



Terminal Life: A Suited Hero

Richard Torregrossa

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A sharp hero and his strong motivations pulls this noir story along at a swift pace.

Richard Torregrossa's *Terminal Life* delivers a down-and-out protagonist who, even though he's a vet who lives in a Brooklyn shelter, wears a well-tailored suit that makes him feel like a superhero. Along with wearing this expensive sartorial treasure, Stark carries a Metro card sharpened on one end to cut like the blade of a knife. Not exactly your typical noir antihero.

Stark is fighting to avenge his wife's murder, his testosterone runs on high, and his cynicism makes it difficult for him to feel anything but anger and hostility. He doesn't simply sneer at danger, he embraces it with a self-destructive gusto that fits nicely into the noir framework. Not only does he put himself in life-and-death situations, but he's also an Afghanistan vet with Hodgkin's lymphoma, and he refuses to receive treatment. Even the prospect of reuniting with his seven-year-old son can not steer him into treatment or away from seeking to avenge his wife's death.

Stark's Uncle Paulie runs a prescription-drug ring and is responsible for a large portion of the bedlam that keeps Stark's nerves on end, though, at times, the book falls into stereotypical mobster characterizations and dialogue. Along with the run-of-the-mill mob boss, there's the sidekick—a downtrodden drunkard Stark knows from his war tour—and a blond beauty who now enters his life. And with Stark being a combination of Dirty Harry and Jason Bourne dressed in a suit, there is not much that goes beyond the generic noir thriller.

Lovers of violence and car chases won't be disappointed, though. As a special-forces trained covert killer, Stark moves through his journey of vengeance one body at a time, without guilt or regret. Torregrossa gives Stark moments of softness, but not many. He's the type of guy who won't ever exhaust all the ways there are to "off" someone.

Torregrossa has a solid grasp of pacing and shows a superb finesse with language. The chapters are short and the scenes are concise, pulling the reader along. The author makes use of his knowledge of martial arts and combat skills, bringing to life the fight scenes. *Terminal Life* won't disappoint.

MONICA CARTER (Summer 2014)

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