

Frog Legs (The Dunbarton Mysteries Series #3) by Valerie Tate

Date Read - 20181231

I am getting to like this series more with each book I read and at the same time I am really getting to like the main characters who are all very well developed. Ali and Chris are a likeable and quite believable couple and James and Alice are real hoots. Melanie sure has a hard time with her choices of boy friends! Then this book introduces by far the best character in the series so far, Charlie, who I think is an even better character than Marmalade! Once again the story is woven around some environmental issues that roll right out of current headlines. There are sure a lot of twists and red herrings and though one of the culprits seemed to be quite obvious I still found myself doubting that guess until the big reveal. There were a couple of casualties that I didn't like to see happen but with the age old motive of human greed they were actually quite necessary and appropriate to the plot. And, BTW, I haven't decided yet which of Charlie's escapades was the funniest but I think it's a dead heat between his encounter with Marmalade and the race back from the pond with the gun! Now I did come across one rather blatant proofreading error that should never have gotten by a human eye in this sentence from chapter 24 - "That's right," Chris agreed. "It didn't take us very long to get here from the cabin and we didn't see Chris' truck or anyone leaving the farm when we drove up" where it's obvious Chris' should read "Jaimie's". I also found a sentence in chapter 1" that I thought read a bit clunky - "including Tom Sloane until her dad had fired him for repeatedly showing up drunk for work." This is strictly a personal preference but I would find it smoother to read thus "including Tom Sloane until her dad had fired him for repeatedly showing up for work drunk." In chapter 5 I read this "almost intelligible with shock and grief" Just What does this mean???? I don't think "intelligible" is the correct word here. Now the following quote from Chapter 11 is just something that hit close to home with what we have going on right now in West Niagara with the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby! Right out of the headlines in our local weekly! -- "Not for the first time, they were grateful for the small Dunbarton hospital, kept alive, despite a series of government cuts to the Health Care budget, by fundraisers and donations from locals determined to preserve the peace of mind it afforded." Anyway I liked this book and I'll sure read the rest of the series and recommend it for anyone wanting a good light mystery.

Vantage Point: A MacNeice Mystery (The McNeice Mysteries Book 4) by Scott Thornley

Date Read – 20181229

I have now read all 4 books in this series and, as is usually the case, liked some of them more than others but I think in some ways this is the best one yet. Although the mysteries of the murders and the police investigations are really the main part of this book the real strength in the book is the solid

characterization of MacNiece and his team and their quite believable handling of all their personal problems and day to day living. As I found in one of the earlier books MacNiece is the boss that anyone would love to work for and that shows in the loyalty of his team and how well they all get along. Now the motive for all the murders is sure a bit different in this story than in most mysteries and once again we get into the common trope of the rivalry between different branches of the police services but here it leads to a real wild, violent and definitely bang up and spectacular takedown scene leading to the finish. I think this story actually deserves more than the 3 stars I have awarded but once again it ends with with the death of the perp without an arrest and the perp being brought into the justice system which is something I don't like in a mystery. I think it's a bit curious that in two serious mysteries that I have read so close together that I have met two so violent and nasty villains as I have here and in Brent Pilkey's Fatal Rage. I thought the villain in that book was the number 1 worst I have ever found in a book but now I wonder if the one in this book isn't at least as bad or maybe even worse! Another little curiosity is that while Mr Thornley has changed the name of his city from Hamilton to Dundurn he has kept street and place names the same such as Upper Paradise, Valens, and Rymal Rd and Cootes Paradise and the Devil's Punchbowl but changed the name of the local daily newspaper from "The Spectator" to "The Standard" which, of course, is the name of the local daily in nearby St. Catherines! I really enjoyed this read but 3 years between releases as it has been with each of the last 2 books in this series is just a bit too long and I hope I can get to read another a bit sooner.

Fatal Rage (The Rage Series Book 5) by Brent Pilkey

Date Read - 20181222

I have been having a very hard time both rating and reviewing this book because it has had such a profound affect on me and I have been severely tempted to rate it as 5 stars which I am very reluctant to do for any but a very limited number of books that are unarguably standouts in their genre. I have read this whole series with more than a little interest as I lived in that area at Sherbourne & Dundas street from 1954 to 1957 and as a usually broke college student managed to do a lot of walking through those streets and alleys and, yeah, I spent time in Allan Gardens, and the "Working Girls" were on Jarvis & Dundas. and the drunks and homeless men were at the Salvation Army Hostel and its all real! I think in many ways this is the best of the series with some good investigation and lots of violent action, the usual great dogs plus a new one and finally what appears to be a possibly good conclusion to Jack Warren and Jenny Alton's romance. Now I'm not usually a huge fan of knowing who the perp is from the beginning and of the POV switching between the Police and the perp but in this case it is almost necessary and was so well written that sometimes I was almost waiting to hear the perp's story. And again I usually don't like a book ending with the demise of the perp by some convenient means before he or she is brought to justice but in this case it was probably the only ending possible. And the perp was surely one of the most nasty, vicious and deranged characters I have met in any of the crime fiction I read. I don't know if I'm reading too much between the lines here but more of the early part of this book, and even some of the latter part, is taken up with Jack's battle with depression than it is with the actual murders and I start to wonder about the 3 year interval between the releases of book 4 and this one, book 5. Everyone should go on to Brent Pilkey's website and read his articles. I hope there's another book released in sooner than 3 years!

Dark Sacred Night (Harry Bosch Universe #31) by Michael Connelly

Date Read – 20181207

I thought this was a fairly good read and perhaps a bit better than some of the recent Harry Bosch books but nowhere near as good as the early books in the Bosch series. One thing that I really like is that Mr Connelly has allowed Harry to age naturally in the series and is he ever showing his age in this book. Renee Ballard is quite a decent character and actually quite reminiscent of a younger Bosch. One thing you can never do in a Michael Connelly novel is find any fault with the writing. However I did think this story was dragged out a bit with a lot of slow, somewhat boring and very repetitious stuff like all those cards Harry and Renee kept reading for page after page. Then the ending just kind of suddenly happened out of nowhere without much meaningful investigation leading toward it. I saw a rumour somewhere that Harry, Renee and Mickey Haller are all going

to appear together in a subsequent book and I sure hope so because I think Mickey Haller is the best character that Mr Connelly has created. This is not a bad book, just not one of the best in the series, but it is sure not worth the exorbitant \$18.99 the publisher priced it for as an eBook and if I hadn't have got it on sale for \$5.99 I would never have read it.

Kingdom of the Blind (Chief Inspector Armand Gamache #14) by Louise Penny

Date Read – 20181201 I have had a hard time rating and reviewing this entry in this fine series by one of my favourite Canadian authors and I originally rated it 4 stars but I am now going to downrate it to 3. As is always the case in these stories the writing, the description of the settings, the weather and especially of the food is superb. All the regular characters are in fine form, especially Ruth and Rosa and the new characters introduced are well developed and likeable or not as the story required. Now I think this may be where I start to have some problems with this book because I don't really like the way Armand behaves and uses people in his investigations and I don't really like Jean Guy too much, either. There are really 3 mysteries which are only very loosely connected and 2 of which ended quite satisfactorily but I really did not like the way Armand and Jean Guy's personal stories ended and I thought the whole abandoned farm and the centuries old family feud thing was a bit far fetched and over the top. I was glad to see the conclusion of the opioid crisis but I thought the whole Armand/Amelia thing was pretty predictable and I had it figured out from the first meeting at the Academy. This is definitely not a bad book but I don't think it is one of the best in the series even taking in the author's personal situation. I know Ms Penny has already said there is another book on the way and I am very curious, given the way this one ended, to see how that will turn out or even if it's possible. Perhaps it's time to retire Armand and start a spin-off Three Pines series with some of the other peripheral characters?

A Season for Killing Blondes (A Gilda Greco Mystery #1) by Joanne Guidoccio

Date Read – 20181122

I took a little break from my Xmas reading list and read this 1st book in this series by Joanne Guidoccio, a Canadian author who is new to me, and I really liked this story. I thought this was a well written and fairly character driven mystery with Gilda and Carlo being pretty good and definitely likeable characters and Gilda's close and extended family all a bit quirky. There's lots of murders and lot's of suspects and, with the Italian connection, of course lot's of good food especially those Sicilian pastries! This story has a bit of a unique take on the amateur sleuth angle in that Gilda doesn't run an investigation avoiding the police and jumping into all sorts of dangerous scenarios where she needs a

rescue but just kind of asks the normal kind of curiosity questions and hires, or at least tries to hire, a PI to do the heavy lifting. There is also a fairly elaborate plan leading to the arrest of the culprit that actually works! At first I was slightly reminded of Melodie Campbell's Gina Gallo Goddaughter series but the only thing these series have in common is the Italian connection as this story is actually a mainly serious murder mystery and Melodie Campbell's series is a hilarious parody of the Godfather stories. Anyway I enjoyed this read and I'll sure read the rest in the series.

Oh, BTW, I do have one comment on a slight disagreement I had with this story and here is a quote -

"Uncle Paolo who is still complaining about the ten cents he has to pay for a shopping bag at No Frills."

I have never paid more than 5 cents for a plastic bag at No Frills!

Body on Baker Street (A Sherlock Holmes Bookshop Mystery #2) by Vicki Delany

Date Read – 20181118

I took a little break from my Xmas reading list and read this 2nd book in this series by Vicki Delaney who is one of my favourite authors. I am not a huge fan of Sherlock Holmes but I have read and enjoyed the first book in this series and I think I actually liked this one even more. I wouldn't know which Holmes story any of the quotes came from but I have read enough of the stories to recognize them and, of course, the pipe and deerstalker but this book has a really great murder mystery with enough twists and red herrings leading to quite a few pretty logical suspects and I don't think my limited Holmes knowledge interfered with my enjoyment of the story. Lots of solid characters with, of course, Gemma and Jayne leading the way but Ryan's pretty close and Louise is impetuous enough and jumps to conclusions a bit too quickly and sort of plays bad cop to Ryan's good cop. I liked Ashleigh and the way she was trying to take over Gemma's shop. The whole Van Markoff brigade are a wacky bunch and all the rest of the characters provide lots of suspects. With all the clues provided I should have been able to identify the murderer but I admit I didn't until Gemma figured it out and the big action scene leading to the takedown was pretty good. And BTW Moriarty is still the best character in these books! I've been reading a lot of cozies in my Xmas reading and some but not all of them are pretty well written so it's a real treat to read a cozy mystery written by a professional author that really knows how to write a mystery. I originally rated this 3 stars but I've changed my mind and upped it to 4. Overall a darn good read!

The Terminal City Murders (Klondike Era Mystery #4) by Sharon Rowse

Date Read – 20181113

I am very stingy with awarding 5 star ratings but I'm afraid I really have no other choice with this book because I enjoyed it so much, it was such a great read and I can honestly not find any even nit-picky faults with it. This whole series has become one of my favourites and I think this one is the best yet. John, Sam, Emily and Trent are all getting to be stronger characters with every book and it's so realistic to see them have squabbles and disagreements and figure out how to work together as a strong team. Clara really showed us a bit of a different side to herself and that she sure is a lot smarter than it previously appeared. At the rate the agency is growing it wouldn't be too far fetched to see Clara join the team officially. Laura is a great addition and should definitely be a full time member of the agency. Now Emily is Emily and you never know what her next scheme will be and how it will affect Granville. It's nice and logical to have characters, like Francis, from earlier books involved even if only in a minor roll because after all Vancouver was still a pretty small city at that time. The courtroom and trial scene and the lawyer, Randall, are worth the price of admission on their own. It is sure nice to have found an honest judge! I guess this book may be read as a standalone but I don't think a reader would fully understand the significance of Benton and Gipson if they hadn't read the previous stories. The other thing that I really like is that in every one of these books I learn a little more Canadian history of which I was unaware and in this case it's about the mortgage business in BC which the author has so fully researched. Check it out – it's accurate! Great read and I'll get into the next one very soon.

10-33 Assist PC (Mike O'Shea Crime Fiction Book 1) by Desmond P. Ryan

Date Read – 20181109

I am having some difficulty in deciding on my final opinion of this book because while there is a lot to like about it there are also a few things that I consider to me fairly major flaws making me downrate it considerably. I have to consider this as 2.5 star generously rounded up to 3. I found this to be well written and edited with well developed and strong characters and some like Mike and Julia especially likeable and even the bad guys characters developed enough to make them appropriately unlikeable. This story has enough action, violence gunfire and other kinds of smoke to appeal to any reader who likes those

elements, as I actually do, and I would have rated this a solid 4 stars until the ending which I'll come back too. I don't know how realistic the interdepartmental jealousies, rivalries and warfare is but we have to suspend some degree of disbelief to enjoy a good story. Now to my problems with this book. I think the plot is a bit over the top and farfetched and maybe a bit far out even with my suspension of disbelief. The sunflower seed gimmick was carried out a bit too far and started to get a bit annoying to me and the Morality Squads interruption of every one of Mike's targets was a bit repetitious and it started to hint at some kind of deliberate interdepartmental leak but nothing happened with that. Of course there's no realistic way the big raid at 10 Unwin could ever happen in real life and I didn't like the way it ended but it sure made for a very spectacular scene. But these are all really minor nitpicks and my major dislike is the cliffhanger ending with the perp escaping which is solely intended to entice the reader to buy the next book. Unless the author makes it very clear at the first of the book and in all the blurbs and synopsis that this story doesn't finish in this book and is continued in one or more books I consider this to be almost fraud by the author and publisher. I have no problem with trilogies or even Douglas Adams "Hitchhiker's Guide ---" trilogy that ebbed up in 5 volumes when the author tells you upfront that it is a trilogy as Linwood Barclay and C. J. Carmichael have done with their trilogies. Anyway I think I've found another Canadian Author to read and I'll know more after the next part of this story.

Bitter End (Bitter Root Mysteries #3) by C.J. Carmichael

Date Read – 20181024

I've really enjoyed reading the Bitter Roots trilogy and in my opinion this book is the best of the three as one would expect of the last book in a trilogy. However I got a sneaky feeling that there was a big loose end left dangling here that looks to be leading to more books in this "trilogy" a la Douglas Adam's "Hitchhiker's Guide --" "trilogy" that ended up with about 5 books! I definitely hope there are more to come because I have grown to very much like the very strong and well developed characters like Zak, Nadine, Tiff, Kenny, Justin, Debbie-Ann and Geneva and I've found Ms Carmichaels writing so readable that I've bought her "A Bramble House Christmas" for my 2018 Xmas reading list even though it doesn't quite fit in my preferred reading genre. This series is a bit different than most trilogies as each book appears to be readable as a standalone with unique mysteries that don't seem connected but through some very clever writing we find out in the 3rd book that they really are and again this reinforces my opinion that these books are much more enjoyable when read in order.

No Place for Wolverines Mystery (A Jenny Willson Mystery #2) by Dave Butler

Date Read - 20181021

OK I thought this book was a somewhat enjoyable read but not nearly as good as book 1 "Full Curl". I've somewhat reluctantly rated it as a 3 star read because it is better than a 2 star but there is at least one flaw that I personally do not approve of in a mystery and which will always cause me to downrate a book. There's lots to like about this book especially the fine description of the mountain setting and the weather, snow and cold which still have me shivering and the action with the rescue of Jenny's mother and the following shootout was quite exciting. I think this book is missing all the help that Jenny's friends provided in book 1 and role of the wild animals that was really prominent in the first story was almost entirely missing from this book. Here's a quote from Chapter 2 that I thought pretty well describes what happens in most organizations -

"She knew there were many good people here dedicated to the park, their efforts valiant despite the system rather than because of it — those weren't the people she despised. Her disgust was reserved for the men and women whose sole objective was to climb the career ladder, rung by slippery rung, tossing aside their morals and ethics as they did so, who changed directions with each passing political breeze, and who clawed their way up while shovelling steaming piles of blame onto the hapless rung-climbers below them."

Then again a major theme of this book seems to be the author preaching against the lack of ethics and integrity in our governments.

I did find one rather obvious editing error in Chapter 17 when Frank Speer is talking to Jenny and we have this line - "Funny thing about that," said Speer. "Frank phoned me last night in a real flap" which obviously should read "Jack" and not "Frank"!

I didn't like how Jenny's story ended but my major problem that almost made me downrate it to 2 stars is that I can not really like a mystery that ends with any of the bad guys riding off into the sunset with a boat load of stolen money to a country with no extradition treaty and not meeting any kind of justice.

I will read another in this series but considering Jenny's situation I can't quite see how there could be another.

Horse Sense (The Dunbarton Mysteries Series #2) by Valerie Tatel enjoyed this book quite a lot more than the first in the series for several personal reasons which I'll talk about later but mainly because this is a very good mystery with a solid investigation, lot's of very acceptable suspects, great descriptions of the countryside, the farms, the small towns, the large, but necessarily so, caste of

characters both good and not so good and a logical and realistic ending and of course the horses. I did have one of the culprits identified before the reveal and part of the motive is obvious but it was hard to guess the methods and opportunities. The only real fault I have is that at times this book got a bit wordy with too much tell not show and could possibly have benefitted from a bit of polishing and some tighter editing. Now to the personal stuff. I have a bit of experience with horses having spent about 50 years involved in the Standardbred horse industry breeding, raising, training and racing Harness horses all over Southern Ontario and even one foray into Quebec. I drove in races for over 30 years. So I'm pretty familiar with all the semen transportation and preservation and storage stuff and I couldn't really find much fault with how Ms Tate handled that part of the story. I don't have first hand knowledge of the dressage and jumping disciplines but I did learn a lot about them from a personal friend, the late Alex Konyot who trained dressage horses and riders and his daughter, Tina, who rode dressage for the USA in the 2012 Olympics and taught dressage riding in Florida. BTW, though this has nothing to do with horses, Alex's wife, Fina, was a retired circus high wire performer! For 33 of the years I trained horses I was stabled in Woodbridge Ontario which is just south of the King Township farms, and the Nobleton, Palgrave and King City towns where Ms Tate has placed this story and she's hit the nail pretty well on the head again. And finally a real personal note – Ms Tate has dedicated this book to the late Dr. Ralph Watt. I personally knew Dr. Watt when he had his clinic in Markham and he was one of the vets we used for our horses stabled at the Woodbridge fairgrounds. A great doctor, a fine gentleman and would really put himself out to help you especially in an emergency if your regular vet was unavailable. I found the dedication very interesting because I often wonder if some of these names in author's dedications are even real people! A good read and I'll sure read more of this series and I have Ms Tate's "The Reindeer Caper" on my 2018 Christmas to read list.

An Element of Risk (A Jack Taggart Mystery #12) by Don Easton

I found this story to be a bit different from any of the previous books in this series which is very close to being my all time favourite series and through much of the first part I was afraid that it wasn't going to measure up to the standards set by the previous books and expected in all of Don Easton's fine books. Then all of my fears disappeared in the second half of the book when Jack really got into action. Again, as seems to be becoming a common occurrence in recent books in this series, we have a fairly complex JackReacher/Spenser type plan that could almost be predicted to go sideways but led to Jack doing the best and most dangerous undercover work of any of the recent stories and a fantastic,

wild and spectacular shootout and ending with the bad guys all meeting appropriate endings. There were a couple of deaths that I was somewhat sorry to see happen but they were a logical part of the story. Too bad Laura Secord, man I love that name but I still wonder if it has to be changed to Fanny Farmer when the books are sold in the US, was on vacation and missed all the action! Jack has a real thing for getting rid of incompetent and deadbeat Assistant Commissioners and I'd forgotten about Wigmore to go along with Mortimer and Quaille so I guess Irene Lexton better figure out how to handle him and her reaction to this escapade is left open to, hopefully, lead to another book in the series. I can't rate this one as the best in the series because I still think "Birds Of A Feather" is the best but this one ranks well up on the list.

Sea of Cortez (A Detective Lane Mystery) by Garry Ryan

I've read and enjoyed, of course some more than others, all the books in Garry Ryan's Detective Lane series and I was really looking forward to this one after the usual year long wait for it but I am actually a bit disappointed in this story. Most of the usual cast of good characters are here and also Lola who is just as horrible as ever and we have a new batch of super bad guys who are mostly appropriately unlikeable and it is a bit different to have Arthur having such a major role in the undercover operation. I think perhaps Paul Lane was burdened down by a bit too much remorse and I didn't quite understand why he thought the way he solved the crime would cause the end of his career. Then again maybe it is time that Mr Ryan retired Paul. Now if you like lot's of wild action and shootouts you'll like this book a lot. Now my problems with this story which have caused me to downrate it somewhat and they're hard to explain while avoiding spoilers. The whole main plot and all the subplots except the Christine, Dan, Indie and Lola thing are just so far fetched, over-the-top and out in left field that no matter how much disbelief I suspend there is no way I could accept any of them. C'mon now – The Calgary action with Frederick? Frederick is a 17 year old grade 12 student so how believable is any of that plot? Now how about the whales in the Baja? Is this book a fantasy or what? OK I still like Garry Ryan's writing and I'll read more of them but this book just didn't cut it for me. BTW can anybody tell me what happened to the third book in the Blackbird trilogy?

Prisoners of Hope: An Amanda Doucette Mystery by Barbara Fradkin First of all this is not a bad book and there are many things to like about it but there are many things, some of which are probably just personal peeves of mine, that I didn't like and have caused me to downrate it to a 2 star rating. I did finish it and it is well written and edited and does include Ms Fradkin's great descriptions of the Georgian Bay setting, the weather and some quite violent action and her usual well developed characters but this is where I start to have problems with this story. With the exception of Kaylee, George and Larry I do not like any of the characters very much and I especially do not like Amanda at all. I haven't

liked her much in any of these books and even less in this one. Now I did get to like Chris a bit more than in the earlier books as Ms Fradkin did build in some explanation of his ability to remain an RCMP officer while gallivanting all over the country and getting into all sorts of police investigations where he doesn't belong. No matter how much disbelief I suspend the whole story line is just a way too preposterous, far out and over-the-top for me to accept. Now, of course, my biggest beef is that the suspected perpetrators were allowed to disappear in Toronto with no justice served and we never really learn for sure who actually committed at least one of the murders. Now one thing that I'm glad to see was that the planned idiotic kayak trip on Georgian Bay with 9 impoverished mothers with 9-12 year old children who have never even seen a kayak never took place because if it had I would have aborted this book immediately. What a completely insane idea that was! Ms Fradkin is one of my all time favourite authors but I'm afraid I won't be buying any more Amanda Doucette mysteries. Please oh Please let's get back to Mike Green and Cedric O'Toole and preferably keep Mike in and around Ottawa.

A double header today!

Bitter Truth (Bitter Root Mysteries #2) by C.J. Carmichael

Now after finishing the first two books in this very enjoyable, well written and well edited trilogy I have to say that this book was even better, if that's possible, than book 1. As other readers have noted the books in this series can be read as standalones but I think reading them in order really helps a reader to better understand many of the characters especially Sheriff Ford and Deputy Butterfield and it's nice to watch the character growth and attitude and relationship changes in Tiff, Zak, Kenny and Nadine. There sure is a lot going on in the small town of Lost Trails and there are a couple of fantastic and quite unforeseen and somewhat unexpected twists in the solution of the mystery with Zak and Nadine's investigation again leading to the "Bitter Truth" but this story is very much character driven with the character's personal lives and problems playing just as much of a role in the story as the mystery itself. I think Ms Carmichael really handles the romantic sub plots very well and the romances are progressing nice and slow and realistically. I got a good kick out of Nadine's response when Zak told her he'd told Sheriff Ford that he wanted to be a deputy and she said "That's awesome. You and me are going to run this town one day, Waller." Do you think we'll find out in book 3 "Bitter End" which I have already acquired and is pretty high up on my TBR list