



Twice Shy

Dick Francis

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A computerized horse-betting system falls into Jonathan Derry's hands--and unless he returns it to the rightful owners, the odds of his survival are slim to none.

Twice Shy Details

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Author : Dick Francis

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From Reader Review Twice Shy for online ebook

Averallann Hittler says

I love this book. very different to his other books. easy to read. shooting. babies and gambling programmes

E.P. says

If nothing else, "Twice Shy" is a delightful romp through the very early days of personal computers, back when people really did write their own programs and record them on cassette tapes. The trip back to what will either be a nostalgia-filled era, or the foreign country of analogue, makes the book fun reading in and of itself.

It's more than that, of course, with some trademark Francis plotting and pacing, and the mundane elevated to high suspense. This time Francis does something a little different and has two main characters, with half of the book devoted to each. I doubt it would have worked in most of his other books, but it works here and provides a nice balance, as the two heroes are brothers who are diametric opposites of each other. There's also plenty of interesting tidbits about the newly emerging field of personal computing, as well as the somewhat arcane world of competitive shooting. I will say that I found the female characters in "Twice Shy," while interesting, to be less compelling than in some of the other works, but it all holds together well and makes for a fun, if at this point oddly vintage, read.

Jann says

What can I say beyond all the superlatives? This is another super Dick Francis book, again about the horse racing world but told in two sections. The main character in the first, Jonathan, is a teacher whose friend has written the computer code for a betting system.

DeAnna Knippling says

I liked this more than I expected, although it is definitely of the "no girls allowed, keep out!" variety. An odd structure--more two novellas, one for each of a pair of brothers. Excellent control on both POVs, beautiful pacing, a real page turner. I got the sense that a lot of people didn't like one or the other of the two halves of the book and no wonder--two completely different personalities on the POV characters. Readers were expecting a thriller, not a family saga. But I found it fun, mostly because it is soooooo very nerdy about early computer programming, and so nicely readable that I barely noticed the pages turning. I think I first read Dick Francis in a Readers' Digest edition--and hated him. But this was all right.

Rog says

I'm a long time Dick Francis fan. I really liked the first half of the book with Jonathan Derry undoing and outwitting the bad guys. The computerized horse racing handicapping program is an interesting part of the story; which takes place in the early days of personal computers. The usefulness and longevity of the program (spanning 14 years) as a predictor of a relatively high percentage of race winners underscores the principle that the worth of a computer is mostly a function of the software that runs on it. The hero investigates and finds the story of the murderer and the genesis of the valuable program. The bad guy is simple and effective but not as interesting as some other D.F. villains; but he doesn't have to be interesting due to the typically well-told story. The second half of the story could have been a decent story by itself with a few key changes. The second half is about Jonathan's half brother, William. He was not believable. After the bad guy ruthlessly attacks William and perpetrates a second attack that results in the lovely girlfriend's broken arm, William doesn't call the cops!? He imprisons the bad guy in the basement to effect some kind of appeasement!? I finished the book out of respect for Dick. The two related stories in one book was an interesting contrast in characters and it worked for me on that level. I'm accustomed, however, to a main character that makes more sense to me. First part, 4 stars. Second part, 2 stars.

Contrarius says

I'm a big fan of Dick Francis, but even I have to admit that this is not a very good book. There are just too many problems with the book.

First -- the story is broken into two sections, which happen 14 years apart. There are two brothers as the good guys, each of whom narrates half the book, with the same villain in both parts. This partitioning of the book creates a big discontinuity in the story, obviously. The time gap also creates a problem because a large part of the story revolves around a computer program -- yet, unrealistically, the computer technology doesn't advance much if at all during that 14 year period.

Second -- many Dick Francis books have moments where you want to tell the hero "Call the cops now!". I don't know why Francis disliked the police, but anyone who reads a few Francis novels will notice that the police are usually uncaring, incompetent, stupid, or hostile -- and they are often actively avoided by the hero. In *Twice Shy*, this attitude is so strong that during one scene you want to YELL in big capital letters "CALL THE COPS NOW!!". In fact, the entire second half of the book would not have happened at all if the hero had simply called the police when he should have. That makes reading the second half annoying, since all the problems are due to the hero's own stupidity.

Third -- the bad guy in this one is just too much of an idiot, an obvious caricature. It's hard to really believe in the story when the villain is so unbelievable.

And fourth -- the hero of the second half does so many stupid things that it's hard to root for him. While the older brother, the hero of the first half, did a good job of tricking and outmaneuvering the hero, the younger brother of the second half tries continually to placate that villain instead of doing anything constructive to get rid of him.

The first half of the book was enjoyable enough, but as you can tell the second half really annoyed me. The second half did have one very good scene, when a character is shot and believes himself to be dying, but that's about it. It hurts me to give a Francis book only 3 stars, but even he can't hit a home run every time!

Jo Ring says

Very very good. Love Dick Francis!

Annie Burrows says

I've been having a bit of a Dick Francis-a-thon lately. And this was the least favourite of the ones I picked up. It is a 2-in-one, where the second part attempts to carry on a story started 15 years earlier in the 1st part. With a different hero. It didn't work for me on lots of different levels - the main one being that in the 15 years between parts 1 and 2, there was so little advance in computer technology that the 2nd hero could still use the programme, and the disc, which sparked off the crime in the 1st part. I don't suppose many people could have predicted, in the early 80's, just how rapidly computer technology would change and advance, though.

Helen-Louise says

When feeling stressed I can always count on Dick Francis. This time it was company for a medical procedure. Book - excellent. Procedure - well, not so much.

Wsm says

It is a fairly implausible, though novel idea, a computer programme which can predict Derby winners. The action unfolds at a brisk enough pace. Francis also makes use of his son Felix's experience as a Physics teacher and marksman. I won't rank it alongside his best books.

Kevin says

I found myself surprised at just how much technology has changed since this book about a computerized horse racing system was released. I also was reminded about the scene with Dr. Evil when his son said, "Why don't we just take him out and shoot him?"

Algernon says

Twice Shy may not be the fastest thoroughbred in Dick Francis' stable of thrillers, but it is still more than able to carry the reader on an edge-of-the-seat race to the finish line.

The main setting is still the racetrack, but within this frame of reference the author is branching out into other

areas of interest. For me, being more than familiar with the kind of books Francis writes (variations on a successful formula where both the hero and the villains are stereotypes), the only way to tell them apart is by these specialty professions that the underdog hero is engaged in and that somehow will help him overcome the evil guys and solve the mysteries. Here we have physics, Olympic level sharpshooting and early computer programming, with an extra helping of racing stable management and betting systems at the racetrack.

"Twice Shy" has another particularity that sets it apart from the other thrillers in the Francis stable. Basically, the book is made out of two novellas, linked by a common adversary. In the first part, a laidback middle-aged physics professor, passionate about his job but with a marriage on the brink of collapse, somehow gets involved in a betting scam. This Jonathan Derry is also interested in rifle marksmanship, spending a lot of money on gear and shooting range fees.

I liked teaching. Specifically I liked teaching physics, a subject I suppose I embraced with passion and joy, knowing full well that most people shied away in horror. Physics was only the science of the unseen world, as geography was of the seen. Physics was the science of all the tremendously powerful invisibilities - of magnetism, electricity, gravity, light, sound, cosmic rays ... Physics was the science of the mysteries of the universe. How could anyone think it dull?

The passage above is a fine example of why I like Dick Francis : he has an unquenchable curiosity about the world he lives in, both on and off the racetrack. He gets passionate about his subjects, and manages to communicate this passion to the readers. He is also a positive thinker, a ray of sunshine in a cynical society. That doesn't mean he ignores the ugliness and the rat race, it means he doesn't believe the bad guys have the upper hand in the end. As an example of this attitude I have bookmarked a passage about a lesson in Newtonian physics, one where Jonathan uses a rifle to illustrate the point to his pupils:

They never asked how radio waves crossed the ether, which was to me a greater mystery. They asked about destruction, not creation; about power, not symmetry. The seed of violence born in every male child looked out of every face, and I knew how they were thinking, because I'd been there myself.

I am not going to give details about the plot, for one thing because this is not really the strongpoint of a Dick Francis thriller, and for another because I don't want to spoil the outcome. But I will mention that the action is set in the early 80's, and the flavour of the period is brought poignantly to my mind when the author mentions early personal computers that boot the operating system from a cassette tape, have only a few kilobytes of memory, and use mostly a text interface. This is how I started to learn programming (I even used an earlier FORTRAN system where I had to punch cardboard rectangles on a special machine and run them through a machine that was as big as a wardrobe) and how I played my first games, so the nostalgic Force is strong in this one:

I was listening to the noise a computer produced when its programs were recorded onto ordinary cassette type.

One surprise that I didn't see in advance was that the story of Jonathan Derry is practically wrapped up by the midpoint of the book. A second story involving Jonathan's much younger brother picks up the thread of those dangerous computer cassettes about 15 years later. William Derry is a different personality from his restrained older brother. He abandons a higher education for a career in racing ("Security, William said, was a dirty word. There were better things in life than a safe job."), he lives the life of a rover, never settling in any one place or in any particular relationship. But even rovers get older, and when William has to give up racing, he lands a great job as an administrator / manager for a big American owner of thoroughbreds.

William has now a great job, a racy girlfriend and, finally, a house where he thinks of putting down roots, but a spectre from the past mugs him in his own front yard. The man his older brother Jonathan put in jail for long years is now out on parole and convinced he was swindled out of a fortune by the Derry brothers. William tries to defuse the situation, but he has little success with logic and common sense against the burning hatred of this baddie.

Historically, it's seldom a good idea to appease a tyrant.

Personally, I believe there would be no story here, if only William had gone to the police with what he knew. But that is not the style of a Dick Francis hero. These guys are self-reliant, resourceful and full of determination not to be trampled under the boots of said tyrants. William is no exception and, with a little more info-dumps about computer programming, he gets the job done.

I will close my review as usual with a passage about the first and most enduring love in the life of Dick Francis: horses and racing, the subject that defines him and gives him his inimitable flavour.

I loved the Heath in the early mornings with the manes blowing under the wide skies. My affection for horses was so deep and went back so far that I couldn't imagine life without them. They were a friendly foreign nation living in our land, letting their human neighbours tend them and feed them, accepting them as servants as much as masters. Fast, fascinating, essentially untamed, they were my landscape, my old shoes, the place to where my heart returned, as necessary to me as the sea to sailors.

I will continue to read and re-read these books, even as I acknowledge they are sometimes not up to the usual high standards I have come to expect. I guess I should make a shelf called comfort reads: easy pieces that pick me up on a rainy afternoon with nothing to do and too little energy for heavier fiction.

David Highton says

Another reliable thriller from Dick Francis, this one is a little dated now because of how old the technology described is now - this was the the days of the Amstrad and the Acorn and the Sinclair computers. Interesting plot spread across two time periods.

Shorty says

I really liked the first half of the novel, and gave it four stars. The novel is split in two, and the second half wasn't as good imo. I gave the second half 3 stars.

The narrator of the first half had a rich, plummy English accent, and was very enjoyable (Simon Prebble). The second narrator (Steven Crossly) sounded like a little like a know-it-all, rich young man from one of those well-to-do schools that teach all the boys to be prigs. He was less enjoyable, but not bad enough to stop listening to. And, he rarely yelled, like the narrator from the last novel I listened to (I am not a serial killer).

Francis says

Well, I gotta say not among Dick Francis' best. A warning to aspiring writers; be careful when writing about technology. You may look foolish and outdated to your future readers a lot sooner than you may think possible.

But it is Dick Francis and he's always worthwhile even when he's not at his best.
