

Shrap Nelson

Rough Justice

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Discussion Topics

Choose your book below to download the accompanying discussion guide.

Be warned! There are spoilers in the guides, so make sure you've finished reading the book first.

Book 1: *Rough Justice*

1. **Trauma, Survivor's Guilt, and the Transition to Civvy Street** Explore Shrap's battle with severe **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** and survivor's guilt following the IED explosion in Kabul that killed her Military Police unit. How does her choice to sleep rough on the streets of London function as both a coping mechanism and a self-imposed punishment to remain **invisible**?
2. **Institutional Bias and Media Perception** Examine how both law enforcement and the media rapidly frame **Doug Romberg** as the prime suspect in Bianca Rubik's murder due to his status as a homeless veteran. How do societal prejudices surrounding rough sleepers and sex workers distort the initial police investigation and hinder the search for the truth?
3. **The Unspoken Bond of Military Brotherhood** Analyze the profound connection between Shrap and Doug, established when Doug prevented her from committing suicide on a station platform.

How does her deep sense of military loyalty to clear her late friend's name compel her to re-engage with society and utilize her investigative skills despite her fragile mental health?

4. **Official Procedure versus Off-the-Books Justice** Contrast **DC Gareth Trevelyan's** procedural, evidence-bound approach to justice with Shrap's unrestricted, off-the-books methods. Does the formal legal system inherently disadvantage vulnerable victims like Bianca and Doug without informal intervention?
5. **Class Privilege and the Unmasking of Annie Pincher** Deconstruct the climax revealing **Annie Pincher**—a respectable, high-society partner's wife—as the perpetrator who murdered Bianca out of rage and subsequently killed Doug to eliminate a witness. How does the narrative highlight the sharp contrast between middle-class respectability and street-level criminality?

Discussion Guide

1. Trauma, Survivor's Guilt, and the Transition to Civvy Street

- **Military Trauma:** Shrap previously served in the Royal Engineers and later the Special Investigations Branch (SIB) of the Royal Military Police. Her unit's vehicle was destroyed by an IED in Kabul, incinerating her teammates, while she was captured, tortured, and abandoned on a frozen road.
- **Survivor's Guilt:** Suffering from severe PTSD, Shrap experiences constant flashbacks, phantom pains, and internal "screams," viewing her survival as an unfair burden and wishing she had perished alongside her team.
- **Sleeping Rough as Punishment & Shield:** Living on the London streets acts as a self-imposed punishment for surviving. The constant background noise of the city drowns out her internal trauma, while her unkempt appearance makes her "invisible" to society so no one can witness her fear or shame.

2. Institutional Bias and Media Perception

- **Sensationalist Media Framing:** Headlines rapidly brand Doug Romberg as "HOMELESS MAN MURDERS SEX WORKER," painting him as a dangerous, unstable vagrant without verifying facts.
- **Police Tunnel Vision:** Southwark CID and DCI Burrows accept Doug's guilt quickly because his fingerprints/DNA are found at the scene and CCTV shows him fleeing.
- **Misconceptions About the Victim:** Law enforcement initially reduces Bianca Rubik to a street-level sex worker. In reality, Bianca was a trained classical dancer, Open University law student, and mother saving money to bring her young son over from Poland.

3. The Unspoken Bond of Military Brotherhood

- **The Platform Incident:** Doug Romberg—a Grenadier Guards veteran who deserted 20 years earlier—saved Shrap's life by physically pulling her back when she was about to jump in front of a train.
- **A Shared Code:** Bound by their military background and mutual understanding of life on the streets, Doug becomes her only true friend.
- **Re-engaging for Justice:** When Doug is framed for Bianca's murder and subsequently murdered himself (knocked unconscious and burned to death), Shrap's military sense of duty compels her to act. She sheds her anonymity, cleans up her appearance, and deploys her investigative skills to clear his name.

4. Official Procedure versus Off-the-Books Justice

- **Procedural Limitations:** DC Gareth Trevelyan is constrained by Met protocols, strict departmental budgets, and DCI Burrows' push to close cases quickly.
- **Unrestricted Tactics:** Shrap operates outside the law, using street-level surveillance, lock-picking, and military intelligence contacts (Trevor Campbell).
- **Filling Systemic Gaps:** Without Shrap's off-the-books investigation, the police would have permanently closed the dockets with Doug framed as a murderer who committed suicide. Shrap uncovers Bianca's true background and the affair with Gregory Pincher, ultimately forcing Trevelyan to uncover the real killer.

5. Class Privilege and the Unmasking of Annie Pincher

- **The Reality of High Society:** Annie Pincher lives in a Grade II listed Georgian home in Hampstead Heath, married to a Deloitte partner.
- **The True Motive:** Discovering her husband Gregory's affair with Bianca, Annie tracked Bianca down, offered her a ride in her Porsche, and choked her to death using a handbag strap to protect her social standing.
- **Callous Disregard:** When she realized Doug Romberg witnessed the murder, she tracked him down, knocked him out, doused him in his own whiskey, and set him on fire, callously dismissing him as "a bum [whom] nobody cares about". This highlights that the narrative's true savagery stemmed from middle-class entitlement rather than street-level vagrancy.