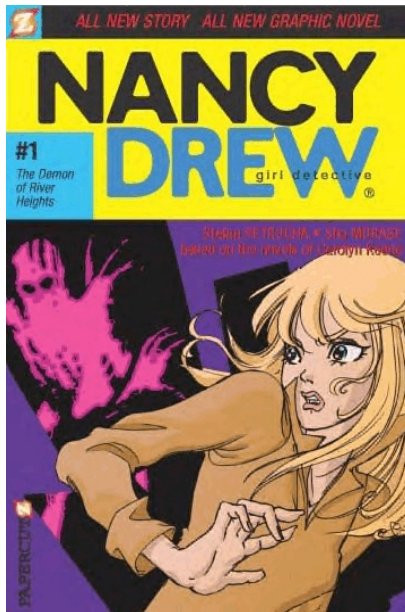


Drew Review: Nancy Drew Graphic Novel:

The Demon of River Heights reviewed by Kevin A. Denis

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As a fan of both Nancy Drew and comic books, I always wondered why DC Comics or Marvel Comics never attempted to license Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, Tom Swift, or any of the other Stratemeyer Syndicate series, especially during the 1980s when, seemingly, everything that could be licensed—G. I. Joe, Care Bears, Transformers, Power Lords, etc.—was getting a comic. I think I understand why now.

The Demon of River Heights begins with the filming of a movie based on an old River Heights legend by two student filmmakers and quickly leads into the story of whether or not the legend is real or a hoax when the filmmakers disappear. I won't spoil any of the story for anyone who hasn't read it yet, but it's safe to say that, as with any other Nancy Drew book, things are not always what they appear to be.

The graphic novel series is firmly set within the world of *Nancy Drew: Girl Detective*. It features Bess, George, Chief McGinnis, and Nancy's nemesis, Deirdre Shannon. (Ned is mentioned but not seen.) I think that's why I find it unusual to see Bess and Chief McGinnis portrayed with a mix of the new *Girl Detective* and the classic.

Bess is portrayed as being Ms. Fix-It, as in the new *Girl Detective* series, but is also portrayed as being more afraid than in the new series. Even Nancy comments that "Bess is usually one of the bravest people I know, but I think the demon-talk from the movie has put us all on edge." Her actions here are a far cry from the girl who very daringly rescued Nancy from a locked basement in *Nancy Drew: Girl Detective #3, False Notes*.

Chief McGinnis isn't portrayed as the glory seeker in the graphic novel as he is in the regular *Girl Detective* series. As Nancy says, "My relationship with Chief McGinnis is generally good, but, of course, he can't help teasing me now and again. It's just his way of making himself feel better because of all the cases I solve before *he* does." It's actually a nice melding of the classic police chief who always welcomed Nancy's assistance and the *Girl Detective* police chief who wishes Nancy would stop interfering with his job.

It took a second reading of the graphic novel in order to really appreciate it. My gut instinct was to dislike it very much, but with a second reading I enjoyed it much more.

I do have some quibbles, of course. First of all, Nancy doesn't look like Nancy to

me. While not a big fan of manga to begin with, I found it odd that I could pretty much agree on the representation of Bess and George, but not Nancy. Maybe it has to do with the first person narration, though I don't imagine myself as Nancy when I read the *Girl Detective* books (I imagine I'm reading a journal Nancy's written on the case). Possibly I'm being influenced by the recent release of the Pamela Sue Martin episodes in the first season of the Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Mysteries.

Secondly, Nancy's hybrid runs out of gas—two days in a row. I realize that hybrids have smaller gas tanks, but they should get approximately 60 miles to the gallon. I went to <http://www.howstuffworks.com/hybrid-car.htm> to answer my questions about hybrids work. The article by Karim Nice explains the types of hybrids, their similarities and differences, and how the electric and gas components work together.

The third thing is relatively minor. While Nancy, Bess, and George did attend Wilder in the *On Campus* series, it's been established in the *Girl Detective* series that Ned attends River Heights University, located in—you guessed it—River Heights, not a place several hours from home. Maybe author Stefan Petrucha was remembering the days when Ned attended Emerson College which was farther away from River Heights.

My final quibble has to do with how Nancy is dressed. Bess and George are shown wearing shorts and jeans (or is that a mini that Bess is wearing?), but Nancy is wearing a skirt. I could understand Nancy wearing skirts if this book took place 75 years ago (even 40 years ago), but she's come a long way into the jeans and a blouse era and needs to dress for detective work accordingly. It appears from the six-page preview of the second graphic novel, *Writ in Stone*, that Nancy's going to continue wearing skirts. (How does any girl run in a long skirt to begin with?)

All in all, I think Papercutz has made a valiant effort in bringing Nancy Drew (and the Hardy Boys) into the graphic novel world. I think as Petrucha and artist Sho Murase become even more familiar with Nancy Drew, her friends, and the world they live in, the series will get even better.