



Crossfire

Dick Francis , Felix Francis

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Shell-shocked and missing a foot-lost to an IED during his tour of duty in Afghanistan-Captain Tom Forsyth has been sent "home" by the army and, at loose ends, returns to his estranged mother's house for the first time since he joined up at seventeen. But Josephine Kauri, the "first lady of British racing," has always put the horses she trains first and her family last. Tom soon finds himself strained to the breaking point with his mother and stepfather.

But there's another reason for the stifling tension at Kauri House Stables: Josephine is being blackmailed for a hefty sum every week-and forced to make her horses lose. Retirement is not an option, as she has been warned that it will result in the thing she most fears: exposure and ridicule . . . and prison, when the government finds out what she's been hiding.

Tom sets out to discover and defeat this hidden enemy using his finely honed military skills. But can he save his mother's reputation and career, or will he find himself caught in the cross fire?

Crossfire Details

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Author : Dick Francis , Felix Francis

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Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Suspense

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From Reader Review Crossfire for online ebook

Miriam Smith says

Being an avid Dick Francis fan I looked forward to reading this book co written with Felix Francis. It was as usual, very well written with a great plot and believable characters, in particular I liked Captain Tom Forsyth and his tales of his officer command in Afghanistan and coping with life after suffering an IED. However, I've dropped a star mainly because I was a little disappointed that the usual tales of horse racing and its exploits wasn't featured as heavily in this one compared to other books. I would recommend "Crossfire" to anyone - even as a standalone novel regardless of whether you're into horses or not, but if you prefer the more traditional horse racing books of Francis's fame then maybe this one is not for you.

LJ says

First Sentence: Medic! Medic!

Captain Thomas Forsythe has returned from fighting and being injured in Afghanistan, to a place called home in name only. He and his mother have never been close. She is a well-known, well-respected, successful trainer of racehorses and at risk of losing everything to a blackmailer and/or the Inland Revenue. For the first time ever, Tom can help his mother; if she would only let him.

One thing on which you can always count with a Francis novel is a captivating opening and this book didn't disappoint. It begins with a bang, literally, and is both current to our time and effective. After that, I must admit, the old charm wasn't quite there.

Tom is an effective character and classically Francis; he's independent, a loner, self-reliant and determined. He was certainly the best of the characters in the story, and the most well developed.

It may sound silly, but I enjoyed that the author's voice, particularly with both the author and the characters being British, sounds British without an attempt to Americanize it. There was a strong sense of place, I feel I'm coming to know the Lambourn region. Details make a difference. The inclusion of information on Tom's life in the military, including what the infantry wears and carries with them, but also information on the tax system; these things add dimension to the story.

Taking into account that I was reading an uncorrected proof, there was a good deal of redundancy. I hope that won't be true with the finished edition.

The plot was good, but lacked the suspense to which I'm accustomed and a number of the situations were strikingly, and rather uncomfortably, familiar from previous books. Remembering specifically which books definitely took me out of being involved in reading this one.

One of the classic Francis elements was missing; the protagonist was never involved in a fight. Considering the occupation of the protagonist, this was one book in which he could really have held his own. Maybe that's why it wasn't included, but I certainly noticed the lack of it being there.

What did work, however, was the climax. It was unexpected, somewhat shocking and one of the best from

Francis in awhile. The epilogue was well done and it is always important to me to know justice is served.

For all its faults, I don't regret having read "Crossfire." It will be interesting to see how the Francis name and style progresses from here.

CROSSFIRE (Ama Sleu-Tom Forsythe-England-Cont) – Good
Francis, Dick and Felix – 45th book
Putnam Adult, ©2010, ARC, US HC ISBN: 9780399156816

[image error]

E.P. says

Last January I set an absolutely ridiculous Goodreads reading challenge for myself--so ridiculous that I'm embarrassed even to admit how high it is (okay, it was 200 books). Needless to say, unless a miracle occurs I'm not going to meet it, although I will say in my defense that I probably have read that many books, but unfortunately a number of them were either not on Goodreads by virtue of being Russian, or I didn't like them, or I just didn't get around to writing reviews for various other reasons. Still, I couldn't just give up without a fight, so I'm going to throw in a few reviews of things that I read last year (or before) in a vain attempt to make up the numbers somewhat.

In keeping with the military theme of most of my recent reading, I'll start off my retrospective reviews with one of "Crossfire," one of the collaborative efforts between Dick Francis and his son Felix Francis.

Funnily enough, since Francis Sr. served in the RAF during WWII and all his books have an autobiographical element, this is the first of his books to feature a military officer. One suspects that, for all the surface-level conservatism of Francis's heroes--they tend to dress conservatively and keep their hair aggressively short, as well as distancing themselves from political activism of all stripes, especially left-wing, and even long-haired, hippy painter Alex Kincaid, from "To the Hilt," is motivated primarily by duty, family, and honor --Francis himself was at heart a rebel and a free spirit, something that comes across in his heroes' preference for self-employment and vigilante justice. Government employees and military men tend to be secondary subjects of satire rather than central heroes.

Anyway, Tom Forsyth from "Crossfire" breaks with that pattern, as he is "married to the military"--until, that is, an unfortunate encounter with an IED in Afghanistan deprives him of one of his feet, along with his military career. Depressed, angry, and unwilling to accept his fate--Tom is one of the angrier, edgier heroes of the Francis oeuvre--he returns to live with his estranged mother in Lambourn until he can get back on his feet, so to speak, only to discover that his mother is neck-deep in trouble and in need of his help.

I admit that I approached the Dick & Felix collaborations with a mixture of interest and trepidation. Dick Francis is probably one of the most formative authors of my reading life, I'm not even ashamed to admit, and sometimes when I reread his works I marvel at how much they've influenced my own stylistic and narrative choices, and probably basic worldview as well. So how would these later, co-written books, hold up?

It must be noted, though, that all of Francis's works were family affairs: as he revealed following her death, his wife Mary was always an integral part of his writing process, up to and including getting a pilot's license and running her own air taxi service as part of the research for "Rat Race." The author "Dick Francis" was

really a collaboration between Richard and Mary Francis; in partnering with his son, Francis Sr. is simply continuing on with the tradition.

That being said, for me the Richard & Mary collaborations were the superior product. Of course, they were the superior product to at least 90% of what was out there, so that's a high bar to meet. The Richard & Felix collaborations are, in my opinion, lacking a certain...sense of taste and timing, I would say, for want of a way to explain it any better. The basic elements are all there, but the word choices don't sparkle quite as much, and the plots don't have that muscular pacing that I had always assumed was the result of Francis Sr.'s experience as a jockey. And it's particularly odd/interesting that those are the things that I find missing in these later books, as they are the things you'd think an editor would have the easiest time adding. But no...

Anyway, all that aside, fans of the mystery genre and the Francis version of it are likely to enjoy "Crossfire" nonetheless. It has all the elements one would expect: a damaged, disabled (most of Francis's heroes struggle with some sort of temporary or permanent disability) hero trying to figure out what to do with his life now that the thing he values most has been taken away from him; skullduggery and evildoing in the racing industry; a femme fatale; and vast quantities of information on subjects as varied as horse racing (of course), the British tax code, the British military and officer training thereof, military tactics and the maxims of Sun Tzu, photography, diabetes, and a number of other things as well.

It's a little hard to decide whether some of the stuff that appears is tired recycling of old material, or a nod to some of the Francis classics: is Tom's struggle with his prosthetic limb and his involvement with a woman with a penchant for some light BDSM a nod to Sid Halley? Is his night spent tied up in a stall a deliberate reworking of Rob Finn's (of "Nerve") harrowing night under similar circumstances? Or are there only so many ways that a hero can be captured and detained in a stable?

"Crossfire" is, while not free of flaws, a very enjoyable book, at least if you're into that kind of thing. It's also a very enlightening book, as it is rather like reading a Francis novel with the cover off and all the inner workings exposed. And at its heart it still has something very real--Tom's disaffection and rage at what has happened to him, and his despair at the loss of his old life. I wouldn't suggest that readers take it as the acme and epitome of the Francis brand, but if you've never read anything by Francis before, this is as good an introduction as anything else, and if you are a long-time Francis fan like I am, it will give you the fix you're craving, while also perhaps revealing some of the structure behind what appeared to be the effortless Francis magic.

Joan says

Well, I read this. And I am now wondering what to put in this review.

I've read some truly wonderful novels by Dick Francis, and some pretty 'sloppy' ones as well to be honest, but I picked this up in a charity bookshop yesterday - while searching for Nevil Shute books - and started reading last night.

It's 'okay'. It's a bit of a mish-mash I think, - a little bit of Dick Francis and more of Felix and although it stands up to close inspection, it lacks that certain sparkle that made some Francis books superlative. I read Francis for the 'horse' side of the stories, and there was really not much of that in this book.

For various reasons I'm not rating this, nor am I 'shelving' it.

Victoria Moore says

"Crossfire" by Dick Francis and Felix Francis was the perfect book for me during a time when I needed something easy to read, fun and informative. Up to now I'd never read any mysteries by Dick Francis, and all I'd previously known about him was that he wrote books with a racing theme. As I familiarized myself with the life of the narrator, Captain Thomas Forsyth, I became intrigued by his life as a soldier in Afghanistan, childhood and his homecoming.

A career infantry man, who considered the British army his salvation, his journey once he reunited with his family was as stressful as his time in Afghanistan. The thing that I found the most fascinating about the story was the way Tom used the survival skills he'd learned in the military to help his mother, Josephine Kauri and her husband Derek Phillips out of a tight spot that included blackmail, murder and fraud. Gripping and suspenseful, with just enough humor to keep it from being maudlin and heavy, "Crossfire" is the perfect blend of intrigue, nostalgia and traditional logic.

Carol Berg says

It breaks my heart to give a weak review to any book with Dick Francis's name on it. It was a grievous loss to the literary world when the master of mystery died in 2010. I am not a horse person or horse-racing fan, but I've devoured every one of Dick Francis's novels, all of which touched on the world of British racing in some fashion. The cool thing was that he could sketch a sympathetic protagonist, whether a jockey, trainer, wine-supplier to the racing crowd, architect hired by a racing family, or whatever in just a few lines, and power into a tantalizing mystery in just a few pages. Action, twists, everything was minimalist. Though some books were weaker than others, most were an engrossing thrill ride, populated with men and women I cared about. Alas, after Mr Francis's beloved wife and collaborator Mary died a few years ago, things were not the same. For four novels, he collaborated with son Felix. I have found none of them up to the standards of Dick Francis's earlier work, but still felt the master's presence. In *Crossfire*, the last to bear Dick's name as co-author, I didn't feel him there at all.

Crossfire's first person narrator, the injured soldier son of a race horse trainer newly back from Iraq, was flat and unlikeable. The plot - our hero forsaking honor and principles to protect his mother (that neither he nor I respected or liked) from the consequences of her long time tax evasion - fell flat. It wasn't just that he considered it an intellectual puzzle. He was not at all an intellectual. So he was proving his worth after his injury? Sorry, didn't work for me. The villains were predictable and as uninteresting and unlikeable as the hero and his mother.

Bottom line, if you want to read a terrific Dick Francis mystery, read *Odds Against*, *Whip Hand*, and *Come to Grief*, the three books starring Sid Halley, my personal favorites, or *Decider* or *Proof* or well, just about any of them. I wish Felix Francis well, but he needs to learn a bit more to carry on his father's fine legacy.

Karen says

I still could not get this book to register correctly just using the title, Crossfire. Be that as it may, I enjoyed reading this! [I]Crossfire[/I], by Dick and Felix Francis, is the latest novel that youngest son Felix has

written. It was quite suspenseful and utilizes a lot of modern technology--but then has an incongruous use of a samurai sword! I did not think the hero, Tom Forsyth--an army officer on medical leave due to the loss of a foot--was completely believable. Although being an amputee has its limits, both physical and emotional, Forsyth insists on doing everything himself without involving the proper authorities (reminds me of Harry Potter!). But, there is a "line" which should not be crossed--and he crosses it, resulting in the death of a young woman and almost his and his mother's deaths. I would think that a trained soldier would not be so reluctant to utilize local law enforcement (but that is my opinion and I know that other readers would be more empathetic). Still, a very good read! A 3.5 out of 5.

Kathy Davie says

Well, this was disappointing. I've enjoyed every other Dick Francis that has come along and it is obvious that Dad did not have a lot of input on this novel. Yes, it is a horse racing mystery...well, at least, it takes place in Lambourn, and the nasty events are happening to a horse trainer.

Tom Forsyth is on medical leave after losing a foot in Afghanistan and soon discovers that his mother, noted horse trainer, Josephine Kauris, is being threatened. Using his battle skills, Tom soon uncovers the mystery behind the threats.

Unfortunately, while the formula is followed, no real tension is created. It's weird because the words are there but I just am not feeling it. Part of it is because, I cannot believe that a captain in the British army with 15 years of experience could be so dumb. He's held captive for over a day before he thinks that, maybe, he'd better get himself out of it? He goes on stakeout but doesn't think that seriously about his practical camouflage? Half way through the day, he thinks of a camera...duh... The best method of achieving leverage is to sleep with one of the perpetrators and then take pictures of her naked...could we get a little bit of tension going here...??? Then there's the ending. Yes, it's all tidy but not very realistic. I mean, sure Tom talks about how the horses and dogs were his friends as a child...doesn't make him a horse trainer.

There's just no passion in this one.

Doreen Fritz says

I am an avid fan of Dick Francis. I love the varied ways in which he draws us into the multiple worlds of British horse racing in his mysteries. I generally rush to read each new installment -- but maybe after this one I'll merely amble in the direction. His son Felix has joined him and co-writes this novel about a soldier in the war in Afghanistan whose foot is blown off by a roadside bomb. The soldier, Thomas Forsyth, returns to his mother's house to recover. If he had anywhere else to go, he would. He and his mother (and stepfather) have never done anything but argue, and he misses the life of a soldier already. His mother is a noted racehorse trainer, but lately many of her most promising horses have inexplicably lost races they'd been predicted to win. Thomas soon discovers that his mother is involved in tax evasion and is being blackmailed. His efforts to discover the blackmailer and free his mother from extortion lead him into dangerous - even deadly - territory. This book had Francis' usual plot twists without also having his usual engaging and smooth writing style. The wording is awkward, the dialog stilted, the characters manipulated for plot effects rather than real and "living".

Grey853 says

A career soldier who's lost his foot in the war, Tom returns to his mother's home until he sorts out what he wants to do with his life since he can't be a warrior anymore. His mother runs a stable and is well known, but he's never gotten along with her or anyone else it would seem. At the start of the book, Tom comes across as a very cold fish, very reserved, distant, and quite bitter. I guess that's to be expected because of the trauma of his injury, but I get the feeling that he was that way before.

At any rate, once he finds out that his mother and stepfather are being blackmailed, the story gets better. He's got a job to do, to save his mother from going to prison. I think having that focus does change him a bit and he starts to be a bit more human.

There's a lot about finances in the book, more so than about horses, which I think slowed the pace of the novel. Still, there's quite a bit of action toward the end and a few surprises.

Jacqueline J says

This was fairly good but not my favorite Francis. I had a couple of huh? moments with some of the horse stuff. One of the things I enjoy about Dick Francis' work is that I know the horse stuff will be done right. Were these huh? moments because this was more than likely mainly written by Felix? I hope that this isn't going to be a problem if Felix continues to write these books.

The story mostly felt the same as the Francis novels I have come to love over the years. The voice is basically the same, the level of detail and research the same high quality. There were parts that were very well done on the getting of information although some of the machinations were not as convoluted as in other Francis novels. The main character was manly and mostly a loner as usual. There wasn't a bout of fisticuffs which is usually but not always included. It did feel similar in plot to many others of Francis' books. Which is not necessarily a bad thing, at least the familiar is well loved and comfortable. The army stuff was good and the British slant on it all was interesting.

The part I disliked the most was the ending, what the main character decides to do with his life in the future. It 100% didn't ring true. I went "you're kidding me?" You'll see when you get there.

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.

Nathan says

I'm a long-time Dick Francis fan, and have most of his books in the basement of our house. (Or rather, had--I reached the point where I couldn't read them again, because even though I know them as "the one with the travel author", or "the one with the architect", I recognized all the plots and villains automatically) "Crossfire" is not, however, a Dick Francis novel. It's by his son, Felix Francis, who did research for Francis pere's earlier books. Felix has not yet grasped his father's style, alas.

Dick Francis novels are all roughly similar, sharing the same flavoursome ingredients. Our hero is a calm and quiet chap (always a chap), often estranged from his father, who avoids confrontation and argument. He's physically attacked early in the novel to show what's up against, and then bravely puts himself into danger again at the climax of the novel (demonstrating his bravery to the reader). The villain is often an older man, and class consciousness is strong--a Lord is frequently the quiet guardian and helper of the hero. There are women, but they're not the central point of the novel. Some aspect of the racing industry features in the book, but often there's another industry that's central--jockeys, lads, and owners don't form the majority of Francis's heroes. The writing is smooth and easy, never didactic, and the hero's choices (including putting himself in danger) are rational and never just for the sake of plot. Finally, the novel ends with a blistering race where the good guys win.

Of those key elements, Felix has preserved the male hero, the racing background, and the horse race at the end. In the middle, though, we have a confused hero who doesn't do a good job of thinking through his actions, an even more confused plot, and occasional lapses into clumsy exposition as though a chunk of Wikipedia were pasted into the middle of an otherwise innocent text. I found it disappointing that the elements I loved so much in the father's writing were not present in the son's attempt to continue the series, and I'm curious to see what the halflife of my fond associations with the "Francis" name are: will I buy the next book, the one after that, ... ? How many disappointments until I cease to buy these at airport bookshops?

Luann says

How can I possibly do justice to the final book by Dick Francis? His books have been such an important part of my reading life for so many years. I hope his son continues - I will definitely read anything he writes - but honestly it just won't be the same.

If you are a Dick Francis fan, you definitely need to read this one. I don't feel that it is his best book ever, but still a very fine story for his last one. I won't mind reading it again sometime in the future. 3.5 stars.

Rest in peace, Dick Francis! You will be missed.

Mark Baines says

Simple straightforward thriller, in the same style as ever. Easy to read, and outcome not immediately identifiable. Relaxing, not testing.
