



Dissolution

By C.J. Sansom

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Matthew Shardlake, a keenly intelligent hunchback lawyer, is in the service of Lord Thomas Cromwell, an ambitious advisor to King Henry VIII. Shardlake, and many like him, sought to create a world in which faith and charity would be enough to settle differences. But following England's break with the Roman Catholic Church, Cromwell is charged with suppressing the country's monasteries and confiscating their land. By the winter of 1537, his actions have led to rebellion and executions. The disembodied heads of accused traitors line the spikes on London Bridge was a warning to others.

Harsh new laws, rigged trials, networks of informers, and Queen Anne Boleyn herself executed on questionable charges—the scene is set for reform and for Cromwell supporter Matthew Shardlake to enter a hellish cauldron of personal, social, and political upheaval. As Shardlake starts to doubt Cromwell's methods for achieving reform, he is sent to investigate a monastery murder that only serves to fuel his suspicions, even as his own loyalty comes under the microscope.

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Dissolution By C.J. Sansom Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #4070522 in Books
- Published on: 2007
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.76" h x 1.18" w x 5.12" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 300 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Murders on the grounds of a monastery, 16th-century intrigue, an unconventional sleuth-readers might wonder if this is a knock-off *Name of the Rose* set two centuries later, but Sansom's debut is a compelling historical mystery in its own right, with fewer pyrotechnics and plenty of period detail. It is 1537; the English Reformation is in full swing; and Lord Thomas Cromwell, King Henry VIII's vicar-general, is busy shutting down papist institutions. When one of his commissioners is beheaded at a remote Benedictine monastery, Cromwell dispatches a second emissary, hunchbacked lawyer Matthew Shardlake, to investigate the murder. What Shardlake and his companion, eager young Mark Poer, discover is a quietly bubbling cesspool of corruption, lust and avarice. The scope of the investigation quickly expands when a novice is poisoned and Shardlake finds the remains of a girl who served the monks in the monastery pond. Shardlake presses on by testing the alibis of the various corrupt monks, but Poer's objectivity is compromised when he becomes involved with the girl's successor, a bright, attractive woman named Alice Fewterer. As the investigation unfolds, Shardlake survives a murder attempt, and finally returns to London to tie his findings to higher-level intrigue. Sansom paints a vivid picture of the corruption that plagued England during the reign of Henry VIII, and the wry, rueful Shardlake is a memorable protagonist, a compassionate man committed to Cromwell's reforms, but increasingly doubtful of the motives of his fellow reformers. With this cunningly plotted and darkly atmospheric effort, Sansom proves himself to be a promising newcomer.

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From Library Journal

It is 1537, and Thomas Cromwell is charged with protecting the newborn Church of England. So when one of his commissioners is murdered in a monastery, he sends his sharpest lawyer to investigate. A debut from (you guessed it) former lawyer Sansom.

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From Booklist

It is England in the year 1537, and Thomas Cromwell is Henry VIII's vicar-general and in the process of dissolving all of the large monastic houses, granting the land to his favorites or the highest bidders. When one of his commissioners is murdered at the monastery in Scarnsea, mired among the marshes of England's south coast, Cromwell sends the hunchback lawyer Matthew Shardlake and Mark, his young handsome assistant, to solve the mystery. They find that not only has the murder been covered up but also other murders have been covered up as well, and they also find treasonous monks hostile to the king and his assumption of the role of head of the English church. As Shardlake uncovers more unsettling facts, he realizes that his own life is in danger--and solving the mystery takes on a life-or-death importance. Reminiscent of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (without much of the intellectual discourse), Sansom's first novel will not disappoint fans of historical fiction. *Michael Spinella*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Johnnie Gonzales:

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