



The Sign of the Book

John Dunning

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Packed with "juicy nuggets of bibliophile gold" ("Booklist"), this irresistibly suspenseful bestseller traces the mark of murder inside the world of rare books. Assessing a book's value is Denver cop-turned-bookseller Cliff Janeway's expertise. But even a pro like Janeway could be supremely challenged by certain signed first editions. When is an autograph authentic? How can forgeries appear to be so convincingly real? The same questions apply, it seems, to a murder investigation in tiny Paradise, Colorado. Janeway agrees to help his lover, attorney Erin D'Angelo, determine if Erin's estranged childhood friend killed her husband -- or was her confession designed to protect her troubled young son? Then Janeway discovers the dead man's books: an impressive collection that may house some real gems. But it's not their financial worth that draws Janeway deeper into the case of deadly small-town secrets -- it's the hunger for peeling back layers of deception to reveal the genuine sign of the book. And in a case of cold-blooded murder, truth is a priceless commodity.

The Sign of the Book Details

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Author : John Dunning

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From Reader Review The Sign of the Book for online ebook

Debra says

I'm delighted every time I pick up a copy of this great series, and again I was not disappointed with this one. Great characters, great plot, fun bibliophile information. Janeway is no pansy, he's a tough ex-cop turned book-seller who will go to great lengths to solve the mysteries he finds himself involved in.

El says

In this Bookman Novel, detective-turned-bookseller/detective-hanger-on, two years have passed since the last time we have read about his adventures. He has a lovely lawyer lady-friend now, and is asked by her to become involved in a case surrounding her estranged childhood friend. There is, of course, a book mystery that Janeway must solve in order to solve the true nature of the case, and he uses his old detective skills, his newer bookseller trade experiences and good ol' fashioned law-breaking and skull-cracking behaviors to help find what he needs.

Much better than his previous book, though this one started slowly. I worried that the whole story would feel that way; luckily, however, things picked up. Dunning is not particularly good at writing amorously, so a lot of the details involving conversation between Janeway and his new lover, Erin, are stilted and rather boring. Gratefully there is very little of it and I could rot my brain simply on the book mystery.

[Note to bro: I'll bring it over next time we hang out. Quick read, will be perfect for you so you don't have to think too much between work/class/clinical/sleep.

I'll see if I can swing by one day and drop it in your mailbox. Otherwise I'll bring it in a couple weeks.]

Benjamin Thomas says

This is the 4th Cliff Janeway book and, I believe, the best so far. Basically, these are hard-boiled crime novels featuring a sleuth who is a former cop but now runs his own antiquarian bookstore in downtown Denver. The author, John Dunning is himself, an antiquarian book dealer in Denver so he knows his book lore and that is initially what drew me to the series. What could be better than a mystery plot surrounding the book trade?

Of course that's only the premise. You still have to have good characterization, plotting, etc. and, of course, a great mystery to solve. That's all here and in spades. If you haven't discovered John Dunning yet, get ye to a bookstore or download the first one *Booked To Die* today!

Ellen says

The first but not my last, July 20, 2012

By Ellen Rappaport (Florida)

This review is from: *The Sign of the Book* (Cliff Janeway Novels) (Paperback)

This was my first Cliff Janeway Bookman story but I will be reading more in this series.

Cliff Janeway is a rare book dealer and runs a book store along with his partner, Erin D'Angelo. Erin's former love interest, Robert Marshall, has been murdered. Cliff finds his wife, Laura, has been taken into custody without the aid of a lawyer. Cliff starts to investigate and finds a rare collection of books may be at the center of this murder.

That's when the "Preacher" comes to the attention of Cliff. The Preacher is a tall strange sort of character that runs a rare book collection with many books signed by the authors. But are those signatures authentic? And how can cliff go about finding who is actually signing them?

I listened to this fabulous mystery on CD narrated/performed by George Guidall. G.G. executed a magnificent job at interpreting the authors words precisely and with depth that added another dimension to this story. There was one scene, in particular, that had me rolling with laughter. It was when the Preacher was over the top paranoid about the relentless Cliff showing up at his every turn. The preacher goes into his bathroom after ranting about his feelings of being constantly stalked by cliff only to find cliff standing in his shower. Cliff then smiles and winks at the Preacher which sends the preacher into a frenzy falling backwards entangling himself in the shower curtain. He flees from his house and jumps into his car speeding away with his side kick running after the car. Absolutely hilarious.

I can only say, "why have I not heard more about this author and this fabulous series?" Have already requested 2 more books in this series and I highly recommend this book and series to all serious mystery lovers.

LJ says

THE SIGN OF THE BOOK (Amateur Sleuth-Colorado-Cont) – G+
Dunning, John – 4th in series
Scribner, 2005- Hardcover

Cliff Janeway is a former policeman and now bookstore owner and collector. He is asked by his attorney girlfriend Erin to investigate the arrest of Erin's former best friend, Laura, who has confessed to killing her husband. What he finds is a woman, who may be trying to protect her disabled son, a bully deputy who has badly mishandled a murder scene, and a house full of signed 1st editions.

*** Dunning has created a wonderful character in Janeway. He's a tough ex-cop who knows how do to long stakeouts, understands judges and knows when a crime scene investigation has been bungled. He also knows books, finding, valuing and selling them. It's a combination that leads to a fully dimensional, and very interesting, character. He also knows how to build an excellent supporting cast, create a sense of place and build tension. If I wish his dialogue were better, that's a small criticism. For those of us who love books and tough-but-tender investigators, this is a very enjoyable series.

Sandie says

Life is different these days for Cliff Janeway. He gave up his career as a police detective and has reinvented himself as a bookseller, a trader and seller of rare books. The book store is humming along as is his love life with his girlfriend, Erin D'Angelo, a lawyer. He's about as content as he can remember being.

Then Erin comes to the bookstore, obviously upset. When she decides to tell him what's wrong, he hears a

story about betrayal and first love. Erin had been engaged to a man, Bobby Marshall. The engagement ended when Marshall and her best friend, Laura, had an affair. Erin cut them both from her life and the two married. She hasn't had any contact for over a decade when Laura's lawyer calls. Bobby has been murdered and Laura has been arrested. She wants Erin to come and defend her.

Erin is torn. Laura is planning to pay for her defense with the rare book collection Bobby had amassed and Erin asks Cliff to drive to Laura's town, check out the collection and see what the facts are in the case. Once he reports back, Erin will decide if her former friendship is an obligation to defend Laura and dredge up old memories.

Janeway drives to the small Colorado town where the Marshalls have been living. He encounters a small town mentality that has already convicted Laura, antagonistic law enforcement and a book collection that surpasses all his expectations. There are already unscrupulous book dealers circling around. Erin decides she must come to Laura's rescue. Can she save her old friend?

This is the fourth in the Cliff Janeway mystery series. Cliff is an interesting detective, mixing knowledge of legal investigation and books. The mystery moves along quickly with interesting twists and turns. This book is recommended for mystery readers.

Algernon says

Paradise is a tiny, out-of-the-way county, in the mountains just west of the Continental Divide. This is almost as remote as a traveler can safely go without backpack and mules. You don't just stumble into Paradise: you go there only with a purpose.

What lures Cliff Janeway to Paradise is a combination of the two ingredients that makes this series so special for me: a hardboiled criminal investigation and a very rare and special book collection. Janeway is a former tough as nails Denver cop who got thrown out of the Force for roughing up one of his suspects. Since then he has discovered a new passion in life as a dealer in rare books. He has his own boutique set in a once disreputable part of town and would like to take it easy for awhile, watching the world go by and perusing his beloved shelves:

I could sit on my stool and watch the passing parade through my storefront window all day long: humanity of all kinds walked, drove, skateboarded, and sometimes ran past like bats out of hell. In the few years since I had opened shop on this corner, I had seen a runaway car, a gunfight, half a dozen fistfights, and this lone whore, who had a haunting smile and the world's saddest eyes.

Yet what I learned from the previous three episodes in the series is that the bookworld can be just as dangerous and cutthroat as the drug trade or the bank robbing business. So Janeway is often forced to lead with his fists and to ask questions later as he follows the trail of first editions and unique manuscripts.

The Paradise case starts with a man being shot in his own remote mansion in the small mountain city. The main suspect is his own wife, who happens to be the former best friend of Cliff's current heart throb Erin. To complicate matters even further, the victim is also connected to Erin, being her former boyfriend who cheated on her all those years ago with Laura, the accused. Since Erin is a very good attorney, Laura asks her to put the past behind and take on the case. Erin is afraid her own involvement in the family's past would cloud her judgement. So she asks Cliff Janeway to head over to Paradise, to dig around and advise her. The investigation soon picks up the scent of a black operation in very special rare books signed by authors and

other famous people. Hence the title.

I believe that's enough of a synopsis to give you a feel for the story. Dunning is as usual in fine form writing a sharp crime story with a classic noir vibe (the novel "Laura" is referenced in several places) and managing to fill the spaces between the action sequences with both black humor and witty dialogue, with memorable secondary characters, and with tantalizing glimpses at the nuts and bolts of the specialized book trade. His passion for the subject shines through the pages brightly and is what really sets the series apart from other good crime fiction.

"You interested in books?" Simms said.

"Sure, isn't everybody?" I said, knowing full well how few people really are, how pitifully few ever read anything more than the morning newspaper.

also,

I love to buy books I love, and I am in no hurry to sell them.

Some of the observations Cliff makes about the business of buying and selling books is depressing, as in the note about how few people are still reading and cherishing the printed word. He's also on point with remarks about how big money and fast internet is pushing the traditional lone wolf book scout out of the trade.

When you take the best parts of any business away from the masses and hand it over to the rich, you can't be too surprised when it starts dying on the inside.

I'm hoping that Cliff Janeway doesn't throw in the towel and that he will continue to hunt for those rare editions and for the people who try to game the system. I'm eager to continue with this series.

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Last note is a gem I picked up from the Paradise investigation: there actually is a book that the movie is based on and it's called "The Ballad of Cat Ballou" by Roy Chanslor. I wonder if it is still in print or re-released as an ebook?

Andy says

George Guidall is a great narrator but this is not a great book. It's OK to have a far-fetched premise at the beginning but it's annoying when the main character just keeps sinking into crazier and crazier vigilante/fascist escapades based on nothing but his hunches.

Valentina "TinchyB" says

I really needed little break from all those romance novels I've been reading in the past few months. So, when I took this one, I just knew it that I wouldn't be disappointed!
I really love all Cliff Janeway books so this one wasn't exception!
Big 5 stars!

Phair says

Audio read by George Guidall in a very 'soothing' voice that made this impossible to listen to in bed without drifting off into sleep. Dragged a little at first but then got better. Learned a bit about signed modern first editions & book fairs but overall this didn't leave me with a burning desire to read more Janeway novels.

Kasa Cotugno says

Cliff Janeway, John Dunning's ex-cop bookstore owner, works on yet another murder that utilizes his knowledge of what makes a book valuable, in this case, signed books. As with Dick Francis, Dunning has crafted mysteries around a subject not usually associated with crime, imparting much information about his chosen subject. It's been a while since I read the first three in the Janeway series, but it was a pleasure to rediscover him.

Janet Aileen says

Another enjoyable book by John Dunning. The plot is clever and interesting, the characters are well drawn.

Bev says

Full disclosure: I bought John Dunning's *The Sign of the Book* as an audio book on CD specifically so I would have an author I'd read and enjoyed before available the next time I needed/wanted to make a road trip up north to see my parents. That happened in early March and I popped the first CD in and headed to Wabash. Everything was fine until I got to the third disc (on the way back home, actually) and George Guidall (our reader) gave us a more in-depth introduction to Deputy Walsh, who is a WAY more annoying, bumbling, self-righteous, opinionated version of Barney Fife. The vocal impersonation he chose for this character drove me absolutely nuts. And there were six more CDs to get through and no way of knowing how much of that time was going to be devoted to the fine deputy. I couldn't do it. So, I abandoned my personal audio copy and ordered up the book from the library--because I wanted to claim it for challenges and, more importantly, I wanted to know who did it. So--although I started this on CD, I read more than two-thirds of it in print and am totally counting it for the Strictly Print Challenge among others.

John Dunning's Bookman Series features Cliff Janeway, a former cop who took up bookselling when he had to leave the force and who has become an expert in various aspects of the field. His expertise often leads him into murderous territory and his experience as a cop helps him solve crimes both bookish and deadly. In this, Janeway's fourth recorded case, he is asked by his bookstore partner, Erin D'Angelo, to help her childhood friend, Laura Marshall. Laura is accused of killing her husband and wants Erin, who is also a successful trial lawyer, to defend her. Ostensibly, Erin wants Cliff to look over the books in the Marshall home to see if their value would help Laura afford a high-quality lawyer. But Erin also wants Cliff to use his abilities as an ex-cop to assess the situation--does he think Laura did it? If not, why did she initially confess? And if she didn't, does he see a way to mount a defense? It's a lot to process in a short time, but it doesn't take Cliff long to figure out that there's something fishy going on. It may be that he doesn't like Deputy Walsh, but he's pretty sure it's not just a personality conflict that's got his instincts on full alert. Something about Walsh's story just doesn't click. And who are the mysterious men who try to get access to the Marshall home in the early hours

one morning? Just how valuable are those books anyway? It all builds to a very surprising grand finale.

This was an enjoyable entry in the Janeway series. Cliff Janeway is an excellent character he's got his ex-cop background that gives him depth, but Dunning doesn't waste a lot of time on angst over what used to be (which seems to be a thing with modern mysteries--the detective has to have a lot of depressing crap going on in his/her life or they're just not interesting enough). Janeway uses his street smarts mixed with bookish know-how to solve his mysteries in interesting ways. Dunning does need to work on the way he represents relationships, though. Janeway and D'Angelo are more than just store partners and friends, but their conversations are not terribly natural. He gives Janeway a good understanding of his partner and expresses that when he tells us about the two of them together, but he doesn't show that understanding in the dialogue. That and the utterly stereotypical deputy caricature prevents a higher rating. ★★★ and a half. Rounded to four here.

First posted on my blog My Reader's Bloc. Please request permission before reposting. Thanks.

Harry says

John Dunning's Cliff Janeway series ranks among my top favorites in mystery/detective series. When I think of Dunning an inevitable comparison takes place in my little grey cells: if you like Dick Francis you will love John Dunning. Why the comparison? What I often find delightful in fiction is not just the story itself; what delights is the acquisition of knowledge on a particular subject. Dick Francis in addition to handing his readers a well crafted mystery delights his readers with his thorough examination of the horse racing world. There is no doubt that when one thinks of horse racing, one thinks of Dick Francis. John Dunning accomplishes the same by delivering to his readers a thorough insider's knowledge of the art of collecting books. When one thinks of antiquarian books; when one thinks of book scouts; when one thinks of avid book collectors, book scams, and book shops across this great nation: one thinks of John Dunning.

When one stumbles across a writer who not only delivers a great story but also infuses one with knowledge than this writer has the power to influence one's life personally. For example: it was due to Ayn Rand's novels that my philosophical perspective on the world and my life in it changed. In the case of John Dunning I became engrossed in book collecting: how can one forget an author when my glass encased book cases, filled with signed first editions of my favorite authors, are filled to the brim as a direct result of reading *Booked To Die*.

John Dunning is not a man of the computer age. His is a world of typewriters. He says: "Unlike a computer, a great old manual typewriter was an honest machine. You did your work, it did its work." Is it any wonder than that his sentences are among the best crafted? No room for mistakes. Syntax, clauses, and style fuse together in a Dunning book with absolute clarity. Dunning is a writer that appeals to the intellect while simultaneously attracting mystery lovers with his behind-the-scenes look at the world of books: the moral and ethical circumstances that drive any great mystery, including death.

Cliff Janeway, our hero, is in many ways a reflection of the writer. Here the comparison with Dick Francis continues. Where Francis writes about the Queen's sport (horse racing) as a result of having spent a good deal of his life as a jockey himself, Dunning writes about books as a result of having owned his own book store in Denver. Where Francis writes about the racing world in England where he spent his jockey years, Dunning's protagonist Cliff Janeway, a former cop, owns a book store in Denver as well. The adage that one write "about what one knows" is never more true with these two writers. Francis's heroes are a reflection of the writer himself: in the case of Francis we empathize with a thoroughly honorable, ethical and objective human being and in the case of Dunning we face our own conflicts through a conflicted hero not averse to

violence but compelled by a proper moral ethic that guides the hero through his various delimitas. As with Dunning who struggled with ADD, being a poor student, and taking the hard road to his own calling, so does Janeway struggle with authority, with finding his true calling as one reads about a cop turned book collector in the Cliff Janeway novels.

And finally I have to wonder about the formula in play here. Did Dunning stumble upon the perfect subject inadvertently or did it come about as a reflection of his own life? Let's face it, what more compelling subject matter for a mystery/detective series could have been chosen than to appeal to the reader himself: it is our love of reading, our love of books that draws us to these pages. And in the case of Dunning, our satisfaction is doubled because what we are reading about is the very thing from which we draw our pleasure: the world of books.

As with all my series reviews, if you've read this review of the Cliff Janeway series, you've read 'em all.

Wendy Header-moan says

A mystery novel by an author who is also a book dealer, a protagonist who is an ex-cop with expertise in rare books, a murder victim who is a bibliophile and whose library may or may not contain valuable autographed copies, some unsavory characters dealing in books with forged signatures...what more could a librarian/mystery lover want? Especially when the detective is, as described by a reviewer, more like Jack Reacher than Miss Marple!
