



# The Cleaner

*Paul Cleave*

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## **The Cleaner** Paul Cleave

Joe is in control of everything in his simple life, both his day job as a janitor for the police department and his night work. He isn't bothered by the daily news reports of the Christchurch Carver, who, they say, has murdered seven women. Joe knows, though, that the Carver killed only six. He knows that for a fact, and he's determined to find the copycat. He'll punish him for the one, then frame him for the other six. It's the perfect plan because he already knows he can outwit the police.

All he needs now is to take care of all the women who keep getting in his way, including his odd, overprotective mother and Sally, the maintenance worker who sees him as a replacement for her dead brother. Then there's the mysterious Melissa, the only woman to have ever understood him, but whose fantasies of blackmail and torture don't have a place in Joe's investigation.

## **The Cleaner Details**

Date : Published December 11th 2012 by Atria Books (first published 2006)

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Author : Paul Cleave

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# From Reader Review The Cleaner for online ebook

## Brenda says

After I read Paul Cleave's newest book, Trust No One, and loved it, I decided to read all his books starting with his first, The Cleaner. This book is very different, but I did enjoy it. A warning for the squeamish, there is a LOT of violence, killing, and gore in this book.

This book is about Joe, a serial killer who works as a developmentally challenged janitor in the police department. I'm not sure how Cleave did it, but he made me like Joe. It was interesting to see things through Joe, who sometimes had a sense of humor, a sense of superiority, and some compassion. There were a few characters that were very well developed, especially Joe's mother. She drove Joe, and me, batty!

There was some confusion in my head at one point, but that was overcome. At about 1/2 into the story, I got a bit antsy for the story to move along, and it did eventually. In the end, Joe's plan, how the police put everything together, and Joe's fate were revealed. I think this was a well written debut, and I will read Cleave's next book.

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## Barbara says

Seven women in Christchurch, New Zealand have been brutally raped and murdered by a killer dubbed the "Christchurch Carver." The homicide squad, led by Detective Schroder, is working hard on the case and Joe - the police station's mentally challenged janitor - sometimes asks "Any new leads?" before getting Schroder his morning coffee.

Joe has reason to be interested because in reality HE'S the Christchurch Carver. Joe pretended to be disabled to get the cleaning job, and his vacant stare and big goofy smile has everybody fooled. In reality, Joe is a clever guy who - as he goes about his daily tasks - copies police files, follows the investigation, and changes out the voice recorder he hid in the police station conference room.

Outside of work hours Joe steals cars to get around, murders people, and sometimes visits his mother - who makes bad meatloaf; talks about things she bought on sale; does jigsaw puzzles; and complains about Joe neglecting her. There's something very off between Joe and his mother, but it's not clear exactly what. It might have something to do with the scars on Joe's body, but this is never specified.

Right now Joe is quite angry because he killed only six of the seven victims attributed to the Christchurch Carver. One woman was killed by a copycat who aped the Carver's methods. As a result, Joe is determined to identify the copycat and pin ALL the murders on him.....a quest that takes up most of the book.

Unfortunately for Joe, he's attracted the interest of a young woman named Sally, who does maintenance work at the police station. Sally had a handicapped brother who died, and she's determined to make 'disabled' Joe's life easier. To this end Sally brings Joe sandwiches for lunch and starts to follow him after work - with all good intentions. After Joe meets a woman named Melissa in a bar, his life gets really complicated. But Joe's an arrogant dude who figures everything will work out for him. In fact, Joe does identify the copycat killer, and this leads to a dramatic climax.

The story is told mostly from Joe's point of view, with occasional passages about what Sally's thinking and doing. Joe's crimes are described in graphic detail, so sensitive readers should be prepared.

The book is compelling and held my interest, but stories told from a serial killer's POV aren't my favorites. Also, the main characters - all of whom are more or less deluded - aren't especially likable. Sally's probably the most sympathetic character in the story, but she's WAY too nosy and intrusive.

Still, this is a well-written psychological thriller that I'd recommend to fans of the genre.

You can follow my reviews at <http://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot.com/>

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### **Sharon says**

Joe is the janitor at the Christchurch Police Department in New Zealand. He is known as 'Slow Joe' by his employers who think he is mentally handicapped, but Joe is far from it. In fact, he is very intelligent and having his employers think he is slow is a major advantage for him. Joe gets told about various cases and the latest one being the one the media have dubbed the Christchurch Carver.

Without giving out too much of the storyline away, I will say this was a very well written book and one in which I really enjoyed. For those who love to read gritty, dark, disturbing, violent and gruesome books, then this book is for you. Recommended.

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### **Dawn G says**

It took me a little while to warm up to this book; however, once I did I had trouble putting it down. Although the author did not create the dark eerie setting I usually look for in a good thriller, the plot and the characters were extremely dark so it was definitely my kind of read. However; the real reason I gave it a five star rating is because of the author's ability to make feel something I'm not even sure I want to admit to feeling. I actually liked and truly felt sorry for the main character, a serial killer. I honestly wanted him to be happy and move past the killing. Now that took some skill on the part of Paul Cleave. This was an excellent psychological thriller?

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### **Mike Gabor says**

I wasn't impressed with this book at all. The story is told mainly thru the voice of Joe, a serial killer known as the Christchurch Carver. Joe works as a cleaner for the police department. He obtained the job by pretending to be mentally retarded. He spies on the squad investigating the murders in order to stay one step ahead of them. The other voice heard is that of Sally, a fellow worker at the police department. She has a connection to Joe as she finds him resembling her late brother who was also mentally handicapped.

The story itself wasn't especially suspenseful. The premise of his pretending to be mentally retarded and fooling the police I found quite unbelievable. A sub-plot involving another killer, I also found to be quite a stretch of imagination. I'll give one of the other books of this author a read to see if this was just a one off.

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## Carol says

The Cleaner by Paul Cleave  
The Christchurch Noir Mystery Series Book #1  
4.5 ★'s

### From The Book:

Joe is in control of everything in his simple life—both his day job as a janitor for the police department and his “night work.” He isn’t bothered by the daily news reports of the Christchurch Carver, who, they say, has murdered seven women. Joe knows, though, that the Carver killed only six. He knows that for a fact, and he’s determined to find the copycat. He’ll punish him for the one, then frame him for the other six. It’s the perfect plan because he already knows he can outwit the police.

### My Views:

I have read The Theodore Tate series and all of the standalone novels by this author and found all of them to be exceedingly well done with interesting, true to life characters. This series will be no exception.

The book alternates between the first person narrative of Joe, with flashbacks to his past, and several third person chapters that focus on Sally, a young woman who works at the department and feels pity, and possibly affection, for Joe. It's a very graphic, physiological story about a serial killer that believes he is smarter than anyone else and will never be caught. There are some humorous twists. He and Sally constantly misunderstand one another. Then there's Joe's mother. The strange Melissa rounds out the quirky characters. It will remind you how little you know about the people that even briefly share your everyday life.

In spite of the occasional humor it's still a dark insight into the mind of a merciless killer. The physiological thriller fan will be held captive with the first chapter.

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## Gatorman says

This was one hell of a ride, a serial killer thriller unlike any I've read so far. The protagonist Joe is quite an interesting killer with a great sense of humor to boot. Told in both first person from Joe's perspective and third person from a co-worker's perspective, the story never fails to fascinate and the writing is superb as usual from Cleave. Dark and nasty with a particularly grisly scene no man will ever forget. A terrific ending that reveals a connection to Cleave's other books. Highly recommended.

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## Sandy \*The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice\* says

Wow!

I have been wanting to read Paul Cleave for some time now, but The Cleaner being chosen for the Psychological Thriller Group read was just the impetus I needed.

I will definitely be reading the rest of his books.

The first chapter is one of the best I have read. It smacks of normality, and then WHAM!

Joe, the Janitor for the Christchurch Police Department, is not your average Joe. He loves his job, but not for the reason you might expect.

To the world, Joe appears "special"; slow, dull witted, and no threat to anyone. He likes it like that. It enables him to live out his fantasies. And his job enables him to ensure that no-one is on to him. For Joe is the Christchurch Carver who, it is reported, has killed seven women. But Joe knows he has killed only six, and the seventh victim is that of a copycat killer. Joe is determined to find the copycat and exact his revenge.

Cleave writes with a humorous touch, unexpected but appreciated in a book as dark as this. There is a lot of violence in this book, but none of it gratuitous. An exceptional debut novel.

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## **Christopher says**

DNF at 72%

The Cleaner starts out wonderfully. We follow along with a serial killer who works as a cleaner in the police station investigating him. He notices that one of the murders attributed to him isn't his, so he decides to hunt down this copycat and show them what he thinks of their cowardice! It's cool and demented and while the writing isn't the best thing I've ever listened to, the premise of serial killer hunting down a killer is always going to hold my interest.

And then we got about half way through. That's six hours into an eleven hour audiobook. This is where the violence happens... and we get told about it over and over... and over and over. Now I'm not one to care too much, but until this point the sex has been fade to black. The violence has been fade to black. You see? And then we suddenly show up to hear this person get mutilated for half an hour (realtime). I was literally rolling my eyes. Yes, I get it. How have they not passed out from pain yet? But we get past it. Finally. Good grief.

But we get past that... and over the next two hours our killer goes from pretending to be an idiot to being an idiot. And then something else happens and I decided that the author was confused about what book they were writing and I DNF'd 8 hours into an 11 hour audiobook. Insane, I know.

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## **Jim Crocker says**

In no time Joe, the cleaner, will start to grow on you—the irresistible attraction of the psychopath. They're whoever you want them to be. THE CLEANER has the "juice" working for it. You'll feel it coming through the pages. Talk about tension. And this one goes full-bore all the way to a chilling conclusion. You'll see

what I mean (heart in throat).

Goodreads Psychological Thrillers November 2015 Book of the Month  
<https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/...>

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### **Roy says**

Disturbing and dark account of a serial killers reign of terror through Christchurch. Its a 1st person style account of Joe, a janitor for the local police station who also happens to be The Carver. He lives this secret double life, and we are witness to his crimes and problems/delusions. A copycat killer appears, and throws his simple life into chaos. I found some scenes a little too disturbing and graphic for my liking. The plot was very simple for the 1st half of the novel and didn't really take off until the 2nd half and by that time I wasn't really that invested. I eventually finished it but just wasn't as good as Bloodmen. I think having a main character who is severely flawed always makes it difficult to empathise with them. And having a thin plot and more a character study of the main character probably didn't help too much.

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### **Debra says**

This has one of the most gruesome torture scenes I've ever read. Men reading it will recoil in horror... definitely not for the faint of heart. I almost felt sorry for Joe, but he's an evil serial killer with a perfect disguise. Another great novel by this author.

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### **Jane and Jerry says**

#### **Great book for our November book reading**

This was a very interesting book and one that was chosen for the November book read at Goodreads. I am glad that this book was chosen for it was very well worth the time and money spent on it...

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### **Jenny Baker says**

I'd never heard of **Paul Cleave** until it was a book selection for the Psychological Thrillers book group. Psychological thrillers are one of my absolute favorite types of books to read, but sometimes they're a little challenging to find.

I loved this book and this book alone has made me a new **Paul Cleave** fan. **He is a master of character development.** I'm not even kidding. I've never read characters that were this vivid. The characters were so distinct and real that I felt like I knew everything about them, every thought that ran through their heads, especially in the dialog.

The narration alternates between Joe and Sally. Joe is the cleaner, who's a highly intelligent, sociopathic,

serial-killing rapist. It's fascinating to read a novel from his point of view. He mostly didn't have a conscience about any of the evil things he did, but at times he appeared to have a small bit of a conscience and then he'd do or say something to make you feel like it was just a false alarm. Oddly, he loved his goldfish more than any living thing. Joe was very sarcastic and funny and I felt weird laughing at the things he said knowing he was a sick bastard. His character is so well developed that at times I wasn't sure if it was a sign of **Paul Cleave's exceptional writing talents** or if Paul is in fact, very unhinged. How in the world does a writer get into the mind of a serial killer like that? It's amazing.

Sally is Joe's coworker and at it took quite a while to learn her significance in the novel.

Evelyn is Joe's mom and she is so amusing. Joe's visits with her were the funniest. Speaking of funny, this novel had several comedic moments in unexpected scenes, such as in a graveyard. I wasn't expecting to laugh while reading a novel that featured a serial killer.

One person said in their review that they felt sorry for Joe and before I read this book, I was thinking *Are you crazy?* After I read the novel, I understood why the reviewer felt sympathy for him. The park scene and later at his apartment will actually make you feel sorry for him. I wouldn't wish that on anyone, not even Joe. If you think Joe is evil, wait until you meet Melissa.

There were times when Joe's luck seemed unbelievable. He was able to do things undetected when he should have been caught. He was able to walk into a conference room of the police station where he worked, grab files and either make copies in the copy room or take the files home. You would think that a station full of police officers and detectives would notice missing files for an open case. Other times, he was able to sneak into people's houses unnoticed, not to mention all of the cars he stole. He also walked everywhere with a briefcase that contained a gun and knives including into work every day.

I loved this novel so much that I immediately went to the library to pick up the next book of this series, *Joe Victim*. If *Joe Victim* is as good as *The Cleaner*, I'm planning to devour all of **Paul Cleave's** novels.

**I highly recommend this novel to fans of psychological thrillers and aspiring writers who want to learn about character development.**

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## Semjon says

Man könnte bei diesem Thriller auf die Idee kommen, der Autor hätte die Idee zu seinem Buch aus der Serie Dexter geklaut. Doch das Buch entstand einige Jahre vor der Serie, trotzdem muss es sich den Vergleich zwischen den Serienmördern aus Miami und aus Christchurch/Neuseeland gefallen lassen. Beide Geschichten sind moralisch verwerflich, denn aus der Erzählperspektive des Verbrechers buhlen sie um die Gunst des Lesers/Zuschauers. Während aber Dexters Motive und Krankheit klar ersichtlich und plausibel sind (Mordlust & Selbstjustiz) fehlt dies bei Joe gänzlich. Vornehmlich sind seine Opfer Frauen, doch nicht ausschließlich. Er bringt Attraktive oder "Krüppel in Rollstühlen" um. Er vergewaltigt sie oder er macht es nur einfach so. Er geht mal brutal, mal kurz und schmerzvoll zur Sache. Er stellt als geistig zurück geblieben am Arbeitsplatz in der Polizei (Raumpfleger) oder als super intelligent der Leserschaft vor. Es geht eigentlich nicht darum zu verstehen, warum Joe mordet, wie er vom intelligenten Schüler zum Putzmann-Schauspieler wird und seit Jahren alle verarscht, mit denen er seit der Kindheit zusammen lebt. Als Psychogramm eines Massenmörders taucht das Buch somit absolut nicht für mich.



Darüber hinaus ist es eine widerliche Gewaltpornographie, denn da, wo bei Dexter kurz vor der Tat ausgeblendet wird, nimmt der Autor bei Joe erst richtig Fahrt auf und beschreibt detailliert die Mordprozesse. Insbesondere die Szene, in der Joe zum Opfer wird, wird zelebriert und so weiß ich nun genau, wie es sich anfühlt und wie es aussieht, wenn man eine Hode mit einer Zange abgetrennt bekommt. Wenn die Geschichte als solches aber nachvollziehbar wäre, könnte ich das noch verkraften. Doch ab der Mitte des Buchs kongurriert Joe dann auch noch mit einem weiteren Mann und einer Frau im Dreiecksverhältnis um das schönste Morden. Tja, die Masse der Leser scheint das zu gefallen, denn sonst wäre das Buch kein Bestseller. Für mich ist es nur ein weiteres Beispiel, welche Abgründe dieses Genre bietet. Absolut nichts für mich.

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