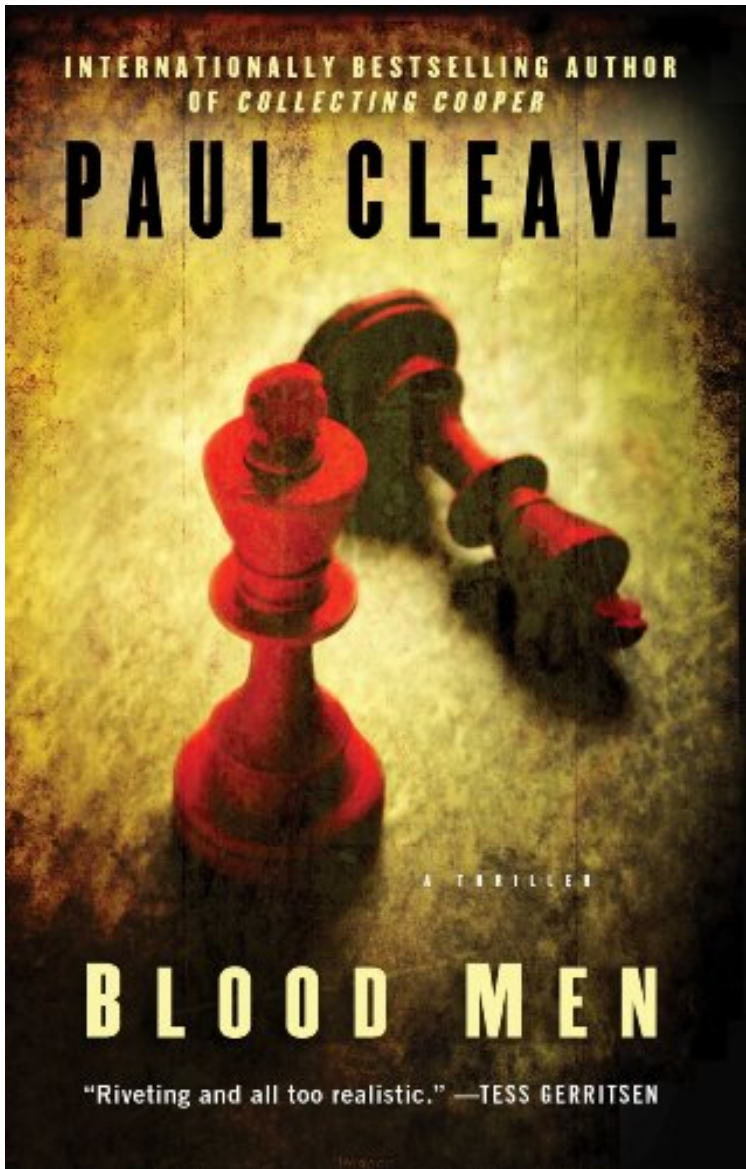


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Blood Men: A Thriller (Christchurch Noir Crime Series) (English Edition)



Par Paul Cleave
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom international bestselling author Paul Cleave comes a gripping thriller about a dedicated family man, who may or may not have inherited his serial killer fathers penchant for violence. WINNER OF NEW ZEALANDS PRESTIGIOUS NGAIO MARSH AWARD FOR BEST CRIME NOVEL OF 2011 Edward Hunter has it alla beautiful wife and daughter, a great job, a bright future . . . and a very dark past. Twenty years ago, a serial killer was caught, convicted, and locked away in New Zealand's most hellish penitentiary. That man was Edwards father. Edward has struggled his entire life to put the

nightmares of his childhood behind him. But a week before Christmas, violence once again makes an unwelcome appearance in his world. Is Edward destined to be just like his father, to become a man of blood? A true master of the genre, Paul Cleave unveils a brutally vivid picture of a killers mind and a city of fallen angels captured at the ends of the earth.

Extrait Blood Men chapter one

The alarm clock dragging me into the Friday morning before the Christmas break sounds like laser fire from an old sci-fi movie, the kind where the special effects budget runs the production company up about a hundred bucks. I manage to open my eyes about halfway. I feel like I have a hangover even though I havent had a drink in ages. I reach out and shut off the alarm and am almost asleep when Jodie pushes me in the back. Hopefully this year Santa will bring me an alarm clock that doesnt make any noise. You have to get up, she says. It takes a few seconds to focus on her words, and I let them slide with me toward the dark hole of sleep. I dont want to, I hear myself saying. You have to. Its your job to get up and then drag me out of bed. I thought it was your turn to drag me out. I roll over to face her. The sun is bright behind the curtains, beams of light shining onto the ceiling. I close my eyes so I dont have to see them. I squeeze them tight and pretend its nighttime all over again. Five more minutes. I promise. Thats what you said five minutes ago when you turned it off the first time. There was a first time? Come on. Its Friday. Weve got the whole weekend ahead of us. Its Christmas, I say. Weve got two weeks ahead of us. But not yet, she reminds me, and she pushes me again. I sit on the edge of the bed and yawn for ten seconds before grabbing her hands and trying to drag her out as well, not wanting to go through this nightmare of waking up alone. She hides under the sheets and starts laughing. Sam comes into the room and starts laughing too. Mummys a ghost, she says, and jumps on top of her. From beneath the sheet comes an oomph, then more laughing. I leave them to it and go and take a shower, the hot water bringing me fully around. Im finished and halfway through shaving when Jodie comes in and climbs into the shower behind me. Just four more days of work, she says, then yawns. I know. Its almost the weekend. Then three more days. Not even that. The last day is always a short one. Sounds like you can add. Its an occupational bonus. The occupational bonus comes about from the fact Jodie is an accountant. Being married to an accountant isnt the end of the world, but thats probably because Im an accountant too. It is, of course, how we met. Accountants are the punch line of a thousand jokes, and our relationship might contribute to those stereotypes I dont know. Jodie turns on the small bathroom radio which is styled as a penguin. She twists its flipper until she finds a station with something decent to listen to, then its other flipper to increase the volume. She sings along to a Paul Simon song about fifty ways to leave your lover, and the accountant in me wonders how he came to that number, how many he tried out. My dad had his own ways of leaving his lovers and Im pretty sure theyre ways that Paul Simon Slit her wrists, Chris never factored in. Jodie doesnt know all the words and fills in the blanks with loud humming. I get dressed and head out to the living room. Toys and schoolbooks are scattered across the floor and the TV is going, gay-looking cartoon characters dancing across the screen. Sam is finishing off her homework while watching the TV, developing the whole multitasking skill at the tender age where homework is done mostly with crayons and markers all kinds of colorful things that make all kinds of colorful messes. The living room is small, especially with the Christmas tree taking up one whole corner. The entire house is getting too cramped, which is why were buying a new one. Today is Sams last day of school until the end of January and shes acting like a kid who just discovered caffeine. I open up the curtains and sunlight pours into the living room and the kitchen, bouncing off every metal surface and making the sun appear to be about as far away as my next-door neighbor. The poplar trees lining the street have been defeated by the heat, the burned leaves drooping, front lawns turning crispy brown as the sun beats down on it all. The air-conditioning is working overtime, separating the outside world from the inside by a dozen degrees. Sams holidays kick in in about seven hours and her excitement levels are high and my stress levels are high and Jodie has high levels of both. Im pretty sure the house has a poltergeist living in it; it comes through at night and does its best to make sure there are no straight lines anywhere. I get the kitchen smelling of coffee. Our kitchen is full of modern appliances, most of them were in style back in the fifties and are back in style now, lots of stainless steel and curves everywhere. I pour Sam a bowl of cereal and she works her way through it, and Im on my second piece of toast when Jodie comes down the hallway into the dining room. Her dark hair hanging around her shoulders is still slightly damp and her skin smells of body wash. She leans in, kisses me on the cheek, and steals the rest of my toast. Payment for the kiss, she whispers, and winks at me. I should have made you pancakes. Theyd have cost you more. Our cat, Mogo, gets under Jodies feet before jumping up on the table and staring at me. Mogo is a tabby with way too much personality and nowhere near enough patience. I sometimes think he has similar thoughts to what my dad must have had all those years ago. He

never eats when I feed him, and he always waits for Jodie to take care of him. He never hangs around me or wants me to pat him either but cats never approach me there's something about me that they don't like. Dogs too. We finish up breakfast and get our gear together. Jodie has her briefcase, Sam her backpack, I have a satchel, and it's time to go. It's eight thirty and the Paul Simon song is stuck in my head and heading outside is like walking into a wall of heat. It's Jodie's turn to drop Sam at school. There are kisses all around and hugs, then car doors closing and engines turning over and we leave in different directions. The inside of my car is an oven. Neighbors wave while getting their own kids off to school, others out walking before the day gets too hot, some working in the garden. The houses in the neighborhood have recycling bins parked out front, the weeks trash all ready to be picked up and emptied, green bins with yellow lids lining the streets. On the way into town I pass vans on the side of the road with trailers people in collapsible chairs reading magazines while selling Christmas trees and Christmas lilies. The central city is bordered away from the suburbs by four long avenues creating a giant box, within it a network of parallel streets made up in a checkerboard style, the buildings planted among them blending into one of two types ugly ones built a hundred years ago, and slightly less ugly ones built in the years since. Most of the scenery could be picked up and spliced into a Sherlock Holmes novel without anybody noticing much difference, except for Holmes himself, who would wonder why Baker Street had suddenly turned from a loitering ground for pickpockets and heroin addicts to one of gang members and glue sniffers. The drive-time routines are slipping out of whack as the city crawls toward Christmas, the traffic is thicker than yesterday, but not as thick as it will be tomorrow. There are a few early-morning or perhaps ultra-late-night hookers on the corners in town; their lifeless eyes follow me as I drive past, fake smiles on their faces, the makeup smudged and worn after a long night, their clothes short and scented with exhaust fumes and spent exhaustion. I've never seen anybody pull over and pick one up at this time of the morning it would be like screwing something out of Dawn of the Dead. I wonder if they take the holidays off, whether Christmas is a merry time for them, whether they go home and slip into Santa hats and listen to carols and put up decorations. I turn on the radio and have to flick through four stations until I can find a pair of DJs who aren't laughing at the tired old sex jokes DJs have been making for the last twenty years. The station I settle on mentions it's already twenty-seven degrees and is only going to get hotter; reminds us all that water restrictions are in place, that global warming is coming, and that Christmas is only seven days away and counting. I strike nearly every red light on the way into town, people sitting in their cars cooking as the temperature rises. It takes me twenty-five minutes to get to the parking building, having survived all the Christchurch Christmas road rage. I drive up to the eighth floor, negotiating the narrow ramps as they wind upward between floors, some drivers taking them more carefully than I do, others treating it as a racecourse. I take the stairs down, breaking into a sweat, and pass a homeless man named Henry at the base of the stairs who tells me I'm a saint after I give him a couple of bucks. Henry has a Bible in his hand so maybe he really does have a keen eye for that kind of thing, or maybe it's coming from the bottle of cheap vodka in his other hand. From there it's only a two-minute walk to work. The sidewalks are full of grim-looking people all resigned to the day ahead, in office buildings, retail outlets, or sleeping under park benches. Some of them are waiting for Christmas, some of them excited, some of them probably not even aware of its approach. The sun keeps climbing. There is blue sky in every direction and the overwhelming sense we won't be seeing any more clouds this year. The accountant firm employs almost fifty people, and is one of the bigger and certainly more expensive ones in town its prestige made obvious by the important-sounding partner names Goodwin, Devereux Barclay and prominent location watching down over the city. It's in one of the more modern Christchurch buildings, sharing it mostly with lawyers and insurance firms. Our company takes up the top three floors of the biggest firm in the building. The foyer is throwing out cold air and people are lining up for the elevator. I take the stairs where the air smells stale and break into even more of a sweat. I work on the thirteenth floor, where the view isn't as good as the bosses above, but better than the lawyers below. I go through the early-morning hellos with a few people once I reach my floor, which takes longer this time of the year because people always seem to want to know what everybody else is doing for Christmas. The ones who ask the most seem to be the people with great plans. Most of us are lucky enough to have our own office with a few using cubicles. I'm one of the lucky ones, plus my office is at the end of a corridor that doesn't get a lot of foot traffic. It's here I deal with taxes and not so much with people. I dump my satchel on my desk and slump in my seat and pull my already damp shirt away from my body. My office is big enough to fit a desk and a person sitting either side of it and not much more. Most spare wall space on the entire floor is covered in school drawings the parents have brought in from their kids crayon-purple Christmas trees and dogs with seven legs reminding us all we'd

rather be somewhere else but here and my office is the same. I stare at a couple of the drawings Sam has done, taking a few minutes to cool down before throwing myself into the file I've been working on. The firm has been hired by a bottled water company, McClintoch Spring Water, searching for tax breaks. It's a company whose advertising campaign used images of Jesus to make it a lot of money last year. I meet Jodie for lunch at twelve thirty outside a caf down The Strip, a line of caf/bars that double as nightclubs at night, with indoor-outdoor flow and tables spilling out onto the sidewalks. I'm called sir because I'm almost thirty years old, but if I came here tonight I'd probably get asked to leave for being too old. The cafs are all at about 90 percent full, some people turning red in the sun, others sitting in the shade of giant umbrellas, the smell of food and cologne thickening the air. The waitresses are all wearing tight black T-shirts. Most of them have their hair pulled back in ponytails that bounce as they walk. On the other side of the road the Avon River is almost at a standstill, bugs attracted by the smell of stagnant river weed and a dead eel floating along belly-up. We talk while we eat, the only subject the new house we were trying to buy. Jodie picks at a chicken salad which is probably only chicken in name; she can't seem to find any meat in it. I work at a plate of nachos, the food okay, not great, but priced as if it were the best in the city. Maybe we're paying a premium to stare at the waitresses in their T-shirts. The new house will have a spare room big enough for me to put a pool table in, and Jodie wants some aerobic equipment. We'll probably use neither, but the fun part at this stage is the dreaming. A new house will be exciting for Sam too. But before that we still have to get through the excitement of Christmas. Sam is the perfect age for Christmas; he still believes in Santa. The waitress comes by when both our mouths are full and asks how the meal is and neither of us can answer. She seems to take that as a good sign and moves on to the next table. It's probably only a couple of degrees away from hitting thirty-five and the waitress is ready to melt into a fleshy puddle when one o'clock rolls around, the umbrellas in danger of catching alight. We pay the bill, and the waitress gives us the smile of the damned. It's only a five-minute walk to the bank. One side of the road is warm in the shade, the other almost white hot. The sidewalks are covered in melted chewing gum and teenagers on skateboards wearing loose clothes with hoodies, perfecting the rapist image kids these days love and clothes designers are making millions off. I wonder how hot it has to get before they take their hoodies off. We get stopped every hundred meters or so by people trying to convince us to sign up to save the whales, save the environment, solve world hunger. There's tinsel hanging from streetlights and building frontages, decorated trees and fake snow on the window-display floors, plastic Santas and reindeer everywhere. People are rushing about on their lunch breaks trying to squeeze in some shopping, some carrying packages and gifts, others wearing lost looks on their faces. The bank is pretty much slap bang in the middle of town, a tall building with the ground floor for the public and on the other floors nobody really knows. It has air-conditioning and about fifty potted plants and a security guard who keeps glancing at his watch. We end up arriving early and are led to a group of comfortable chairs to kill time in. Nobody offers us anything to drink. There are racks full of banking brochures on the wall next to us, plenty of posters advertising interest rates; young families with new homes and new kids and big smiles is the image of choice which is fine with us. But once you've seen one poster there isn't much more to look at: just more floating and fixed interest rate packages and more smiles from people thrilled to be a slave to their mortgage. There are percentage symbols plastered everywhere. Then, at thirteen minutes past one two minutes until our appointment with the mortgage consultants six men carrying shotguns walk calmly through the door. *Revue de presse* Riveting and all too realistic." (Tess Gerritsen) Relentlessly gripping, deliciously twisted and shot through with a vein of humor that's as dark as hell. Cleave creates fictional monsters as chilling and as charming as any I've ever come across. Anyone who likes their crime fiction on the black and bloody side should move Paul Cleave straight to the top of their must-read list. (Mark Billingham, award-winning author of *Blood Line*) Compelling, dark, and perfectly paced, New Zealand writer Cleave's psychological thriller explores the evil lurking in us all, working relentless magic until the very last page. There's nary a misstep in this riveting thriller about the bad deeds even good men sometimes do. (Booklist) Dark, bloody, and gripping, *Blood Men* is classic noir fiction. In Paul Cleave, Jim Thompson has another worthy heir to his throne. (John Connolly, New York Times bestselling author of *The Whisperers*) "Cleave [has an] impressive talent for character traits, building tension, and his edgy presentation of Christchurch a town which, thanks to his previous novels, is now a solid addition to the geography of noir cities." (Bookgasm.com) Paul Cleave writes like the fine-tuned punches of a middleweight boxer with short sharp jabs to the solar plexus that make you gasp. (Courier-Mail (Brisbane, Australia)) Cleave displays a certain adroitness in insistently plucking the imagination with icy fingers of

fear. (Christchurch Press (New Zealand))