



PLOT:

When a famous young woman disappears suddenly, Nancy Drew is faced with an even more puzzling mystery that involves the theft of a jeweled spider. Once the property of the opera diva, Madame Arachne Onides, the gemstone had supposedly passed into the possession of an unscrupulous millionaire. He hired someone to mount it on a silver cobweb necklace, but the gemstone ornament turns out to be a fake! What has happened to the real jeweled spider, and who masterminded the theft and blackmailed the missing young woman? As Nancy investigates for answers, she is led to the offshore island estate of the late opera star's husband whose life is being menaced by the same shadowy figure intent on trapping the young sleuth! (From the back cover.)

CHARACTERS:

Nancy Drew - the titian-haired teen sleuth is caught in a web of intrigue

Bess Marvin & George Fayne - Nancy's friends are always there to help her out

Carson Drew - Nancy's father investigates a decedent's estate to help his daughter solve the case

Ned Nickerson - Nancy's favorite young man in on hand to aid her catch the crook behind it all

Tad Farr - a young man who seeks Nancy's assistance with his mother and a mysterious drawing

Maggie Farr - Tad's mother who cannot speak but drew a spider to communicate a message

Kim Vernon - a pro-golfer who drops out of the championship games for unexplained reasons

Simon Shand - a businessman who offers Nancy a reward to find a mysterious thief

Russ Chaffee - Kim's coach who seeks Nancy's help finding out why Kim dropped out

Jack Vernon - Kim's brother who recently went into politics and is hiding a past secret

Brett Hulme - Kim's ex-boyfriend who is also a jewelry designer

Madame Arachne Onides - a deceased opera star whose legacy includes a jeweled spider

Renzo Scaglia - a famous opera star who was once a suitor for Madame Arachne

Paul Taggart - an arachnologist whose spider is the model for Madame Arachne's jeweled spider

Eugene Horvath - the widower of Madame Arachne and her business manager

Sandor - Eugene Horvath's chauffeur and manservant

REVIEW:

When Nancy Drew receives a letter from Tad Farr requesting her assistance identifying a drawing that his sick mother made, which vaguely resembles a spider, she sets off on a new mystery to solve. Tad informs Nancy that his mother had taken ill and was currently in the hospital, weak and unable to speak. The crude drawing of the spider was the only communication she had been able to manage thus far, and he hoped that Nancy could help him figure out the significance of the picture. At the same time, Nancy's friends, George Fayne and Bess Marvin, announce that famed golfer, Kim Vernon, is in River Heights. The three teens go to the River Heights Country Club to see the pro in action, and Nancy soon becomes embroiled in yet another mystery when she stops a strange man with a beaky nose and drooping eyelid trying to reach into Kim Vernon's golf bag!

Kim Vernon thanks Nancy, and as Nancy is about to leave, Simon Shand, a notorious businessman, approaches her with an offer of a huge reward if she can find the man she caught with Kim's golf bag. Politely declining the reward, Nancy agrees to see what she can do about bringing the man to justice. Later that same evening, the mystery involving Kim Vernon deepens when Nancy's boyfriend, Ned Nickerson, introduces her to Kim's coach, Russ Chaffee. Russ is desperately trying to find out why Kim abruptly dropped out of the championship games without any reason and enlists Nancy's assistance in uncovering the truth.

Her two cases come together unexpectedly, however, when Nancy travels to New York City to visit Tad and his mother. When told that Mrs. Farr was watching her favorite soap opera at the time she fell ill, Nancy pays a visit to the television affiliate that carried the show. Luckily, the guard on duty in the lobby of the television station recognized Nancy by name and allowed her to go upstairs to speak with the staff. She was shocked, however, to learn that just prior to the soap opera beginning on the day in question, a newscast had interrupted programming to announce Kim Vernon's withdrawal from the championship games!

Nancy realizes that her two cases may have some connection, so she confronts Kim Vernon. Kim tells Nancy in no uncertain terms that her decision to drop out of the game was her private choice and asks her not to look into it. Nancy, however, cannot drop the sneaky suspicion that there is more to Kim's decision than meets the eye. A visit to Kim's ex-boyfriend, Brett Hulme, proves dangerous when a rock is thrown through the window, nearly hitting the young jewelry designer in the head. Her visit is not in vain, though, for she sees a silver cobweb necklace being designed for a client to go with a special broach.

Continuing her investigation, Nancy sits in on one of Jack Vernon's campaign speeches. Jack is Kim's brother who is running for political office. The speech turns violent when hecklers in the audience suddenly turn the political rally into a brawl. After

the police arrive to calm things down, Nancy approaches Jack, but as soon as she asks him about Kim's decision to drop out of the championship games, he brushes her off. Never one to give up, Nancy is more determined than ever to find out what is going on. Her next clue is just around the corner though, for when she arrives home, she receives a call from Tad Farr. His mother managed to spell out the word "G-O-L-F-E" which Nancy immediately realizes is golfer - meaning Kim Vernon! Tad informs Nancy, however, that his mother never met Kim Vernon; before her present job, she worked for an opera star by the name of Madam Arachne Onides! Nancy's mind immediately races - Arachne was the name of a woman in Greek legend who turned into a spider!

From this point, Nancy's investigation really heats up. A visit to the Footlighters' production for the Oceanview Festival turns quite productive when Nancy meets an opera star by the name of Renzo Scaglia, who invites her to solve a mysterious crime that happened at an earlier Oceanview Festival. On a hunch, Nancy asks if the crime involved Madame Onides and is rewarded when the famed opera singer is momentarily stunned. He reveals nothing further, however, and Nancy is left with an open invitation to visit him at the festival.

The next day, Ned and Nancy return to the country club for a round of golf, and upon encountering Kim Vernon, Nancy plays a hunch. She asks Kim if she knows a Maggie Farr, but is disappointed when the golf star does not recognize the name. Nancy goes on to explain that Maggie worked as a scrub woman for Madam Arachne, and that Maggie had drawn a picture of a spider that no one could explain. Nancy's questions paid off, as Kim suddenly becomes extremely upset and runs off!

All of Nancy's leads seem to lead together, so Nancy begins to step up the investigation. A local arachnologist named Paul Taggart assists her unbeknowningly when he reveals that Brett Hulme had specifically come to him about seeing a red spider some time ago! Nancy knows her trail is leading her closer to the truth when she returns home to find an unconscious housekeeper - knocked out by an intruder whose description matches that of the squinty-eyed man from the country club!

A shocking revelation from Renzo Scaglia, the appearance of Madame Arachne's widower, a trap set that leaves Nancy bound in an abandoned warehouse, an assault on Jack Vernon in the park, a webbed tennis racquet, a mysterious intruder at Eugene Horvath's island estate, and a stolen spider all lead Nancy on a dangerous journey to uncover the truth behind the jeweled spider and the real identity of the beak-nosed, squinty-eyed thief!

PERSONAL THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS:

The extent of Nancy's fame is certainly spread far! When Nancy drives her father to New York City to see a client, she does some investigating of her own and on

a Sunday afternoon, she is allowed to visit employees in a television studio - all because the security guard "recognized the famous young sleuth by name." That's quite a reputation!

And that reputation is further brought to light at the Footlighters' theatre when Hamilton Spencer introduces Nancy to a famous opera singer. Not only are we treated to the THIRD Wanderer book to reference the Footlighters, but this time, Hamilton Spencer makes a reference to Nancy solving a mystery that "involved a weird dancing puppet." Again, as with *The Sinister Omen* when reference is made to the revised test of *Mystery of the Moss-Covered Mansion*, the specific title to the mystery is cleverly omitted, but the reference to *The Clue of the Dancing Puppet* is clear!

(And, of course, the fact that Nancy and her father drove to New York City on a Sunday afternoon so he could see a client would seem to indicate that they lived within a few hours driving distance. This, of course, would support the time frame reference in *The Elusive Heiress*, where the time difference between Wyoming and River Heights was two hours - making River Heights in the Eastern Standard Time zone.)

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!