

Brandenburg by Henry Porter.
Orion 2005.

Having read and hugely enjoyed *Empire State*, Henry Porter's last novel, I awaited the publication of his fourth with keen anticipation. It saddens me to say, however, that try as I might *Brandenburg* left me deeply disappointed.

Sustained rather than pacy, *Le-Carré*-esque in some of its interpersonal exchanges, *Brandenburg* is set against the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe epitomised by the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the East German regime.

The leading character, *Rosenharte*, is a German art historian into whom the Stasi, MI6 and the CIA have sunk their teeth and around all of whom he has to find a way. Porter is a fine writer and superbly puts across both the pettiness and paranoia of the security apparatus of communist regimes. *Brandenburg* is also highly atmospheric.

My disappointment - which is, of course, highly subjective - stems from the fact that its plot, characters and background seem very dated. In a world dominated by fears of Islamist terrorism and nuclear conflagration in the Middle East it is hard to recall the anxiety engendered by Communism, or the strains and fears of the Cold War, and thus hard to take it seriously.

In spite of Porter's best efforts it is difficult to remember that we used to do precisely that.

For me at least *Brandenburg* failed to rouse my historical memory sufficiently or successfully to seduce me into the world that it portrays.

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