

A rough and ready tale of Brissie crime

Iraqi Icicle

Bernie Dowling

BY THE BOOK

With GAVIN LESLIE



I RECENTLY finished reading a novel written by a mate of mine.

Fellow journalist Bernie Dowling is a Brisbane boy, born and bred, and it really comes across in his debut novel *Iraqi Icicle*.

He's also a bit of a larrikin, punter and a lover of rock music and red wine. It's a no wonder his hero is too.

Steele Hill is his name, and his misadventures in *Iraqi Icicle* are partly drawn from his earlier book of short stories *One For the Money* and partly new work.

Hill, an orphan who invented his corny film-noir name after reading a billboard for BHP (advertising Broken Hill steel), is a professional punter who has been warned off the race tracks. He has a nasty habit of finding himself in the middle of sticky situations, like murders and race rigging.

This is a crime novel, but unlike your Inspector Morse or Pascoe and Dalziel books, Hill isn't doing his sworn duty, he's solving crimes to avoid being fitted up for them and thrown in the slammer for the term of his natural life.

I'm not a big reader of crime novels, so for me the big hook in *Iraqi Icicle* was that it was set in

and around Brisbane in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

This is a city I lived in for eight years and came to know very well. Hill walks down the streets that I know and love. Fitting, then, that Dowling draws a lot of inspiration from the music of rock group the Go Betweens, and in particular their song *Streets of Your Town*.

For those of you who don't know, the Go Betweens ARE Brissie in the '80s and early '90s.

Sure, there were others, but *Streets of Your Town* will always be linked to that time and place. (That song is going to be stuck in my head all day now).

Of course there are other catches in the book, like the extremely likeable Hill. There is a real desire for him to keep out of harm's way – even when he puts himself there in the first place.

There's also the familiarity with that brief period of time, made fresh in your mind by references to the pop culture and big news events of the time.

Dowling's style is pretty rough and ready at first – much like his characters – but once you get past that the book is a great first effort.

Iraqi Icicle isn't on any book store shelves as yet, but you can get it at several websites, including www.digitalprintaustralia.com, www.amazon.com, www.abebooks.com, www.a-libris.com and www.borders.com



Iraqi Icicle is journalist Bernie Dowling's debut novel.