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Cover Art: Ruth Sanderson / **Interior Art:** Paul Frame

Plot:

Nancy is asked to help a young French engineer who has uncovered a mystery surrounding an 18th-century ancestor in a letter found among his grandfather's papers. As the young detective attempts to solve one mystery, she also investigates a series of strange incidents at the River Heights Art Institute. Although nothing is ever taken, the Institute is plagued with burglaries! Undaunted by attempts to stop her, Nancy uses her incredible sleuthing skills to follow the mysterious clues, including an amazing find in an old costume, and unravel this intriguing tale! (*from the back cover*)

Characters:

Nancy Drew - the Titian-haired teen sleuth solves more than one mystery for a French engineer

George Fayne & Bess Marvin - Nancy's ever-faithful friends who aid her in her quest

Carson Drew - Nancy's father who seeks her assistance to help his young French client

Pierre Michaud - a French engineer who seeks Nancy help in tracing a family secret

Mr. Varney - a wealthy investor who is backing Pierre's computer project

Lisa Thorpe - a young woman whose ancestry may hold the secret for which Pierre is searching

Norton Thorpe - Lisa's father who has no hidden distaste for Pierre

Nyra Betz - Pierre's assistant who has more on her mind than just working for Pierre

Emily Owsler - the former maid of Lisa's ancestor

Maxwell Fleen - the attorney who has taken over the firm where Lisa's ancestor made her will

Mr. Gregory - the curator of the River Heights Art Museum who seeks Nancy's aid

Jane Heron - the curator's assistant at the art museum

Lee Talbot - an artist who has been accused of copying other's art for his own

Peter Worden - a reporter for the River Heights Record

Louie Bousha - an ape-like henchman who causes trouble for Nancy

Review:

This mystery begins when Nancy is asked by her father to help out a client of his - one Pierre Michaud, a French engineer who has come to America for more than just business. While disposing of some of his late grandfather's belongings, he came across a letter from a Louise Duval in River Heights who had made a discovery when tracing her ancestry that would have great importance to Pierre's grandfather. Unfortunately, Pierre doesn't know if that information was ever divulged, and now it appears Louise has been dead for some years. Her only living descendant is Lisa Thorpe, socialite daughter of wealthy businessman Norton Thorpe. Pierre had made contact with Lisa, but her father had taken an instant disliking to the French businessman and forbade his daughter to see or talk with Pierre.

Nancy and Pierre go out to lunch, where he informs her of his business venture in the States, a new form of computer memory that is being financed by a Mr. Varney. While at lunch, Nancy becomes aware of a swarthy man watching them from across the street. She recognizes him as having been outside her father's law office when they left. That's when Nancy gets a telephone call from her father's office. Carson Drew's secretary informs Nancy that Pierre's assistant, Nyra Betz, called searching for him. The building with Pierre's workshop was on fire!

When Nancy and Pierre arrive at Pierre's office, it's in flames. Pierre dashes in to rescue a screaming Nyra Betz from the burning building, and she repeatedly blames herself for leaving the building unattended for a few moments to grab some lunch. Nancy, however, finds it odd that she and Pierre arrived moments before the fire engines and has to wonder why Nyra would have called her father's office before she called the fire department. The mystery deepens, however, when the fire chief shows them a warning written on one of the walls – GO HOME, FRENCHY – OR A LOT WORSE WILL HAPPEN!

As Nancy ponders this strange occurrence, she visits her friend, Bess Marvin, who is working at a local thrift shop with Lisa Thorpe. Nancy invites them both for ice cream, and after some reluctance, Lisa agrees to go. Nancy mentions that she is assisting Pierre in his mystery surrounding Louise Duval, and Lisa is unusually reserved about the matter. She does, however, invite them to her home and shows Nancy and Bess a portrait of Yvette Duval and her husband, Paul. As they are viewing the portrait, Lisa's father comes home. Upon learning of Nancy's involvement with Pierre, he immediately demands they leave.

Returning home with at least one clue – the name of Louise Duval's former housekeeper – Nancy finds a message waiting for her. Mr. Gregory, the director of the art museum, would like Nancy's help regarding some recent break-ins. Excited by the idea of yet another case, Nancy begins working hard to solve the case she's already on.

Contacting Ms. Duval's former maid, she meets with her to discover that Louise Duval was indeed doing some "foreign research," but no one was ever told any specifics. She died before she could reveal what was discovered by her attorney, Jonas Becker. The former maid reveals something even more mysterious – the late Ms. Duval died of a heart attack after being nearly run down by a big red car. Nancy thanks the elderly woman for her help and heads for home. In the fog on the way home, however, Nancy finds herself the target of a mysterious red car with no apparent driver behind the wheel!

The mysteries begin to deepen as Nancy is warned by the swarthy man to stay away from Pierre or face dire consequences! When she further discovers that Louise Duval and her family had donated considerable money to the art museum, Nancy becomes excited. Even a spat between local artist, Lee Talbolt, and a River Heights newspaper reporter does nothing to dampen her spirits as she begins to move closer to solving the mysteries. Nancy, along with Bess and her cousin, George Fayne, stay overnight at the art museum to try and lure the intruders into capture – only to find themselves the target of a roaming knight in armor with a very sharp axe! And the target of the break-ins? A painting donated by the Duval family at the opening of the art museum!

Nancy has her work cut out for her. After Bess and George see a woman leaning into Nancy's car, Nancy wonders what the woman was searching for. But her intent becomes clear when Pierre becomes infuriated with Nancy after seeing a sticker for Data-Linc, a competitor, in her car! Then, just as Pierre is ready to show his new technology to a computer representative, the computer explodes! Nancy, having noticed that something was wrong with it immediately before the explosion, is sure someone booby-trapped the computer to ruin Pierre's reputation. Another attack by the mysterious red car, tampering with her car engine, a stolen painting, false accusations regarding Lee Talbolt, a lawsuit for libel, a mysterious letter from Yvette Duval's sister, and a clue in the hem of an antique dress found in Lisa Thorpe's attic all lead Nancy to a final showdown at the home of a recently-deceased history professor who was assisting Louise Duval in her research where Nancy makes the most unexpected discovery of all!

Personal Thoughts and Opinions:

As I continue through the Wanderers, one striking thing I've noticed is that Paul Frame's depiction of Bess in the internal illustrations is very similar to his depictions of Trixie Belden when he illustrated that series. I've recently come into possession of several Trixie books that Paul Frame illustrated, and when compared, you would almost think that Trixie herself had become Nancy's timid friend!

And speaking of Bess, nice to see that she has a job in this book. Rarely, if at all, does it seem that any of our three favorite chums are employed. I know that in 100 - *A Secret in Time*, George is driving an ice cream truck, but other than that, I'm not sure

if I recall any other instances where any of them have a job (at least, in the original series).

Not a whole lot of personal thoughts on this book. It was a good read, although the number of characters thrown into the mix were a bit much. The cover art by Ruth Sanderson is extremely beautiful for this book. I think she has the splitting image of the Nancy I always imagined growing up reading the books. The cover is also a bit reminiscent of *The Secret in the Old Attic* with Nancy in an attic, an open trunk, a wardrobe, and a man peering out of the darkness at her. One would almost wonder if Ms. Sanderson took her inspiration from Russell Tandy's original cover art for *Old Attic*.

These paperbacks are not the original texts - they may not be as rich in details and the characters may not be as multi-dimensional, but the stories are entertaining and original, and the cover style and the art are definitely high standard. Give them a chance - start "wander-ing" through these first Nancy Drew paperbacks - you might just find you like them!