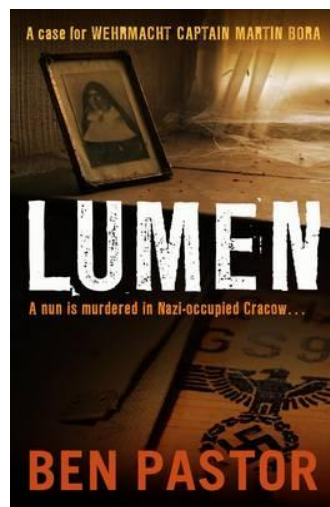




EURO CRIME

Reviews



Pastor, Ben - 'Lumen'

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The setting is October 1938, Cracow, Nazi-occupied-Poland. Father Malecki, a Polish American priest from Chicago has been investigating the powers of Mother Kazimierza, abbess of a convent in Cracow. She has a devoted following, brought about by her alleged ability to see into the future. When she is shot dead in her convent garden, Wehrmacht Captain Martin Bora is charged with the investigation. Bora's task is made impossibly difficult by the brutality of the occupation, and the gradual realisation that great crimes are being perpetrated.

He comes across his old Jewish piano teacher carrying basalt blocks in the freezing cold:

“Herr Weiss.”

Not so much that a German officer had addressed him, but that he'd used a form of respect intimidated the old man, whose first reaction was to step back and aside with head low, as required.

“Herr Weiss, it's Martin Bora.”

Both Martin Bora and Father Malecki are under massive pressure from their superiors. Father Malecki has to face the obstruction of the Archbishop and the American consul, as he struggles to come to terms with the tragedy. Martin Bora has to deal with his fanatical superior Colonel Schenk. Schenk's bizarre ramblings that may sound strange today were in fact firmly embedded as part of the Nazi belief system:

“In two weeks I had her pregnant, and the third week I married her. Unfortunately it turned out to be a daughter, but she did better ten months later.” He tapped the floor with his foot, surveying the sparse population of the officers' club. “I hope you have a high sperm count. A high sperm count is essential in these matters.”

Bora's life is made even more stressed by his sharing a billet with the thoroughly unpleasant Major Retz, who sends Bora out to spend his nights in the cold as he uses the apartment to ‘entertain’ the actress Ewa Kowalska, or her daughter Helenka, or any other

young woman he can find.

Martin Bora accompanies Colonel Schenck on a dispiriting visit to their allies in the dismemberment of Poland, the Russians. He also sees and reports on actions committed by the SD (security police) in the forests and the countryside that will put both his career and his life at risk.

While the solution to Mother Kazimierza's murder might not be too difficult to work out, there are some big surprises as well as another mysterious death that along with the vibrant sub-plots make this book a tense read. That tension is maintained by dialogue that seems authentic to the period and situation.

LUMEN is an example of how the crime fiction novel can be used to address historical, religious, and moral questions, reaching a wider readership than possible than with non-fiction works. The author's use of changing perspectives has created an excitingly authentic atmosphere, which combined with the undoubted historical accuracy makes this novel a memorable read.

“Choose, Martin. Right now, right now. Because your life you may lose regardless, but your immortal soul you'll lose absolutely if you make the wrong choice.”

Ben (Maria Verbena) Pastor was born in Italy, but she has lived for thirty years in the United States working as a university professor in Vermont. She writes in English.

Norman Price, England

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Norman blogs at [Crime Scraps](#).

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