

*The Wolfe Pack*  
*The Nero Wolfe*  
*Literary Society*

## The Copernicus Connection

### THE COPERNICUS PLOT

### SOMEONE IS STEALING THE GREAT SCIENTIST'S BOOKS.

*IS IT PROFESSOR PLUM?*

*IS IT O.J.?*

## WE ASKED SOME LEADING MYSTERY WRITERS TO TACKLE A RIDDLE OF ASTRONOMICAL PROPORTIONS

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It is one of the most baffling international puzzles in memory. According to a recent Associated Press news report, seven of the 260 surviving copies of Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus' momentous 1543 book, in which he argued that the Earth goes around the sun and not vice versa, have been stolen from university and scientific libraries worldwide over the past several years. The copies of "De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium (On the Revolution of Heavenly Spheres)" are worth \$400,000 apiece, but are virtually impossible to fence. So, wonder Interpol and police agencies everywhere, why have multiple thieves, or one thief very gifted at disguise, used various ruses to take the tomes from cities as far apart as Krakow, Poland; Kiev, Ukraine; Stockholm; St. Petersburg, Russia - and Urbana- Champaign, where a copy recently vanished from the University of Illinois? Intrigued, we enlisted some of America's top mystery writers to consider the purloined book caper and how their sleuths might approach the case.

## NERO WOLFE AND THE MISSING MANUSCRIPTS

*By Robert Goldsborough*

After the eighth and ninth copies of Copernicus' "On The Revolution of Heavenly Spheres" are stolen -- both from New York City collectors' private libraries -- a delegation from SABCA (Society of Antiquarian Book Collectors of America) visits Nero Wolfe in his Manhattan brownstone and pleads with him to identify the thief.

Several of SABCA's members own copies of the rare volume, and one of them, a millionaire bond trader, offers to pay whatever the great detective charges to take the case. Wolfe, who has a copy of the Copernicus volume in his own extensive library, considers the problem and accepts the commission, charging a six-figure fee.

The homebound, oversized (285 lbs), orchid-growing, beer- guzzling, gourmandizing genius, with the invaluable help of his loyal assistant and man-of-action, Archie Goodwin, reviews the thefts, both foreign and domestic.

Wolfe then calls a longtime acquaintance at Interpol in Paris, who shares his contention that the books were not stolen for money (not one had yet appeared on the black market of stolen books). Rather, the Interpol man felt the volumes had been taken because of a more philosophical motive -- which Wolfe himself had suspected from the start. <

Wolfe lapses into contemplation at home, sending Archie off to haunt the antiquarian bookshops of New York, where he meets intriguing, bookish characters but unearths no leads. A temporarily stymied Wolfe then remembers a New Yorker article he had read months earlier about an organization called EarthCenter, which contends that the sun and all the planets revolve around Earth, which is the true center of the universe.

This Flat Earth Society-like organization is financed by another multimillionaire, the eccentric octogenarian and reclusive widower Atlee Marmaduke, who made his fortune in aluminum in the '30s and '40s and who now espouses and supports a variety of off-the-wall causes, including a plan to close all publicly financed zoos and free the animals.

Wolfe senses the answer to the mystery may lay with EarthCenter. He sends Archie to Marmaduke's palatial estate in Westchester County with instructions that he talk his way in and persuade the recluse to visit Wolfe in the brownstone. But when Archie arrives, he finds the huge house deserted. Using his kit of tools, he jimmy's a lock and enters the mansion. In the cathedral-like, two-story library, he finds a very dead Marmaduke in a pool of blood on the floor -- his skull crushed by a brass bookend that is itself a bust of Copernicus.

Thus is launched the most baffling and convoluted case of Nero Wolfe's long and storied career. A case that leads to intrigue and treachery -- and more murder -- in the demimonde world of book thievery and counterfeiting, to say nothing of ancient superstitions and opposing theories of astronomy.

Wolfe is faced with more suspects than in any previous case, and before it is solved, his colossal intellect is tested as never before.

*[Robert Goldsborough, former editor of the Chicago Tribune Magazine and currently special projects editor of Advertising Age, is author of seven novels continuing the adventures of Nero Wolfe, created and made famous by the late Rex Stout.]*

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