

NERO WOLFE NOVELLAS RANKINGS, RATINGS & CAPSULE COMMENTS

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Ranking	Rating	Novella Information Capsule Comment Alternate Titles (if any)
01	A+	DIE LIKE A DOG, 1954 (Three Witnesses, 1956) Near perfect, echoes AK Green & EQ. Complex plot for a 20,000word story. AKA "The Body in the Hall", "A Dog in the Daytime"
02	A+	THIS WON'T KILL YOU, 1952 (Three Men Out, 1954) Baseball & murder; solid deductions & detection. Not one misplaced word in the ballpark chapters. AKA "This Will Kill You", "The World Series Murder"
03	A	BLACK ORCHIDS, 1941 (Black Orchids, 1942) Top-notch early Wolfe. Evocative of Emma Lathen at her best & a bit of Gladys Mitchell. AKA "The Case of the Black Orchids", "Death Wears an Orchid"
04	A	THE ZERO CLUE, 1953 (Three Men Out, 1954) Surrealistic, almost sci-fi Asimov-ish story featuring mathematics, numbers, probabilities, coincidences & EQ-like dying message. Least typical of all the Wolfe stories. AKA "Scared to Death"
05	A-	TOO MANY DETECTIVES, 1956 (Three for the Chair, 1957) Dol Bonner & Sally Colt join the boys. Solid, complex plot worthy of EQ.
06	A-	BITTER END, 1940 (Death Times Three, 1985) A Re-write & condensation of a former Tecumseh Fox novel. Complex plot, complicated character relationships and fairly-clued. The first novella length adventure for Wolfe & Archie.
07	B+	COUNTERFEIT FOR MURDER, 1961 (Homicide Trinity, 1962)

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		Hattie Annis character elevates a C+ plot to a B+ story. Re-write of what is now known as "Assault on a Brownstone".
		AKA "The Counterfeiter's Knife"
08	B+	CORDIALLY INVITED TO MEET DEATH, 1942 (Black Orchids, 1942)
		Leisurely paced Christie-like story. American version of the English Manorhouse setting featuring unusual household.
		AKA "Invitation to Murder" (Don't confuse with 1953 novella)
09	B+	BEFORE I DIE, 1947 (Trouble in Triplicate, 1949)
		Violent & funny. Runyon meets Hammett. Events take place just after WWII.
10	B+	THE COP KILLER, 1951 (Triple Jeopardy, 1952)
		Solid plot, working class characters, good clues & deductions.
		AKA "Cop Killer"
11	B	THE GUN WITH WINGS, 1949 (Curtains for Three, 1951)
		Undeservedly neglected, low-keyed, well-written story.
12	B	DISGUISE FOR MURDER, 1950 (Curtains for Three, 1951)
		A great deduction by Wolfe. Key clue hidden in plain sight. Unnecessary melodramatic action sequence added at end.
		AKA "Affair of the Twisted Scarf"
13	B	MURDER IS NO JOKE, 1957 (And Four to Go, 1958)
		A solid, quietly effective, fairly-clued story despite highly improbable behavior by 3 characters. Later expanded, partly re-written & re-titled "Frame-up for Murder" which also deserves a B rating.
14	B-	POISON A LA CARTE, 1960 (Three at Wolfe's Door, 1960)
		Misogynistic story featuring Permutation Theory. Could have been top-notch had Wolfe used deductive reasoning instead of a stratagem to expose the killer.
15	B-	METHOD THREE FOR MURDER, 1960 (Three at Wolfe's Door, 1960)
		Solid effort, FW Crofts-like plot. Borders on humdrum

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		but manages to avoid it.
16	B-	A WINDOW FOR DEATH, 1956 (Three for the Chair, 1957) Good characterization, Ross MacDonald-like plot. Could use a little re-writing & polishing. AKA "Nero Wolfe and the Vanishing Clue"
17	C+	OMIT FLOWERS, 1948 (Three Doors to Death, 1950) Slow pace, somber tone, plot could be tighter. Archie makes a great deduction.
18	C+	BULLET FOR ONE, 1948 (Curtains for Three, 1951) Decent mis-direction, perhaps plot is too simplistic & artificial. Dick Francis theme.
19	C+	INSTEAD OF EVIDENCE, 1946 (Trouble in Triplicate, 1949) JD Carr-like plot, Gladys Mitchell-like finish. Clues are withheld. Too long by 1,000 words. AKA "Murder on Tuesday"
20	C+	THE NEXT WITNESS, 1955 (Three Witnesses, 1956) Homage to ES Gardner. Questionable courtroom & legal maneuverings. Interesting business background for the crimes. AKA "The Last Witness"
21	C+	INVITATION TO MURDER, 1953 (Three Men Out, 1954) Slow-paced, fairly-clued, decent plot. Two mysteries solved. AKA "Will to Murder" which is the better title.
22	C+	BOOBY TRAP, 1944 (Not Quite Dead Enough, 1944) WWII story. Subdued humor, mostly slow-paced, fairly-clued. Drags in spots.
23	C	MAN ALIVE, 1947 (Three Doors to Death, 1950) Homage to Christie's "And Then There Were None". Plot could be tighter.
24	C	WHEN A MAN MURDERS, 1954 (Three Witnesses, 1956) Similar theme to "Man Alive". Nothing special here. Needs a better title.
25	C-	DEATH OF A DEMON, 1961 (Homicide Trinity, 1962) Action-packed & suspenseful but unfairly clued. Lots of coincidences & loose ends.

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		AKA "The Gun Puzzle"
26	C-	HELP WANTED, MALE, 1945 (Trouble in Triplicate, 1949) WWII story. Humorous situations but far-fetched plot.
27	C-	CHRISTMAS PARTY, 1956 (And Four to Go, 1958) Good cat-fights, slight yet amusing plot, little detection. AKA "The Christmas Party Murder"
28	C-	THE RODEO MURDER, 1960 (Three At Wolfe's Door, 1960) Too many cowboys & cowgirls. Decent mis-direction, possibly unfairly clued. A dull story. AKA "The Penthouse Murder"
29	C-	NOT QUITE DEAD ENOUGH, 1942 (Not Quite Dead Enough, 1944) WWII story. Decent plot, good deductions but too long by 1/3.
30	D+-	BLOOD WILL TELL, 1963 (Trio for Blunt Instruments, 1964) Interesting character relationships, shaky deductions, entertaining story but plot has holes. The closest Stout comes to writing a Dr. Thorndyke-type story. The last novella Stout wrote.
31	D+-	DOOR TO DEATH, 1949 (Three Doors to Death, 1950) Very funny, thin plot, almost no detection.
32	D	IMMUNE TO MURDER, 1955 (Three for the Chair, 1957) Easily guessable killer, not much detection, mostly of interest to fly fishing enthusiasts.
33	D	EENY MEENY MURDER MO, 1962 (Homicide Trinity, 1962) Plotline & law firm background had potential but careless writing torpedoes story.
34	D-	HOME TO ROOST, 1952 (Triple Jeopardy, 1952) Weak plot, uninteresting characters, fairly clued but no real deducing by Wolfe. AKA "Nero Wolfe and the Communist Killer", "Nero Wolfe Devises a Stratagem"
35	D-	MURDER IS CORNY, 1962 (Trio for Blunt Instruments, 1964) Weaker than usual characters, weak plot, clues &

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		deductions not first-rate. AKA "The Sweet Corn Murder"
36	D-	KILL NOW--PAY LATER, 1961 (Trio for Blunt Instruments, 1964) Unfair clueing, odd plotting, decent humor, two somewhat interesting characters.
37	F	THE SQUIRT AND THE MONKEY, 1951 (Triple Jeopardy, 1952) Potentially interesting storyline turned into a dull read by uninspired writing & loose ends. AKA "See No Evil", "The Dazzle Dan Murder Case"
38	F	EASTER PARADE, 1957 (And Four To Go, 1958) Weak plot, nil characterization, little detection. AKA "The Easter Parade Murder"
39	F	FOURTH OF JULY PICNIC, 1957 (And Four To Go, 1958) Promising storyline spoiled by unfair clueing, weak characterization & careless plotting. AKA ", "The Labor Union Murder", "Fourth of July Murder"

Sources consulted:

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The Wolfe Pack website: www.nerowolfe.org

The Wolfe Pack book discussion meetings

The Golden Age of Detection Fiction discussion group site:

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Opinions, rankings and ratings are my own.

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