

## The Lazy Boys

Carl Shuker (Penguin, \$28)

Parents beware! Don't send your 18-year-olds to Otago University!

That could be the strongest message to come out of this book as the main characters, all of them "students" in their late teens, take out massive loans, drink and smoke themselves silly, party for days at a time, live on greasy takeaways, vomit frequently, root anything with a pulse, burn couches on the terraces at Carisbrook, light fires in the street, get into fights, take huge amounts of drugs, self-mutilate, sleep all day and don't go anywhere near lectures for most of the academic year.

This, you can tell from all of the above, is not a "naice" book. Nor is it uplifting. But who said that novels have to be uplifting? Better that they be true, and *The Lazy Boys* has the ring of ugly truth about it.

The central character is Richard Sauer, a bright but deeply unpleasant youth who finds himself at Otago for no other reason than to get away from his stultifying middle-class life in Timaru, where his parents have made

financial sacrifices to get him to varsity.

Richey's aimlessness finds a mirror in his friends and flatmates (he has already been kicked out of the halls of residence) as they idle their way through their first year. It is already April and Richey is yet to attend his first lecture.

He quickly careens beyond apathy to anger. Just what he's angry about, apart from being 18, isn't made entirely clear, although we are told that there has been an incident at an out-of-control student party that led to a disciplinary hearing on a sexual harassment charge.

Student Dunedin is the hero of this book. Shuker — another graduate of Bill Manhire's celebrated Victoria University creative writing course and beneficiary of the Penguin production line for local fiction — knows the lifestyles and speech of the inhabitants of the city's anarchic north end and captures them brilliantly on the page. You can smell the Speight's and the pheromones.

As I said, not a "naice" book, but a book with an awful fascination as the reader turns the pages to discover more of what some of our offspring are probably getting up to.

