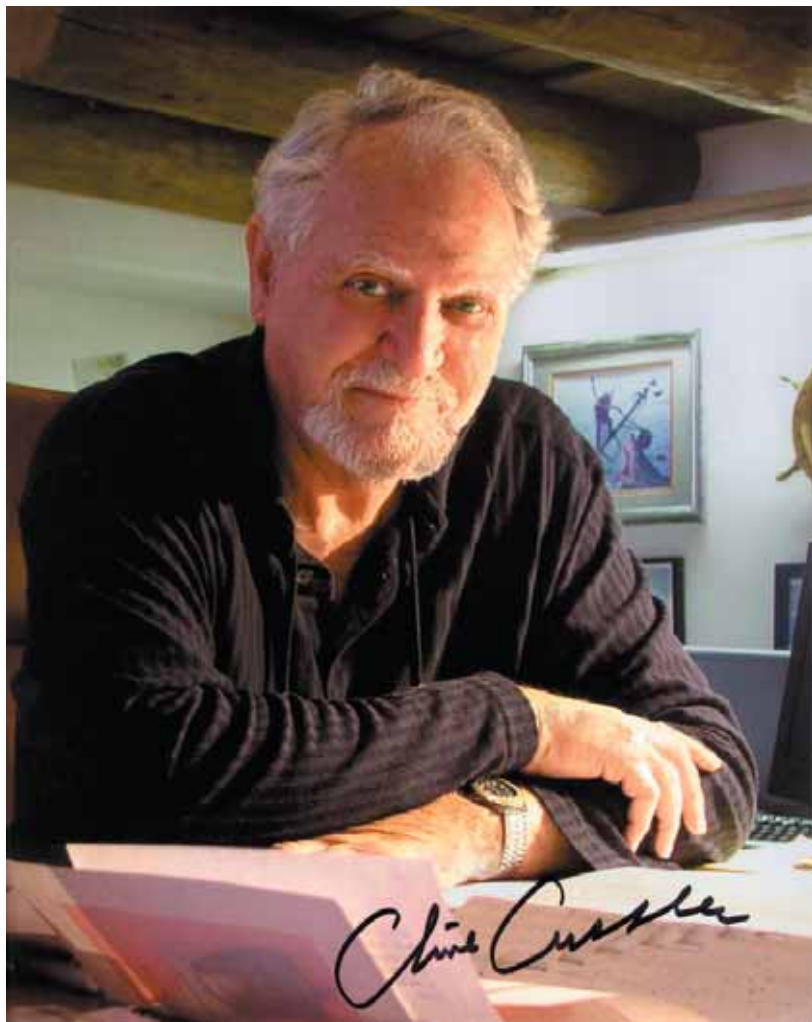


BY JOSHUA PLATT

# Q10 Questions with Clive Cussler

*He's one of the world's top-selling mystery and adventure novelists. He's funded the discovery of over 60 historic shipwrecks. But Clive Cussler always finds the time to treat his fans like gold.*



A signed picture of Cussler at his writing desk, provided in response to a through-the-mail request. Photo: John DeBry/G.P. Putnam's Sons.

**T**he *New York Post* calls him “just about the best storyteller in the business.” During his 40-year literary career, author Clive Cussler has written 28 books, which have been translated into 40 languages and appeared in 110 countries. Worldwide, Cussler fans have purchased nearly 150 million books.

This literary force had humble beginnings. In 1965 Cussler was an award-winning ad exec seeking new challenges. Cussler’s wife, Barbara, was working nights. “I had hardly anything to do and no one to talk to,” Cussler said in a Barnes & Noble *Meet the Writers* interview. “Out of solitude, I decided to write a book.”

In the foreword to *Pacific Vortex* (though published later, it was the series’ first book) Cussler explained that he sought to create a “pure, old-fashioned adventure” series with a “hero who cut a different mold ... a congenial kind of guy with a tinge of mystery about him.” Thus was born Dirk Pitt and the National Underwater & Marine Agency (NUMA).

“I envisioned writing a small paperback series,” the author reflected in *Clive Cussler and Dirk Pitt Revealed*. “I thought that if I could make ten thousand dollars a year I would be a happy man.” Cussler now commands \$7 million a book according to the *Denver Post*, and has become an industry unto himself.

*The Mediterranean Caper* hit shelves in 1973 and was nominated for a Mystery Writers of America award. Cussler’s breakout book, *Raise the Titanic*, came in 1976. The novel’s success catapulted Cussler to the top of the bestseller lists. It was made into a movie (a critical and box-of-

fice flop, it was the first and only Cussler work to be attempted on the big screen), inspired board and video games, and was syndicated as a comic strip.

Cussler followed with fourteen other Dirk Pitt novels over the next three decades and seven books for two spin-off series: *The NUMA Files*, co-authored with Paul Kemprecos, featuring the adventures of Pitt's colleague, Kurt Austin; and *The Oregon Files*, penned with Craig Dirgo, chronicling the adventures of mercenaries based aboard a state-of-the-art warship disguised as a tramp steamer.

All were widely popular, if not critical hits. Cussler told Amazon.com he cares little about critical acclaim, though, considering himself "as much an entertainer" as a writer. His goal is to give readers their money's worth by creating novels with "far-fetched plots" that are "convoluted as hell."

The plan works. Reviewing Cussler's most recent *Oregon Files* effort, BookReporter.com critic Joe Hartlaub says, "*Sacred Stone* does not aspire to be great literature." It is, however, "... a great novel, an absorbing, riveting and entertaining work that is almost impossible to put down."

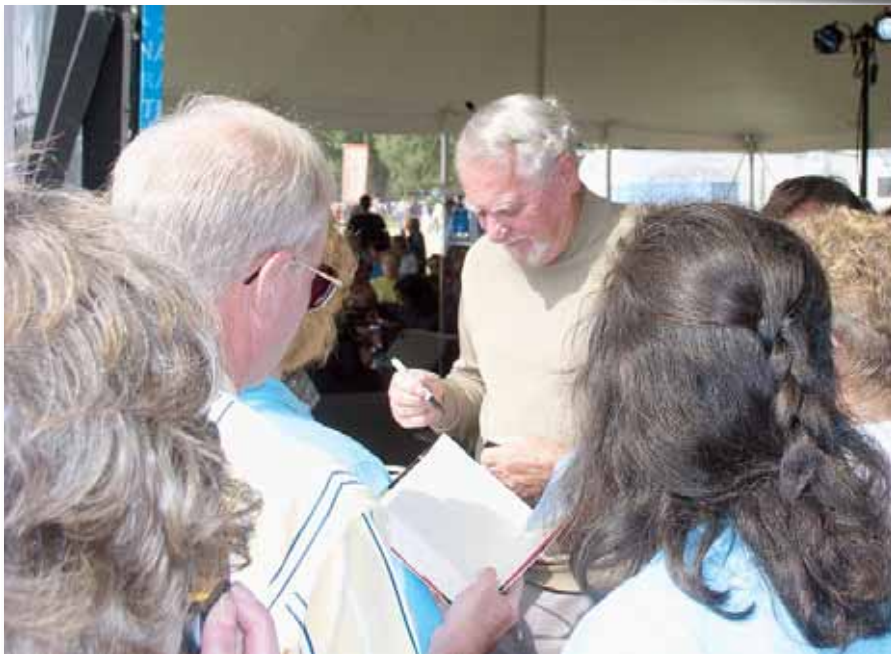
Success allows Cussler to imitate his protagonist. Like Pitt, Cussler's collection of nearly 90 antique automobiles is world-renowned. And

## 10 Questions with Clive Cussler



1. Do you sign autographs through the mail? How many requests do you receive? *Yes I do. I receive about 50 requests a week.*
2. What is the strangest autograph request you have ever had? *A woman asked me to sign my name to her left breast. How could I refuse?*
3. Are you aware of how large the hobby of collecting autographs has become? How did you become aware? *From the large number of people who ask for my John Henry. The demand for historical autographs must be huge.*
4. Do you sign autographs when asked in person? If so, do you limit the number of items per person? *Yes, I do. & No I don't.*
5. Are there any upcoming events where people might be able to get your autograph in person? *I'm going on book tour late in November & December to Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, Denver & Phoenix.*
6. How do you view people who pose as fans, but actually sell the autographs? *I don't mind as long as they wind up with people who treasure them.*
7. Are there any famous people whose autograph you would want? *Lincoln, Washington, Teddy Roosevelt.*
8. Do you collect anything? *Old Cars, Classics and fighter convertibles.*
9. Are there any items you refuse to sign? *I haven't run across any yet.*
10. How much do you think your autograph is sold for? *They wouldn't buy a cup of coffee, but they make great clearstoppers.*

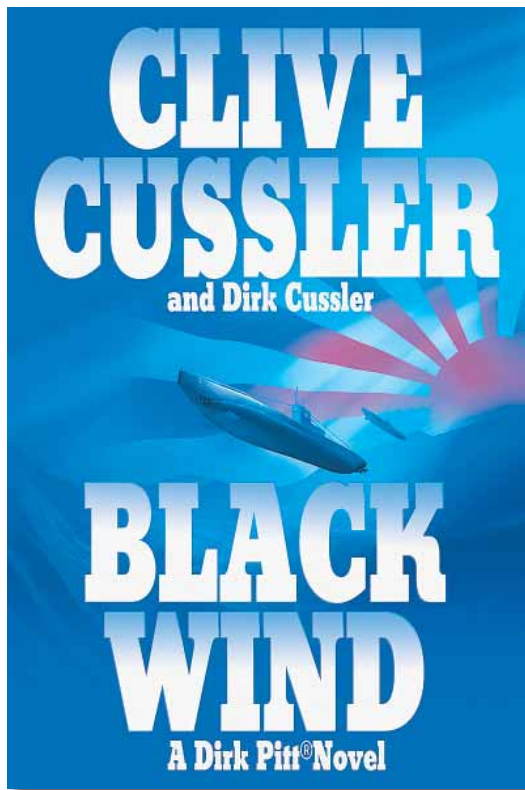
Autograph



Cussler signs for fans at the National Book Festival in Washington, DC.  
 Photo: Gail Fineberg/Library of Congress.

since 1978, the real-life NUMA – funded with Cussler's own money and book royalties – has discovered more than 60 historically important shipwrecks. NUMA's exploits have also been literary hits. Cussler and Dirgo's *The Sea Hunters* and *The Sea Hunters II* both topped the *New York Times*' non-fiction bestseller list.

Now "retired," Cussler is seemingly busier than ever. In 2004, he published three novels: *Sacred Stone*, *Lost City* (a *NUMA Files* book), and *Black Wind*, the newest Dirk Pitt adventure, penned jointly with son, Dirk. Cussler also recently completed *Vin Fizz* – a soon-to-be-pub-



The cover of *Black Wind*, Cussler's most recent Dirk Pitt novel, co-authored with his son, Dirk Cussler. Courtesy: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

lished children's book inspired by Cal Rogers' 1911 transcontinental flight in a plane by the same name. Additionally, Cussler is developing a coffee table book about his car collection. And, Cussler tells

AC, he is already plotting each series' next novel.

Because of his prolificacy and lengthy stay in the spotlight, a wide range of Cussler memorabilia exists. Fortunately for autograph collectors, Cussler's signature is readily available.

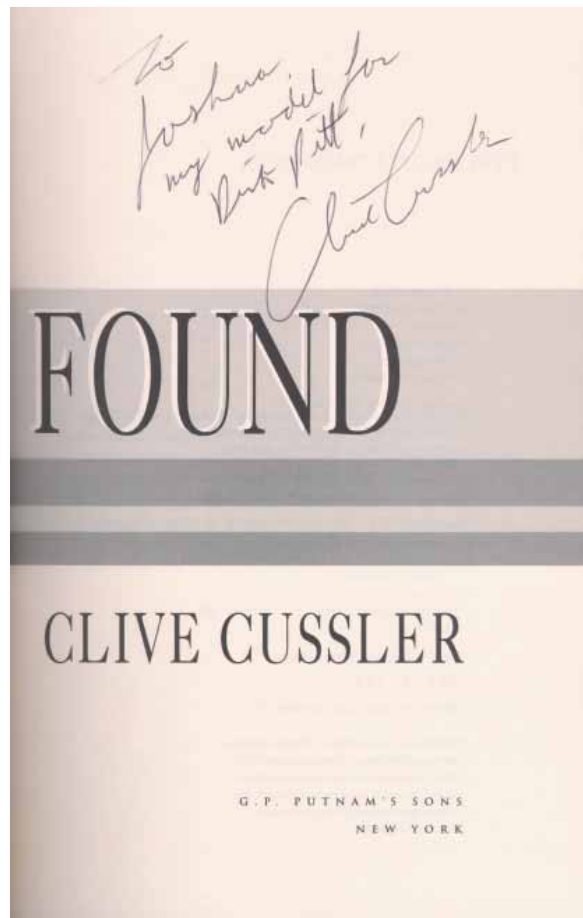
Cussler has been a regular on the book tour circuit for years. He recently drew huge crowds at the National Book Festival in Washington, DC. And Cussler is undertaking a West Coast publicity tour of *Black Wind* in November-December 2004.

Fans meeting Cussler at book signings have memorable experiences. "Some authors just sign their name," Cussler told AC during a recent phone interview.

"I always talk with the readers, and I personalize the signature and inscription."

An enormously generous man, Cussler further endears himself to fans as a willing

through-the-mail signer. Years ago, Cussler gave away signed copies of his 1975 novel, *Iceberg*. The rarest of Cussler's early works, a first-edition hard cover copy today commands nearly \$2,000!



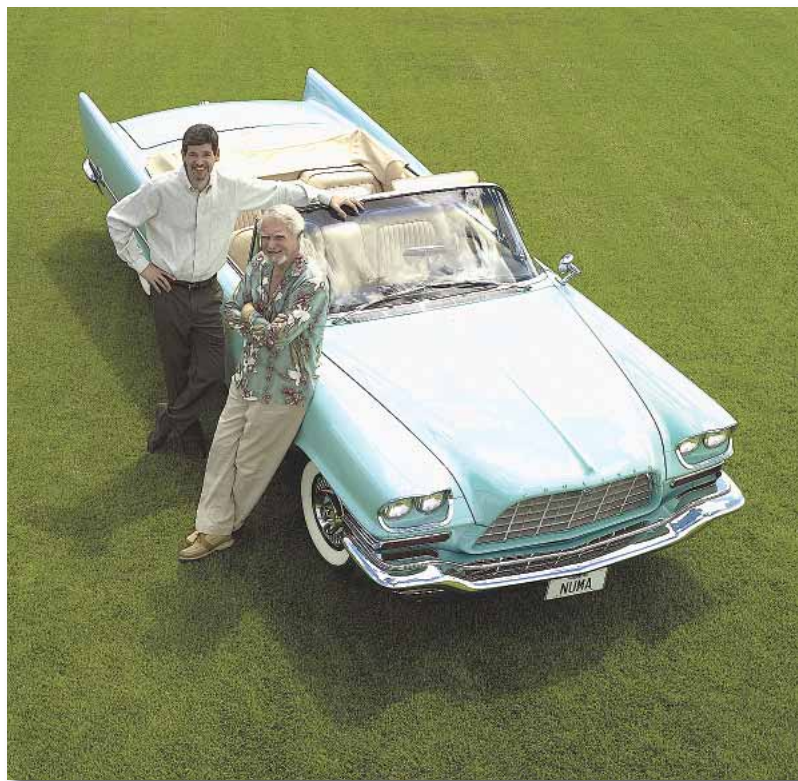
Atlantis *Found* signed and inscribed title page.

Now, readers' letters are often met with a signed and inscribed original manuscript page or an autographed picture of Cussler with one of his many cars.

"I respond to all of them," says Cussler. "The readers and fans put me where I am. So, I owe it to them. That's why I do it. That's why I bend over backwards."

Wayne Valero is co-founder of the Clive Cussler Collector's Society, and author of *The Collector's Guide to Clive Cussler*. His collection of Cussler memorabilia – "arguably the largest and most comprehensive in existence" – includes 550 different autographed books and approximately 100 other items, many signed. According to Valero, because Cussler's autograph is "so easily obtainable," its value is relatively modest.

"Clive has only a few items worth in excess of \$1,000," explains Valero.



Clive and Dirk Cussler with Clive's 1958 Chrysler 300 Convertible, featuring NUMA vanity plates. Photo: Paul Peregrine/G.P. Putnam's Sons.

"A large majority of items can be found easily for under \$20."

Cussler recently answered *Autograph Collector's* exclusive 10 Questions survey by mail from his home in Arizona. Here's what he had to say:

**AC:** Do you sign autographs through the mail? How many requests do you receive?

**CC: Yes, I do. I receive about 50 requests a week.**

**AC:** What is the strangest autograph request you have ever had?

**CC: A woman asked me to sign my name to her left breast. How could I refuse?**

**AC:** Are you aware of how large the hobby of collecting autographs has be-

come? How did you become aware?

**CC: From the large number of people who ask for my John Henry. The demand for historical autographs must be huge.**

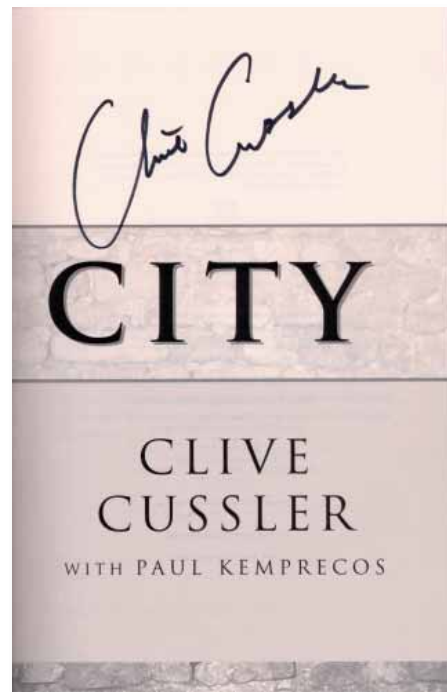
**AC:** Do you sign autographs when asked in person? If so, do you limit the number of items per person?

**CC: Yes, I do. & No, I don't.**

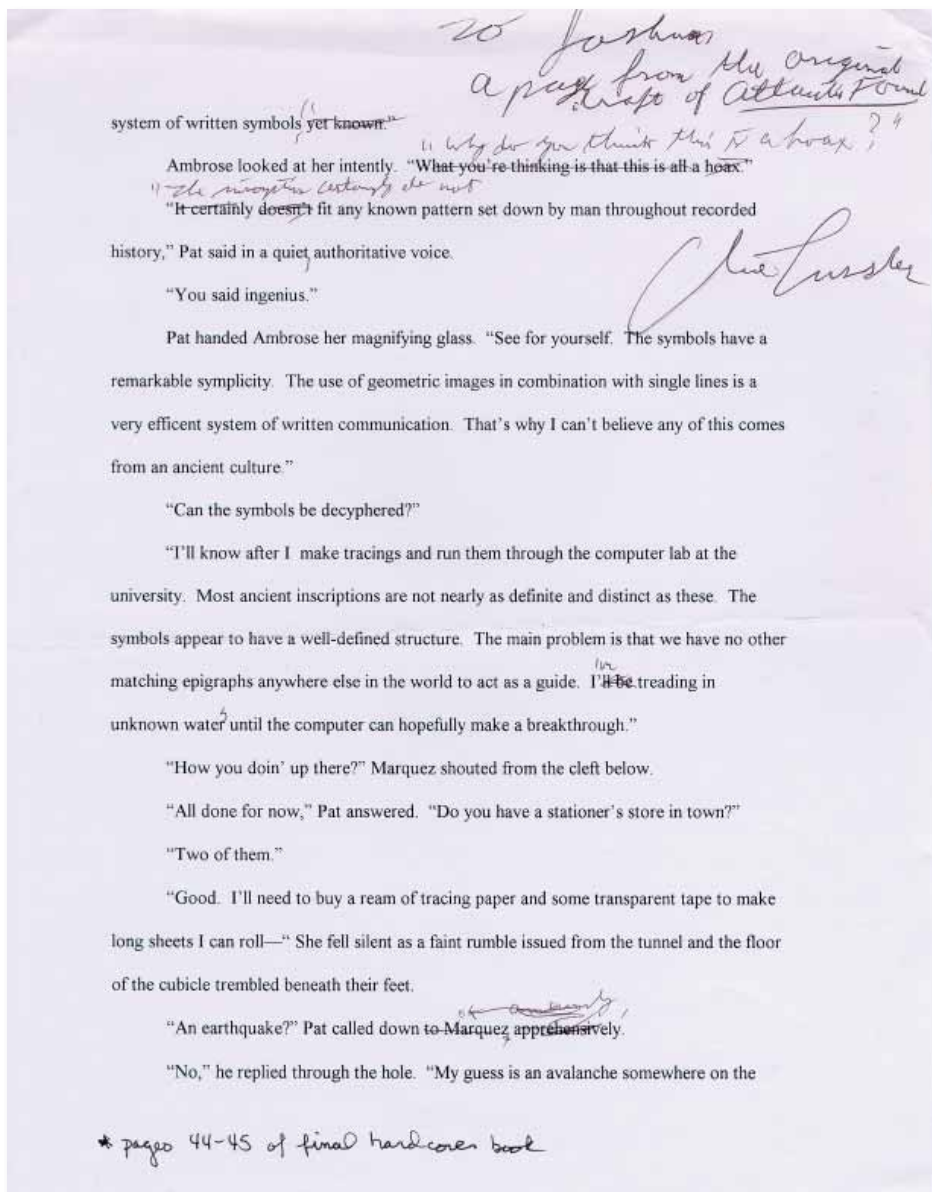
**AC:** Are there any upcoming events where people might be able to get your autograph in person?

**CC: I'm going on book tour late in November & December [2004] to Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, Denver & Phoenix.**

**AC:** How do you view people who pose as fans, but actually sell the auto-



A signed copy of *Lost City*, a NUMA Files adventure co-authored by Cussler and Paul Kemprecos.



Cussler frequently replies to fan mail with signed and inscribed manuscript pages, like this one from *Atlantis Found*.

graphs?

**CC: I don't mind, as long as they wind up with people who treasure them.**

**AC:** Are there any famous people whose autograph you would want?

**CC: Lincoln, Washington, Teddy Roosevelt.**

**AC:** Do you collect anything?

**CC: Old cars, classics and fifties convertibles.**

**AC:** Are there any items you refuse to sign?

**CC: I haven't run across any yet.**

**AC:** How much do you think your autograph is sold for?

**CC: They wouldn't buy a cup of coffee, but they make great door-stops. <sup>ac</sup>**

Collectors seeking autographs may send up to three items to:

**Clive Cussler  
c/o Pitch Productions  
P.O. Box 5059  
Scottsdale, AZ 85258**

(Information and address courtesy of [www.NUMA.net](http://www.NUMA.net)).

**JOSHUA PLATT**, who has read all of Cussler's novels, can be reached at [jrplatt2000@yahoo.com](mailto:jrplatt2000@yahoo.com).