

Empire State by Henry Porter.
Orion, 2003.

Where the espionage conflicts of the Cold War were the staple of thrillers before the fall of the Berlin Wall there is no doubt that since then, and especially since September 11th 2001, it is the threat posed to the West by Islamic terrorism that is providing the genre's writers with much of their inspiration.

Henry Porter's Empire State has a credibility and immediacy to it that makes it a cliché page turner, and a cast of characters that genuinely intrigue and/or attract. The story starts with the assassination of a leading member of the United States administration near Heathrow airport and proceeds via New York, London, Albania and Egypt to its dramatic and unpredictable conclusion. At its heart are a group of present and former MI6 operatives, the outstanding member of which is a woman, Isis Herrick. Porter conveys the determination and ingenuity of the intelligence services as they struggle to cope with the threat posed by an Al Qaeda-like terror group, and extra credibility is lent to his story by the fact that after September 11th there is next to nothing of which most of us would believe a band of determined terrorists to be incapable.

This is Porter's third novel but the first that I have read; I shall now be rushing to read the first two, and shall eagerly await his fourth. This is thrilling thriller writing of the highest quality and intelligence.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh