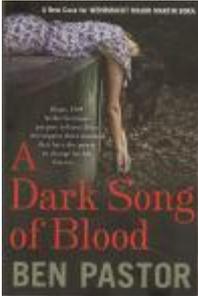


## CRIME SCRAPS REVIEW

### A DARK SONG OF BLOOD BEN PASTOR



*A Dark Song of Blood* by Ben Pastor is grown up crime fiction, a fine book that raises difficult moral questions concerning loyalty to one's country, a cause and the church.

The third book in the Major Martin Bora series finds the anguished war wounded officer in Rome during that period in 1944, when the Allies were battering the German defences round Monte Cassino, and shortly after the start of the book have landed at Anzio. It has been said that the Second World War was simple you shot everything in front off you. The situation in Rome is much more complex for the anti-Nazi Martin Bora. He mixes with the upper echelons of Italian society, and the Vatican hierarchy, but has to watch his back as Italian Fascists, German SS, Gestapo, the Resistance, and the Wehrmacht are all struggling for a fleeting advantage in a



rapidly deteriorating situation.

Martin Bora and Italian policeman Sandro Guidi must investigate the suspected murder of Magda Reiner, a German Embassy secretary, who has “accidentally” fallen from a fourth floor window to her death. Magda has had several lovers, and one of them Merlo is Secretary General of the National Union of Fascists. Dr Caruso the head of Rome’s police tells Guidi.....

*“Keep looking into the dossier, there’s plenty about His Excellency’s goings-on. The Germans want his neck so prove he killed her.”*

When Bora’s elderly university teacher now a cardinal is found with a Roman society lady in a compromising position, both shot dead, he has to examine his conscience and face the corruption all around him and investigate two more murders.



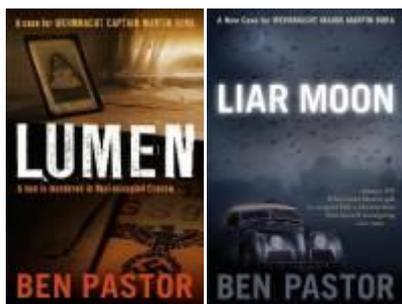
As well as the relationship between the Third Reich and the Vatican, the fate of Rome’s Jews, and the civil war in Italy, *A Dark Song of Blood* also deals with the less serious subjects of Sandro Guidi’s lust for the mysterious and pregnant Francesca, Bora’s rocky marriage to the ice queen Benedikta and his obsession with the glamorous Mrs Murphy.

*“Sometimes you leave people to set them free, as I did with your stepfather. Of course it was impossible, in our position, to stay married after Sarajevo started the Great War. It worked out for the best. He found your mother and married her happily, and I fell in love with D’Annunzio.”*

*A Dark Song of Blood* is one of the best books I have read this year, cleverly blending real life events and characters, such as Field Marshall Kesselring, in with

the fictional narrative producing a work that is both a mystery and a worthy historical record.

Ben Pastor was born in Italy but lived for thirty years in the United States working as a university professor in Vermont.



The good news is that the next Martin Bora novel *Tin Sky* is due out in April next year.