



A Peace without Honor: Sin and Retribution I

Adalbert Lallier

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In the late 1990s, Adalbert Lallier, a professor of economics at Concordia University in Montreal, became a minor celebrity by acknowledging that he had served in the Nazi Waffen-SS during World War II and by testifying against his former commanding officer. That officer was convicted of war crimes in 2001.

In this fictional thriller set in the unsettled post-Vietnam era of the 1970s, Lallier explores the violence that men do in the name of war, honor, and personal vengeance and the consequences that all too often are suffered by innocent civilians. As the novel opens, a Vietnamese student, scarred by personal losses inflicted by the United States military, plots a terrorist attack on a US military base. Additional attacks follow, and soon agents of the FBI and other government agencies are embroiled in a desperate hunt for the perpetrators and their leaders.

The shadow of the attacks of September 11, 2001, seems to hang over this novel, as if the author had started out by wondering what might have happened in the 1970s if covert foreign agents had adopted the tactics of organized, coordinated terrorism that al-Qaeda used a generation later. The response of the US government in Lallier's fiction, in which tireless investigation and determined pursuit are mixed with confused inertia, political posturing, and misdirected aggression, seems to reinforce this parallel.

The exciting and intriguing plot is unfortunately weighed down by the author's somewhat stilted and long-winded prose and by his overt editorializing about the morality of the characters and their actions. It's always better to show than to tell, as the adage goes. Lallier often introduces his characters with chapter-length biographical profiles along with commentary about their personalities, moral philosophies, and sexual habits.

It can become frustrating to the reader when many of these characters are then summarily disposed of before contributing more than a few pages of action toward the plot. This may be one of the ways in which Lallier seeks to show the wastefulness and destruction of violence; nonetheless, it interferes with the pace of the story and is a questionable choice.

A Peace Without Honor is a mixed bag. It is a thriller with a strong and interesting plot that is burdened by the way the author handles the characters. It is also a moral meditation on the self-perpetuating destructiveness of war, but it does not offer a solution to the problem.

The subtitle, *Sin and Retribution I*, suggests that this book is part of a series. However, based on the description on the publisher's website, what would appear to be the second novel in the series, *Sin and Retribution II*, does not involve the same characters or situations. It does, however, appear to deal with similar themes involving the complex relationship between human nature and violence, a relationship about which Lallier demonstrates an abiding personal concern.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (May 30, 2013)

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