



Red Threads

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Investigating the bludgeoning murder of Val Carew, killed near the tomb of his late wife, also dead under suspicious circumstances, Inspector Cramer finds a single clue in a red thread found in the victim's hand.

Red Threads Details

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From Reader Review Red Threads for online ebook

Adam Graham says

Red Threads is often presented as an Inspector Cramer mystery: A case where Inspector Cramer is the star and solves the case without any aide from Nero Wolfe. It's understandable to do that, but let's be clear Inspector Cramer is not the star of this book.

Millionaire Val Carew is found murdered in tomb of his late wife who was an Indian princess. Carew, who was considering remarrying a white woman, was found scalped.

Jean Farris is in love with the dead man's son, Guy but becomes angry when he asks her to return a skirt jacket she'd made with rare genuine bayetta thread that Guy had given her from his own jacket. Farris storms off from after this odd request and is then knocked out and wakes up in her underwear with the skirt and jacket gone. She then discovers the reason for the interest in the thread: the murdered man had a thread of bayetta in his hand.

Jean resolves who robbed her and who committed the murder and clear her beloved. It is Jean, not Inspector Cramer who is the heroine of the story and focal point of the story. She makes for a charming and intelligent amateur detective who dominates the narrative and lifts the whole work. Cramer is merely John Law. Stout saw no reason to work up another New York City Police Inspector when he'd created a perfectly serviceable one for Nero Wolfe.

Inspector Cramer is not an entirely unsympathetic character in the story. Cramer is an honest cop, even if his methods are not necessarily laudable. Forced to return from his first real vacation in years, Cramer takes to the case with bulldog determination and shows a certain cunning in catching a suspect even if it turns out to be the wrong suspect. And once Jean sets him on the right track, he ties everything up neatly.

I can't really blame Cramer for missing the solution to this case. At least five people including Jean withheld evidence from him and only one of them was in on the murder. Kind of hard to get the right conclusion without the right information.

The book's portrayal of Native Americans was a subject of some concern, indeed the whole foreword to the book was consumed with a critique of this aspect of the book. Woodrow Wilson, the only full-blonded Indian in the story talks like he's ready to appear in a Republic Western or take up duty outside of a Cigar Store. Stout would treat a Native American character by the same name with far more sophistication and respect thirty years later in *Death of a Dude*. To me, it was only a minor distraction because the character's part is relatively minor.

The final chapter is a bit silly and overdone, but overall the Jean Farris character carried the story through with a little help from Inspector Cramer making *Red Threads* an enjoyable 1930s mystery even without Nero Wolfe.

Geoff says

For the Nero Wolfe die-hard completist only.

Michelle Wardhaugh says

Not a bad little mystery. His heroine is an odd mix of clever and beyond stupid. The cover of my copy bills this as an Inspector Cramer feature, but he plays a relatively small role compared to other detectives and police inspectors in most crime dramas. The people who eventually bring in the clues and unofficially solve the crime are simple witnesses and bystanders. This a unique twist in an otherwise fairly straightforward murder investigation.

M.L.D. says

3 1/2

So, Inspector Cramer gets his own case. Kinda. We're not allowed in Cramer's head (I suppose having too much sympathy for him would be problematic when Wolfe & Archie are giving him hell in their books), nor is he allowed to have a spurt of genius. We do see that he's quite good at police work--thorough about pursuing leads and a very good interviewer. And those skills lead to him getting the proof he needs to close the case. Along the way he chews and mangles many cigars.

But the lead investigator here is not Cramer, but a young woman whose romantic interest is the main suspect. She's the one who thinks outside the box and solves the case--she just can't prove it.

For 1939, I suspect Stout's handling of Native Americans is pretty good, although the full-blooded Cherokee character speaks English in broken sentences. Of course.

Michael Brown says

A non Nero Wolfe story with some of the flavor and a few characters from the Wolfe series. Nice mystery but hard to get into.

Tony says

RED THREADS. (1939). Rex Stout. **.

This is not a Nero Wolfe novel, but instead features Inspector Cramer, whom we have encountered in various Wolfe novels as his cigar-chewing antagonist. The plot and setting are close to being preposterous: a multi-millionaire who made his money on the Indian reservations out West is found murdered – with an Indian tomahawk – in the marble-constructed edifice he had built as his wife's tomb after her death. The building was also a museum holding artifacts from various Indian tribes. It seemed to be modeled from a mixture of the Taj Mahal and the Pyramids of Egypt. There were only a few people who were allowed to visit the tomb other than the husband, but that doesn't help. We are focused at first on the man's son, the inheritor of the millions, and a woman who has taken a love interest in him. The woman, Jean Farris, is a principal in a company of the same name, that specializes in the production of one-of-a-kind fabrics used to create high-

fashion designer clothes. One of the fabrics in question contains segments of a red yarn that was first used in the manufacture of military clothes for invading Spaniards back in the early days of America's founding. The Indians, after killing off the Spanish soldiers, took the red yarn from their clothes and wove it into their own cloths. Those were very rare and expensive when they could be found. After meeting a cast of characters worth of a deMille film, Inspector Cramer can finally get on with his job, and ultimately brings the criminal to justice. There's a lot of background on the fashion industry in this book, and I discovered why. I bought this book at a used paperback store, and found a copy of Stout's obituary folded up into it. It indicated that Stout left behind his family and his second wife, who was in the fabric creation business – much like some of the characters in this book. Interesting! Unfortunately, this was more interesting than the novel.

Michael says

I was eager to read this book by Rex Stout. While it does not involve Stout's famous detective Nero Wolfe, it does include Inspector Cramer and all of the police, DA's and other official law enforcement officers of the Wolfe cannon.

While the book was sufficiently entertaining it was far below the standard I have come to expect from Stout. The book is written in the third person, and I didn't realize how much I would miss the voice of Archie Goodwin narrating the story. Without that point of view, the story was less interesting and it took a long time for it to grab me. There was one Stout signature moment, when one of the people involved decides to gather the suspects together to reveal the murderer.

All-in-all, I would certainly encourage a Nero Wolfe fan to check this out, as an example of non-Wolfe writing. But a reader who has never tried any Rex Stout, this is in no way a book to start with. There are loads of far more interesting books out there.

Simon says

I have been putting off reading this for years because now that I have, there are no Rex Stouts left that I haven't. Yes, you miss Nero and Archie. God, yes. And his plotting is a little dull, despite inclusion of things like scalping and mysterious Indian princesses in glass-faced coffins. But what *Red Threads* mainly lacks is funny lines, of the sort that dot every other mystery Stout wrote.

But it's Stout. Enjoy!

Travis says

Can't believe this is the first Rex Stout book I've added.
I love Stout. He is the American Agatha Christie.

In this book, Nero Wolfe, Stout's most famous creation is completely absent, and Inspector Cramer, the police detective that always crosses paths with Wolfe gets his own mystery to solve.

There is a bit of a cheat, as one of the main characters plays amateur detective and helps Cramer, but he pulls together the solution.

The mystery is clever and it was interesting seeing so many of the characters that are usually seen as getting in Wolfe's way or rivals being the good guys and shown as competent at their jobs.

Jean says

Inspector Cramer's on book; Goodwin and Wolfe are not a part of the plot. We miss the familiar routine at the old brownstone and especially Archie's wit. If Archie and Wolfe stories remind me of a particularly effervescent soft drink, then this is soda that has gone flat. The plot is intricate, the suspects suitably recalcitrant, the women strong and stubborn--but it is almost too well-made. More like an etude than a concerto. This is the first time I have read it--and probably the last--while I have read all the Wolfe series multiple enjoyable times.

Wade Grassman says

Let me say I am an unadulterated fan Nero Wolfe, until recently I this was the only Rex Stout I had read. Not too long ago I read *Bad for Business*, a Tecumseh Fox novel and really enjoyed. This book was advertised as an Inspector Cramer novel and that does it an injustice. The erstwhile Cramer is really a minor character until the final chapters. For Nero Fans District Attorney Skinner are here. Even Stebbins gets a mention. The real work is done by a misfit group of characters. Like most Stout novels the story is populated by odd and unlikely characters, but, like most Stout novels, the characters are likable and you care what happens to them.

I don't want to give away too much, but I really enjoyed this novel. Is it as good as some of Nero's best cases, no. That shouldn't dissuade you from giving it a chance.

Lisa Kucharski says

One of two off shoots that exist in the world of Nero Wolfe but don't feature him, nor Archie. In this book we see Inspector Cramer in all his usual crankiness, called in from vacation to help solve a murder not even in New York City but White Plains. So, he goes over the all the paperwork and re-interviews people who are suspects... but it is Jean Farris who actually really investigates who killed Val Carew after his son is charged with his murder. (She is in love with the son.)

She herself, is not a suspect, but a victim of a strange attack to get at her clothes that contain a specific thread that she has woven into an outfit. (The character of Jean is probably inspired a bit by the author's wife who was involved in fashion etc.... and well fabrics herself.)

And Jean uses a method to draw out the murderer, who she believes with decent logic took her outfit with the thread. In doing so she also exposes herself to danger, but luckily there are others who also realize it and help her.

She ends up having to, in the same way that Nero Wolfe and Archie had to, wake up Cramer to the fact that he has the wrong person, and that if he really dug deeper than just what was placed before him... he might have figured it out himself.

So, while the story basically reinforces Cramers' shortcomings, we get to see a much more contemporary and strong female lead than other Wolfe stories contained.

The other story- within the Wolfe landscape - is The Hand In The Glove and that features Dol Bonner.

Andrea says

Featuring Inspector Cramer from the Wolfe books, this story should have interested me more, particularly as a good portion of the story revolves around a successful young businesswoman determined to find the truth regarding the murder of the father of a man she cares about.

But somehow my interest just drifted in the middle. I wanted to know how it ended, but I didn't care to read through how they worked out the solution.

[There's a rather interesting foreword to this book by a Native American writer, discussing the plot points dealing with Native Americans, which left me thinking the book would be very bad in its treatment of Native American characters, but it was merely so-so on that point.]

Dannica Zulestin says

Not one of Rex Stout's best. But I may have gone in with my expectations too high. Even though I knew there would be no Wolfe and, even sadder, no Archie, I at least believed this book would center around Inspector Cramer.

Instead, Cramer was more or less a sideline character while the book focused on a woman who was in love with one of the suspects. I could have put up with that, but she was kind of an idiot.

You know how Archie says in every book, practically, how he'll be watching the suspects' faces but it's no good because you can't actually prove anything by people's expressions? Well, this woman does just that. Endlessly frustrating.

It's also kind of racist. Not as bad as it could be, but I set a higher standard for Rex Stout. In most of his books he doesn't use racial stereotypes and I was disappointed by his portrayal of Native Americans here. Well...There are still some good lines and it's still Rex Stout if you want to read it. But I wouldn't particularly recommend.

Alger says

There are a few phases to Rex Stout's literary career. The first is his start in the pulps, with dozens of little articles that spanned genres and returned very little money. So he turned to the profitable Stout School-Banking system for a decade, and then with the breathing room of a small fortune began a career as a serious novelist, in the midst of that phase he hit upon the Nero Wolfe premise which originated as a mild satire of the overactive sleuth so common in tec fiction of that era and grew into its own distinct genre of detective

story. The final phase of his life takes up the last forty years of Stout's career, where he devoted himself to political causes funded by the clockwork release of increasingly formulaic Nero Wolfe Novels.

Red Threads is a novel that stands right on the cusp of Stout's surrendering serious writing for a life of writing nothing but Wolfe and political activism. Like the rest of Stout's Non-Wolfe output, this is a middling effort that exposes all of Stout's weaknesses as a writer in the starker terms. Most important in this example is Stout's inability to compose a consistent or likable female character. This singular failure is almost met by Stout's inability to describe or stage a scene clearly, individualize characters except through stereotype, or think through his plots closely to identify weaknesses or gaps. These failures are all the more surprising since the lead character of this novel and her interests are so closely modeled after those of Stout's own wife, and the locations and social scene are so closely modeled upon his own home and friends. Also by this point Stout had written something more than 20 novels and novellas, and this book was published in the glory year that saw *Some Buried Caesar* come to print. If ever Stout was going to write a classic novel outside the Wolfe series, this would have been the year. This book is all the proof needed to demonstrate that Stout was an above average pulp writer who found his perfect vehicle in the team of Archie and Nero. This book is so lacking in heft that even the introduction by Robert J. Conley can't be bothered to read past the opening twenty-five pages for examples of the stereotypical misrepresentation and woodenheadedness of Stout's depiction of Native Americans. Like *Too Many Cooks*, this book has the potential to turn away many readers who confuse Stout's lack of interest in a realistic portrait of a non-white character with actual bigotry on his part. Stout's later career as a champion of civil rights and his somewhat better portrayal of non-whites in his later books proves the bigotry charge is a little strong, although he certainly is open to a charge of not being able to grasp the harm in aping stereotypes for affect in his writing.

The lack of a sane or reasonable plot, the unreasonable ploy used to expose the murderer, the weak chains of evidence and all of the other nonsense that we a happy to overlook in a Nero Wolfe novel because of the bouncy narrative joy of Archie's telling are all laid out for us here in limp prose; exposed and risible. In short, this is a Nero Wolfe Novel without the motive power of Nero Wolfe, and Stout did himself a favor by surrendering his attempts to escape his creation's gravitational pull.
