

A modern retelling of a knight's tale

Disturbing the Peace

P.D. LaFleur

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Heroes come in many shapes and sizes. In *Disturbing the Peace*, they are of middle age and approaching the ends of their careers. Lawrence Garrison, one hero in P.D. LaFleur's latest novel, is coming to grips with his own mortality, sees beauty and value in every human soul, and has vowed, for reasons of regret, to look after the needs of others before those of his own.

Emilio Fortino is another hero but of a different stripe. Like Garrison, he faces his own mortality. He also seeks peace in a world gone mad and pursues redemption for a recent failure that nearly cost his life. Both are noble creatures in their own ways, and both share a sense of honor and duty. The difference is this: Garrison is sheriff of a rural county in central Florida; Fortino is a hired operative and professional assassin.

The setting of the novel is as unlikely as the two central characters. Dodge County, a fictional swath of Florida that recalls the state's heritage as pioneering cattle territory, is far from the Florida we know from travel brochures and theme parks. It is a hot, flat and, to many outsiders, unattractive and unforgiving. The people who populate Dodge County are generally poorer and less educated, but less tainted by the faux world of gated communities and high-rise condos that dot the shoreline. The *Peace* of the title refers in part to the Peace River, an actual meandering waterway that flows from mid-Florida to the Gulf of Mexico.

Fortino, who retired to a villa in the hills of central Italy, has been called back into service by a group of exiles from Chechnya, the oil-rich but war-torn Russian province. His last assignment was a disaster, and it is his urgent wish to end his

career on a high note that lures him to consider working for the Chechen exiles. After some initial reluctance, he agrees to devise a scheme that will pressure Moscow to grant important concessions to the down-trodden and brutalized Chechen people. It is a simple plan, and Fortino is a master of planning and efficiency.

The scheme brings him to Florida where the jet-setting son of a Russian politician is attending the Super Bowl. When the plot unfolds, Fortino's path crosses that of Garrison. That's when the story really takes hold.

Disturbing the Peace is, in many ways, a modern retelling of the tales of the King Arthur's knights where nobility and chivalry were esteemed. The characters are drawn, as is the setting, with a sympathetic eye, and the dialog is spot-on. If it begins with suspense and curiosity, it ends with a gallop and bounds headlong to a dramatic finish.

LaFleur's novels are based on clever plots and thoughtful themes, but their greatest strengths are the characters. The ones who populate this novel are finely drawn and clear of purpose. They are real people, not cardboard cut-outs, and they live and breathe with real jobs, real failings and real weaknesses. Vanya Zakayev, Fortino's assistant in the scheme, is an ingénue, a circus acrobat with a passion for the Chechen cause and a love of things that go boom; Rupert Zell is a deputy who, under Garrison's tutelage, grows personally and professionally; Dennis Toomey, a disgraced FBI agent and Tawanda Bradford, a former deputy on her way to a law degree, add crucial experience, observations and advice to Garrison and enrich the story with humor and humanity.

LaFleur, whose previous novel *Mill Town* garnered a Gold Medal at the 2009 Independent Publisher Book Awards and a 2009 President's Book Award from the 2009 Florida Publishing Association, has written one more fine novel in *Disturbing the Peace*.

Nicholas James
North American Book Reviews