



Two Little Boys

Duncan Sarkies

(John Murray, £11.99)

Hater

David Moody

(Gollancz, £9.99)

A FINE MESS

The two little boys in New Zealander Sarkies' first novel are actually overgrown teenagers in their mid-twenties. Nige and Deano – who share the narration with their different takes on events – have been friends for 15 years. But theirs is a relationship fraught with dependency and jealousy.

Dean in particular can't cope with Nige having a new friend, Gav, who gives him confidence and inspires him to grow up and broaden his thus-far limited horizons.

Nige is a bank clerk, Deano a

part-time bus driver; and though surrounded by beautiful nature, their lives are boring. Things only get interesting when Nige accidentally runs over and kills a backpacker. His panic and guilt, and Deano's scary management of the situation, highlight the dynamics of their unhealthy union.

The story is straightforward, but what carries it is the psychological portrayal of the two men. At first, their inner thoughts are banal, and it's hard to distinguish between them, but as things get messier, it becomes clear that one is a well-balanced nice guy, and the other is dangerously messed up.

Notwithstanding the irritatingly casual writing and a slow start, this might be the best thing to come out of NZ since Flight Of

The Conchords.

Hater is also messy and scary, but in a simpler way: zombies. Overworked family man Danny starts witnessing apparently random acts of violence, committed by the unlikeliest of people in the unlikeliest of settings.

The eponymous haters, overcome with fear and rage, will do anything they can to attack and kill. As the incidents become more frequent, it becomes apparent that there is an epidemic.

The fact that the story is in parts ultra-realistic – Danny's job at the council, for example – and the characters so believable, makes the gory sci-fi angle even more terrifying. A dark, filmic thriller.

Emmanuelle Smith