



Shelf**AWARENESS**

A WARRIOR ON THE EASTERN FRONT

A favorite recent read features an unlikely main character and an unlikely author, appropriately for an absorbing mystery. First, the author: one would expect Ben Pastor, not a pen name, to be a man, perhaps a pious fellow. But Ben is short for Verbena, an Italian woman born Maria Verbena Volpi who many years ago married an American officer and moved to the U.S. A professor of the classics, she now lives in Italy and has a fascination for "the warrior's life, past and present," as she puts it.



Writing in English, Pastor has published historical novels set in Roman times as well as the Martin Bora series, which, in another unlikely twist, features a Wehrmacht major working for the Abwehr, German counterintelligence, during World War II. Bora is from an aristocratic, conservative family that prizes military service.



The most recent book in the series published here is *Tin Sky*, from Bitter Lemon Press. Set in spring 1943 in Ukraine, a few months after the Battle of Stalingrad, *Tin Sky* is a fascinating, gritty tale, focused on the seemingly coincidental deaths in German jails of two Red Army generals--one a defector, the other a captive--as well

as a forest near Kharkov that locals claim has been haunted for the past 20 years, and the challenge for Bora of living true to his moral values in the midst of Nazi evil. Bora is reminiscent of Count Claus von Stauffenberg, who nearly killed Hitler with a

bomb in 1944. But Pastor says Bora is more like Oskar Schindler, considering Bora's "daring, daily acts of disobedience to criminal orders.... Bora is not so much a *man against* as he is an individual whose education clashes with the prevailing views of the culture around him." He's also a fascinating character in a pivotal time--and well worth the read.

John Mutter, editor-in-chief, *Shelf Awareness*