

## Worthy of status like Rumpole

### Rough Justice

Victor Kline

Frances Allen Ltd, \$7.99, ebook \$2.99

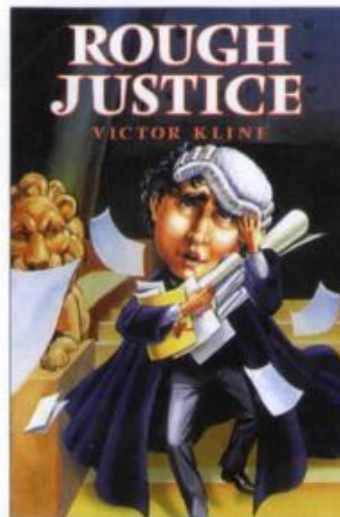
review by Peter Fagan

This is a gem of a book, set in 1960s Sydney and country New South Wales. The story focuses on the professional and personal woes of Felicio Tagg, "arguably the country's most incompetent barrister" and his hilarious mishaps with judges, clients, crooks and their cohorts.

A simple divorce brief runs feral and has Felicio in hot pursuit of evidence to kick-start his career. In accepting a brief from close ally James Fortescue, Felicio's career takes a turn for the worse, exposing him to the legal quagmires of fraud, arson and defamation, all clouded in his incompetence and misfortune. His kind nature and naivety land him in compromising situations as his professional and personal lives become entangled. Characters emerge and sub-plots develop. The result is an original storyline which traverses the culture of large corporate law firms, rural society and the inner sanctum of both Felicio's pitiful existence in basement-level chambers and the pinnacle of chambers' life led by James Fortescue. Though friends, the two are polar opposites, Felicio's clients "demanding a refund or a punch up" while James is the "unofficial greatest of the great".

With an undercurrent of humour, the twists and turns in the story touch on themes of snobbery, greed, and some disparity in the justice system. Clever sub-plots teetering in the background help create suspense and, although the mood varies according to the theme, the writer maintains the comic value.

Just when you think the tide is turning for Felicio, with his love



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life prospering and demands for his services on the rise, through one mishap or another he comes crashing back down, facing the "bottom of the barristerial barrel". The further Felicio sinks into the mire, the more support you feel for him. By the end, you are firmly on his side. The ending also leaves the door open for future tales, with you wanting more of the hapless but loveable Felicio.

The book's main strength is its eloquent prose and humour. It is also set in a different era, and it's interesting to ponder the social values that existed 50 years ago. It was an era when women were restricted in entering pubs and clubs. The story also discreetly raises constitutional issues that are curious to consider retrospectively.

In the genre of legal fiction, this book is worthy of classic status alongside *Rumpole of the Bailey*. First published in 1994, it is now available as an epub and is light, highly entertaining and full of chuckles for lawyers and others. □