

The Seattle Times

Thursday, October 9, 2008 - Page updated at 11:10 AM

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"The Eleventh Man": The fates of legendary football teammates play out in WWII

By Mary Ann Gwinn
Seattle Times book editor

"The Eleventh Man"

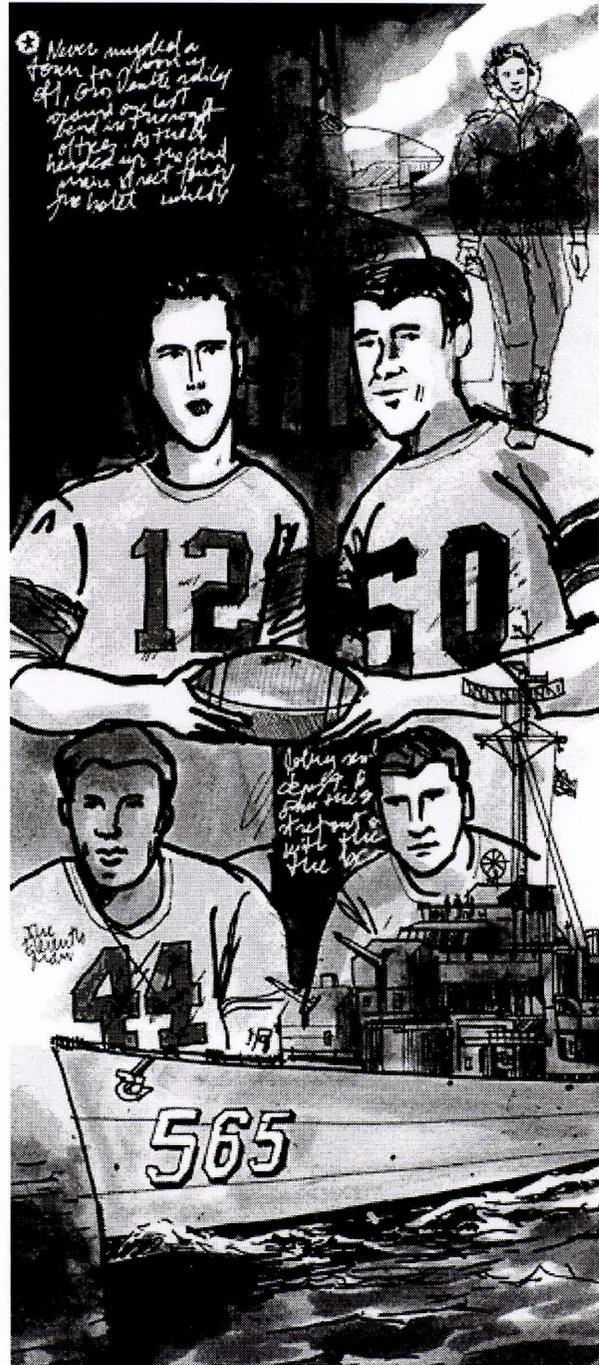
by Ivan Doig

Harcourt, 406 pp., \$26

Ivan Doig is a fearless storyteller. The Seattle author, an icon among writers of the American west, has set his novels and memoirs against our region's natural grandeur and has put hundreds of characters in play on its outsize stage. Now, in his novel "The Eleventh Man," Doig has taken on the largest of backdrops: the entire theater of World War II.

"The Eleventh Man" is the story of Ben Reinking, the son of a newspaper owner in Gros Ventre, a small town in Montana. Ben, out of college just two years, is fighting the war in a peculiar way: Yanked from an assignment as a combat pilot, Ben has been pressed into service as a journalist/propagandist for the Threshold Press War Project, a government-backed press service that feeds heroic stories to midsize and small newspapers that can't afford their own war correspondent.

In college, Ben was a member of Treasure State University's legendary "Supreme Team," which fought to an undefeated season after one of their players ran himself to death in a workout (who's at fault is one of the unfolding mysteries of the book). Every surviving member of the football team has joined up. Ben's assignment is to tell their war stories, all over the globe.



Author appearance
Ivan Doig

The author of "The Eleventh Man"

Right from the get go, Ben resists; the odds are that at least a few of these stories are going to be obituaries. His handler, a shadowy figure called the Colonel, insists that the awful arithmetic of wartime still tilts toward the team's survival: " 'Statistically speaking, in this war we are looking at a nine percent mortality rate for active combatants such as your teammates. Rounding that off to a whole man, as we must' — Ben stared at a human being who could use the law of averages to measure dirt on a grave — 'that is one in ten, isn't it.' " Not to give too much away, but things don't quite turn out that way.

Ben, not having any choice in the matter of wartime duty, throws himself into the task; he's got the genes of a newspaperman and can't resist the dramatic contrast of the Supreme Team's stories: Vic Rennie, the Blackfoot Indian who lived in a relative's shack while attending Treasure State, has already stepped on a land mine and is consigned to a wheelchair. But Dex Cariston, scion of a moneyed Montana family, is sitting out the war in a camp of conscientious objector-status smoke jumpers (as with many details in this book, this one is based on historical fact; there really was such a unit).

Meanwhile, Ben's blood is a-boil over Cass Standish, a married female pilot assigned to the same Montana air base. Cass is head of a squad of all-female pilots charged with ferrying planes from one North American location to another. Some of the best scenes in "The Eleventh Man" convey the crackling "From Here to Eternity"-style passion between these two: Cass is wild about Ben, but she's married, her husband is slogging out the war in the jungles of New Guinea and she's not about to write a Dear John letter addressed to a soldier in green hell.

Doig's way with a sweeping scene is on display in "The Eleventh Man's" evocation of the awful grandeur of war. Standing on the deck of a destroyer as it attempts to bomb a Japanese submarine into oblivion, Ben watches his own death postponed:

"Sea air rushed by, there on the steel promontory into the dark. A mane of moonsilver flowed back from the destroyer's bow ... As his eyes adjusted, Ben could just make out the long narrow deck below, armaments jutting ready if they only had a target, faces of the gun crews pale patches foreshortened by helmets."

Then the submarine takes a direct hit: "He felt the shudder up from the water. Astern, explosions bloomed white in the darkness. Knowing this to be one of the sights of a lifetime, he watched with an intensity near to quivering. Not often is it given to you to stare away death, see it go instead in search of your sworn enemy."

While "The Eleventh Man" is a showcase for larger-than-life characters and scenes, at times it threatens to founder under the weight of its structure. Readers are parachuted into the lives of each teammate, then yanked up again and set on the road to somewhere and someone else. The book is a stage chockablock with interesting characters who speak their lines — bluff, hearty, lyrical, ironic — then get snatched away.

And a key concern of the novel — whether a malign *deus ex machina* is dictating the assignments, and fates, of the team — was never quite resolved to this reader's satisfaction. Would a government agency really thrust these young men into hazardous assignments for the purpose of creating dead heroes, or is Ben's presence more a sort of jinx? Both possibilities are suggested but never spelled out. Ben's minders are

will read at these locations:

• 7 p.m. Monday at Third Place Books, 17171 Bothell Way N.E., Lake Forest

Park (206-366-3333 or www.thirdplacebooks.com).

• 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Eagle

Harbor Book Co., 157 Winslow Way E., Bainbridge Island (206-842-5332 or www.eagleharborbooks.com).

• 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Seattle's

Elliott Bay Book Co., 101 S. Main St., Seattle (206-624-6666 or www.elliottbaybook.com).

• 7:30 p.m. Nov. 12 at Town Hall Seattle (sponsored by University Book Store), 1119 Eighth Ave., Seattle; \$5 (206-634-3400 or www.ubookstore.com).

• 7 p.m. Nov. 13 at Parkplace Books, 348 Parkplace Cent Kirkland (425-828-6546 or www.parkplacebookskirkland.com).

manipulative and heartless, but they never really step from behind the curtain.

With Doig's warm regard for his Supreme Team characters, his disdain for his story's villains and his way with the heart-stopping action scene, in "The Eleventh Man" he has created a wartime epic, but with a difference. Though its marketing suggests it will resonate with the "Greatest Generation," "The Eleventh Man" trembles with the weariness of the modern age toward carnage — a war novel with an anti-war heart.

Mary Ann Gwinn: 206-464-2357 or mgwinn@seattletimes.com. She is The Seattle Times book editor and a director of the National Book Critics Circle.

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Winning Football Team Loses Its Luck on WWII Battlefield: Books
2008-10-13 04:01:00.70 GMT

Review by David M. Shribman

Oct. 13 (Bloomberg) -- An undefeated 1941 football season. A town scratched into Montana's northern plains. A war with many fronts, including the home front. A small-town newspaper editor. A willowy female pilot who's in love with our hero while her husband is fighting in the Pacific. Damn good raw materials for a novel, no?

``The Eleventh Man'' draws from three of the hardest genres in the American canon: the sports book, the war novel, the story set in the great West. The author of this hat trick is Ivan Doig, who is a genre all his own.

The setting is Gros Ventre, the fictional community in Two Medicine country that Doig has mined much the way Thomas Hardy did with Wessex. They're not on the map, but they occupy our interior landscape. And though on the surface this novel revolves around one resilient American theme (that championship season), it's really about honor, loyalty, and the character and courage that war creates -- and reveals.

The book begins with one of the great opening sentences of the season: ``Never much of a town for showing off, Gros Ventre waited around one last bend in the road, supertime lights coming on here and there beneath its roof of trees.'' Thus starts the tale of the storied Golden Eagles of Treasure State University, who swept through their entire '41 season and then were swept into the war that began as the season ended.

All 11 starters enlisted in the war effort, but one of them, Ben Reinking, is plucked by Washington to chronicle the heroics of the other 10 -- making them fodder for the propaganda effort before, grimly but inevitably, they become fodder for the Axis forces and the fortunes of war. Through their stories we learn their secrets and shame, their valor and bravery.

``War and Peace''

For Ben, who is our periscope into World War II, watching the conflict was ``like reading ``War and Peace'' standing up.'' But for the reader it is a glimpse into the heartbreaking caprice and cruelty of war: ``Sure, you could believe for all you were worth that you were too young and fit and lucky to be chased down by death, but all of accumulated history yawns back, why not you?''

The Golden Eagles died in the customary ways, which is to say the worst ways possible; in, as Doig puts it, ``the black fire of nightmare.'' They died in New Guinea, or in a kamikaze raid at Leyte Gulf, or in some forgotten field. It was a team ``betrayed by the law of averages, with something that amounted to a moving wall of oblivion hinged to the war for them.''

Doig is a master of fiction, to be sure, but his story has a bitter root of truth. Eleven members of the football team from Montana State College in Bozeman did die in World War II, and for his story Doig drew on oral histories, memoirs and other research material.

Landlocked Navy

Indeed, the war reached deep into faraway Montana; almost 900 trainees were sent to the Montana School of Mines in Butte in the V-12

program, which in one of the most rugged landlocked states prepared young men ... for the Navy.

All this is a reminder that the Greatest Generation was far more complex than we often think. In a way that's the message of this book, stuffed full of the standard wartime heroism but seasoned, too, with the moral agonies of the conscientious objector, the adulterer and the opportunist who uses war as a step on the career ladder.

This may have been a good war -- and this is surely a good war novel -- but in the end this story, like all war stories, is mostly a sad one. The Golden Eagles landed in a mess of trouble and tragedy.

``The Eleventh Man'' is published by Harcourt (416 pages, \$26).

(David M. Shribman is executive editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. The opinions expressed are his own.)

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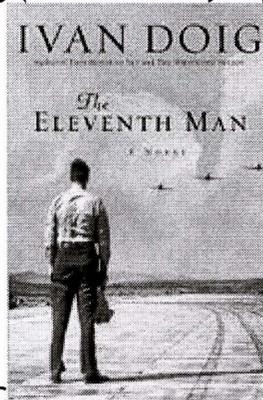
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FROM JANUARY MAGAZINE (ONLINE)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2008

New Today: *The Eleventh Man* by Ivan Doig

There's something sweetly sentimental in all the testosterone lurking not far beneath the covers of *The Eleventh Man* (Harcourt), a football novel that melds into World War II from Ivan Doig (*This House of Sky*, *The Whistling Season*).



That would seem a contradiction in terms -- sweet sentiment. Masses of testosterone -- but somehow it's not. Somehow it works in a book that manages to be epic in scope and fact.

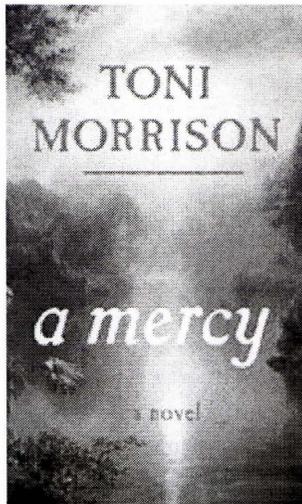
The war licked its chops over the battle of Leyte Gulf, as it came to be called, with the inevitability from day one that history would speak of such a gang-fight of fleets in the same breath with the Spanish Armada, Trafalgar, Jutland, and Midway. Ben all but moved into the wire room at East Base to follow reports of the military struggle shaping up around the Philippine Islands. It proved to be like reading War and Peace standing up.

Ben Reinking is the 11th man, left behind to chronicle the exploits of his former football teammates as they make their way through various theaters of war. An exciting book with all the right stuff. *The Eleventh Man* might well be the very best thing Doig -- an acclaimed and respected author -- has done to date. I loved every word.

LABELS: FICTION, LINCOLN CHO

Fall foreword, or the big books of autumn

Posted by [mnorman](#) October 04, 2008 19:09PM



Book-clubbers will tell you that their best attendance invariably comes in the fall. The reason, I think, is that echo, like an old circadian rhythm, we carry from our school days. It nudges us to place a short stack of good books on the nightstand each autumn, and it compels publishers to roll out their marquee titles then.

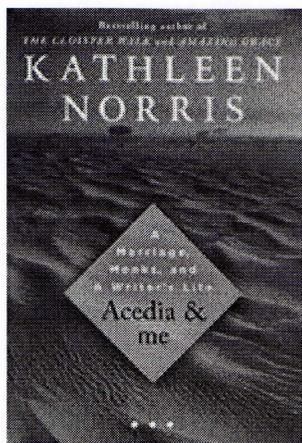
Publishing houses also line up trophy books in anticipation of brisk holiday sales in two months, hoping to catch a well-timed best-seller wave. But the industry is also queasy, as markets roil and Joe Lombardi, chief financial officer of Barnes & Noble Inc., pronounces this the harshest book-selling environment in 30 years.

Visits to the library tick up during inclement economic weather. The Cleveland Public Library reports circulation of books alone is up 6.4 percent over last year's pace. And branches of the Cuyahoga County Public Library calculate that readers have checked out 341,847 more books through August this year than they did through August 2007.

From wherever you pluck your books, the fall contains plenty of lip-smacking titles, including new fiction from that chiseled Mount Rushmore of American literature: Toni Morrison, John Updike and Philip Roth. Readers looking for less lofty fare will be sated, too, with a new memoir from John "Marley & Me" Grogan and some fresh Stephen King short stories.

Quentin Tarantino once observed that "You can't write poetry on the computer." True enough, but check out our list of 33 worthy authors who gave it a try.

OUT NOW



"Acedia & Me" by Kathleen Norris is a meditation on world-weary lethargy from the revered author of "The Cloister Walk" and "Amazing Grace." The North Dakota-raised editor at The Christian Century mixes memoir, monks and spiritual classics to consider her own ennui. (Riverhead Books, 334 pp., \$25.95)

"American Wife" by Curtis Sittenfeld is a fat, engaging novel that presumes to explore the interior life of Laura Bush, here called Alice Lindgren. The young Cincinnati-raised author has much empathy for her central character, and very little for Charlie Blackwell, who becomes president of the United States. (Random House, 558 pp., \$26)

"Angler" by Barton Gellman examines Vice President Dick Cheney's uses of power and his rarity in the realm of American politics -- a man who has sought influence not to promote himself, but his ideas. Gellman won a Pulitzer Prize for his Washington Post reporting on Cheney, and his meticulously researched nonfiction is riveting. (Penguin, 483 pp., \$27.95)

"Ballistics" by Billy Collins collects a new batch of poems from the popular former U.S. poet laureate, who packs auditoriums and pleases audiences with his wry, accessible work. Writing in The Plain Dealer, critic Dave Lucas found Collins stretching his repertoire to good effect here. (Random House, 112 pp., \$24)

"Fine Just the Way It Is" by Annie Proulx is the third book of Wyoming short stories from the fiction writer who created "Brokeback Mountain." It comes as a shock that the "Shipping News" novelist moved to Wyoming as recently as 1994 -- her writing here carries the grit and wallop of generations. (Scribner, 221 pp., \$25)

"The Given Day" by Dennis Lehane is a thick historical novel five years in the making from the Boston-saturated author of "Mystic River" and "Gone Baby Gone." Instead of murder, Lehane focuses on Babe Ruth when he played for the Red Sox and the 1919 Boston police strike. Ambitious, and garnering mixed reviews. (William Morrow, 704 pp., \$27.50)

"The Good Thief" by Hannah Tinti is a debut novel that has generated terrific word of mouth for its balance of tenderness and peril in the story of an orphan boy who is "rescued" by a young man pretending to be his brother. Cleveland Heights writer Dan Chaon calls it "Tim Burton doing Dickens." (Dial Press, 327 pp., \$25)

"The Hemingses of Monticello" by Annette Gordon-Reed, a historian and law professor, is a doorstop

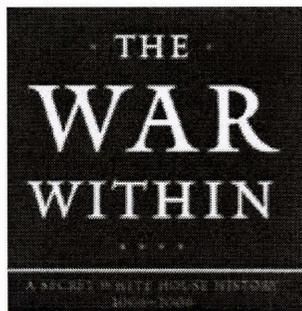
corrective to early American history, painting a composite portrait of a family that stood at the wellspring of the nation's beginnings. These pages on Thomas Jefferson, slave Sally Hemings, their children and kin fascinate and surprise. (Norton, 798 pp., \$35)

"Home" by Marilynne Robinson is a companion novel to the quiet, lyrical Pulitzer-winner "Gilead." This time, a prodigal Iowa son returns to a dying father, where a stymied sister abides. The Plain Dealer and The New Yorker lauded it, but Michiko Kakutani in The New York Times was dismissive. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 325, \$25)

"Hot, Flat and Crowded" by Thomas L. Friedman is "The World Is Flat" author's missive on global warming. The New York Times columnist subtitles this book "Why We Need a Green Revolution -- And How It Can Renew America." Facts are illuminating and well-framed, but the tone is sermonizing. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 438 pp., \$27.95)

"Indignation" by Philip Roth finds the dyspeptic author telling the story of a new character, the intense butcher's son Marcus Messler, enrolled in an Ohio college in 1951, worried about his sex life and the Korean War draft. Roth, who attended Bucknell College in Lewisburg, Pa., in the 1950s, concisely conjures a lost era. (Houghton Mifflin, 233, \$26)

"A Promise to Ourselves" by Alec Baldwin is the actor's roar against U.S. family courts that he describes as cruel and unfair. Declaring this the book he "never wanted to write," Baldwin blames the system more than his ex-wife, Kim Basinger, in the custody fight over their daughter, Ireland. (St. Martin's, 224 pp., \$24.95)



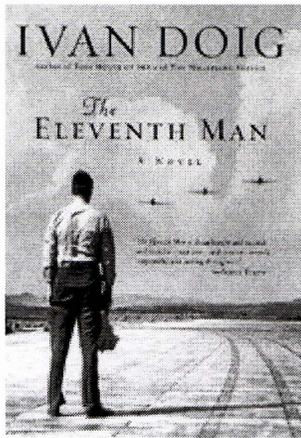
BOB
WOODWARD

"The War Within" by Bob Woodward is the finale of the author's authoritative, exhaustive and exhausting four-part series on the administration of George W. Bush. Like its predecessors, it features exclusive investigative sources and documents. This time, the president granted Woodward two sit-down interviews. (Simon & Schuster, 512 pp. \$32)

THIS MONTH

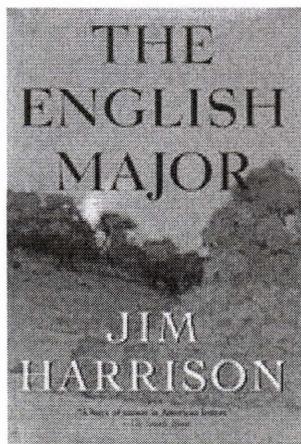
"The Blue Cotton Gown" by Patricia Harman is a frank, absorbing memoir from a midwife at a tiny West Virginia health clinic. The book recounts the sexual, financial and family histories of her patients, and of the author herself, who struggles with her marriage to the clinic doctor and her own burnout. (Beacon Press, 289 pp., \$24.95)

"Chagall" by Jackie Wullschlager is worthy of an art lover's gasp, a biography of the great figurative painter, born poor in Russia, who wandered Europe during its upheaval and took the shtetls of his youth as inspiration. With 40 full-color reproductions and original research from the chief art critic of the London Financial Times. (Knopf, 592 pp., \$40).



"The Eleventh Man" by Ivan Doig is a novel in which the entire starting lineup of a 1941 Montana college football team enlists after Pearl Harbor. The title figure is the former player pulled out to write war propoganda on his teammates and is unhappy with the job. Doig, a Montana sage, expands nicely from his Western base. (Harcourt, 406 pp., \$26)

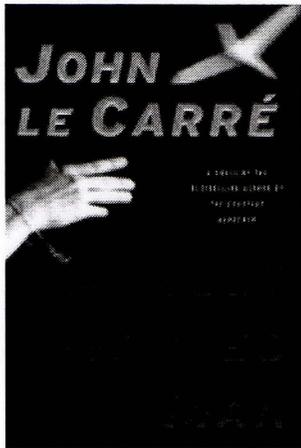
"Emily Post" by Laura Claridge is a biography of the woman whose sharp advice has followed us into the 21st century -- Joan Didion called Post's writing on grief the most useful she read. The author does deft, intriguing work in the book, subtitled "Daughter of the Gilded Age, Mistress of American Manners." (Random House, 525 pp., \$30)



"The English Major" by Jim Harrison is a road novel about the 60-year-old title character's attempt to start over when his dog dies, his wife of 38 years dumps him and then maneuvers the Michigan family farm out from under him. The author of 25 books is known for his *joie de vivre* and his wit. (Grove Press, 2542 pp., \$24)

"I See You Everywhere" by Julia Glass is from the Manhattan novelist who won the National Book Award for "Three Junes." Her latest femme-centric book evolves over 25 years between two sisters -- one a wildlife biologist and a rebel, the other a responsible arts editor who chafes against her more conventional life. (Pantheon, 287 pp., \$24.93)

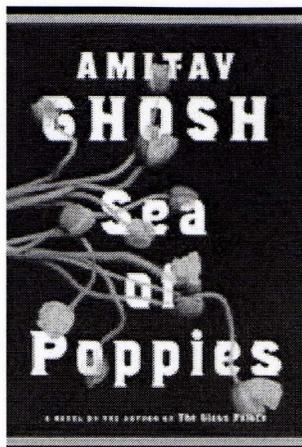
"The Longest Trip Home" by John Grogan is the author's attempt to bring lightning down into the sweet spot that sold over 4 million copies of "Marley & Me." This new memoir tells of Grogan's Catholic, Detroit boyhood, his parents' woe when he leaves the faith, and how he faces their mortality. (William Morrow, 331, \$25.95)



"A Most Wanted Man" by John le Carré is the latest novel from the master who gave us George Smiley in "The Spy who Came in from the Cold." The new story starts with a half-starved young Russian Muslim smuggled into post 9/11 Hamburg with an improbable amount of cash, triggering the interest of multiple spy agencies. (Scribner, 323 pp., \$28)

"Poe's Children" edited by Peter Straub, is an anthology of cutting-edge horror writers, featuring a chilling story from Clevelander Dan Chaon, "The Bees," about a man haunted by past mistakes. The 24 tales include work from Kelly Link, Stephen King, Neil Gaiman, Jonathan Carroll and Elizabeth Hand. (Doubleday, 534 pp., \$26.95)

"Roads to Quoz" by William Least Heat-Moon, who made his mark with "Blue Highways," the 1982 meander along the America less traveled. Here he traces the southern half of the Louisiana Purchase, watching for "quoz" -- anything out of the ordinary. He collects stories and eccentrics, as he did in earlier books. (Little, Brown, 563 pp., \$27.99)



"Sea of Poppies" by Amitav Ghosh is the epic novel predicted to wow lovers of the English language. Ghosh, best known for "The Glass Palace," sets his new story just before the Opium Wars that roiled India in the 19th century, and he places his characters aboard a ship transporting "coolies" and outlaws. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 512 pp., \$26)

"The Shadow Factory" by James Bamford, whose first book, 1982's "The Puzzle Palace" unlocked secrets of the National Security Administration. This time, he probes the agency's activities "from 9/11 to the Eavesdropping on America." Embargoed until Oct. 14. (Doubleday, 416 pp., \$27.95).

"To Siberia" by Per Petterson, the Norwegian whose 2007 book in English, "Out Stealing Horses," became an international triumph. Now, he turns his spare, deliberate prose to the story of a brother and sister, whose grandfather has committed suicide and whose village is imperiled by oncoming Third Reich planes. (Graywolf, 245 pp., \$22)

"Tried by War" by James McPherson, the historian who won a Pulitzer for his Civil War classic, "Battle Cry of Freedom," turns his eye toward Abraham Lincoln as commander in chief, an idea McPherson argues that Lincoln essentially invented. Full of humanizing touches and fluid prose. (Penguin, 329 pp., \$35)

"The Widows of Eastwick" by John Updike catches up with the trio of characters he created for his 1984 novel, "The Witches of Eastwick," as they outlive their subsequent husbands and return to the Rhode Island seaside town where they made mischief three decades ago. Early word has been lukewarm. (Knopf, 303 pp., \$24.95)

NOVEMBER

"Gone Tomorrow" by P.F. Kluge is the ninth novel from the gifted Kenyon College writing professor. It tells of a literary executor trying to make sense of the life of a small-college Ohio writing professor killed in a hit-and run. From the author of "Eddie and the Cruisers," which is being reissued as well. (Overlook, 288 pp., \$24.95)

"The Hour I First Believed" by Wally Lamb is the first novel in a decade from the author of "She's Come Undone." It is an ambitious book about a couple who move to Colorado and take jobs at Columbine High School before the massacre. The husband is away, but the wife, who survives, is traumatized. (HarperCollins, 739 pp., \$29.95)

Books: The List: 3 new takes on familiar stories

The Salt Lake Tribune

Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated:10/19/2008 11:19:10 AM MDT

Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury

By Alison Light

Bloomsbury

\$30 » 376 pps

Let us pause for a moment and imagine literature without Bloomsbury. That group of writers, philosophers and artists occupies a fertile spot in our minds. Do we really need another book on Bloomsbury? The answer is, resoundingly, yes. Especially "Mrs. Woolf and the Servants." Light's aim in writing the book is "to give the servants back their dignity and the respect they deserve."¹¹

- Susan Salter Reynolds, The Los Angeles Time

Madeline and the Cats of Rome

John Bemelmans Marciano

Viking Juvenile

\$17.99 » 48 pp

John Bemelmans Marciano, grandson of "Madeline" author-artist Ludwig Bemelmans, has written the first entirely new Madeline storybook since the author's 1962 death. It's in the spirit of the originals, even if it doesn't try to emulate every detail. Marciano wanted to play up some of his grandfather's love of comic books and graphic design, but he knew longtime readers wanted the new book to be as close to the midcentury originals as possible.

- Scott Timberg, The Los Angeles Times

The Eleventh Man

By Ivan Doig

Harcourt

\$26 » 352 pp

"The Eleventh Man" draws from three of the hardest genres in the American canon: the sports book, the war novel, the story set in the great West. The author of this hat trick is Ivan Doig, who is a genre all his own. Though this novel revolves around one resilient American theme (that championship season), it's really about honor, loyalty, and the character and courage that war creates - and reveals.

- David M. Shribman, Bloomberg News

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To Rebecca HTP-NYC Saletan@HMH

cc Thomas H. HTP-NYC Bourman@HMH, Erika
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bcc

Subject More Doig reviews

Hi Becky-

Some more nice reviews for Ivan Doig!

A RAVE in the Rocky Mountain News, 10/16:

<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/2008/oct/16/the-eleventh-man/>

A highlight: Doig just keeps getting better....Doig incorporates all the elements of a good novel: an intensifying love interest, the drama of war, repeated moments of life-or-death intensity, the complexity of multiple story lines, historical curiosities, seamless prose and even a winning football team...THE ELEVENTH MAN, Doig's 12th, is his best thus far.

A mixed review in the Oregonian, 10/17

http://www.oregonlive.com/O/index.ssf/2008/10/fiction_review_the_eleventh_ma.html

A highlight: "Doig's book is really about our strong history of storytelling, and the variety of ways we spin out words, especially during and about war times....it feels quite right to call Doig's writing a part of Americana." *Oregonian*

Bloomberg pickup in the 10/19 Salt Lake Tribune:

http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_10755066?source=rss

-T.

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The Greatest Sacrifice

A young army reporter chronicles the harrowing lives of his football buddies in World War II.

Reviewed by Molly Gloss
Sunday, October 19, 2008; BW04

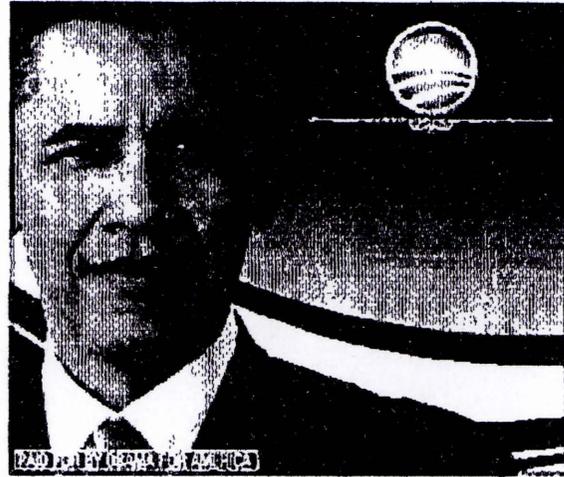
THE ELEVENTH MAN

By Ivan Doig

Harcourt. 406 pp. \$26

The 11 men alluded to in the title of Ivan Doig's new novel compose the starting football team for fictional Treasure State (Montana) University in its much-heralded undefeated 1941 season. Now, in 1943, 10 of those men are scattered in far-flung theaters of a world war, and the 11th, Ben Reinking, is writing up his teammates' exploits for a military propaganda machine called the Threshold Press War Project -- TPWP, sardonically known as Tepee Weepy.

Advertisement



The story occasionally jumps back to earlier events in Ben's life and to the 1941 football season, in particular a pivotal week before the opening game when the sudden death of a teammate was the catalyst for the so-called "season of the Twelfth Man." But the bulk of the novel follows Reinking as he chronicles his teammates' war experiences -- and, when necessary, their deaths -- for publication in newspapers around the country.

It's a shapely premise for a novel, allowing Doig a broad canvas on which to paint the breadth and scope of World War II: Carl is bogged down in the forests of New Guinea; Jake pilots Lend-Lease planes from East Base, Mont., north to Russia; "Animal," on a Marine troop ship, hopscotchs from one island beachhead to the next; Sig, in the Coast Guard, patrols the Puget Sound shore; Moxie bosses an anti-aircraft gun pit in Antwerp; Nick serves on a destroyer in the Pacific; and Dexter is confined to a conscientious objector camp in the north Montana woods. Add to these a squadron of Women Air Force Service Pilots -- WASPs -- assigned to East Base, ferrying military aircraft north to Canada, and nearly every military operation is in play.

Scenes range from the jungles of Guam to the Butte du Lion of Waterloo, but the story returns again and again to East Base, Mont., where Doig, not surprisingly, is at his most lyrical, evoking the landscape of Ben Reinking's (and Doig's own) childhood. "Wheatfields winter-sown and fallow stretched below like checkered linoleum laid to the wall of the Rockies. There to the west he could pick out the long straight brink of Roman Reef and its dusky cliff, and the snake line of watercourse that would be English Creek. Gros Ventre, though, held itself out of sight beneath its cover of trees."

English Creek and the town of Gros Ventre are familiar place names in Montana's Two Medicine country that Doig first imagined for his trilogy about the McCaskill family, novels that are still perhaps his best-known works: *English Creek*, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* and *Ride with Me, Mariah Montana*.

The Eleventh Man is more wide-ranging and plot-heavy than those earlier works. Statistical probability means nine of the 10 on the "Supreme Team" should survive, but those odds are neither a guarantee nor

a consolation; as the novel opens, two of the team are already in their graves, and another has lost a leg, fighting in Sicily. Soon, Ben Reinking is writing a third obituary, and then a fourth. As one by one the men perish, the novel takes on a growing sense of doom and inevitability.

Ben, on temporary assignment at East Base, falls for the WASP commanding officer, Cass Standish, and their love affair casts its own dark shadow: Cass is a married woman with a husband serving in Guam. Mysteries underlie both the season of *The Twelfth Man* and the fateful roll call of deaths reported in Ben's Tepee Weepy dispatches. There are lengthy scenes of battle: the invasion of Guam, the battle of Leyte Gulf, the bombardment of Antwerp, all described in historical detail.

Yet this is not a novel with a strong sense of suspense or dramatic complication. Most of the deaths befalling the "Supreme Team" happen off stage, relayed to Ben and to us after the fact; and we're almost halfway into the book before something occurs that puts Ben himself in peril. For a war novel taking place on such a wide, dangerous field, the book is remarkably quiet. Doig is known for his rich imagining of local American history and the nuances of human relationships, and this is a book that deliberately keeps its attention on the places where war intersects with those less dramatic themes.

He is also sometimes called old-fashioned, which can be either criticism or approbation, depending on your point of view; and granted, it's sometimes hard to distinguish nostalgia from careful, thoughtful avoidance of cynicism. There are a few cringe-inducing moments in *The Eleventh Man*, especially in the romance between Ben and Cass. "She flicked him the urgent smile that showed the irresistible tiny gap between her front teeth, and he melted like a schoolboy and knew it. Deeply and rigorously they kissed again, running their hands silkily here and there, as if keeping track of everything in the book of hotel-room romance."

But *The Eleventh Man* vividly evokes a prior time and way of being. It takes a serious view of war and the practitioners of war, and looks hard at the meaning of heroism. And not incidentally, it contains enough loose threads to hint at a sequel, which will be good news to Doig's many loyal readers.

Molly Gloss is the author of several novels, including most recently "The Hearts of Horses."

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Books: The List: 3 new takes on familiar stories

The Salt Lake Tribune
Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated:10/19/2008 11:19:10 AM MDT

Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury

By Alison Light

Bloomsbury

\$30 » 376 pps

Let us pause for a moment and imagine literature without Bloomsbury. That group of writers, philosophers and artists occupies a fertile spot in our minds. Do we really need another book on Bloomsbury? The answer is, resoundingly, yes. Especially "Mrs. Woolf and the Servants." Light's aim in writing the book is "to give the servants back their dignity and the respect they deserve."

- Susan Salter Reynolds, The Los Angeles Time

Madeline and the Cats of Rome

John Bemelmans Marciano

Viking Juvenile

\$17.99 » 48 pp

John Bemelmans Marciano, grandson of "Madeline" author-artist Ludwig Bemelmans, has written the first entirely new Madeline storybook since the author's 1962 death. It's in the spirit of the originals, even if it doesn't try to emulate every detail. Marciano wanted to play up some of his grandfather's love of comic books and graphic design, but he knew longtime readers wanted the new book to be as close to the midcentury originals as possible.

- Scott Timberg, The Los Angeles Times

The Eleventh Man

By Ivan Doig

Harcourt

\$26 » 352 pp

"The Eleventh Man" draws from three of the hardest genres in the American canon: the sports book, the war novel, the story set in the great West. The author of this hat trick is Ivan Doig, who is a genre all his own. Though this novel revolves around one resilient American theme (that championship season), it's really about honor, loyalty, and the character and courage that war creates - and reveals.

- David M. Shribman, Bloomberg News

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TELEVISION**Fiction review: "The Eleventh Man"**

by Kristin Thiel, special to The Oregonian

Friday October 17, 2008, 11:31 AM

In 1943 Ben Reinking is two years past college and solidly in the middle of an affair with a married woman, a deadly mystery from his past and World War II, for which he's been unwillingly made a cog in the American propaganda machine.

"The Eleventh Man," Ivan Doig's latest novel, carries readers along on its promise of political conspiracy and fateful meetings, but it drops us before we reach an expected conclusion. In war, one must be on-target; in a good story, ending slightly off-target is more important.

Thanks to the bravado of a celebrity-seeking reporter, all of Montana knows of the legendary college football team Reinking was a part of; after the players' graduation from school and into the war, the American government can't pass up such an opportunity, and Reinking is assigned to chronicle the missions of each of his 10 teammates for the Threshold Press War Project.

Reinking "understood that the name was meant to invoke the doorstep hometown, the breadbasket America ... with its sons and daughters in the war. But it never left his mind for long that a threshold also was where people wiped their feet on something." As with that description, Doig does a fine job at keeping most of the third-person narrative from Reinking's perspective, which lends a readable touch to such a serious situation. This is a story from a young man, so its voice is wide-eyed and moved as well as sardonic and on guard.

After his experience with untrustworthy media during his football days, Reinking is determined to slip things by "the red pencil of the invisible copy officer back in Washington," things such as the uninteresting realities of some of his teammates and the true heroics of people the government would rather not dwell on. One of the latter is Reinking's lover, Cass Standish, a member of the Women Air Force Service Pilots, which really existed and included 916 women, 38 of whom were killed during the war.



Idiot Box: Television by
Peter Arnes Carlin

- "Mad Men" episode 12:
My eyes are vague
blue...
- Democracy in Action:
Hey, Joe, Whaddaya
Know?
- "Mad Men" episode 11:
Ode to Joy

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Shawn Levy

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Standish's story is an interesting one, and "The Eleventh Man" might have been better if it had included more chapters from the points of view of her and others in her squadron. Instead, Doig's narrative cuts away from Reinking to other characters, from a Montana senator to Reinking's father to a couple of players on his old team. None of those characters gets his due, and it feels like a forced way to fit in plot updates.

Still, Doig has definitely written a different kind of American war novel by including in relatively prominent ways characters such as Standish and her crew -- and others, such as Reinking's Blackfoot teammate, Vic Reunic, and members of the Civilian Public Service. Beyond that, Doig's book is really about our strong history of storytelling, and the variety of ways we spin out words, especially during and about war times. When Reinking was struggling to report, "a script turned out to already exist in him. ... The lore of war." In this way it feels quite right to call Doig's writing a part of Americana.

Details: *THE ELEVENTH MAN*

Ivan Doig, Harcourt

\$26, 416 pages

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Spirit: An Interview with Ivan Doig
by Betsy Burton

Because we loved Ivan Doig's new novel *The Eleventh Man* so much, we tried to talk him into visiting TKE to read from it. Deep in his next novel, he couldn't leave home, but (we hope because he has a soft spot for TKE) he agreed to this interview and to signing copies for our customers—for which we are infinitely grateful.

BB: The subject of propaganda, which must be anathema to a former journalist such as you, is one of the moral—or I guess I should say immoral—centers of *The Eleventh Man*. Without giving away too much of the story, were there propaganda projects you uncovered in your research on WWII that had such dark undersides as The Threshold War Project or names as imaginative as Ben's mangled acronym for it, Tepee Weepy?

ID: No, I made up Tepee Weepy *and* its dark side, but we've seen that dark side in Iraq and Afghanistan in particular, seen the Pentagon's dark side. It's been said that the first

casualty of war is truth and that's the journalist's truth, I guess, Ben's truth. We've seen it recently with the Pentagon coaching the so-called military "analysts" who gave us their war commentary just this spring—coaching them about what to say. Ben constantly has to contend with the heavy hand of wartime journalism. I don't know that there was anything like Tepee Weepy during WWII, but the Office of War Information certainly had an effective machine. *Any* military operation tries to make itself look as good as it can so everyone will hear what they say about themselves and believe it. They insert themselves between the public and the actuality of war.

In the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan we don't even see the coffins come home as we did in Vietnam. It's becoming harder and harder for journalists to work. It really does go back to that old journalistic saying I mentioned, that the first casualty of war is truth.

BB: In the acknowledgments you make it plain that the idea for your Supreme Team was based in part on fact. Was the discovery of the Bozeman team you cite what started

you on the trail of the plot for your novel? Or, did you begin wanting to tell a tale of Montana's involvement in WWII and fold the Supreme Team into that tale when it surfaced?

ID: Two things converged when a librarian friend—librarians are research utility infielders, something that writers *so* badly need—gave me the information [on the Bozeman team] and I immediately thought, What if you were the eleventh man and had seen everything that had happened to your teammates in the war—you'd feel that fate was *looking* for you. That was one story line. The other was women pilots ferrying planes in the Lend-Lease program. These two story lines came together pretty promptly and then spread into the plot. It was the history, those two *pieces* of history, rather than Montana, that started the book up in this case—if they had occurred in Washington or Utah I'd have set it there. It was history that drove the story. In the novel, Ben's father says, "History writes the best stories."

BB: To pursue the idea of The Supreme Team, the members of which figure so prominently in your book, the camaraderie that members

of a great football team develop, coupled with a fierce competitiveness directed at the other team, is perfect training and perhaps a perfect metaphor for war. Although you never underline this, your journalist/team captain Ben has a pretty clear-eyed view of both. Can you talk a bit about the similarities for good and for ill?

ID: There's an undercurrent in the Supreme Team's football history, particularly under their coach, that *is* a metaphor for combat or at least for organized conflict. The iron-butt training the coach demanded is a metaphor for the kind of training that occurs in war. And they're physically fit, big, Western, outdoor guys who can handle rifles, do the chores they need to do—their training singles them out as prime soldier material.

I think that is part of what happened in Montana and New Mexico during WWII and probably the rest of the West, although I don't have the statistics on Utah or Wyoming. But the guys from Montana and New Mexico took the most deaths of WWII. The national guard of Montana was sent to New Guinea; that meat grinder happened long

before the other troops were deployed to places like Africa. It was early 1942, defenses were thin in that part of the world and we needed to protect Australia. So guys who had never seen a palm tree were up to their armpits in jungle.

Football training is a metaphor for good *and* for ill. It helped them cope with what the military wanted, train for conflict, but the difference is in the kind of conflict. This kind [war] is deadly.

BB: Cass, the wonderful, wiry WASP pilot and squadron commander, is an inspired character, one who knows what she's doing and why and has a pretty strong moral compass—as does Ben. The situation you put them in forces them to examine in a haunting way what is and isn't moral, what they can and can't live with. You've had plenty of strong female characters in your novels before—in all of them, as nearly as I can recall. But you've never created anyone as amazing as she is. Is she modeled on anyone you found in your research or do you think it was the extraordinary time, the extraordinary opportunities women had during the war, opportunities that they had never had before, that made

her possible, believable?

ID: Cass is not modeled on anyone (laughs). My life is FULL of strong women from my wife to my agent to my editor to my sales director. But one of the things I tried to do in the book was to give the reader that eternal question, What do you do when love sneaks up on you inconveniently? I was interested in having Cass deal with it as a *man* would have—she doesn't back off from her right to have Ben Reinking in her life. Cass is meant to show a Shakespearean or Conradian “what if,” but with a woman instead of a man. She's a great intuitive leader when she's in command, but what about when she's *off-duty*? She's terrific in the cockpit, she's at home in the cockpit, and she's up against a lot on the ground, especially in late 1944 when the Air Force says, ‘We don't need you anymore.’

So, Cass had had an odd turn of luck—the war was her chance at the cockpit, which was male territory up until then. She and her WASP Squadron were temporary beneficiaries. I wanted that complication too, that while the war is doing its *worst* on some characters, it's

doing its best on others.

Cass is made up out of my mind, though. She's small and wiry because the cockpit *required* it. There was a—perhaps apocryphal—story about the P39 Bell Aircraft. Eddie Bell was a little guy and when his engineers brought him a 2/3 size mockup of the plane he got in it and looked around, said, "This is great!" and sent it off to production.

Joking aside, the Russians loved that plane, and used it for strafing. Your customers at The King's English are literary. They should like this story—Kurt Vonnegut was strafed by one of these planes. It was after he'd escaped from that nightmare in Dresden. He and his company were on the run, on the ground, and the Russians figured they were Germans and strafed them. They were flying P39s. One of the oddities of the war.

BB: Finally, fierce irony and a fiendish plot that mixes love and treason, integrity and treachery, heroism and history with the kind of social realism, social commentary that comes so naturally to a journalist; characters with names like Moxie Stamper, Sig Prokosch, and Animal Angelides; acronyms like Teepee Weepy—it's all

so Dickensian, in the best sense. I've never thought of you in connection with Dickens before since your voice is so surefootedly Western. Has Dickens been an influence on your writing, and if not, who has?

ID: *The Whistling Season* reviews mentioned Dickens every so often (laughs). It's not conscious, I'd say, but the richness of description and life in Dickens is up my alley. I'm *with* Dickens in thinking you ought to use the whole orchestra when you write. And names are a big part of it with me. I've got a computer printout of my characters from my novels—there are over 500 of them. I work *consciously* on their names. The women's names in the Montana trilogy all ended in vowels and the guy's names in consonants. This was deliberate. In *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* Angus says, "Montana, America, those words with their ends open." Women have that open outlook more than men do. Cass is the exception. She's more masculine. Although her real name is Cassia. Cassia Standish. I've wanted to use the name Cass for the last several novels.

To get back to your question, I'm marching to the drum of Dickens and

Conrad— characters with full-blown names are a part of that.

BB: Before we go, can you give TKE readers a teasing fact or two from your next book?

ID: While we're still on names, the kids in *The Whistling Season* seem to have stuck in people's minds. In the new novel there's a kid so skinny he's nicknamed Russian Salmon. Morrie [the teacher from *The Whistling Season*] makes his way to Montana to do battle during the heyday of the copper mining and the miners' struggle with Anaconda Copper Company—the giant of the day. You have had quite a history in Utah, too, but Butte was known as the copper king of its day. Butte offered, short of Henry Ford's assembly line, the best-paid jobs available. Also the most dangerous. So, for immigrants, the best and the worst. Risking your neck and also risking mine silicosis. So, I'm dropping Morrie into Butte with references back to *The Whistling Season*. I've been telling people that one of the school kids from *The Whistling Season* is in the next book, too.

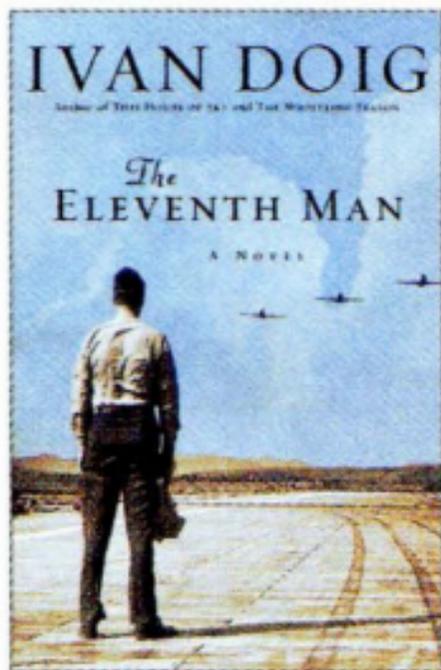
BB: Booksellers at TKE are clamoring for pre-release copies of

The Eleventh Man. Soon everyone in the country will be. We're sad that you couldn't come to the store this year, but thank you so much for taking the time to talk about your extraordinary new book. And best of luck on the next one!

ID: From your mouth to God's ear. I wish I could teleport myself to The King's English. Thank you so much,
Betsy

Juan, Betsy's interview for your review. Thanks again for signing stock for us. You are a gem!

LAnne Delmar



The Eleventh Man

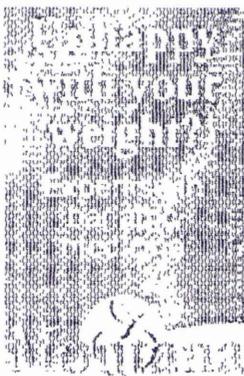
A Novel, by Ivan Doig

(Harcourt, \$26, 9780151012435/0151012431)

“A football team that makes the papers in 1941 goes to war in 1943, its players deployed from Europe to the Pacific—all but the quarterback, who, son of a journalist, is assigned to chronicle their exploits for the wartime propaganda machine he loathes. Indelibly wrought characters

and a plot that mixes love, treason, heroism, and history make this a blissfully good read.”

—Betsy Burton, *The King's English*, Salt Lake City, UT



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Archived Story

Drawing on history - Ivan Doig spins people's lives in 'Eleventh Man'

By **GINNY MERRIAM** for the *Missoulian*



Writer Ivan Doig researched World War II aircraft as part of his work on "The Eleventh Man."

As a kid growing up in the sheep-ranching country along the northern Rocky Mountain Front, Ivan Doig sat beside his dad in the bar in White Sulphur Springs and listened to men talk about World War II.

Moagher County alone sent

273 people, more than 10 percent of its 2,237 residents in 1940.

"That's a high damn percentage," Doig said in a recent interview from his home in Seattle. "If we had that today, we'd have 30 million people in uniform."

Doig went on from those childhood stories to earn degrees in journalism and a doctorate in history, work as a newspaper and

magazine writer and editor, and become a novelist. He became friends with the late historian Dave Walter of the Montana Historical Society in 1982 when he was working on his novel "English Creek" and researching 1930s Montana. A few years ago, knowing Doig's penchant for the stray fact in Montana history, Walter gave Doig a file on a Montana State College football team; 11 of its players died in World War II. The novelist's imagination ignited the embers in his memory, and the result is his 12th book and ninth novel, "The Eleventh Man," coming this month from Harcourt Inc.

"I immediately leaped on it as a novelist," Doig said. "What if you were the 10th or 11th guy on that team? It's late in the war, and fate has done its work on eight or nine of your teammates? That triggered the idea of the 11th man."

Doig kept turning it over: Does that 11th man try to dodge it somehow? What if he were a military war correspondent?

"Then you'd have their story and his story," Doig said. "This is head bone-connected-to-the-neck bone, down to the spine of the story."

Doig invented Ben Reinking and made him the son of newspaperman Bill Reinking, owner and editor of the Weekly Gleaner in the town of Gros Ventre, Montana, who appeared in Doig's trilogy "English Creek," "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana." He made Ben captain of the winning 1941 football team at fictional Treasure State University in Great Falls.

The whole team enlists after the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor. Ben trains as a pilot, but against his wishes is ordered into war reporting for the military's Threshold Press War Project - "Tepee Weepy" - meant to chronicle the war in glorious stories for small-town newspapers. Ben's central duty is writing stories about his teammates, made into the "Supreme Team" by the military promotional machine. He approaches the job with dread of being the only one spared.

Novelists have to complicate things, Doig said, so he made up Cass Standish of the Women Air Force Service Pilots. WASP Standish is married to someone else who's fighting in the Pacific islands, but she accidentally falls in love with Ben. And she gives the novelist a chance to comb WASP memoirs and to show the skills of women pilots when the role was unconventional.

"That tugged at me right away, the chance to have a woman fighter pilot," Doig said. "For Cass, the war is a chance at the cockpit, complicating things. She and her squadron are the temporary beneficiaries of luck and fate."

Doig's research rolled on, through post-war newsletters at the Montana Historical Society that offered priceless details and archival reminiscences. He and his wife, Carol, returned to Seattle from Helena with more than 300 photocopied pages on a single trip.

"A lot of it was where Google doesn't go," Doig said. "Dusty archives ... Some of these letters at the Historical Society just squeeze your heart."

Some things Doig picked up by ear. A pilot friend who bailed out of a plane in Korea helped with description. And Doig's own six years in the Air Force Reserve, which included a stint on active duty during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, contributed.

Doig spent considerable time trying to understand a Naval destroyer.

"A lot of what a novelist does is get people in and out of rooms," he said. "So how do you do that on a ship, credibly?"

Doig resorted to schematic drawings.

"I'd make photocopies and then trace the paths that Ben and his teammate Danzer would take in the ship," he said.

Widely known for his memoir "This House of Sky" and recipient of the lifetime Distinguished Achievement Award from the Western Literature Association, Doig draws on his trinity of vocations as journalist, historian and novelist in his work. But the spinning out of people's lives is most important to him.

"I see myself as a storyteller," he said. "I think my imagination rules these books. But it does so still having some respect for the historical laws of gravity."

"On the other hand, once in a while I sneakily make things up."

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It's Doig's characters who are his continuing body of work. Many of them hail from the country of his youth, and they're nearing 500 in number across nine novels. Doig keeps track of them.

"These characters do have a country of their own in my mind," he said. "I can add to or subtract from them through the years. That has been a deliberate strategy. There will be this continuing trove of characters for me to draw from."

As a storyteller, Doig saw "The Eleventh Man" as a chance to give readers a fresh take on a couple of questions, he said.

"During a time of war, how do you hold yourself together?" he said. "We're still facing that. And what do you do when love sneaks up on you, sometimes inconveniently?"

With this book, Doig will not do a tour. He was prepared for a "chorus of moans" from booksellers, but he's found them supportive. His last novel, "The Whistling Season," brought him a new wave of readers, and he's at work on a sequel. A book takes three or four years. And a book tour takes three or four months.

"One of the things I do constantly is fight for my time," he said. "I'm in a productive period. The best thing I can do for people who like my books is to write more books."

Missoula freelance writer Ginny Merriam is a former Missoulian reporter and books page editor.

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Eco Geek
Michael Ableman of 'Beyond Organic' fame comes to Everett



LIVING

Published: Sunday, October 12, 2008

Read all about it: Authors visit, sign books

Stranger in a strange land: It's free film day at the Everett Public Library. Head on over at 2 p.m. today for a showing of "Choking Man," a drama about an extremely shy dishwasher from Ecuador in a Queens, N.Y., diner who is trying to find connection in an unfamiliar world. Mandy Patinkin plays Rick, the owner of the diner.

The library is at 2702 Hoyt Ave. Call 425-257-8000 or check their Web site, www.epils.org, for more information about the Second Sundays Film Series.

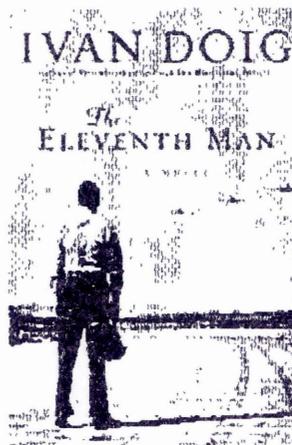
In harm's way: Seattle author Ivan Doig will read from and sign copies of his newest book, "The Eleventh Man," at 7 p.m. Monday at Third Place Books. The novel, set during World War II, is about 11 members of a college football team who enlist in memory of one of their own who was killed in action. One is chosen by a secret war-propaganda agency to track down and write about his teammates' exploits and their fates. The book lists at \$26, but can be found cheaper.

Third Place Books is at 17171 Bothell Way NE, Lake Forest Park. Call 206-366-3333 or go to www.thirdplacebooks.com for more information.

Storyed romance: Whidbey Island writer Nancy Horan will talk about "Loving Frank," the shocking (for its day) love story of architect Frank Lloyd Wright and Mamah Cheney, at 2 p.m. Oct. 19 at the Everett Public Library. Horan will sign copies of the book following the discussion. Marysville Bookworks will sell copies at the library event. The paperback copy of the book lists at \$14.

See library location and information above.

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"The Eleventh Man" by Ivan Doig

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WEEK IN REVIEW

MONDAY

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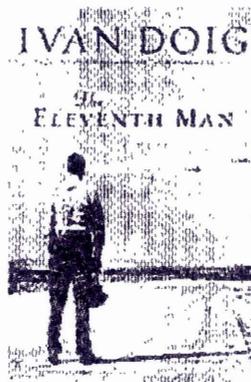


MONDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2008

New Today: *The Eleventh Man* by Ivan Doig

There's something sweetly sentimental in all the testosterone lurking not far beneath the covers of *The Eleventh Man* (Harcourt), a football novel that melds into World War II from Ivan Doig (*This House of Sky*, *The Whistling Season*). That would seem a contradiction in terms -- sweet sentiment. Masses of testosterone -- but somehow it's not. Somehow it works in a book that manages to be epic in scope and fact.

The war licked its chops over the battle of Leyte Gulf, as it came to be called, with the inevitability from day one that history would speak of such a gang-fight of fleets in the same breath with the Spanish Armada, Trafalgar, Jutland, and Midway. Ben all but moved into the wire room at East Base to follow reports of the military struggle shaping up around the Philippine Islands. It proved to be like reading War and Peace standing up.



Ben Reinking is the 11th man, left behind to chronicle the exploits of his former football teammates as they make their way through various theaters of war. An exciting book with all the right stuff. *The Eleventh Man* might well be the very best thing Doig -- an acclaimed and respected author -- has done to date. I loved every word.

LABELS: FICTION, LINCOLN.CHO
 POSTED BY LINCOLN CHO AT 12:00 AM

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Bookmonger: The Difficult Task of Crafting War Stories

Kitsap Sun

Bookmonger: The Difficult Task of Crafting War Stories

Master storyteller Ivan Doig is back. The Seattle-based novelist, who often returns to his Montana roots for inspiration, situates his latest book at an air base in World War II-era Montana.

But in "The Eleventh Man," Doig also sends his lead character, Lieutenant Ben Reinking, ranging across half a world's worth of time zones to cover the exploits of 10 men.

Reinking, the son of a small-town newspaper editor, had been training as a pilot. But once his aptitude for wordsmithing is discovered, as well as his connection with a legendary college football team, he is plucked out of flight school and assigned to the Threshold Press War Project.

Teepee-Weepy, as it is called, is a military propaganda unit that churns out morale-building human interest stories about military activities, and distributes them to newspapers across the country. Back in Washington D.C., Reinking's superiors have sniffed out a compelling story line.

In 1941, Treasure State University's football team had had an undefeated season that was extolled in the press far beyond the Great Falls stadium where they had sealed their glory. But following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, every member of the starting lineup, including Reinking, had enlisted in the military.

Now Reinking has been ordered to follow these All-American heroes as they pursue their individual careers in military service. He chases about from Antwerp to Fairbanks to Guam as his former teammates fight for their country, and his "Dream Team" reports become immensely popular with the readers of America's small-town weeklies.

But Reinking grows to hate his assignment.

As the war drags on, writing the inevitable obituaries doesn't come easier with experience. And as the death toll continues to rise, he begins to suspect that something beyond the mere law of statistical averages is coming into play.

Compounding Reinking's disconsolation is his infatuation with Cass, a Women Air Force Service Pilot stationed at his base. The attraction is mutual, but there is a stinger — this WASP inconveniently happens to be married. Cass's husband is fighting overseas.

As with his other books, Doig's research is impeccable. This venerable author, who boldly ventures "where Google doesn't go," always digs up intriguing information to incorporate into his stories. It is uncanny how his keen eye for historical authenticity brings with it a moral authority that has a distinct bearing on current events.

The military's propensity for spinning stories from the battlefield may be nothing new, but shouldn't the endurance of the practice be questioned?

Those who expect another smooth-as-butter read such as the one offered by Doig's marvelous "The Whistling Scason," are setting their hopes for "The Eleventh Man" too high.

From the bumpy first few chapters, to the hyperbolic love scenes, and dialogue that snap-crackles out of characters' mouths to jarring effect, this work on love, loyalty, luck and the toll of war feels worked upon, fretted over, and wrangled into place.

The final result isn't perfect — but no one can say Doig hasn't given it his all.

The Eleventh Man

By Ivan Doig

Harcourt. 416 pages. \$26.



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Archived Story

Human striving set in real history will make you fear for characters' lives
By **GINNY MERRIAM** for the *Missoulian*

IVAN DOIG

Author of *The 12th Man* and *The 11th Man*

The ELEVENTH MAN

A NOVEL



If it's been a while since you read a novel that took you over and made you cry, visit your bookseller today for a copy of Ivan Doig's "The Eleventh Man."

Doig's 12th book and ninth novel gives Doig loyalists what they expect: a story of human striving set in real history and, in part,

in the writer's heartland in Marias River country. It also delivers a tightly wound plot and characters who make you fear for their lives.

Ben Reinking of Gros Ventre, Montana, is not long out of Treasure State University, where he was captain of the lordly football team of 1941. Then the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and all 11 varsity starters enlisted. Ben is trained as a pilot but is yanked away from flight by the military news machine, ordered to cover war's glory in stories sent to small-town newspapers across the country. He is a writer and son of Gros Ventre newspaperman Bill Reinking, but he's uncomfortable with the non-combat role while his teammates serve in battle.

Ben is even unhappier when his military bosses order him to cover his teammates as the "Supreme Team," travelling to profile them in the combat theaters of World War II. His life is further complicated when he meets Cass Standish, a WASP fighter pilot. She's married to someone else, and they try not to fall in love but fall in a classic case of swept away.

No slow start here: The story launches and builds relentlessly, and the reader becomes invested with Ben in the outcome. We get to know each teammate as Ben writes about them all. The law of averages says that one of the 11 won't make it home. But will that law hold? Who will be left at war's end? What if something happens to Cass?

Dolg matches the tempo and rhythm of his writing to the story and the characters. There are no meandering rivers here, and the writer drives the story down the middle of the narrative field. His omniscient narrator takes us from Pacific island battlefields to the air base of Great Falls to bomb-riddled Antwerp to the small-town newsroom of his father's weekly Gleaner in a way that sometimes evokes Scrooge's spirit guide in Charles Dickens' redemption story "A Christmas Carol."

We still get the uncanny Dolg ability to put us in the Montana landscape, as when Ben and his aide drive in a ragtop Jeep along the bluff south of Shelby: "The fields along the shimmering highway the next couple of hours to Great Falls, they well knew, would be the cooked results of summerlong sun, the waiting grain baked golden, the mown hayfields crisp and tan, the distant dun sidehills further tinted with broad scatters of sheep. Behind them were a good many miles of the same."

And we feel the tension of being Ben, here in nerve-wracked Antwerp: "Beer helped, luckily. Trying to force yourself to relax is much like pouring into the wrong end of a funnel, but sip by sip in the vaulted concrete room full of strangers' racket, he took refuge in that sensation of a place where nobody knows you're you. Yet."

"The Eleventh Man" is a lusty novel, male in its sensibility and its treatments of football, war, dangerous flying, sex and old-time newspapering. The cover blurb is by lawyer novelist Scott Turow, who calls it "intensely suspenseful and moving throughout." Harcourt is touting it as "Ivan Dolg's most powerful novel to date."

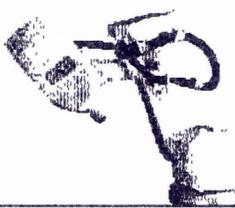
In nearly 30 years of book writing, Dolg has rarely disappointed his readers. "The Eleventh Man" gives us the 12th link in that satisfying literary chain.

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October 10, 2008

Book Brahmins: Ivan Doig

IVAN DOIG



*Ivan Doig was born in Montana in 1939 and grew up along the Rocky Mountain Front, the dramatic landscape that has inspired much of his writing. A recipient of a lifetime Distinguished Achievement Award from the Western Literature Association, he is the author of eight previous novels, most recently *The Whistling Season*, and three works of nonfiction, including *This House of Sky*. His latest book is *The Eleventh Man*, to be published October 18 by Harcourt. He lives in Seattle.*

On your nightstand now:

The King's English by Betsy Burton. Adventures in bookselling by Salt Lake City's La Pasionara of literature.

Favorite book when you were a child:

Comic books. When we would come to town from ranch work on Saturday night, my dad would empty all the dimes and nickels out of his pocket, and I would race to the drugstore to buy "funny books." Funny or outlandish ("Amazing!" usually blood-red on the cover), they lit my imagination in the total absence of children's classics in our tumbleweed way of life. And I can still tell when a comic-strip cartoonist is vamping it and when the drawn lines thrum with blood from the heart.

Your top five authors:

William Faulkner, for the unvanquished audacity of his language and characterizations. Isak Dinesen: her delicately sly handling of magic and romance brings out the fabulous in human fables. Ismail Kadare, who outlasted the Iron Curtain nightmare that was Albania to give us such profoundly universal novels as *Chronicle in Stone*, *The Palace of Dreams* and *The Three-Arched Bridge*. Pablo Neruda, poet of Chile and the world, for showing us what an infinite prism is metaphor. Linda Bierds, blessed poet not of self but of selves, with an uncanny ability to rove history in bell-clear tones.

Book you've always meant to finish reading:

Burger's Daughter by Nadine Gordimer. This epic of political involvement during the apartheid era in South Africa is intricate at all levels and at its most intense and Dostoevskian, I tend to put the book down like something glowing mysteriously and vow to come back to it when it and I have cooled.

Book you're an evangelist for:

The All of It by Jeannette Haien. It's a pocket miracle, partly an Irish *A River Runs Through It*, partly a love story of the most heart-aching sort, and thoroughly stunning in its command of language.

Book you've bought for the cover:

Wind, Sand and Stars. The Paul Bacon Studio's 1967 paperback artwork for Antoine de Saint Exupery's meditations on flying, a lone small biplane in the center of the cover with a swatch of the Andes emerging above, still seems to be perfect. No way could I have guessed that Paul later would become part of American consciousness with a very different piece of art, that ever-rising shark on the cover of *Jaws*, and that starting with my first book, *This House of Sky*, his inimitable inventiveness would grace five of my covers.

Book that changed your life:

Solitude by Anthony Storr. One of the oddest aspects of being a writer is having to sit around in your own

Right from the get go, Ben resists; the odds are that at least a few of these stories are going to be obituaries. His handler, a shadowy figure called the Colonel, insists that the awful arithmetic of wartime still tilts toward the team's survival. " 'Statistically speaking, in this war we are looking at a nine percent mortality rate for active combatants such as your teammates. Rounding that off to a whole man, as we must' — Ben stared at a human being who could use the law of averages to measure dirt on a grave — 'that is one in ten, isn't it.' " Not to give too much away, but things don't quite turn out that way.

Ben, not having any choice in the matter of wartime duty, throws himself into the task; he's got the genes of a newspaperman and can't resist the dramatic contrast of the Supreme Team's stories: Vic Rennie, the Blackfoot Indian who lived in a relative's shack while attending Treasure State, has already stepped on a land mine and is consigned to a wheelchair. But Dex Cariston, scion of a moneyed Montana family, is sitting out the war in a camp of conscientious objector-status smoke jumpers (as with many details in this book, this one is based on historical fact; there really was such a unit).

Meanwhile, Ben's blood is a boil over Cass Standish, a married female pilot assigned to the same Montana air base. Cass is head of a squad of all-female pilots charged with ferrying planes from one North American location to another. Some of the best scenes in "The Eleventh Man" convey the crackling "From Here to Eternity"-style passion between these two: Cass is wild about Ben, but she's married, her husband is slogging out the war in the jungles of New Guinea and she's not about to write a Dear John letter addressed to a soldier in green hell.

Doig's way with a sweeping scene is on display in "The Eleventh Man's" evocation of the awful grandeur of war. Standing on the deck of a destroyer as it attempts to bomb a Japanese submarine into oblivion, Ben watches his own death postponed:

"Sea air rushed by, there on the steel promontory into the dark. A mane of moonsilver flowed back from the destroyer's bow ... As his eyes adjusted, Ben could just make out the long narrow deck below, armaments jutting ready if they only had a target, faces of the gun crews pale patches foreshortened by helmets."

Then the submarine takes a direct hit: "He felt the shudder up from the water. Astern, explosions bloomed white in the darkness. Knowing this to be one of the sights of a lifetime, he watched with an intensity near to quivering. Not often is it given to you to stare away death, see it go instead in search of your sworn enemy."

While "The Eleventh Man" is a showcase for larger-than-life characters and scenes, at times it threatens to founder under the weight of its structure. Readers are parachuted into the lives of each teammate, then yanked up again and set on the road to somewhere and someone else. The book is a stage chockablock with interesting characters who speak their lines — bluff, hearty, lyrical, ironic — then get snatched away.

And a key concern of the novel — whether a malign *deus ex machina* is dictating the assignments, and fates, of the team — was never quite resolved to this reader's satisfaction. Would a government agency really thrust these young men into hazardous assignments for the purpose of creating dead heroes, or is Ben's presence more a sort of jinx? Both possibilities are suggested but never spelled out. Ben's minders are

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• 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Eagle

Harbor Book Co., 157 Winslow Way E., Bainbridge Island (206-842-5332 or www.eagleharborbooks.com).

• 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Seattle's

Elliott Bay Book Co., 101 S. Main St., Seattle (206-624-66 or www.elliottbaybook.com).

• 7:30 p.m. Nov. 12 at Town Hall Seattle (sponsored by University Book Store), 1119 Eighth Ave., Seattle; \$5 (206-344-3400 or www.ubookstore.com).

• 7 p.m. Nov. 13 at Parkplace Books, 348 Parkplace Cent. Kirkland (425-828-6546 or www.parkplacebookskirkland.com).

manipulative and heartless, but they never really step from behind the curtain.

With Doig's warm regard for his Supreme Team characters, his disdain for his story's villains and his way with the heart-stopping action scene, in "The Eleventh Man" he has created a wartime epic, but with a difference. Though its marketing suggests it will resonate with the "Greatest Generation," "The Eleventh Man" trembles with the weariness of the modern age toward carnage — a war novel with an anti-war heart.

Mary Ann Gwinn: 206-464-2357 or mgwinn@seattletimes.com. She is The Seattle Times book editor and a director of the National Book Critics Circle.

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The Eleventh Man, by Ivan Doig (Harcourt, Oct.). By the author of *The Whistling Season*, the story of football teammates thrust into the battlefields of World War II.

The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, by Stieg Larsson (Knopf, Sept.). A punky goth girl from one of Sweden's wealthiest families goes missing, and Uncle Henrik wants to know why.

The Given Day, by Dennis Lehane (Morrow, Sept.). The author of *Mystic River* turns his skills to a historical novel about an American family caught in the closing calamities of World War I.

Goldengrove, by Francine Prose (Harper, Sept.). One transformational summer in the life of a grieving 13-year-old girl.

The Ghost in Love, by Jonathan Carroll (FSG, Oct.). Ben Gould falls, hits his head on the pavement and should die, but his body lives on — to hilarious consequences.

Guernica, by Dave Boling (Bloomsbury, Sept.). A story of love and family unfolds in Basque country, until the Luftwaffe rains death and destruction from the skies.

Home, by Marilynne Robinson (FSG, Sept.). By the author of *Gilead*, a novel that takes place in the house of Rev. Robert Boughton, the best friend of *Gilead*'s hero.

I See You Everywhere, by Julia Glass (Pantheon, Oct.). A portrait of two very different but very close sisters, by the author of *Three Junes*.

The School on Heart's Content Road, by Carolyn Chute (Grove, Nov.). The author of *The Beans of Egypt, Maine* offers a novel about a disaffected boy and his life on the American fringe.

Sea of Poppies, by Amitav Ghosh (FSG, Oct.). In the early 19th century, a mighty ship called the *Ibis* makes its way across the Indian ocean to fight in China's Opium Wars.

The Sealed Letter, by Emma Donoghue (Harcourt, Sept.). Based on a real case, this novel by the author of *Slammerkin* involves a married woman, a scandalous affair and a trial that rocked Victorian England.

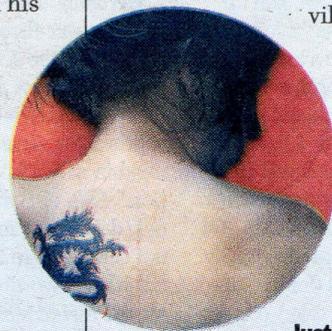
Songs for the Missing, by Stewart O'Nan (Viking, Nov.). When a popular high school student in a quiet Midwestern town disappears, the community is changed forever.

Testimony, by Anita Shreve (LB, Oct.). Sex, lies and videotapes in a tony New England boarding school.

To Siberia, by Per Petterson (Graywolf, Oct.). The Norwegian author of *Out Stealing Horses* gives us a novel about two siblings in wartime brought closer by a family suicide.

The Toss of a Lemon, by Padma Viswanathan (Harcourt, Sept.). A bride at 10, a widow at 18, our Brahmin heroine moves back to her dead husband's village to raise her two children alone.

The Widows of Eastwick, by John Updike (Knopf, Oct.). The witches of Eastwick — widows now — revisit their wicked deeds in a small Rhode Island town.



Night of Thunder, by Stephen Hunter (S&S, Sept.). Bob Lee Swagger chases a malevolent villain through the dizzying swirl of NASCAR.

SHORT STORIES

Happy Families, by Carlos Fuentes (RH, Sept.). The author of *The Old Gringo* offers 16 wildly different family dramas.

Just After Sunset, by Stephen King (Scribner, Nov.). Recent tales from the king of horror.

Yesterday's Weather, by Anne Enright (Grove, Sept.). Winner of the 2007 Booker Prize for *The Gathering*, Enright now offers stories about longing and loss.

POETRY

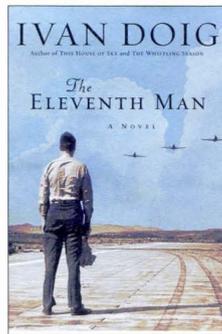
All One Horse, by Breyten Breytenbach (Archipelago, Sept.). Fables and watercolors by the prize-winning South African writer.

Ballistics, by Billy Collins (RH, Sept.). His last was his bestselling *The Trouble with Poetry*.

The Truro Bear and Other Adventures, by Mary Oliver (Beacon, Oct.). Poems and essays devoted to the world's creatures.

Marie Arana is the editor of Book World. She can be reached at aranam@washpost.com.

When war came home



The Eleventh Man
Ivan Doig
416 pages, hardcover:
\$26.
Harcourt, 2008.

In our collective memory, World War II happened “over there.” But of course it also happened here — to soldiers’ families, to women who went to work for the first time outside their homes, to the planters of victory gardens.

The war hit home particularly hard in Montana, which lost more than its fair share — its death rate was second only to New Mexico’s, according to Ivan Doig. In his ninth novel, the celebrated Western writer brings that inequitable distribution of tragedy to life through Lieutenant Ben Reinking, who grew up along the Rocky Mountain Front — Doig’s childhood home.

The son of a newspaperman and former captain of a legendary football team that went undefeated during the 1941 season, Reinking is pulled from fighter pilot training and assigned by the Threshold Press War Project, or “Teepee Weepy,” to spend the war following his teammates, writing military propaganda about Montana’s “Supreme Team” in combat.

One by one, Reinking’s comrades fall, and he struggles with the guilt of having been handed a position of privilege. Meanwhile, he falls in love with a pilot who ferries airplanes to Canada — a married woman whose husband is fighting the Japanese in far-off jungles. Emo-

tional entanglement ensues, in prose sometimes thick with romantic clichés:

“The two of them imbibed it all,” writes Doig, “wanting to be nowhere else and in no other company. *Why can’t it be like this*, they shared the thought without having to say so, *on and on?*”

The plot feels contrived, as the unseen powers behind Teepee Weepy yank Reinking around the globe without explanation. In shuttling among the war’s theaters, Doig deprives himself of a signature strength: his deep roots in Montana’s Two Medicine country, and his ability to evoke that place with integrity.

As in his other books, Doig, himself a self-described “relic,” excels at recreating the past. Brief moments in history become fully textured and difficult to forget.

When the Marines invade Guam, Reinking is there to narrate for broadcast back home, describing the “terrible hail” of Japanese bullets bouncing off armored tanks, mortar shells exploding as soldiers slog shoreward, and the “dark blobs of bodies in the water.” The scene, inspired by an actual recording made by Doig’s friend, the late historian Alvin Josephy, is more powerful than any history lesson.

At 69, Doig still doesn’t shy from love, nostalgia and the tension between fate and chance. In an age of endless irony,



Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

the venerable chronicler of the West’s bygone eras remains a fearlessly earnest storyteller.

BY EMMA BROWN

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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

John Updike, Pittsburgher Stewart O'Nan have new novels on fall list

Sunday, July 13, 2008

By Bob Hoover, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

After a two-week break, I'm resuming the hunt for the interesting books of the fall. It's shaping up as the busiest season for new releases ever.

The list of upcoming fiction is both broad and deep, particularly in new titles by old names. Here's the list, starting with a very familiar name:

"The Widows of Eastwick" by John Updike (Knopf, \$24.95). Oct. 31.

A writer comfortable with sequels (the "Rabbit" novels), the 76-year-old Updike resurrects the story of "The Witches of Eastwick," his scandalous and sexy 1984 best-seller, by sending his coven back to the town of its misdeeds.

"Songs for the Missing" by Stewart O'Nan. (Viking, \$23.95). November.

A year after his "Last Night at the Lobster" was received with high praise, Pittsburgh's O'Nan, 47, comes right back with his 11th novel set closer to home, the Lake Erie shore in Ohio. Some echoes of Calvary Camp are in this story of a missing girl, a place well-known to kids who grew up in the East End, like O'Nan.

"Golden Grove" by Francine Prose (Harper, \$24.95). Sept. 16.

The place is a lake in summer, the main character a teenage girl, the action the loss of a sibling. Shades of O'Nan's novel, but Prose ("Blue Angel") is sure to bring her own subtle approach.

"The Whiskey Rebels" by David Liss. (Random House, \$26). Oct. 2.

Also close to home (our back yard, as a matter of fact) is the new historical novel by Liss ("A Conspiracy of Paper"). The Western Pennsylvania rye distillers are up in arms over a federal tax, creating drama on the frontier.

"The Given Day" by Dennis Lehane. (Morrow, \$27.95). Sept. 28.

The publisher's betting the farm on the latest from Lehane ("Mystic River"). This 700-page fictional account of Boston is set in 1919, when the police force went on strike, Babe Ruth was still with the Red Sox, a flood of molasses paralyzed the town and postwar unrest sparked violence. Publicity campaign is massive.

"Fine Just the Way It Is" by Annie Proulx. (Scribner, \$25). September.

Is there another "Brokeback Mountain" in her latest short-story collection? A selection I read in a recent New Yorker, "Tits-Up in a Ditch," was under-whelming.

"I See You Everywhere" by Julia Glass (Pantheon, \$24). October.

Glass ("Three Junes") has mastered the novel of manners, American-style. Her new one also deals with two sisters a la O'Nan and Prose, but covers 25 years in their lives.

"American Wife" by Curtis Sittenfeld (Random House, \$26). Sept. 2.

Noses are allegedly twitching at the White House in dread of Sittenfeld's novel about a first lady who sounds a lot like Laura Bush, including a fatal car accident, a president who reads children's books, and religious fundamentalism. Sittenfeld's first novel, "Prep," was a popular success.

"The School on Hearst's Content Road" by Carolyn Chute. (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$24). November.

With "The Beans of Egypt, Maine" in 1985, the sad-faced Chute proved that rednecks flourish north of the Mason-Dixon Line, too. The book was a surprise hit and now she's back with another weird tale in the Maine woods.

"The Eleventh Man" by Ivan Doig (Harcourt, \$26). October.

Teammates on a Montana college football team go off to World War II with one of their own ordered to follow their fates. Doig has become the modern-day Stegner of Western literature in some camps, a skilled soap-opera writer in others.

"The English Major" by Jim Harrison. (Grove Press, \$24). October.

A self-publicizing foodie dilettante specializing in the game of his native Michigan when he's not writing fiction or poetry, Harrison has fans in several camps. Here he sends his 60-ish hero on the road after his wife dumps him.

Yamaguchi Yoshiko. Under a number of aliases (including "Shirley Yamaguchi" in the U.S.), Yoshiko weathers all "the twists and turns in the history of modern Japan."

"One Fifth Avenue" by Candace Bushnell (Hyperion). Bushnell ("Sex and the City") takes a "Grand Hotel" approach to a ritzy Lower Manhattan apartment building where "the lives of New York City's elite play out."

"Deaf Sentence" by David Lodge (Viking). The esteemed British novelist — twice a finalist for the Booker Prize — delivers a tale about a linguistics professor "vexed by his encroaching deafness and at loose ends in his personal life."

October

"Flight: New and Selected Poems" by Linda Bierds (Marian Wood/Putnam). A retrospective of the Bainbridge Island poet's work, addressing "the things that unite us in our common humanity — art, science, music, history." Bierds teaches at the University of Washington.

"The Brass Verdict" by Michael Connelly (Little, Brown). "Lincoln Lawyer" attorney Mickey Haller and Detective Harry Bosch form an uneasy partnership as they investigate a case involving Walter Elliott, a prominent L.A. film executive accused of murder.

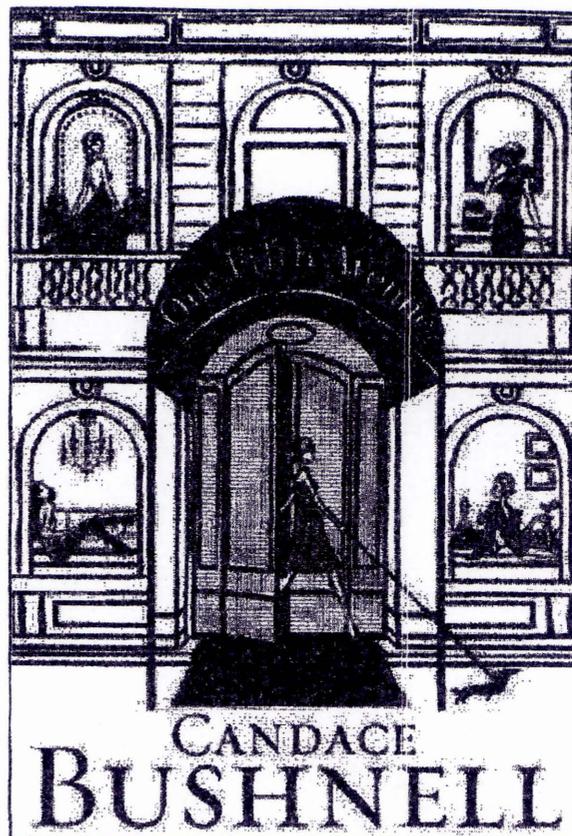
"A Partisan's Daughter" by Louis de Bernières (Knopf). The author of "Corelli's Mandolin" takes 1970s London as his backdrop, in a novel about a "bored, lonely" married man who invites a Yugoslavian hooker into his car. Only she's not a hooker — and she is one hell of a storyteller.

"The Eleventh Man" by Ivan Doig (Harcourt). Seattle resident Doig's latest novel tells a World War II story of a journalist and former member of a championship Montana college football team who is tapped by a government "press" agency to tell the wartime stories of 10 former teammates.

"Sea of Poppies" by Amitav Ghosh (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). A saga set in India during the 19th century Opium Wars, with a cast of characters thrown together by colonial upheaval. A finalist for the Man Booker Prize by the author of "The Glass Palace."

"I See You Everywhere" by Julia Glass (Pantheon). A novel about two sisters, one a risk-taking rebel, the other more quiet and responsible but yearning for something more. By the winner of the National Book Award-winning "Three Junos."

"The English Major" by Jim Harrison (Grove). A novel about a man in his 60s who, robbed of his farm by his "late-blooming real estate shark of an ex-wife," takes a road trip to San Francisco to visit his movie-producer son. By the author of "Legends of the Fall" and "Dalva."



HYPERION

The Seattle Times

Tuesday, September 9, 2008 - Page updated at 01:34 PM

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Fall Arts Guide | Literary highlights

By Mary Ann Gwinn
Seattle Times book editor

Seattle Arts & Lectures. It's a mystery how SAL maintains such an A-list lineup in these tight times; you'd be lucky to spot this critical mass of authors and artists in Manhattan. The fall roster includes novelist **Richard Russo** (Sept. 17); essayist **Terry Tempest Williams** (Oct. 7); poet **W.S. Merwin** (Nov. 7); novelist, essayist and New Yorker critic **John Updike** (Nov. 12); and photographer **Annie Leibovitz** (Nov. 19). *Benaroya Hall.*



PAUL GILMORE

Alexander McCall Smith. The King County Library System brings the elegant and witty Smith, author of the bittersweet Botswana-based *Precious Ramotswe* mystery series, to town. *Sept. 28, Meydenbauer Center, Bellevue.*

Marilynne Robinson. Author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel "Gilead," Smith returns to Seattle to read from "Home," her new novel that looks at the "Gilead" story through the eyes of different characters. *Oct. 2, Seattle Public Library.*

Richard Hugo House's 2008-09 literary series. This clever and provocative series, which invites selected authors and artists to produce new work around a particular theme and then discuss it with audiences, has two installments: Oct. 24's "Road Trip" and Nov. 21's "Personal Injury." Of the two, "Personal Injury" looks particularly toothy, featuring poet and performer **Allen Johnson**, social critic and memoirist **Richard Rodriguez**, essayist **Sallie Tisdale** and the singer **Laura Veirs**. *Hugo House.*

Dexter Filkins. The New York Times war correspondent's new book, "The Forever War," is based on his Afghanistan and Iraq reporting experiences, and advance reviews are calling it some of the best war reporting ever. *Sept. 22, Town Hall Seattle.*

Dennis Lehane. The author of "Mystic River" and screenwriter for HBO's "The Wire" will read from his new historical novel "The Given Day." It's a 720-page doorstopper that interweaves stories of the Boston Police Strike of 1919, the Spanish flu pandemic, red-baiting, anti-union violence and the Catholic Church. *Whew. Oct. 8, Third Place Books.*

Local authors. Look for these talents as they appear at bookstores around town: Neal Stephenson, reading his new novel "Anathem"; Ivan Doig reading "The Eleventh Man"; and Robert Clark discussing "Dark Water," his new book about a 1966 flood in Florence, Italy. *Numerous dates and locations, see listing.*

Attached is the interview with Alden Mudge from the October issue of BookPage.

On or before the first of October, 460,000 copies of this issue will arrive in more than 3,000 subscribing bookstores and public libraries nationwide.

This review will also be available to the websites of more than 380 public libraries subscribing to BookLetters. Please note that these 380 libraries represent more than 15 million active patrons.

BY ALDEN MUDGE

Teammates in arms

A winning football team finds tragedy in war

BY ALDEN MUDGE

Since the publication of his beautiful memoir of growing up in Montana, *The House of Sky* (1979), Ivan Doig has been hailed as a great Western writer. That reputation was burnished by the publication of his marvelous Montana trilogy: *English Creek* (1984), *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* (1987) and *Ride With Me, Mariah Montana* (1990), which masterfully portrays the lives of four generations of the McCaskill family in Two Medicine country. Doig's lovingly invented landscape near the Rockies in Montana.

But like many ambitious writers who find their subjects and locales beyond the bright lights and big egos of the East Coast publishing world, Doig battles just a bit at being pigeonholed as a Western writer.

"I find that's kind of an odd fence that's put around those of us who happen to live out here on this side of the Mississippi River," Doig says during a call to his home high on a bluff over Puget Sound, just north of downtown Seattle. "Writers of my generation are always described as writers of place. Maybe that's true as far as it goes. But what about the poetry under the prose? What about the fact that when readers raise their hands at book signings or readings, it's the characters and the language they tend to mention?" Doig says. "It seems to me the 'Western writer' tag shortchanges the pretty sophisticated literary effort that's gone on among my writing generation out here. It's going to be interesting to see after the publication of *The Eleventh Man*, am I still going to be a Western writer after taking these characters to Guam, New Guinea, Fairbanks, Alaska?"

Interesting indeed. *The Eleventh Man*, Doig's ninth novel and 12th book, is a panoramic page-turner about World War II as seen mostly through the eyes of Ben Reinking, a GI reporter assigned by the government's propaganda machine to write about the exploits of his former teammates, who comprised the starting lineup of the "Supreme Team," a championship Montana college football team that went undefeated in 1941.

"My imagination works best when it has a jumping off place of fact," Doig says, explaining the seed of his novel. "Somewhere in *The Eleventh Man*, the newspaper man Bill Reinking [Ben's father, an appealing small town newspaper publisher] says 'history writes the best yarns.' I thoroughly agree with that. Quite a number of years ago in the library of the Montana Historical Society in Helena I came across the half-lore and half-proven story of an entire Montana college football team that had gone into World War II, and the starting 11 had all perished in the war. The library is the greenhouse of the imagination for me. I suppose I tucked that away and my mind worked on it and at some point wondered, what

if you were the 11th man while the war was taking its toll on all the others?"

The toll of war is widely and deeply felt in *The Eleventh Man*. As a war correspondent, Ben travels to every theater of World War II to write about the experiences of his former teammates, allowing Doig to work his magic over a much wider landscape than in his previous novels.

Some of that magic derives from the language Doig deploys in telling his tale. He has often used the phrase "poetry under the prose" to describe the effect he is looking for, by which he means "an interior rhyme or chime of language, something in a sentence which you hope will surprise and delight the reader, at least a little bit. I work at it also in the vernacular that my characters will talk, whether it's military, here in *The Eleventh Man*, or forest rangers in *English Creek*. I try to get a shimmer of how people will talk about their work or because they are in their work," Doig says. "I've often warmed up for the morning's work by reading 10 pages of the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, which is the great University of Wisconsin project to capture how people say things in various parts of this country."

Doig's cast of characters here is large and vivid. And although this is a novel of war and football, his women characters—a Russian woman pilot ferrying bombers from Fairbanks to the Soviet Union, for example, or Cass Standish, an American flyer in the WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) with whom Ben develops a complicated wartime romance—are among his most interesting characters.

"I sometimes take more pleasure in writing the female characters than male characters for some reason," Doig says. He adds: "I did have great good luck here. Everybody who saw this piece of writing before it emerged into galleys was a woman, starting with my wife Carol."

In fact, Doig and his wife have an unusually close working relationship. They came to Seaside together in 1966, when Doig entered a Ph.D. program in American history at the University of Washington. She has always been the first reader of his writing, his co-researcher and his research photographer. They sit across from one another at a trapezoidal desk they designed for the large converted family room where they work, looking out over Puget Sound from a bluff some 300 feet above the water. "We're both old newspaper people," Doig says. "In our newspaper and magazine past both of us shared space with people we didn't particularly choose to. You learn to have a cone of concentration over you. So it's never been an issue with Carol and me."

Turning reflective, Doig adds, "I've always seen writing as a profession. I have been, I suppose, kind of prickly proud about being a professional, all the way back to being a magazine freelancer here in Seattle, during and after graduate school. I spent much too long at that kind of life before *This House of Sky* took me out of it. But I came out of college and into journalism as what I saw as a serious wordsmith and a serious journalist. Producing language and story to the best of my ability has always been what I see that I'm up to."

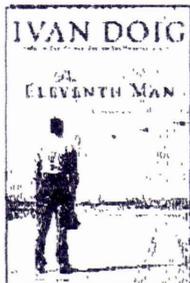
With *The Eleventh Man*, Doig demonstrates once again that his ability remains deep and wide. ♣

Alden Mudge writes from San Francisco.



IVAN DOIG

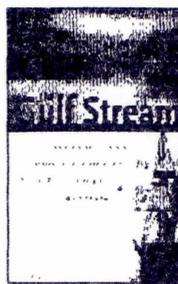
Ivan Doig finds inspiration in the real-life story of a college football team that fought in WWII.



The Eleventh Man
By Ivan Doig
Hardcover
\$26, 416 pages
ISBN 9780151012435
Also available on audio

UNIVERSITY PRESS
Fall Titles

THE GULF STRAM tells the story of one of the world's most powerful natural forces that has newly influenced the exploration and development of the New World. Full of details about the ocean and the people who explored the sea over the past 500 years, helping readers understand the connections between natural and human ecologies. —Todd Miller, executive director, North Carolina Coastal Federation



HC \$28 9780807832172



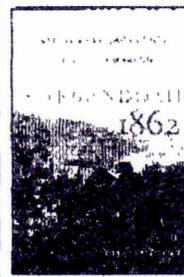
THE ORIGINS OF THE MILKY WAY collects 36 stories that are great for children and are still being told by Cherokee storytellers today. Presented by members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in their own words, the stories appear in free verse form, like poems on the page, so that if you read them aloud, you can hear the rhythm of the stories as they were originally told.

HC \$19.95 9780807832196
PB \$12.95 9780807859308

This fascinating, colorful history unveils countless preconceptions in the illustration of black gay subcultures thriving in just about every imaginable rural and religious culture in the South... The courage and humanity of Johnson's interviewees. —Publishers Weekly



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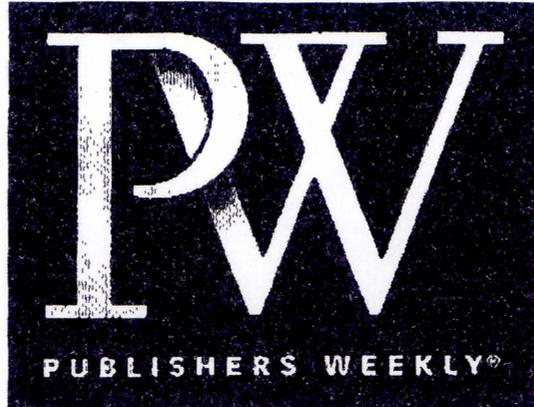


HC \$35 9780807832004

Moving seamlessly between tactical details and analysis of strategic significance, Peter Cozzens presents SWEETANQUAN 1862, the free, balanced, comprehensive account of a campaign that has long been romanticized but never fully understood.

University of North Carolina Press

OCTOBER 2008 BOOKPAGE • www.bookpage.com



June 16, 2008

The Eleventh Man

Ivan Doig. Harcourt, \$26 (416p) ISBN 978-0-15-101243-5

In the solid latest from veteran novelist Doig (*The Whistling Season*), 11 starters of a close-knit Montana college championship football team enlist as the U.S. hits the thick of WWII and are capriciously flung around the globe in various branches of the service. Ben Reinking, initially slated for pilot training, is jerked from his plane and more or less forced to become a war correspondent for the semisecret Threshold Press War Project, a propaganda arm of the combined armed forces. His orders: to travel the world, visiting and writing profiles on each of his heroic teammates. The fetching Women's Airforce Service Pilot who flies him around, Cass Standish, is married to a soldier fighting in the South Pacific, which leads to anguish for them both (think Alan Ladd and Loretta Young). Meanwhile, Ben's former teammates are being killed one by one, often, it seems, being deliberately put into harm's way. Doig adroitly keeps Ben on track, offering an old-fashioned greatest generation story, well told. (Oct.)

LIBRARYJOURNAL.

August 15, 2008

Doig, Ivan. *The Eleventh Man*. Harcourt. Oct. 2008. c.416p. ISBN 978-0-15-101243-5. \$26. F

This inspiring World War II novel features a large cast of skillfully drawn characters and celebrates the many sacrifices made by anonymous soldiers during the war; fans of Doig (*This Whistling Season*) will welcome his characteristic warmth and generosity. The narrative follows the members of an undefeated high school football team from Montana after the war casts them all over the globe. At the center is Ben Reinking, who has been selected by the army to report on his teammates in various theaters of the war. These reports quickly become popular, but as the losses mount, Reinking is increasingly pressured by the government to report information selectively or in ways that are misleading. In the end, Doig has important things to say about our thirst for heroes and heroic stories and where we might find them. He also shows great sympathy for the unheralded men and women who fought this war. Recommended for all libraries.—Patrick Sullivan, Manchester Community Coll., CT

KIRKUS REVIEWS

August 1, 2008

Doig, Ivan
THE ELEVENTH MAN

The members of a legendary Montana college football team become grist for the World War II PR mill in this latest from Doig (*The Whistling Season*, 2006, etc.).

Ben Reinking isn't thrilled to be yanked out of pilot training and told that his assignment for the duration is to write about his former Treasure State University teammates for the Threshold Press War Project (TPWP), which provides ready-made stories for local newspapers across America. Despite their undefeated season at TSU in 1941, Ben has bad memories of their bullying coach, indirectly responsible for the death from overexertion of the squad's 12th man, and he despises Ted Loudon, the smarmy sports columnist who dubbed them the "Supreme Team" and now thinks their collective story will be a propaganda bonanza. In the war's far-flung theaters, from the jungles of New Guinea to bomb-blasted Antwerp, Ben struggles to write honestly about his teammates, including one who's a conscientious objector, under the constraints imposed by the TPWP, which wants heroes, not the truth. His other major preoccupation is Cass Standish, a crackerjack pilot confined by her gender to ferrying fighter planes to bases. Ben and Cass are having a torrid affair, but she's married and too honest to pretend she knows what will happen when her husband comes home from the Pacific. Doig, as always, brings American history alive in a rousing narrative that doesn't airbrush the past; questions of loyalty, courage and conscience, he shows, were just as complicated during World War II as they are today. He offers several scenes with his trademark blend of high drama underpinned by technical know-how: Ben and a buddy struggling to get a tired old plane in the air from a soft gravel runway; Ben reporting into a microphone attached to an unwieldy tape recorder as he lands with the Marines at Guam. Montana remains important as home ground, for the main characters and their author, but it's a pleasure to see Doig expanding his horizons.

Another fine effort from a veteran writer who knows how to play to his strengths while continuing to challenge himself.

ENTERTAINMENT

October holds hope of good reads

BOOK NOTES

Dan Webster

We're approaching the halfway point in July, so there's still plenty of time left to complete that summer-reading list.

A couple of books that have landed on my desk lately, though, are uncorrected proofs of volumes that won't arrive on bookshelves until October. Even so, both seem well worth waiting for.

One is "Bretz's Flood: The Remarkable Story of a Rebel Geologist and the World's Greatest Flood" (Sasquatch Books, 320 pages, \$21.95) by John Soennichsen. The book tells the story of J Harlen Bretz, the man who first theorized – arousing much controversy – that the unique scablands of Eastern Washington were caused by massive, ancient flooding.

Soennichsen, by the way, is the author of the ongoing online novel "Valley of the Shadow" that is being presented, chapter by chapter, at www.spokesmanreview.com/blogs/shadow.

The other book coming in October is Ivan Doig's novel "The Eleventh Man" (Harcourt, 416 pages, \$26). His ninth novel, and 12th book overall, is set during World War II and tells the story of one man's attempts to document the wartime exploits of his 10 teammates on a legendary Montana college football team.

Doig is the Seattle-based writer of

Montana roots whose previous works include "This House of Sky" and "Dancing at the Rascal Fair."

None less than novelist Scott Turow has his name emblazoned on the cover of my review copy: " 'The Eleventh Man,' " Turow wrote, "is about loyalty and survival and sacrifice – and love – and remains intensely suspenseful and moving throughout."

Mark your literary calendars for both.

What is genre?

Genre writing is the great misunderstood literary conundrum. When something is labeled "genre" – as in "mystery" or "science fiction" or even "romance" – it's immediately considered, in some corners, as less than literary.

Yet some great writers of the 20th century, from Graham Greene to Raymond Chandler to Ursula K. LeGuin, toiled in various genres. And no one credible would question these writers' literary abilities.

A discussion about genres will take place at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at Auntie's Bookstore. The Inland Northwest Writers Guild, which is open to published and unpublished writers, is the host.

For information, e-mail Bonnie McDade at communiquéink@hotmail.com, or call Lind Bond at (509) 838-0206.

Book talk

• Inland Northwest Writers Guild, 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Auntie's Bookstore, Main

and Washington. Call (509) 838-0206.

• Auntie's Youth Book Group ("Airman," by Eoin Colfer), 2 p.m. Saturday, Auntie's Bookstore.

The reader board

• Michael Farley ("Dreamscapes"), Amber LaParne and Jasmine Paul ("Ghosts of Anne and Sylvia"), readings, 1 p.m. today, Auntie's Bookstore.

• Kathleen O'Brien ("Northwest Green Home Primer"), reading, 7:30 p.m. Monday, Auntie's Bookstore.

• Dale Soden ("Historic Photos of Washington State"), PowerPoint lecture, 7 p.m. Tuesday, Auntie's Bookstore.

• Ken Bryan ("My Brother's Eye"), Scott Melville ("The Scent of These Armpits"), readings, 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Auntie's Bookstore.

• T. Dawn Richard, Ed Muzatko, Charlotte McCoy, Mark J. Bessermin, Rosie Belisle, Jeff Lewis ("Northwest Tall Tales, Short Stories and Other Rare Ramblings"), group reading, 7 p.m. Friday, Auntie's Bookstore.

• Kelly Milner Halls ("Dinosaur Mummies"), Verla Kay ("Rough, Tough Charley"), 11 a.m. Saturday, South Hill Library, 3324 S. Perry St. Call (509) 444-5385.

Dan Webster can be reached at (509) 459-5483 or by e-mail at danw@spokesman.com.

KIRKUS REVIEWS

August 1, 2008

Doig, Ivan

THE ELEVENTH MAN

The members of a legendary Montana college football team become grist for the World War II PR mill in this latest from Doig (*The Whistling Season*, 2006, etc.).

Ben Reinking isn't thrilled to be yanked out of pilot training and told that his assignment for the duration is to write about his former Treasure State University teammates for the Threshold Press War Project (TPWP), which provides ready-made stories for local newspapers across America. Despite their undefeated season at TSU in 1941, Ben has bad memories of their bullying coach, indirectly responsible for the death from overexertion of the squad's 12th man, and he despises Ted Loudon, the smarmy sports columnist who dubbed them the "Supreme Team" and now thinks their collective story will be a propaganda bonanza. In the war's far-flung theaters, from the jungles of New Guinea to bomb-blasted Antwerp, Ben struggles to write honestly about his teammates, including one who's a conscientious objector, under the constraints imposed by the TPWP, which wants heroes, not the truth. His other major preoccupation is Cass Standish, a crackerjack pilot confined by her gender to ferrying fighter planes to bases. Ben and Cass are having a torrid affair, but she's married and too honest to pretend she knows what will happen when her husband comes home from the Pacific. Doig, as always, brings American history alive in a rousing narrative that doesn't airbrush the past; questions of loyalty, courage and conscience, he shows, were just as complicated during World War II as they are today. He offers several scenes with his trademark blend of high drama underpinned by technical know-how: Ben and a buddy struggling to get a tired old plane in the air from a soft gravel runway; Ben reporting into a microphone attached to an unwieldy tape recorder as he lands with the Marines at Guam. Montana remains important as home ground, for the main characters and their author, but it's a pleasure to see Doig expanding his horizons.

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

Issue: July 1, 2008

The Eleventh Man.

Doig, Ivan (Author)

Oct 2008. 416 p. Harcourt, hardcover, \$26.00. (9780151012435)

Doig constructs an elaborate premise for his latest venture into Montana history: the entire starting lineup of Treasure State University's 1941 football team—undefeated and known as the "Supreme Team"—enlist in the armed services shortly after Pearl Harbor. One of those players, Ben Reinking, finds himself pulled from pilot training and given a peculiar assignment by a special branch of the military whose charge is, in effect, creating heroes for the war propaganda machine. Ben, a journalism major whose father runs a small-town paper in Gros Ventre, Montana, is ordered to follow in the footsteps of his 10 teammates throughout the war, reporting on their adventures, triumphs, and, inevitably, their deaths. His mission, which he comes to abhor as its ghoulish side becomes dominant, takes him from flight-training school in Great Falls, where he falls in love with a married female pilot, to the invasion of Guam, the jungles of New Guinea, and the Battle of the Bulge. As always, Doig writes with impressionistic flourish—his style can



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Some good... some bad

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 - some mixed - but

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best news is to be reviewed in
this TOUGH climate and shrinking
coverage!



Detroit Free Press

November 2, 2008

Book review: 'The Eleventh Man'

BY DAVID M. SHIRIBMAN
BLOOMBERG NEWS

An undefeated 1941 football season. A town scratched into Montana's northern plains. A war with many fronts, including the home front. A small-town newspaper editor. A female pilot (a WASP who ferries P-39s) who's in love with our hero while her husband is fighting in the Pacific. Good raw material for a novel, no?

Ivan Doig's "The Eleventh Man" draws from three of the hardest genres in the American canon: the sports book, the war novel, the story set in the great West.

And though on the surface this novel revolves around one resilient American theme (that championship season), it's really about honor, loyalty and the character and courage that war creates -- and reveals.

The book tells the tale of the storied Golden Eagles of Treasure State University, who swept through their entire '41 season and then were swept into the war that began as the season ended.

All 11 starters enlisted in the war effort, but one of them is picked by Washington to chronicle the heroics of the other 10 -- making them fodder for the propaganda effort before they become fodder for the fortunes of war. Through their stories we learn their secrets and shame, their valor and bravery.

The Golden Eagles died in the customary ways, which is to say the worst ways possible; in, as Doig puts it, "the black fire of nightmare." They died in New Guinea, or in a kamikaze raid at Leyte Gulf, or in some forgotten field. It was a team "betrayed by the law of averages, with something that amounted to a moving wall of oblivion hinged to the war for them."

Doig is a master of fiction, but his story has a bitter root of truth. Eleven members of the football team from Montana State College in Bozeman did die in World War II, and for his story Doig drew on oral histories, memoirs and other research material.

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Press

Wartime characters made flesh and blood

Updated: November 2, 2008 at 02:50 AM CST

The Eleventh Man

By Ivan Doig

Harcourt, 416 pages, \$29

FOR his ninth novel, *American West* novelist Ivan Doig returns to his roots in rural Montana before tra to the global theatre of the Second World War.

The 11th man is Ben Reinking, local hero of the Golden Eagles football team, who along with 10 other brought Treasure State University victory in the fall of 1941.

Months later, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. enters the war, and the 11 young men are c of another sort.

Ben chronicles the fate of his teammates for the Threshold Press War Project (nicknamed Teepee Weep; of the U.S military. Ben is ordered to submit a series of articles cutely titled The Supreme Team, which HQ and then proudly dispatched to small-town papers across the U.S.

It's the type of dreck Ben's newspaperman father calls "PhD writing": Piled higher and deeper.

Ben, who trained as a pilot, is grounded for the express purpose of turning out this sentimental copy. B DNA and rural stubbornness soon have him resenting the task, and locking horns with his commanding

Dogging the 11 men through the war is the often-cited law of averages, a cynical but accurate formula, each man has a one in 10 chance of not returning home. As Ben profiles each man, the suspense mount who will die?

Ben also confronts a moral dilemma when one of his teammates, thought to be working on a secret mis turns up at a pacifist camp run by the Quakers close to his hometown. This is not a story Ben's bosses v

The Eleventh Man takes the reader into new corners of the war. Younger readers will not likely know ti infested trenches of New Guinea, Japanese advances threatened Australia, or that in Alaska, Soviet and side by side.

We meet a compliment of female pilots and mechanics who fly the North. These brave, and all but forg women served their country proudly, but unlike their Russian sisters, were forbidden from combat.

Ben has a love affair with one of these spunky fly girls, Capt. Cass Standish, whose husband is fighting away and likely, she surmises, having his own romantic trysts.

Description and dialogue make each character flesh and blood. You can almost hear the fast-talking bar

perfume. Tommy Dorsey music mysteriously plays in your head.

Doig always has a gift for conjuring up time and place. He is the master of a nostalgic realism uniquely

On Ben's 11 companions: "Those we were left, ticked through Ben's mind like split seconds on a stop v

Rowboat docks on a pristine lake were "spaced the distance of a fly cast apart." A particularly garish ac
described as "visual braille."

The Eleventh Man, although panoramic in scope, is filled with these tiny details. By the novel's satisfy
comes richly to life.

Fans of Larry McMurtry and Annie Proulx will enjoy Doig's work. Story, character and setting are the
novels. Doig tends to set his novels in decades past (*The Whistling Season*, *English Creek*), and this ch
his style.

His work is always refreshingly scrubbed of irony. Doig, on rare occasions comes within spitting distar
never succumbs.

Ditto on puns and cliché. He makes writing look easy and perhaps this is why international fame has el

Hopefully, this rich and enjoyable new novel will change that. Oprah, you listening?

Al Rae is a Winnipeg comedian.

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Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

'The Eleventh Man' by Ivan Doig

War is hell, but there's always Montana

Sunday, November 02, 2008

By Bob Hoover, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The current bard of the wide, open spaces, Ivan Doig has built a solid following with his steady, straightforward fiction about the "real America," the mythical land that Sarah Palin locates somewhere in the sticks.

Doig hails from that vast emptiness along the Canadian border called Montana, where men are expected to be men, and as for the ladies, "Montana men did not believe that a woman's grasp in life included the steering wheel" of a car.

With all that Blue Sky Country canvas around him, the novelist limited his previous works to the lives of a few hardy folk, earning himself the endearing tag of "storyteller." Yet, he always seemed to be using a small artist's brush to paint on a small corner of that big blue blank.

He's become more ambitious in his new one, taking on World War II as his backdrop, but he insists on using that little brush rather than taking a broad sweep. The result is a story confined to his Montana as the war flashes by like a newsreel.

It's an intriguing setup: Ben Reinking, member of the undefeated 1941 Treasure State University football team, the "Supreme Team," is fighting as a propagandist for the War Department.

His assignment is to bat out inspiring patriotic stories about the other 10 starters who are in various battle stations around the world as he works for something called the Threshold Press War Project. To move things along, three are already dead at the book's start.

"THE ELEVENTH MAN"

By Ivan Doig
Harcourt (\$26)

While this structure gives Doig permission to send Reinking globe-trotting, the author continually returns him to Montana, where there's an air base used to ferry American-made planes to the Soviet Union, flown largely by the Women's Air Force Service.

Ben himself takes frequent flights in bed with pilot Cass Standish, whose husband is stationed in the Pacific, before shipping out to chronicle another tragedy.

Doig seems to have most of his research watching Hollywood war films, picking up that "gee-whiz" dialog that only Ronald Reagan made believable and giving us average-Joe characters straight out of Warner Bros. central casting.

With his adulterous ways and willingness to sell out the truth for the war effort, Ben remains a half-formed hero whose emotions and purpose are muted. There's no vividness to Doig's hero, or the rest of his characters.

The storyteller takes precedence here, and Doig crafts a clutch of fine descriptive passages, but overall, the novel feels artificial, imitative and forced.

Contact book editor Bob Hoover at bhoover@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1634.

First published on November 2, 2008 at 12:00 am

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New & Notable: fiction

Page 2 of 2

The Eleventh Man by Ivan Doig (Harcourt, \$28.95) draws from three of the hardest genres in the American canon: The sports book, the war novel, the story set in the great West. It begins in 1941, the Golden Eagles football team has swept through the entire 1941 season and now all 11 starters have enlisted in the war effort, with one of them going to Washington to provide fodder for the propaganda effort. David M. Shribman, reviewing the book for Bloom-berg News, says, "Doig is a master of fiction, to be sure, but his story has a bitter root of truth. Eleven members of the football team from Montana State College did die in the Second World War, and, for his story, Doig drew on oral histories, memoirs and other research material." Buy it.

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Queen's College Knight News

Eleven Isn't the Magic Number, But It's Pretty Close

By: Justin Sloboda

Posted: 10/29/08

World War II is one of the most frequently used backdrops in fiction. It's been used and abused by writers to the point where it's rare to see someone do something new or different with it. Ivan Doig, however, manages to pull off such a feat with *The Eleventh Man*.

The Eleventh Man follows the journey of Reinking, the 11th member of a college football team whose other 10 members fought in World War II. Reinking, who has journalistic talent and experience, is chosen to visit his 10 former teammates and record their stories. He does this as part of a propagandist assignment he is given by the Threshold Press War Project, a government-funded press outlet that funnels propaganda news stories to smaller newspapers.

The narrative throws us into the story of a man uniquely positioned during the war - the propagandist.

This seemed like it was going to be a story rife with compelling newsroom drama where we would see Reinking struggling against the censoring nature of propaganda as he tries to report the truth. We would see him go through these moral dilemmas while dealing with the situations that arise from his surroundings. Sadly, this only comes in small, limited doses throughout the novel.

The story primarily centers itself around the individuals he follows while reporting. At some points in the book, the narrative focuses entirely on the individual characters he visits.

It is at these points that we start to see the typical World War II stories emerge. The narrative tends to leave these supporting characters just as their stories get interesting. Once one story piques our interest, we are whisked away from their world and thrust haphazardly into another.

When we return to Reinking's story, we focus on his relationship with Cass, a married woman whose husband is off in the war. This has been done before, and in better ways. There's no weight to this plot line, rendering it arbitrary in comparison to the rest of the narrative.

The key twists in the narrative remain unresolved. Reinking's suspicion that there is some sort of conspiracy under the surface is totally removed from the rest of the narrative and feels out of place. Moreover, these suspicions are never validated or denied. Doig only lays out several possible explanations.

In many ways, the book has the artificial feel of a World War II novel written in 2008. Instead of being a seamless narrative that transports the reader to its own time, it constantly reminds us that time separates us from the narrative.

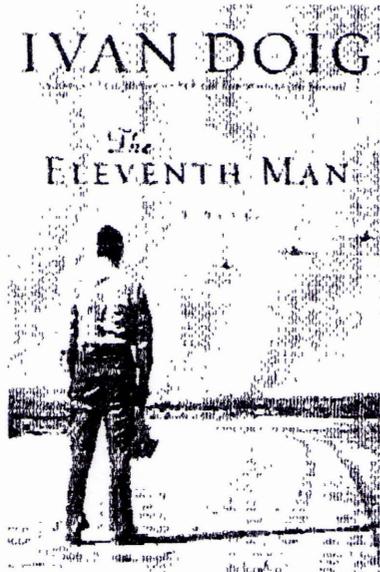
Despite these flaws, however, *The Eleventh Man* does have its moments. The stories of the 10 teammates are interesting, even if we are with them for too short a time. Additionally, the narrative twist is interesting and thought provoking, even if it is never properly resolved.

Overall, The Eleventh Man is average. There is nothing in the text to earn it high praise or strong criticism.

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By John Broening
Special to The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 10/30/2008 09:49:06 PM MDT



(The Denver Post)

Toward the end of "The Eleventh Man," Ivan Doig's galumphing World War II novel, the hero, an Army

misnaming two stars of Army's football team ("It's Blanchard and Davis, kamerad."), he pulls out a pistol and shoots them.

Sure enough, they turn out to be German secret agents, saboteurs thwarted in their mission to cut vital communication wires.

The scene in which the shrewd American soldier uses sports trivia as a code language to detect enemy agents was a staple of the WWII drama for so long that it eventually became fodder for a "Saturday Night Live" skit 30 years ago. It's a sign of what's wrong with "The Eleventh Man" that the novelist plays this scene, and many other too-familiar moments from WWII dramas, completely straight.

"The Eleventh Man" tells the story of the fictional Treasure State starting football team, undefeated regional champions from a university in Montana. With one exception, they all enlist in the war effort.

A former tight end on the TSU team, Reinking is conscripted by the Threshold Press War Project (loosely modeled on FDR's Office of War Information) to report on the wartime activities of his former teammates. Reinking's assignments takes him from bombed-out Antwerp to a submarine in the Pacific to a surveillance post in Washington state.

In the most interesting section of the book, he visits a teammate who's opted for conscientious objector status. Doig gives us a vivid description of a camp

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for smoke jumpers, where "conshies" are trained in the fearsome skill of parachuting into forest fires.

Reinking takes up with the fiery Cass Standish, a pilot in the all-female WASP air corps who's married to a soldier stationed in the Pacific. She is, of course, his female counterpart, and, like him, fearless, sharp-witted and larger than life.

After a halfbreed Indian teammate is killed in a bombing raid on a military hospital, Reinking figures that the rest of his buddies are safe: The law of averages dictates that only one of the 11 should die in the conflict. As more of his former teammates start dying, "The Eleventh Man" turns into an unlikely combination of "Saving Private Ryan" and "Ten Little Indians."

It's clear what attracted Doig to this story, which, as he acknowledges in an afterword, was based on the unlucky fate of the wartime Montana State College football team. It allows the writer to give us a number of Greatest Generation set pieces: a bucket-of-bolts airplane crash-landing in the middle of the wilderness, a marathon drinking session involving American and Russian soldiers, a kamikaze raid on a naval ship.

Unfortunately, there's the problem of the prose, which stands between the novelist and his vision like a dirty flyscreen. With writing that's full of bizarre diction, clunky rhythms and unintentional rhymes, "The Eleventh Man" reads like it was hastily translated from an obscure foreign language:

"Silently he wrung the neck of the words he had just heard."

Or:

"The ginger hair was briskly cut in a way he must have caught from being around Marines, a curt

bristle her fingers wanted into whenever they weren't otherwise engaged in the cabin out back a half hour ago."

Doig considers himself a bit of a stylist, the kind who finds it difficult to compose a straightforward declarative sentence. Instead of writing, "He realized he was still alive," Doig gives us, "It took some moments for this unexpected lease on existence to register on him." Instead of using the perfectly adequate "he said" for dialogue, he prefers "he lamented huskily" or "he reported bashfully" or any number of variations out of the Boys' Life fiction writer's handbook.

"The Eleventh Man" is based on a great deal of original research, and there are some interesting passages about lesser-known aspects of the war. But the true-to-life-story, rather than giving the novel some dramatic arc or momentum, tends to flatten it out.

Doig has built a small, solid reputation as a regional writer. "The Eleventh Man" reads like a self-conscious effort to discard this constricting label and produce a work with a larger sweep and a broader appeal. Like most such efforts, it will probably land in the vast trough that exists between popular fiction and literature, where most novels seem to end up.

John Brening is a Denver-based freelance writer.

Nonfiction

The Eleventh Man by Ivan Doig, \$26

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