

MORNING STAR

Venus Of Salo by Ben Pastor (Bitter Lemon, £9.99), latest in an epic series mixing history with whodunnits, takes us to autumn 1944. Colonel Martin Bora of the Wehrmacht is summoned to Salo, the last redoubt of Italian fascism — at least until recently — in which the remnants of Mussolini’s doomed regime pretend to run the country under the all-but-explicit control of the Germans.

Bora is tasked with finding a missing Titian painting which Hermann Goring is eager to add to his collection. Distracted from his hunt by a series of murders and an unwise love affair, the melancholy maverick colonel soon has other things to worry about: the Gestapo believe they have at long last enough evidence to move against him.

Pastor never makes the error of presenting her protagonist as one of Hollywood’s “Good Germans.” He’s just an army officer, trying to do his duty without destroying his soul. The result is convincing historical fiction of a high order.