Loyalty, fate and sacrifice are in play in Ivan Doig’s sweeping World War II epic about the members of a legendary Montana football team who all enlist...

AUTHOR APPEARANCE

Ivan Doig

The author of “The Eleventh Man” 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 (206-624-6600 or www.elliotbaybook.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 Center, Kirkland (425-828-6546 or www.parkplacebookskirkland.com).

LOCAL SCENE


Hardcover

1. The Anglo Files, Sarah Lyall
2. Chefs on the Farm, Shannon Borg and Lora Lee Misterly
3. Babar’s World Tour, Laurent de Brunhoff
4. India, DK Publishing
5. When You Are Engulfed in Flames, David Sedaris
6. Heat Lightning, John Sandford
7. The Given Day, Dennis Lehane
8. The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, Stieg Larsson
9. Tsar, Ted Bell
10. The Book of Lies, Brad Meltzer

Paperback

1. Wanderlust and Lipstick, Beth Whitman
2. Walk the Blue Fields, Claire Keegan
dramatic contrast of the Supreme Team's stories: Vic Rennie, the Blackfoot Indian who lived in a relative's "'s hack 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 jammers (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 aboil 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" 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 ajusted, 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 nese 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 ajusted, 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

outlines are suggested but never spelled out. Ben's minders are 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.

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NEW WEST OR OLD?
MEN AND Masculinity
IN RECENT FICTION
BY WESTERN AMERICAN MEN

DAVID J. PETERSON

WORKS REVIEWED

Scholars of western literature and culture have spent a good deal of the past thirty years or so analyzing and critiquing traditional representations of western masculinity. As Jane Tompkins put it so well in West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (1992), “what is most interesting about Westerns ... is ... the way they create a model for men who came of age in the twentieth century. The model was not for women but for men: Westerns insist on this point by emphasizing the importance of manhood as an ideal. It is not one ideal among many, it is the ideal, certainly the only one worth dying for. It doesn’t matter whether a man is a sheriff or an outlaw, a rustler or a rancher, a cattleman or a sheepherder, a miner or a gambler. What matters is that he be a man” (17–18). As writers such as Tompkins show, much of what it took to “be a man” involved the often violent assertion of white male privilege and dominance—over
women, ethnic and sexual minorities (male or female), over animals, and over the land.

This essay considers the eight books under review in this light, with particular attention being paid to how this model of dominant white masculinity has (or in some cases has not) shifted in response to sociocultural change. And I’ll start with a caveat: these books comprise a mixed bag in terms of literary quality. Were it not for this review’s thematic interest—representations of men and masculinity in some current fiction by western men—I’d just as soon not bother with some. From an aesthetic perspective, several are simply wanting, whether owing to the writers’ level of experience or lack of creative depth. Be that as it may, taken together, these works provide a useful barometer for measuring how contemporary male writers are imagining and reimagining western masculinities. Some, such as Robert Greer, Marc Phillips, and Ivan Doig, return to legendary forms of masculinity—the cowboy and the war hero—to experiment with these models’ evocative powers and to explore their nature and effects (sometimes positive, sometimes negative) on modern western men. The difficulties, frustrations, and failures associated with boys’ initiations into manhood are also considered by Greer, Phillips, and Doig, a theme shared by several of the stories by Rigoberto González and Darren DeFrain as well. Still others demonstrate in both positive and negative ways how men respond to the “crisis of masculinity” created by shifts in gender and sexuality norms as well as by socioeconomic change in the era of globalization. Here I find the men separated from the boys—fictively and authori­ ally. Writers such as Greer, Phillips, Doig, and González acknowledge these changes and explore how men can still be men without needing the traditional presumptions of dominance and privilege. Other writers, particularly Alberto Arcia and Stephen Foreman, retreat into what seems to me to be reactionary forms of heteronormative masculinity, producing fiction where men frequently behave more like macho adolescents than men who can cowboy up and meet the challenges of contemporary life without resorting to misogyny or homophobia.

**Legendary Men**

Cowboys are alive and well in Robert Greer’s *Spoon* and Marc Phillips’s *The Legend of Sander Grant*. In these narratives, men face seemingly insurmountable odds, as cowboys must. Greer’s territory is the conflict between traditional ranching and the exploitation of mineral resources in the intermountain West, a familiar theme to many readers of contemporary western literature. In Phillips’s case, the stakes are higher and more mythic: Texas ranchers pitted against the enmity of a seemingly implacable God.
Greer is perhaps most familiar to readers as the author of the C. J. Floyd mysteries (now comprising seven novels), and Spoon reflects the narrative skills Greer has rightly been praised for in terms of genre fiction—tight, engaging dialogue along with tight, engaging plot. The novel pits “Old West” values and lifeways against “New West” politics and greed, creating an ecological thriller that will please most readers. The story concerns the struggles of the Darley family—Bill, Marva, and their son, TJ, owners of the Willow Creek Ranch in Hardin, Montana—to prevent the Acota Energy Corporation from grabbing their land, ranched by the family for generations, to strip-mine low-sulfur coal. Told through TJ’s perspective, the narrative follows the ranchers’ fight against a stable of enemies bearing all the hallmarks of traditional western baddies, though tweaked for modern times: “There’s somethin’ else at stake here. ... Somethin’ bigger than petty fines for trespassin’, or the fact that Acota’s primed to forever scar up this valley. And that’s the fact that we’re dealin’ with bullies. Flat-out, second-grade, kicksand-in-your-face kind of bullies. Arrogant asses who think they can do anything they please” (199).

If the enemy is familiar, their methods have changed to suit the times, as TJ notes regarding Acota Energy’s leading “scout,” Ed Koffman: “He’d snookered them not with a six-gun and the intimidating Old West skills of a land-grabbing bully, but with his well-honed New West skills as a corporate lawyer” (51).

Greer’s men are passionate: for ranching, for justice, for the land. As TJ’s father, Bill, declares at a meeting of ranchers: “what binds us together ... is our desire to keep Acota from turning this valley into a string of strip-mining pits, a concentration camp of dust and fumes,” to which he adds, “What I’m holdin’ out for ... is a way to preserve my way of life. A way of life I love and one I damn sure don’t intend to let go” (101). Another cattleman asserts, “I’d kill over this land. No question about it” (103). Given such a set-up, readers would be forgiven for expecting a traditional shoot-em-up ending. But just as the bad guys have changed with the times, so, too, have the heroes. TJ’s father plans to meet New West lawyering with New West lawyering. And though guns do get drawn (it is genre fiction, after all—there needs to be some action!), they’re more likely to be aimed at earth-moving vehicles’ tires than people.

The Darleys are assisted in their fight by the drifting ranch hand Arcus Witherspoon, a.k.a. Spoon, “a part-black, part-Indian cowboy searching for his roots,” a search that has taken him across the country and led him to the Darley ranch (1). Indeed, with Spoon, Greer has transformed that most mythic of western heroes, Shane, into an engaging model of minority masculinity that reminds readers that not all heroic
western men are white. Like Shane, Spoon rides in from out of nowhere to help save the day, and, again like Shane, he rides out when the job is done. Unlike Shane, he relentlessly pursues answers to his past, and unlike Shane, he relies more on his wits and the gift (literal) of foresight than his fists or the gun. Men need to be prepared for action, but that preparation now takes the form of using wit and wisdom to succeed in a fight rather than drawing first and asking questions later.

Similar to Greer's Spoon, Phillips's The Legend of Sander Grant, set in northeast Texas, considers legendary forms of western manhood. The novel's opening paragraph tells us its eponymous hero

is a giant. But people around Dixon are used to that. His daddy was a giant, and his daddy's dad, and so on. Back when other whites had just arrived, Sander's people were already there, and nobody knew where in hell they came from. Those who used to trouble themselves about it, of course, they've grown old and died. Locals now remark on Sander Grant in the same way they do the August heat. Like a mother tells her kids Jesus is love. (7)

But giant here is not a sobriquet à la Edna Ferber's novel Giant (1952) or George Stevens's film interpretation of it (1956)—Sander and the men in his family are literally giants, looming large in the narrative and in our imaginations. Phillips’s clever, albeit fantastic, explanation for these larger-than-life men and their history is that they descend from the giants mentioned in an arcane passage from Genesis, which recounts that once upon a time, there "were giants in the earth ... ; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown" (Gen 6:4 KJV). Phillips spins this passage into a wondrous novel, his first, written clearly in the tradition of the western tall tale wherein God renews his fight with the giants through violent attacks on their ranch, their family, and their friends. It's certainly magical in terms of narrative and in the creation of characters who are hard-working western ranchers and deep, mystical, philosophical thinkers who, like the Darleys and Spoon, survive more by wit and wisdom than by brawn.

Like the men in Greer's novel, the Grant men are independent-minded, hard workers and hard dealers—all very traditional western masculine attributes. These heroes, then, are "real men" in that western tradition of mythic masculinity, all with a touch of the extraordinary. Ivan Doig's The Eleventh Man takes up legendary men, too, though not in so literally mythic a fashion. The hero of his eighth novel is Ben Reinking, a World War II military correspondent working for a mysterious Pentagon agency known
as the Threshold Press War Project (TPWP, or Teepee Weepy). The son of the editor of the Gleaner, the newspaper from the small town of Gros Venture (which readers will recognize from Doig’s Montana trilogy), and captain of a legendary 1941 Treasure State University football team, Ben is recruited by TPWP having been pulled from combat-pilot training school. His job is to cover, for the duration of the war, his football teammates, all of whom, with the exception of one, are serving in various branches of the armed forces. All he knows is that his stories serve the military’s propaganda efforts. TPWP wants heroes, and the young men of the ’41 team are made to serve—regardless of their moral character or role in the war—as national icons of heroic masculinity. Some of them are truly heroic, some seek to further themselves through the crass manipulation of the system; others are frustrated by not being allowed to serve at the front (Ben included), and one is a conscientious objector. One by one, his former teammates die, and Ben is required to produce accounts of their deaths that will transform them into legends.

While Greer and Phillips present us with men who are ultimately certain of their abilities, men who are, in essence, inherently heroic, Doig examines how men become heroic, in terms of sense of self and of how culture both requires and produces legendary figures. Regarding the first, many of the men in the narrative must struggle with uncertainties, particularly when facing the battlefield and loss. As for the culture’s desires for heroes, Doig explores that great statement of how Western heroes are made from the film The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence (1962): “This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” Indeed, a large portion of the novel concerns the manipulation of “facts” to produce heroic narrative, a potent commentary on the tradition of western men’s writing itself. Such manipulation comes in multiple forms with multiple motives. There’s sportscaster and writer Loudon’s manipulation of language to produce legend in order to aggrandize his own career, Ben’s frequently forced manipulation (which he often tries to resist), and finally TPWP’s manipulation to produce heroes the nation can believe in in order to support the war. Doig seems to suggest that readers, too, desire such manipulation, and he reveals the cost of such desire through violence and loss.

**Boys to Men**

While focused on the conflict between ranching and mining in the New West, Greer’s novel also considers another enduring theme in western literature: the initiation of boys into manhood. TJ’s father plays a role in this
regard, but Spoon has a stronger influence on TJ’s emerging masculinity. Much of this instructional work is done through Spoon’s example-setting work ethic and ingenuity, along with a healthy dose of folk wisdom encapsulating the essentials of manhood: “Don’t never forget that preparation’s as important as patience and persistence when it comes to most things in life, TJ. If a man’s gonna survive, he best understand that” (27). And “Guessin’ for stockbrokers and politicians, son, not for us cattle-ranchin’ types. When you’re facin’ a real problem, it’s best to steer clear of guesswork” (66). Such sayings become a bit cloying at times, particularly given their regular appearance. Be that as it may, Spoon enacts his own advice, and TJ learns to do so as well, demonstrating that for Greer and his characters words need to be backed by action. At the same time, Spoon’s advice stresses the need for men to control more negative emotions and fears in order to achieve success as men.

Phillips’s novel is also concerned with the initiation into manhood, tracing Sander’s growth (physically and intellectually quick) from his birth, adolescence, and early adulthood. Various individuals participate in Sander’s transition into manhood, including his mother and father, the local Unitarian minister, his bisexual art instructor, and even his male ancestors (all of whom, stretching back to the beginning, can communicate through the most recently deceased ancestor). As with TJ in Spoon, the young giant is given the responsibility of finding his way on his own terms—with guidance, of course. Sander, under age eighteen (which is practically middle-aged for giants), takes over as ranch foreman, and his foray into improving the herd pays off through increased herd size and profits. When a struggle of biblical proportions unfolds under Sander’s watch, the Grants band together to engage God in an old-fashioned stand-off to save the ranch and themselves from destruction.

Greer’s and Phillips’s messages are clear: it takes family and community to raise boys up into productive masculinity. Doig’s Ben, too, must come to terms with his transition into manhood. But here the struggle unfolds without the benefit of much familial guidance (Ben frequently cannot reveal the exact nature of his work to his father), without the benefit of communal support, and, to complicate matters, his struggle unfolds within the theater of war. While TJ and Sander are guided in their journeys by strong men, Ben mainly encounters feckless, manipulative men, causing him to question the nature of the heroic models the nation values as well as his own abilities to discover for himself an authentic masculine identity grounded in truth, not legend. One way he negotiates this quandary is to write a screenplay that will, though fictive, present the truth behind the manufactured legends.
Rigoberto González’s *Men without Bliss* contains numerous stories focused on boys’ transitions into manhood. González, whose 2006 memoir, *Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa*, won the Before Columbus Foundation’s American Book Award, arranges this collection in two parts. The first eight stories, “Men in the Caliente Valley,” can be considered a short-story cycle—all the men are residents of a housing project in Caliente Valley, an agricultural town edged by irrigated fields of onion, lettuce, and grapes somewhere in southern California. Its residents are primarily Mexican farm laborers. In this setting, González’s men, young and old, struggle against the poverty that entraps them in seemingly dead-ended lives. The second part contains five stories about “Men in Other Places”; some have escaped Caliente Valley, but in seeking new lives in other places, they still find they must confront their pasts, their demons, and all else that stands in the way of achieving bliss as men.

For the young men stranded at the edges of California dreaming, effective models of masculinity are largely absent. For González, the loss of fathers and other male role models, as well as other forms of family dysfunction, are problems as serious as, if not more serious than, economic and cultural marginalization. Consider the collection’s opening story, “Mexican Gold,” where Marcos, the central character, confronts his lack of maturity as he stands in the local video arcade, the popular after-school hangout:

Marcos suddenly feels self-conscious, as if his presence here means that he hasn’t grown out of his childhood. But he’s a man now at eighteen. ... He wishes he were still in those days when all he had to do was long for the freedom from school. But those moments of puffing on cigarettes with urgency between classes and the defiance of sitting in the back of the classroom, making the substitute teachers nervous, seem so stupid now. Now. The present—this was a terrible place to be in. (18)

That present is defined by a vicious cycle of anger at his ineffectual mother and guilt over the death of his brother Roger. Because he lacks emotional maturity, he is unable to release either and thus remains, through most of the story, in a state of paralysis.

Emotional maturity and the ability to make positive choices, important in the transition into manhood, are taken up again in “Plums,” the story of a young, gay Latino, Abismael, who frequents a motel near the projects to escape home and indulge in fantasy. As he bathes in the motel tub, he “imagines sailors drowning, their beautiful muscular bodies washing ashore weeks later, and eyes on the beach looking on with that sadness that comes to a face when it sees such loss—or waste. He has caught
his own mother staring at him that way while she’s ironing in the corner of the room and he’s flipping through magazines, pausing to gaze at the men” (41-42). Abi dreams particularly about a macho neighbor, Gilberto, “his make-believe lover, fantasy boyfriend” (43). Though Gilberto regularly abuses his wife, Abi is drawn to this figure of hypermasculinity: “He imagines his head against Gilberto’s tight torso, his warm breath drying the wet hairs on Gilberto’s sternum. And when Abi tries to give him a hickey on that muscle-swollen chest, Gilberto will nudge him away with a heavy hand and a sleepy warning: ‘No plums’” (43). Abismael’s challenge is different from that which characters such as Marcos face: the struggle to embrace real men and the potential for real love rather than the stereotyped gym-body, hyper-masculinity that dominates so much of American—and as Gonzalez reveals, Mexican American—gay culture. In this sense, the machismo of Mexican-American culture, represented by Gilberto, merges with homonormative models of desire—both of which prevent men from achieving bliss. So when he meets the “geeko” Tony-Raúl, the motel clerk, Abi’s maturation into manhood involves choosing between fantasy and the real (50).

As these writers remind us, young men’s transitions to positive forms of manhood involve painful struggles with doubts and fears, with moving beyond fantasies of masculine desire and identity, and with making good moral choices—often without strong guidance from other adult men.

**Masculinity in Crisis**

The concept of a crisis affecting masculinity (particular that of Euro-American males) emerged in the 1990s as changes in gender roles, identity politics, and socioeconomics began threatening male dominance and privilege. Unlike some writers under consideration in this review, the works of Greer, Phillips, and Doig create male characters who positively adjust to these changes. While their works still associate western masculinity with often violent conflict (ranchers forced into an armed stand against a rapacious corporation, ranchers fighting against a vindictive God, men struggling in the theater of war) and socioeconomic marginalization, their men negotiate these conflicts without needing to shore up their manhood by oppressing women or other marginalized groups.

Indeed, women play a vital part in the action and thinking of all three writers. Doig, for example, uses his character Cassie (a pilot and Ben’s lover) to recover the history of women who served as ferry pilots, transporting aircraft from the factory to various US bases. Ben fully supports Cassie’s desire to contribute to the war effort. He can maintain his sense of mascu-
linity without the need to dominate women; although his dream of being a fighter pilot did not come to fruition, he does not respond to that disappointment by attacking women who fly, as do other characters in the novel.

Time and again, you think Phillips's Legend will fall into age-old stereotypes of western masculinity, as seems to happen as Dalton, Sander's father, contemplates the family's various contributions to the ranch's success: "He preferred Jo rule the house and matters thereabouts in the manner which had thankfully become her custom, as an unyielding matriarch, benevolent but noticeably absent due process. This, he was certain, was the bedrock of their strength as a family. Meanwhile, he plied the land which fed them, his domain and birthright, with fathoms of understanding from Grant generations. ... It seemed the proper order of things" (19). This sounds like the familiar gendered division of labor on ranches and farms as recounted by Cynthia Culver Prescott in Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier (2007). But Phillips invokes the stereotypes in part to undercut them; while the division of labor seems traditional and firmly set (woman in house, man in the field—the "proper order of things"), Jo is not relegated to secondary status. Though not a giant, she looms large nonetheless. She plays an equal role in raising Sander. She has no qualms confronting God after several years of falling herd numbers caused by drought, lightning, and other disasters: "You look here! You will step up and do Your job. Help my man. Are You listening to me?" (15). God apparently doesn't answer, leading Jo to create plans instrumental to saving the ranch. After she instructs her husband on what she thinks should be done, she adds, "And don't look for God around here for a while. We're on the outs, but He'll get over it" (16).

At another point in Phillips's novel, Sander's parents learn that Jason, Sander's art instructor, who has a strong influence on the young giant, is rumored to be bisexual. As we'll see in a moment, in a less thoughtful writer's hands such a plot twist can devolve into heteronormative males asserting their masculinity through disparagement of sexual minorities. But Phillips chooses instead to subvert the stereotype of intolerant rural men. The narrator informs us that rather than berating his son and attacking the "pervert," Sander's father acknowledges that "the differences between people," including sexuality, "were things Dalton and all his kin were very tolerant of, for obvious reasons"—they are, after all, giants persecuted by God (56). The issue isn't Jason's sexuality; it's the family's wish to keep Sander open to all possibilities (sexual, religious, intellectual, artistic) without undue influences from any direction, including his own family: "Sander needed to figure out for himself what was important enough to strive for and what sacrifices must be offered to achieve it" (58).
González’s *Men without Bliss* more directly examines Latino masculinity in crisis, frequently represented as resulting from characters’ economic and cultural marginalization. But while some of his men are trapped by place and poverty (“Good Boys”), others are trapped by tradition and family (“Your Malicious Moons,” “The Call,” “Men without Bliss”) or haunted by regret for what they did or did not do (“Mexican Gold,” “Nayarita Blues,” “The Abortionist’s Lover”). Still others struggle with desire and sexuality (“Plums”), and some are trapped by machismo and similar models of normative masculinity (“Confessions of a Drowning Man”) that ultimately prove as damaging to men as economic and ethnic marginalization. In “Your Malicious Moons,” for example, Jesse struggles for a sense of independence from a dead, though still domineering, mother, who was formerly mayor of Caliente Valley. While powerful, domineering women appear with some frequency in *Men without Bliss* (“Mexican Gold,” “Road to Enchantment”), González is not exploring, à la the crisis of masculinity, how women emasculate men as much as he is exploring how men fail because they embrace an identity based on self-pity, anger, victimhood, becoming their own worst enemies. Jesse, for example, seeks revenge against his mother and his brother, Victor, by planning to come out publicly as Victor announces his mayoral candidacy.

You’re anxious, not about Victor, but about your mother—dead four years and you still carry her coffin on your shoulders. ... Each time Teresa Talamontes Remembered comes around, you feel like the rebellious boy she criticized for being self-absorbed. You must admit she was right. ... But who else is there to think about when you’re boyfriendless, fatherless, motherless, and most of the time brotherless. You refuse to change because you want to spite her, and even with this firm conviction you can’t help but wonder if it’s still her power and not yours. (25)

As González makes clear, it’s Jesse’s self-pity and anger that’s holding him back, as much as he wants to blame his mother.

The rich complexities in the representations of masculinities embodied by the work of Greer, Phillips, Doig, and González make the rest of the books under consideration less than satisfying. The central character of Jim Miller’s *Drift*, for example, encounters challenges to manhood at the leading edge of postmodern ennui. While the men in the works reviewed thus far endure conflict with themselves and others, Miller’s presentation of the problems contemporary western men face takes a decided theoretical turn—indeed, in terms of producing engaging narrative, too theoretical a turn. Miller’s thematic concerns—such as the struggle to find human
connection in an urban landscape that seems constructed to deny such connection, or the erasure of a cityscape’s radical, working-class past and its replacement by venues catering to tourists and the rich—are valid and pressing. Yet his love of high theories (the novel opens with epigrams from Guy Debord and Walter Benjamin), as well as of his literary antecedents (especially Walt Whitman and James Joyce), frequently get in the way of creating an engaging, insightful narrative.

For much of the novel’s first half, we follow Joe Blake, frustrated poet and community college English instructor, as he wanders the postmodern cityscape, disaffectedly ruminating on how the metropolis, with all its simulated facades and alienated people, fails to nurture the masculine soul with true sustenance. What’s a western man to do? Herein lies the heart of my problem with Miller—the solutions. They entail us watching Blake find a companion, his former student Theresa Sanchez, through whom he might gain some sort of poetic insight into modern life. This retreat into the heterosexual male’s fantasy of the exotic minority woman who will provide the white man with spiritual insight through sexual fulfillment is certainly tried and true, but it’s also troubling and seems incommensurate with the heightened crisis spawned by the age of simulacrum. Witness their first time together and I think you’ll see what I mean: “Joe turned and touched the side of her face, gazed long into her eyes and thought, who is this other, this living mystery?” (98); “Joe watched her undress slowly, peeling off her T-shirt, unclasping her bra, and letting her shorts and panties fall in a graceful dance. It filled him with desire but also reverence. Her naked body made the room sacred” (98).

Readers won’t get much beyond such cliched connections between men and women. Compare the rather worn “wonder” here with Abi’s, in González’s “Plum,” once he lets go of hypermasculine fantasy to embrace Tony-Raúl: “When the music starts playing, Abi rests his head against the tattooed cushion of Tony-R’s shoulder, and breathes in the musk of a cologne that probably didn’t cost very much, but for Abi, it’s quite valuable and deliciously real” (57). While Joe Blake certainly resembles another man without bliss (at least until he finds Theresa), Miller never seems to rise to the level of understanding that González achieves with his characters.

Such forms of arrested development masquerading as insight into the problems men face in the contemporary West plague the fiction of Alberto Arcia, Stephen H. Foreman, and to some extent Daniel DeFrain. Both Arcia and Foreman seem to address the crisis of masculinity by bolstering their characters’ manhood through misogyny and homophobia. DeFrain is a bit more complicated in this regard; at times, he appears
aware of the need to critically engage with men’s reactionary heteronormativity, but the results are uneven.

Identified by the back cover blurb as “a satirical take on the clash of cultures between north and south of the US border,” the first novel by Panamanian-born writer Alberto Arcía serves up what I can only describe as a perfect example for what machismo-riddled adolescents might imagine real manhood to be. If Miller’s Joe falls into rather clichéd representations of how men find life’s meaning through relationships with women, Arcía’s hero, Alex Perez (an aspiring writer like Joe Blake—is there a pattern here?) is nothing short of crass without any clear satirical purpose:

I sat in my car wondering how Ramona was going to react to me getting fired. Will she smile and give me pussy? Hell, she should kiss me. The damn woman had repeatedly admonished me for my choice of profession and I was now fired. ... What was probably in store for me would be the dreaded out-of-a-job-again look. I hated that. ... [S]he did believe in kicking a dog when it was down, so I expected to be chastised. What a pain in the ass she had become. (76)

In the novel, women are represented as either castrating bitches who use men for sex (his girlfriend Ramona and his mother-in-law), whores (mostly women in Mexico and Guatemala), or women the narrator and other males desire to “poke.”

The novel’s misogynistic narrator relies on homophobia as well in order to bolster his sagging sense of manhood. But, as with misogyny, there doesn’t appear to be any satirical point to the homophobic statements made by many of Arcía’s characters. “Hero” and author seem to savor the chance to use the word maricon (the Spanish equivalent of faggot). At one point, Alex is arrested and sent to prison in Guatemala. There he is put in charge of a lucrative business whereby prisoners pay to visit a bordello: “The Guatemalans were not draconian in the manner in which they treated their prisoners,” we read. “There was a bright ray of sun shining upon the jailhouse; all I had to do was grab it. These people were not at all like the gringos, whose prison system is designed to breed maricones” (140). This is just one example among many, along with derogatory uses of faggot, homo, and queer. I suspect that Arcía believes that using maricon and similar terms to get a laugh is his idea of playful satire. But that’s not the effect it produced for this reader. Arcía’s novel, read through the lens of masculinity in crisis, reveals a retreat into a puerile, hyperheterosexual masculinity to meet the challenge posed by shifts in gender relations and sexuality.
Stephen H. Foreman is better known as the screenwriter of *The Jazz Singer* (1980) than as a novelist. His second novel, *Watching Gideon* promises to explore the deep, vital connections between fathers and sons and to do so in an interesting, fresh way. Set in the 1950s, the novel presents the story of Jubal Pickett and his son, Gideon, who, due to "lazy tongue," has never spoken (11). Despite this, the father and son share a strong communicative bond, and Jubal can intuit what the boy wishes to say. The setup promises an intimate, insightful exploration of the relationships between fathers and sons—particularly in terms of emotional nurturance. When Gideon is stricken with appendicitis and may die, for example, Jubal’s reaction testifies to the strength of their bond: “His job had been to take care of the boy, and look what he let happen. ... Now the stricken man lacerated himself without mercy. In his mind he begged to be beaten. If his son died, he would die, too, would take his hunting knife and eviscerate himself in the same room, die with eyes fastened on his dead boy’s body” (17).

In order to better their lives, Jubal decides to join the uranium rush unfolding in the Southwest. So father and son head for Edom, Utah, and along the way meet up with Abilene Breedlove. As her last name suggests, the narrative here takes a turn into clichéd gender representations typical of sexual thrillers. Much of the novel is concerned with Gideon’s burgeoning sexuality (which Abilene seeks to exploit), Jubal having sex with Abilene, and Abilene having sex with Jack (her employer in Edom) and finally with Gideon (in an attempt to gain possession of the claim stake). Jubal’s and Gideon’s dreams and lives are ruined by Abilene’s sexual machinations—Jubal dies as a result, and Gideon then kills Abilene because she betrayed his father sexually. Read as commentary on the crisis of masculinity, Foreman’s novel seems to suggest that women’s power (troped here as sexual) represents a direct threat to male power and privilege, which is met by the age-old western male response of extreme violence.

The characters who experience the contemporary crisis of masculinity in DeFrain’s short-story collection *Inside & Out* share misogynistic and homophobic attitudes similar to Arcia’s. The collection is quite uneven in terms of DeFrain’s exploration of how men rely on these to protect and bolster their masculinity. The weaker stories in this regard tend to be those focused on adolescents’ sexuality and their transition to manhood (“The Butcher’s Dog,” “Stomp,” “At the Window”), their plots seeming to suggest that there are few issues bigger than the discovery of sex and loss of adolescent freedom on the trajectory toward manhood. The collection’s first story, “The Butcher’s Dog,” has the following opening line: “Beyond a place for me and Victoria to screw, the cooler has other important functions too” (1). The narrator works for the local butcher (hence the
convenient cooler) and suspects that Victoria, his girlfriend, is sleeping with other boys in town. His reaction is unsurprising jealousy, which he processes through homophobic references to her other partners: “How could I understand Victoria—a few drinks in her and she’s wrapping that blonde hair around Curtis Gunderson? Geoff Burgiss before that. Then Mike Wells, and Baxter Knutson, that faggot” (6).

While many of his subjects are adolescents, and their concerns and language understandably are meant to reflect their lack of maturity, DeFRAIN struggles with presenting any great insights into the formation of masculinity. There are gestures toward Joycean epiphanies, as in “Stomp,” where a high school boy courts the girl of his dreams—predictably a cheerleader—kisses her, and is subsequently beat up for it—predictably—by members of the football team on the orders of her boyfriend, who’s on an LDS mission in Italy (okay, less predictable). The story ends with the beating, the lesson for the narrator being that getting the kiss was worth the assault: “It hurt, sure, and I’d take it so bad it would continue to hurt for a couple of weeks later. But what I remember finding out, in fact, is that something in me kind of liked going at it” (62). One would hope we’ve moved beyond the facile macho pairing of sex and violence. DeFRAIN is actually at his best when writing about adult men and their struggles with loss (“Snake,” “The Monolith”), with raising sons (“Big Mike,” “Why Oshkosh”), and with relationships (“The Canyon,” “The Tree”). But with the exception of “Snake”—about a gentle giant of a man from Omaha, Nebraska, who takes in a woman who has been violently abused by her husband—few of these manage to move us beyond traditional, stereotypical understandings of masculinity.

No one expects western fiction writers to account for what the New Western scholarship has discovered regarding dominant representations of men and masculinity. So when we encounter genre writers such as Greer, emerging writers such as Phillips and González, and established writers such as Doig, all of whom produce works that take representations of western masculinity in new directions that respond positively to sociocultural changes in gender relations, sexuality, and so forth, we have cause to celebrate. We can only hope that writers such as Arcia, Foreman, Miller, and DeFRAIN are paying attention.

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Forged from an unlikely mix of Anglo influence and industrial might, Alabama's largest city is in

Call it a city of Anglophiles, if you will. Streets named Canterbury, Cambridge, and Balmoral wind through neighborhoods of classic Tudors with lattice-paned windows and steeply pitched roofs. Lawns are manicured and edged with neatly trimmed boxwood hedges. In the villages that border the downtown area, antiques stores seem to spring up around every corner. The trial of the controversial, thoroughly entertaining, and recently convicted former mayor, who talked of reincarnating Trafalgar Square downtown, forced citizens to adopt yet something else from the Brits—a dry sense of humor.

The name itself, taken from a flourishing city across the pond, Birmingham, England, during the Industrial Age, is a fitting moniker. In the late 1800s, the three raw materials needed to produce steel—coal, iron ore, and limestone—were discovered in and began being extracted from the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, a phenomenon that transformed what had been a cornfield into the South's booming industrial epicenter: Birmingham, Alabama. In fact, at the turn of the century, steel and iron production generated such an explosion in population and wealth—think Silicon Valley in the 1990s—that the town garnered the nickname the Magic City.
the midst of a downtown revival, even as it retains its small-town Southern charms. By Beaty Coleman

As the iron and steel trades prospered and subsequently mellowed over the past 120 years, the once-smokestacked landscape (which earned Birmingham a far less attractive nickname: Pittsburgh of the South) gradually morphed into high rises filled with bankers, lawyers, and doctors. And, more recently, vacant 1920s buildings have been converted into lofts, accommodating professors and medical students at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), the enormous engine—college, research center, and teaching hospital all in one—that occupies 86 city blocks and drives the economy.

"Right now all the seeds planted by so many progressive people over the past 20 years are coming to fruition," says downtown advocate and developer Robert Simon. The new loft dwellers have upped the hip factor, reviving the café and restaurant scene, so now it's easy to partake of both lively nightlife and early-morning cappuccinos. In addition to the mainstays that Birmingham's enormously wealthy families have bequeathed to the city, including a world-class art museum and a top-notch music and entertainment facility, the Alys Robinson Stephens Center, the redeveloped areas are drawing residents of the surrounding suburbs downtown on a daily basis—something virtually unheard of in the '80s. The city's north side, around Third Avenue North, bursts with industrial spaces that have been converted into stores and restaurants. Lakeview, to the east, is studded with watering holes for thirtysomethings and young professionals; the old Dr. Pepper factory there has become a destination for design enthusiasts, with stalls and shops offering antiques and furnishings, architectural firms, plus a community theater. In a town where antiques stores thrive, dealer Robert Hill's converted industrial space nearby stands out as one of the best, divided into a series of vignettes filled with religious artifacts, tapestries, and furnishings from all over Europe. "If you're looking for something in Birmingham you can find it, whether in my store or another," Hill explains. "We're all friends and we know who has what—we'll send you to the right place."

Downtown properties that fell into decay in the '70s and '80s are finding all kinds of innovative new uses. The biggest surprise is a block-long community garden, Jones Valley Urban Farm, that grows and sells organic produce and flowers to local groceries, farmers' markets, and restaurants. "They've helped the community understand the importance of knowing where your food is (text continues on page 60)"
Essential Birmingham
The area code is 205.

Explore Mountain Brook. Four charming villages—English, Mountain Brook, Cahaba, and Crestline—make up this bucolic enclave southeast of downtown.

Hike it or bike it. Follow the creeks along Jimison Trail or escape to the nearby Oak or Ruffner Mountains for miles of wooded trails. A guided tour of the old railway tracks that circle Red Mountain (redmountainpark.org) might yield a mining relic or two.

Make your trip ironclad.

Saw's Original Bar B Que, 1000 5th Ave. S., 205-753-2545; sawsbbq.com—and Saw's (sawsbbq.com)—to decide the best.

What to See
Alabama Ballet, alabamaballet.org: One of the South's best companies, with repertory from the classical to the contemporary.
Alys Robinson Stephens Performing Arts Center, 1200 Tenth Ave. S., 975-ARTS; alysstephens.org: Its four venues, including the Concert Hall, an acoustical marvel, are the place for music—classical, jazz, and opera.
Birmingham Botanical Gardens, 2612 Lane Park Rd., 414-3950; bbgardens.org: Stop to smell the roses at the Dunn Formal Rose Garden; mark your calendar for the "Glorious Gardens" Mother's Day weekend tour of the city's finest private gardens.

Jones Valley Urban Farm, 701 25th St. N., 322-0542; jvuf.org: A downtown block converted into a community garden and farm that provides organic produce to area green markets, restaurants, and stores.
Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, 1530 Sixth Ave. N., 251-9402; 16thstreetbaptist.org and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, 520 16th St. N., 328-9696; bcri.org: Attend a service at the historic church, site of the tragic 1963 bombing; then tour the Institute across the street to immerse yourself in the struggle for equal rights.

Where to Stay
Aloft, 1903 29th Ave. S., 874-8055; alofthotels.com: This chic new retreat near Soho Square in Homewood offers 111 well-appointed rooms and the popular W XYZ Bar in the lobby. Across the street, sample great sushi at Jinsei (1830 29th Ave. S., 802-1440; jinseisushi.com).
The Redmont Hotel, 2101 Fifth Ave. N., 324-2101; theredmont.com: Its landmark sign lights up the skyline, it has 114 guest rooms and suites, and its rooftop bar has become a see-and-be-scene spot for locals.
The Tutwiler Hotel, 2021 Park Place, 322-2100; thetutwilerhotel.com: This historic downtown icon opened in 1914, and each of its 149 rooms was completely redone two years ago.

Where to Eat
Bottega Restaurant and Café, 2240 Highland Ave. S., 939-1000; bottegarestaurant.com: Chef Frank Stitt merges a penchant for Italian (try the café's roasted-pepper-and-tomato-chutney pizza) with his Southern heritage.
Bottle Tree, 3719 Third Ave. S., 533-6288; thebottletree.com: The only excuse for passing on a PBR tallboy ($3) is their ginger margarita.
Casa del Sol, 3314 Highland Ave. N., 322-2851; casadelsoleats.com: Mexican cuisine with reps from the Gulf, including a mean smoked brisket and Gina's awesome flan.
Culver Grill, 2011 14th St. S., 879-9555; culvergrill.com: An unpretentious sanctuary with its own Signed First Editions club.
Ellen's, 2831 Highland Ave. S., 879-9555; elensrestaurant.com: A sophisticated café and wine bar.
Hot and Hot Fish Club, 2101 14th St. S., 873-5751; hotandhotfishclub.com: Sit at the chef’s counter to watch Chris Hastings deftly navigate the kitchen, creating his signature South Carolina low-country inspired cooking.
Il Ginepro, 2707 2nd Ave. N., 322-3220; ilginepro.com: Italian eats with wood-fired brick oven.
Jinsei, 1830 29th Ave. S., 802-1440; jinseisushi.com): The winter menu boasts mostly seafood, with home-furnishings shops, antiques, rug dealers, and more.
Pepper Place, 29th St. S. at Second Ave. S., 802-2100; pepperplace.com: A former Dr. Pepper factory is now a mecca for interior-design fans, with home-furnishings shops, antiques, rug dealers, and more.
Robert Hill Antiques, 3029 Third Ave. S., 326-0088; roberthillantiques.com: Exquisite Continental antiques, formal and ecclesiastical—a favorite among the city’s design cognoscenti.
Theadora, 2821 8th St. S., 879-0335; theadora.com: Edgy women’s apparel with timeless appeal.
Tricia's Treasures, 2700 19th Pl. S., 871-9779: Prepare to spend hours sifting through this huge warehouse chock-full of everything from sterling silver to old door frames and shutters.

Where to Shop
A'Mano, 2707 Culver Rd., 871-9093; amanojewelry.com: Quirky handmade artworks, many by locals.
AMW, 1829 29th Ave. S., 870-3588: Estate jewelry and sterling silver plus vintage and contemporary photography tucked into an old antiques store.
Ashford Hill for Henhouse Antiques, 1900 Cahaba Rd., 918-0505; shophenhouseantiques.com: Primitive pieces juxtaposed with fine antiques.

Mary Evelyn, 2815A 18th St. S., 879-7544; maryevelyn.com: Elegant furnishings and works of art selected by designer Mary Evelyn McKeen.
Peasant Depot, 2016 Morris Ave., 251-3314; peanutdepot.com: Supplying roasted, salted, Cajun, and raw peanuts for more than 100 years.
Pepper Place, 29th St. S. at Second Ave. S., 802-2100; pepperplace.com: A former Dr. Pepper factory is now a mecca for interior-design fans, with home-furnishings shops, antiques, rug dealers, and more.
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November 10, 2008

Dear Dr. Doig,

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me about your writing and your new book, *The Eleventh Man*, by phone this Thursday, November 13, at 4 PM. Congratulations on this new World War II epic. Also, from the bit I heard, it sounded like you did a great interview on KUOW last week.

Articles based on our interview are set to appear on the History News Network website (hnn.us), and in Seattle’s weekly, *Real Change*. Since I’ll be writing for HNN, I thought it would be a good idea to talk with you about your views as a historian and novelist.

I apologize for dragging you through territory you’ve covered with other interviewers, but I think readers would be interested in some of these areas:

1/ How did you evolve from a historian to a novelist?
2/ Are your novels usually sparked by historical events or details? Some examples. Can you talk about the intersection of history and fiction in your work?
3/ What inspired *The Eleventh Man*?
4/ What was your research process for *The Eleventh Man*?
   Esp. on MSU football team, WASPs, OWI, CO’s, combat on Guam, etc.
5/ How did your WWII childhood in Montana bear on the novel? Your work as a journalist? Did you play football in MT?
6/ Was there a wartime soldier /writer on whom Ben Reinking was based? Was there a unit like TWPW?
7/ Mary Ann Gwinn called Eleventh Man “an war novel with an anti-war heart?” Was that what you intended?
8/ Did the current Iraq and Afghanistan wars help prompt this work, or affect your writing?

This is probably a lot more than we can cover in 30 minutes, but I’m sure whatever you can discuss will be stimulating and insightful. If you ever have time, I’d like to talk with you more about your life as a writer and your storytelling technique.

Thanks again for your thoughtfulness and generosity.

Best wishes,
Dear Ivan,

Here's version of our interview from History News Network website (hnn, us). It's about the same as Real Change piece with a bit more on your background in history — and, alas, no photo of you.

Hope all is well and that you're making progress on your next opus.

Thanks again for your patience, generosity, and kindness.

Best wishes,

Roth Lindley
306-523-3399
How a Historian Turned Novelist and Wrote a Book about World War II: An Interview with Ivan Doig

By Robin Lindley

This interview was conducted by Robin Lindley for Real Change, a Seattle newspaper. Mr. Lindley, an attorney, is a contributing writer for HNN. He is a past chair of the World Peace through Law Section of the Washington State Bar Association, and has worked as a law teacher and as an attorney with federal and local agencies, and investigated the death of Dr. Martin Luther King as an attorney with the Select Committee on Assassinations, US House of Representatives.

In his epic new novel, *The Eleventh Man*, celebrated Seattle writer-historian Ivan Doig tackles the huge maelstrom of World War II. The book follows the wartime odyssey of Ben Reinking, one of thousands of Montanans who enlisted in the military after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

Ben wants to fly, but the Army pulls him from pilot training and assigns him to a military public relations unit, the Threshold Press War Project ("Tepee Weepy"), to churn out stories on the fortunes of his fellow football players from the undefeated "Supreme Team" of Treasure State University. As he collects news material from combat zones and distant outposts, Ben romances a married female pilot, Cass Standish, while her husband slogs through the jungles in the South Pacific.

Doig recounts Ben's war experience with a novelist's eye for telling details and a historian's revealing research on little-known units and events such as the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP's), conscientious objector camps, and Coast Guard patrols of the Pacific coast, to the invasion of Guam, the brutal fighting in New Guinea, the Alaskan front, and the German aerial assault of Antwerp.

The novel was inspired by the actual wartime loss of the players on a legendary Montana State College football team. Doig spent three years researching and writing *The Eleventh Man* with the assistance of his wife Carol. The novel has been praised for its compassion, humanity and generous spirit. From *Kirkus Reviews*: "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.”

Doig, a historian by training, has a doctorate in western history from the University of Washington. He wrote his dissertation on pioneer Seattle attorney and judge John J. McGilvra (1827-1903), who was appointed US Attorney for Washington Territory by Pres. Abraham Lincoln.

Before graduate school, Doig served in the United States Air Force and also worked as a journalist and freelance writer. Doig has written three acclaimed works of nonfiction notably his evocative Montana memoir, This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind, and Winter Brothers, a unique account of the life of early settler and ethnologist James G. Swan who lived on the Washington coast with the Makah and Haida tribes.

His eight previous novels include the acclaimed Montana trilogy: English Creek, Dancing at the Rascal Fair and Ride with Me, Mariah Montana. Each of his novels is enriched by impeccable research from digging in dusty libraries and archives to collecting oral histories and folklore. Biographer Elizabeth Simpson wrote in Earthlight, Wordfire: The Work of Ivan Doig: “Historical detail adds layer upon layer the texture of Doig’s work and provides the fabric of the daily lives of his characters.” Doig's honors include a Lifetime Distinguished Achievement Award from the Western Literature Association.

Doig recently discussed The Eleventh Man and the art of blending of history and fiction from his Seattle home.

Robin Lindley: Was your main character, Army reporter Ben Reinking, based on a real soldier?

Ivan Doig: No. Ben is my own fictional creation, as my characters always are. No prototype there.

Lindley: Ben wants to fly but he's assigned to write stories for the Threshold Press War Project. Was there a TPWP unit during World War II?

Doig: There was not a unit like TPWP or “Tepee Weepy.” I made that up as well, although the Office of War Information was a big operation that did a lot of domestic propaganda. I’ve been aware of it through the years knowing, from my journalism background, about Elmer Davis the fine journalist who became the head of [OWI]. I’ve noticed that Gordon Parks, the famous black photographer, and Jane Jacobs, and quite a list of people worked for them. Tepee Weepy is an invention of my own for plot purposes. It’s somewhat an exaggeration of so-called military public information, which is something of an oxymoron.

Lindley: You were a pre-school boy during World War II, but did your childhood bear on the novel?
Doig: I was aware of the war, especially in the aftermath. When I was a kid growing up in Montana, I was aware of how many people had been in the war. Two of my mother's brothers were in the war. One was on a destroyer in the South Pacific for much of the war, and the other one was in the Montana National Guard and was called up early on, and he spent much of the war in Australia in a unit that was sent to New Guinea in the terrible fighting there.

I was always aware within the family and in the ranch crews that my dad would hire in the bars of White Sulfur Springs, there were a lot of people who had been in the war. That stuck with me. When I was working on the book about my mother's life, *Heart Earth*, I got to researching this. That book is set in late 1944 and early 1945. I came across the list in the little weekly newspaper. The county was Meagher (pronounced "Mar"), named after an Irish Civil War general who became the governor of Montana Territory. Meagher County in the 1940 census had a population of 2237, and 273 people served in the war. It was a high percentage, and higher than the national percentage by quite a lot.

Montana in both World Wars took an inordinate proportion of the death toll. That came in part from ranch guys who knew how to use a weapon [and] to do chores, so they were looked on as good, ready-made soldiers, and often put into harm's way promptly. So that did bear on me as a kid.

Lindley: Ben is a reporter, a collector of stories. How did your work as a journalist bear on the book?

Doig: My work as a journalist comes out most dramatically in the use of Teletype. The teletypes are almost a character of their own [with] their own dialog, a sort of bullet-like way that things are expressed and boiled down. When I started in the newspaper business in 1963, teletypes were still in use, and one of the echoes of those days are the teletype bells going off constantly after the Kennedy assassination as those news details broke across that long weekend.

Lindley: Football is prominent in the novel. Did you play football in Montana?

Doig: Yes, I did play football. I was the 150-pound fullback on my high school team.

Lindley: That's a small fullback.

Doig: Yes. A small fullback for a small team. I was the biggest man in the backfield. I had enough high-school football to hint at what Ben and the TSU team might have done.

Lindley: Did you draw on your military experience in the Air Force in the book?

Doig: I certainly did, particularly the active duty during the Cuban missile
crisis. I think some of the book’s inflections of life in uniform are drawn from my own watching and waiting. B-52 bombers regularly roared off from our Texas airbase. We all knew we were within range of those Russian missiles in Cuba. During my six years of reserve duty, I did put in some time in public information.

**Lindley:** Were you on “high alert” during the Cuban missile crisis?

**Doig:** Yes. It was high alert on the worst day of the Cuban missile crisis, October 27, 1962, the day a U2 plane was shot down over Cuba and another U2 plane strayed deep into Russia, and the US Navy was depth-charging Soviet submarines in the Caribbean, and Russian troops in Cuba were maneuvering tactical nuclear missiles toward Guantanamo. All this is going on, and I’m at Lackland Air Force Base outside San Antonio writing home to my folks in Montana. I report our sergeants are telling us, “We are now in condition three. Defcon three.” Condition four is normal, condition three is a serious threat, condition two is war, and condition one was every man for himself. (I think that was apocryphal myself.) The Kennedy Administration was not going to back down easily, and fingers were on triggers on the American side. In retrospect, I was inescapably right to recognize this was a life and death situation for all of us.

**Lindley:** Did the war in Iraq and Afghanistan affect your decision to write the book?

**Doig:** No. I was drawn to the story originally because of a football team being lost in the war, and it was the impulse to tell the story.

**Lindley:** And that was based on the Montana State College team?

**Doig:** Yes. A librarian friend, Dave Walter, at the Montana Historical Society helped me on so much of my research. He was an absolute fount of Montana history, and he tipped me on this Montana State team, and gave me a file. There was fact and lore in the file, but the basic story was that the team goes into combat and they all end up lost. Dave was also my source on the conscientious objector part of the book. He researched the Montana conscientious camps and interviewed the CO’s. They were called civilian public service camps. They [CO’s] worked in national parks primarily as trail builders and maintenance men. A minority were fire fighters.

**Lindley:** Was the starting eleven of the Montana State football team killed?

**Doig:** It’s not clear whether it was the starters of one year or starters of a couple of years combined. The National Guard was called up in 1940. It’s possible some were called up then and didn’t get to start with the others of 1941, then went on into the war. There’s some records missing, mostly at the college end. I frankly did not go too far into this because I didn’t want
my fiction touching that close to the actual guys.

Lindley: Did you follow any of the stories of the actual team members in creating your characters?

Doig: No, I decided not to do that. I simply wanted my own characters in chosen parts of the war, and have the plot develop from there. Out of that came episodes like the Coast Guardsman [on the Washington coast] with a dog. Twenty-five years ago or more, a guy told me he had done that. So, serendipity: that had been tucked away in my memory, and I went to the Coast Guard Museum of the Northwest on our waterfront. They have a good research library, and Carol and I pulled out all the material I needed on patrolling the coast. The primary thing they did was watch for Japanese submarines or Japanese coming ashore for water.

Lindley: Was there evidence that Japanese came ashore?

Doig: There were submarines off the coast. One surfaced and shelled a beach in Oregon, and some shipping was sunk. They [Coast Guardsmen] were also on watch for invasion. It turned out to be not at all likely, but Pearl Harbor got everyone's attention.

Lindley: I appreciate the little known details you bring in such as lives of the conscientious objectors, the WASP's--the women pilots, the National Guard in New Guinea, and other obscure aspects of the war.

Doig: I got to researching on the Marines for the character of "Animal" Angelides and there's a terrific book on With the Old Breed by a Marine. There's the story in there about the invasion of Peleliu, one of the bloodiest invasions, and a total waste. No strategic value. Like the battle on Biak [New Guinea].
I researched the Montana National Guard through the newsletter of the 41st Division Association, which had a diligent editor. Up through the seventies, he got reminiscences of guys who had been in on various actions during the war like Biak, the Philippines, and New Guinea.

Lindley: The story of the women pilots is very compelling, and I don't think many people now are aware of their role in the war. What sparked you interest in the WASPs?

Doig: In my research in Montana, I learned about the Lend-Lease Program to the Soviet Union, and somewhere in there the WASPs contribution to that was mentioned. They were based in Great Falls, and that gave me a chance to include a hotshot woman fighter pilot.

Lindley: And their job was to ferry planes around the US to airbases where they were needed?

Doig: Yes. Actually, women were not allowed to fly beyond the US, so
they flew from factories to northern tier bases in the US.

**Lindley:** Seattle Times book critic Mary Ann Gwinn called The Eleventh Man a war novel with an anti-war heart. Do you agree?

**Doig:** I suppose it is. I didn’t intend it so deliberately, but war novels, if they have any kind of a heart, it has to be an anti-war heart. Otherwise, they’re simply glorifications of gore and slaughter.

**Lindley:** Your book captures the misery of prolonged war and a sense of war weariness as it dragged on.

**Doig:** Yes, it just grinds on and on. The depressing thing is that Iraq has ground on longer than that war.
The Eleventh Man

Ivan Doig

Review:
Author Ivan Doig takes readers on a fascinating voyage through two years of World War II, as seen through the eyes of Ben Reinking, quarterback of Treasure State University’s undefeated "Supreme Team". As Ben follows in the footsteps of his 10 teammates reporting on their adventures, triumphs and loss, he searches for purpose in his life, always wondering what might happen to that life if the odds don’t go his way.

Although the action occurs during WWII, this book is not about the war. This story is one of strong men and women struggling against events that do not bend to individual will. You will root for each character as you follow their life from that glorious time on the gridiron to what awaits on the battlefields of WWII. This intriguing read will bind readers to their chair until the last page is turned and the book is closed.

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Book Page interview with Ivan Doig

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Elevating the Fallen

In Ivan Doig’s new novel, a World War II military journalist is ordered to make heroes of his doomed comrades.

BY MIKE PEED

I

VAN DOIG may not have pioneered Montana literature — that honor belongs to Lewis and Clark — but since “This House of Sky,” his memoir of growing up along the Rocky Mountain Front, was nominated for the 1979 National Book Award, Doig has been considered the literary equivalent of Gary Cooper, another of the Treasure State’s favorite sons: good and decent, emblematic of an honored past. Doig’s fiction is often labeled old-fashioned, but although he trades in nostalgia, it’s rarely of the Hallmark variety. His McCaskill trilogy dissects the intricate relationship between a landscape — Montana’s Two Medicine country — and its colonizers. In “Bucking the Sun,” construction of the monumental Fort Peck Dam, begun in 1933, mercilessly displaces both water and tradition.

Mike Peed is on the editorial staff of The New Yorker.

THE ELEVENTH MAN

By Joan Doig.


Like those novels, Doig’s new book, his 12th, takes its inspiration from yesteryear. (The author, in fact, has a Ph.D. in American frontier history.) In World War II, only New Mexico’s death rate outranked Montana’s, and among the fallen were 11 Montana State College football team. In “The Eleventh Man,” Doig reimagines them as members of a fabled 1941 team at the fictional Treasure State University.

The novel opens in 1943 with the former teammates flung across a warring globe, from the Pacific Northwest to Guam, from Antwerp to New Guinea. The Threshold Press War Project, an armed services propaganda outfit, has ordered Ben Reinking, the team’s left end and son of a small-town newspaper editor, to write a series of articles called “The Supreme Team on the Field of Battle.” Though the purpose of his task is never fully illuminated, Ben deploys, “lock, stock and type writer,” to profile his former teammates and, as instructed, elevate them to a hero status above what an athletic field might bestow.

The members of Doig’s cast speak an easygoing 1940s vernacular, more imagined, one hopes, than real. Soldiers drink “skunk juice,” receive the “galoot salute” and look forward to a “rub a dub dub.” In bed and out, he was unbreakable company,” Ben’s inamorata, a female pilot, thinks of him, “bright as a mint silver dollar ... a first-class passion ration.” (“And,” Ben says in return, “how baboon lucky I am to be with you.”) These incessant wisecracks overwhelm, yielding characters who become less individuals than accom plices in parody. As ever, Doig seems most comfortable with hushed descriptions of Montana’s landscape and its way of life. Gros Ventre, Ben reminds himself on a brief home leave, “was the same age as the tree rings in the mature cottonwood

COLONNADER ALONG ITS STREETS, AND ALTERED ITSELF AS SLOWLY;”

As Ben visits his football buddies (a conceit that lends the plot a tidy arc) and as a colonel’s statistics (“In this war we are looking at a nine percent mortality rate for active combatants”) repeatedly fail to safeguard them, the novel emanates a sense of unavoidable ruin. And yet most of the fighting and the inevitable dying — what Ben labels “the creeping wall of oblivion” — occurs off the page. The narrative itself remains paradoxically peaceful.

The strength of “The Eleventh Man” comes in its exploration of larger subjects — the nature of heroism, and of propaganda. Which enlistee is more heroic, the one stationed in the remote reaches of the Pacific or the one fated to patrol the Washington coast? Ben is never sure whether he’s a victim or a perpetrator of the Army’s war of words, and he feels guilty about “dodging bullets from the teleprinter” rather than the real thing.

It is, nonetheless, an old-world sense of loyalty and duty — a Doig trademark — that keeps Ben and his comrades on guard. “The team and its mortal dangers were a mere handful compared to the innumerable slaughtered in the vaster jaws of war,” Doig writes of Ben’s assignment. “But they were his handful.”

* * *
Novelist-historian Ivan Doig on his wartime epic \textit{The Eleventh Man}

\textbf{Back to mountain wartime}

\textit{By ROBIN LINDELEY, Contributing Writer}

In his epic new novel, \textit{The Eleventh Man}, celebrated Seattle writer Ivan Doig tackles the huge maelstrom of \textit{World War II}. The book follows the wartime odyssey of Ben Reinking, one of thousands of Montanans who enlisted in the military after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

"Ben wants to fly, but the Army pulls him from pilot training and assigns him to a military public relations unit, the Threshold Press War Project ("Tepee Weepy"), to churn out stories on the fortuitous, his fellow football players from the undefeated "Supreme Team" of Treasure State University. As he collects news material from combat zones and distant outposts, Ben romances a married female pilot, Cass Standish, while her husband slogs through the jungles in the South Pacific."

Doig recounts Ben's war experience with a novelist's eye for telling details and a historian's revealing research on little-known units and events, such as the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP's), conscientious objector camps, and Coast Guard patrols of the Pacific coast, to the invasion of Guadalcanal, the brutal fighting in New Guinea, the Alaskan front, and the German aerial assault of Antwerp.

The novel was inspired by the actual wartime loss of the players on a legendary Montana State College football team. Doig spent three years researching and writing \textit{The Eleventh Man} with the assistance of his wife, Carol.

"The novel has been praised for its compassion, humanity and generous spirit. From Kirkus Reviews: "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."

Doig, a historian by training, has a doctorate in western history from the University of Washington. Before graduate school, he served in the United States Air Force and worked as a journalist.

"Doig has written three acclaimed works of nonfiction including his lyrical memoir, \textit{This House of Sky}, and eight previous novels, notably a Montana trilogy: \textit{English Creek}, \textit{Dancing at the Rascal Fair}, and \textit{Ride with Me, Mariah Montana}. The Western Literature Association honored him with a Lifetime Distinguished Achievement Award."

Doig recently discussed \textit{The Eleventh Man} and the art of blending history and fiction from his Seattle home.

Was your main character, Army reporter Ben Reinking, based on a real soldier?

"No. Ben is my own fictional creation, as my characters always are. No prototype there."

Ben wants to fly but he's assigned to write stories for the Threshold Press War Project. Was there a TPWP unit during World War II?

"There was not a unit like TPWP or "Tepee Weepy," I made that up as well, although the Office of War Information was a big operation that did a lot of domestic propaganda. I've been aware of it through the years knowing, from my journalism background, about Elmer Davis, the fine journalist who became the head of [OWI]. I've noticed that Gordon Parks, the famous Black photographer, and Jane Jacobs, and quite a list of people worked for them. Tepee Weepy is an invention of my own for plot purposes. It's somewhat an exaggeration of so-called military public information, which is something of an oxymoron."

You were a preschool boy during World War II, but did your childhood bear on the novel?

"I was aware of the war, especially in the aftermath. When I was a kid growing up in Montana, I was aware of how many people had been in the war. Two of my mother's brothers were in the war. One was on a destroyer in the South Pacific for much of the war, and the other was in the Montana National Guard and was called up early on, and he spent much of the war in Australia in a unit that was sent to New Guinea in the terrible wartime loss of the players on a legendary Montana State College football team."
Did the war in Iraq and Afghanistan affect your decision to write the book?

No. I was drawn to the story originally because of a football team being lost in the war, and it was the impulse to tell the story.

And that was based on the Montana State College team?

Yes. A librarian friend, Dave Walter, at the Montana Historical Society helped me on so much of my research. He was an absolute fount of Montana history, and he tipped me on this Montana State team, and gave me a file. There was fact and lore in the file, but the basic story was that the team goes into combat and they all end up lost.

Dave was also my source on the conscientious objector part of the book. He researched the Montana conscientious camps and interviewed the CO's. They were called civilian public service camps. They [CO's] worked in national parks primarily as trail builders and maintenance men. A minority were fire fighters.

Was the starting eleven of the Montana State football team killed?

It's not clear whether it was the starters of one year or starters of a couple of years combined. The National Guard was called up in 1940. It's possible some were called up then and didn't get to start with the others of 1941, then went on into the war. There's some records missing, mostly at the college end. I frankly did not go far enough into this because I didn't want my fiction touching that close to the actual guys.

Did you follow any of the stories of the actual team members in creating your characters?

No, I decided not to do that. I simply wanted my own characters in chosen parts of the war, and have the plot devolve from there. Out of that came episodes like the Coast Guardsman [on the Washington coast] with a dog. Twenty-five years ago or more, a guy told me he had done that. So, serendipity: that had been tucked away in my memory, and I went to the Coast Guard Museum of the Northwest on our waterfront. They have a good research library, and Carol and I pulled out all the material I needed on patrolling the coast. The primary thing they did was watch for Japanese submarines or Japanese coming ashore for water.

Was there evidence that Japanese came ashore?

There were submarines off the coast. One surfaced and shelled a beach in Oregon, and some shipping was sunk. They [Coast Guardsmen] were also on watch for invasion. It turned out to be not at all likely, but Pearl Harbor got everyone's attention.

I appreciate the little known details you bring in such as lives of the conscientious objectors, the WASP's — the women pilots, the National Guard in New Guinea, and other obscure aspects of the war.

I got to researching on the Marines for the character of "Animal" Angelides and there's a terrific book, With the Old Breed by a Marine. There's the story in there about the invasion of Peleliu, one of the bloodiest invasions, and a total waste. No strategic value. Like the battle on Biak [New Guinea].

I researched the Montana National Guard through the newsletter of the 41st Division Association, which had a diligent editor. Up through the '70s, he got reminiscences of guys who had been in on various actions during the war like Biak, the Philippines, and New Guinea.

The story of the women pilots is very compelling, and I don't think many people now are aware of their role in the war. What sparked your interest in the WASP's?

In my research in Montana, I learned about the Lend-Lease Program to the Soviet Union, and somewhere in there the WASP's contribution to that was mentioned. They were based in Great Falls, and that gave me a chance to include a hotshot woman fighter pilot.

And their job was to ferry planes around the US to airbases where they were needed?

Yes. Actually, women were not allowed to fly beyond the U.S., so they flew from factories to northern tier bases in the U.S.

The Kennedy Administration was not a serious threat, Condition 2 is war, and it was the impulse to tell the story.

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Plummer gets wordy, naughty and nice ‘In Spite of Myself’

By Elysa Gardner
USA TODAY

For some public figures, the memoir can be a means of self-defense or catharsis, an attempt to either justify or come to terms with one’s failings and foibles.

Not so Christopher Plummer, bless his heart. No one reading In Spite of Myself, the veteran actor’s delightfully sprawling account of his life and career, could accuse him of being a withholding guy. He is candid to the point of either justify or come to terms with one’s failings and foibles.

An actor with stories to tell: Christopher Plummer, 78, shares his passions, both professional and personal, in his memoir.

Add ‘Eleventh Man’ to Ivan Doig’s best yarns

The Eleventh Man
By Ivan Doig
Harcourt, 406 pp., $26

Ivan Doig, who blends the skills of novelist and historian, was researching another book when he lucked onto a forgotten but stunning scrap of history:

In World War II, the 11 starters on the football team at Montana State College in Bozeman joined the military. All 11 died.

That “breath of actuality,” as he puts it, inspired Doig’s ninth novel, The Eleventh Man. It’s his most ambitious and one of his best.

In the novel, a small-town newspaper editor says, “History writes the best yarns.”

Doig has been doing just that in books such as Dancing at the Rascal Fair, set in his native Montana, as literary as it is sparse.

His new novel employs his usual brand of characters — prickly, quotable Westerners — and throws them into a world at war.

His fictional hero is Ben Reinking, the newspaper editor’s son, and a talented writer in his own right.

As a football star, Ben was part of that championship season at fictional Treasure State University, undefeated in 1941. Two years later, he’s yanked from pilot training to become a military correspondent.

The brass, eager for heroes, orders him to write a series of articles about his former teammates scattered around the globe. But Ben is no propagandist, which means hinting at the complexities between the lines, as his ex-teammates are killed one by one.

Doig is at his best exploring little-known crannies of the war: work camps for conscientious objectors and the role played by WASPs (Women Air Force Service Pilots), one of whom Ben falls in love with. She’s smart, pretty and married.

The former football players and a mysterious 12th man who died in a team practice are hard to keep straight, at least early in the novel. Readers may wish for a scorecard to refer to.

But Doig’s language is a joy to read. His accounts of combat and the home front take on new resonance in the context of the current war, which seems to have no home front, at least for most Americans.

Near the end of World War II, Ben comes to realize that “The world was more complicated now, but he also knew that every era makes that excuse for tripping over itself.” True then; true now.
The Pacific Northwest Indie Bestseller List, as brought to you by IndieBound and PNBA, for the week ended Sunday, November 23, 2008. Based on reporting from the independent booksellers of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association and IndieBound. For an independent bookstore near you, visit IndieBound.org.

HARDCOVER FICTION
1. The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society
Mary Ann Shaffer, Annie Barrows, Dial, $22, 9780385340991
2. The Eleventh Man
Ivan Doig, Harcourt, $26, 9780151012435
3. The Private Patient
P.D. James, Knopf, $25.95, 9780307270771
4. The Hour I First Believed
Wally Lamb, Harper, $29.95, 9780060393496
5. A Mercy
Toni Morrison, Knopf, $23.95, 9780307264237
6. The Story of Edgar Sawtelle
David Wroblewski, Ecco, $25.95, 9780061374227
7. Ender in Exile
Orson Scott Card, Tor, $25.95, 9780765304964
8. The Host
Stephenie Meyer, Little Brown, $25.99, 9780316068048
9. The Art of Racing in the Rain
Garth Stein, Harper, $23.95, 9780061537936
10. A Lion Among Men
Gregory Maguire, Morrow, $26.95, 9780060548926
11. The Christmas Sweater
Glenn Beck, Threshold Editions, $19.99, 9781416594857
12. A Most Wanted Man
John le Carré, Scribner, $28, 9781416594888
13. The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo
Stieg Larsson, Knopf, $24.95, 9780307269751
14. The Brass Verdict
Michael Connelly, Little Brown, $26.99, 9780316166294
15. Anathem
Neal Stephenson, Morrow, $29.95, 9780061474095

HARDCOVER NONFICTION
1. Dewey
Vicki Myron, Grand Central, $19.99, 9780446407410
2. Outliers
Malcolm Gladwell, Little Brown, $27.99, 9780316017923
3. Hot, Flat, and Crowded
Thomas L. Friedman, FSG, $27.95, 9780374166854
4. American Lion
Jon Meacham, Random House, $30, 9781400063253
5. The Last Lecture
Randy Pausch, Hyperion, $21.95, 9781401323257
6. Goodnight Bush
Erich Origen, Gan Golan, Little Brown, $14.99, 9780316040419
7. Annie Leibovitz at Work
Annie Leibovitz, Random House, $40, 97803755505102
8. Barefoot Contessa Back to Basics
Ina Garten, Clarkson Potter, $35, 97814000054350
9. Letter to My Daughter
Maya Angelou, Random House, $25, 9781400066124
10. Dog Blessings
June Cotner (Ed.), New World Library, $16, 9781577316169
11. Holidays on Ice
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, suppertime 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.)

To contact the writer of this column: David M. Shribman at dshribman@post-gazette.com.
The Eleventh Man

By Jenne Camp, Special to the Rocky
Published October 16, 2008 at 7 p.m.

Grade: A

Plot in a nutshell: Many authors peak with a second or third book and then dwindle in their later years, but Doig just keeps getting better.

His exceptional new novel opens in 1941, when Montana's Treasure State University boasts an undefeated starting lineup that makes football history. Two years later, World War II intervenes and the 11-member lineup is scattered across the globe.

When the hero-starved U.S. military pulls Ben Reinking out of pilot training and assigns him to follow his teammates, writing their stories for small-town newspapers, Ben is tested nearly beyond his limits.

Statistics suggest that all but one of the "Supreme Team" will survive the war, but, as Reinking chronicles the experiences of one man after another, we watch those conclusions overridden by the harsher realities of war.

Sample of prose: When the U.S. Navy destroyer Ben is on begins evasive maneuvers to avoid a Japanese submarine, the tension onboard is palpable and dramatic:

"Sea air rushed by, there on the steel promontory into the dark. A mane of moon silver flowed back from the destroyer's bow, and a marching tail of wake behind it. As his eyes adjusted, Ben could just make out the long narrow deck below, armaments jutting ready.... Standing there witnessing the might of a fully armed vessel turning on its nagging foe could have been thrilling, Ben was duly aware, except for the distinct chance of being blown out of the water at any second. Drowned like a kitten in a sack. He tried to swallow such prospects away, down a throat dry as paper. The lack of any least sign of the enemy out there in the total surround of ocean seemed to him the worst part. On land he had been shot at by experts and never felt this much fear."

Pros: 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.

Cons: None.

Final word: The Eleventh Man, Doig's 12th, is his best thus far.
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Winning Football Team Loses Its Luck on WWII Battlefield: Books
Review by David M. Shribman

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To contact the writer of this column: David M. Shribman at dshribman@post-gazette.com.
Ivan Doig

‘The Eleventh Man’

Wednesday, November 12 at 7:30 pm
Ivan Doig grew up along the rugged rims of the Rocky Mountains in Montana where much of his writing takes place. His first book, the highly acclaimed memoir *This House of Sky*, was a finalist for the National Book Award. He comes to Town Hall to read from his latest novel, *The Eleventh Man*, the story of a close-knit Montana college championship football team, all of whose members enlist as the U.S. hits the thick of WWII. Presented by Town Hall, with University Book Store. ★ Tickets are $5 and are available at www.brownpapertickets.com, 800/838-3006 and at the door beginning at 6:30. Town Hall members receive priority seating.
Your locally owned, independent bookstore. Service is our specialty!

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On the Cover

**It's Time to Sleep, My Love**
Written by Eric Metaxas
Illustrated by Nancy Tillman
As warm as a good-night hug, this lullaby is lovingly brought to life by The New York Times bestselling artist—and Portlander—Nancy Tillman, whose illustrations celebrate the wonders of the natural world and the bonds of family.
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**The Eleventh Man**
Ivan Doig
From the Pacific Northwest #1 bestselling author of *The Whistling Season* and seven-time Pacific Northwest Book Award-winner comes the WWII story of a Montana football hero plucked from pilot training by the propaganda machine to chronicle the adventures of his teammates, scattered throughout the war’s lonely and dangerous theaters.
$26.00  Harcourt

**The Salvage Studio: Sustainable Home Comforts to Organize, Entertain, and Inspire**
Amy Duncan, Beth Evans-Ramos, Lisa Hilderbrand; photos by Kate Baldwin
Using "reduce, reuse, and recycle" as their mantra, the Salvage Studio ladies of Edmonds, Washington, show how simple it is to have a green and comfortable daily life. Included are 35 sustainable and cost-effective craft projects for any skill level, and most use items that people often throw away!
$21.95  Skipstone

This *Holiday Books* guide is a project of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association and its member stores. PNBA supports independent bookselling in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia.

*Post production changes in price and on-sale date, as provided by the publisher prior to publication, are beyond the control of PNBA stores.*
As he does with his many preceding novels, Ivan Doig roots "The Eleventh Man" in rural Montana of the past, but this book, set during the years of American involvement in World War II, is much more wide-ranging than the author's previous work. Here Doig focuses on the exploits of a monumentally successful football team, but lest the combination of college football and the Second World War make the book sound like a parody of Father's Day marketing, let me state right away that Doig has bigger fish to fry than pressuring the hot buttons of American masculinity. This is a tale almost entirely devoid of nostalgia, and one that wishes to celebrate the valor of the greatest generation while viewing it with skepticism and even cynicism.

The novel centers on Ben Reinking (I feel like there is something metaphorical happening with this name, but I haven't figured out what exactly), a war correspondent working for the vaguely mysterious Threshold Press War Project, a government news bureau that specializes in providing stories to small-town papers. Ben was once part of the "Supreme Team," an undefeated Montana university football team, and when the entire starting lineup is injured or killed in action, leaving Ben to wonder if perhaps they are being put in harm's way deliberately so the propaganda is built on such a narrative, that of a 12th man who died unexpectedly and to whom the team dedicated its season. That narrative - that history are consistently altered to make even more sacrifices.

It seems like a straightforward project, and one the son of a small-town newspaper man ought to embrace, but Ben has plenty of doubts and resents having been forced out of pilot training to pursue the family business. He also has plenty of problems, not the least of which is his romance with a married female pilot, an affair that provides much fodder for musings about the uses of narrative, about the ways in which we construct fictions to inspire bravery, loyalty, and sacrifice. The Supreme Team itself was built on such a narrative, that of a 12th man who died unexpectedly and to whom the team dedicated its season. That narrative — which turns out to be far more sinister than it seems — serves as a microcosm for Ben as he finds himself forced to sign off on one reworked story after another. As the novel circles from the history of the undefeated season to the soldier's will and back again, it insistently chews over the notion that great powers will always be willing to sacrifice some men to inspire others to make even more sacrifices.

To make this point, Doig takes Ben through some of the major European and Pacific battles, and the novel is full of exciting set-pieces: firefight, battles against the elements, kamikaze attacks. Doig's prose is generally engaging, though sometimes the writing becomes boggled down with awkward and convoluted descriptions: "The painted stones spelled the way down the steep hillside, the enormous lettering ghost-white in the bunchgrass." More troubling, the characters themselves, including Ben, remain perpetually at an alienating distance. Reading about their exploits often feels like watching characters portrayed through black-and-white newsreels. Everything is urgent and immediate and present, and yet strangely difficult to embrace.

Nevertheless, the book remains always compelling and accessible. It's hard not to read some kind of contemporary analogy into this historical tale about a government's willingness to manipulate truth and lies to further its own ends. On the other hand, such manipulation is fairly universal in times of war, and if there is anything Doig has shown himself adept at over his career, it is accessing the universal through the particular.

David Liss is the author of five novels, most recently "The Whiskey Rebels."
January 12, 2009

Dear Ivan,

I hope you’re doing well.

Thank you for the great interview on The Eleventh Man. An article based on our conversation appeared in Real Change this week. I’m enclosing a copy, and you can get more copies of the issue by calling Real Change editor Adam Hyla at 441-3247, x 207.

A similar article—with a bit more on your background in history—will be posted on the History News Network site this month. I’ll send on a copy of that article too when it appears.

Thanks again. I look forward to your next book.

Best wishes,

Robin Lindley
Pacific Northwest Independent Bestseller List for April 13, 2008

The Pacific Northwest Independent Bestseller List, as brought to you by Book Sense and PNBA, based on reporting from the independent booksellers of the Pacific Northwest.

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**Mass Market**

| 1. Bad Luck and Trouble | **6. The Name of the Wind** |
| Lee Child, Dell, $7.99, 9780440243663 | Patrick Rothfuss, Daw, $7.99, 9780756404741 |
| **2. The Pillars of the Earth** | **7. The Other Boleyn Girl** |
| Ken Follett, Signet, $7.99, 9780451166890 | Philippa Gregory, Pocket Star, $7.99, 9781416556534 |
| **3. Simple Genius** | **8. Atonement** |
| David Baldacci, Grand Central, $9.99, 9780446618731 | Ian McEwan, Anchor, $7.99, 9780307388841 |
| **4. Spanish Dagger** | **9. The Catcher in the Rye** |
| Susan Wittig Albert, Berkley, $7.99, 9780425220887 | J.D. Salinger, Warner, $6.99, 9780316760488 |
| **5. The Woods** | **10. 1984** |
| Harlan Coben, Signet, $9.99, 9780451221957 | George Orwell, Signet, $9.99, 9780451524935 |
Meet the Author: Ivan Doig

Check Our Catalog

Teammates in arms

A winning football team finds tragedy in war

Review 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 bristles 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 America 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 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 Seattle 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 (Harcourt, $26, 416 pages, ISBN 9780151012435), Doig demonstrates once again that his ability remains deep and wide.

Alden Mudge writes from San Francisco.

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Indie Next
Recommendations From Independent Booksellers

"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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Add 'Eleventh Man' to Ivan Doig's best yarns

ABOUT THE BOOK

By Ivan Doig
Knopf, 648 pp., $29.95

By Bob Minzesheimer, USA TODAY
Ivan Doig, who blends the skills of novelist and historian, was researching another book when he lucked onto a forgotten but stunning scrap of history:

In World War II, the 11 starters on the football team at Montana State College in Bozeman joined the military. All 11 died.

[Handwritten note: Great review. I've always loved Bob Minzesheimer! x Liz D.]
That "breath of actuality," as he puts it, inspired Doig’s ninth novel, The Eleventh Man. It’s his most ambitious and one of his best.

In the novel, a small-town newspaper editor says, "History writes the best yarns."

Doig has been doing just that in books such as Dancing at the Rascal Fair, set in his native Montana, as literary as it is sparse.

FIND MORE STORIES IN: World War II | Westerners | Dancing | Bozeman | WASPs | Ivan Doig

His new novel employs his usual brand of characters — prickly, quotable Westerners — and throws them into a world at war.

His fictional hero is Ben Reinking, the newspaper editor’s son, and a talented writer in his own right.

As a football star, Ben was part of that championship season at fictional Treasure State University, undefeated in 1941. Two years later, he’s yanked from pilot training to become a military correspondent.

The brass, eager for heroes, orders him to write a series of articles about his former teammates scattered around the globe. But Ben is no propagandist, which means hinting at the complexities between the lines, as his ex-teammates are killed one by one.

Doig is at his best exploring little-known crannies of the war: work camps for conscientious objectors and the role played by WASPs (Women Air Force Service Pilots), one of whom Ben falls in love with. She’s smart, pretty and married.

The former football players and a mysterious 12th man who died in a team practice are hard to keep straight, at least early in the novel. Readers may wish for a scorecard to refer to.

But Doig’s language is a joy to read. His accounts of combat and the home front take on new resonance in the context of the current war, which seems to have no home front, at least for most Americans.

Near the end of World War II, Ben comes to realize that “The world was more complicated now, but he also knew that every era makes that excuse for tripping over itself.”

True then, true now.
Elevating the Fallen

In Ivan Doig's new novel, a World War II military journalist is ordered to make heroes of his doomed comrades.

By Mike Peed

Ivan Doig may not have pioneered Montana literature — that honor belongs to Lewis and Clark — but since "This House of Sky," his memoir of growing up along the Rocky Mountain Front,

The Eleventh Man


was nominated for the 1979 National Book Award, Doig has been considered the literary equivalent of Gary Cooper, another of the Treasure State's favorite sons: good and decent, emblematic of an honored past. Doig's fiction is often labeled old-fashioned, but although he trades in nostalgia it's rarely of the Hallmark variety.

His McCaskey trilogy dissected the intricate relationship between a landscape — Montana's Two Medicine country — and its colonizers. In "Bucking the Sun," construction of the monumental Fort Peck Dam, begun in 1933, mercilessly displaces both water and tradition.

Mike Peed is on the editorial staff of The New Yorker.

Like those novels, Doig's new book, his 12th, takes its inspiration from yesteryear. (The author, in fact, has a Ph.D. in American frontier history.) In World War II, only New Mexico's death rate outstaged Montana's, and among the fallen were 11 starting players from the Montana State College football team. In "The Eleventh Man," Doig reimagines them as members of a famed 1941 team at the fictional Treasure State University.

The novel opens in 1943 with the former teammates flying across a war-torn globe, from the Pacific Northwest to Guam, from Antwerp to New Guinea. The Threshold Press War Project, an armed services propaganda outfit, has ordered Ben Reinling, the team's left end and son of a small-town newspaper editor, to write a series of articles called "The Supreme Team on the Field of Battle." Though the purpose of his task is never fully illuminated, Ben deploys, "lock, stock, and type writer," to profile his former teammates and, as instructed, elevate them to a hero status above what an athletic field might bestow.

The members of Doig's cast speak an easygoing 1940s vernacular, more imagined, one hopes, than real. Soldiers drink "skunk juice," receive the "globoot salute" and look forward to a "rub a dub dub." "In bed and out, he was unbeatable company," Ben's inamorata, a female pilot, thinks of him, "bright as a mint silver dollar ... a first-class passion rater." (And, Ben says in return, "how ballys lucky I am to be with you!") These incessant wisecracks overwhelm, yielding characters who become less individuals than accomplices in parody. As ever, Doig seems most comfortable in hushed descriptions of Montana's landscape and its way of life. "Gros Ventre," Ben reminisces himself on a brief home leave, "was the same age as the tree rings in the mature cottonwood colonnade along its streets, and altered itself as slowly."

As Ben vaunts his football buddies (a conceit that lends the plot a tidy arc) and as a colonel's statistic ("In this war we have lost a nine percent mortality rate for active combatants") repeatedly fail to safeguard them, the novel emanates a sense of unavoidable ruin. And yet most of the fighting and the inevitable dying — what Ben labels "the creeping wall of oblivion" — occurs off the page. The narrative itself remains paradoxically peaceful.

The strength of "The Eleventh Man" comes in its exploration of larger subjects — the nature of heroism, and of propaganda, which endures more here than the colonel stationed in the remote reaches of the Pacific or the one fated to patrol the Washington coast? Ben is never sure whether he's a victim or a perpetrator of the Army's war of words, and he feels guilty about "lodging bullets from the typewriter rather than the real thing."

It is, nonetheless, an old-world sense of loyalty and duty — a Doig trademark — that keeps Ben and his comrades on guard. "The team and its mortal dangers were a mere handful compared to the innumerable slaughtered in the faster jaws of war," Doig writes of Ben's assignment. "But they were his handful."
The Greatest Sacrifice

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

THE ELEVENTH MAN

By Ivan Doig
Harcourt. 406 pp. $26

Reviewed by Molly Gloss

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.

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, Montana, to Russia; “Animal,” on a Marine troop ship, hopsscotches 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 South 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 — WAPs — 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, Montana, where Doig, not surprisingly, is at his most lyrical, evoking the landscape of Ben Reinking’s (and Doig’s own) childhood. Wheat-fields winter-sown and falow stretched below like checkerboard linoleum laid to the wall of the Rockies. There to the west he could pick out the long straight brick 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 evergreens. Where Doig, not surprisingly, 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 Eleventh 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 some wide, dangerous field, the tone 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 fiddled 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.”
NEW WEST BOOK REVIEW

Love and War: Ivan Doig’s The Eleventh Man

Ivan Doig’s new novel, inspired by the story of eleven members of Montana State’s football team who died in World War II.

By Jenny Shank, 10-31-08

The Eleventh Man
By Ivan Doig
Harcourt, 406 pages, $26

Montana native Ivan Doig returns to his home state for his ninth novel, using East Base in Great Falls as the launching pad to send his characters to every part of the globe, including Guam, New Guinea, Belgium, and Alaska. The Eleventh Man is an engrossing World War II epic, centered around newspaper reporter Ben Reinking, who is removed from pilot training and given orders to write articles for a U.S. government propaganda agency called the Threshold Press War Project (or TPWP) that provides frontline stories to run in newspapers that are too small to support correspondents. Besides being the son of a Montana newspaper editor, Reinking has another valuable qualification for this duty: He played football for Montana’s Treasure State University in 1941, when the team went undefeated and became known as the “Supreme Team.”

Two years later, all of the starting eleven have enlisted, and Reinking is assigned to chase them around the globe, hopping from airplanes to boats to jeeps to capture the individual stories of his former teammates—and penning their obituaries when necessary. A colonel tells him, “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.’

But the job quickly turns gristlier than predicted as more of Reinking’s friends are felled. In the acknowledgments, Doig writes that this story was sparked in his mind when he was researching at the Montana Historical Society in Helena and discovered that “eleven starting players of Montana State College in Bozeman did perish” in World War II.

Reinking would have preferred to continue on his path to becoming a pilot rather than serve as a journalist at the mercy of his commanding officers, who ruthlessly edit his pieces to convey a portrait of the war that is acceptable to the government but increasingly clashes with his own war-weary views.
But Reinking finds a way to distract himself from the anguish of war, beginning a passionate affair with Cass Standish, a married Women’s Airforce Service Pilot who leads a group of women flying planes north to help hand them off to Russian soldiers as a part of the Lend-Lease arrangement. Cass is a brash, confident woman who loves to fly and doesn’t know what she’ll do about her husband when the war is over. Whenever their schedules match up to land them both in East Base, Cass and Ben enjoy fleeting trysts. Reinking thinks of her as a woman who came “with all manner of peril attached.”

As the body count among his teammates rises, Reinking wonders if his superiors are purposely giving his friends dicey assignments in order to generate a story of a team of dead heroes, or if he’s merely a colossal jinx.

_The Eleventh Man_ combines an action-packed plot, a red-hot love triangle, and suspenseful war scenes with the fine writing for which Doig is known, vividly conveying a huge cast of characters in such detail that the reader has little trouble keeping them straight. The dialogue is a particular strength, crackling with sardonic wit, subtext, and plenty of 1940’s slang, although occasionally the repartee seems more like movie dialogue than believable speech, such as when Reinking’s friend introduces him to a woman named Inez Mazzetti, adding, “But that’s all the z’s a guy ever catches around her, right, sugarpuss?” Still, this snappy talk steeps the reader in the period atmosphere.

_The Eleventh Man_ is a vivid account of a complex tale, and in it Doig displays all the gifts of a writer seasoned to perfection.

[End of article]
The Pacific Northwest Indie Bestseller List, as brought to you by IndieBound and PNBA, for the week ended Sunday, October 26, 2008. Based on reporting from the independent booksellers of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association and IndieBound. For an independent bookstore near you, visit IndieBound.org.

### HARDCOVER FICTION

1. **The Story of Edgar Sawtelle**  
   David Wroblewski, Ecco, $25.95, 9780061374227
2. **The Eleventh Man**  
   Ivan Doig, Harcourt, $26, 9780151012435
3. **The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society**  
   Mary Ann Shaffer, Annie Barrows, Dial, $22, 9780385340991
4. **A Most Wanted Man**  
   John le Carré, Scribner, $28, 9781416594888
5. **The Brass Verdict**  
   Michael Connelly, Little Brown, $26.99, 9780316166294
6. **A Lion Among Men**  
   Gregory Maguire, Morrow, $26.95, 9780060548926
7. **The Art of Racing in the Rain**  
   Garth Stein, Harper, $23.95, 9780061537936
8. **Rough Weather**  
   Robert B. Parker, Putnam, $26.95, 9780399155192
9. **The English Major**  
   Jim Harrison, Grove, $24, 9780802118639
10. **Home**  
    Marilynnne Robinson, FSG, $25, 9780374299101
11. **The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo**  
    Stieg Larsson, Knopf, $24.95, 9780307269751
12. **The Host**  
    Stephenie Meyer, Little Brown, $25.99, 9780316068048
13. **Anathem**  
    Neal Stephenson, Morrow, $29.95, 9780061474095
14. **The Given Day**  
    Dennis Lehane, Morrow, $27.95, 9780688163181
15. **Extreme Measures**  
    Vince Flynn, Atria, $27.95, 9780743270427

### HARDCOVER NONFICTION

1. **Dewey**  
   Vicki Myron, Grand Central, $19.99, 9780446407410
2. **The Limits of Power**  
   Andrew J. Bacevich, Metropolitan, $24, 9780805088151
3. **Hot, Flat, and Crowded**  
   Thomas L. Friedman, FSG, $27.95, 9780374166854
4. **My Stroke of Insight**  
   Jill Bolte Taylor, Viking, $24.95, 9780670020744
5. **Goodnight Bush**  
   Erich Origen, Gan Golan, Little Brown, $14.99, 9780316040419
6. **The Wordy Shipmates**  
   Sarah Vowell, Riverhead, $25.95, 9781594489990
7. **The Last Lecture**  
   Randy Pausch, Hyperion, $21.95, 9781401323257
8. **The Snowball**  
   Alice Schroeder, Bantam, $35, 9780553805093
9. **Bad Money**  
   Kevin Phillips, Viking, $25.95, 9780670019076
10. **More Information Than You Require**  
    John Hodgman, Dutton, $25, 9780525950349
11. **A Bold Fresh Piece of Humanity**
October 20, 2008

Ivan Doig
17277 15th Ave. NW
Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Ivan,

A bunch of reviews and roundups have come in recently—here’s everything recent that I know of. Hope all’s well with you.

All best,

Tom Bouman
212-592-1176
The Eleventh Man

By Jennie Camp, Special to the Rocky

Published October 16, 2008 at 7 p.m.


Plot in a nutshell: Many authors peak with a second or third book and then dwindle in their later years, but Doig just keeps getting better.

His exceptional new novel opens in 1941, when Montana's Treasure State University boasts an undefeated starting lineup that makes football history. Two years later, World War II intervenes and the 11-member lineup is scattered across the globe.

When the hero-starved U.S. military pulls Ben Reinking out of pilot training and assigns him to follow his teammates, writing their stories for small-town newspapers, Ben is tested nearly beyond his limits.

Statistics suggest that all but one of the "Supreme Team" will survive the war, but, as Reinking chronicles the experiences of one man after another, we watch those conclusions overridden by the harsher realities of war.

Sample of prose: When the U.S. Navy destroyer Ben is on begins evasive maneuvers to avoid a Japanese submarine, the tension onboard is palpable and dramatic:

"Sea air rushed by, there on the steel promontory into the dark. A mane of moon silver flowed back from the destroyer's bow, and a marching tail of wake behind it. As his eyes adjusted, Ben could just make out the long narrow deck below, armaments jutting ready . . . . Standing there witnessing the might of a fully armed vessel turning on its nagging foe could have been thrilling, Ben was duly aware, except for the distinct chance of being blown out of the water at any second. Drowned like a kitten in a sack. He tried to swallow such prospects away, down a throat dry as paper. The lack of any least sign of the enemy out there in the total surround of ocean seemed to him the worst part. On land he had been shot at by experts and never felt this much fear."

Pros: 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.

Cons: None.
Final word: *The Eleventh Man*, Doig's 12th, is his best thus far.

Subscribe to the Rocky Mountain News
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.

Meagher 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 novelist?

"I'd do that," Doig said. "Or Cass Standish of the Women Air Force Service Pilots. W A S P 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 her mind, "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." 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.
Human striving set in real history will make you fear for characters' lives
By GINNY MERRIAM for the Missoulian

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," traveling 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 fail 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. 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?

Doig 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 newroom 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 Doig 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-wrecked 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 Doig's most powerful novel to date."

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

Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Seattle writer Ivan Doig enlarges his canvas in 'The Eleventh Man'

Last updated October 16, 2008 11:10 a.m. PT

By JOHN MARSHALL
P-I BOOK CRITIC

Ivan Doig is usually as reliable as the tides.

Book after book, the longtime Seattle writer illuminates some distant corner of the past with empathy, humanity and resonant details of life. His books usually revisit his native Montana -- Doig has claimed the area as his own fictional territory, like Faulkner's Mississippi. Whatever the setting, Doig's books are filled with genuine characters who walk off the page and into the reader's heart.

He does it again with his ninth novel, but with a significant difference. "The Eleventh Man" (Harcourt, 402 pages, $26) is set against a much larger canvas -- spanning the globe during World War II.

This is Doig's version of an epic, still filled with fine characters and details, yet displaying some problems on this wider scale, including a far-fetched plot premise with the main character.

That appealing, well-drawn character is Ben Reinking, a former college football star at a Montana school that Doig calls Treasure State University. Reinking was the starting end on the 1941 "Supreme Team" that captured national headlines when, after the death of a teammate in a grueling practice, it rallied to an undefeated season.

All of the players, except one, have enlisted in the service after graduation. Reinking was in pilot training when he was pulled away for special war duty. His new assignment: chronicling the war experiences of his Supreme Team cohort for local newspapers across America.

Reinking is a reluctant draftee in these high-level government efforts. He has the necessary writing talent, since he is the son of a small-town newspaper editor. But he also is an independent sort who chafes at being used, and at using his teammates, as part of the hero-making Threshold Press War Project. Reinking's reticence only grows as more of his teammates become casualties. The war statistic is that 9 percent of those in combat will be killed, but members of the Supreme Team have been dying at a much higher rate.

COMING UP

IVAN DOIG DISCUSSES 'THE ELEVENTH MAN'

WHEN/WHERE: 7:30 p.m. Saturday, The Elliott Bay Book Co., 206-624-6600; 7:30 p.m. Nov. 12 at Town Hall, 206-634-3400; 7 p.m.; Nov. 13 at Parkplace Books in Kirkland, 425-828-6546.
Reinking's only real solace comes in the embrace of a member of the Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) who fly new combat aircraft from their manufacturers to a huge base in Montana on their way to delivery in Alaska to Soviet allies.

Capt. Cass Standish is a perfect match for Reinking's mix of courage, resolve and sensitivity, but there is one major problem -- she is married to a soldier fighting in New Guinea. Divorce is unthinkable under those circumstances, but so is ignoring the sizzling affair with Reinking. As Doig writes, "Nothing prepared a person for this. The way he and Cass had fallen for each other was as unlikely as a collision of meteors."

The surviving Supreme Team members dwindle to a precious few until there is just one left to chronicle -- Moxie Stamper, the quarterback, now serving in an anti-aircraft unit in Belgium. Will he survive as American forces storm toward Germany? Or will Reinking be an eyewitness to the last hero's demise?

"The Eleventh Man" races to its dramatic conclusion with a sense of urgency not present in the rest of the novel because Reinking hopscotches between so many different assignments.

Doig covers many areas of operations in his epic war story, both stateside and overseas. But there are too many in brief relief to build much momentum in this long novel. Readers can feel as yo-yo'd as Reinking does.

Doig, an Air Force reservist during the Kennedy era, roots many elements of "The Eleventh Man" plot in actual World War II experience. He brings welcome attention to WASP pilots, conscientious objectors and the terrible casualties suffered by members of one football team (Montana State College).

But Reinking's assignment is pure invention, which undercut the book's effectiveness for me, a veteran of the armed forces' officer training in journalism/public relations during Vietnam. That Reinking would be whisked off to various combat zones to write feel-good stories about members of one little football team from the distant West stretches belief, especially after he is wounded himself.

The military has long supplied hometown stories for the stateside press. But Reinking's special assignment seems too grandiose in scale and too narrow in focus, as well as cynical and even Machiavellian.

It is a rare misstep for Doig, but a crucial one in this novel. It is even more disappointing after the mastery of his previous novel, "The Whistling Season," one of his best books.
Fall books preview: A few pages to leaf through this season

11:45 AM CDT on Thursday, October 2, 2008

FROM WIRE REPORTS and The Dallas Morning News

There's a tradition in publishing that says the reading public gets distracted during an election season – best to stay away from major book releases. Like so much else, this crumb of conventional wisdom has been swept under the rug.

There's new fiction out this fall by Stephen King, Julia Glass, Toni Morrison and John le Carré; and new nonfiction by best-selling prognosticators Thomas L. Friedman and Tipping Point author Malcolm Gladwell. Michael Lewis, the Liar's Poker author, wins the Perfect Timing Award with Panic: The Story of Modern Financial Insanity, about the five most violent financial upheavals of recent history. Get going on that update, Michael!

And like a bird-parent pushing the strongest fledglings out of the nest first, many of this fall's books have already been released. Here's a sampling: Fiction

Available now

When Will There Be Good News? by Kate Atkinson (Little, Brown). A new Jackson Brodie mystery from the author of Case Histories and One Good Turn, in which three disrupted lives come together in unexpected and deeply thrilling ways.

The China Lover by Ian Buruma (Penguin Press). A rare excursion into fiction by the cultural commentator (Anglomania, Murder in Amsterdam), tracing the curious career of Japanese film star Yamaguchi Yoshiko. Under a number of aliases (including Shirley Yamaguchi in the U.S.), Ms. Yoshiko weathers all the twists and turns in the history of modern Japan.

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.

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.

October

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

Fall books preview: A few pages to leaf through this season | Dallas Morning News | New... Page 2 of 3

A Partisan's Daughter by Louis de Bernieres (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 prostitute into his car. Only she's not a hooker – and she is one heckuva storyteller.

The Eleventh Man by Ivan Doig (Harcourt). Mr. 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.

Lulu in Marrakech by Diane Johnson (Dutton). The doyenne of American expatriate fiction (Le Divorce) moves the action from her usual Paris setting to Morocco, where her undercover CIA heroine navigates the complex interface of Islam and the West.

Death with Interruptions by Jose Saramago, translated by Margaret Jull Costa (Harcourt). In his new novel, the Portuguese Nobel laureate (Blindness) posits a world where no one dies.

The Widows of Eastwick by John Updike (Knopf). Mr. Updike's sequel to his 1984 novel, The Witches of Eastwick, finds his three heroines contemplating a reunion in their Rhode Island hometown after divorce, remarriage and widowhood have carried them to the far corners of the world.

November

2666 by Roberto Bolano, translated by Natasha Wimmer (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). The acclaimed masterpiece – all 900 pages of it – by the late Chilean writer (The Savage Detectives) involves academics, convicts, an American sportswriter and others all converging on a U.S.-Mexican border town where factory workers keep vanishing.

Just After Sunset by Stephen King (Scribner). Short stories from the horromeeister.

A Mercy by Toni Morrison (Knopf). A new historical novel by the Nobel Prize winner (Beloved) about an Anglo-Dutch farmer reluctantly acquiring a slave girl in 1680s colonial America. "I really wanted to get to a place before slavery was equated with race," Ms. Morrison has said.

Available now

The Hemingses of Monticello by Annette Gordon-Reed (Norton). An epic saga of the Hemings family, whose bloodline has been mixed with that of Thomas Jefferson since our third president took slave Sally Hemings as a mistress.

Acedia and Me: A Marriage, Monks and a Writer's Wife by Kathleen Norris (Riverhead). The author of The Cloister Walk wrestles with the phenomenon of acedia, a term used since the Middle Ages to describe the phenomenon of soul weariness.

The Snowball: Warren Buffett and the Business of Life, by Alice Schroeder. (Bantam.) This is as close as readers are likely to get to a memoir from the Oracle of Omaha. He hand-picked Texas native Schroeder to do the writing.

Titanic's Last Secrets by Brad Matsen (Twelve). Mr. Matsen follows the investigations of legendary divers John Chatterton and Richie Kohler (chronicled in Shadow Divers) as they search through the wreck of the Titanic and its sister ship, Britannic, to try to answer the enduring mystery of the Titanic tragedy: Why did the ship sink so quickly?
October

The Shadow Factory: The Ultra-Secret NSA From 9/11 to the Eavesdropping on America by James Bamford (Doubleday). Mr. Bamford, author of two previous books on the National Security Agency, tells how the bureau transformed itself after Sept. 11 to turn its almost limitless ability to listen in to friend and foe alike over to the Bush administration in the service of the war on terror.

Emily Post: Daughter of the Gilded Age, Mistress of American Manners by Laura Claridge (Random House). The life of America's premier arbiter of manners, from her Gilded Age social life to her scandalous divorce to her fateful decision to switch from society novels to a book about social behavior.

Gerard Manley Hopkins by Paul Mariani (Viking). A biography of the Jesuit priest who used his journey out of loneliness and despair to write some of the 19th century's most innovative poems.

Mosaic: Finding Beauty in a Broken World by Terry Tempest Williams (Pantheon). Essays on various subjects, from the mosaics of Ravenna, Italy, to the prairie dogs of the American Southwest, from the author of Refuge.

Chagall by Jackie Wullschlager (Knopf). The story of one of the world's best-known artists. Born poor in Russia, Chagall took as his inspiration the lost world of the shtetls of Eastern European Jews, even after he became a political exile and made his new home in America.

November

Outliers: Why Some People Succeed and Some Don't by Malcolm Gladwell (Little, Brown). Mr. Tipping Point looks at this question: What makes high-achievers different? Answers apparently lie in their culture, family, generation and the idiosyncratic experiences of their upbringing.

Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North by Thomas J. Sugrue (Random House). The story of the struggle for racial equality in the northern states, from the desegregation of northern Jim Crow schools to the integration of the suburbs.

December

American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon by Steve Rinella (Spiegel & Grau). This look at the buffalo and man, the species that drove it to the edge of extinction, has been getting great pre-publication reviews.

Mary Ann Gwinn and Michael Upchurch of the Seattle Times and staff writer Michael Merschel contributed to this report.
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.

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, hopscotches 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."