



Even Money

By *Dick Francis, Felix Francis*

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Ned Talbot is a small-time bookmaker on the edge of giving it all up when his world is turned upside down by a man who claims to be his father, long thought dead. And when the mysterious stranger is murdered, Ned feels compelled to find out exactly what is going on. But the more he discovers, the longer the odds become for his survival.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The third collaboration between bestseller Francis and son Felix (after *Silks*), a taut crime thriller, features an especially sympathetic hero. Bookmaker Ed Talbot is struggling with his wife's mental illness, even as technology threatens to give the big bookmaking outfits an insurmountable advantage over his small family business. Soon after a man shows up at Ascot and identifies himself as Ed's father, Peter, whom Ed believed long dead, a thug demanding money stabs Peter to death. Ed is in for even more shocks when he learns his father was the prime suspect in his mother's murder—and that Peter's killing, rather than a random act of violence, may be linked to a mysterious electronic device used in some horse-racing fraud. Ed must juggle his amateur investigations into past and present crimes with his demanding family responsibilities. Though some readers may find the ending overly pat, the authors make bookmaking intelligible while easily integrating it into the plot. (Aug.)

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About the Author

Dick Francis (pictured with his son Felix Francis) was born in South Wales in 1920. He was a young rider of distinction winning awards and trophies at horse shows throughout the United Kingdom. At the outbreak of World War II he joined the Royal Air Force as a pilot, flying fighter and bomber aircraft including the Spitfire and Lancaster.

He became one of the most successful postwar steeplechase jockeys, winning more than 350 races and riding for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. After his retirement from the saddle in 1957, he published an autobiography, *The Sport of Queens*, before going on to write more than forty acclaimed books, including the *New York Times* bestsellers *Even Money* and *Silks*.

A three-time Edgar Award winner, he also received the prestigious Crime Writers' Association's Cartier Diamond Dagger, was named Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America, and was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 2000. He died in February 2010, at age eighty-nine, and remains among the greatest thriller writers of all time.

Felix Francis (pictured with his father, Dick Francis), a graduate of London University, spent seventeen years teaching A-level physics before taking on an active role in his father's career. He has assisted with the research of many of the Dick Francis novels, including *Shattered*, *Under Orders*, and *Twice Shy*, which drew on Felix's experiences as a physics teacher and as an international marksman. He is coauthor with his father of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Dead Heat*, *Silks*, and *Even Money*. He lives in England.

From The Washington Post

From The Washington Post's Book World/washingtonpost.com Reviewed by Michael Dirda Sometimes, after a long time away, you revisit your old home town or college campus and discover that the favorite pizzeria of your highly caloric youth is still in business. Man, were those mushroom and pepperoni slices delicious! So, ignoring your cholesterol count, you order a large pizza, sit down with your favorite cold one and take a big mouthwatering bite. And are, inevitably, disappointed. No matter how good the pizza might be, it's no match for those pies of yesteryear. Some key ingredient seems to be missing, or the new owners have mucked about with the recipe, or maybe your own taste buds have grown more sophisticated. Nonetheless, you eat all eight slices anyway, and enjoy them. It's still pizza, after all. Just so, one can say of

"Even Money" that it may not be up to the standards of "Nerve" or "Forfeit" or "Whip Hand" or "Reflex," but it's still a Dick Francis thriller. The key elements are all here: the horseracing milieu, the damaged hero, various moral dilemmas, the easygoing first-person narration, at least one scene of brutal violence, the presentation of a lot of information about some romantically arcane subject (e.g., wine, investment banking, photography) and, of course, a more or less happy ending. However, there's no getting around the fact that Dick Francis is nearly 90. He was born in 1920, piloted Spitfires during World War II for the Royal Air Force and spent the 1950s as one of Britain's leading jockeys, riding horses belonging to the Queen Mother. Only after his early retirement did he turn to writing fiction, starting with "Dead Cert" in 1962. But by producing a book a year up until 2000, Francis firmly established himself as a brand name, the purveyor of reliable, literate entertainment. In particular, his novels have always appealed to women -- and not only because of the horses in them, but also because his heroes are usually quietly attractive, sensitive men in their 30s burdened with guilt or otherwise psychologically wounded. The faint air of melancholy surrounding them adds an aura of almost Byronic romance. Usually, these troubled Dick Francis heroes find themselves caught up in righting an injustice or solving a mystery that affects their lives or the lives of people they care about. In most of his 40 or so novels, Francis does without a recurring character, with one exception: Sid Halley -- a onetime jockey who has lost an arm -- becomes a private investigator in "Odds Against" and is the hero of three subsequent novels, including "Whip Hand" and "Come to Grief," both of which received Edgar awards for best mystery of the year. Through most of his career, Francis relied on the help of his wife, Mary, who performed background research, provided a sounding board for possible plot developments and edited the final text. When she died, Francis stopped writing, apparently forever. But in 2005 he published a new Sid Halley novel called "Under Orders" and then in 2007 produced "Dead Heat," with the help of his younger son Felix. The two again collaborated on "Silks" last year and now again on "Even Money." Before joining his father in the family business, Felix Francis was an international-class marksman, the leader of expeditions to the Himalayas and the jungles of Borneo and a teacher of physics. The hero of "Even Money" is Ned Talbot, a 37-year-old bookmaker who inherited his grandfather's business. As the novel opens on a depressing day at the Ascot race course, Ned has already suffered more than his share of life's troubles. His parents were killed when he was a baby; his beloved wife, Sophie, has had bipolar disorder diagnosed; his grandmother is gaga in a nursing home; and his electronics-whiz assistant, Luca Mandini, is thinking of quitting. What's more, Ned feels increasingly pressured by the large-scale betting agencies that would dearly love to put him out of business and acquire his pitch position at the tracks. So it's not surprising when the bookmaker, observing a happy couple, says to himself: "I supposed I must have been that happy once." Well, this being a Francis novel, things have only just started to get rough for Ned Talbot. Before Chapter 1 ends, he will learn that his father is actually alive and involved with something deeply shady. By the end of Chapter 2, there will be an assault and a murder. And by the beginning of Chapter 6, Ned will discover a rucksack with a secret compartment tightly packed with 30,000 pounds in cash, a mysterious device that looks like a remote control, some counterfeit horse papers and "a small polythene bag containing what appeared at first to be ten grains of rice, but, on closer examination, were clearly man-made. They looked like frosted glass." This rucksack and its contents provide the main narrative engine of "Even Money." But Francis adds two other subplots of nearly equal importance, one focusing on Sophie's fragile mental health, especially when under stress, and the other involving some mysterious goings-on at the track: Lately, just before certain races, all cellphones and computers stop working for five minutes. As one would expect, by the climax of the novel all three plot lines are brought together. Though Ned worries about the hospitalized Sophie, constantly keeps on the lookout for a shifty-eyed, murderous man in a hoodie and increasingly questions what he knows about his own family's past, he never neglects his business. In the course of "Even Money," the Francises present an informal introduction to English bookmaking and horse-betting. Here, for instance, Ned talks about "punters" -- i.e., gamblers: "The most successful are those who know almost every horse in training. And they study the races every day. They learn, over time, which horses run consistently to form and which do not. They discover which horses prefer right-handed tracks and which do better left-handed, which jumpers like long run-ins and which short, and whether they are likely to win uphill finishes

or flat ones. They know if a horse runs above or below par on firm or soft ground, and also what weight suits a particular horse and whether to keep away from it in handicaps when it's rated too highly. They know where each horse is trained, if it runs badly after long journeys in a horsevan and even if a particular horse tends to do better than its rivals in sunshine or in rain." And if punters know their horses, the riders and trainers know them even better. The great jockey Lester Piggott "was said to be able to recognize any horse he had ridden even when it was walking away from him in a rainstorm." Yet, despite all its seeming impossibility, Ned gradually realizes that some kind of horse-switching scam must lie behind the mysterious contents of the rucksack. Can Luca's electronics expertise help solve the mystery? While "Even Money" is an agreeable way to pass a few hours, it often feels soft and rather anemic, without real driving force. Nonetheless, the overall tone and sensibility are identifiably Franciscan, and longtime fans will enjoy taking a leisurely canter round a familiar track. But new readers who want to see Dick Francis at his best should pick up one or two of those early novels. They show why Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin, among many others, so admired Francis's writing. After all, as any punter knows, a "Dead Cert" is a much better bet than "Even Money."

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Fletcher:

Information is provisions for folks to get better life, information these days can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a understanding or any news even a huge concern. What people must be consider whenever those information which is within the former life are difficult to be find than now's taking seriously which one is suitable to believe or which one the particular resource are convinced. If you find the unstable resource then you buy it as your main information you will have huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen inside you if you take Even Money as your daily resource information.

Yvonne Casey:

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