



## Earthly Remains

*Donna Leon*

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Donna Leon's bestselling mystery novels set in Venice have won a multitude of fans for their insider's portrayal of La Serenissima. From family meals to coffee bars, and from vaporetti rides to the homes and apartments of Venetians, the details and rhythms of everyday life are an integral part of this beloved series. But so are the suffocating corruption, the never-ending influx of tourists, and crimes big and small. Through it all, Leon's Commissario Guido Brunetti has been an enduring figure. A good man who loves his family and his city, Brunetti is relentless in his pursuit of truth and some measure of justice.

In *Earthly Remains*, the twenty-sixth novel in this series, Brunetti's endurance is tested more than ever before. During an interrogation of an entitled, arrogant man suspected of giving drugs to a young girl who then died, Brunetti acts rashly, doing something he will quickly come to regret. In the fallout, he realizes that he needs a break, needs to get away from the stifling problems of his work.

When Brunetti is granted leave from the Questura, his wife, Paola, ships him off to a villa owned by a wealthy relative on Sant'Erasmus, one of the largest islands in the *laguna*. There he intends to pass his days rowing, and his nights reading Pliny's *Natural History*. The recuperative stay goes according to plan until David Casati, the caretaker of the house on Sant'Erasmus, goes missing following a sudden storm. Now, Brunetti feels compelled to investigate, to set aside his leave of absence and understand what happened to the man who had become his friend. *Earthly Remains* is quintessential Donna Leon, a powerful addition to this enduring series.

## Earthly Remains Details

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Author : Donna Leon

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## From Reader Review Earthly Remains for online ebook

### Carol Scheherazade says

I love Brunetti, his colleagues and family, as well as the city of Venice depicted in her previous books so I I felt a bit sad they were neglected in this one. Didn't have the same warmth. The storyline was good but too similar to previous books. Venice must be incredibly crooked and polluted , which is horrific, but I can only read about it so many times. I would have preferred a storyline NOT about pollution or crowding yet again. Not my favorite.

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### Joan says

I very much enjoyed reading this latest installment in the Brunetti series -- for the first 80% of the book. The last 20%, in which the plot just dissipates to point of invisibility rather than actually ending coherently, revealed that Leon didn't have a first-rate story in mind here -- only her first-rate ensemble of characters. It's actually worse than "not having a first-rate story." She has more or less written this story before (the story of Italian manufacturers who don't dispose of their poisonous chemicals safely). I'm not completely sure, but I think it was in the novel **About Face**. Did anyone else notice that?

I have observed the same phenomenon with other series-detective novelists, most notably P. D. James. Let me know if you want to hear the rest of my rant on the subject.

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### Melanie (Mel's Bookland Adventures) says

Perfect snow weekend read

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### Kathy says

Great Start to book: "Brunetti surprised himself by saying, 'I had to fake all this and end up here in the hospital, with doctors prodding and poking at me, just because I have to protect the people I work with from reacting to the work they do.' He had never spoken this aloud never thought it out in this fashion before....'I've been thinking about it for a long time,' Brunetti continued discovering truth as he spoke it. 'I need not to have to do this work for a while. Not think about it and not do it and not end up in a hospital because a suspect said something offensive about a girl.'"

Brunetti is granted a two-week absence from work, but it will not be idyllic.

We learn of so many things that lead to murder and they are wondrous within a beautifully paced book that explores truths of nature's rules, juxtaposed with Brunetti's reading of Pliny during his hiatus: bees and their survival being one.

Can a murder mystery be poetry? In the case of this particular book, yes.

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### Cynthia Dunn says

4.5. I really liked this one.

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### **Andrew Smith says**

I've been reading Donna Leon's Guido Brunetti series for close to twenty years. At first it was my love of Venice that drew me to the books - Brunetti is a Commissario of Police, based in the The Floating City – and the descriptions of life (and death) in this unique environment have brought me back time and again. The nuances and customs of this city feel to me quite different to anything I've come across anywhere else. The very absence of roads make the whole place a maze that only the locals can effectively navigate. Mix into this the natural suspicion Italians have for all government bureaucracy and the tendency for native Venetians to always know somebody who knows somebody and the way has been paved for readers to enjoy not just a series of crime stories but an ongoing commentary on the lives of people who live in this wonderful place.

The cast is always kept small and the main players are ever present. From Guido's pompous boss, Vice-Questore Patta, and his ever inventive and effective assistant, Signirina Electra, to Brunetti's friend and colleague, Lorenzo Vianello, I've grown to love each and every one of them over the years. I've also grown up with Brunetti's family (a university professor wife and two children) ageing at the same rate as me as I've waited each Spring for the next episode.

In this book the involvement of some of the cast has been limited, in fact it's been pared back to focus mainly on Brunetti's involvement with one man and the mysteries and tragedies that he uncovers as a result. After a strange incident when questioning a suspect in a drug related matter, our lead man finds himself in the local hospital, wondering if his job is something he's prepared to countenance from this point on. As it happens, he's given the opportunity to withdraw to a small, seemingly idyllic, island situated in the Venetian Laguna for a period.

This is crime fiction so obviously there is a crime, but as is often the case in these books it takes quite a while for an incident to manifest. I've always thought that the crime itself is a secondary element in these books – Venetian life and the descriptions of the daily struggles, worries and challenges its people face is the primary reason I'll always come back to this series. That and the people who have begun to feel like old friends - friends I wouldn't want to be absent from my life.

The crime element here is typically tragic and points to bigger, localised issues. Brunetti is an intelligent and thoughtful investigator, highly skilled in questioning suspects and witnesses. Don't expect this story to rush ahead with much shooting of guns and manic chases around the city's canals, that's not the nature of these books. But do expect thoughtful reflection and a dawning realisation that something bigger may be at play. Seasoned readers of these books will know that endings are not always neat and tidy – something I really like! Whether you're an existing fan of this author or if you're a crime fiction fan looking for something a little different, I think you'll find plenty to like here.

My thanks to a Grove Atlantic and NetGalley for providing an early copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Adina says**

I requested this novel because Donna Leon is one of my mum's favorite writers. She's a crime novels addict and I remember her talking to me about this series a couple of times. Her love for the author made me curios

and I jumped at the occasion to read the latest release, the 26th!!!! Installment in the Commissario Brunetti series. I was a bit worried that I will have some problems understanding the personal life of the main characters since I did not read the previous novels and I was partially right.

Donna Leon, the author of the series of novels that have as main character Guido Brunetti, a detective at the Police Headquarters in Venice, is an American of Irish and Spanish origins who's lived in Venice for over 30 years. From the way she writes, we see that she is in love with the beauty and uniqueness of Venice and the nearby islands but also sees its darker side: environmental damage, pollution, crime, corruption. These latter issues are the subject of her newest novel.

Following an uncontrolled fit during an interrogation (a case of corruption in the high society of Venice) Brunetti realizes he needs a break and he gets nearly three weeks away from the office to recover. His wife Paula sends him to the villa of a rich aunt, on the secluded island Sant Erasmo, to relax and read. Here, he spent the days in the companionship of David Casati, the caretaker of the villa and an old friend of Brunetti's father. The two became friends and David helps Brunetti to restart rowing, to rediscover the beauty of the lagoon and initiates him into the life of bees, which unfortunately, for some unknown reason, perished from the island. After a storm, David Casati disappears and Brunetti interrupts his vacation and starts his own investigation to discover the truth about the disappearance and, after the discovery of the corpse, about the death of David Casati.

About a third of the book covers the relationship between Brunetti and David Casati, the way they spend their time together in nature. Only later the conflict is triggered and the novel becomes a detective story.

I liked the book and the style in which it was written but the beginning was a bit boring. I discussed with my mum and she told me that her other novels are more action packed so I will probably read other Donna Leon books. In order to have a better reading experience, I should have started with the first books in the series to better understand Brunetti as a character, his spiritual conflicts, the other people from his life and circumstances that made him react like this at the beginning of the book. I would not recommend to start with this novel if you never read anything by Donna Leon before, it is more suitable for readers that already know and love these characters.

I received this copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

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## **Pia says**

I'm a total Donna Leon fan, and I'd usually give her 6 or 7 stars out of 5, that's how much I like the Commissario Brunetti series. This book, however, although very good, is not among my favorites.

For one, I think there were too many things going on. Some contemporary issues were recreated in the book and, for me at least, it was too much: we have both the death of bees and the hatred of Venetians for tourists.

We still have the amazing characters that we've met before: Brunetti, Paola, Patta, signorina Elettra, Brunelli, Pucetti.

This time, the book takes place near Venice, in Sant' Erasmo, in the middle of the laguna. Brunetti, suffering from burnout and a bit of depression from work, is spending a fortnight in a house belonging to one of Paola's wealthy relatives, in order to rest and recuperate.

There, he befriends the caretaker, who was also his father's rowing partner many years ago. When the old man is found drowned, Brunetti returns to work in order to find if it was an accident or murder.

And here we have the old Brunetti, somewhat disillusioned and wary of his work, but in top form when it comes to solving the case.

I received an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **notgettingenough says**

The last Leon I read was in 2010 and I really thought I'd call it a day. It was *Through a Glass, Darkly* and was irritatingly thin on plot, but big on fillers - politics/environment. A couple of weeks ago, however, I spotted this for a couple of francs at a church sale and couldn't resist. Had things changed?

Well, yes and no. I can't even say this one's thin on plot. It has virtually no plot whatsoever. But it seems much less didactic than *Through...* It's a melancholy meander through what I think of as the outback of Venice, the islands and their lagoons, in the oppressive heat of summer. The environmental issues are the more effectively presented by being done in a gentler way.

If you are looking for a whodunnit or a police procedural that has your heart beat pumping away, this isn't it. But in the most quiet of ways, I did find this hard to put down. If you want an authentic slice of Venice with an environmental subplot that is, alas, entirely believable. Indeed, I wonder if the controversy over the poisoning of workers and lagoons which resulted in a not guilty verdict for the Porto Marghera plant, was the inspiration.

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### **Mal Warwick says**

For some reason I cannot fathom, Marilyn Stasio raved about *Earthly Remains*. Stasio has been editing a column on crime fiction for the New York Times Book Review—forever, it seems. Her recommendations are often good. But this one wasn't. She called this novel, the 26th in Donna Leon's long-running Commissario Brunetti series, "one of her best." I don't agree.

Though there is a mystery underlying the action in *Earthly Remains*, it doesn't even begin to surface until one-third of the way into the novel. And the investigation undertaken by Commissario Brunetti isn't undertaken in earnest until more than two-thirds of the way.

Many of Leon's signature themes are prominent in this curious book. She rhapsodizes about Venice, the surrounding communities, and the Laguna Veneta, the extension of the Adriatic Sea on which the islands of the city are located. In *Earthly Remains*, the romance of the Laguna comes in for special praise. Predictably, too, the corruption rampant in Italian society emerges clearly in the story. Brunetti's boss, Vice-Questore Patta, is, as always, obsequious with authority and disdainful of those who report to him. If anyone in a position of power in Venice is under investigation by Brunetti or his colleagues, Patta will surely intervene in the suspect's favor. And, once the plot of the novel finally becomes clear, Leon spotlights the illegal activity that has helped to poison the Laguna and surrounding territory. In Donna Leon's Italy, corruption engulfs business as well as government, the police, and the Church.

One of Leon's bad writing habits is to describe action in excruciating detail. I have no idea whether she picked up the habit writing for magazines that pay by the word, but *Earthly Remains* and many of her other novels read that way. Here's a representative example from one of the first pages in the novel: "Brunetti had

apologized for the heat in the room, explaining that the ongoing heatwave had forced the Questura to choose between using its reduced supply of energy for the computers or for air conditioning and had chosen the former. Ruggieri had been gracious and had said only that he'd remove his jacket if he might. Brunetti, who kept his jacket on, had begun by making it amply clear . . ." That was 68 words. How many words do you think Elmore Leonard might have used to convey the essential information in that passage? In fact, is there any essential information there?

If you are a die-hard Donna Leon fan, you might want to read *Earthly Remains*. If you're not, be forewarned: not a lot happens in this novel. It's very slow going.

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### **Rita says**

This is a unique look at Guido Brunetti, the man, rather than Commissario Guido Brunetti. He is not sure that he wants to be a policeman any longer. Most of this book is devoted to the break he needs for restoration. No wife and children, no Questorie, just him in an isolated country villa.

Guido becomes friends with an older man, who used to row with his father. Together they begin rowing around the laguna. The older man keeps bees in various areas around the laguna, but his bees are dying and the toll of dumping toxic waste into the laguna rears its ugly head. We then find that this man aided in this illegal dumping in his younger days, never thinking of the consequences. He loses his beloved wife to a rare form of cancer and now his bees. The guilt hangs heavy on this man.

Soon Guido Brunetti is forced to resume his role of Commissario Guido Brunetti to get to the bottom of what really happened. To do so he is forced to look into the shadowy past of the company this new found friend once worked for.

This book is a welcome departure from Donna Leon's usual Guido Brunetti, although I still enjoy the usual stories.

This is a book for our times. What we have done and continue to do to the earth is heartbreaking.

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### **Elaine Tomasso says**

I would like to thank Netgalley and Grove Atlantic for an advance copy of *Earthly Remains*, the 26th outing for Commissario Guido Brunetti of the Venice Carabinieri.

Brunetti is suffering from burnout or what he describes as a desire to run away from his job and never return, something we can all sympathise with. His wife, Paola, packs him off to a relative's house on a remote island on the Laguna to rest, read and think. Instead he meets an old friend of his father, Davide Casati, and spends his days rowing and looking at wildlife with him. When Davide disappears Brunetti first organises a search and then gets drawn into finding out what happened.

*Earthly Remains* is a gentle novel, full of charm. Although Brunetti is a policeman and uses police resources it is not a procedural, more a man trying to explain the death of a new friend. Venice and the Venetian way of life are very much at the forefront, food drink, customs, prejudices, secrets, pragmatism and ambiguity.

There is a dark tone to the novel in the underlying message that money and influence will win against the forces of law, order and justice so it's no wonder that Brunetti is disenchanted but his curiosity and humour go a long way to mitigating this tone.

I like the fact that Brunetti takes so much pleasure from his simple life on the island. It is a joy to read and

contrasts so sharply with the sleaze of his everyday life, just as the weather while hot on the island is enjoyable but the same heat makes city life almost unbearable.

I thoroughly enjoyed Earthly Remains and have no hesitation in recommending it as a good read.

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## **Jeanette says**

It's so welcome to be on the laguna with Guido for so many days. Rowing more than fishing, but still an experience. For me this series latest (#26) was a 3.5 star but I rounded it up for the strong Guido central core. At times other characters crowd the scene- but this one was nearly entirely Guido. A long married man having a respite under rather contradictory and strange conditions, but still a delicious spell of being in a outside isle on the peaks of the laguna villa. Singular and peaceful! Or not?

Paola and Elettra have their conversations, but this one was in great majority about the men of work- decades past and now. And also how that time past of industry has fall outs not only for those visibly afflicted.

Some of the quotes in this one were subtle and yet central Brunetti and Venetian calle prone pithy.

"They sat in silence for a moment, three Venetians, relatives at the wake of a city that had been an empire and was now selling off the coffee spoons to try to pay the heating bill."

As I have seen Chicago in the last 7 decades, I SO understand that quote.

But the sense of the dialect and the people on the small out islands and marsh barriers is outstanding in this one. The rest of it, especially in the Scarpa or Patta sense- not nearly as good as some other Brunetti. Foa steers us a few times, but I missed him too.

The Brunetti children are clearly off stage here as well- Raffi only getting one dinner conversation about his friend's birthday gift. And Chiara was off at the Lido. I miss the kids being in it more. They put another whole Italian level on it, IMHO. Opens the door beyond the stodginess of most of the old folk. And also Leon puts more than the average religious belief scoffing into this one (although she always gets at least a couple minor mocks in there within every novel in this series). One time for a quip in parallel to a Rosary recital which was especially obnoxious to me. And when people are crazed with grief, she doesn't omit a savage fling at their "weird" idea that any prayer could be meaningful. Really, such cheap shots. It's way beyond her writing ability to do these constantly- they are so banal compared to her literary comparisons or quips re Paola the most classically erudite.

Not the very best of the series, but far from the worst. And also holds a departure in that there are many more solitary Guido perceptions and moment to moment sensibilities than in the norm of the series. A good thing, for me.

Enjoy!

Almost forgot! There was a priceless couple of paragraphs in here that describe Paola and Guido negotiating a strident walk over the bridge to get home one night in the middle of July. It's cheek to jowl tourists and no one will move and all are standing in depth seeing "views". That one was EXCELLENT. 6 star. I've done that in huge crowds during ticker tape parade folly etc.- you look at the feet and MOVE. Never look up, pause or parry sideways to duck around or you will be "lost".

## Thomas says

3.5 stars

This is book 26 in the Guido Brunetti series. Brunetti is a Commissario Police officer in Venice, Italy. He takes a medical leave of absence after faking a heart attack in order to stop a subordinate from attacking a suspect during an interview. His wife arranges for him to spend two weeks at a villa owned by one of her wealthy relatives. He becomes friends with Davide Casati, the caretaker of the villa. Casati and Brunetti's father were rowing partners many years ago and he and Brunetti start rowing every day in the canals around Venice.

But then Casati goes missing and his daughter asks Brunetti for help. Brunetti does find his body and starts an informal investigation. What he finds leads him to a long ago explosion at a chemical plant and some buried secrets. I found the ending to be somewhat unsatisfactory, but perhaps realistic, given a certain amount of corruption in Italy. Brunetti is an honest, dedicated police officer, experienced in the ways of navigating through bureaucracy and being told to stop investigating sensitive matters.

Some quotes:

"Brunetti, urban to his marrow, was incapable of distinguishing the scent of one flower from another, but the scent pleased him."

"After a long time, he went back into the house to prepare his solitary dinner, well, solitary save for the company of Gaius Plinius Secundus, dead for nearly two thousand millennia but very much present to Brunetti."

Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for sending me this book.

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## Alex is The Romance Fox says

Earthly Remains, the 26th novel in Donna Leon's Commissario Guido Brunetti Series, was a bit of a disappointment.

I have been a fan of this series since I read the 1st book years ago and Commissario Guido Brunetti has become one of my favorite book characters and of course the way that the author portrays the everyday life of Venice.

The story starts off really slow...nothing really happens for the first 100 or so pages. Brunetti has taken leave and is staying at his wife's family villa in one of the many islands in the laguna. He spends his days eating, sleeping, reading and rowing.

Davide Casati, the caretaker of the villa, who also happens to have been a rowing friend of Brunetti's father goes missing during a storm. His body is recovered and it becomes apparent that there is something sinister what seems like he had committed suicide.

Brunetti then spends his supposedly rest time trying to find out the mystery of his friend's death.

Corruption, poisoning of the Venice waters, secrets and of course Brunetti's quest for finding the truth and justice for the crimes committed.

The ending was so abrupt - I was left thinking.....is that it!!!!

I think I may just take a break from this series. The last two or three books have lacked the lustre I found in the start of the series.

However, if you are a fan of this series, then I suppose you should read this one.

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