Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons
http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/
This is the author's preprint version of this article.


*Cleanskin* is a horrible book full of nasty characters. But it’s impossible to stop reading until the end.

Madelaine is a young wife and mother in a small town – Port Lincoln – trapped with an overcritical husband and an ill-matched group of friends with little in common but their young children. As we get to know her better, however, Madelaine appears less and less a put-upon victim and more and more a malevolent force. The balance tips when she mocks her timid best friend, the bulimic Danica, at a dinner party. When her husband can’t stand it any more and leaves, Madelaine loses all semblance of reason and chaos ensues.

Lynch certainly has a talent for the forensic dissection of the causes and effects of mental instability. Madelaine’s father is that old cliché, the abusive clergyman, but Madelaine is an original, with her obsessive videotaping of every social occasion. There are a few technical problems. The action often passes between the historical present and flashback without those little markers that orient readers. Some of the early scene-setting is over-laborious. And why is the novel set in the Whitlam years? These things distract from the book’s otherwise considerable power.