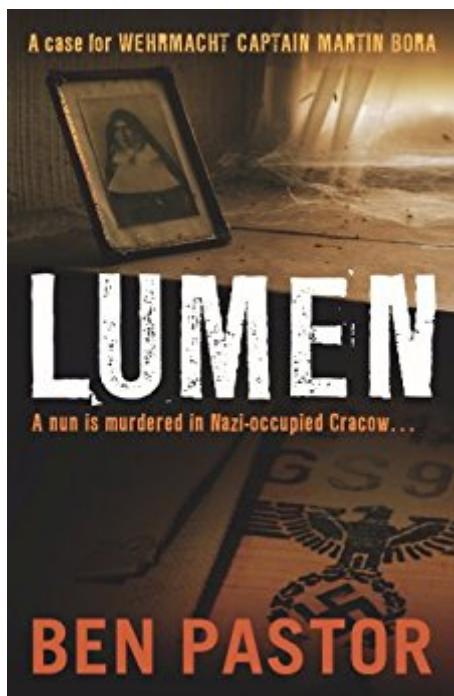


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Lumen (Martin Bora)



Synopsis

"Pastor's plot is well crafted, her prose sharp. . . . A disturbing mix of detection and reflection."—Publishers Weekly "A mystery, it rivets the reader until the end and beyond, with its twist of historical realities. A historical piece, it faithfully reproduces the grim canvas of war. A character study, it captures the thoughts and actions of real people, not stereotypes."—The Free Lance-Star Part wartime political intrigue, detective story, psychological thriller, and religious mystery, Ben Pastor's debut follows a German army captain and a Chicago priest as they investigate the death of a nun in Nazi-occupied Poland. In October 1939 Captain Martin Bora discovers the abbess, Mother Kazimierza, shot dead in her convent garden. Her alleged power to see the future has brought her a devoted following; her work and motto, "Lumen Christi Adiuva Nos" ("Light of Christ, help us"), appear also to have brought some enemies. Father Malecki has come to Cracow, at the pope's bidding, to investigate Mother Kazimierza's powers. The Vatican orders him to stay and assist Bora in the inquiry into her killing. Stunned by the violence of the occupation and the ideology of his colleagues, Bora's sense of Prussian duty is tested to the breaking point. The interference of seductive actress Ewa Kowalska does not help matters. Ben Pastor, born in Italy, has lived for thirty years in the United States, working as a university professor in Vermont. She is the author of other novels, including *The Water Thief* and *The Fire Walker* (St. Martin's Press).

Book Information

File Size: 717 KB

Print Length: 322 pages

Publisher: Bitter Lemon Press (April 19, 2011)

Publication Date: April 19, 2011

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B004EHZPI2

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #184,784 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #15

Customer Reviews

Highly original plot, time frame and characters. Captain Martin Bora is a Wehrmacht officer with a hyper sense of honor and patriotism who finds himself in the early stages of WWII (Poland 1939) fighting for an amoral regime already up to its ears in genocide and atrocities against noncombatant civilians. Bora is part of the German occupying forces in Krakow, Poland's cultural capital, directing mop-up operations against remnants of the Polish Army and evolving elements of a local resistance. His immediate superior has become attached to a Catholic mystique--the Mother Superior of a famous abbey. The nun is murdered in the cloister of the abbey and Captain Bora is ordered to investigate by his superior. The procedural that develops is unique in its inclusion of a running discussion of theology, honor and Catholic church doctrine. Bora's investigation is complicated by a second murder and by the ongoing interference of his new superior (a Nazi eugenics fanatic) and by German security forces (SS and SD) who have embarked on a terror campaign against Polish Jews and other minorities. Bora's faith in his commitment to his country, profession and faith is under constant attack, and a betrayal by his wife is an almost fatal blow. Of the three Martin Bora books in print, this one (the first) is probably the most challenging to the reader, but is quite fine in its own way. The two books that follow continue Bora's progress through the gradually ebbing fortunes of the German forces and moral dilemmas evolve in those circumstances. A thoughtful and entertaining series by an excellent writer.

Story of a callow Nazi intelligence officer tasked with investigating the apparent murder of the Abess of a convent in newly conquered Poland. It's a little slow, and drenched in Catholicism, but it has interesting characters and a thoughtful discussion of issues of faith in a time of war. Martin Bora is an interesting fellow, and I'll be tempted to see how he develops in subsequent novels.

Set in the months following the German invasion of Poland in 1939, this first book in the Martin Bora series follows a Captain in the Intelligence arm of the German army who is tasked with solving the murder of a famous Polish nun in Cracow (aka Krakow). He's given a sidekick or sorts, in the form of a visiting Catholic priest from Chicago, who has been sent by the Vatican to write a report about the nun as a possible candidate for sainthood. Meanwhile, he must also deal with the odious

womanizing officer he is roommates with, and the troubling increase in civilian killings he learns of. Captain Bora is a thoughtful, university educated, sober soldier, whose notions of honor and law conflict with the wartime reality and his own desires. The result is a mystery that spends a good deal more time on his moral struggles than your typical whodunit. The book does a very good job of placing the reader in the early moments of World War II, as seen through the eyes of a willing soldier who isn't yet aware of the nature of the beast he's a part of. Some of the book's best moments are when Bora comes into contact and conflict with the SS, who are clearly engaged in some completely different and separate agenda from his own straightforward military one. There are other nice details, such as references to Bora's previous service in Spain during the Civil War, and a tense meeting with a Soviet unit (recall that at the time, Germany and the USSR split Poland between them). Unfortunately, the period detail isn't enough to sustain the somewhat plodding pace of the story, which wheezes slowly through Bora's investigation of the nun's killing and a subplot involving several Polish actresses involved with his roommate. There's also a lot of discussion of religion and faith with the Chicago priest that didn't connect with me at all. The premise of a German army "detective" is a good one, but on the whole it feels like a first book in need of an experienced editor who could give it a little more shape and trim some of the fat. Originally written and published in 1999, it has been republished in conjunction with the second in the series, *Liar Moon*.

Pastor writes some truly amazing sentences. A lot of them might seem obtuse at first (they certainly did to me) but actually just require you to sit and wait and think about exactly what she's saying with each word and phrase. I would recommend this series for Pastor's wordplay alone, but the story is also fascinating. Horrifying look at the Holocaust and human corruption. It's an incredibly bleak story. I wouldn't recommend it purely as a mystery novel, as Pastor has a way of making the mystery plot unsatisfying. The series isn't "let's solve the mystery," but a deep character study of Martin Bora, a character who happens to sometimes be assigned mysteries to "solve." Four stars instead of five because I sometimes felt the plot was dragging.

Pastor is a very good writer, very evocative of time and place, and decent delineation of characters. A relief after reading several books by amateurs who think they can write. Good plot, although I suspected one of the perpetrators from the beginning. However, I did not find it to be a page turner, it required some effort to stick with it, partially because none of the characters were engaging and the author has some quirks in her style. For one, she leads up to what seems like it would be an important statement or revelation and then stops. It usually turns out later that the issue is not

particularly relevant to the story. She's good, and I'll read more, but she's no Cruz Smith, Furst, or Kerr. I followed this book with Smith's "Wolves Eat Dogs" which I can't put down.

Nearing the end and the suspense is building. The theme is early WWII in Poland and the underlying tension between the German Wehrmacht officer corps, the SD security forces, and the SS paramilitary forces. Alan Furst fans will enjoy this one, Can't comment on the ending yet, but I doubt I'll be disappointed.

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