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Even Money Review

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Even Money - Dick Francis and Felix Francis



Timothy Nunes



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Ever wondered what it would be like to be involved in a hair-raising car chase? Or how it might feel to be involved in a dangerous game of cat and mouse with a clever villain, trying your utmost to outsmart the bad guy and win the day? Well, if the answer's "yes" and you've never read a Dick Francis novel, you've been missing out—but you can easily correct that oversight by reading his latest novel, *Even Money*.

Readers familiar with Dick Francis know that his best-selling novels share a few things in common: something to do with horse racing, sympathetic protagonists, and the chance to learn something new via his protagonists' varied professions. Yes, the ever-changing and unique professions of Francis's many protagonists are a hallmark of his writing, so it may surprise some fans to learn that the protagonist in his latest novel is nothing more than...a

bookie.

Ned Talbot, a common bookmaker residing on the lowest rung of the British horse racing ladder (if not British society as a whole), initially struck me as the oddest Francis protagonist of all time. As a matter of fact, I actively disliked Ned through much of the first half of the book.

And yet, in the pages of *Even Money* (which, I should also mention, was co-written with his son, Felix), all of the pieces of an excellent mystery or suspense novel are woven together so expertly that any initial qualms about the protagonist quickly fall by the wayside.

Even Money is the story of an everyman who, though orphaned as a toddler, meets a man one day at the racetrack who claims to be his late father. The man tries incessantly to talk to Ned before he's brutally murdered in front of Ned's eyes, after an all too brief conversation.

Thus begins the story of *Even Money*, a tale that starts at one of England's most prestigious horse races, the Royal Ascot, and extends half way around the world to the shores of Australia. Readers follow Talbot as he tries to support an ailing wife while simultaneously trying to unravel a web of intrigue that includes yet another murder, radio frequency identification (RFID) chips, insurance fraud, and a family secret so dark as to easily span multiple continents. How Ned deals with such challenges shows his true metal, allowing us to sympathize with the man (if not the man's profession). And, through it all, we're kept on the edge of our seats, living and learning through the eyes of Francis's protagonist and possibly ending up knowing more about bookmaking than many a gambler.

Yes, *Even Money* may have one of the most unconventional protagonists of any Dick Francis novel, yet one convention remains completely unchanged: it's one hell of a read. I'd recommended it to both current fans and fans-to-be.

