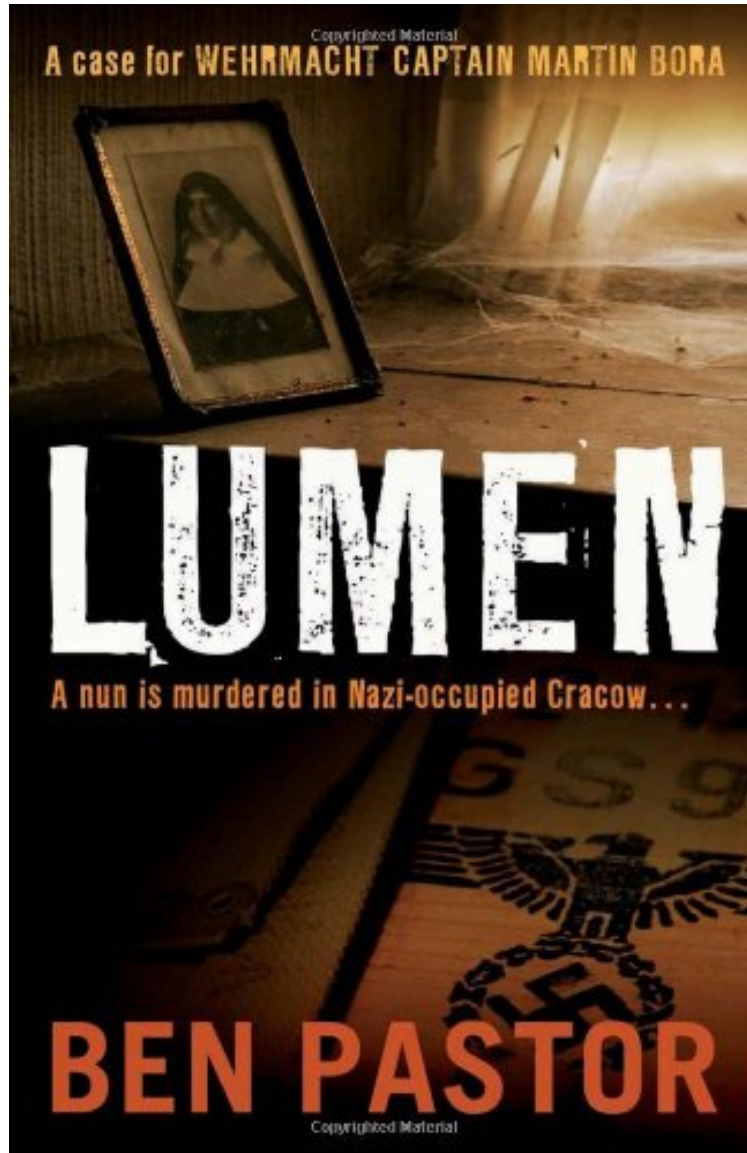


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Lumen (Martin Bora)

Ben Pastor

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Ben Pastor : Lumen (Martin Bora) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lumen (Martin Bora):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. "Your mistake is that you have committed to a man and not to your country" - 4+By Blue in Washington Highly original plot, time frame and characters. Captain Martin Bora is a Wehrmacht officer with a hyper sense of honor and patriotism who finds himself in the early stages of WWII (Poland 1939) fighting for an amoral regime already up to its ears in genocide and atrocities against noncombatant civilians.

Bora is part of the German occupying forces in Krakow, Poland's cultural capital, directing mop-up operations against remnants of the Polish Army and evolving elements of a local resistance. His immediate superior has become attached to a Catholic mystique--the Mother Superior of a famous abbey. The nun is murdered in the cloister of the abbey and Captain Bora is ordered to investigate by his superior. The procedural that develops is unique in its inclusion of a running discussion of theology, honor and Catholic church doctrine. Bora's investigation is complicated by a second murder and by the ongoing interference of his new superior (a Nazi eugenics fanatic) and by German security forces (SS and SD) who have embarked on a terror campaign against Polish Jews and other minorities. Bora's faith in his commitment to his country, profession and faith is under constant attack, and a betrayal by his wife is an almost fatal blow. Of the three Martin Bora books in print, this one (the first) is probably the most challenging to the reader, but is quite fine in its own way. The two books that follow continue Bora's progress through the gradually ebbing fortunes of the German forces and moral dilemmas evolve in those circumstances. A thoughtful and entertaining series by an excellent writer.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A little slow, but interesting
By James Lane
Story of a callow Nazi intelligence officer tasked with investigating the apparent murder of the Abbess of a convent in newly conquered Poland. It's a little slow, and drenched in Catholicism, but it has interesting characters and a thoughtful discussion of issues of faith in a time of war. Martin Bora is an interesting fellow, and I'll be tempted to see how he develops in subsequent novels.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Amazing writing
By Chris Pastor
writes some truly amazing sentences. A lot of them might seem obtuse at first (they certainly did to me) but actually just require you to sit and wait and think about exactly what she's saying with each word and phrase. I would recommend this series for Pastor's wordplay alone, but the story is also fascinating. Horrifying look at the Holocaust and human corruption. It's an incredibly bleak story. I wouldn't recommend it purely as a mystery novel, as Pastor has a way of making the mystery plot unsatisfying. The series isn't "let's solve the mystery," but a deep character study of Martin Bora, a character who happens to sometimes be assigned mysteries to "solve." Four stars instead of five because I sometimes felt the plot was dragging.

"Pastor's plot is well crafted, her prose sharp. . . . A disturbing mix of detection and reflection."—Publishers Weekly
"A mystery, it rivets the reader until the end and beyond, with its twist of historical realities. A historical piece, it faithfully reproduces the grim canvas of war. A character study, it captures the thoughts and actions of real people, not stereotypes."—The Free Lance-Star
Part wartime political intrigue, detective story, psychological thriller, and religious mystery, Ben Pastor's debut follows a German army captain and a Chicago priest as they investigate the death of a nun in Nazi-occupied Poland. In October 1939 Captain Martin Bora discovers the abbess, Mother Kazimierza, shot dead in her convent garden. Her alleged power to see the future has brought her a devoted following; her work and motto, "Lumen Christi Adiuva Nos" ("Light of Christ, help us"), appear also to have brought some enemies. Father Malecki has come to Cracow, at the pope's bidding, to investigate Mother Kazimierza's powers. The Vatican orders him to stay and assist Bora in the inquiry into her killing. Stunned by the violence of the occupation and the ideology of his colleagues, Bora's sense of Prussian duty is tested to the breaking point. The interference of seductive actress Ewa Kowalska does not help matters. Ben Pastor, born in Italy, has lived for thirty years in the United States, working as a university professor in Vermont. She is the author of other novels, including *The Water Thief* and *The Fire Walker* (St. Martin's Press).

From Publishers Weekly
Mixing elements of a psychological thriller and an existential meditation, Pastor's debut follows a German army captain and a Chicago priest as they investigate the death of a nun in Nazi-occupied Poland. Mother Kazimierza's alleged power to see the future has brought her a devoted following; her motto, "Lumen Christi Adiuva Nos" ("light of Christ, succor us"), gives the novel its title. In October 1939, Captain Martin Bora discovers the abbess shot dead in her convent garden. Father Malecki has come to Cracow at the pope's bidding, to investigate Mother Kazimierza's powers. Now the Vatican orders him to stay and assist in the inquiry into her killing. Meanwhile, the Germans are consolidating their hold on their Polish territory, dispossessing farmers, beating civilians and forcing Jews into labor gangs. Though stunned by the violence of the occupation and by the ideology of his colleagues, Bora never deviates from his Prussian duty. After three months, two suicides, much detective work and some speculation about Catholicism and faith, choice and chance, good and evil, Bora and Malecki discover the true story of the abbess's death, which implicates Bora's fellow army officers. Pastor's examination of Bora and his colleagues illuminates the many contradictions of life in the service of a criminal state. The narrative's explications of Catholic belief and theology defy readers to reconcile faith, or inner light (lumen) of any kind, with the realities of the Nazi regime. Pastor's plot is well crafted, her prose sharp, but her novel is meant to be more than light entertainment. She raises again the questions recently posed by Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*: how can art explore the human side of a victimizer without seeming to forgive the unforgivable? Pastor's disturbing mix of detection and reflection is a provocative though not definitive answer. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Lumen is a work of promise and fulfillment. A mystery, it rivets the reader until the end and beyond, with its twist of historical realities. A historical piece, it faithfully reproduces the grim canvas of war. A character study, it captures the thoughts and

actions of real people, not stereotypes. A "The Fredericksburg Free Lance Star One of Pastor's many startling accomplishments here is to render this man, Bora, as simultaneously cutthroat in pursuit of Hitler's expansionist aims and consistently humane in his choices and concrete leanings within the situation that presents itself. Lumen succeeds on all levels a magnificent achievement. A" -- Christopher Noel, author of *Spoils and In the Unlikely Event of a Water Landing: A Geography of Grief* From the Author "There are at least ten related but different meanings for the word. Light, torch, source of light, light of the eye, daylight--" [LUMEN, page 123] This quote from LUMEN epitomizes, I believe, the meaning of title and novel as a paradigm of divided loyalties, and the difficulty of coming to terms with one's good and bad angels. I was born in post-WWII Italy in a professional family. My mother, a known writer and journalist, was of Jewish descent (the Sabbatinis are among the Roman Jewish families with their own badge, showing a hand reaching for the Tablet of the Laws). My physician father's family had deep roots in scholarship and the Church, and its most ancient origins were at the German speaking border of northern Italy. During the Second World War, while my father was drafted in the Italian Army and spent harsh years in a French prison camp in Africa, Mother's family was under surveillance because of its Jewish surname and Grandfather's antifascist outspokenness. It wasn't until I became an adult that the complexity of this dual heritage became significant for me. Disturbing, thrilling, typically European, it is a tension that calls for decision or suspension, action or immobility, attention or denial. Finding my mother's war-time diary after her death added depth to the dilemma. Episodes of atrocity and generosity followed one another. Her bitter words about German occupation and violence stood in stark contrast with the sketch of her offering a handful of cherries (then selling for the equivalent of fifty dollars a pound) to a 15-year old Wehrmacht soldier bound for the hell of Cassino. Hatred, compassion, fear, love. Mother's difficulty in addressing the all-round tragedy of war reinforced my thinking about light, darkness, and divided loyalty. As an archaeologist, I have learned to dig for evidence, to rely on well-thought out assumptions, to try to make sense of fragments, innuendos, mutilated inscriptions. A long-time admirer of the German resistance groups that attempted to bring an end to tyranny by eliminating Adolf Hitler, I was familiar with the milieu of courageous men and women whose lives were risked and often lost in the process. Klaus von Stauffenberg, handsome, aristocratic, Catholic, and unlikely killer, was central to the assassination plot on July 20, 1944. History teaches that the valorous attempt failed. Within hours Stauffenberg and his closest collaborators were shot at the light of truck headlights in a Berlin courtyard, and it is estimated that up to 7000 German officers and civilians were purged in the following months. How could I combine this heroic figure standing in the glare, the darkness of divided loyalties (oath as a German officer vis-a-vis higher principles), and the idea of mixed parentage? Enter LUMEN's protagonist, Martin Bora. Born in Edinburgh of British and German ancestry, heir to recusant Catholics on both sides, he nonetheless bears the first name of Martin Luther, and the last name of Luther's wife, Katharina von Bora. A classically trained cavalry officer with a passion for languages, music, and his new wife, immediately the war puts Bora's public and private morality to the test. Confronted by the severity of Father Malecki, the tough Chicago priest, Bora discovers that in real life choices are seldom clear, or things are what they seem to be. "Right and wrong, honorable and dishonorable -- they're words and they are blurred to me until I sort them out again. No one can do it for me and it frightens me, it frightens me to have to choose. To have to pick one of the opposites when they're so blurred, and walk away with it not knowing if I have done well, if the choice was wise, when I don't even see the rims of wisdom anymore. Bora's anxiety applies to all of us. And, despite its mystery format, LUMEN was written for the innocent who suffered and died, as well as for those on the wrong side who dared to make the right choice. Surely, literary murders are solved, and sleuthing illuminates their motives. The darkness within persists, and it is in that lack of needed light that one's soul is lost, or saved. LUMEN is humbly meant to serve as a reminder especially at this time, when ethnic cleansing again defaces the world.