

## Book Review: In Between Days

By Graham Reid

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***In Between Days* by Andrew Porter** (Text Publishing \$37)

Under a title which becomes increasingly ambiguous as his cleverly structured narrative gets deeper and darker (night? limbo?), American writer Andrew Porter has crafted a novel of emotional insight, increasing tension and a story that pulls the reader into unusual but always credible family circumstances.



*In Between Days* by Andrew Porter. Photo / Supplied

Porter lets details of a pivotal incident seep slowly through the narrative, the reader discovering them in pieces as the protagonists do, and a chilling aspect of the increasingly complex shifts in family relationships is that they are acted out in a comfortable middle-class world where reasonable people try to behave within the conventions of their upbringing. But conspicuously fail to do so.

The separated couple of Houston architect Elson and Cadence – she a former student of his who realises she married too young when the children, Chloe, and gay son, Richard, leave home – struggle with their shattered relationship. There are also new lovers, the much younger partner, Lorna, for him, a more casual non-committal involvement with Gavin for her.

But the story takes an increasingly treacherous path when, for reasons which remain long unspecified, daughter Chloe is suspended from college for some incident involving her boyfriend, Raja.

As their son reflects on the past year, he notes his lover, Marcus, "has gone off to Korea to study cooking claiming it was temporary then breaking up with him a few weeks later; Chloe had gotten herself expelled from college; his parents had divorced; and his degree, as it turned out, wasn't as valuable as he'd thought. Working for six dollars an hour at Cafe Brasil wasn't exactly his idea of a promising life."

Equally confused are the adults: "What did we do wrong?" Cadence says desperately to Elson at the mid-point in the middle class *cri de coeur*. "What did we do to deserve this?"

But these are early days and when Raja secretly arrives in the city to join Chloe – he is now considered a fugitive by the FBI – the knife twists even further into fraught relationships. This becomes a world where relationships fracture, confidences are betrayed, telephones are slammed down mid-conversation and there are rippling consequences for distant and unexpected violence. Each character pulls the others unwittingly into a vortex of involvement, suffering and paralysing self-doubt in what might have been otherwise unexamined lives.



At the end of the day, speculates Elson, how would they sum up his life? "For so long he had cared only about making beautiful buildings and then only about Cadence and then only about his children, but what in the end was he left with? What in the end did he have to show for it?"

But the story is far from over as Chloe and Raja plan the kind of getaway only desperate young lovers might consider.

If the language seems to strain in the closing stages when the weight of Berlin's history and that of family are metaphorically linked, award-winner Porter is too sharp a writer to let the obvious dictate. But Chloe, finally aware, realises the distance back to family is more difficult than that into the unknown.

Perhaps these crucial days during which this gripping story takes place were just the "in between" ones in long, difficult but also rather ordinary lives.

**Graham Reid is an Auckland reviewer.**

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