Greg Flynn was in international public relations for 15 years, but gave up his day job to write *The Berlin Cross*, spending a year researching and writing a thriller which combines Raymond Chandler style crime fiction with Graham Greene style international espionage, set in Berlin and New York in the late 1940s.

Flynn has two hero-protagonists, one a British military police officer in Berlin, the other a New York private eye. John Docker is the gumshoe, hired to schlep around New York on the trail of a holy relic, while Beauchamp (who seems to have no first name) is the beleaguered MP, trying to solve a murder in spite of opposition from his superiors as well as the American MPs. They don’t meet until Chapter Zwanzig (a bit of an affectation, I thought, numbering the chapters in German) when Docker travels to Berlin, and until then they are allocated strictly alternating chapters. This is sometimes a bit confusing. They aren’t different enough to be immediately distinguished, and their adventures run somewhat parallel – meeting baddies, encountering their respective love-interests, being shot at, and so on – so even though Berlin and New York are obviously extremely different settings at that period, it’s often hard to remember which particular hard-boiled character we’re reading about at any one time. When the two men join forces in the last third of the book, it becomes easier to tell them apart.

Given Flynn’s stated aim, it’s not surprising that the book is full of cliches. They’re all there – the Nazis trying to get their hands on a sacred relic, the policeman’s conflict with superiors and allies while just trying to do his job, the evil Russians buying
atomic secrets, the beautiful but unreliable women (one for each bloke). The book is more a pale imitation than a clever parody. There is nothing particularly inventive about the way the plot elements are used, the characters are little better than stereotypes, and the motivation is sometimes obscure. Beauchamp, for example, is ordered by his superior officer to hand the murder case over to the Americans, and his refusal to do so seems merely bloody-minded, even though his boss is admittedly the standard bumbling, shortsighted fool interested only in placating his own bosses. There are regulation twists in the story, but nothing to really keep the pages turning.

Flynn has done his research and no doubt his facts are sound. He read the New York Times of the period so he could strategically insert references to current events, and he was careful with weather and locations. However, despite all his efforts, I’m afraid that The Berlin Cross is a not very thrilling thriller.