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In brief

Catherine Taylor on recent debuts

Fresh, by Mark McNay (Canongate, £10.99)

As children, brothers Sean and Archie learned about Scottish inner-city life the hard way. They were brought up by their uncle Albert, whose tough approach to discipline was easily surpassed by the psychotic Archie, the elder of the two boys. Terrified and in awe, Sean was forced to tag along with such Archie-inspired enterprises as stealing cars while high from glue-sniffing. Now Sean is married, settled, and Archie is soon to be released from his latest prison term. The problem is, Archie gave Sean a sum of money to "look after" while he was inside and Sean spent it on a school trip for his daughter. He's been saving desperately, but his job at a poultry factory doesn't pay much. When he discovers that Archie has been let out early and is looking for him, Sean starts running around like one of the headless chickens he dismembers every day. Menacing, witty, with snappy no-nonsense dialogue and an unambiguously shocking ending, McNay's debut is every bit as fresh as its title.

