



To the Hilt

Dick Francis

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From the acclaimed master of mystery and suspense comes the story of a self-imposed outcast who must refresh his detection skills in order to save himself and his family.

To the Hilt Details

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Author : Dick Francis

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From Reader Review To the Hilt for online ebook

Martina says

I realize that there is a common thread in Francis' novels - you've got a good guy who basically gets in the thick of events by circumstance, or because other people like piling their problems upon him. Furthermore, the same guy often finds himself dodging physical attacks/murder attempts while trying to sort out the \$h!t the aforementioned other people piled upon him. Of course, somewhere in there is a (strong or feeble) link with horse racing, another of Francis' trademarks.

Summed up like that, that recipe sounds quite formulaic. But in the case of *To the hilt*, it works. And I mean, *works*. The novel opens up with a bang, i.e., four thugs beating the stuffing out of the protagonist, Al Kinloch, a painter who lives a secluded life in the Scottish mountains. He quickly becomes involved in various family matters, and from there, things start to get interesting. I really enjoyed reading the novel, simply because it's well written, and got me so hooked that I had to keep reading in even when I wasn't supposed to (view spoiler). The body count is not high, far from it, but that doesn't detract from the plot, which is interesting and flows with a nice pace. The novel is a bit unconventional in the sense that the main character is just caught up in consequences which were not of his doing, but still exerts himself (on behalf of his family members), even though there is nothing in it for him. (In all reality, Alexander just wants to live his solitary life and paint.) The lively and quirky characters he meets along the way added a comic relief to the story - a nice touch that is oftentimes lacking in a crime/mystery novel.

All in all, this is a nice, fun read for people who have time on their hands, but don't want a hard 'n' heavy thriller.

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, like able, 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.

Sue says

Alexander Kinloch wants nothing more than to be able to stay at his mountain retreat in Scotland and paint and earn his living. All of which he is doing until the day he returns from a trip to town for mail and supplies and is greeted by 4 thugs who rough him up considerably while demanding "where is it?" Al tells them nothing and they leave after pitching him over a cliff. While on his trip to town, he'd learned that his stepfather had had a heart attack and his mother was requesting his presence. So, banged up, he went and it was there that he began to learn what it was that the thugs were after. Al convinces his stepfather to name him as power of attorney and he begins to investigate to try to save the family brewery. Unfortunately, there are several people who would prefer that he not be looking into the financial trail...

I think this is one of the best ones I've read. As is typical of Dick Francis, horses play a role but this one isn't in and around the stables the way many of the books are. Here he's trying to preserve some family treasures, one of which happens to be a horse, along with a prominent racing cup and a sword hilt. This holds true to formula in that he has to get banged up a bit before it is all sorted out and the bad guys are led off. Even though it follows a general pattern, the twists and turns are unique. In the end you're left with a feeling of satisfaction about this likeable guy who shows his ingenuity and the extent to which he'd go to help the family.

Julie Hodgson says

This is the first and only one of Dick Francis novels I have read. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Nina says

4.5 stars. A near perfect crime story. :)

Carol says

I always enjoy reading a good Dick Francis novel. They are pretty clean, the language isn't too bad, and not a lot of sex.... Sometimes I even reread the books, because it's like being with a friend you haven't seen in several years. I really enjoy the characters he uses, and also enjoy the series he writes about too.

Jenny Lee says

classic Dick Francis. All the components of a good thriller.

E.P. says

"To the Hilt" is, I'll be honest, the last in my opinion of Francis's really, really good novels. After that they were just good.

It's also one of the last of his "artist-hero" books, this time about Alexander Kincaid, nephew to the laird (yes, really) and semi-starving artist, who lives in a bothie in the Highlands and paints golf courses (yes, really). He's the family outcast who is called upon to save the family finances and honor when things go awry.

There are more or less three intertwined plots in this book: the story of Al's fight to save his mother from ruin and disgrace when his stepfather passes away, the story of the hunt for the family heirloom, a sword hilt that had once supposedly belonged to Bonnie Prince Charlie, and the story of Al's painting of a portrait that may or may not turn out all right. It's a testament to Francis's technique that all are equally engrossing, and one worries quite a bit over whether or not Al will be satisfied with the result of his latest painting.

It's also a story of the harsh beauty of wilderness and the perfidy of the humans who sometimes populate it, and the spirit of resistance against said harshness and perfidy. A lyrical novel, as befits its subject matter, that is also a gripping thriller.

David says

Nothing like a Dick Francis classic to get me back into 5-stars.

This is one of my favorites in his collection. A great mix of characters, and the story lines keep you flipping the pages. I enjoyed the complicated batch of relationships in this story.

Joan Maclin says

A cleverly written book with suitably eccentric characters and an very inventive plot. I enjoyed the sense of place that is rather key to the story ... from the bothy to central London. It inspired a very minimal bit of research that I may find time to continue ... who knew about the Glen Coe massacre after all? Read on recommendation, I also liked this book because it is one I'm very unlikely to have discovered on my own. I perhaps will not race out to read other Francis volumes but suspect I'll enjoy other in good time.

Jim says

This was a fun read. I have been meaning to get back to a Dick Francis novel for a while and after reading

this am glad I did. It is not a great novel and it did not "wow" me. Not a whole lot of action. It was just an enjoyable story.

Alexander Kinloch, nephew of a Scottish earl, wants to do nothing more than paint and occasionally play the bagpipes in his bothy in the Scottish mountains. He enjoys his solitude. The story opens with Alexander in town to pick up his mail and supplies. Since his bothy has no electricity or phone he uses the opportunity to phone his mother and learns that his step-father has suffered a heart attack. He promises his mother he will come to visit. Upon returning to his bothy he finds four thugs who beat him up all the while demanding to know "where is it" before tossing him over the side of a cliff. Neither Alexander or the reader knows what "it" is that the thugs are looking for.

Bruised and battered Alexander returns home where he learns that his step-father's prosperous brewery has been ripped off to insolvency by the finance director who has absconded with millions of pounds. With his step-father deeply depressed and still recovering from his heart attack Alexander agrees to act as his power of attorney and try to save the brewery. There are wonderful characters in this story ... in addition to Alexander we have his contained mother Vivienne, his dithering step-father Ivan, his uncle the Earl ("Himself"), and Chris Uttley, the chameleon private investigator to name a few.

A Dick Francis novel wouldn't be complete without horse racing and in this outing we have Golden Malt, a thoroughbred owned by Ivan, and in the care of Al's estranged wife Emily, a race trainer. Al needs to hide Golden Malt as well as the King Alfred Gold Cup both of which are owned by Ivan but it is difficult to prove and don't want to get tangled up in court. Al is good at hiding things. He has been keeping the ceremonial hilt owned by his uncle the Earl ("Himself") hidden for years. This is the jewel-encrusted, solid gold handle of the ceremonial sword of Scotland's would-be king, Bonnie Prince Charlie which the Scottish government claims belongs to them.

It is a race to save his step-father's, and thus his mother's, honor. Along the way Alexander will emerge from his life as a recluse, discover the costs of becoming a hero ... and the benefits.

Dick Francis was honored by the Mystery Writers of America as a Grand Master in 1996.

Hannah says

Dick Francis is quickly becoming my favorite mystery author, and one of my favorite authors in general! Every time I sit down with one of his books (usually hungering for something engrossing and interesting), I almost always have it finished by the next day, because I *can't stop reading*. Why would I want to? His stories are fast-paced, his characters charming and likeable without being too generic, and his plots intricately and well-constructed. It's just *fun* to read his stuff. And I almost always learn from them, which is bizarre. From "Shattered" I learned more than I'd ever known before about glasswork. From "Nerve" I learned an immense amount about steeplechase jockeys and the horse-racing world in general. I don't *mean* to get this information, it's just part of the story!

This book actually deals less with the world of racing than any of the other Dick Francis mysteries I've read. The hero, Alexander Kinloch, is an artist living alone in the wilds of Scotland on land owned by his Earl uncle (referred to in the book as "Himself"), and the only horses in the book are the ones Al paints and the horse he has to hide for his ailing stepfather, whose company has been plundered from within and is heading towards bankruptcy.

The characters in this story are enjoyable and fleshed out, the dialogue is enjoyable as ever, and it's a gem

among an already fantastic trove of stories. There should be a category for leisure reading that's still intellectual and engaging. This book would fit in that category perfectly.

James Adams says

Another strong showing from Francis, again with his cool prose and strong characters. This time the lead is an eccentric artist dealing with family troubles, of which embezzlement and murder are only two. A tad more brutal than any of his books I've read before, but that is no complaint. Definitely worth a look for fans of suspense novels in general, and of Francis in particular.

Mhd says

Maybe it's not in my top-ten-Francis, but it was very enjoyable. Very likable characters. Unusual location and interesting art milieu. And, I expect to reread it someday. Good book.

Dana Stabenow says

I've been rereading all the Dick Francis on the shelf in the Homer Public Library. This one is still my favorite, painter Alexander Kinloch, nephew of a Scottish earl, is summoned from his aerie in Scotland by his mother to tend to his step-father, whose prosperous brewery has been ripped off to insolvency by its disappeared comptroller. Wonderful characters, contained but loving mother Vivienne, dithery but honorable step-father Ivan, proud, stubborn, hilarious uncle Himself (the earl), viperous but charming step-sister Patsy and her execrable husband Surtees, and one of the more capable and most amusing sidekicks I've ever read, the private investigative team of Young and Utley. Francis' villains are never that obscure, by their behavior shall ye know them, but the creating of the portrait of Zoe Lang is wonderfully descriptive and mesmerizing.

Reflex, Straight, Banker, Proof, Decider also wonderful. Yeah, he was a jockey and there is always a horse around somewhere, but the books are often only peripherally about racing. Part of the greatness of his novels lies in the different worlds he explores in each of them, painting in *To The Hilt*, photography in *Reflex*, gemstones in *Straight*, venture capitalism in *Banker*, wine in *Proof*, architecture in *Decider*. He writes pretty much the same character every time, first person male, young, stubborn, honest, honorable, never a whiner, always calm and cool and on occasion astonishingly forgiving. Maybe it's always the same narrator, but it's someone you want to know, and the writing is excellent. Read *Proof* for the telephone conversation between English Tony and French Henri, worth the price of the book alone.
