

Jonathan Harding on what racing fans can expect

# A legendary story imaginatively retold

**B**Y NOW the majority of racing fans must surely be aware of Frankel and his remarkable story. After all, he is the horse against whom all others are inevitably judged following his 14-race unbeaten career.

He became the undisputed poster boy of British racing while putting every challenger of his generation to the sword between 2010 and 2012, and he continues to add to his legacy as the sire of superstars such as the indomitable Cracksman and St Leger winner Logician.

His exploits on the track are well documented and his powerful running style was as familiar to us as Roger Federer's backhand or Jonny Wilkinson's conversions. With this in mind, the onus was on Simon Cooper to provide a fresh perspective in this book.

It was a tall order for anybody but the author rises to the challenge by focusing on the first-hand stories and small details behind the legend of the horse, which is mostly concerned with his invincibility.

Cooper paints a complete picture of Frankel, charting his meteoric rise from the first years of his life through to his glorious send-off when winning the Champion Stakes at Ascot.

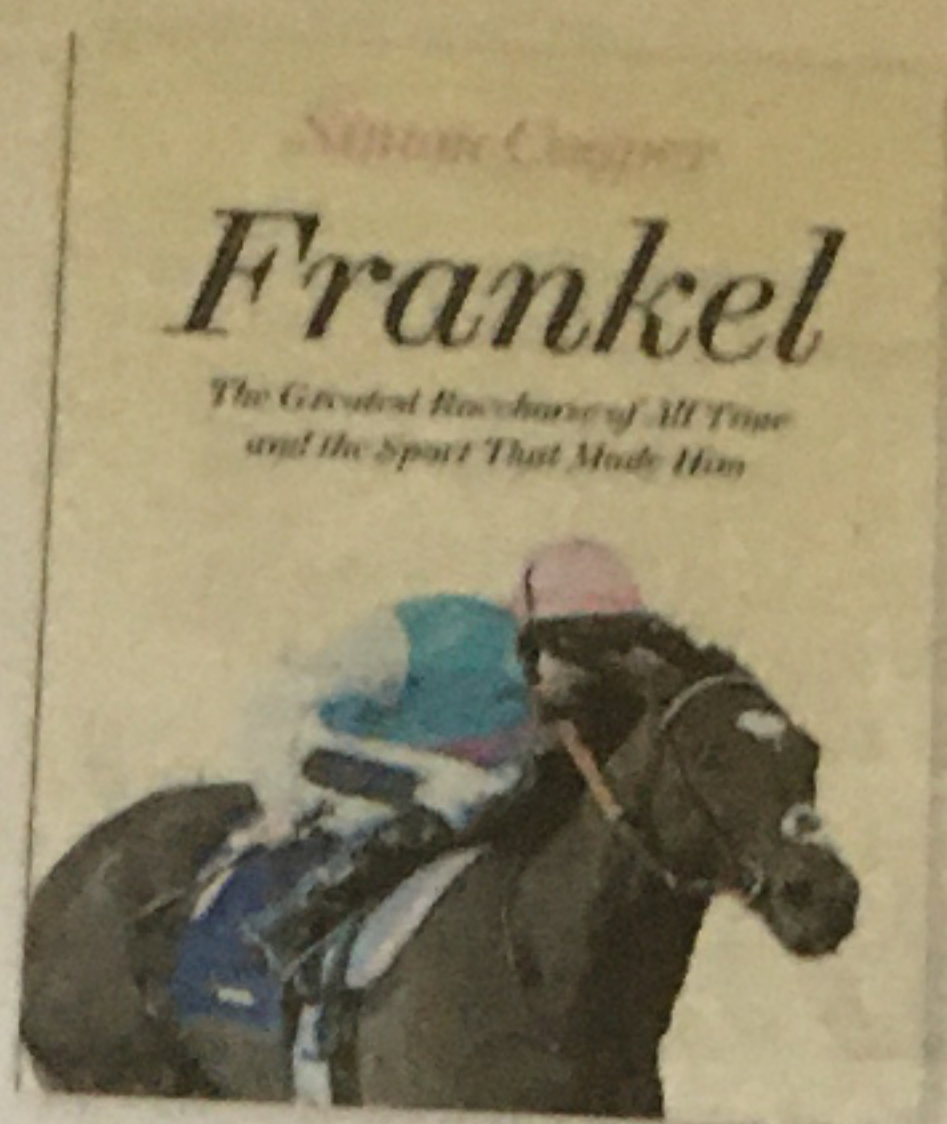
This takes the form of a pilgrimage. The author visits the studs and tracks that staged Frankel's story, transporting the reader with his vivid descriptions, such as the "dusty-pink mock Tudor, faux Elizabethan house" that was once home to Sir Henry Cecil.

He sprinkles the narrative with stories of Frankel's legendary trainer, his jockey Tom Queally, who was on board for every race, the grooms who learned to cope with his explosive nature and his owner Khalid Abdullah, who thankfully kept him in training for three years.

After a brief prologue, the book begins with Cooper visiting Frankel at Banstead Manor Stud. He writes that he tried not to elevate it to a semi-religious experience, adding that it would be "the wrong side of sane" to equate meeting a racehorse to an audience with the Pope.

Whether he manages this is a matter for debate. Cooper conveys an obvious affection for Frankel and he dwells on the smallest details of their meeting, such as his fear that just patting him on the neck seemed a "small and fleeting gesture" when greeting a true great.

This visit provides a useful starting point for his account of Frankel's early life and he carefully guides us through the often testing maze of bloodstock and all of its associated jargon as we learn about the histories of Juddmonte, Coolmore and the super sire Galileo.



## Frankel: The Greatest Racehorse of All Time and the Sport That Made Him by Simon Cooper, Harper Collins, £20

The story moves seamlessly to Frankel's arrival at Cecil's Warren Place in January 2010 and the author introduces his groom Sandeep Gauravaram, or Sandy, who may have looked after a handicapper had Cecil not told him to wait for "the pick of the Prince's arrivals".

Racing fans are a famously nostalgic bunch and all of Frankel's greatest hits are covered, with his scarcely believable success in the 2,000 Guineas and his famous Duel on the Downs with Canford Cliffs rightly afforded their own chapters.

While he is undeniably the star of the show, this book is about so much more than just Frankel and its author succeeds in producing an intimate portrait of his trainer and his battle with cancer. This is exemplified by his passage on Frankel's penultimate victory at York.

Cooper captures the crowd's affection as Cecil stood with his pride and joy in the winner's enclosure: "The full-throated appreciation adds a sort of poignancy. Everyone knows the sands of time are running out for both, in different ways and to different places."

It was a moment that went down in racing folklore but the best thing about this book is the space reserved for less fabled moments, such as the journey back from York, when Cecil and head lass Dee Deacon stopped at a Little Chef to reflect on their achievement over a cup of tea and watch the sunset from the comfort of a concrete bench.

An emotional journey comes to an end with another visit to Banstead Manor and the author telling Frankel he was grateful to have known him. Thanks to Cooper, and his dedication to colouring in the blanks in this famous story, we can now know Frankel a little better too.