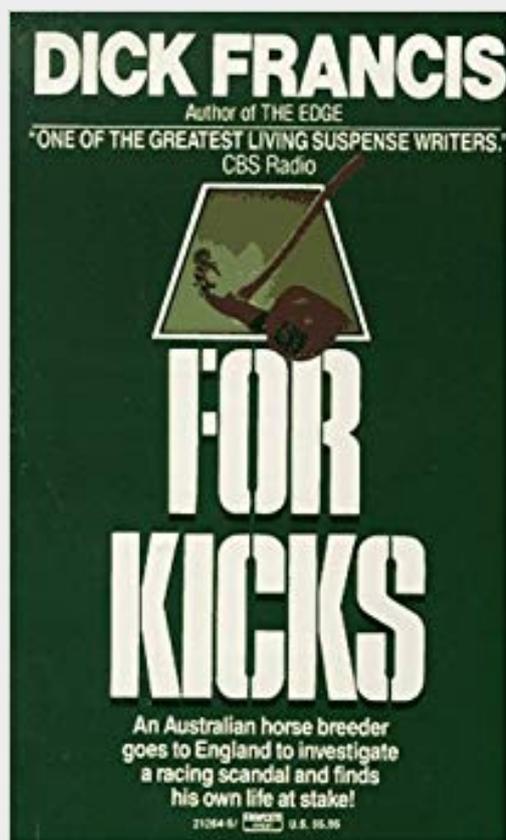


For Kicks by Dick Francis



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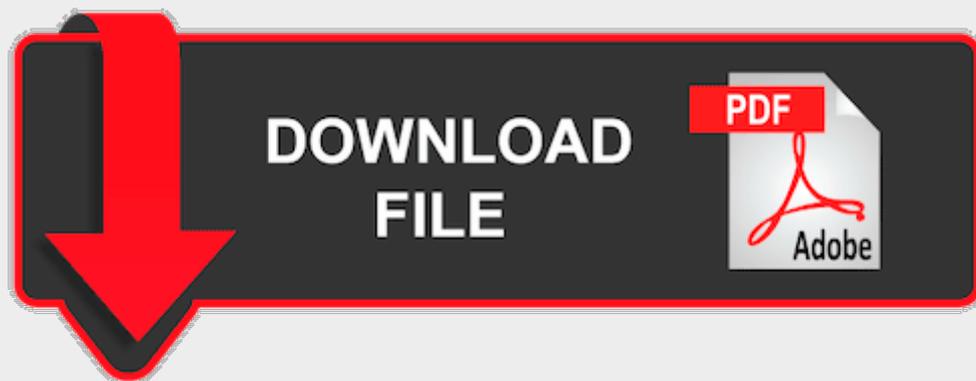
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"The best thriller writer going." Atlantic Monthly Daniel Roke didn't want to leave his Australian stud farm to help look into an English horse-doping scandal. But there he was in England, taking over investigative duties vacated by a racing journalist who had died in a suspicious auto accident. And soon enough, Daniel learned that men who would give drugs to horses would do much worse to human beings....



Reviews of the For Kicks by Dick Francis

1. Goodman

A friend referred me to Dick Francis novels. I have read three novels so far and have really enjoyed them. He is a very good writer and can really tell a story. The stories are set around steeplechase racing in England in

the 1960s (so far, I'm reading from earliest to latest), but they are not the same, and not really about horse racing but mysteries in a horse racing setting. So far, they've been very good.

2. kolos

The Earl of October visits Daniel Roke, owner of a prosperous stud farm in Australia. The Earl belongs to the group that governs National Hunt racing in England. They're having a problem with the doping of racehorses. Some kind of substance or method is being used that's undetectable in testing. The Earl wants Dan to impersonate a stable hand and investigate - for 20,000 British pounds.

Dan at 27 years old is the sole support of three young siblings who are still at school. Obviously the money would come in handy. But he takes on the Earl's challenge, not because of the exorbitant pay, but because he feels trapped by his responsibilities and the dull predictability of his life.

In England Dan finds himself living and working at the bottom of the social scale (a shock to his pride) and tangling with some truly horrible characters (a danger to his continued existence). When as part of his role he grows his hair and wears a black leather jacket, he turns out to be devilishly attractive to women. This adds to the difficulty of his undercover job.

FOR KICKS rises above its corny title, and is a fun read from beginning to end.

3. Topmen

Perfect

4. Malaunitly

Good hook. Haven't seen a Dick Francis book, I didn't like

5. Dogrel

enjoyable as Dick Francis always is. Condition of book is really good.

6. You'll never walk alone

The Dick Francis formula (first-person male narrator who is God's gift to women, specialist settings, stoic endurance of personal violence and above all horses horses horses) draws me in every time, carries me through for an exciting ride. As always, I can't put down the book before it's finished, I love his descriptive prose, enjoy his characterisations, and the inevitably gruesome come-uppances of the baddies, as always, proves ultimately satisfying.

Is it therefore churlish to call "For Kicks" a bit too predictable, a bit too mannered? The flow of the narrative is inexorably towards our hero proving he has what it takes to become a Super Spy: I imagine Francis ticking off plot requirements one by one, until he concludes with our man employed by the Mysterious Spy Handler and the dangle for the character continuing in the Next Book: no surprises, really. Dick Francis' flawed hero books (Sid Halley et al) lie in the future, presumably: but this is too structured, too clever. This reader wanted a sting in the tail, a surprise twist to the plot, an ending as psychically satisfying as the horse torturers receive: and it just doesn't quite deliver. For me, it's therefore not one of his best ("Boncrack"? "Reflex"?) BUT it's still a rattling good read

7. Karg

In "For Kicks" Francis continues to demonstrate the mastery of the horse-thriller genre he established in "Nerve." Even more so than "Nerve," "For Kicks" is slightly bizarre, unrealistic wish fulfillment, but that in no way diminishes its charm--in fact, it is one of the key factors in its charm. Who doesn't want to run off from their life from time to time in order to go have exciting and important adventures? The difference is that Daniel Roke, the hero of "For Kicks," actually does so.

An Australian stud farm manager, Daniel is invited to go undercover to investigate a mysterious string of doping cases in England. Evil deeds ensue, and the plot Daniel uncovers will horrify any horse lover or anyone with any sort of a conscience at all.

Where Francis excels is in the pacing of his story, starting off slowly, almost innocuously, and then building to a nail-biting conclusion. Where he excels even more is in the psychological development of his hero, who rather impulsively gives up a life of duty in order to go on this mission, and who has to shed his air of competence and command in order to fit in as a lowly, not-very-good stableboy, and who has to undergo humiliation and privation in order to uncover the truth. In the end, Daniel realizes that:

"I wasn't the stuff of martyrs; and the prosperous business had already driven me once into a pit of depression.

"I knew now clearly what I was, and what I could do.

"I remembered the times when I had been tempted to give up, and hadn't. I remembered the moment when [...spoiler!] my mind made an almost muscular leap to the truth."

Daniel's "muscular leap" to the truth is such a vivid description of the experience those of us who figure things out have, that the book is worth five stars for that alone. I've always been sorry that Daniel was not brought back as a repeat character, like Kit Fielding and Sid Halley, but perhaps that would dull his luster as a hidden thrill-seeker, unable to enjoy a safe, prosperous life and needing to lie, cheat, and steal, not to mention commit violence, in order to feel alive and fulfilled, no matter how much he knows that to be irrational. I can't exactly say that "For Kicks" is Francis's absolutely best work, but it's incredibly enjoyable and will deliver its kicks again and again.

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