



Flying Finish

Dick Francis

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Much to his snobbish family's horror, Henry Grey takes on the dirty and demanding job of transporting racehorses by air. And when he discovers that he is transporting something altogether different, he has to fight to land with his life intact.

Flying Finish Details

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From Reader Review Flying Finish for online ebook

Boots S says

When amateur jockey and pilot Lord Henry Grey launches himself into a career in the bloodstock market, he finds more danger and excitement than he'd ever anticipated. Henry immediately takes to his glittering new world and, when he meets the glamorous Gabriella in Italy, is sure he's hit the good life. That is, until a horse mysteriously dies in transit and a colleague vanishes. Then Grey discovers that both his predecessors went missing in mysterious circumstances and begins to doubt the wisdom of his career change. Either he has to turn detective or his own disappearance could be next .

Lauren says

3.5 stars. I'm still calibrating my Francis reviews.

Henry Grey is an earl's son, but in the sixties, all that means is that he has a manor home that's falling apart, a lot of assumption that he's stuck-up and useless, and a few good connections. At the start of the novel, Henry decides to start trying to live the life he wants. He quits his desk job and takes a much more physical one instead, overseeing the air transport of horses.

Henry is an unusual character and a little hard to warm up to at first. He admits himself that he's standoffish and doesn't give people much of a chance to get to know him or like him, partly--it emerges--because he reflexively assumes that if they did like him, it would only be because of his title, which is what he likes least about himself. He wants to be appreciated for his competence, and he is, in fact, highly but believably competent: he's a skilled amateur steeplechase jockey and a skilled amateur pilot, so you can see why he'd like this new job, even though the pay is terrible. It also explains why he spends so much time putting up with Billy, another hand on the job who does everything he can to make Henry's life difficult and painful: Billy hates Henry's position so much that Henry would only be giving him satisfaction by proving that he can't take his incessant awfulness.

It takes a little while for the plot to get going, but soon Henry clues in: there's something Yardman Transport is doing that isn't on the up-and-up. And there's the fact that his predecessors and coworkers keep going missing...

Tie in a little bit of romance, a frankly adorable international birth control smuggling ring, some immensely clever plotting, and one of the best action sequences I've ever read, and you have *Flying Finish*. It falters only in getting a little too hung up on some technical details and in the unavoidable, unfortunate fact that part of its plot has become history that no longer seems quite as shocking, but if that irks at all, there's always that incredible action sequence and a network of people passing on birth control for free to people who need it. Francis has a smooth style and pretty flawless plotting, and a sense of respect and sympathy for his characters that makes everyone involved feel human and striking. Once again, great fun.

James Thane says

In this Dick Francis novel the protagonist is an amateur jockey. However, unlike most of Francis's novels, our hero spends very little time on horseback, and racing constitutes a very minor part of the story. Henry Grey is heir to a British title but would prefer not to be. The last child and the only son in his family, he was largely ignored as a child and developed into something of a loner with few social skills. He's happiest when he's piloting a small rented plane on his days off, alone in the skies over Britain.

Like many of Britain's noble families, Henry's has fallen on hard times financially. The massive family home is ancient and falling into disrepair. His parents and elder sisters expect Henry to do the right thing and marry some wealthy heiress who will bail out the family, but Henry wants no part of it and constantly avoids the young women that his mother keeps throwing at him.

He works in an office that arranges for the transportation of racing horses to countries near and far, but he's bored with that and so takes a job on the planes that actually fly the horses from one destination to another. The man who owns the company humors Henry by giving him the job, but he's sure that the titled nobleman won't stick it out for very long.

Obviously, though, the employer has never read a Dick Francis novel and doesn't know the kind of man he's really dealing with here. Like most Francis protagonists, Henry Grey is a quiet but very intelligent and capable man. He's also very determined and once he sets his mind to something, it's virtually impossible to change his course. Before long, Henry will discover that something very odd is going on in the horse transport business, and his discovery could well cost him his life.

Like most Dick Francis novels, this one is well-plotted and moves along at a brisk pace. The climax is riveting and if I have any reservations it's only because Henry Grey is not quite as interesting as the protagonists in most of the other books. Still, I enjoyed the book, and I'm sure that most Dick Francis fans will as well.

Ed says

"Finalist 1966 Gold Dagger Award; Finalist 1968 Edgar Award for Best Mystery "

Racing related thrillers - Henry Grey, an English duke, becomes bored with his lifestyle and, much to his parents' disgust, take a job transporting race horses by air in addition to taking flying lessons and being a horse jockey on weekends. When employees of the horse transporting agency begin disappearing Grey inquires into their disappearances. Before long he finds himself tangled up in a scandal that could put his very life in danger, and finds that those he believed to be his allies are aiming to end his life before the plane he's on ever hits the ground.

LJ says

FLYING FINISH - Ex
Francis, Dick - 5th book

Lord Henry Grey was an amateur jockey and pilot. But when he decides to abandon his desk-bound job for an active career in the bloodstock market, he finds that there is more to couriership than he had ever suspected.

Interesting information about shipping horses and the dangers involved. Great character, excellent suspense.

Algernon says

[7 / 10] I'm a big fan of the author, and this book is in line with his usual output, a little too much so. There's the usual quiet, but secretly strong hero, getting mixed up with crooks and finding love along the way, also having his ass kicked by the bad guys but getting the better of them through sheer perseverance and endurance. Mr Francis hit on a winning formula and this book is a simple permutation of the successful elements deployed in the previous books. I just felt there's not enough sparkle to raise it above the norm.

Harry says

What is there to say about Dick Francis? As I think about all of his books (yes, this review covers all of his books, and yes I've read them all) I think about a moral ethical hero, steeped in intelligence and goodness embroiled in evil machinations within British horse racing society - either directly or indirectly. The heroes aren't always horse jockies, they can be film producers, or involve heroes engaged in peripheral professions that somehow always touch the horse racing world.

But more than that, Francis's heroes are rational human beings. The choices made are rational choices directed by a firm objective philosophy that belies all of Francis's novels. The dialogue is clear and touched with humor no matter the intensity of evil that the hero faces. The hero's thoughts reveal a vulnerability that is touching, while his actions are always based on doing the right thing to achieve justice.

Causing the reader to deeply care about the characters in a novel is a difficult thing to do. No such worries in a Francis novel. The point of view is first person, you are the main character as you read the story (usually the character of Mr. Douglas). The hero is personable, likeable, non-violent but delivering swift justice with his mind rather than through physical means. This is not to say that violence is a stranger to our hero. Some of it staggering and often delivered by what we would think of normal persons living in British society.

You will come to love the world of Steeple Chase racing, you will grow a fondness for horses, stables, trainers and the people who live in that world. You will read the books, devouring one after the other and trust me Dick Francis has a lot of novels (over 40 by my last count).

There are several series woven into the fabric of Francis's work: notably the Sid Halley and Kit Fielding series.

Assessment: Dick Francis is one of my favorite writers. I read his books with a fierce hunger that remains insatiable and I mourn his death.

Cathy says

I just listened to the Chivers Audio version of this book, narrated by Tony Britton, for the umpteenth time. I love the fact that it was written in the mid-1960's. It is classic Dick Francis and exactly what I want in a stress-relieving book on tape.

Helen says

Vivid characters and strong, engrossing detail about a world most of us know nothing about, horse transport by air. The story is technologically dated, but that only makes it feel like a slice of history, a window into the Cold War as seen by someone who only casually gave it thought--until people he cared about started disappearing. The opening paragraph hooks the reader with strong foreshadowing. This, and other similar, casually tossed off asides are instrumental in keeping us intrigued as the mystery builds until Henry finally begins to peel back the curtain. Francis is terrific and juxtaposing the normal and ordinary--an unhappy, socially awkward young man discovering love and fulfillment--with raw terror and moral bankruptcy. My only quibble is the book ended about 2-3 pages too soon. We're left to guess--with fairly strong pointers, to be sure--about some important outcomes. Not a book to easily put down, especially in the last third.

Stephanie says

Despite the indication otherwise, I did not read the paperback. Instead I found a first edition hardback of this 1966 classic for \$1 at a library sale, and the cover (a pegasus covered in a Union Jack) is amazing! Very excited to add this to my Dick Francis collection. Beyond that, the book is pretty typical of the early DF books: very engaging, very British, and just a little bit brutal. This one does veer from his other novels, however, by leaving the reader a little big hanging at the end.

Margareth8537 says

On a Dick Francis binge at the moment, and thoroughly enjoying re-reading him

Hana says

Henry Grey is the only son of an earl--and he hates it. A loner, with a bit of an inferiority complex and a chip on his shoulders, Henry lives his life in boxes. He has few friends and is coldly shut off from his family. His two pleasures in life are riding as an amateur steeplechase jockey and flying. At the airfield where he learned to fly he's managed to keep his rank a secret and it's here he feels most at home. He has a boring 9-5 job desk job at a bloodstock agency handling paperwork on high-bred horses.

When he refuses to be home for a posh weekend, his sister rages at him, calling him "a spoiled, bad-tempered bastard." Those words from the kindest member of his family shake Henry out of his rut and he gives up his desk job and takes a menial position at a horse transportation firm, perhaps to prove to himself

that he's not too spoiled to do a hard day's work. The work involves shipping horses around Europe and to America by air. It is tough and takes skill and a lot of horse know-how. His co-workers are a rough and tumble lot and when one of them finds out Henry is an aristocrat he sets out to make Henry's life hell. Then odd things start happening at the transport firm....

I liked the way Henry matures and learns to open himself up to others; by the end he is a changed man. The plot is overly complicated and almost doesn't work, but the final chapters were so believably terrifying that I found my heart pounding right up to the Flying Finish.

Content PG: Horses and people get badly hurt.

Kate K. F. says

Flying Finish is one of Francis' odder books as the main character is the son of an Earl who seems to be drifting through life. At the beginning of the book, he takes a job helping to transport horses by plane which no one who knows him can understand. During this job he learns about a smuggling ring and falls in love before being pulled into an incredibly dangerous situation. As this is an older book of Francis', some of the language used can be harsh in terms of class and race perspectives. The main character's growth as he figures out what he wants to make of his life adds to the story because the plot is a good gripping thriller with some Cold War overtones.

Ellen says

My favorite author of all time!!!!!! I am pretty sure that I have read all of his books. He writes mystery and it always includes horse racing in some way. This is my favorite one!!!!!! Even if you know nothing about racing or horses Dick Francis can draw you in and hold your interest. Fabulous characterization and storytelling.

iamtedae says

Dick Francis, a little like Agatha Christie, must be a guilty pleasure. An author this prolific and popular must concede something of true quality, right? Well, perhaps. It's not great literature, but from what I remember from college work, great literature isn't exactly fun. What I say here can be said of everything I've come across in Francis's work.... an interesting, unusual, entertaining story with likable good guys, surprising bad guys, and interesting (and sometimes misleading) inbetween-guys, not to mention the gratifying resolution that's hardly ever predictable. In this particular story, I enjoyed the novice-landing-a-plane-he's-not-prepared-to-line, one I always seem to appreciate. Yes, that's a little weird. Not to mention the down-to-earth titled fellow hiding his privilege to prove his worth. Good stuff.

Chris says

This is an enjoyable Francis novel simply because the character of Gabriella is one of the better Francis heroines. It also stands out because the character of Henry goes through a believable character change and arc. There are connections in his growth and behavior that Henry doesn't see, but that the reader does. The point of the novel seems to be class, and there is a slight plot hole that a reader will wonder about. Readers should be warned, however, that this is one of the more violent Francis endings.

John Marsh says

Library Audible

Much to his snobbish family's horror, Henry Grey takes on the dirty and demanding job of transporting racehorses by air (He had worked initially in the office of a company handling the paperwork and agents for transporting). And when he discovers that he is transporting something altogether different, he has to fight to land with his life intact.

Meets friend of pilot Patrick - Gabriela and falls in love with her an Italian girl. They communicate in French as he does not know Italian and she does not know English. Patrick is fluent in Italian. In Milan Gabriela works at a souvenir counter in the airport. Patrick smuggled contraceptive pills for Italian women who could not get them in Italy.

Various employees of transporting company that Henry Grey worked for had gone missing as they were murdered by Billy. The boss was transporting communist and other contraband with the horses. Also, one of the senior employees had got involved in a scheme to export horses twice to get extra retirement money as at that time the UK was giving 1.75% of export value as an incentive.

Both Gabriela and Henry are shot, unbeknown, in Milan by Billy hired gunman masquerading as a horse groom in the transporting planes working for the boss. Billy had a real dislike of Henry as he had inherited a title and would physically bully him which was also a ruse to distract Henry was seeing what was really going on. Rather than shooting Henry after kidnapping him when he left the hospital as he had received only a graze. Gabriela shot through the lung and quite serious. Henry had some out to go to the police station in Milan, Billy wanted Henry to beg and thus gave the opening for Henry to turn the tables instead of being shot execution style outright. Henry (who has a commercial licence) flies the larger hijacked plane DC4 back to his home airport just enough fuel, only just found the airport. Patrick also survived but two other flight crew murdered. Ends with the understanding Gabriela and Henry and Patrick all survive and Henry is going to take up the pilot job he was offered. He also races horses.

B says

A horse transport worker discovers that his company is not always on the up and up. This book takes place in Italy, having the main character falling in love as well.

Lots of death, exciting.

Steelwhisper says

This is easily the darkest, and probably one of the handful of best Dick Francis. What kills me on top, it still

has a modern, a relevant feel, even though by now a lot of it is hopelessly dated: no mobiles, airports after 9/11, feminism in Italy, no more Yugoslavia. Instead now this book reads like an excellent historical, with the author commenting on the present through the past. I guess this has to be the ultimate test of an excellent genre book: the test of time and being as relevant now as fifty years ago.

Fabulous.

Pygmy says

Dick Francis usually writes a brand new character for every one of his mysteries, and this one in particular I found rather compelling. Like many of Dick Francis' protagonists, The main character isn't very aware of his own abilities, appeal, and strengths. He knows himself as suppressed and mild, drifting, introverted and socially awkward. The way he describes himself spoke a lot to me....except in my case, I rather lack the nerves of steel and cold willpower that he eventually exhibits in the fight for life, limb, and justice.

The only downside to this book is the excessive details of flying planes. I understand that the author was really into flying, but he doesn't infodump on horse racing, so why does he infodump on flight controls and procedures? It threw me out of the flow of the story more than once, and I ended up skimming once or twice as well. Otherwise, a very good read.
