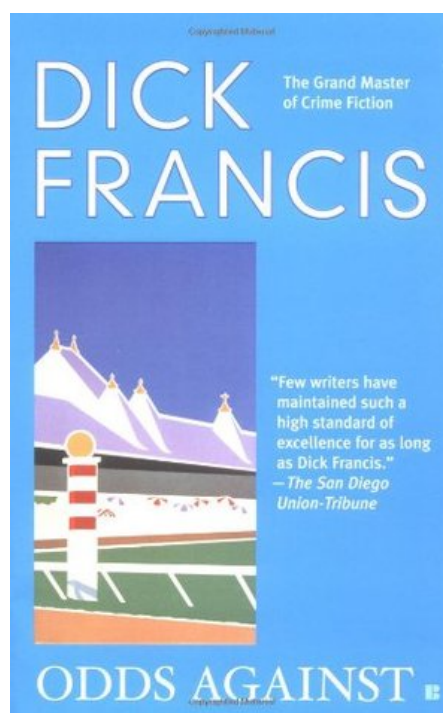




Odds Against

Dick Francis

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Former hotshot jockey Sid Halley landed a position with a detective agency, only to catch a bullet from some penny-ante thug. Now, he has to go up against a field of thoroughbred criminals--and the odds are against him that he'll even survive.

Odds Against Details

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Author : Dick Francis

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From Reader Review Odds Against for online ebook

Louise Hartgen says

I don't think I ever came across a Dick Francis main character that didn't engage my interest, but Sid Halley is a cut above the average. That doesn't mean he's my favourite, no, that privilege would have to go to Kit Fielding of "Break in" and "Bolt", but Sid Halley always makes for interesting reading. He is deep, complex, and can be very infuriating at times, but he never bores.

This was my first reading of book 1 in the Sid Halley series, though I've read all the others several times. Once Champion Jockey, Sid has been marking time since the loss of the use of his left hand made him unable to race. For two years he has acted as advisor to Hunt Radnor Associates, a successful detective agency. As the story begins, a bungled ambush has left him with a bullet in the belly. Far from pushing Sid further into depression, this seems to act as a wake up call, and when he visits his father-in-law to convalesce and meets the highly unlikeable Mr and Mrs Cray, who have some very nasty secrets in their suitcases, Sid's investigative antennae fairly begin to quiver.

This was another great Dick Francis read. When I write reviews for these books I find myself using the same words over and over, but this is why I find these books so consistently good, and why I go back to them again and again. The story had me from the first few sentences. The research was flawless, the characters were well drawn. The descriptions of places and people were vivid. The denouement was edge of the seat. There was a twist I totally wasn't expecting. I finished the book wanting more, and I will definitely read the rest of the series now, as it's a while since I did. I just love this author so much! The one sadness I have is that I wish he'd written four books about Kit Fielding as well! ?

Sunita says

Reread but I hardly remembered anything except that it was a Sid Halley book. I mostly listened to the audiobook, which was narrated by the late, much missed Ralph Cosham. He did his usual excellent job with both the men's and women's parts and brought a lovely poignancy to Miss Martin's character.

This is one of Francis's earliest books, and the 1960s setting comes through. Worries about nationalization, for example. Sid is recuperating from an attack at the agency where he works and is drawn into a mystery surrounding accidents at Seabury Race Track. Over the course of the story Sid regains his confidence and comes to terms with the severe hand injury that cut short his racing career. An excellent introduction to the Francis oeuvre if you haven't read him, featuring one of his best-liked characters.

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.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"It came, the blinding flash in the eyes, as we soared into the air. White, dazzling, brain shattering light, splintering the day into a million fragments and blotting out the world in a blaze as searing as the sun.

I felt Revelation falling beneath me and rolled instinctively, my eyes open and quite unable to see. There there was the rough crash on the turf and the return of vision from light to blackness and up through grey to normal light."

Two years ago Sid Halley crashed during a horse race and horse shoes made razor thin by use sliced up his left arm like roast beef at the deli counter. The doctors wanted to take his arm, but he insisted that they sew it up and hope for the best.

The best turned out to be an arm so deformed that people can't bear to look at it and can't bear to look away. Sid learns to hide his hand in his pocket. His days as a championship steeplechase jockey are over. He has a friend give him a job in his detective agency out of pity or with the hopes to put him back on his feet? Sid isn't sure, but he is itching to get back to feeling useful.

The novel begins with Sid recovering from a bullet wound to his stomach. His first stakeout did not go very well. His wife has left him, but his father-in-law the Admiral, who didn't want him in the first place, is sticking with him. It seems like when things start going wrong for someone they keep going wrong. Sid barely has time to recover from one disaster before another is staring him in the face.

Sid finds himself saddled with a nonexistent personal life, but hopes that throwing himself into a case will at least keep him occupied. He starts investigating a series of mishaps at a local racetrack. This quickly escalates into a scam worth millions and when things are worth millions people who get in the way start to

get hurt. Sid can't clear all the jumps that have been put in front of him. Desperate to help, and motivated by the natural tenacity that made him such a great jockey lands him at the mercy of a trio of crooks who enjoy administering pain to cripples.

And when they are beautiful it somehow lends more pain to the process.

"Doria Kraye stood there, maliciously triumphant. She was dressed theatrically in white slender trousers and a shiny short white jacket. Her dark hair fell smoothly, her face was as flawlessly beautiful as ever: and she held rock steady in one elegant long-fingered hand the little .22 automatic I had last seen in a chocolate box at the bottom of her dressing-case."

'The end of the line, buddy boy,' she said."

Sid does meet a woman who doesn't wish to be as beautiful as Doria Kraye, but she does wish that she could be normal, just plain would be fine. Fire has turned a portion of Zanna's face into a dreadful mess. She can't just hide her face in her pocket like Sid can his hand.

The interesting part that Dick Francis explores so deftly in this novel is the way people react to deformity. It brings out the absolute worst in some people by inspiring mystifying hatred or a smothering bout of pity or a chilling abhorrence when all anyone wants who has suffered some crippling accident is to be treated normal. Zanna moves her desk at work so the good side of her face is what people see. Even though she can't see her face, she can see her face in the eyes of the people who notice the burns. The blanched expressions and the looks of horror never allow her to forget.

I used to believe that people who suffering these crippling injuries will eventually adjust and they do, but unfortunately the people that they see day in and day out do not ever allow them to just move on. They have to deal with the reactions to their injuries every day. Unless a person is strong willed their injury will end up defining them.

Even when they have lost their jockey some of the horses want to finish the race.

It has been a long time since I've read Dick Francis, too long. I enjoy horse racing, although I mostly stick to The Triple Crown of racing and the big races leading up to those events. I did recently, almost by accident, watch a steeplechase race from England on television. It was fascinating. The jumps, the jockeys who get thrown, and the horses that continue to run the race without their jockeys. I had never seen anything like it before. I don't know how they keep enough steeplechase jockeys ambulatory to keep having races. That bit of fortuitous channel flipping did plant the seed back in my mind to read the Sid Halley series by Francis. I'd never read them, but always heard they were excellent. Next in the series is *Whip Hand* which many fervent Francis fans consider to be his best book. I for one can't wait!

Christopher Woitach says

I have read every Dick Francis book, here is what they have to offer:

Great characters

Excellent stories

Well thought out plots

Great books!

Chip says

The first of the wonderful Sid Halley books ... my favorites of the Dick Francis horse racing mystery thrillers - perhaps because of the damaged (in this case, literally) nature of the hero protagonist?

E.P. says

In "Odds Against," Francis's fourth fictional outing, he takes a decidedly darker turn. Although not lacking in evil villains, both "Dead Cert" and "For Kicks" had a strong aspect of glamorous wish fulfillment, and so, in its own way, did "Nerve." Alan, Rob, and Daniel all had tough times, sure, but overall they were living lives other people think they would want to lead. In "Odds Against," though, Francis creates for the first--but not the last--time a hero whose life is decidedly unaspirational, and in doing so, introduces his most long-running hero and a theme that would haunt much of his works: what do you do when the thing you most want is taken away from you, and you still have a lot of life left to live?

Sid Halley was a champion steeplechase jockey until a riding accident left him with a crippled hand and a bitter mind. He drags himself into his new job, acquired for him by his father-in-law, as a dogsbody at a private investigative firm, until one day he gets shot. While convalescing, he is once again dragged by his father-in-law into a mystery that will turn out to be much bigger than either of them expected. Sid will have to come to terms with who he really is.

Francis had a long fascination with the physically and mentally damaged, and Sid is his first, and most prominent, overtly disabled character. Still identifying as a jockey three years after the accident took place, he doesn't know what to do with himself or what to get up for in the morning, until the villains make the mistake of not taking him seriously. He discovers that he is tough, fearless, and likes to win--no surprises there, but it turns out he is tough, fearless, and likes to win off the racecourse as well as on it--but that most people fail to see this in him, something he learns to use to his advantage.

Although there's plenty of action here, and of course a tightly constructed plot that keeps you guessing till the end, the real suspense is in what Sid will do. Will he give up and go away, as he wants to? Or is he going to come back fighting? As Sid himself doesn't know and is quite astonished at times at his own behavior, it's impossible for the reader to guess (although of course we know how these books end, but still...), and the double tension drives the book forward to its nail-biting conclusion. "Odds Against" is not for the super-squeamish or fainthearted, as Sid's injuries are pretty extensive, but it heralds a new step forward in Francis's writing and now, more than 40 years after it was first published, is still fresh and shocking.

Tamia Burt says

I've reread this one countless times. And I never tire of it. The characters and plotting completely satisfy every time.

James Love says

Mix equal parts of Agatha Christie, Eric Ambler, Graham Greene and Leslie Charteris. Shake well. And garnish with a dash of Grey and L'Amour.

Dick Francis is the perfect author for an enjoyable reading experience. His characters remind me of watching the old Roger Moore Saint TV show or the Margaret Rutherford Miss Marple movies... just good clean fun.

Carol says

Second Read: Sid Halley is a most interesting character. Having not read one since 2011, I was quite delighted to have found a copy and was able to read it. Going to keep hunting. My Mom was a huge Dick Francis fan and she introduced him to me. We were both hooked and really enjoyed it. This was like being with an old friend and it was most enjoyable. One of the few characters champion jockey-turned-racetrack mystery writer Dick Francis has ever written more than one novel about is champion jockey-turned-racetrack private eye SID HALLEY. When his left hand is crippled in a racing accident, Halley is devastated. It's a fall from grace. Unable to face a future without racing, he takes up self-pity. Fortunately, his ex-father-in-law steps in and cons Sid into investigating some shady goings-on at a racetrack he has an interest in.

It turns out to be the boot in the arse Sid needs. Discovering he has a knack for detective work, he sets himself up as a private investigator, sometimes assisted by boyhood chum and sometime-judo instructor Chico Barnes. The crippled, introspective, moody Halley and the rough-and-tumble, happy-go-lucky Barnes are a memorable team.

Francis captures perfectly the fears, insecurities and the vulnerability of a one-handed man in a two-handed world. In a society that worships the beautiful, the deformed are the true outsiders, watching from outside the circle of light, nursing their pain and resentment, hiding their hurt like so much shame, watching. It's a toss-up as to who's the better one-armed dick -- Halley or Michael Collins' Dan Fortune.

In 1978, a British television series based on the characters created in Odds Against appeared, entitled The Racing Game. Francis served as a consultant and was very impressed with the young, one-handed actor, Michael Gwilym, who played Sid Halley. So impressed that he wrote a sequel, 1979's Whip Hand, and dedicated it to Gwilym. Many, including this author, consider it to be his best book.

And in 1995, for the first time in his career, Francis wrote a third book about the same character. Come to Grief brought us a much scarred Halley, coming to grips with his own mortality and limitations -- when a very close friend becomes the main suspect in a nasty case he's working on, involving the deliberate mutilation of racehorses. It's a troubling and disturbing read, but also a powerful one, and it nabbed Francis an unprecedented third Edgar nomination -- the only time three consecutive books in a series have each been nominated for an Edgar. Although Odds Against (his first nomination) lost, both Whip Hand and Come to Grief did win, the latter the same year he won the Grand Master award.

Unfortunately, Come to Grief was to be the last novel Francis would be able to complete with the assistance of his beloved wife and partner, Mary, who passed away in 2000. The 1999 unauthorised biography, Dick Francis: A Racing Life, had suggested that Francis' books had in fact been written by Mary herself, although Francis never confirmed the rumours. Certainly, though, Mary did do much of the research and editing of

Francis' novels and stories, particularly the latter efforts.

After Mary's death, it was widely believed that *Come to Grief* would be Francis' final novel, but in September 2006 readers were treated to the unexpected appearances of a fourth Halley novel. Under Orders found Halley back on his feet (after the events of 1995's *Come to Grief*) and, if anything, more determined than ever.

First Read: I always enjoy reading a good Dick Francis novel. I really enjoy the Sid Halley series too. This is the first of them, and I really was glued to the book and didn't hardly move it was so good to me. 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. I'm not a gambler, but I really enjoy watching them live, as well as on screen. There is a certain excitement that I don't find in many other places.

Algernon says

probably the best known thriller by Dick Francis, the introduction of Sid Halley - steeplechase jockey turned private investigator. It contains all the trademark aspects of Mr. Francis heroes and plot development, still fresh close to the start of his writing career

Lauren says

This is an old-fashioned delight: a taut, well-plotted novel that's grounded in competence, suspense, and nitty-gritty professional details. While also being laid-back and pleasant. This was my first Francis, but it definitely won't be my last.

Sid Halley used to be a jockey until his hand was badly mangled in a fall--Francis alludes to what a sharp horseshoe and a horse's full weight can do to you, and it's not pretty--and since then, he's been drifting through life without fully participating in it. He's wound up as a consultant in a large PI firm that frequently deals with racetrack security and related matters, but he basically goes through the building like a ghost. Until, that is, the opening of the novel, where a case has gotten him gut-shot. This time, his recovery will be a little more eventful and a little more engaging.

His father-in-law--he's separated from his wife, but maintains an excellent, genuinely warm relationship with her father--invites him to do some of his recuperation at his country house, where it turns out he has a plan to give Sid something to do in his recovery. Seabury, a fading racecourse, might not be fading so naturally. Rather, it might be being sabotaged repeatedly so that it will lose business and shareholders will be inclined to sell, leaving one particularly nasty creature named Krave to buy up all the shares and then turn the land over to developers. And so Sid finds himself once again with a purpose, ferreting out the scheme and the people behind it and at least providing Seabury with a chance to save itself.

Come on, that's fun. And Sid is eminently likable--matter-of-fact about his shortness, annoyed by his inability to eat anything but beef broth while his stomach is healing, self-conscious about his hand, smart, capable, and slowly putting his life back together. I actually kind of do think they don't make these like they used to, so if you like, say, old school Robert Parker or John D. MacDonald and would also like them if they were British, a little more mild-mannered, and set around a bunch of horses, you will like this.

Hana says

Sid Halley used to be a jockey, one of the greats. He used to be alive.

Now he merely drifts in a job at that he thinks was given to him out of pity; pity for a cripple with a deformed and useless hand. Then a two-bit crook takes a pot shot at Halley who winds up, once again, in a hospital. On leave, visiting with the father of his ex-wife, Halley is drawn into a complex investigation of financial fraud, crooked real estate deals and race track politics. Along the way he will learn to confront his debility and rediscover the will to live.

There are moments of pure terror, terrific characters and a clever, twisty plot, but what makes this one is a five star is how Francis dissects the instinctive human reaction to disability, to physical ugliness--and to being disabled--with unflinching candor and a sensitivity that never becomes maudlin or manipulative. Highly recommended even for those who rarely read adventure or detective stories.

This might be my all-time favorite Dick Francis and Sid Halley is his most inspiring hero. Fortunately, there are three more in the series: Whip Hand, Come to Grief and Under Orders, all excellent.

Content rating PG for violence, and two particularly sadistic and twisted villains.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

Quite advanced for its time, really. Sid Halley, an ex-jockey, is a doubly damaged anti-hero: not only does he have a smashed hand that leaves him partially disabled, he was abandoned by his mother as a toddler. After his riding career is over, he is offered a job as an investigator but his emotional scars keep him from doing much, until he meets someone as wounded as himself. Halley is a typical Francis drifter-through-life, emotionally isolated but still financially comfortable enough to know the rules of Sloane Rangerdom and enjoy rubbing shoulders with the rich.

Though his wife left him early on, his ex-father in law still has him round to the big house occasionally, and this time it's to try and kickstart his interest in life again through investigating the dodgy dealings of a wide boy with perverted sexual tastes. Unfortunately, this character isn't really revealed; I felt Francis could have done a lot more with Krave (yup, same name as the famous murdering twins) and his past. This is the first appearance in a Francis novel of the twisted appetites that later became standard fare for the baddies--was this Francis' idea, or the publishers', I wonder? Sid comes in for a lot of physical abuse--to the place that I wondered how he lived through it, but according to Francis' autobiographies all jockeys have amazing powers of healing--or they retire early.

One thing I did notice was the odd surnames given those in power: the dilatory Lord Hagborne (born to a hag, was he?) and Captain Oxon, who in my head quickly morphed into Captain Oxo!

A quick read and a welcome change after For Kicks which I have so far been unable to finish because I find it too full of deadwood.

Joe Noir says

The very first Sid Halley novel, and one of Dick Francis' best.

Sid Halley, the former jockey with the disfigured, nearly useless hand, a failed marriage, and a job as a private investigator. He's not really required to do any work, and he does precious little. Until his ex-father in law pushes him out of depression and into action.

Action, suspense, insight into both horse racing and human nature. Evil villains, sadistic violence, a few deft twists. All in all a thumping good read.

Halley would be featured in four novels by Francis, and a fifth by Francis' son Felix.

Odds Against would earn Francis his first Edgar Award nomination for best novel. The next Halley novel, Whip Hand, would earn Francis the Edgar and the CWA Gold Dagger.

Look for the Pocket paperback editions with the cover art, usually depicting a scene of violence from the novel, divided up into cubes with a couple missing; like missing pieces of a puzzle. Those are my favorites, and give the reader a great sense of the action.

Babette says

This was my first Dick Francis book. I have been avoiding them for a long time - even though my mother was a keen advocate. In browsing the shelves of Foul Play last winter, my favorite mystery bookshop in Columbus, Ohio, I found Odds Against. Since it is the first in the Sid Halley series, I decided to get my feet wet. I am glad I did.

My long avoidance of Dick Francis was my belief that the backdrop of horse racing would be a detractor for me, even though I was born in blue grass country. There was some jargon in this book that I didn't understand, but the characters and their relationships are what won me over. Sid Halley has experienced a good amount of misfortune in his life, and the book opens at such a time - he has just been shot.

His recovery is slow, but brings with it significant life changes, one of which is his first case.

I am eager to read about the next one.

Vickie says

I think this is my favorite character in all of the Dick Francis mysteries. I read this years and years ago after my dad introduced me to the world that Dick Francis wrote about. I think there are three books with Sid as

the main character, but this one is the best. He takes what has happened to him and makes it work instead of letting it rule his life.

Excellent mystery set in the horse racing world.

Definitely recommend.

James Adams says

A fast, fun read, well up to the usual Francis standards.

Sid Halley, former jockey, has been working for a P.I. firm since his final race, which cost him the use of a hand. He had only been marking time until being shot during an ambush. He's given a big case involving racecourses that leads him to truly become an investigator, but at great cost.

Halley is a fantastic hero, sardonic and pragmatic, and the support characters are all swell. The mystery is properly twisty, and there is some rather nasty action as well.

All in all, this is a fine read, perfect for Francis fans as well as any mystery readers wanting to see what this author is all about.

An Odd1 says

Re-read much Francis. Scary when warped sadistic couple attack his already deformed hand. I've never even been to a horse race, but Francis has a knack - Dick, not son. I'm planning to work my way up (down?) series (again).

Sid Halley narrates rough recuperation. Fall as jockey deformed left hand, so he has "worked" for two years, hanging around cramped PI firm for Hunt Radnor 71 p 225. His former father-in-law Admiral Charles Roland believes sadistic Howard Kraye ~50 "rotten underneath" p 33 sabotages racecourses, now Seabury, to take them over cheap, sell to developers.

With tiny camera, Sid photographs Kraye's private papers on a country weekend at Oxfordshire where host Charles pretends to criticize Sid. Kraye "dangerous big-time crook" p 56 and wife Doria share deviant love of torture, pain, hurt Sid's hand.

Kraye also steals most rare expensive quartz sample borrowed just to get guests. Luckily Sid advised Charles to get insurance. Couldn't they report theft later and get rock back? (view spoiler)

Oxon drugs guards, even stable lads, "fast asleep" p 183 with free beer. At night alone, villains chase Sid around deserted Seabury building. Chico Barnes waits by phone at boss Hunt's home.

In silence, "soft single cough" p 194 draws Sid to tap, leaking, scalding hot. Boiler is set to blow in three hours. Actually less. Oxon miscalculated. (view spoiler)

In side-plot, nasty lawyer Ellis Bolt has secretary Zanna Martin "late thirties" p 105. Accident from "rocket" p 107 firecracker at 16 makes her "shy lonely spinster" p 105. She agrees to turn desk around toward door so clients see her badly disfigured face, false eye, *if* Sid keeps useless left hand out of his pocket. She kicks him out before dinner when he admits his real identity. (view spoiler)

James Thane says

This book introduces Sid Halley who, if memory serves, is the only protagonist that Dick Francis ever used more than once. Halley was a very successful jockey until he fell from a horse which trampled his left hand, abruptly ending his career. He accepts a job with a detective agency that has a racing division, but he spends a couple of years simply hanging around the office without being given any meaningful assignments. But he's willing to go with the flow, or the not-flow, as the case may be, because he's still trying to figure out what his future is going to be now that the one thing he really loved has been taken from him.

Things take a turn for the worse when one of the detectives in the office asks Halley to assist him in a minor sting and Halley winds up being shot. Now he has a crippled hand and a ventilated stomach, which will take some time to heal. His wealthy father-in-law asks Sid to visit over a weekend and Halley agrees to do so. (Sid's wife has left him, which is not at all uncommon for a protagonist in a Dick Francis novel, but he's still on good terms with her father.)

The father-in-law has an ulterior motive, which Halley soon discovers. The other weekend guests are a particularly obnoxious man and his equally disagreeable wife who enjoys being knocked about while having sex. Without telling Halley what he's up to, the father-in-law cleverly manipulates things so that Halley will wind up investigating the disagreeable guest.

The bad guy is apparently involved in a nasty scheme to sabotage a race course so that he can gain a controlling interest and turn the place into a housing development. Well, of course, we can't allow something that horrifying to happen, but once Halley is on the job, a lot of other very horrifying things will happen--most all of them to him.

Dick Francis is a very dependable author who almost always tells an interesting tale that moves swiftly along, and this book is certainly no exception. Although the protagonists do vary in nearly every book, there is a certain formula at work in these novels, and the principal characters are almost always of a type. That's certainly not a problem, and any fan of the series will want to look for this entry.
