, by modern comparison, could be called stilted, but it is in keeping with the style of the publication, and characters and story lines.

*Forbidden Knight* follows the fortunes of a pretty telegraph operator in a New York City hotel under the "protection" of several hangers-on in the lobby. She falls in love with a stranger who is under a cloud in his hometown and is passing bogus currency in the Big Apple. It is more of a romance than a crime story.

*Prize*, while full of romance, comes with murder and mystery and intrigue. A young American rescues two women amid a brutal Turkish assault on a convent and falls in love with one, a beautiful but dangerous woman who is accused of poisoning her husband, unbeknownst to him. She schemes and plots to rise to marry the Prince of Marisi, poisoning two others along the way.

The short story, *Out of the Line*, is more modern and is a tale of pathos. A bored woman, widow of a rich man to whom she was married for seven years, celebrates her birthday by giving money to homeless men on lower Broadway. One of the men is a former lover who she presumably wronged. Invited to visit her, he rejects her in no uncertain terms. It was interesting reading Stout's early works even if it does not appeal to the modern eye.

As a forerunner of his later accomplishments, the novels and short story certainly are indicative of what was yet to come. If only for that reason they are worth reading. But there is another: they are well-written and enjoyable.