



Prisoner's Base

Rex Stout , William L. DeAndrea (Introduction)

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Prisoner's Base Details

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Bettie? says

Description: *Hours after Priscilla Eads pleads with him to take her case, Nero Wolfe is shocked to find out that she was murdered, and soon he is investigating her fortune-hunting husband and greedy business associates.*

Alexis Neal says

Under normal circumstances, a woman showing up on Wolfe's door looking for a place to stay would be unceremoniously bounced. But if the woman shows up when Wolfe and Archie are in the middle of a standoff, she may end up being escorted inside so Archie can use her to antagonize his employer. The situation is complicated when someone else tries to hire Wolfe to find a missing heiress (the same young lady who just so happens to be upstairs in the South Room). Wolfe's self esteem won't let him accept a fee for finding something that he already has, so he ejects the young woman and gives her a twelve-hour head start before he'll come looking for her. Within three hours, the young woman is dead. Archie feels pretty rotten about the whole situation (having essentially sent the woman to her doom), and vows to catch the murderer, even if means working with--or even for--the police. Which leads to a rather unusual situation: Wolfe takes the case, with *Archie* as his client.

The resolution of this particular mystery involves an assortment of towel-making execs, an attractive stylist of dubious talent, a comely (if slightly nutty and not terribly brave) widow, a handsome young South American, a young Hercules (Archie's description), and a slimy lawyer. There are, of course, an assortment of more familiar faces as well--freelance detective Saul Panzer, chef Fritz Brenner, Inspector Cramer, and Sergeant Stebbins.

Archie's passion for this particular mystery lends a certain pathos to the story--which is by no means a universal characteristic of Stout's work. Many of Wolfe's jobs are just jobs; this one is personal. Not only does Archie feel responsible for the death of the young heiress; before long *another* attractive young woman is killed under circumstances that once again lead him to assume at least some responsibility for the untimely demise--particularly since Archie had a certain amount of respect and even fondness for both the young women in question. Archie tends to be fairly flip and irreverent about pretty much everything, including murder, so it's nice to see him actually connect with the story on an emotional level.

Also, Wolfe gets hauled downtown by none other than Archie's nemesis, Lieutenant Rowcliff, with the expected results--namely, Wolfe loses his temper and fur flies.

The story here is actually pretty good, and the resolution of the mystery is neat and fairly creative. When Wolfe's investigation is not progressing rapidly enough for Archie's taste, Archie's obsession with finding the murderer leads him to offer his services to the police. This, in turn, allows him to be absent from the office and out of the loop with regard to Wolfe's own efforts. The end result is a reveal that is a surprise to the

police *and* to Archie (who usually helps do the revealing).

Prichard's narration isn't strong enough to be an added bonus, but he does a decent enough job to make the audiobook a legitimate alternative for those so inclined.

Jim says

"Rex Stout is the most rereadable author in the history of the genre."

Introduction by William L. DeAndrea 1992

I know that I enjoy rereading Nero Wolfe stories and over the years I have done have done just that. According to Goodreads Rex Stout wrote 47 Nero Wolfe books. While I have reread many there are some that I have missed and I think Prisoner's Base is one of those. Reading a Nero Wolfe book for the first time is always a joy.

A woman makes an appearance at Wolfe's brownstone on West 35th Street in New York City. She times her appearance so that she knows Wolfe will be tending his orchids (between 4PM and 6PM) and she can talk with Archie Goodwin, Wolfe's confidential assistant, first. She doesn't tell Archie her name and she doesn't want to hire Wolfe. She is looking for a place to stay. Room and board. Normally she wouldn't even have been admitted but Wolfe and Archie have had another disagreement and Archie installs her in the guest room. Needless to say Wolfe is not pleased and refuses to allow her to stay. He is not running a hotel. Hours later she is murdered.

Her name was Priscilla Eads and she was the heiress to a multi-million dollar cotton-towel business. With a greedy board of directors and a fortune-hunting South American ex-husband there are no shortage of suspects. Feeling guilty over her death Archie takes a leave of absence to solve her murder himself. He even teams up with the police department to work on the case!

Of course Nero Wolfe becomes involved. Priscilla Eads was murdered after Wolfe turned her out of his house, Archie has taken a leave of absence, and the police had taken Wolfe from his house to the police department for questioning. None of this is acceptable and he intends to solve the murder. Wolfe has a new client. Wait until you find out who it is.

This was a slight departure from the usual story in that Archie has taken a leave of absence and works with the police but fear not as the ending features the usual gathering of suspects in Wolfe's office where he will reveal the identity of the murderer. Wolfe is a genius and no murderer can outwit him when he puts his mind to solving the crime.

There was no real surprise here like I often find when reading Agatha Christie. One of the real enjoyments is the relationship between Wolfe and Archie, life at Wolfe's brownstone on West 35th Street, and of course how Wolfe leaves Inspector Cramer red faced.

Bill Kerwin says

A woman who unsuccessfully seeks Nero Wolfe's services is later found murdered. Archie feels responsible, and temporarily leave's Wolfe's employ to solve the case.

Another good entry in the series.

Jim Mann says

Rex Stout was one of the great masters of the mystery story. His Nero Wolfe novels are all great fun to read, in part of the story itself, but also for the distinctive voice of the narration. All (or at least all of the dozens that I've read) are told in first person by Wolfe's assistant, Archie Goodwin, whose wise-cracking banter, his swagger, and his wit stamp a unique imprint on the series.

In Prisoner's Base (the name seems to be based on a version of the game tag), a young woman shows up at Wolfe's residence, wanting to simply pay to stay to be kept hidden until the end of the month. As Archie hides her away and tries to explain this to Wolfe (who he knows of course will refuse), someone else shows up: a lawyer, wanting to pay Wolfe to find this same young woman. Wolfe refuses him, send him on his way, then refuses the woman. All seems to be over until the next morning they discover that the woman has been killed.

At that point, Archie and Wolfe are on the case. It's an entertaining one involving business owners who stood to loose had the young woman lived another week, a possible attempt by her ex-husband to claim half her property, and assorted others (including the usual assortment from the NYPD). As will all Nero Wolfe novels, well worth the time.

Una Tiers says

A nice business as usual Nero Wolfe mystery with Archie stepping to the front of the stage. Nice twist in the plot although the attitudes toward women were rather backward.

Pupottina says

A casa di Nero Wolfe, questa volta, “Sulla soglia c’era un essere umano di sesso femminile, di vent’anni o poco più, provvisto di due occhi fuori ordinanza, di un bel personale sano, di una valigia di pelle meravigliosamente lustra e di una cappelliera.”

È una donna, in elegante abito color pesca, che resta misteriosa per poco e riesce a destare in Wolfe la sua proverbiale avversità per il genere femminile. Ovviamente, di tutt’altro avviso è Archie Goodwin, che ne resta all’istante sedotto, non solo dall’avvenenza, ma anche dal carattere deciso. Infatti, la donna misteriosa, che si rivela essere Priscilla Eads, ha le idee chiare su cosa pretende dagli inquilini della casa di arenaria

sulla Trentacinquesima Ovest. Conosce a menadito la casa e sa in quale stanza alloggerà per una settimana. In lei è tutto mistero e seduzione, peccato che non vada a genio a Wolfe, che la mette alla porta e, quindi, il cuore infranto di Archie Goodwin può solo sognare la tenerezza di quel sentimento, che avrebbe potuto essere.

Perché Priscilla Eads voleva alloggiare in casa Wolfe e non in un albergo? Forse ha sentito parlare della cucina di Fritz Brenner, il cuoco svizzero francofono, di cui l'investigatore privato Nero Wolfe si pregia di essere il padrone? O forse è perché, se lei fosse rimasta, Archie Goodwin avrebbe avuto vita facile e sarebbe stato ricambiato dalla gentil donzella?

Non lo sapremo mai, perché qualcuno trama contro di lei. Infatti, prima viene trovata morta la sua domestica, poi la stessa Priscilla.

Per il misogino Nero Wolfe, le donne acquistano importanza solo da morte, poiché lui è un investigatore specializzato in omicidi.

Tra fantastiche orchidee, la verità viene alla luce, un petalo dopo l'altro, un indizio dopo l'altro, perché niente è impossibile per Nero Wolfe.

<http://youtu.be/-npu1xG4pd0>

Marysia says

I always enjoy reading the Nero Wolfe books. This one was satisfying, but I wouldn't rank it up there as one of the best. For one thing, it's fairly heavy on Archie and light on Wolfe, and I've realized that the interactions between them is one of the most enjoyable parts of the books for me -- there isn't so much of that here. The title of this book and the cover art don't really have much to do with the plot.

Plot Comments:

The middle of this book has an exciting part that, while I had a pretty good idea of how it would turn out, kept me turning the pages to find out. I normally enjoy Nero Wolfes for the character interactions and seeing how everything fits into place, but the "action" scene was a nice change of pace. However, I felt as though a lot of the sections detailing Archie's work with the police could have been trimmed; we didn't really learn anything important and it dragged. Like most Nero Wolfe novels I've read, the solution of the crime doesn't come down to the tiny details of the crime scene, but more about motive and the psychology of the killer. I wasn't totally satisfied with how it was resolved. (view spoiler) The business aspects of the novel also seemed kind of unrealistic, but maybe that was part of the point regarding the possible motives of the board of directors.

The endings of these books are usually pretty abrupt after the denouement but there's often at least a paragraph or so of wrap-up. This one just ended right then and there.

****IMPORTANT NOTE!** It has come to my attention (reading the Wikipedia article for the book) that: "Random House discovered in 2011 that most of the Bantam paperback editions of Prisoner's Base lack the final chapter (17), which is 1.5 pages in length in the hardcover editions. The Wolfe Pack, the Nero Wolfe literary society, took the liberty of providing the final chapter in PDF format on its website." Here it is: <http://www.nerowolfe.org/pdf/corpus/B...>

That's the sort of conclusion I was looking for. So the fault this time is on the publisher, not Stout.

Character Comments:

Sarah Jaffee is an interesting character. I didn't actually like Priscilla Eads at all, especially with her backstory, but Sarah was interesting -- not sympathetic exactly, but understandable, and she undergoes some character development after meeting with Archie.

Tony says

PRISONER'S BASE. (1952). Rex Stout. ***1/2.

This another adventure for Stout's Nero Wolfe. This time, the central theme of the case that Wolfe picks up relates to the inheritance of a large and successful company that manufactures towels and linens. Much of the story revolves around the legal issues of possession of goods after an owner dies. When the legal heir dies, the next in line is found murdered. Where do you look next? It is obvious. But, obvious or not, Nero Wolfe can only work on cases where he manages to find evidence of wrong doing that he can use as a basis for action. Stout manages to provide lots of potential suspects for the murders in this book. First of all, there is each member of the board of directors; each of whom stands to do well as an inheritor. Then there is the fly-in suspect from South America who claims to be the real husband of the wife of the deceased. This goes on and on. Once you manage to keep all the characters straight, the story moves on in a logical fashion. Getting into it, however, was not an easy task.

Evgeny says

A woman showed up at Nero Wolfe's house. She wanted to use it as a hotel where she could stay hidden for several days. Usually she would not be even let in with such strange request, but Archie just had a disagreement with his employer, so he put her in the guest room while Nero Wolfe had his regular sessions with orchids. As soon as the latter came down the woman was sent away. She was found murdered several hours later. Archie Goodwin felt it was practically his fault, so finding a murderer became personal for him. He even managed to get Nero Wolfe involved.

This story has several interesting details missing from a usual mystery of the series. Nero Wolfe does not have a client in the traditional sense, but he has to leave his house to answer the summons from the police. He almost never gets outside, and each time he does it really means he cannot avoid it. Archie Goodwin volunteers to work with the police. Yes, you read it right: the narrator of the series does unthinkable.

I also found the scene with Archie trying to save another woman's life to be very dramatic like something coming out from a thriller as opposed to traditional mystery.

I felt bad about the murdered woman, but somehow the more I learned about her the less I cared. I am not sure if it was intentional as Rex Stout can and does write quite unsympathetic people. As a mystery it is quite good and I was able to figure it out a little time before Nero Wolfe explains it.

Jen says

This was my first Nero Wolfe book. I wasn't so crazy about the story overall, but I did get a big ol' kick out of Archie and Nero and their relationship. I think I'm going to have to start at the beginning of the series in order to get a better appreciation of it.

Anne (Booklady) Molinarolo says

An uninvited "guest" appears on Nero Wolfe's doorstep. Archie knows that Wolfe will not accept a female in his home, especially one who won't give him her name. Later, a man comes by to contract Godwin and Wolfe to find his ward before June 30th. The same date that the young woman locked in Wolfe's 3rd floor room had stated as the date she wanted to stay through. When Archie sees the picture of the missing woman, Pre Eads, he knows it's the young woman he had interviewed earlier. When her guardian leaves, Nero sends for the Eads woman and throws her out.

A few hours later, Pre Eads is found strangled on her living room floor. Her maid had been strangled in the same manner a few hours earlier to get Ead's key. Archie feels responsible and finds himself a Nero Wolfe client. Who wanted Pre dead? And why is the date June 30th so important?

Classic Rex Stout. Fun and humorous read.

Jill Hutchinson says

See my review of "Full House" for comments

Sean O says

It's hard to give a Nero Wolfe novel anything less than four stars. But this came fairly close.

The mystery, as in many of the Wolfe novels, was pretty good, but the solution was a wee bit underwhelming.

I enjoyed the cast of characters, but there was a lot of development to zero end. 90% of it was red herrings, and the key was a bit of unseen fummery.

Still, a good read, and some lovely Stout writing. 3.5 rounded up.

Cherie says

Stellar!
