

MBR BOOKWATCH

One of crime fiction's more unusual protagonists is Baron Martin Bora, a German Army Major during World War II. In a previous novel, *Lumen*, Bora served in Spain, Poland and at Stalingrad, where he gained some distinction for solving a murder. This novel takes place in 1943 just as the Italian government switched sides, but the Nazi troops still controlled the north.

As the novel opens, Bora is in a hospital after his troops were attacked by partisans; he loses his left hand and shrapnel is embedded in his leg, leaving him in pain for the rest of the book. Parenthetically, this reader wondered how he was not sent home after being so badly injured. In any event, when he returns to his duties, his superior foists on him an investigation into the murder of a fascist leader. His inquiries take place in conjunction with those of a local inspector, who in turn is seeking a serial killer.

While the description of the investigation and activities against the partisans are skillfully drawn, more important is the author's portrayal of the individual characters, especially Bora, who apparently scrupulously undermines efforts to transport Jews to concentration camps. To say the least, the characters are quite original, Bora a droll creation, highly intelligent.