

Destination: Berlin

SG Cardin

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The Deutsche Democratic Republic during the Warsaw Pact era was a grey country steeped in mutual suspicion. As this book's protagonist views it "East Germany seemed to stay stopped in time—her guess 1949." A mind-boggling proportion of common citizens were informants to the state secret police known as the Stasi. The figure of one-sixth is most often cited.

Destination: Berlin is set in 1988 during uncertain change as glasnost and perestroika charge up the Eastern Bloc for independence movements. Ronald Reagan cracks into the sound bite hall of fame by demanding "Mister Gorbachev tear down this wall!" American and British militaries maintain a major presence in West Germany. Author S. Cardin demonstrates that Soviet and East German spy agencies walked a tightrope between cooperation and cross-manipulation in hopes of securing the most information. Here they wish to acquire launch codes to American nuclear warheads.

Into such an intriguers' paradise innocently appears American Corporal Sharon Cates an award-winning member of the military police. She travels by train to Berlin with a briefcase from her security job at the launch code vault in Osnabrück West Germany. Aboard she guardedly socializes with Dimitry Nagory a Soviet soldier attached to the London embassy. He's too refined and linguistically gifted to be there by pure accident.

A sudden explosion blows the train from the rails throwing Sharon and Dimitry into a rural farmscape where they evade pursuers on foot. They must scramble halfway from the border to the safety of West Berlin; a degree of trust is necessary. All too soon a series of decisions bring on the point of no return. Sharon is apprehended with the briefcase by Soviet intelligence but Dimitry gets the weapons advantage. "If he put the gun down she was caught. If he shot at his own agent he would be branded a traitor..."

The Stasi / KGB search for the American and a renegade Soviet is basically one full-time guy from each agency to trying to recover nuclear secrets assisted by local polizei and a few lesser agents. This illustrates how close the USSR was then to perishing for a lack of funding. This book's nearly straight-line story doesn't match the most notable of thrillers for motivational opposition or judicious twists and reversals. The characters' dialogue regarding Berlin attractions such as the Brandenburg Gate or Spandau Prison sounds too much like brochure copy. An embedded comparison to veteran bestseller John LeCarre invites a no-win assessment.

The author served the in United States Army including seven years with the military police in Europe. The utilitarian value of *Destination: Berlin* is enhanced by maps a glossary of military terms and suggested stops for tourists. Those who have been to Germany or plan to travel there are likeliest to receive the full benefits of the author's efforts and enthusiasm.

TODD MERCER (November 5, 2007)

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