

Terror and suspicion on the Eastern Front

CRIME



Joan Smith hails a bold series set in the Second World War

A German officer serving in occupied Ukraine during the Second World War might not sound like a sympathetic character, but Ben Pastor's novels featuring a Wehrmacht major are turning into one of the most appealing series in modern crime fiction, combining

intriguing plots and characters who defy easy interpretation.

In the fourth novel, **Tin Sky** (Bitter Lemon Press £8.99/ebook £7.99), Martin Bora has recently escaped the horrors of Stalingrad and is serving as a counterintelligence officer in northeast Ukraine. Local people are sullen and uncooperative, and they're terrified of going into a nearby forest where mutilated corpses keep turning up. Although irritated by the superstitions attached to the area, Bora begins a desultory investigation.

Then a Russian general defects, driving across the German lines in a T-34, the Soviets'

most advanced tank. He hopes to save his neck by passing on high-level intelligence, but he and another captured general are found dead in their cells. Bora is infuriated by the murders, but also troubled by questions of

whether individual deaths matter in the midst of such carnage. This fine novel is packed with tense moments and moral ambiguity.

Mons Kallentoft is a successful Swedish crime writer. His novels about a troubled female detective, Malin Fors, have been translated into more than 20 languages. His latest, **Water Angels** (Hodder £13.99/ebook £7.99), translated by

Neil Smith, is set once again in Kallentoft's home town, Linköping, where several couples have adopted Vietnamese orphans, but a scandal about whether the children's parents were actually dead has led to a crackdown by the Swedish government.

When one of the couples is found murdered in the basement of their home, the police discover that their adopted daughter is missing. It isn't clear whether she's been abducted, but the case is particularly difficult for Fors, who has been trying without success to have a baby with her new partner. An alcoholic relapse threatens as her team investigates the couple's background, desperately trying to establish whether the girl is still alive.

Kallentoft's novels always run at a high emotional temperature but his signature device – a

disembodied commentary by the murder victims, who observe events from an undefined space – has become so intrusive that the dead appear to be trying to solve the crime themselves.

The title of Stuart MacBride's new novel, **22 Dead Little Corpses** (HarperCollins £9.99/ebook £1.99), suggests that a mass killer is on the loose in Aberdeen. That's slightly misleading but the book starts with a messy suicide and the discovery that the victim's wife and children are missing. MacBride's detective, Logan McRae, is in exuberant form despite having a girlfriend in a coma, and the novel belts along with outbursts of mordant humour.



CRIME
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