



The first Nancy Drew book I ever read in its entirety was *The Secret of the Forgotten City*. I had borrowed a salmon-colored library edition (the one with the cover of *The Sign of the Twisted Candles* on the front) from the Groton Elementary School Library sometime in during the fourth grade. I remember vividly my nine-year-old self being entranced with Nancy's adventures searching for Native American gold in the Nevada desert, developing a secret code with her friends, and chasing (and being chased by) Fleetfoot Joe, a villain whose nickname is so important to him that the initials on his wallet are F. J.

Since that first book I've read every single Nancy Drew book published in the English language, many of them more than once, and I own over 500 books in my own private collection (including six distinct versions of *The Flying Saucer Mystery*!) Now, as an adult, I still collect the new Nancy mysteries and eagerly read them as I purchase them. And I add to my collection all the time; three books this week, as a matter of fact.

And yet, putting away newfound treasures amongst the old, I paused and reflected on how long it has been since I had read one of the old, yellow picture cover Nancys. I nostalgically ran my hand over a group of books, and one, the only flashlight Nancy amongst a group of older yellow picture covers, caught my eye. *The Secret of the Forgotten City*. How many years had passed since I had first enjoyed Nancy's adventure digging for gold? Too many too count. With a small, almost reluctant smile, I picked up my treasure, cradled it in my hands, and opened to page one.

I had only planned to read the first brief paragraph, remember Ned Nickerson's joke of yelling "Au! Au! Au!" to get Nancy's attention fondly, especially because Kate Emburg spoofed it so cleverly in the Susan Slutt adventure *The Secret of the Forgotten Sissy*. But like my nine-year-old self discovered all those years ago, I was again hooked, and I tore through the book right there, reliving and remembering old friends and adventure one more time.

I had fondly remembered Mrs. Wabash, who seemed both odd and yet somehow wise to me. Of course, she sought out Nancy to solve her mystery—she's definitely wise! And I had forgot Wanna Antler, the strangest name, perhaps, in all of Nancy Drew, though one of the loveliest, the charming graduate student who guides Nancy's friends through their archaeological expedition. And I wished I could forget Archie, the obnoxious grad student who really doesn't know what he is talking about; people like him always make me cringe.

In retrospective, *Forgotten City* isn't quite a classic Nancy Drew. For one thing, it's riddled with mistakes. For example, Wanna talks about using carbon-14 dating to determine the date of a turquoise bead. Carbon-14 dating cannot be used on inorganic objects such as stones and gems; besides, finding out the date of a piece of turquoise would only tell the age of the stone, not when it was carved.

And Bess isn't very well done in the book, either. She rides off with Archie to chase after Mexican migrants who have come to the desert because of rumors of gold. She and Archie chase after them as if it was all a grand sport, when the knowledgeable reader realizes that the discovery of gold would mean a great boon to these struggling, poor people. Bess is also very superstitious and foolish in this book, fearful of curses placed on beads and slipping over a small rock and spraining her ankle. She's not nearly as dashing as George, who grabs a poisonous sidewinder snake by its head before it can strike Nancy, and then proceeds to calmly hold the venomous reptile until the group is safely into the Nevada desert where she can gently release the animal. George certainly comes off much better than Bess here, though none of the secondary characters in *The Secret of the Forgotten City* shines quite like Dave Evans, who takes on dangerous missions, confronts villains, sculpts pictographs, and discovers artifacts with so much aplomb that one wonders, quite briefly, if he doesn't deserve a series of his own.

Nancy and her friends' reaction to Las Vegas was quite surprising to me, too. The first time I read it, the snide comments about the city passed me by, since as a nine-year-old in rural upstate New York I knew very little about Las Vegas. Now, complaints about it being too "loud" and flashy strike me as a bit disingenuous for a character who is worldly and open to new ideas and places, though I suppose no matter how old I am, Vegas would never strike me as Nancy's kind of town.

*Forgotten City* was always rather unique amongst the Nancy Drews because the capture of the criminal is not the end of the book. Fleetfoot Joe attempts to kidnap Nancy one night from the camp, but after a quick ruse and call for help and he finds himself surrounded by half of the Emerson College football team. Despite his boasts that Nancy is no match for him, Fleetfoot Joe goes meekly off to prison, a victim of his own hubris and Nancy's incredible good fortune. Her fortune continues to hold a lot in this book, and I'm not sure which coincidence is more unbelievable: her discovery of Wanna Antler when all Mrs. Wabash could tell her was that she lived in Nevada somewhere, or her discovery of hidden gold when she really had no solid idea of where to look for it in the first place. As a nine-year-old, I certainly overlooked these coincidences, but now, as an adult, they are a bit much to take.

Still, they matter little. Finishing the book only spurred me to pick up another. Spending time with Nancy like this is spending time with an old friend; I may not have as much in common with her as I used to, but I love her still just the same.