

75 Years of Mystery Unfolds, Part VII: Spot the Villain

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Dastardly villains and sinister suspects were classic in the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories series, providing perilous suspense and sometimes comic relief. Often foiling Nancy or trying to scare her off a case, villains were part of the quintessential Nancy Drew formula.

While mystery solving, Nancy routinely encountered forgers, kidnappers, burglars and organized crime syndicates. Rarely was Nancy without some kind of gumshoe drama. Nancy was often kidnapped, chloroformed, had “all-purpose assailant rocks” thrown at her, received fake telegrams and phone threats, and had her house burglarized. As if second nature, she was often tailed, her car sabotaged, mail stolen, masked intruders menaced her, clues were stolen, and she was bound and gagged and left “to starve.”

Starve our dear Nancy? Who would do such a vile thing you might ponder. Criminals come from all walks of life, but in Nancy’s world they were rather easy to spot. Often instantly suspicious of certain criminal types, there were obvious clues to who might be a villain.

Villains often sported colorful names or aliases like Stumpy Dowd, Benny the Slippery One Caputti, Tom Tozzle, Zany Shaw, Sniggs, Foxy Felix, Bushy Trott, Spike Lander, Rudy Raspin, Jake Suggs and Snorky.

Facial features were usually a dead giveaway. A large or hooked nose, a severe square-jawed face, and wild bushy or coarse stiff hair might belie a villain. Shifty, dark, sharp, piercing, narrow or penetrating eyes were sure to be indicators of a bad sort. Nancy would take a second look if someone’s eyes had an evil glint or a hard cruel glint to them. Beware if they had a dark complexion, sallow skin or a crinkly ear. If their face was coarse, rough, crude, hard, scowling, ugly or unpleasant, they had to be crooks.

Whether Nancy received a threatening phone call, a voice commanded from the dark, or she was eavesdropping, a raspy, sneering, growling, gruff, or coarse voice was a clear indicator of a cantankerous criminal.

Surely an affront to Emily Post, the manners of Nancy Drew villains were not only off-putting but sent up red flags to our resident sleuth. Villains often had a miserly appearance, were known skinflints, or had an air of superiority. Rude, shifty, unpleasant, harsh, angry, cruel behavior, a queer manner, an exaggerated swagger, and general all-around ill-mannered villains did not go unnoticed. Of course, looking like a crook never helped villains escape Nancy’s powers of observation either.

Like a book judged by its cover, villains were often revealed due to their appearance. Ill-fitting clothes—several seasons out of style—had the fashion police running for cover. A flashy or boldly-patterned suit—especially loud plaids—and a gaudy necktie were often the crime committing outfit of choice. Even worse for a villain’s prospects was a grease spot or a dirty accessory.

A man being mean to his wife—calling her a whiner or a nagging wife—was surely a clue on the trail to catching criminals. Female villains—often wives—were unpleasant

and rude and usually looked mannish or wore too much makeup. Exaggerated coifs or helter-skelter hairdos and strong pungent perfumes were typical of female villains.

Always attune to Nancy's every move, villains often knew Nancy was on a case before she did. A visit from an old friend with a mystery puzzler was often interrupted with a phone threat. It was as if various gangs of criminals had established a rotating shift of callers to the Drew home.

No matter who the villain, their manners, or how they dressed for criminal success, a Nancy Drew mystery just would not have the same flair without your gaudy-necktied, shifty-eyed, gruffy-voiced smuggler or thief.

(75 Years of Mystery Unfolds is a continuing series of articles dedicated to the 75 year history of the Nancy Drew series, running during 2005 in *The Sleuth* (www.nancydrewsleuth.com/thesleuth.html) and *The Whispered Watchword*. Look for part 6 in the April 2005 issue of *The Sleuth*, part 8 in the June/July issue of *The Whispered Watchword*, and part 9 in the June issue of *The Sleuth*.)