

TIN SKY

Ben Pastor (Bitter Lemon Press: £8.99; e-book £5.75)

It's always good for the central figure in a crime novel to be that bit different. Martin Bora is an Olympic equestrian and a concert standard pianist. Oh, and he is also a Nazi, a major in the Wehrmacht, based in the Ukraine following the disaster of Stalingrad. The mystery begins when two defectors both die in unusual circumstances, just as they are about to open up to him as the chief interrogating officer.

Researching this book provides a few more mysteries. Bitter Lemon Press say this is "the fourth in the Martin Bora series". Ms Pastor's own website, however, discloses it is the 11th. Although Tin Sky is published only this year in Britain; it dates from 2012. The notes on other books describe him as a colonel. Assuming they were written in chronological order, there must be a few more in the pipeline to look forward to. Pastor's background is an interesting one. Italian by birth ("Ben" is short for Verbena), she has lived and worked in the US for 30 years, latterly as a Professor at the University of Vermont.

There is a huge (but not an excessive) amount of historical background in this book. I am not in a position to comment on its accuracy, but nothing jars. The characters are believable, including Bora himself. That is no mean feat given his harrowing background. While he has sensitivities, he has no issues with what he would regard as standard reprisals and other horrors of war. This is no ordinary hero and no ordinary crime novel.

Ms Pastor's other "cycles" – her word not mine – see novels set in WW1 Prague and the Roman Empire of the fourth century AD. This is a tribute to a huge range of

scholarship. Taken with her accomplished writing skills, it results in an intriguing and highly readable book.