

BOOK REVIEWS

THE SEA RUNNERS by Ivan Doig

TITLE	DATE	SLEEVE
Booklist	Sept. 1, 1982	1
Michigan State Univ.	Sept. 16, 1982	1
Chicago Sun-Times	Sept. 19, 1982	2
Oregon Hist. Soc. News	Oct. 1982	2
Library Journal	Oct. 1, 1982	3
New York Times	Oct. 3, 1982	3
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Detroit, MI Free Press	Nov. 7, 1982	11
Journal American	Nov. 7, 1982	11
Journal American	Nov. 24, 1982	12-13
San Diego Magazine	Jan. 1983	14
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Daily Record (Ellensburg, WA)	Feb. 4, 1983	15
Elliott Bay Book Co. Newsletter	Fall, 1983	16-17
Booklist (Amer. Libr. Assoc.)	no date	18
Los Angeles Times	no date	18

taire, Alexander Woolcott, Edna Ferber) and by his references to critical events of the day (Sacco-Vanzetti conviction, Teapot Dome Scandal). The novelist tries for a realistic portrait of the gala pre-Depression years, complete with the era's nonsense, financial woes, and political scandal. Benchley's last novel was *All Over Again* (Booklist 77:1126 Ap 15 81). DPD.

[OCLC]

81-43406

Boissard, Janine. A new woman. Tr. by Mary Feeney. 1982. [192p.] Little, Brown, \$10.95 (0-316-10099-4). Galley. Aug.

Boissard tells the story of Claudine Moreau, a Parisian housewife whose husband leaves her at the age of 45. The author does a wonderful job of evoking Claudine's joie de vivre—her love of cooking and taking care of her husband, the peace she finds in seeing the afternoon sun drift slowly across the wall of her apartment, the simple pleasure she takes in all the tasks of everyday life. This ability to revel in the very dullness of one's life is abruptly lost when Claudine's husband tells her he has found another woman. The rest of the novel vividly describes Claudine's journey into a new acceptance of herself and a life without the man she married at a young age and to whom she devoted 25 years. A gem of a book. AG.

[OCLC]

82-7187

Bredes, Don. Muldoon. 1982. [320p.] Holt, \$15 (0-03-058281-4). Galley. Sept.

Another novel about coming of age in the late sixties—this time the seriocomic tale of William Muldoon, Jr., son of an earthy lady tennis pro and a boozy but charming ex-sports-writer. After a four-year absence at college, the son returns to his Southern California home hoping to avoid the draft, win back his girl friend, and, along the way, decide what to do with his life. Sound familiar? Unfortunately Bredes relies far too heavily on stock situations and characters from a very familiar period. The girl friend's parents are garden-variety neofascists, the hero and his friends discuss "awareness" through pot smoking, and an idyllic climax has Muldoon eschewing middle-class material values in favor of living off the land. What saves all this from being a retread of dozens of other retreads is Bredes' mildly sardonic style. He has some legitimate fun with this motley assortment of sixties stereotypes. For larger fiction collections. WL.

[CIP]

81-20316

Browne, Gerald A. 19 Purchase Street. 1982. 431p. Arbor House, \$15.50 (0-87795-413-5). Galley. Sept.

Browne moves from *11 Harrowhouse* (Arbor House, 1972) to *19 Purchase Street*, where a placid suburban estate masks a staid conglomerate's scheme to launder billions of mob dollars. Enter Andrew Gainer, who becomes involved in this less-than-legal enterprise when his sister is murdered during one of the conglomerate's shuttles to Zurich. How is Gainer to discover the truth about his sister's death and then to exact his vengeance? By plotting a complex inside heist that, through elaborate electronic wizardry and daredevil human bravery, will liberate a fortune from this highly secure mansion and then restore it—or most of it—to Gainer's advantage. Or so goes the original plan,

which will undergo radical correction while running its course. Browne handles the material in this thriller of a tale expeditiously, particularly in a spectacular shoot-out in New York harbor, but some of the elaborate if creaky details that the author injects along the way are hardly for the squeamish or fastidious reader. Browne is also the author of *Green Ice* (Booklist 74:1474 My 15 78). JB.

82-72051

Cherryh, C. J. Merchanter's luck. 1982.

[208p.] NAL/DAW, paper, \$2.95

(0-87997-745-0). Galley. July.

Two former rivals in interstellar trade become uneasy allies in a deadly interstellar chase. This is a semisequel to the author's Hugo Award-nominated *Downbelow Station* (Booklist 77:1138 Ap 15 81), and readers familiar with the former book will have an advantage in approaching this one. It is less convoluted than some of Cherryh's other work, and her enormous gifts for characterization (females in particular), world building, and raising serious issues within the framework of "space opera" plots are as evident as always. RG.

[OCLC]

Coldsmith, Don. The Elk-dog heritage.

(Double D western) 1982. 181p.

Doubleday, \$10.95 (0-385-17501-9). YA

This is a different sort of western that deals with two Indian bands, one of whom is the dread Head Splitters, who have always been victorious in their battles—that is, until they meet the Elk-dogs. After a great battle between the two bands, the Elk-dogs' reputation grows in stature; they are the pride of their tribe and are now content to bask in their glory. But this doesn't last too long due to the unrest of the younger warriors who want to make a name for themselves. Author Don Coldsmith has created a number of unique characters here, such as Heads Off, a wise young chief; his wife, Tall One, an asset to him in many ways; and Badger and his young friends, who instigate all the trouble that could lead to another bloody battle with the Head Splitters. Through it all, the author manages to spin an engaging story of Indian life and intrigue. GEV.

[CIP]

80-2849

Cook, Thomas H. The orchids. 1982.

252p. Houghton, \$12.95 (0-395-32503-X).

Galley. Sept.

Cook's latest novel, told in the first person and in a series of flashbacks, is the story of Peter Langhof, a former Nazi doctor who performed medical experiments on concentration-camp inmates during World War II. Langhof is living on an estate in a South American republic, hidden by the local tyrant in exchange for the payment of diamonds stolen from Jews in the camps. The camp scenes are filled with conversations between Langhof and Ira Ginzburg, a Jew, who discuss important philosophical issues: the roots of evil, humanity's capacity for self-deceit and self-brutality, etc. To show that Langhof is a German living in a Spanish-speaking country, Cook peppers the dialogue with phrases such as "Ich bin hier" and "Nada. Gracias." If you're still not tired of Nazi novels, this one's not so bad. Cook is the author of *Blood Innocents* (Playboy, 1980). GC.

[OCLC]

82-9175

Deverell, William. High crimes. 1982.

[408p.] St. Martin's, \$15.95

(0-312-37221-3). Galley. Sept.

In this suspense novel, four men and a woman are en route to Newfoundland on a ship containing \$300 million worth of drugs being transported from South America to New York. Tipped off to their arrival, the Canadian police devise a complicated network—Operation Seawall—to catch the drug runners. Fast-talking lawyers, ambitious cops, devious CIA men, a hardworking drug enforcement officer, and a Colombian Mafia leader all play key roles in the ensuing drama. An entertaining, action-oriented story that manipulates the traditional elements of the suspense genre with enough dexterity to keep most readers turning pages. AG.

[OCLC]

81-21409

Devine, Dominic. This is your death.

1982. 221p. St. Martin's, \$10.95

(0-312-80052-5). Galley. Aug.

This is the last novel written by the late Devine, whose distinguished mystery writing career included his 1979 thriller, *Sunk without Trace* (Booklist 76:480 N 15 79). Writer Geoffrey Wallis is very popular with the reading public, envied by his friends, and hated by his family. Wallis thrives until his ne'er-do-well brother Lionel reappears, presumably to blackmail Geoffrey. Shortly thereafter, Geoffrey is found with four bullets in his chest—Lionel is accused of the crime. Things take a whiplash turn, however, when Maurice Slater, historian and perennial friend of Geoffrey's, is engaged to write Geoffrey's biography. Slater uncovers Geoffrey's life and the real cause of his death in this complex thriller. CF.

[OCLC]

82-5564

Doig, Ivan. The sea runners. 1982.

[288p.] map. Atheneum, \$13.95

(0-689-11302-1). Galley. Sept.

YA

Blending historical detail and believable dialogue with a remarkable ability to describe the natural world, Doig has fashioned a delightful adventure novel. The story, based on an actual incident in 1853, concerns the attempt of four Swedish laborers to escape from New Archangel in Russian Alaska. Indentured servants committed to seven years of mistreatment from the Russians, the four steal an Indian canoe and set off on an arduous trip down the length of the Pacific Northwest coast, hoping eventually to reach Astoria, Oregon, at the mouth of the Columbia River. Bad weather, high seas, hostile Indians, and a lack of food stand in their way. Doig does a good job establishing the strained relationship between the escapees, and he is equally effective at evoking the immense physical strains of such a seemingly impossible journey. Best of all, though, are his descriptions of the ocean itself: "the remorseless hurl of it, impending, collapsing, upbuilding." A winning combination of Northwest history, muscular prose, and raw adventure. BO.

[OCLC]

82-45174

The Eureka years: Boucher and McComas's *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 1949-54. Ed. by Annette McComas. 1982. 348p. Bantam, paper, \$3.50 (0-553-20673-7).

With a mixture of short stories, letters, arti-



DICK ESTELL "THE RADIO READER" WKAR-TV
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY, E. LANSING 48824

September 16, 1982

Mr. Ivan Doig
17021 10th Avenue, N.W.
Seattle, Washington

Dear Mr. Doig:

I was very happy to receive your recent writing, THE SEA RUNNERS, from Atheneum this week. After trying to explain to many listeners why I felt it would be difficult for me to read WINTER BROTHERS, I was especially happy to get another chance to read from one of my favorite authors.

The question is: will you permit me to read THE SEA RUNNERS on my national network of public radio stations?

If you do grant me permission, I will be scheduling it to be read early in 1983. I have only leafed through the book (I never read a book until I record it for broadcast) but I have found all the reviews to be most praiseworthy. Indeed, from my earlier experience reading THIS HOUSE OF SKY, I would trust my own intuition, anyway, in the selection of one of your writings.

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future so that I might begin to make scheduling arrangements. In the meantime, I hope the bookstores stock a sufficient quantity.

Sincerely,


Dick Estell

Book Reviewer, Public Radio Network

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9-19-82

Trial by sea and by time

I VAN DOIG writes a clear, clean prose, simple but purposeful, the kind that is hardest to achieve. He sculpts language, wielding verb and noun like hammer and chisel, carving sentences with spare, vigorous energy.

This *House of Sky and Winter Brothers*, two meditations on American Westernness, proved his originality as

stylist and thinker. Now, in

The Sea Runners (Atheneum,

\$13.95), he has also become a splendid lyric storyteller with his first venture into fiction—an adventure novel, at that. Observe:

"Melander you would have spied early. Top-lofty man with lanks of arms and high hips, so that he seemed to be all long sections and hinges."

And: "Clumps of wan light, warmth fallen through chinks in the overcast, now would pinto the forest flanks."

"Now" is the winter of 1852 at New Archangel, Baranof Island, Russian America. Melander, a Swedish seaman indentured to the "tsarmen" for seven years, is rubbed raw by the fetters of near slavery. He resolves to escape by sea, stealing one of the 20-foot Indian canoes from the village outside the New Archangel fort. The route: 1,200 perilous miles stairstepping past islands, shoals, straits and sounds down the Pacific Coast to Astoria, Oregon Territory, where ships home to Sweden can be found.

For mate he chooses an axeman named Karlsson, slender and reticent, "a man built smoke-tight," and for "provisioner" appoints Braaf, an apple-cheeked, nimble-fingered thief. Weeks later, when the three are deep into preparations, a brutish, fiery-tempered blacksmith called Wennberg discovers the plot and demands entrance. There is no other choice.

Mistrusted at first, Wennberg proves his worth once the quartet gets away. His brawn makes the canoe fly. Unsuspected talents rise in the others also. Karlsson turns out to be a fine cook, Braaf a sensitive weather-reader, and leader Melander a mother-hen with both a soothing chatter and a mastery of detail.

As the voyage lengthens each man faces a sea-change in himself. Will further hidden resources emerge, or will each become more of what he seems, the lines carved deeper? The press of endurance upon character is an old, old subject that goes back to Homer, but Doig freshens the odyssey.

Tossful days, surf, the crash of tide accompany the voyagers. Now a storm, now a calm: each day a new test of nature and of self. "Vast weeks of dare" and boredom pass, cheerful Melander clucking away the friction that surfaces among men under such circumstances.

One for the books

Henry Kisor / Book Editor

Until the halfway point, off the coast of New Caledonia (now British Columbia), when Melander is shot to death by Indians. Karlsson, chosen leader by default (only he can read), discovers that Melander had maps of coast just to the northern tip of Vancouver Island, barely two-thirds of the voyage, and he had kept quiet about it, trusting to his sailor's sense to take them the rest of the way. Karlsson is no seaman, but with doggedness and luck the canoe men struggle past Vancouver Island and the Strait of San Juan de Fuca.

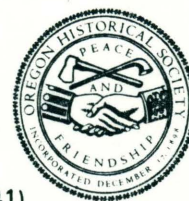
OF the rest, let me say only that there is further loss, and crisis, and growing, rending doubt and desperation. This, after all, is high adventure, and not knowing how it ends makes the tension of reading all the higher.

Ivan Doig's story is simple, yet his muscular style and novelty of historical detail—what other tales do you know of Alaska before Seward euchred it out of the Russians in 1867?—set it apart among survival fiction. I can't recall another recent adventure novel so thoroughly satisfying.

And it delights me to learn that Doig is at work on a second novel, this one set in Montana.

OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS



Vol. XXVI No. 5, October 1982, 1230 SW Park Avenue, Portland 97205 (222-1741)

OHS Schedules 109th Annual Meeting to Celebrate the Historical Pacific Northwest

The 109th anniversary of the Oregon Historical Society will be marked by festivities of historical and cultural significance, thereby providing something for everyone. Members will soon receive official notice of the event and the ballot for the board member election. However, mark your calendars now for Sunday, November 7th, as the day will be a full and exciting one.

Rather than face another confrontation with the traffic surplus on I-5, our meeting place for 1982 will be the Hilton Hotel in downtown Portland. Members and guests will assemble for luncheon and for an outstanding program. Our speaker will be author Ivan Doig whose new novel *The Sea Runners* has just been published by Atheneum Press, New York. Based on his-

torical records, *The Sea Runner* is the gripping tale of four Scandinavian escapees from their indenture to the Russian Fur Company at New Archangel and their desperate canoe journey down the coast of the Pacific Northwest. The success of Mr. Doig's first novel comes as no surprise to those who have read his previous two works of non-fiction, *This House of Sky*, and *Winter Brothers*, both of which won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award. *Winter Brothers* has also been adapted for a public television documentary which will air this fall. The title of Mr. Doig's talk to our annual meeting is *Blue as the Odyssey*, in which he takes us on a voyage in search of Northwest lore.

Before luncheon everyone will

have a chance to participate in our traditional silent auction, a superior collection of objects donated to us for this purpose throughout the year by loyal members and patrons. Immediately after lunch and the program, we will adjourn a short distance to the Oregon Historical Center where we will have the last view of our successful SOFT GOLD exhibition before it is officially closed by Honorary Committee Chairman, Mrs. Harold A. Miller.

Around 4: p.m. all those wishing to do so will gather again at Jake's Famous Crawfish Restaurant on Southwest Twelfth and Alder to drink a complimentary toast to our younger friends on the occasion of their 90th anniversary. These two venerable institutions — ours and theirs — share a strong commitment to the history of Portland, and their invitation to our members is a fitting climax to such a history-permeated day. Watch your mailbox and get your reservations in early.



Ivan Doig, author of *The Sea Runners* relaxes on the Dungeness Spit during the winter of his *Winter Brothers*, highly acclaimed historic work.

Thunder Lodge Players Will Bring Traditional Roles to OHS Visitors

The SOFT GOLD exhibition has been the impetus for many interesting and informative programs at the Center, chief among them being the "Soft Gold Conversations" and the film series. The most recent addition to this illustrious schedule promises to

too horrible to contemplate. What should a medical scientist do if he hits on a totally new concept of biological warfare that the experts have apparently overlooked? Have they really overlooked it? Two years later my old college tutor shocked me by opining that moral concepts were probably best conveyed by fiction if one could do it. Could I do it? The new concept was inevitably linked with espionage which suggested the genre. But could one capture Everyman's interest in a concept based upon molecular biology, epidemiology, and general systems theory? After three chapters I succumbed to nausea and realized that I had a lot to learn. Seven years later, with much help from friendly editors, I had a fifth draft which worked. But, oh—the editing!

"Espionage novels, like detective novels, remind us that truth is hardly come by, but set a wider stage and add the essentially moral element of treason and deception. And, as Jacques Maritain said, 'There is a spy in everyone.' In *The Siberian Reservoir* I have tried to incorporate these age-old themes and add two more: the corrupting effect of bureaucracies, and the dangers of technological arrogance."

Timothy Cohrs

Tendencies

(*St. Martin's—December*)

"*Tendencies* charts one man's downward spiral into confrontation with himself. As an American he carries our national character proudly—a brittle veneer of cynicism, a leaden core of bright-eyed naïveté, and a total disregard for the rest of the world. In the course of the novel each of these characteristics is tested to such an extreme by other men, twisted politics and strange geography, that each turns blatantly bankrupt. What our American is left facing is himself, and his awkwardness with this situation is one which is at the heart of our country. It is the largeness of the novel as a form that excited me in writing *Tendencies*. Not just the hundreds of pages it took, but the play of new peoples and strange terrain against the constant backdrop of our quiet lives in a familiar world. This is the sort of interchange that a virtuoso like Ishmael Reed has played out as far and fast as it can go. Though my protagonist retains the untarnished innocence of a Natty Bumpo even while strangling an enemy (since any enemy is deep within that section of experience that we can simply disregard), he does live in Reed's world where evil dogs us and the reality of conspiracy is more twisted than the plot of a farce."

"I came to write fiction after several years of being a published poet. I am 29 and live and work in New York City."

Martina D'Alton

Fatal Finish

(*Walker—October*)

"Growing up in a big, noisy family in New York City, I quickly discovered that reading was the easiest escape. I learned to concentrate in the midst of chaos and developed a healthy inner life, populated with imaginary friends and

set in exotic locales. Daydreaming. I wore out my library card to feed my habit and although I read everything, I became an avid fan of suspense novels, from Sherlock Holmes to Nancy Drew to Graham Greene. These novels explored the dark side of human nature and gave me a great deal of pleasure as well. Of course, the best literary novels contain strong elements of suspense but when it came to writing my own book, I turned to the suspense novel. The idea of ordinary people (like me) doing extraordinary things (I wished) has always interested me, and it is this that I tried for in *Fatal Finish*. It opens with a murder during the New York City Marathon. A few years ago, I was running the marathon, and around the 23rd mile, said to myself, 'This is killing me.' Because I had been casting around for a plot, I took myself seriously. Soon I had a first draft and in the process had rediscovered my old habit of daydreaming, but now I could call it work. So, if you'll excuse me, I'll just close my eyes and get back to work."

Jacqueline Diamond (pseud.)

Lady in Disguise

(*Walker—December*)

"Words have fascinated me as long as I can remember. I wrote my first story at age four; it was one sentence long. We moved, as I was growing up, from Menard, Texas, to Louisville, Kentucky to Nashville, Tennessee, and one of the first places I always explored was the library. The first book I remember loving was *The Shy Stegosaurus of Cricket Creek* by Evelyn Sibley Lampman, although my mother assures me I was once addicted to an opus called *Where Is Farmer Brown?* I went through Dr. Seuss, Hugh Lofting, Albert Payson Terhune, and an eclectic assortment of others. In high school, I met Dickens and Hardy and Shakespeare and, in French class, Balzac and Anouilh. And I wrote—poems, stories, and essays by the dozen. At Brandeis University I studied poetry writing with Howard Nemerov and playwrighting with William Gibson (*The Miracle Worker*), then won a Thomas Watson Foundation fellowship to spend a year in Europe, writing. Since then I have worked as a reporter and editor, first for a small newspaper and now for the Associated Press in Los Angeles."

"Seeing 'Pride and Prejudice' on *Masterpiece Theatre* sparked my interest in the Regency period. The result was *Lady in Disguise*. Reading should be a joy from beginning to end, and I have tried to write the kind of book I like to read."

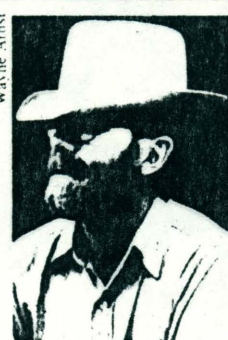
Ivan Doig

The Sea Runners

(*Atheneum—October*)

"*The Sea Runners* arrived into my life as a waif of fact which kept insisting that it was going to grow up to be fiction. This despite the staunchly nonfictional lineage of my byline: a career as journalist and free lance writer; then the memoir *This House of Sky*, a Christopher Award winner and National Book Award nominee; and then the journal/biography, *Winter Brothers*, co-

Wayne Armstrong



cently adapted into a public television documentary. But arithmetic backed up the argument of this newcomer that it needed to be nurtured into a novel. Eleven and a half inches of

newsprint, about a thousand words—the scant but enticing story of four Swedish workmen who attempted to flee from indentured life in Russian America (Alaska) in 1853. The immense voyage of those men by canoe from New Archangel (Sitka) toward the Oregon port of Astoria, more than a thousand miles down one of the most beautiful and treacherous coasts of the planet, I knew at once I wanted to write; yet that single waifish newspaper tale was the sole account. And so, fiction and its four accomplices moved into my typewriter. They are Melander, Wennberg, Karlsson and Braaf, my sea runners who, although they exist only in the world of my pages, draw breath from the actuality of that great and terrible journey of 1853. It proves to be an invigorating climate, this upland where fiction meets actuality."

Jerome Doolittle

The Bombing Officer

(*Dutton—October*)

"Most serious American novels stay close to the writers' own experiences: growing up, love, family life, writing itself, military service and going to school. Missing from this list is work as most people know it: leaving the house every day for a shop or factory or office. Only a few novelists—Updike, Marquand and Cozzens among them—bother to follow the rest of humanity to work. And yet it is the job that defines the economic status, the social class, the family's way of life, the personal relations and even the health—emotional as well as physical—of most people. And it is on the job that most people face their most serious ethical and moral choices. Lack of money, no lack of children and a dislike of schools have forced me to hold nonacademic jobs most of my life. And so when President Reagan gave me time to write a novel by firing me from my last job—a Democratic political appointment—it seemed natural to choose the workplace as a setting. *The Bombing Officer* is a junior diplomat who approves or disapproves air strikes in Laos, against what might or might not be military targets. The problems raised by this—like the problems a great many people face in a great many other jobs—are of the highest moral order and religious significance. And these are the two true and proper concerns of a novel."

Aaron Elkins

Fellowship of Fear

(*Walker—November*)

"*Fellowship of Fear*'s protagonist is Gibson Oliver, a professor of physical

N.Y. TIMES
10-3-82

Novels of History and Imagination

THE SEA RUNNERS

By Ivan Doig.
279 pp. New York:
Atheneum. \$13.95.

THE BAREFOOT BRIGADE

By Douglas C. Jones.
313 pp. New York:
Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
\$15.50.

By MARY LEE SETTLE

WE carry our history within us, in our habits, our language, our country, our names, our mores, our memories. To write from within that timescape is the prime function of the novelist whose subject is the past. The historian is concerned with facts, the archeologist with physical objects, but the novelist must find that universal center that is both contemporary and historically true if the novel is to transcend romance and create its own present. Both of these novels do this.

"The Sea Runners" by Ivan Doig goes beyond being "about" survival and becomes, mile by terrible mile, the experience itself. Mr. Doig has created the illusion of going with four men in a 20-foot canoe over a thousand miles of the Pacific Northwest, from Alaska to the Territory of Washington, in 1852. The voyagers are

Mary Lee Settle's most recent novel is "The Killing Ground."



Drawings by Marla Horvath

Swedes, indentured servants in what was then Russian America, before it was bought as "Seward's folly" and became Alaska.

The feeling for the winter sea and the forbidding land is formidable. The four men are Melander, a sailor; Karlsson, a woodsman; Braaf, a thief; and Wennberg, a blacksmith. There is little courage or camaraderie — only the awesome sea and four men who have

little in common and bear with each other because of their mutual need. Slow and brutal time passes; from cove to cove, island to island, in storms, in fog, the days and hours of survival are the drama and plot.

The book contains factual surprises: Russian America was settled by somewhat the same system of indenture used in Virginia 200 years before, even to the seven-year commitment; much of the West was settled by people who got there by sea and not across land. Yet the research never intrudes on the story.

The journey is a true one, based on an 1853 letter to the editor of The Oregon Weekly Times about the survival of three men following the same sea route. Only their names are known. The characters in the novel are Mr. Doig's creation. As he says in the author's acknowledgment, they "have lived only in the world of this book." And they do live (or die), in prose that suits the experience without straining for poetic "transcendence."

Sea tale goes past adventure

THE SEA RUNNERS

By Ivan Dolg, Atheneum, 279 pp. \$13.95

By Mark Muro
Contributing Reporter

The last six years, while the literary cosmos has been reverberating with the names of Updike and Wolfe, D. M. Thomas and, yes, T. S. Garp, a flannel-shirted writer from the provinces has been busy crafting a brilliant and original contribution to American letters. His name is Ivan Dolg, and his works, the 1978 National Book Award nominee "This House of Sky," and 1980's "Winter Brothers," surely stand as two of the best and least-talked about books of recent years.

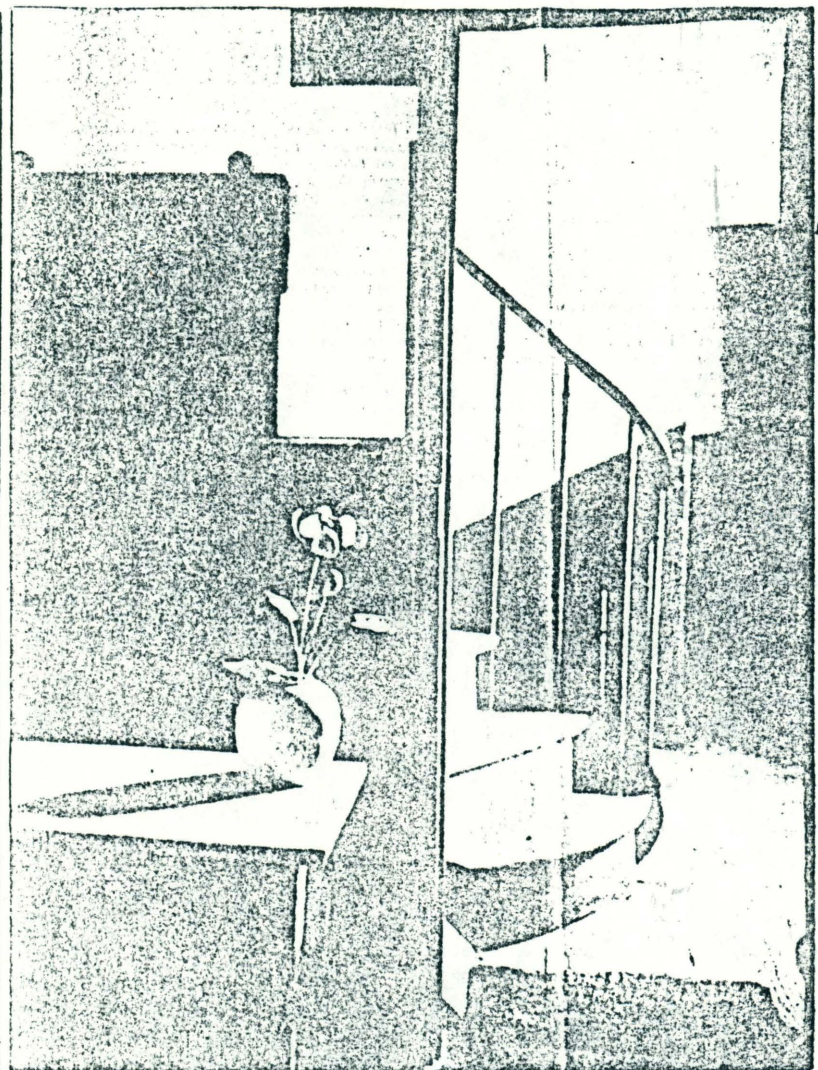
Like a meticulous shipwright or carpenter, Ivan Dolg fashions books of beautiful conception and impeccable workmanship. Employing a clean, clear prose as sturdy as the pine and fir and spruce of his native Montana, Dolg writes paragraphs and chapters of unobtrusive brilliance. Each piece of each work is lovingly set in place, the seams carefully shaved smooth, every plank beveled into the larger plan.

In "The Sea Runners," a superbly simple adventure story pits four men against the all but infinite vastness of the North Pacific and the opposing edge of the North American continent.

Beginning with the winter of 1852 at New Archangel, Baranof Island, a frontier Alaskan settlement far up the western coast of what is now British Columbia and what was then Russian America, "The Sea Runners" tracks the "vast weeks of dare" of an incredible escape from the near-slavery of indenture to the Tsar's empire. Twelve-hundred forbidding miles south the four men paddle - glib, gangly Melander, the mastermind, silent Karlsson, the thief Bratt, and brutish, fiery-tempered Wennberg - determined to get themselves to Astoria, Oregon, freedom, and then home to Sweden. Shrewdly mediated and swiftly told, the tale, with its four men, a stolen 20 foot Indian canoe, and the drastic weather and waves of a hostile coast, makes riveting reading.

In Dolg's sure hands this material becomes much more than a maritime adventure. For here is none of the sentimental men-against-the-sea rhetoric that often dilutes the writing of lesser authors. There are, instead, countless sentences like these:

...for at basis, this crossing of Katmai Strait constituted an act of theft. Of stealing survival from a hazard that held every intention of denying it to you. Afloat you exist in balance between unthinkable distances. Above, the sky and the down-push of all its vastnesses. Under, the thickness of ocean with its queer, unruly upward law of gravity, buoyancy. In time the



The list of this century's supreme photographic artists is short. Atget, Steichen, Stieglitz, Sander, Cartier-Bresson... And, of course, Andre Kertesz. Born in Budapest in 1894, he made his name during the 1920s in Paris. The outbreak of World War II made his move to New York in the mid-30s more permanent than he had originally intended, and Kertesz remains to this day, still at work, in Greenwich Village. "Andre Kertesz: A Lifetime of Perception" (Abrams, \$45) surveys his extraordinary career from its Hungarian beginnings to the present. Kertesz' peerless feel for composition is evident here in the 1926, "Chez Mondrian."

greater deep, that of sky, must win this pushing contest in which you are the flake of contention, and you will go down."

Or more simply: "A dusk breeze gossiped here and there in the higher-up swags of forest."

Both austere and delicate, such writing prompts the recognition that, yes, it is like that. Such artistry suggests Hemingway without the self-conscious moments of machismo. So truthful the art, so patient Dolg's attention to historical detail one is not surprised to find in the last pages that the fiction draws breath from reality. The novel ends with a contemporary letter to the editor in the Oregon Weekly Times mentioning just such an improbable voyage as that of "The Sea Runners."

Furthermore, throughout runs a philosophic amplitude demanded by nature's huge backdrop, though, like the prose, this is never forced. Always we find the mystical

implications of the bonds between mind and landscape, emotion and fact. Dolg's muscular, exact prose, his tactile sense of detail and his

craftsmanlike control of form all contribute to a remarkable evocation of the human spirit in contest with inhuman forces.

LOCAL BESTSELLERS

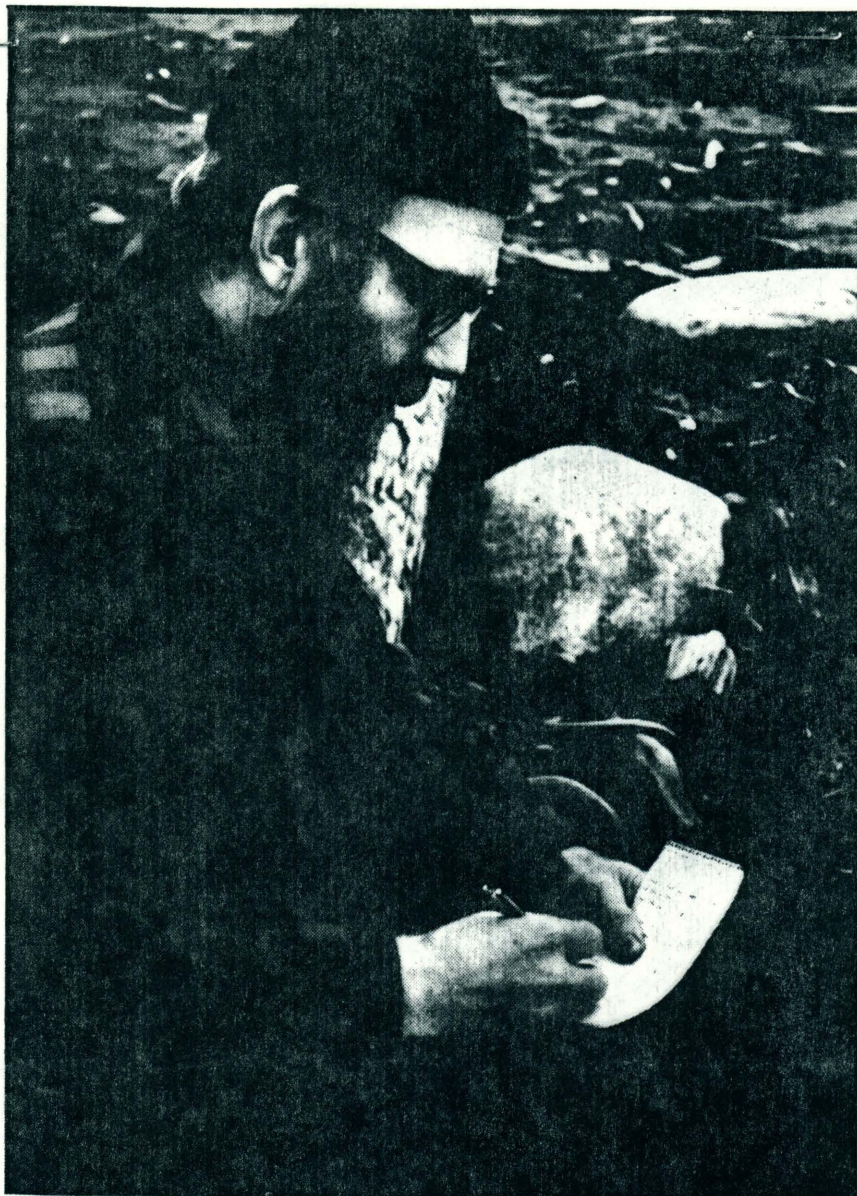
FICTION

1. MASTER OF THE GAME, by Sidney Sheldon, Morrow.
2. THE VALLEY OF HORSES, by Jean Auel, Crown.
3. CROSSINGS, by Danielle Steele, Delacorte.
4. FOUNDATION'S EDGE, by Isaac Asimov, Doubleday.
5. ANGER, by May Sarton, Norton.

NONFICTION

1. WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE, by Harold S. Kushner, Schocken.
2. LIVING, LOVING AND LEARNING, by Leo Busaglia, Holt, Rinehart.
3. THE ONE MINUTE MANAGER, by Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, Morrow.
4. LIFE EXTENSIONS, by Dirk Pearson and Sandy Shaw, Warner.
5. THIS IS JUDY WOODRUFF AT THE WHITE HOUSE, by Judy Woodruff, Addison-Wesley.

From Lauriat's, Barnes & Noble, Reading International, Walden Books, and Harvard Book Store Cafe.



Ivan Doig is a well-known author

Author Ivan Doig to speak on Island

Ivan Doig, nationally known author of "This House of Sky" and "Winter Brothers," will be guest speaker at the Second Annual Authors' Brunch, sponsored by the Bainbridge Island Branch of the American Association of University Women. The brunch and talk will be held Monday, Oct. 25, 10 a.m., at Bethany Lutheran Church, Finch and High School Roads on Bainbridge Island.

Doig will give readings from his work, including his latest novel, "The Sea Runners," released in late September. Nominated for a National Book Award in contemporary thought, "This House of Sky" won a Christopher Award, the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award. "Winter Brothers," also the winner of

public television documentary which will air on KCTS (Channel 9) Nov. 24, 8:30 p.m.

Born in White Sulphur Springs, Mont., Doig received degrees in journalism from Northwestern University and a doctorate in history from the University of Washington. He and his wife Carol live in Seattle, where he is working on a second novel, set in Montana.

Tickets for the brunch and talk are \$6.50, \$5 of which is a tax-deductible contribution to the AAUW scholarship fund. Tickets may be purchased at Vern's Winslow Drugs and Eagle Harbor Book Company on Bainbridge Island, or from AAUW members. Tickets will also be available at the door. For further information, call Elise Wright, 842-6232.

Escape From Russian Alaska

WASHINGTON POST Oct. 17, 1982 BOOK WORLD

THE SEA RUNNERS. By Ivan Doig. Atheneum. 279 pp. \$13.95

By **EVAN S. CONNELL**

IN A POSTSCRIPT to *The Sea Runners* Ivan Doig speaks of the "great and terrible journey" made by three Scandinavians—Gronland, Lyndfast, Wasterholm—who escaped from Russian America during the winter of 1852-53. A fourth man, whose name has been forgotten, also began this journey but was killed by Indians. The survivors made it to Willapa Bay, just north of the Columbia River, and probably would have died there if they had not been discovered by Washington oystermen. On the basis of this event, about which very little is known, the author has built a trim, salty novel.

Melander, Braaf, Karlsson and Wennberg, all indentured servants at New Archangel—today called Sitka—

EVAN S. CONNELL is the author of *Mrs. Bridge and Mr. Bridge*, *A Long Desire* and *The White Lantern*.



Illustration from "The Sea Runners"

decide that their seven-year obligation cannot be met. So, under the stewardship of Melander, they accumulate what they will need: gunpowder, fishing lines, blankets, rope, compass, spyglass, candles, hatchets, fire steel and flint, a map case waterproofed with birch tar—most of it filched by light-fingered Braaf. "Put it simply, stealing

was in Braaf like blood and breath. He was a Stockholm street boy, son of a waterfront prostitute and the captain of a Baltic fishing ketch, and on his own in life by the age of seven."

From New Archangel to their intended destination, Astoria, is about as far from Stockholm around the coast of Europe to Italy, with two significant differences. First, instead of meeting civilized people en route these fugitives could look forward to a variety of dangerous Indians. Second, they did not know where Astoria was because Russian maps did not extend that far.

On the night of January 7, 1853, the night after Christmas according to Russian calculations, they shove off in a stolen Tlingit canoe, 20 feet long, "its wooden skin not much more than the thickness of a thumb," bearing painted oval designs with black centers, like egg-shaped eyes, to counter the weight of evil.

At dawn—behold! A canoe in pursuit.

"You long-ass bastard, Melander!" cries Wennberg. "The Russians won't follow us, ay?" But the pursuers are Tlingits, who quit paddling when it becomes apparent

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 17)

The Sea Runners

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

that the white-haired thieves will fight.

After that it is North Pacific rain, willow-green coast, seasickness, and paddle-paddle-paddle.

One evening ashore Braaf feels himself watched. But the observer is a totem pole with a hooked beak and eyes the size of his hands. Some 60,000 Indians inhabit these shores: Haida, Bellabella, Kwakiutl, Nootka, Tsimshian.

On a raw morning as a pair of cormorants hangs above the tidal boulders they find another canoe on the gravel beach—a carved cedar shell much larger than their own, large enough to hold eight or 10 seal hunters. Wennberg, a blacksmith, smashes the hull with a heavy rock and the fugitives desperately shove off again, but this time their luck fails: "Melander, almost tidily, lay folded forward, the upper part of his long body across his knees, the back of his head inclined toward the other three canoemen as if to show them where the musket ball had torn its red hole."

Now they are three.

Karlsson becomes the leader by default because clever little Braaf is unable to read a map and burly Wennberg has not brains enough to lead his shadow. So they work interminably south toward Astoria, Wennberg either seasick or complaining. One day Karlsson bags a black-tailed deer and they feed on it until they wobble.

At some point the canoe slides into a new season: "Out of their winter rust, ferns unroll green.

Up from the low dampness of the forest the blooms of skunk cabbage lick, a butter-gold flame and scent like burnt sugar." Seals bob in the offshore swells, salmon turn home, gray whales leave Baja. "Geese and ducks and whistling swans write first strokes of their calligraphy of flight northward."

Still the Scandinavians have not reached Astoria. Wennberg therefore concludes he might be justified in squeezing the life out of Karlsson—until a rifle barrel presses against his ear.

Fog, rain, beans and mussels collected for lunch until even the huge blacksmith begins to look flat. Then, with the tide flowing, Karlsson shoots a seal. Braaf, quick on his feet, starts toward it. "Of what happened next, only this much is sure. That amid a climbing stride by Braaf as he began to cross the wrist of rock . . ." Ah, but if you want to find out what did happen next you will have to get *The Sea Runners*.

It's a taut story. That long gray dripping coast becomes almost palpable. Wennberg, Karlsson, Melander and Braaf are convincing.

The narration sometimes is beaten out of shape, as though the blacksmith had been allowed to hammer it: "Whale stood on end in dive through contorted lesser creatures. . . . This coast's mornings are as if a brawl had gone on . . ." Such artificially compressed prose becomes distracting and annoying. Good writers don't torture the language. Nevertheless there is quite a lot of good prose in *The Sea Runners*, and Ivan Doig probably will outgrow these mannerisms. Already he has joined the company of Janet Lewis, John Williams, and a few other sensitive novelists who know how to utilize the past. □

books

fiction

Ivan Doig turns novelist

by Bruce Brown

"A LAZY WIND, WE CALL THIS ON Gotland," says the first. "It goes through you instead of around you."

"Melander," says the second, "I wonder you don't swallow your tongue sometime for the savor of it."

"I'll settle for three paces headstart on each of you," chips in the third.

The Sea Runners

By Ivan Doig
Atheneum, \$13.95

"The two of us who are dead, neither of them is you. There's your luck," says the fourth. "Now shut your gab and get some sleep."

These are the voices of the four main characters in Ivan Doig's new novel, *The Sea Runners*. The first is Melander, a "sly-booted" sailor and former first mate who masterminds an escape of Scandinavian indentured servants from New Archangel in Russian Alaska on Christmas Eve, 1852. The



Duane Hoffmann

Doig: an important step forward.

second is Wennberg, a hulking, emotionally unstable blacksmith who discovers the plot and somewhat reluctantly becomes enmeshed

in it. Third is Braaf, a moon-faced youth who makes it possible for the expedition to outfit itself largely at the Czar's expense through his vocation of incessant thievery. Karlsson, a somewhat debauched peasant woodsman, makes four.

Based on an actual incident involving four other men, Doig's story traces the fate of the four escapees as they paddle south for Astoria and freedom in a big Tlingit ocean-going canoe, hoping to navigate approximately 1,000 miles of the North Pacific Rim in midwinter. The crew is an odd lot, constantly throwing off sparks of inventive invective and mutual distaste, but there is a crazy logic to their composition as well. As the four pause to look back for the last time at the lights from the Russians' Christmas party at "the Castle," one senses this is a very risky venture, but there is a chance they may make it.

The character of the four, and the four as one, becomes evident as they flee south across Dixon Entrance toward the Queen Charlotte Islands. The thief, Braaf, for instance, emerges as a much more astute observer of human nature than either his years or his schooling would lead one to suspect. "A shopkeeper likes to be clever. Else he wouldn't be a shopkeeper," he informs the crew at one point. "Sometimes he'll stash money right there, in some crock like any other. . . . So I picked one, lifted the lid. And there they were, riksdaler and more of them. My pockets had mumps when I went out of the place. I slid behind the shopman, he's at the other end of the steps now, ask him please sir, is the store open? Never to the likes of me, he says. Runs me off. Tells himself, clever man like

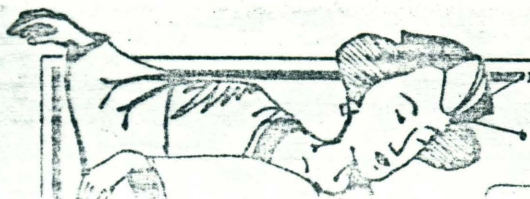
him he'll not let in some street stray."

A more interesting character still is Melander, the former first mate who hatched the idea, put together the crew, knew how to read maps, and led them, always talking. "Keep your hair on, Wennberg, there'll be supper quick as quick. . . . Braaf, it would be pretty to think this canoe will paddle itself, but it won't. Get the holiday out of your stroking, aye? . . . Karlsson, that surf looks like worse and more of it. Let's bend our way around, so-fashion. . . ." The child of a working-class Swedish family who went to sea early, Melander has a wry mind, and the broadest experience of the bunch. Of them, he would be most capable of either steering a true course, or reflecting on the philosophic ironies of their flight to freedom.

With Melander's unexpected death barely halfway through the book, it becomes apparent that *The Sea Runners* is bent on taking the same risks as its namesakes. In the aftermath, the leadership is thrust on quiet Karlsson, who promptly finds that Melander has left no map of the last section of coast between Vancouver Island and the mouth of the Columbia. He had intended to wing it. This discovery, combined with the growing hostility among the survivors (now in a way completely free), sets the stage for a variety of possible developments. Will Wennberg flat flip out, the proverbial loose cannon on the deck? Will Braaf do the work, or will he shirk, cutting nose to spite face? And can Karlsson, so unlike Melander, keep them together and moving forward?

But just as *The Sea Runners* seems about to take off, it instead tails off, partly because of the risks that Doig is determined to take.

continued on next page



• silk kimonos •

books

continued

Following the death of a second member of the crew, the thief Braaf, Doig is forced to let his two weakest characters carry the vessel to conclusion. This might have been a *tour de force*, but Doig seems in too much of a hurry (the party travels the length of Vancouver Island in a couple of paragraphs) to blow much air into Wennberg and Karlsson. They shout at each other a couple of times and Wennberg stomps off for periods of beard-pulling dementia, but they and their situation do not come alive and breathe the way earlier parts of the book do. Unlike Elbridge Trask and Charlie Kehwa at the end of Don Berry's *Trask*, the classic Northwest novel of coast travel and adventure circa 1850, neither Wennberg nor Karlsson seem to grow or be changed by their survival of the most desperate portion of the adventure. They are flat pegs, and their flatness unfortunately robs *The Sea Runners'* conclusion of some of its resonance.

I am one of the many people who have been following Ivan Doig since reading his first book, *This House of Sky*. A beautiful, fever-vivid memoir of bad luck and love in Montana sheep country, *This House of Sky* is memorable for the characters of Doig's grandmother and father, and its evocation of Montana, "the sun wheeling so hot above the plain that sweat cooked from you where you stood, yet on the crownline of the mountain horizon there might be white-gray snow clouds coldly billowing." Doig's fascination with his own rather normal college and pro-

fessional careers marred the end of the book a little for me, but I dismissed it since on balance *This House of Sky* is as good as any-

thing I have ever read on the West.

Doig's second book, *Winter Brothers*, seemed to me to mix the virtues and liabilities

editors' picks

LIFE, THE UNIVERSE, AND EVERYTHING, by Douglas Adams (*Harmony Books*, \$9.95). In the last (second) thrilling episode of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy, our hero Arthur Dent, Ford Prefect (named after a car Ford used to sell in Britain), and two-headed Zaphod Beeblebrox were beset by the evil and tacky Vogons and paranoid androids before they made it to *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, where the floor show is Armageddon. Pocket Books just published the second episode in paper (\$2.95), and Harmony's brought out the third in hardback; it answers the question posed by *Life, the Universe, and Everything*. Author Adams is a sort of Cantabrigian Vonnegut, poised at the *Sirens of Titan* phase of madcap sci-fi celebrity. You can get introduced to his characters on KCTS-TV (Channel 9): *The Hitchhiker's Guide* series airs at 9:30 pm on Thursday and 9 pm on Saturday.

HOUSEKEEPING, by Marilynne Robinson (*Bantam Windstone*, \$2.95). A family saga by a U.W.-minted Ph.D., endorsed by Doris Lessing, Walker Percy, *Time*, *The New York Times*. John Hawkes said, "There are few first novels published since mid-century

to compare with *Housekeeping* for sheer perfections of language and for conveying what it means to be human."

RABBIT IS RICH, by John Updike (*Fawcett*, \$3.95). The third installment of Rabbit Angstrom's fictional biography, set in 1979, when "the fucking country was running out of gas" and running scared. *Weekly contributor* Roger Sale wrote in *The New York Times Book Review*: "For me, *Rabbit Is Rich* is the first book in which Updike has fulfilled the fabulous promise he offered with *Rabbit, Run* and *The Centaur* 20 years ago."

ATLANTIC HIGH, by William F. Buckley (*Doubleday*, \$19.95). This loquacious account of his Atlantic crossing in a 70-foot yacht suggests his heart is in his avocation. It has some of the qualities of his journalism (wit, extreme self-assurance); but strikingly unlike his journalism, the book is also generous, balanced, and civilized.

MONSIGNOR QUIXOTE, by Graham Greene (*Simon & Schuster*, \$12.95). Greene's irony mellows in this graceful, brief sort-of-retelling of Cervantes's epic, as played in post-Franco Spain by a deracinated priest and, as Sancho, a Communist mayor who lost the last election. Rocinante burns oil.

of *This House of Sky* in reverse measure. Here Doig's tendency toward self-absorption drowned the story of early Washington pioneer James Swan, the west side of the Olympic Peninsula, the Indians, and everything else in a quivering tide of reflections on things like what his (Doig's) face looks like in a mirror. *Winter Brothers* has its moments (I think of his imagining the settling of the West as a colonial action of the Chinese heading east, instead of the Americans heading west), but you have to search harder in the stew.

The Sea Runners seems to me to be an important step forward for Doig, not just in the transition to fiction, but in the growth of his narrative range. From the outset, the story of the four sea runners is told in an idiosyncratic, clipped dialect of Doig's creation. This device, together with his practice of breaking each chapter into many short sections, works well, imparting both drama and a flavor of history to the unfolding story. There is, in fact, a great deal to praise in *The Sea Runners*, and I recommend it to all who thirst for another draught of Doig's writing.

I just wish he had done more with the crew after Melander's death. For as the gabby first mate might have said, "Takes more than pounds of potatoes to fill a Gotland man's shoes, aye?" ■

Bruce Brown of Sumas, Washington, is the author of Mountain in the Clouds: A Search for the Wild Salmon, published this fall by Simon and Schuster.

Doig retells 19th century adventure

By Irene Wanner

When Seattle author Ivan Doig was researching Makah Indian whale hunting for his second non-fiction book, *Winter Brothers*, he came across a detailed letter to the editor of the Oregon Weekly Times from the winter of 1852-3. Four Swedish men, seven-year indentured workers from the Russian colony of New Archangel (now Sitka, Alaska), had escaped in a canoe and made their way south toward Astoria and freedom from "ill usage and tyranny." One man was killed by Indians; three survived and were found in Willapa Bay, just north of the Columbia River.

This single news item intrigued Doig. He realized there was "not enough to write as non-fiction," that if he wanted to tell the tale, he would have to "expand the reported incidents." Although his publishers were "reluctant to see me turn to fiction," Doig sent off a proposal. He was offered an advance amounting to only half that for his previous book, and somewhat "put off," he prepared "a manuscript sample of 50 or 60 pages" for another publishing house. The book was accepted and paperback rights have been bought by Viking/Penguin.

Extensive research

Doig, who holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Washington, is no stranger to strenuous research. Because he is "pretty literal and methodical," even on his first novel, he made two trips to Juneau and Sitka, arranged a sea voyage down the coast from Alaska — his own experience with seasickness, for instance, is passed on to one of the escaping Swedes — looked at old maps, paced off the dimensions in a replica of a Russian blockhouse, rooted through travelers' accounts, Russian reports, historical society archives, "looted books of sailors' slang," and made a visit to the University of California/Berkeley library, where extracts of an 1853 journal provided many details of daily life.

19th century tone

The Sea Runners, because of Doig's caring work, has the "tone of 19th centuryism" he wanted. Its "old-fashioned narrative" and "mid-air voice" allow us to "focus on various moments" during the arduous voyage of Melander, Karksson, Braaf, and Wennberg.

The Sea Runners

By Ivan Doig
Atheneum
279 pages. \$13.95

Melander, a sailor, is fascinated by the idea of serving on the Russian steamship *Emperor Nicholas I* in New Archangel and signs on for seven years' service. Instead, he is put to work salting fish, living in a community of criminals, drifters, and debtors. One morning, looking beyond the stockade walls that keep the workmen in and the Indians out, he determines to leave. Melander proposes the idea to an axeman, Karlsson, then to a thief, young Braaf. They are joined by Wennberg, a blacksmith, who threatens to reveal their plans if he is not taken along.

Champagne celebration

On Jan. 7, 1853 — the night after Russian Orthodox Christmas — the men "liberated" firearms from a gun room, loaded a canoe, and paddled into darkness. Celebrating briefly with a stolen bottle of champagne and a "final glittering glimpse" at the city's lights, they turned southward.

The men face rough seas and fierce weather, struggles among themselves and against Indians, but they also tell stories to pass the time while they wait for storms to pass. They speak of dreams. They joke, then argue, battle fatigue and hunger, and are surprised sometimes at the beauty of their journey.

Braaf, one morning, thinks he is being watched, turns, and sees "goblin poles," "creature upon creature bursting from cedar bole." The men sense the totem poles mark "a kind of cathedral." Another day, Karlsson is touched by a drop of water as he walks in the woods. "In surprise, Karlsson tipped up his head until he was peering straight up. He saw another water bead detach from a limb 80 feet above him and drop like a slow tiny jewel, giving him time to step aside before it struck." Melander finds Karlsson there, waltzing with raindrops.

Even after one man is killed, the men must continue on. They paddle southward, uncertain of their position, once passed unseen by a sailing ship, another time during the rough coast at night in order not to be seen by Indians. Their strength begins to



Ivan Doig's first novel is a tale of a daring escape from servitude

fail and the monotony of the journey becomes felt.

A second man dies on the coast of Washington, drowning when he slips from the rocks as the men hunt seals. Doig instills a certain tedium, evoking desperation, disappointment, and finally disillusionment. Nothing more is known of the survivors, but they come vividly to life during their search for freedom.

Although Doig feels "just fine" with his transition to fiction, he is glad to have the "technical difficulties" of *The Sea Runners* behind him. He has begun writing a novel set

during the Depression in his home state of Montana and says it's a "looser book," with a "colloquial voice." Since the book is a long one — "half the length of a Michener, maybe" — Doig hopes to complete it by the end of 1983. "I've had extraordinary luck with editors," Doig says, noting the publisher's plans already being made for his novel-in-progress. The humor, grace, and sincere love for the art of prose showcased by *The Sea Runners*, as well as by Doig's previous work, validate such enthusiasm.

Irene Wanner is a Seattle short story writer.

Escaping the Russians by Canoe

The Sea Runners

By Ivan Doig

Atheneum

279 pages, \$13.95

Ivan Doig, whose book "This House of Sky" (1978) was nominated for a National Book Award, has written an extraordinary adventure novel.

"The Sea Runners" is an account of four men's escape from indentured labor in the cold and rainy isolation of New Archangel, an outpost on an island off the west coast of British Columbia that was the capital of Russian America in 1853.

The four men are Swedes, brought by their varying fortunes to become "seven-year men" signed on for that period as laborers in the Russians' fur-gathering enterprise. They are "the Russians' horless oxen," as one of them, an ex-sailor named Melander, grumbles.

The escape plan is Melander's. He is intelligent, voluble, a natural leader, the Ulysses of the foursome.

"In a time and place earlier, Melander would have been the fellow you wanted to set a spire on a cathedral; in a later, to oversee a fleet of mail planes."

Melander recruits Karlsson, a decent, taciturn woodsman whose ability as a hunter would make him

valuable. The third member of the party is Braaf, onetime Stockholm street urchin and a gifted thief.

When Braaf steals the supplies needed for the escape, he is observed by Wennberg — a huge and surly blacksmith who guesses what is afoot and demands to be taken along.

While the Russians are carousing on Christmas Eve, the four Swedes steal a 20-foot cedar canoe belonging to some Tlingit Indians living in the neighborhood and flee south along the coast.

Their destination is Astoria, a port at the mouth of the Columbia River in the Oregon Territory — more than 1,000 miles away.

As the days pass they endure the weariness of endless hours' paddling. A storm overtakes them as they cross a wide stretch of open water. They run into parties of hostile Tlingits, a fierce people whose tribal chiefs sleep on a pile of skulls.

Doig is a very effective storyteller whose prose is strongly cadenced and vividly metaphorical.

He describes a portion of the wild coastline along which they paddle as "a high-standing sea of mountains, white chop of snow and ice and rock, with arms of the Pacific, blue fjords and inlets, thrusting in at whatever chance: Alaska's locked grapple of continent and ocean."

Melander and his companions

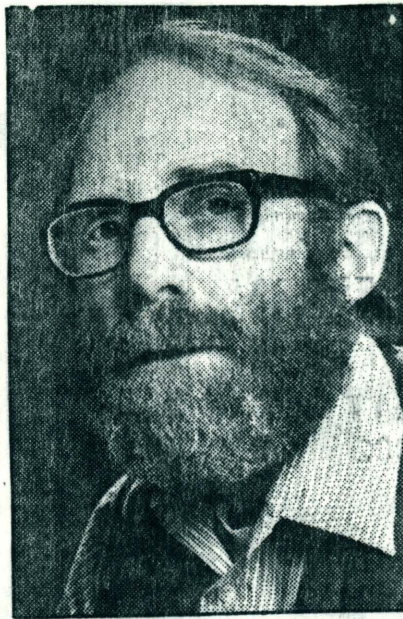
are not pasteboard adventurers, but are carefully drawn individuals. Their speech has the richly aphoristic and imaginatively obscene qualities characteristic of men who are from traditional cultures.

"The Sea Runners" is a beautifully crafted tale with the convincing matter-of-factness and understated violence of a Norse saga.

—Fitzgerald Higgins

Grand Rapids Press

10.31.82



Ivan Doig
Northwest adventure

**Novel based on fact is
vigorous and accurate.**

"The Sea Runners"
by Ivan Doig.
Atheneum.
\$13.95.

by **Lucile McDonald**

A letter written in 1853 by a Willapa Bay oysterman inspired Ivan Doig, Seattle author, to explore firsthand a section of the Northwest Coast and write this unusual novel about four escapees from Russian indentureship in New Caledonia (Sitka), Alaska. All were Swedes who rebelled at the virtual slave conditions under which they worked.

In Doig's book, they steal an Indian canoe, stash away pilfered supplies and take off during the Russian colony's Christmas celebration, aiming to reach Astoria, 1,200 miles distant.

The man who knows most about navigation falls victim to an Indian attack. His companions continue to paddle their treacherous course from island to island and down the outside coast of Vancouver Island and Washington on the turbulent wintry sea. One of the trio is a violent man who the others suspect is capable of treachery; his presence contributes to the suspense of the seemingly endless journey.

The author's unusual sentence structure is especially suited to the setting, characters and theme. Doig revives a period about which little is known. His careful research is reflected in the chapters and they have definite educational value.

The first quarter of the narrative traces the stealthy preparations before the men leave Sitka. When their departure was discovered, the governor sent no contingent to pursue them. "Let the sea eat them," he announced. He was positive they could not survive.

Doig made certain that the seamanship of his characters and the course they followed would be plausible. He admits he was well coached by the staff of the University of Washington oceanographic ship, on which he made a voyage. As a result, this novel will impress the most critical reader with its realism.

(Lucile McDonald is a freelance writer and regional historian.)

October 31, 1982

One for the winter

The Sea Runners. By Ivan Doig. Atheneum. \$13.95.

By RON LEYS
of The Journal Staff

Four men — fisherman, woodsman, blacksmith, thief — find themselves in a stolen Indian canoe on a desperate voyage down the Pacific Northwest coast in the winter of 1853.

They are Scandinavian workmen fleeing from indentured servitude — slavery, as they see it — to the Russians who run Alaska, and toward Astoria, a port at the mouth of the Columbia River that they have only heard stories of.

In this first novel, Ivan Doig has written a tale for long winter nights in front of the fireplace. A story of adventure and death, of unlike men locked together in the face of hardship and doubt.

The adventurers are castaways from the all-male world of Russian Alaska. Doig, once a ranch hand in

Montana, reveals an understanding of men who live only among men, a feel for the easy profanity and obscenity of their speech, for their resentment of those who profit from their labor.

Doig also reveals himself as a craftsman who knows words and the patterns of speech so well that he can write by feel rather than by rules.

The result is a prose that is fresh and original, without being difficult. Words that flow like thoughts rather than like mindless locomotives chugging along tracks spiked down by English teachers.

The reader is lifted and carried along the inhospitable coast by the desire to see how the adventure concludes and by the rhythm and current of Doig's prose.

The novel is based on a real voyage. Doig researched the route on a passage aboard the University of Alaska's research vessel, Alpha Helix.

Milwaukee Journal 10.31.82

Nov. 3, 1982

Author's brunch

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Bainbridge Island Branch of the American Association of University Women I would like to express my appreciation to a number of people and businesses for helping to make our Annual Author's Brunch (held Oct. 25) a great success. The community was very supportive by putting up posters and selling tickets (Vern's Winslow Drugs and Eagle Harbor Books). The article in the "Review" was very nicely done, and timely. Mr. Bob Sherman was kind enough to again print the tickets and only requested some chocolate pudding. Bethany Lutheran Church has a lovely large room and kitchen for our brunch and we hope this becomes a traditional location.

Our thanks again to Ivan Doig who gave of his time and talent to help us build our scholarship fund which benefits local women seeking further education and/or training. Mr. Doig and A.A.U.W. were pleased to have Ms. Marinoni's Advanced Composition class from the high school. How nice to share our event with students.

Our apologies to anyone sitting near the back who could not hear adequately. We shall use amplification in the future.

Jan Petring,
Secretary



LOUISVILLE, KY.
TIMES
—D. 149,313—
LOUISVILLE METROPOLITAN AREA

NOV 6 1982

BY ROB DECKARD

THE BOOK SCENE

A stirring, seaworthy story
of four against the Pacific

The Sea Runners

Ivan Doig

Atheneum, New York

279 pages, \$13.95

Here is another marvelous yarn of the North Pacific, from a fellow whose love for the region evidently is exceeded only by his knowledge of it.

It is of an epic voyage, though of only 1,000 or so miles by a crew of just four. No discoveries, save of themselves and the price of freedom. No colonies claimed for crown or church. Only great courage among men dwarfed but not dominated by the awesome superiority owned by nature and the hostile peoples arrayed against them.

Square in the middle of the 19th century, this careful researcher tells us, a tiny band decided they could no longer endure the deprivation and subjugation of remaining Russian serfs in the colony of New Archangel, which we know better as Alaska.

These men had indentured themselves for seven years in return for passage and a place to be; not so raw a deal as one might suppose, given the hard times in their native Sweden.

But they came to despair of their lot and set about making their way out of it. There was no question of their boarding a harboring ship, and there was patently less chance of their successfully making an overland trek.

They then turned to a powerful and treacherous ocean in a slip of a canoe, a magnificent cedar craft spirited away from the local Indians.

The journey must have been extraordinarily difficult, for only one of the four had any real experience with small craft. They traveled in winter, to avoid the greater danger of roving tribes, and accepted the peril of storms.

They could escape neither, but persevered.

Doig — who also wrote *This House of Sky and Winter Brothers* — combines impressive research with a marvelous gift for prose, with predictable results. He's a pleasure to read.

— Rob Deckard, Times book editor

Chilling cold-war possibilities
and a look at East Europe

East European Military Establishments

A. Ross Johnson, Robert W. Dean

and Alexander Alexiev

Crane Russak, New York

200 pages, \$19.50

The Third World War

Gen. Sir John Hackett

MacMillan & Co., New York

372 pages, \$15.95

One of the fortunate accidents of the publishing business is that these books have appeared within days of each other.

The Crane Russak volume, a slim non-nonsense treatise on Polish-Czech-East German potential, is the sort of thing the average reader, even the best of scholars, seldom sees in detail, for this is a Rand Corp. study digest. Rand is a think-tank that sells its talents to the highest levels of government, with sources beyond normal awareness.

The MacMillan book ranges rather farther, and is a fictionalization of the terrifying facts holding the potential for World War III. Gen. Hackett has become alarmed at street-level and upper-level ignorance and indifference.

This fine dramatization of the possible — or should we say, probable — horror not too far ahead of us may help the Hackett conscience a little, at least, even if the follies continue.

for timeliness. The Rand book is particularly linked to the news, for it gives a historic and political analysis of the generation of Polish attitudes vis-a-vis Russia, and it relates Russian aims and methods to the peoples and systems and sets of resources the Moscow regime seeks to control. Years ago, the distinguished writer Jack Fischer did a small book titled "Why They Behave Like Russians." This one brings that menacing tale up to date.

While Hackett's story ranges the world — Japan to Vietnam to Libya to Norway to space to Ireland and on and on — the Rand volume provides a test-tube view of Communist domination at work and lays out the bones of the manner in which the Soviets have spent the last 37 years "getting their ducks in a row" for expansion.

A good many field-grade-and-up officers are likely to use both of these books to update the war-plans notebooks.

The Rand volume was so intended; the Hackett work aims at the public. Professionals will be more comfortable with the non-fiction approach, most likely, but Hackett's suggestions merit serious study — with the dramatics peeled off.

The Rand book also describes Russia's problems with East Germany — the non-nation background witnessed by anti-Communist powers as well as the two unhappy "allies." It tells of the Soviet requirement that satellite nations pay for the weaponry and "adviser" service the dominant country forces upon them; it describes the awareness of the Communist apparatus of national and local patriotic feeling and the means used to suppress such feeling; it details the internal politics of the satellites; it explains a myriad of puzzling, until-now-unanswered questions.

It is difficult to see how the news of Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe could be understood without knowledge of the material in this tight, little study.

— Joseph Domic, free-lance reviewer

St. Louis Post-Dispatch
11/7/82

Challenging The Icy Seas

THE SEA RUNNERS

A novel by Ivan Doig

279 pages, Atheneum, \$13.95

The theme of Ivan Doig's first novel is as venerable as Homer's *Odyssey* and Xenophon's *Anabasis*: men who hunger for freedom and security can be spurred to unimaginable feats of endurance to achieve them. On this ground alone, "The Sea Runners" rates a close look. The story, moreover, is a neatly crafted spellbinder.

Doig's plot is classic in its simplicity. In the early 1850s, four indentured Swedish laborers — so called seven-year men — who are working out their contracts at the Tsarist Russian fur station at New Archangel (present-day Sitka, Alaska), decide that they have endured enough tyranny and boredom and plan an escape. Stealing a native dugout canoe and a few supplies, including a fragmented map of Alaskan waters, they set forth to paddle the thousand rugged sea miles which separate them from the nearest outpost of freedom — the American fur colony at Astoria, Oregon.

The idea of escape originates in the mind of charismatic ex-seafarer, Melander. To aid him, he recruits the taciturn forester, Karlsson, and his handy axe. In turn, they win over the Dickensian waif, Braaf, a congenital sneak-thief whose nimble fingers are needed to provision the voyage. The burly, irascible blacksmith, Wennberg, becomes an unwelcome fourth party when he uncovers the plot and forces his way in by threatening to inform on the others.

The heart of the narrative deals with the struggles of the fugitives to navigate the interminable sea miles in the face of some of the planet's worst weather. Added to the challenge of groping their way through a world with no horizon, the men must worry about

the possibility of pursuing Russians and hostile Indian tribes. But the greatest potential hazard to the expedition is a clash of four sharply different personalities. In the end, however, a shared humanity and a yearning for freedom triumph over self-indulgence and temperament.

As a writer, Doig demonstrates some of the courage of his characters. He is not afraid to test the resources of the language to fashion a prose style uniquely his own. Oddities of syntax and diction, which in his earlier, non-fiction works proved at times mildly distracting, appear to have metamorphosed into virtues in his fiction. Henceforward, a passage of Doig prose may become as readily identifiable as a page from Faulkner or Hemingway.

"The Sea Runners" is an engaging and moving narrative, a parable of human interdependence in a world still governed by mindless natural forces. It may well win one of the annual awards for fiction. But it probably is not suitable fare for the intellectually timid or lazy reader. —William Curran

the reviewers

Lynn Theodore and

Colleen Warren are St. Louis freelance writers.

Joseph Losos, St. Louis stockbroker.

Howard Schwartz teaches English at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

William Curran is a writer living on Bainbridge Island, Washington.

Nancy Schapiro is editor of the Webster Review.

Harry Levins is chief copy editor of the Post-Dispatch.

Clarence E. Olson is book editor of the Post-Dispatch.



DETROIT, MICH.
FREE PRESS
D. 604,062—S. 720,937
DETROIT METROPOLITAN AREA

NOV 7 1982

From Alaska to danger in a stolen canoe

The Sea Runners

by Ivan Doig
Atheneum, 288 pages, \$13.95.

Review by Ripley Hotch

Ivan Doig is a former journalist who is best known for "This House of Sky," which was nominated for a National Book Award. "The Sea Runners," Doig's first novel, reads for good swatches like a finely honed magazine story. It is full of precise details, deftly drawn characterizations, solid historical detail.

It also has some penchant for philosophizing — not, mind you, the sort of deep-dyed purple theo-mythological enrobing of inanities that passes for thinking these days, but the sort of quizzical, excuse-me-I'm-not-being-pushy glancing observation that worms its way to the heart of an issue.

For my part, I like the yarn best. Philosophical dress can be cut from whole cloth. Yarns have to be spun with some care out of the skein of facts.

DOIG'S YARN concerns four Swedes caught in indentured-laborer status in Russian America (Alaska) in 1853. They concoct a plan to escape by stealing a

native canoe and paddling from New Archangel (Sitka) to Astoria in what is now Oregon.

It is an exceptionally daring voyage of 1,000 miles against prevailing currents, in winter, through inhospitable country. And like all such good yarns of men against the sea, it is a test of the four strangers' various abilities. Each can contribute something: the planner and navigator, Melander; the silent oarsman Karlsson; the thief and weather-watcher, Braaf; the blacksmith and firemaker, Wennberg.

Almost all of them almost make it.

They become, as they are stripped of comforts and certainties, men who must keep to a purpose that guided their choice to escape: Will they stay where they have been to some degree comfortable and safe, but enslaved, or will they go outward to danger, discomfort and a promise of freedom?

Wennberg is their complainer, their reminder of what they have left, Melander their goad to keep going, Braaf the questioner. Their argument about going, and eventually going on, is a debate about time, memory, anticipation, the fear of uncertainty. Out of that comes a definition of adventure, of choosing the not safe rather than the safe. And deciding that it is

better not to know than to know: "Ours might seem a kindlier evolution if what we know as memory had been set in us the other way . . . The snag, of course, is . . . the single exactitude we could never bear to know: death's date. In order then that we can stand existence, the apparatus fetches backward for us rather than ahead. Memory instead of foreknowledge. So Karlsson on wait here in the Alaska night is like all of us in life's dark, able to know only that a moment is arriving due and to hope it is not the last of the series."

The book is not quite so dark as that makes it seem. It basically throws off the philosophizing and concentrates on the adventure.

Doig is successful enough with his characters that a reader wants to know what happens to them later and successful enough with his plot that it seems to end too soon. A good author knows instinctively not to wear out his welcome, and Doig's next novel will be welcome indeed.

Ripley Hotch is editor of Detroit magazine.

The Sea Runners
IVAN DOIG

Ivan Doig's "The Sea Runners" has a penchant for philosophy.

Ivan Doig paints landscape of mind for his Northwest

THE SEA RUNNERS by Ivan Doig, Atheneum, 279 pages, \$13.95.

With his new book *The Sea Runners*, Seattle author Ivan Doig has added an adventure novel to his 1978 autobiography and 1980 biography.

All three books are exceptionally rich in lyrical vivid descriptions of the American West. The autobiography, *This House of Sky*, takes its title from Doig's view from a window in which "the square of air broadens and broadens to become the blue expanse over Montana rangeland, so vast and vaulting that it rears, from the foundation-line of the plains horizon, to form the walls and roof of all life's experiences ... a single great house of sky."

Here Doig grew up in what seems a distillation of the American experience, an experience of wrestling survival and stubborn dignity from a capricious land. In recreating his own background, Doig, now in his 40s, brings a sense of *deja vu* to his contemporaries — he has acutely lived a life most of us have experienced only in our imaginations. Living out of his own time, he gives us, too, a deeper past.

Doig extends this sense of time going backward in his biography, *Winter Brothers*. Here, he describes and imaginatively shares the life of James Gilchrist Swan, an early pioneer and settler in Washington and British Columbia.

Again, Doig here retraces the American past, moving always West, and combining not only dreams, hard work and endurance, but also the entrepreneur cum con artist.

In *The Sea Runners*, Doig moves even farther west, to the extreme edge of the continent — Alaska. Here in 1853, four Swedes are working as indentured servants to the Russians in Sitka: Melander, the seaman, a tall, lanky leader; Karlsson, a quiet, careful, capable man who can be counted on to do any job well; Braaf, a young thief who comes across as a fallen angel; and Wennberg, a stubborn, strong, abrasive blacksmith with undercurrents of strict hellfire

The Book Celler

By Joan Garcia Kotker
Freelance Columnist



The four plan to steal a Tlingit canoe and escape to Astoria, 1,200 hard-rowed Pacific miles away. Again, Doig has based his book on real life) in "1852-3 oystermen at Shoalwater Bay ... north of the mouth of the Columbia River came upon three men, 'the perfect picture of misery and despair,' who had achieved a canoe voyage down the Northwest Coast from indentureship at New Archangel (today's Sitka)."

The escape preparations of Doig's fictional crew are very good reading — how can four men possibly get out of a well-guarded stockade with equipment enough for a six-week journey, let alone a canoe? The most engrossing of the four characters in the preparation

section is Braaf, the boy-thief: It's up to him to steal all the necessary equipment, and it's great fun watching him do so.

Once the voyage begins, it's all Melander's show, and the pacing here is excellent — the reader simply doesn't want to put the book down.

As the voyage continues, the focus shifts to Karlsson. One of life's followers, circumstances force him to become a leader, an interesting metamorphosis in character.

THE DOMINANT character, however, is not a character at all, but rather the Pacific Northwest Coast. It is this coast and its weather that controls the voyagers, and once again, Doig demonstrates his mastery of description. The Russian map the voyagers navigate from has been drawn "as if an entire tiny commonwealth has sprung to creation ... Sprigs small as the point of a pencil denote the great stands of forest. Titled flats are delicately dotted, as if

speck-size clams breathe calmly beneath. Wherever the land soars ... the rise in elevation is shown as a scalloped plateau. Threaded among the shores and islets go the proven sailing routes, as though an exploring spider has spun his test voyage of each passage."

Or here is Doig, describing He-carte Strait: "At the eastern reach of this mariners' thicket, islands are bunched together like galleons desperately seeking a lee anchorage." And Doig's Washington coast is a place where "talons of cape rock, haired on top with timber, clutched down into the bright surf," where stones of the sea stand "in pillars, in triangles, in shapes there were no name for," and go "out into the ocean, like a caravan of cliffs and crags..."

The four men themselves take second place to the landscape — none of these imagined characters has the fullness of the people described in Doig's earlier books. However, each of the voyagers serves admirably to highlight the beauty and terror of this astonishing part of America, the Northwest Coast.

In *This House of Sky*, Doig created what he termed a "landscape of the mind" through his descriptions of Montana — and in *The Sea Runners*, he has performed the same feat for his beloved Northwest.

Kotker is an English instructor at Bellevue Community College. Her column covers both new releases and books in print.

Life as art

Journal-American
Wednesday, November 24, 1982

Seattle author Ivan Doig draws on uncommon roots to tell stories with a curious kind of genius

continued →



It's not the stories Ivan Doig tells, but how he tells them.

Staff photo by Jeff Larsen

Only the Scots and the coyotes could live where Ivan Doig grew up, and the coyotes starved out one winter. Blizzards weren't interested in the aspirations of men either. In a world dictated by the unforgiving realities of land and weather, consciousness was molded by their rhythms.

Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.

The remembering begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all.

So begins Doig's first book *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind*. Since then, he has written two more from the military-precise study of his modest north Seattle home: *Winter Brothers: A Season at the Edge of America* and *The Sea Runners*. On the surface, they seem unlikely candidates for literary greatness. Doig's first book is an autobiography of growing up a widower's son in the hardpan sheep country of southwest Montana. The second is about a hard-drinking chronicler of the Makah Indians and the third is a fictional account of four Swedes' escape down the Northwest coast from Russian Alaska in 1853.

Perhaps it is not the stories but, as Doig would say, their tellings that have made this tough little Scot from Montana the subject of critical acclaim. The views of Robert Kirsch of *The Los Angeles Times* are typical: "(his) language begins in Western territory and experience but it touches all landscapes and all life."

DOIG CHUCKLED at the praise.

"Yeah, nice reviews, nice. But you don't get rich on reviews," he said. *This House of Sky* has sold about 20,000 editions in hardback and another 21,000 in paperback; moderate sales by publishing standards, certainly not the sort that would let a writer retire to a life of leisure. Doig's wife, Carolyn, an English instructor at Shoreline Community College, is the family's main breadwinner.

But *This House of Sky* also was nominated for the National Book Award. And Kirsch's comments were a drop in a flood of praise, including a full page rave review in *Time* magazine. Rich or not, Ivan Doig has arrived as a talent to be noticed.

His rise to artistic prominence, he points out with ever-present good cheer, has been less a matter of soulful artistry than of grunt-drudging. Too poor to attend college, he was saved from the sheep ranching life he grew up in by a scholarship to Northwestern University. After leaving Northwestern in 1962 with a masters degree in journalism, Doig went looking for whatever work was available. His first job was as an editorial writer for a newspaper in Decatur, Ill. He left, after a couple of years because "The highest thing around Decatur was corn."

Next stop was a stint as editor of *Rotarian* magazine in Chicago. The work was challenging, Chicago an exciting town. Still, his Western soul yearned for something beyond concrete and smog so he quit to enroll in graduate school at the University of Washington. Leaving with a Ph.D. in 1969, he decided he didn't want to return to the sweatshop life of newspapers. ("It teaches you discipline, but you end up with nothing to show for it.") Instead, he set out into the tenuous world of freelancing. Freelancers are writers who contribute to newspapers and magazines and are paid by the story.

"I would work like crazy for three weeks and end up with \$250 for the story. With those kind of economics, I had little to lose by quitting to write the Great Work."

THE GREAT WORK had actually been formulating for a few years, ever since Doig's father died in 1971. A remarkable man, Charlie Doig, with "a small man's jut of jaw toward heaven," and a sense of humor and humanity that remained unbent by the backbreaking labor of sharecropping sheep. When he died, Doig began a journal of his memories of his father. The more he collected, the more a book took shape in his mind. In 1974, he began *This House of Sky*.

"My inspiration was Watergate," he said. "I figured if a bunch of defrocked politicians could get published, I could."

He quickly learned the secret to writing great books: Get up in the morning, sit down at a beat-up typewriter and sentence by sentence, write, rewrite and write some more until, on a good day, you finish up with five triple spaced pages.

On the days he accomplishes that goal, Doig rewards himself with a single, carefully measured scotch and water. During his work on *This House of Sky*, the libations were few and far between. After four years, he had 100 pages that satisfied him. Better than nothing, though, so he sent them out to publishers in hopes of an advance. After four months of mailings, he received a reply from publisher number 13: \$4,500 to tide him through completion.

The book hit the stands in the fall of 1978. He was anxious to see how it would fly. It was a short wait. By Christmas, 15,000 copies were sold and reviewers were falling all over themselves with superlatives. His writing, they said, caught a sense of his Montana homeland with a rare poetry: His mother died where "a low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up watchfully, and atop it, like a sentry box over the frontier between the sly creek and the prodding meadow, perches out a single room herding cabin. . . (we were) secure as hawks with wind under our wings."

And there was his father, who Kirsch from the *Times* said emerges as one of the most remarkable characters in American literature: "The clockless mountain summers were over for my father. Forty-four years old, a ranch hand, now a widower, Charlie Doig had a son to raise by himself. . . He had to fit us under a roof somewhere, choose a town where I could start to school, piece out in his own mind just how we were going to live from then on. It tells most about my father over the next years that I was the only one of those predicaments that ever seemed to grow easier for him."

Such word stylings were no accident.

"The most vivid language comes not from the classroom, but from the spoken word," Doig said. "I remember when I was a child, my grandmother described someone as 'Looked like she was drawn through a knothole backwards.' That's when I started to listen in earnest. The fact that we drifted from town to town to find school for me gave me lots of people to listen to. Any group that has constraints put on it by its environment develops its own language."

"The Irish have used that method to turn their language into spoken music. In the Tierney Basin where I grew up, words were about all we could afford. I still go back there with a tape recorder. The people do incredible things with English."

WITH HIS first book done, Doig faced the challenge of what writers call the "sophomore jinx." Many a wordsmith has a good first book and then is never heard from again. During his graduate work at the University of Washington, Doig became interested in one James Gilchrist Swan, a booze-binging minor civil servant who drifted around the west until settling at Port Townsend in 1859.

Swan was a historian and anthropologist of rare talent. Every day for the next 41 years, he dutifully wrote down his observations of life on the continent's northwest tip. He was particularly rare for his time for his interest in the Makah Indians, a people with whom Swan became fast friends. In the depths of the UW archives rest crates of Swan's observations, some 2.5 million words worth. Doig dove in.

Slowly, an unusual man emerged from the diaries. Swan respected the Indian's religion, particularly their regard for dreams. Once he dreamed that two friends died. He told an Indian shaman who explained it was an omen of an impending gift. A few days later, there was a storm and a huge bed of clams was uncovered near town. See? the shaman said.

But Swan, like many men of his time, was a contradiction. While recording the Makah's remarkable culture, he also championed the white settlement that would destroy it. A lover of the natural glory of the Northwest, he wanted to see Port Townsend become a second New York. What, Doig wondered, drove such men?

He packed up to spend three months traveling Swan's haunts. Toward the end, he found that, despite floating bridges, Trident bases and housing developments, some things haven't changed and never will: The wind still thrashes Hood Canal, birds and animals still grace the jungle-like forests, the Olympic Mountains are still always in view.

More significantly, Doig found himself developing a kinship to Swan: "A kind of adopted kinship, stronger than differences of blood can ever be. Winter brothers, perhaps call them."

Winter Brothers also was critically acclaimed when it appeared in January 1981. Doig found himself set upon by literature professors and others interested in his symbolism, theme development and so on.

"I'm afraid I dissappointed them. *Winter Brothers* is an attempt to find comparison between Swan's experience and mine. It goes no deeper. I've never much believed in talking about writing. If you understand what I write, fine. If not, that's fine too. But I see no point in involved analyses," Doig said. (The book is the basis for a documentary tonight at 9 o'clock on Channel 9. See story below.)

While researching *Winter Brothers*, Doig came across an 1853 newspaper article recounting the canoe trip of three Swedish indentured servants from New Archangel (now called Sitka) to Willapa Bay. Nearly dead from starvation, they were nursed back to health by American oystermen. They hoped to reach Astoria, but had no idea where it was because Russian maps didn't go that far. That's all the story told, except that a fourth man was killed by Indians.

Fascinated, Doig saw potential for an adventure novel. *The Sea Runners*, published last month, is the result. Beyond a tale of storms, hostile Indians and paddle, paddle, paddle, Doig wanted to portray the feel of the Northwest coast, a place where, to a writer fascinated with environment, the elements of trees, beaches and fog take on a definable personality.

"The coast becomes a fifth character in the book," he said.

AGAIN, reviews of praise. Again. Doig chuckles modestly. He's busy writing another book, although he and Carolyn are trying to take a little time off for some final backpacking before the snows set in.

The nicest thing about writing for a living is that you can work at your own pace, use your imagination and don't have to fuss with committees, memorandums and other forms of city folderol that would drive sheepmen nuts, Doig said. He likes the suburbs because almost everyone else is gone all day, giving him uninterrupted concentration. He hopes to write one book every two years for as long as he can. Meanwhile, he doesn't forget his heritage.

"My biggest reward isn't reviews, or even money. It came when *This House of Sky* was first published," Doig said. "I started receiving letters with Montana postmarks, from old school mates, friends of his parents and so on. Their opinion I care about."

"(Doig's) language begins in Western territory and experience but it touches all landscapes and life."
— Robert Kirsch, L.A. Times

"The most vivid language comes not from the classroom, but from the spoken word."
— Ivan Doig

TJ

send

The Sea Runners by Ivan Doig (Atheneum, \$13.95).

Man-against-the-sea yarns are always good for high adventure, but since the days of Joseph Conrad they seldom have been treated with such highly polished writing, satisfying characterizations and originality as pervades this tense tale—based on an actual canoe voyage down the northwest coast from Russian America (Alaska) to Washington Territory in 1853.

Four indentured Scandinavians—a seaman, a farmer, a blacksmith and a thief—escape their still-celebrating Russian masters on the night after Christmas. They steal a native canoe and start the long trek from New Archangel (Sitka), heading for Astoria, the American settlement in Oregon Territory just below the mouth of the Columbia River. Their excruciatingly slow progress is impeded by winter weather, adverse currents, dwindling provisions and, when they go ashore at night, unfriendly natives. As might be expected, these four diverse characters increasingly get on one another's nerves, yet successful, if unwilling, interdependence is their only chance for survival.

The Sea Runners is a rugged story, beautifully written by Ivan Doig, whose previous book, *This House of Sky*, was a strong candidate for the 1978 National Book Award.

—S.P.

SAN DIEGO MAGAZINE - Jan '83

Philadelphia Inquirer
January 9, 1983

re

Reviewed by
Richard E. Nicholls

THE SEA RUNNERS

By Ivan Doig

Atheneum. \$13.95

It is 1853. Four men, fugitives, are first seen paddling a "high-nosed cedar canoe, nimble as a seabird, atop a tumbling white ridge of ocean." They are Scandinavians and, having escaped indentured servitude at the dismal Russian settlement of New Archangel ("the tail of the end of the world"), in the territory one day to become Alaska, they are intent on following the coastline down to Oregon, America and freedom.

From an intriguing fragment in a period newspaper, Ivan Doig drew inspiration for this extraordinarily exciting fiction, creating four brambly, believable figures and a tale so filled with the inhuman beauty, fogs, treacherous currents and "white, boiling walls of water" of the "shoulder of the Pacific" from Alaska to the Columbia River that one can almost taste the sea spray, and feel the constant bob and buck of the canoe.

"Pilgrims in the wilderness of water," threatened by famine, hostile Indians and the ceaselessly difficult sea, their wits and brawn taxed to breaking, the men become fitting symbols of endurance without losing any of their quirky individuality. As a moving celebration of physical and spiritual survival, rendered in exuberant, ferociously inventive language, *The Sea Runners* has no superiors and few equals among modern tales of adventure.

Don

PHILADELPHIA, PA.
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JAN 9 1983

The bookshelf/adventure *7*

Reviewed by
Richard E. Nichols

THE SAMURAI
By Shusaku Endo
Harper & Row, \$12.95

In 1613, four samurai were sent on a diplomatic mission to the viceroy of Mexico, becoming some of the first Japanese known to have traveled far from their homeland. Failing to secure trade concessions from the viceroy, they pressed on to Europe, suffering many hardships, arduously traveling through both Spain and Italy, and eventually achieving an audience with the Pope.

Convinced by the Franciscan priest who had accompanied them throughout their journey that it would further their mission, they converted to Christianity. After four difficult years, they returned to Japan to discover that Christians were being persecuted, all Europeans had been expelled, and their country was now set on a course of utter isolation.

Inspired and intrigued by this episode, Shusaku Endo has written an epic novel that is both a gripping adventure and a powerful meditation on the conflicts of faith and duty. Focusing on one of the envoys, a simple, honest soldier grimly intent on carrying out his duty, Endo (a devout Catholic himself) believably traces the steps by which the man discovers in his new religion a certainty and solace his life had lacked. Often bleak, filled with a fresh vision of the natural world of marsh, ocean and desert, and with a profound sense of faith, *The Samurai* is a major achievement.



WATERS OF POTOMACK
By Paul Metcalf
North Point Press, \$17.75

The word Potomac may mean "river of swans," or, more prosaically, "they are coming by water." Its exact meaning is now as lost as the tribes of aboriginal Americans who lived by the river and named it. The Potomac river basin includes parts of four states and all of the District of Columbia. Although little studied, it has been a central highway of our history.

Paul Metcalf has remedied this neglect with a moving "documentary history" of its discovery, settlement and exploitation, drawing from the journals, letters and official reports of both memorable and forgotten figures, and interweaving these vivid glimpses of the last three centuries with brief, pungent pieces on the geology and natural history of the river. Beautifully edited and designed, filled with fascinating materials, *Waters of Potomack* is a fitting celebration of a river that threads through much of our national history.

THE SEA RUNNERS
By Ivan Doig
Atheneum, \$13.95

It is 1853. Four men, fugitives, are first seen paddling a "hip-nosed cedar canoe, nimble as seabird, atop a tumbling whirl of ocean." They are Scandinavians and, having escaped indentured servitude at the dismal Russian settlement of New Archangel ("the tail of the end of the world"), in the territory one day to become Alaska, they are intent on following the coastline down to Oregon, America and freedom.

From an intriguing fragment of a period newspaper, Ivan Doig drew inspiration for this extraordinarily exciting fiction, creating four bravely, believable figures and a tale so filled with the Indian beauty, fogs, treacherous currents and "white, boiling walls of water" of the "shoulder of the Pacific" from Alaska to the Columbia River that one can almost taste the sea spray, and feel the constant bob and buck of the canoe.

"Pilgrims in the wilderness water," threatened by famished hostile Indians and the ceaselessly difficult sea, their wits and brawn taxed to breaking, they become fitting symbols of endurance without losing any of the quirky individuality. As a moving celebration of physical and spiritual survival, rendered in exuberant, ferociously inventive language, *The Sea Runners* has few superiors and few equals among modern tales of adventure.

The Daily Record, Ellensburg, Wash., Fri., Feb. 4, 1983 Page 3

Your library this week — Childhood memories — — draw reader to Doig by Mary James



A certain combination of twisted jack-pine and layered, ragged shale unlatches echoes in both my mind and body. Like dreams, these echoes come back to me in color scenes: Children racing among the trees, tilting across logs which have fallen over creek beds and adults with fishing poles in hand or "tin cups of coffee cradled close, backs to the campfire.

It is these echoes of Northwestern childhood camping which first led me to Ivan Doig's books which now number three: "This House of Sky"; "Landscapes of a Western Mind" (1978); "Winter Brothers" (1980); and, his most recent, "The Sea Runners" (1982).

My admiration of Doig began when I read these words from "Sky":

"Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.

"The remembering begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all."

For nearly a year, I declared to any who would listen, "You must read 'This House of Sky' (and if you haven't you still must). When I can write like Doig, I shall feel I've arrived."

Time has passed, and two new books have come out. Somehow the press of student papers has prevented my reading of "Winter Brothers," Doig's second book, but the reviews are good.

"Library Journal" gives us the plot. "This book grew out of Doig's discovery of 'the diaries of James G. Swan, an obscure 19th century artist and observer of coastal Indian life in the Pacific Northwest. The result is a 90-day log book, a kind of diary within a diary, in which, day by day, Doig's thoughts are interwoven with Swan's written record.

"The idea is for the two diarists to become 'companions,' Swan on one side of the century line, Doig on the other, the 'westernness' of each uniting the two."

Of this double diary, James Kaufmann of Christian Science Monitor says, "... A book of either man's diary pages alone would give more than any reader has right to

ask. But it is the interchange between Swan and Doig that gives the book its unique flavor."

Such information is enough to whet my appetite. I intend to be first in line with my reserve card for "Winter Brothers."

While "Brothers" slipped by me, I've had more luck with "The Sea Runners." It arrived this Christmas, a present from a cousin who grows dearer each time he gives me a Doig book. Delighted with the book, I still approached it cautiously. After all, once you've read what you believe to be the perfect book, what will follow?

"Sea Runners" is its own book. Except for the physical setting, in this case the coast between the Sitka Alaska and Astoria Oregon, which elicits similar childhood echoes to the setting of "This House of Sky," "Sea Runners" affected me quite differently from "Sky." "Sky" made me laugh and cry; "Sea" demanded quiet intensity.

The same excellent control of language is evident, but the story pulls a different emotional string. "This House of Sky" reaches into the core of parent-child relationships, "Sea Runners" is both a story of individual self-discovery and group bonding for survival.

I resisted the opening, "A high-nosed cedar canoe, nimble as a seabird, atop a tumbling white ridge of ocean." A fragment. I put the book down. How many had I crossed out of students' papers that week? But came a little voice — a coherent fragment. Well, I conceded and picked up the book again.

The second phrase convinced me to read on: "Carried nearer and nearer by the water's determined sweep, the craft sleds across the curling crest of wave and begins to glide the surf toward the dark frame of this scene, a shore of black spruce forest."

And read on I did, into a story which begins in 1853 in Russian Alaska at a village now called Sitka. The story begins quietly with one man's plan to escape his indentured servant status by canoeing down the winter coast to Astoria, Oregon, American territory.

Doig writes carefully with great detail, so that the reader really believes the escape possible. Turns in the adventure are carefully folded into the narrative — just at the point when all seems smooth and quiet, a story of pleasant description, Doig's pen deals mental body blow.

"Sea Runners" is a book which echoes after the final page has been read. Indeed, two nights later my dreams stole a scene from the book to give me a message. Quiet writing, but powerful echoes.

Interpreting The West:

An Interview With Ivan Doig

*Ivan Doig is a man of medium stature with a rugged academic look about him. He has published three books: **This House Of Sky** (HBJ, \$5.95), **Winter Brothers** (HBJ, \$5.95), and **The Sea Runners** (Atheneum, \$13.95) soon to be released as a Penguin paperback. You are made immediately aware of his Celtic origins by the heavy red beard which is just beginning to grey. Minus the glasses and dressed in buckskin he could be one of Charles Russell's trappers.*

I met with Ivan and Carol, his wife, in The Elliott Bay Cafe on a rainy summer day. Ivan preferred to tape the interview because he said he was spending enough time behind a typewriter working on his new novel, which he talked about at some length. Great artists inspire us not only with their works but with their presence as well. I found this to be true of Ivan Doig.

Interviewed by John Dally

JD: There seems to be a lot of scholastic as well as experiential background to your work. In the section of *The Sea Runners* where they're paddling south to the Queen Charlottes, the description of the ocean was incredible. I used to work on a commercial salmon troller, and I started to get seasick all over again. What sorts of research have you done and how did you start writing?

ID: I think I write best about things I can either see or get firmly in mind through research. In that particular part of *Sea Runners* set around the Queen Charlottes, the descriptions of the water and so forth are from flying over it in a Grumman Goose when Carol and I went out to the village of Massett for the sake of a beach scene. We had what turned out to be the good luck of a very foggy, overcast day, so the Goose from Prince Rupert flew very low over the water. The pilot was simply going by a radio



photo by Wayne Sourbeer

beam and was going to pick up the shoreline of the Queen Charlottes eventually. So, I was able to look right down on the water and get the descriptions.

JD: Have you spent some time on the water?

ID: No, I'm not a water-person. I'm not a canoeist or kayaker. I'm a lover of the shoreline. I really haven't done water traveling except, again on *The Sea Runners*, coming down from Juneau to Seattle on a University of Alaska oceanography ship, which gave me the rest of the water and coastal descriptions.

JD: The thing I find remarkable about your style is that it resembles the landscape in its luxuriousness. There is a real lyricism to it that I think is part of the landscape as well. Is that something you work for?

ID: Well, I only had two English courses in my college life, but somewhere I heard that form ought to fit content and content ought to fit form. I think the books reflect that notion—*Winter Brothers* being a journal because it's primarily about a guy who keeps journals, and *House Of Sky* with the italic musings on memory being a book about memory, and *The Sea Runners* in brief, almost movie-like takes, paragraph by paragraph, moments of a long journey. So this probably carries over into the descriptions too. I've been interested in trying to capture landscape in metaphor. I do feel that after *Sea Runners* and *Winter Brothers* back to back, I've run dry of coastal descriptions for a while. The book I'm working on now, and maybe the next couple, will be set in Montana. But, yeah, I do try to think of what the landscape will suggest in terms of language.

JD: Maybe this would be a good time to talk about your new book?

ID: Okay. It's a novel set in Montana in the late years of the Depression, in the area where I lived during high school. That's between Sun River and Glacier Park on the east side of the Rocky Mountains. I'm creating a town

Continued on the back page.

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and a ranching valley to put on the actual landscape up there. And also a National Forest. This gives me the chance to do whatever I want with the characteristics of the town and the ranches and the forest and so on. Carol has taken photographs of Montana buildings that would have been around in the 1930s. We piece them together to get what that small town main street would look like in the '30s. I've been working on that today, in fact.

The book is about a family that's been through the Depression. My narrator is a fourteen-going on fifteen-year-old son of a forest ranger, both native born to that area. So, it's a look at the generation that is coming out of the Depression. I'm interested in the late years of the 1930s as a historical hinge; of people feeling they have endured the major historical event of their lives and, of course, having no way of knowing another one, World War II, is coming. This novel will be much more like *House Of Sky* than the other two books.

JD: This *House Of Sky* is subtitled *Landscapes of a Western Mind*. Do you see yourself as a "Western writer," a "Northwest writer?"

ID: I would generally say "Western," simply because so much of my stuff is set in Montana. I have no notion of where the dividing lines rest, but I consider myself interested in regional topics out here, and hope to get to larger topics of life through a particular lens of regional characteristics.

JD: When I think of your work I also think of the works of Thomas McGuane, Richard Hugo, and Jim Welch. It seems like these writers, yourself included, are defining some kind of "Western" attitude, way of life, philosophy, style of living. Does that interest you? Do you look for them consciously?

ID: I'm not conscious of working on my own theory of the West. Because my background is in journalism and history I'm more interested in trying to interpret what the actual West seems to me to be like.

JD: Say I gave you the task of putting together a reading list on Northwest culture. What would be some of the books you'd include?

ID: Well, in Montana there are classes taught now in Montana literature, which often include *The Lady In Kicking Horse Reservoir*, Jim Welch's *Winter In The Blook*, and Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It*, which I think is one of the great stories of America, not just the West. *The Big Sky* by A.B. Guthrie, which is a book important to a lot of us because it showed that a Montanan could write a book that got published, when I was a kid out there. From farther this direction, Ken Kesey's *Sometimes A Great Notion*, Don Berry's *Trask*, Norman Clark's *Milltown*. I would probably put in there Swan's own *Northwest Coast*.

JD: Any painters you'd include?

ID: Tony Angell!

JD: Tony Angell.

ID: Because he's a friend and I'm paying close attention to what he's doing. We're about the same age. We're kind of watching each other go at life in this way. Tony's painting and sculpture interests me a lot.

JD: Do you make your living as a writer?

ID: Some years.

CD: But he doesn't do anything else. [laughs]

ID: [laughing] Yeah, I don't do anything else. I've been full time at it for thirteen years.

JD: Do you have a daily schedule?

ID: I usually wander into my office, at my house, a little after 7 a.m. and will work from then till about 11:30, lunch time. Maybe go out for a cup of coffee along elegant Aurora Avenue in between. And then in the afternoon after a break or reading or walking around the neighborhood I either write some more or edit what's been done in the morning, or do research or whatever. Pretty much go till 5 p.m. Out of this I achieve so many pages a day. It varies as to where I am in a book. If it's first draft it's four or five pages a day, usually five days a week.

JD: Do you write out those four or five pages and then go back to edit, or do you write one sentence over and over till you get it exactly right and then move on to the next?

ID: Well, I tinker quite a lot as I go along. I'm a cut and paste writer because of my journalistic background. My manuscripts gain heft from Elmer's glue and the additions of paper as I go along. That's the primary method of tinkering. The book I'm doing now is the most natural sounding book I've done. It has a first person narrator, this fourteen-year-old, and it's written in colloquial Montana lingo. And so it has a more casual flow than the very dense parts of all three other books. Some of those were revised endlessly. I'm purposely drawing back on the current book and not revising it till my kid narrator would sound like me, a forty-four year old Seattlelite with a Ph.D.

Days of rain, those four next.

Of Channel water like a gray-blue field very gently stirred by wind.

Of clouds lopping the mountains, so they seemed strange shagged buttes of green.

Of soft rattle of wings as gulls would rise in a hundred from a shore point of gravel.

Of fog walking the top of the forest in morning.

The Sea Runners, Atheneum, 1982: p. 182
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continued on next page

continued from previous page

JD: Who do you write for?

ID: I wish I knew how to answer that. This may be too glib, it just came to me. I write for the sheet of paper in front of me.

I try things out on Carol incessantly, of course. She's my first and best editor. Because of having been a journalist where stuff had to be accessible enough to attract people, and having been around history departments and a lot of unreadable history, I do want these books of mine to be readable. That's in the back of my mind. But with **Winter Brothers**, if I'd had any particular reader in mind, I probably wouldn't have made that as difficult in format.

JD: Is accessibility something, then, that worries you in your writing?

ID: Not much. Only in that I have a habit of looking things over and if it sounds pretty good to me, which is what I'm primarily trying to achieve—to Carol and friends who look at the manuscript—that's generally good enough. It then goes to an editor in New York who's being paid decently to see how easily it reads.

However, I'm interested in less accessible books that others have done. I thought **Riddley Walker** a wonderful piece of work. Also **The Book Of Ebenezer Le Page**. And **One Hundred Years of Solitude**. But my notion would be that if you're setting out to do a technically arcane kind of fiction you had better do it as good as any of those three, and not just make it difficult in an academic sense.



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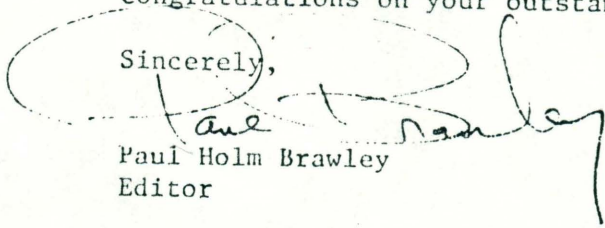
*Copy to
Ivan*

Dear Publisher:

Congratulations! I was pleased to see that books of yours have been selected by the Booklist young adult books staff to be included in the 1982 YA Reviewers' Choice list appearing in the January 15, 1983 issue. The titles chosen for this list have been cited for their strong appeal as young adult recreational reading among the adult books published in 1982. Librarians and teachers who make book selection decisions have found that the YA Reviewers' Choice list alerts them to adult titles which deserve placement in their young adult collections.

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Sincerely,


Paul Holm Brawley
Editor

The following titles have been selected for the Booklist 1982 YA Reviewers' Choice:

Return to Auschwitz, Kitty Hart.

The Sea Runners, Ivan Doig.

Four Swedes Against the Sea

By ELAINE KENDALL

The Sea Runners by Ivan Doig (Atheneum: \$13.95)

An agile thief, a landlocked seaman, a cullen blacksmith and a displaced farmer escape by Indian canoe from the Russian fur trading station in New Anchorage, Alaska. The year is 1852, and the four are Swedish nationals; each has been serving as an indentured laborer in this bleak outpost.

Braaf, the boyish larcenist, signed on for the seven-year tour as an alternative to prison; Melander, the sailor, under the misapprehension he would serve aboard ship; Wennberg, the blacksmith, volunteered for mercenary reasons; Karlsson

because Alaska—then Russian America—seemed to offer greater opportunity than the barren ground of his stony Swedish province. At various stages in their terms of service, all four men are miserable for private reasons: homesick, hopeless, in debt, seeing no end in sight to their virtual enslavement. Their wretchedness is all they have in common.

Melander, quick-witted, the most articulate of the lot and an experienced seaman, instigates the audacious plan. They will steal one of the strong graceful Kolosh canoes and make their way down the convoluted Pacific shore to the American port of Astoria, a distance of 1,200 treacherous miles. Melander recruits Karlsson for his strength, Braaf for his cleverness and the sour Wennberg because he has accidentally discovered a cache of provisions stolen by Braaf and might otherwise betray them to their Russian masters.

While the ensuing drama depends upon the unpredictability of the sea and grueling physical hardship for its power, the fascination of the story is in the psychological tensions among the men, the alterations in character produced by brutal necessity. Doig's prose is peculiarly tailored to the time, the place, the characters and the nature of the ordeal itself. He has devised a style that at first is stilted and artificial; later, it wears so smooth with use as to seem the natural speech for this unlikely quartet—a strange language for a bizarre guest.

Of the four, only Melander has any innate gift for self-expression. Karlsson has never had much need of speech; Wennberg is a well of dark secrets, and a chat-box doesn't last long in Braaf's risky profession. The strained, fragmented and often surprisingly lyrical language becomes an effective device to distinguish the men from one another, to convey their foreignness and to point up the conflicts among them. A few phrases quickly define them.

The Russians will not suspect the plot, Melander says, because "Our souls are fresh and there's spring green in our eye as far as they know." "Now listen, you walrus pizzlies," Wennberg interrupts crudely, while Karlsson

Book Review

remains silent, observing Wennberg with a countryman's judicious perception. "There was something not reckonable, but opposite from usual, about this blacksmith. As when the eyelid of a wood duck watching you closes casually from the bottom up." Braaf, concerned only with the logistics of stealing the necessary guns, merely shrugs. Savvy and streetwise, he concentrates solely upon his specialty.

As in all sea stories, monotony is broken only by disaster. One of the four is killed by pursuing Indians; another is swept off a promontory and drowned. Here, however, the relentless grind serves Doig's artistic purpose. Without the tedious redundancy, there would be no way to convey the rigors and terrors of the trip. How else could the reader begin to comprehend 1,200 miles of paddling, hunger, cold, wet, exhaustion and despair?

Doig has based his novel upon a letter written to an Oregon newspaper in 1853 by an American settler, reporting the discovery of three Swedish survivors of a mysterious shipwreck. That sketchy reference led the author to retrace, in reasonable safety, the route taken by the escapees, to hypothesize the sort of men who might have embarked upon such a voyage, to reproduce an extraordinary physical and emotional experience in language seemingly invented for this express purpose.

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Introduction of the Honorary Doctoral Degree Candidates

Mr. George Noe, Doctor of Engineering
Mr. Richard Gray, Doctor of Science
Dr. Ivan Doig, Doctor of Letters

1984 Montana State University Honors Lecture*

Dr. Ivan Doig

George Noe

A 1936 graduate of Montana State University and a native of Forsyth, Mr. Noe has lived in Australia for more than 40 years. According to a contemporary, his career is "almost a history of building and construction in Australia and the Southwest Pacific." His major accomplishment is the construction of the Sidney Opera House in 1972, now a worldwide landmark.

Richard Gray

Founder of the Freshwater Biology Foundation in Minnesota, Mr. Gray has been a strong supporter of research at Montana State University. In 1980 he established the R.G. Gray endowed chair in biology, the first such designation on this campus. As a business leader and an advocate of the values of research, Mr. Gray has long demonstrated a deep concern for environmental matters.

Ivan Doig

A Montana native, Dr. Doig has written several books, but his most critically acclaimed work is *This House of Sky*. The book is the story of his coming of age on a sheep ranch near White Sulphur Springs. Dr. Doig's most recent work, a novel set in the Choteau-Dupuyer area titled *English Creek*, is scheduled for publication next fall.

*In 1983 MSU began the tradition of publishing the Annual Honors Lecture. We are pleased to make Dr. Doig's lecture the second in our series. It will be available by year's end.