

Terminal Secret

Mark Gilleo

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Featuring a unique, creative plot that is sure to keep audiences guessing, Terminal Secret is an enthralling murder mystery.

Terminal Secret by Mark Gilleo is a gripping and delightful fast-paced murder mystery. Set in Washington, D.C., the novel focuses on two seemingly unrelated homicides. The first, an investigation of the murder of a local attorney on her own doorstep, is helmed by seasoned detective Earl Wallace and his rookie partner, Emily Fields. Dan Lord, a local attorney turned private investigator, is concurrently hired by a congressman's wife to discover the killer of her ex-partner, an army veteran who suffered from addiction issues.

Both investigations are ostensibly cut-and-dried, but matters become more complicated when a medical examiner reveals that stranger forces are to blame for the string of recent deaths. Danger ensues as more details come to light and the two investigations merge. A dark secret is uncovered, and Lord, Fields, and Wallace must contend with its repercussions or risk losing their own lives in the struggle for the truth.

Character development is fascinating, providing a very real look at the difficulties of trying to survive a harrowing past while contending with an even more frightening future. For example, though they are at vastly different places in their professional and personal lives, detectives Wallace and Fields bond over a desire to transcend their rough pasts. This isn't stated outright; instead, the pair develop an affinity for each other through a series of humorous interactions and poignant moments.

The book maintains good momentum. Characters and settings are introduced quickly, but without anything becoming predictable. The tone of the text matches the urgency of the crimes.

New and bizarre details, motives, and characters appear throughout the text, furthering the feeling that much larger forces are at play. For example, the discovery that terminally ill cancer patients are a connecting factor of the investigations topples earlier notions that the killings and random deaths are just singular instances of crime or misfortune.

The energetic text is aided by sharp, concise word choice and deliberate syntax. Action is plentiful, but the story does not suffer because of it. Prose is laden with rich imagery that seamlessly evokes the feelings of dread and disorientation caused by the discovery of many murders. Though an easy read, the skill employed in keeping the story moving coherently while maintaining a plethora of twists and turns is admirable.

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AMANDA ADAMS (September 28, 2017)

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