



Duck the Halls

Donna Andrews

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A new side-splitting Meg Langslow mystery from award-winning, New York Times bestselling author of Six Geese A Slaying, just in time for the holidays

The brilliantly funny and talented Donna Andrews delivers another winner in the acclaimed avian-themed series that mystery readers have come to love. A few nights before Christmas, Meg is awakened when Michael is summoned to the New Life Baptist Church, where someone has rigged a cage full of skunks in the choir loft. The lengthy process of de-skunking the church requires its annual pre-Christmas concert to relocate to Trinity Episcopal, where Mother insists the show must go on, despite the budget-related protests of Mr. Otis, an elderly vestryman. Meanwhile, when Meg helps her grandfather take the skunks to the zoo, they discover that his boa has been stolen—only to turn up later during the concert slithering out from the ribbon-bedecked evergreens.

It's clear that some serious holiday pranksters are on the loose, and Meg is determined to find them. But before she can, a fire breaks out at Trinity, and Mr. Otis is discovered dead. Could this be a bit of nasty revenge from the now deposed Pruitt family? Or harassment from the Evil Lender? As Meg searches for answers she also races to finish all of her Christmas shopping, wrapping, cooking, caroling, and decorating in time to make the season jolly for Michael and the twins.

Guaranteed to put the "ho ho hos" into the holidays of cozy lovers everywhere, Duck the Halls is a gut-bustingly funny mystery, the latest from the award-winning Donna Andrews.

Duck the Halls Details

Date : Published October 22nd 2013 by Minotaur Books

ISBN : 9781250028778

Author : Donna Andrews

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Mystery, Cozy Mystery, Holiday, Christmas, Fiction, Humor

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From Reader Review Duck the Halls for online ebook

?Susan? says

A 3.5 for me because the ending kind of went flat. Quite a few cute parts and funny characters but I think if I knew them better it would have been a more enjoyable read. Comming in in the middle of a series can be tricky that way. A well rounded story about what starts out as harmless pranks turns into a murder investigation. A small town, family and church oriented Christmas story. Skunks and bunnies and snakes, Oh No! Believable characters and good narration kept it going for me.

Kathy Davie says

Sixteenth in the Meg Langslow humorous mystery series based in Caerphilly, Virginia, and revolving around the village blacksmith and her extended family.

My Take

A sweetly easy mystery with a focus on merry and not-so-merry pranksters and the goodwill and cooperation of truly Christian people as they help each other out. I do love this example of true Christianity with people of different denominations helping each other out so beautifully. Exactly how it should be.

Lucky for Meg, both Michael and Rob have joined the Caerphilly Volunteer Firefighters, which means she learns quickly where the mysterious excitement is. Our girl simply cannot resist being in on all the action.

I love the description of the Christmas decorations Mother has put up---definitely my style, LOL. But it's the sound of the old ballroom-turned-library that really has me melting in my wing chair.

It's a different sort of Nativity scene in several ways with a surfeit of skunks, a brace of ducks, a herd of rabbits, a table for one (I love the twins' hopeful looking around at all concerts and performances after that first time, LOL), appearing in churches while the most official reason requiring critters in this holiday season is the menagerie Mrs. D requires for the living Nativity play on Christmas Eve. Then there's the Nativity play with its assortment of animals, including dinosaurs. Hey, God created them two-by-two, LOL.

Definitely a lesson in how to handle skunks!

I do have to laugh as we read of all the different ways Meg is scheming to get out of her mother's plans for organizing repairs and scheduling. I think we should vote Mother in for president of the U.S.A. She'd tidy the country up right quick.

How unreasonable can someone get? Remove the communion rail? When it's just as easy for a couple rows to stand in front of it?? Fortunately there are more in town who simply step up to help---I do love the description of the port-a-potties!

That sneaky Christmas Eve dinner implodes. There's just too much nosiness rampant. Definitely worth a rueful laugh.

This particular story was an excellent example of how not to do an info dump and still convey the relevant information as well as help us catch up with who's doing what. Very nice. Good point on the boy-who-cried-wolf...a very useful character device.

LOL, I need to buy this one if only for Meg's finely developed plan to counter her mother-in-law's nasty comments. Too, too funny...and even more fun is watching mama-in-law's reactions when she can't get a rise out of Meg. It's such a positive way to approach this divisive, mean holiday problem. Oh, lord, if you have family who never crafts you the right gift, this could well be another reason to buy! You'll crack up reading about Cousin Sylvia's Christmas gift giving propensities! And it's a great segue into the denouement of the story!

The Story

Someone is pranking the churches in Caerphilly until it turns to murder. Until that point, however, rooms, concert halls, and spaces for the myriad of activities---including a much-beloved choir performance---that a church enjoys during the holiday season must be accommodated while repairs are made, and it's up to Meg to coordinate it all. Much better than having to help with clean-up!

There's also the new clash of mothers over who's doing the most fabulous Christmas dinner---and not a traditional one.

Ah yes, it'll be a Dickens of a Christmas...

The Characters

Meg Langslow is a blacksmith and her husband, **Michael Waterston**, is a drama professor at the local college. Their twin sons, **Josh** and **Jamie**, are now four years old and have chosen to have their own bedrooms. A brave move on their parts. **Rob** is her klutzy but very computer-literate game developer little brother who lives with them in their renovated old (and big) Victorian farmhouse along with **Rose Noire**, a cousin into organics and nature. **Tinkerbelle** is Rob's Irish wolfhound while **Spike** is the vicious little furball.

Dad is Dr. Langslow, one-half of where Meg got her desire to be involved. He can't resist keeping an ear out for the action on the police band radio. **Mother**, a very classy lady, is more circumspect but doesn't hesitate to take over and impose her decorative taste on everything and everyone.

Dr. Montgomery Blake is Dad's father, the distinguished zoologist who has a show on Animal Planet; he runs a private zoo in Caerphilly. **Victor** is the zoo's night-shift head keeper. **Caroline Willner** is an old friend of Grandfather's and a frequent partner in mischief who runs a wildlife sanctuary. **Cleopatra** is an emerald tree boa.

Dahlia Waterston is Michael's mother with the mean comments. She normally takes a cruise at Christmas. This time around she's thinking of an Asian dinner.

The Shiffley family

It's a big family with their fingers in a lot of different pies. **Randall** is the town's mayor and runs a construction company that handles a lot of things including snow removal, vandal repair, and hay bale placement. **Caleb** is one of the young ones. **Quincy Shiffley** is a bachelor recovering from heart surgery; his farm has been a source of multiple complaints. **Judge Jane Shiffley** prefers to hold court in her family barn.

Sammy Wendell is one of Rose Noire's beaux. **Charlie Gardner** is the registrar at the college with the tips on where to look to confirm someone's bona fides; he's also the friend loaning Michael the basement apartment.

Caerphilly PD

Chief Henry Burke is a good guy and has come to accept Meg's sleuthing; **Minerva** is his truly lovely wife. **Debbie Ann** is the local police and emergency dispatcher. **Eli Slattery**, the animal control guy, get a break when Grandfather shows up at the scene. **Horace Hollingsworth**, Meg's cousin, is the lone crime scene

specialist. **Aida Butler** is one Burke's deputies and a member of New Life Baptist; **Ronnie** is her son. **Vern Shiffley** is another deputy.

Caerphilly Volunteer Firefighters

Chief Featherstone is the new fire chief and still trying to get used to how much the people in a small town know.

New Life Baptist church

Ambrose Wilson is the reverend. **Nelson Dandridge** is the church's caretaker. The Burkes are members of the congregation, and Minerva heads up the **Ladies' Auxiliary**, similar to St. Clotilda's Guild. **Jerome Lightfoot**, a.k.a., Bigfoot, is the pain in the butt choir director with no clue how to handle people and a pushy attitude.

Trinity Episcopal Church

Robyn Smith is the new reverend / rector / pastor at the church, replacing **Dr. Rufus Womble**. She's married to **Matt** who may well be bringing **Great-Aunt Brynhild** (*EEK*) back with him. **St. Clotilda's Guild** is filled with volunteer ladies who take up the slack for most things. **Riddick Hedges** is the office manager, bookkeeper, and general factotum---the only paid staff member who never seems to get anything done unless it's to hinder others. The Langslows and family belong to this congregation. **Barliman Vess** is a member of the vestry and everyone's *bête noir*, picking away at anything he sees as an excessive expense.

Mrs. Thornefield donated her entire estate to Trinity Episcopal. A lovely thought, only it's taking up so much room in the church's undercroft.

Temple Beth-El

Rabbi Grossman sends over a brilliant calendar with thorough information.

St. Byblig

Father Donnelly is concerned about whether the church will need to be reconsecrated. Thankfully, the **Bowl-o-Rama** steps up to help out.

Methodist Church

Mrs. Dahlgren, the church secretary, has a rep for being difficult. Doesn't sound like she thinks much, either. **Reverends Trask** and **Larsen** are quite cheerful about the addition and the children's help.

The Cover

The cover is an orangey red with a lighter focus on a green sleigh loaded with a Christmas tree and presents popping out all over the skies, haphazardly pulled by two white Pekin ducks in belled harness and green-and-white striped scarves, LOL.

The title focuses on one of the pranks, one that seems to spread itself through this Christmas story, and *Duck the Halls*.

Janeil says

This is probably my favorite Donna Andrews books in the Meg series (so far). What could possibly be more trying than Skunks in the New Life Baptist Choir loft, boa constrictor at the Christmas Choir Concert, ducks in the Catholic church, a body in the Episcopalian church. Christmas in Caerphilly is quite the holiday!

Mark Baker says

With the town churches being overrun by a series of pranks, Meg is called in to organize a schedule so all the Christmas concerts and services can still go on as planned. But who is behind the pranks? And why have things escalated to murder?

This is a second Christmas entry in the Meg series, and it was purely delightful. I finished it on Christmas Eve, and it helped put me in the Christmas spirit, yes even with murder involved.

Read my full review at Carstairs Considers.

Angela says

If you like Jan Karon's Mitford series - this is the cozy mystery for you!

Lara Thoms says

Duck the Halls is a cleverly written Christmas story filled with humor and suspense. The story begins with a call that there were skunks found in the choir loft of a nearby church. Who wouldn't love a story that begins with a bunch of skunks? The author manages to keep the story light and fun while still including a murder mystery. I must say that this is one of the most fun holiday stories I have ever read.

Carly says

Book Reaction (not a full review)

I think this book may have jinxed me.

The story starts with an unknown prankster leaving a cage full of skunks in the Baptist church.

On two of the nights that I listened to the audiobook on the way home from work, I nearly ran right into a skunk. I am deathly afraid of skunks.

As with the rest of the book, the story is charming, with a boatload of wacky characters and a protagonist who is both sympathetic and humorous. I love visiting Donna Andrews' Caerphilly in much the way that I used to enjoy my visits to Lillian Jackson Braun's Moose County: I read the books for the characters' antics, not for the mystery.

Which is a good thing, as there's not much of a mystery to speak of. Andrews follows the Cozy Mystery Formula for detective fiction, which makes the crime very easy for the reader to solve. First, identify the Unpleasant Newcomers (not necessarily to the town, but to the cast). There will likely be three or four of them. One of them will be distinguished early on as the chief antagonist and someone that everyone,

including the protagonist, wants to kill. This will be the murder. The others will split into two logical groupings. One, the one with the superficial but breakable alibi, will be guilty of the murder. The other will initially be suspected, but will turn out to be involved in a different crime. The protagonist will surprise the villain in the act, the villain will tie her up and monologue, and another member of the cast will surprise them and save the day.

One of the reasons that I don't tend to dip into the cozy mystery genre much is that this particular formula troubles me. It creates a division between the comfortable and comedic characters and those whose lives are of so little worth that their death or misery can be cheerfully put aside as the characters go on with their lives. After all, that's why the genre is called "cozy."

But for all that, the Meg Lanslow series is so very charming and so much fun that even I can put aside my annoyance with cozies and join everyone else in treating murder as a minor inconvenience.

In this case, my favourite parts were Meg's sang-froid in dealing with the crazy circumstances that her family creates, such as a duck appearing in her bathtub. (She puts it in her brother's bathtub, and later, when she is faced with telling her sons about the duck's future as Christmas dinner, she presents it to her grandfather as a Christmas present that she didn't have time to wrap.)

The ending, too, had me in stitches.

Julie says

Duck the Halls by Donna Andrews is a 2013 Minotaur publication.

This holiday edition of the long running Meg Langslow series is centered around a string of criminal mischief incidents at several local churches. The damage done by these invasions has forced the churches, which are of differing denominations, to help each other out so their Christmas pageant show can go on.

Meg, who is helping Robyn, a new minister who happens to be both young and female, with her scheduling issues. In the process, Meg witnesses a few skirmishes between church members, all of whom seem to have forgotten the spirit of the holiday. Things go from bad to worse when one of them is murdered. Meg must prove which of the prime suspects is a murderous grinch, hopefully before the all important Christmas presentation.

This book, as with most of the books in the series, has some laugh out loud moments in it. The church politics and the stress of rehearsal for the Christmas pageant was humorous, because, while exaggerated for this story, was also a little too realistic.

The only small complaint I had was that Meg's father and brother have very small and muted roles and I missed their presence. However, I did enjoy the prominence of the female characters in this one, with Meg's mother working in concert with Meg, which was actually pretty funny.

This is the sixteenth installment in the series, and I inadvertently picked this one out thinking it was the sixth installment. I was shocked by some of the developments that took place since I've only read the first four or five books in the series, but sadly, I will not be able to read the series in order, because of a licensing issue with my library and the publisher So, it was just as well.

Despite missing out on the events that led up to this point, I found this story to be just as refreshingly funny

as the previous installments, maybe even more so. The mystery is solid, and I enjoyed the festive atmosphere, and the touching, heartwarming conclusion.

Overall, this was a fun, highly entertaining holiday mystery anyone can enjoy.
4 stars

Susan says

A spoof for sure, but light and enjoyable reading.

Nicole says

Another enjoyable cozy set in Caerphilly, this one at Christmas! Lots of fun, and a good mystery!

Nancy says

Lots of laughs in this cozy mystery!
Quite enjoyable series .. I hope to catch up with the ones I have missed by end of 2018.

SheriC (PM) says

A very cute, very light holiday mystery that starts with a series of silly pranks where a person or persons unknown are filling various places of worship with animals – skunks, snakes, ducks, etc – that eventually turns dark, and then someone is dead and it's not a joke to anyone. Our protagonist isn't a professional detective or sleuth for hire. As far as I can tell, she's just an unashamedly nosy mom. But then, this is book #16 in the Meg Langslow series and there is probably a whole lot more to this character and her history than I was able to grasp in this one short book. Certainly there is a whole history to her extended family dynamics, which come into play throughout the story and bring us a really adorable holiday scene at the conclusion. This does work okay as a standalone, but I suspect the pleasure in it would be enhanced for readers who are already familiar with the series.

Many thanks to Themis-Athena and Murder by Death – I can't remember which of you recommended this one to me, but you were right, this was a fun antidote to the string of unfinishable holiday-themed books that I kept trying to use to put myself in a holiday mood.

Audiobook, purchased via Audible, with a very good performance by Bernadette Dunn, although I think she does a much better job on all the Shirley Jackson books – maybe she needs that darker material to really sink her teeth into.

I'd have liked to use this for The 16 Tasks of the Festive Season, but I already have books lined up for all the book tasks and I already have a Christmas book for the Holiday Book Joker.

Readaholic Jenn says

I absolutely loved this book and hope the rest of the series is as funny and cozy as this one.

Carol Stanley-Snow says

I LOVED THIS BOOK!!! And i love the author. Such a talent. She must have a wicked sense of humor because her characters are too funny. And, the situations are just belly laugh good!!

READ...READ...READ!!!

Sarah says

4 Stars
