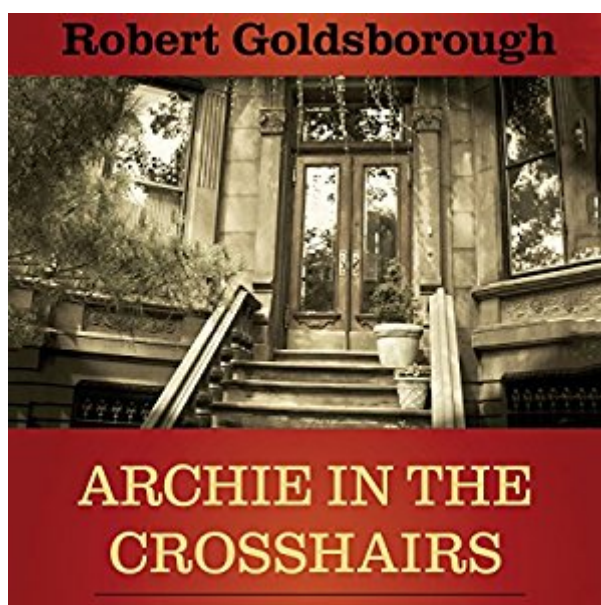


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Archie In The Crosshairs



Synopsis

When Archie Goodwin's life is threatened, Wolfe must find the gunman or lose his right-hand man. Archie Goodwin is chipper as he strolls home from his weekly poker game, money in his pocket and a smile on his lips. He has just reached Nero Wolfe's stately brownstone on West 35th Street when a sedan whips around the corner and two gunshots ring out, nearly hitting Goodwin. It is a warning, and the message is clear: The next bullet will not miss. Rotund investigator Nero Wolfe has made more than his fair share of enemies over the years, and it seems one of them has decided to strike, targeting Wolfe's indefatigable assistant. Some might run for cover, but Archie Goodwin is not the type. With the help of Wolfe's brainpower, Goodwin will find the man who wants him dead - unless the killer gets to Goodwin first.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Many years ago, my writing partner Jack and I devoured all Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe books, in order, passing them back and forth. My partner, a large man, considered himself the Nero Wolfe of comedy writers, and was fond of closing his eyes, hands laced across his stomach, lips pursing in and out while he figured out a resolution to a plotting problem. Of course, Jack was actually napping while I struggled to pull the script together, and his ear-shattering snoring generally gave him away. When we had finished the last of the Rex Stout NERO WOLFE books, we were in a state of withdrawal, though Jack did continue his Wolfe impressions at moments of plot-impasses. So when Robert Goldsborough took up the pen to continue the legend with MURDER IN E MINOR in 1986, I

dived in with hungry enthusiasm... and found it good: close, but clearly not a Stout-Wolfe. It was a hybrid, a Goldsborough-Wolfe. I bought his next book (DEATH ON A DEADLINE) but it stayed tucked on a shelf. When ARCHIE IN THE CROSSHAIRS was offered, I enthusiastically agreed to read it. And you know what? If you haven't read any Stout-Wolfe for 20-some years, this Goldsborough-Wolfe feels like authentic Stout-Wolfe. Archie is actually ruffled in this one, which is pretty much unheard of, and Fritz's recipes sound more palatable than the Stout-Wolfe affinity for lamb kidneys and shad roe. But so many of the elements that made the Stout-Wolfe books beloved are here. Wolfe and Archie do not age. History continues to move forward at its slow pace. (ARCHIE IN THE CROSSHAIRS takes place during the Truman Administration and the Korean War.) Wolfe follows his routine, with breakfast in bed, time with his orchids, meals on time in the dining room, his daily beers...

I am a big fan of Rex Stout's mystery novels, including of course the Nero Wolfe series. While in principle I dislike the idea of an author's work continuing after his death, I did find the first seven Robert Goldsborough versions of Nero Wolfe to be enjoyable. Goldsborough is a real writer who has produced some pretty good mysteries on his own, and the books written from 1986 to 1994 were worthy takes on Nero and Archie. They lacked some of the zest of the real thing, and were coming a bit unglued in time, but they added a little dash of realism that eluded Rex Stout. Judged on their own, not compared to Rex Stout's work, they were better-than-fair mysteries. Sadly, the last two books, including this one, are not up to the standard. They're below-average mysteries that rise up to three stars due to Goldsborough's smooth writing and the characters he inherited. But they not only lack zest, they lack life, and realism has flown to New Jersey. Nero Wolfe plots are thin and silly, but compelling nonetheless. The stories are driven by character, and ideas, and time-and-place. The resolutions are seldom logical, but they are always satisfying. When Goldsborough took over, the characters lost their ability to grow as the Stout universe froze. The post-mortem versions lack grand ideas, and the time-and-place was beginning to fray (this is true of some of the later Rex Stout stories as well). But Goldsborough retained enough of the original quality to make the stories worth reading, and he explored some nuances from a more realistic perspective than Stout could ever manage. This particular story has a plot too thin and silly even for a Nero Wolfe, and the characters have become bad actors walking through parts that bore them.

I am absolutely open to revisiting classic characters- Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, etc. Some of these efforts succeed really well, either by doing an outstanding job carrying on the

tradition or by remaking the story in a fresh way. I have loved Rex Stout for over 30 years, read all his books (some of them many times). I just don't think Goldsborough captures the essence of these characters that I love. What specifically isn't right? Small things but also significant things. Archie's vocabulary feels wrong. His cadence as a narrator is off. But more importantly his personality, as well as Wolfe's and Cramer's feels misrepresented. The author uses "markers"-- smart alecky Archie moments, mentions of the orchids or Cramer's cigar, etc. -- but misses the warm depths of who they are, the rich layers of their friendships and rivalries... None of it sounds right. Similarly, Wolfe's delight in the use of language is missing, as are his dignity, his principles, his profound sloth and self-centeredness, his sense of entitlement based upon being both extremely intelligent and a US citizen, and complex masculinity and courage. His arrogance is there, in a way that feels like shorthand-- as if a very large man is standing in for Wolfe-- while they may look similar in the surface, it feels like only a passing resemblance. His deep commitment to gastronomy and knowledge of orchid cultivation are treated as boxes to be checked off. I actually learned a great deal about orchids from the Stout books as a young girl, have raised many, and have rarely been without orchid plants in my home thanks to Rex Stout. But here everything is handled on such a surface level that there is nothing to learn.

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