

New Nero Coming

By **BOBBY RAY MILLER** and **RONALD G. BURNS**

BREWSTER, N.Y. (UPI) — On a chilly afternoon in mid-November, a lean, amiable, white-haired man of 87 will begin what he's begun every year about that time since 1934: a story about America's portliest detective, Nero Wolfe.

"I never write in the summer," said Wolfe's creator, Rex Stout, in an interview at his home, which straddles the New York-Connecticut border. "I'll start one on November 19th at 4 o'clock. It'll probably be finished the middle of January. Come out in the middle of June, something like that. Provided I'm alike — I could die, good God, I'm 87-years-old. In fact, if I didn't want more than my share, I'd have died quite a while ago."

Stout, who sports a beard once described as "a wishy-washy thing that looks as if he stole it off a billy-goat," said he wrote a new Nero Wolfe book each year.

"Well, that's what I did for 40 years, but I've slowed down a little."

The fictional Wolfe weighs one seventh of a ton and lives in a four-story brownstone on West 35th Street in New York City. His assistant, Archie Goodwin, does his legwork, a chef cooks his meals and another assistant helps him tend to the 10,000 orchids he keeps in a rooftop greenhouse.

The stories have been so successful that other writers have written books about Stout's books. There is also



—UPI Telephoto

Now that winter approaches, Rex Stout is writing again.

the Nero Wolfe Cookbook. Stout said he has cooked all the dishes mentioned in the adventures "at least two or three times."

Some students of Nero Wolfe have argued that Wolfe is the illegitimate son of another fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, since Wolfe was born in Montenegro about the time Holmes visited there in one of Arthur Conan Doyle's mysteries.

But the amiable Stout discounts that possibility as a coincidence.

"Oh, somebody's just having a lot of fun. If they think that's fun, well, okay."

Wolfe is nothing like his creator. Wolfe hates exercise and has a hot temper; Stout is agile and affable. Wolfe likes gourmet cooking and insists on it. Stout, too, likes good food, but won't

refuse a hot dog.

Stout said he could not explain Wolfe's origins.

"Alexander Woollcott claimed I created Nero Wolfe after him. Maybe because he's fat, I don't know."

"I honestly know nothing about where he came from. Listen, you know damn well in all fiction writing, dramatic, narrative — no matter what level of literature — all characters are of two kinds. They're all either created or contrived. In the created ones, the writer really has no idea where he came from or anything else. And the others, they're made up. And, boy, how you can tell 'em apart. In Dickens, for instance — Dickens is full of contrived characters — the minute one of 'em appears, you can spot him. Now, as for created charac-

ters, they appear at all levels. Tarzan was one, for example. That's the two kinds.

"Now, Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin are the created kind. I don't have the faintest notion where they came from or any of that. I know nothing about it."

Which of his own books does he like best?

"I have no idea . . . I really have no favorites," Stout claimed at first. But he talks fondly of "The Doorbell Rang," a mystery set in the mid 1960s in which Wolfe tangles with the FBI. Many critics believe it is Stout's best work.

"I once got a fan letter that said, 'Dear Mr. Stout, I have read many of your Nero Wolfe mysteries and enjoyed them. I have now read The Doorbell Rang. Goodby.' It was signed John Wayne."

Rex Todhunter Stout was born, one of nine children, in Noblesville, Ind., Dec. 1, 1886. A year later, the family moved to Kansas. He read the Bible twice before he was 3 and before he was 10 he read about 1,200 other volumes of biography, history, fiction, philosophy, science and poetry in the library of his father, John Wallace Stout, a Quaker and a teacher.

At 13, he was the state's champion speller. At 18, he joined the Navy, and eventually became a yeoman aboard the Mayflower, President Theodore Roosevelt's yacht.

After leaving the Navy in 1908, Stout roamed the country. He was a cigar salesman in Cleveland, a guide to the Indian Pueblos near Sante Fe, a barker for a sightseeing bus in Colorado Springs, a bookstore salesman in Chicago, Indianapolis and Milwaukee, and a stable hand in New York.

He created the school banking system and installed it in 400 cities and towns throughout the country. In 1927, Stout retired from the world of finance and went back to writing. His first novel, How Like A God, was published in 1929.

Stout does most of his writing at his home, called High Meadow, which he built himself. He modeled it after the palace of the Bey of Tunis, which he saw during a vacation in the Mediterranean area. The result is a concrete U-shaped structure of 14 rooms built around an interior court.

"We didn't put in a eunuch well because there aren't enough eunuchs in this country to make it worthwhile."