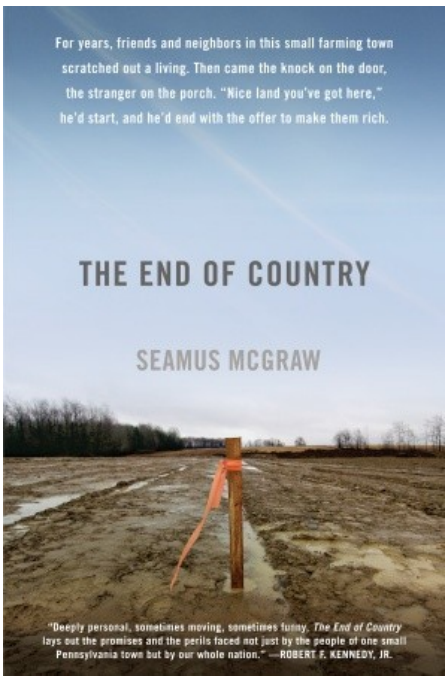

The End of Country: Dispatches from the Frack Zone

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The End of Country is the compelling story about the epic battle for control of one of the richest natural gas deposits the world has ever known: the Marcellus Shale, worth more than one trillion dollars. In a remote northeastern corner of Pennsylvania, an intense conflict begins, pitting the forces of corporate America against a community of stoic, low-income homesteaders, determined to acquire their fair share of the windfall—but not at the cost of their values or their way of life. Though the natural gas is extracted through a controversial process known as hydrofracking, many couldn't resist the offer to lease their land in exchange for the promise of untold riches.

For years, this part of the world was invisible to all but the farmers, urban transplants, and small landholders who called it home. But journalist Seamus McGraw, a native of the region whose own mother was one of the first to receive a leasing offer, opens a window on a stiff-necked group of Pennsylvanians as they try, with little guidance or protection from the state or anyone else, to balance the promise and the peril of this discovery. Along the way, McGraw introduces us to a host of colorful characters, from a gas company land agent with a Green Beret to a wizened quarryman with an old coonhound, a .22 rifle, and an unerring sense of right and wrong who leads a personal crusade to police the gas company's operations.

The cutthroat dash by petrodollar billionaires to secure drilling leases will make some poor residents rich, and put the entire community at risk of having its land tainted by toxic chemicals and its water supply contaminated by gas. Above all, it will test the character of everyone in the community as they fight against "the end of country."

Rich with a sense of place and populated by unforgettable personalities, *The End of Country* is a tale of greed, hubris, and envy, but also of hope and family—and the land that binds them all together.

The End of Country: Dispatches from the Frack Zone Details

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From Reader Review The End of Country: Dispatches from the Frack Zone for online ebook

Eli says

Excellent view from the perspective of people who are affected by the fracking boom. It doesn't really pick sides, but shows many different sides. Doesn't pull punches about the impact of fracking but leaves questions to ponder.

Amber says

This is an interesting, thoughtful, well-written book, from an industry outsider, about the rapid increase in gas drilling in the Northeast, a brief history of US oil and gas production and consumption, and what the increase in drilling of late it means for local communities, the environment, and the US economy more generally. I work in the natural gas industry, so I was particularly interested in an outsider's perspective—the author is a freelance writer who grew up in northeast Pennsylvania and began learning about gas drilling to help his mother as she fielded offers for her mineral rights.

More important than the survey aspect of the book, though, is that the author does a very good job telling the human stories, of the Pennsylvanians whose lives have been affected by gas drilling—both the disruption to their roads, water, and lifestyle, and as well the money they've made from signing bonuses and royalties. He also does well to highlight the discrepancy in lease terms among citizens—in terms of dollars, certainly, but more importantly in terms of what protections people can secure (for roads, well locations, setbacks, other environmental issues, etc.), and as well the discrepancies between gas producers in terms of how careful they are, and how honestly they deal with the communities.

With no background in the industry, the author really does grasp the essence of the gas drilling boom, particularly with his analogy to heroin addicts in noting that the only way the industry knows how to deal with good times is to drill another well, and the only way the industry knows how to deal with bad times is to drill another well.

The book features several interesting anecdotes, including: the possibility that the burning bush in Exodus was from an ignited natural gas deposit; that in 1858 the Fredonia Gas Light Company was first able to meter gas use, and charged $4/mcf for it (higher prices than in today's market, even before account for 100+ years of inflation!); that oil use helped the environment by stopping the use of whale oil; that Mitchell began using water (rather than other fluids) to fracture Barnett shale wells by accident; that coal producers lobbied for, and got, the rights to withhold data on how much energy was produced (explaining why data in Pennsylvania is far inferior to that in Texas, Wyoming, and other energy producing states).

There are a few mistakes in the book: he asserts that two-thirds of US electricity is produced by coal, when in reality the figure is about 40 percent; that Chesapeake signed a joint-venture deal with BP in the Haynesville, when the truth is that Chesapeake's joint ventures were with BP in the Fayetteville and Plains in the Haynesville; and that one of the seven planned East Coast LNG terminals also was designed for exports, which isn't true—designing it that way would add billions of dollars of expense, and no one would have spent that money speculatively (in reality, developers have now considered re-developing them into export terminals, but they certainly weren't planned that way). But in the scheme of things, these mistakes are

relatively minor, and few in number.

I'm hardly a conservative, but the author's liberalism did grate in a couple instances—when recognizing the ingenuity of the entrepreneurs he previously had just thought greedy, and in his endorsement of a citizen's amazement at encountering racism among Democrats. Also, the author's attribution of a $1/mmbtu Nymex gas price rally to updated Penn State reserve estimates for the Marcellus made little sense. But these are relatively small qualms in a very well executed book, one the natural gas industry should take seriously, in terms of how its actions are perceived by laypeople.

Michael says

http://philadelphiareviewofbooks.com/...

At the top of the natural gas industry's food chain sit men like Aubrey McClendon.

McClendon, the great-nephew of Robert S. Kerr, former Oklahoma governor and founder in 1927 of the Kerr-McGee Corporation, an oil and natural gas company, started out life in the energy industry as a landman. He bought up enough lucrative acreage to make his own Chesapeake Energy either the first or second largest landholder in each of the Barnett, Haynesville/Bossier, Marcellus and Utica natural gas shale fields as well as another half-dozen oil and liquid natural gas plays around the country. McClendon did not inherit his great-uncle's politics. Kerr supported the New Deal and after his term as governor, served fourteen years in the Senate as a Southern Democrat working with Lyndon Johnson and Richard Russell on bringing the Great Society's ideals into the South. But McClendon adopted much of Kerr's rhetoric as an executive, couching his aggressive exploration into "clean" energy sources in terms of conservation and energy independence. Kerr's father once told him, "To raise a family, you have to have three things – land, wood and water," and McClendon soon found out that to profitably extract natural gas you'd need both land and water, and you'd have to remove a lot of wood to find the right spots to drill.

Despite his pedigree, Aubrey McClendon made much of his fortune on his own, starting Chesapeake with co-founder Tom L. Ward in 1982, the year after McClendon graduated from Duke University. With an initial investment of $50,000 to incorporate in 1989, in less than twenty-five years, largely through the aggressive acquisition of leaseholds, Chesapeake became the second largest natural gas firm in the United States.

Chesapeake's shareholders have learned, over the last few months, that McClendon treated the funds and holdings of the company he founded as if they were his personal assets. In 2008, soon after the financial crisis, the board of directors, no doubt under McClendon's sway, awarded him a one-time $75 million compensation payment for a loss he suffered on a margin call on Chesapeake's stock. This, in the same year he received the highest pay of all executives of S&P 500 companies, earning $112 million.

Though he touts natural gas as a cleaner source of energy than coal and oil, McClendon's politics and environmental activities skew to the right. He donated $250,000 to the Swift Vets and POWs for Truth during the 2004 presidential campaign. Though thwarted by litigation, McClendon planned to develop 400 acres of dunes on the shores of Lake Michigan. Oil fields and forested mountaintops haven't quenched his thirst for despoiling the land.

But despite his firm conservative politics, McClendon, while at the helm of Chesapeake, spent profligately, using his company's extensive landholdings to ratchet up $13 billion in liabilities by March of this year,

according to Clifford Krauss of the New York Times. Before being ousted as chairman, McClendon ran a $200 million hedge fund betting on natural gas with the money he earned extracting it from the ground. In fact, many of Chesapeake's assets, bought on loan, are owned jointly with McClendon. McClendon borrows against the reputation of his company and invests in the publically-traded company's assets and resources. Corporations are people, and people are people, and it's hard to tell the difference sometimes.

According to a recent Reuters report, this blurring of the line between professional and personal activity has allowed McClendon to leverage his holdings into an ever more extravagant lifestyle. His contract allows him to fly himself, friends and family to Europe and the Caribbean for free. All he has to pay, by law, is the taxes on the personal flights, though most of his personal flights can be written off as business trips if he does any work at all. Chesapeake's shareholders foot the rest of the bill. Benjamin Wallace, author of The Billionaire's Vinegar, described McClendon's wine cellars as not "particularly connoisseur-y…. It's pretty much exclusively big-name trophy vintages. Just eye-balling it, it's got to be worth millions." The value of his historic map collection is assessed at $12 million, and of his many homes the most ostentatious might be his $20.8 million mansion on Bermuda's "billionaire's row" neighboring properties owned by Michael Bloomberg, Ross Perot, and Silvio Berlusconi. One of Chesapeake's subsidiaries, AKM, in fact serves as McClendon's personal administrators, and AKM's alumnus serve as contracted consultants in maintaining his properties.

McClendon's excesses, however, do not all tend to the private. His civic and public contributions to his hometown of Oklahoma City have made the formerly depressed capital a natural gas boom town, even though it lies hundreds of miles from the most significant shale plays. According to Reuters, McClendon and Chesapeake (it's hard to distinguish the two entities) purchased at least 108 properties for $240 million in the Oklahoma City area. He played a pivotal role in bringing the Seattle Supersonics franchise to Oklahoma City, to become the Thunder and play in Chesapeake Energy Arena. Like a biblical prophet, McClendon replenished the city's dried riverbed and spent $10 million on a boathouse and tower, transforming the North Canadian River into "an Olympic-class rowing venue."

An insatiable hunger for more acquisitions, both professional and private, has undone the very industry McClendon, through Chesapeake, helped grow into the most promising new energy source in half a century. By pushing exploration of the shale fields to the absolute limit, Chesapeake and its competitors, along with a cadre of geologists, discovered a previously unknown cache of natural gas which might fuel every gas-burning device in the United States for the next hundred years. The landmen in the shale regions, backed by exuberant figures and deep-pocketed gas companies, ignored the laws of supply and demand, and paid more, by many magnitudes, for leases on the mineral rights to farms and forests in the remote hills of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio. The larger leases brought more gas to market and drove down prices. Chesapeake's stock suffered and McClendon, Forbes's Most Reckless Billionaire, came under scrutiny.

In a June 8 meeting, Chesapeake shareholders voted 80% to deny McClendon's pay package, essentially ousting him from his chairmanship. Richard Levick, writing in Forbes, cites the 20% vote to affirm McClendon as anomaly enough for pathological diagnosis. Suffering from the J.R. Ewing Syndrome, those 20% of voters acted in "the belief that an adventuresome, big-idea, observe-no-limits, entrepreneurial cowboy kind of a guy is, by definition, too creative to be safely excised from the corporate dermis."

Just two months before his rejection, McClendon, in his cavalier manner, told the Wall Street Journal, "I get mad at the New York-based environmentalists because if you were truly environmentalists you wouldn't have a storm surge system and a sanitary system hooked together here that requires you to close your beaches 10 times a year. You'd hire an army of people to pick up plastic bottles off the street and newspapers off the street and it wouldn't all go into the rivers. But you know, these are people who have a great deal of

influence with the president and I think he had lost some of their confidence and he needed to do something to deliver a victory for environmentalists."

Doesn't sound very apologetic, does he?

This is the top of the heap of the natural gas industry.

Let's look at the bottom.

Seamus McGraw starts his recent book, The End of Country, with the appearance a young woman wearing a nose ring and a leather jacket at the door of his mother's farmhouse in northeastern Pennsylvania.

"Nice land you've got here."

This refrain echoes through the hills where McGraw grew up, the old coal mining region around Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. Soon enough, though, the gas companies wise up and start sending out landmen who the locals can relate to. Big, gruff and charismatic, they wear cowboy boots and speak with sweet lilting Texas accents. They park on the lawn when they visit, far enough off the driveway so the new truck they drive doesn't make the landholder's beat pickup look like a jalopy. But the beat pickup is a jalopy and the poverty it represents is the primary reason these homeschooling Texans can snake their lease contracts into the lives of people like McGraw's mother.

The End of Country tells the story of natural gas prospecting and extraction in the Marcellus Shale region, which encompasses most of Pennsylvania west of the piedmont as well as sections of neighboring states. McGraw moved away from the hills he sets his story in long ago. Through two failed marriages and a third, successful attempt at family life, he lived in New York, writing feature stories for big name periodicals. His father, a failed gentlemen farmer decades gone, looms large over the land he left behind. The motor oil the old man poured into the burrows of groundhogs in the 60s sits gurgling under his wife's garden. The dead calves of an old cattle plague still haunt McGraw's memories of the fields he will one day inherit. But with the financial collapse of 2008, McGraw's work dries up, and bighearted Marshall Casale arrives at the McGraw farm on Ellsworth Hill, and money speaks louder than words.

The culture of the Irish Americans in Pennsylvania's coal mining region comes alive in the hills and valleys near Scranton, and in McGraw's mother, who holds dearly to her defiant claim to a farm in Protestant country. The social complexities of these groups, who most see as all white and all Anglo and far too hillbilly for serious study, drive the story of McGraw's parents. Far from the Scots-Irish hill-dwellers and poor farmers who originally populated these remote regions, the McGraws succeeded as part of the educated middle class in the first half of the 20th century, until purchasing a dried-up piece of farmland with an old house on it, where they raised their two children – Seamus and his sister – and where nothing grew and no profits could be reaped from the earth. For Seamus, far less connected to the culture of quiet defiance his mother and father embodied, the wooded hills offered suicidal drag strips for him and his friends and hidden hollows where he could smoke joints and sweat-soaked cigarettes. Ellsworth Hill becomes ground zero for the encroachment of industry on personal history in McGraw's portrait of the ravages of natural gas drilling.

The cast of characters in early gas and oil exploration are down on their luck and desperate – from Hart and his small gas cistern in upstate New York to Colonel Drake and his Titusville oil find to the present and Zagorski's discovery of the Marcellus's potential. The hardscrabble life of the roughnecks under the shadow of derricks and wellheads paints the picture of a truly American industry, in which hardworking men do anything, no matter the cost to their bodies or the earth, to make a living. A lucky few made fortunes, most

sacrificed their youths for a dream. Marshall Casale and the other landmen, along with the conniving public bureaucrats and archivists, represent a peculiar new type – a speculator, a broker, a carpetbagger, a piece of Old Weird America right here and now in the Appalachian Mountains. The geologist, Terry Engelder, speaks like an oracle from his office at Penn State, upping the ante of natural gas supplies and inciting the biggest energy rush in half a century.

Victoria Switzer and Ken Ely represent two ends of the spectrum of relationships to the land – Victoria a preservationist, set against human exploitation of resources, Ken a conservationist, concerned about his right to those resources. These two forces of local conscience guide McGraw through his exploration of the specific relationships between the people and the gas companies. When we meet them, with the landmen knocking down their doors, we don't believe either will sign, but both do and for the very reasons they should most resist forfeiting mineral rights to their properties. Victoria signs because the vague equivocating of the landmen has convinced her natural gas is the wave of the future, a way to eliminate needless wars in the Middle East and carbon-spewing coal power plants at home. Ken signs because he wants to stick it to the man, make life difficult for the drillers and cut contractual deals for stones and timber on his land. Both later choke on their heedless actions, and front community-wide litigation against Cabot, the most reckless of the drillers. These futile legal skirmishes represent the only avenue for citizens to act. As McGraw shows, small victories can be made and integrity restored an inch at a time.

McGraw manages to provide an account of drilling practices and all the environmental hazards entailed therein, without the sensationalism and fear-mongering of Josh Fox's film Gasland. Where Fox is polemical, McGraw is a storyteller, one not bounded by political pride or posturing. Though McGraw shows himself and his family as enlightened, well-informed, environmentally-conscious people, the lure of "progress" and money (mostly money) lead them inexorably to sign a lucrative lease and do everything they can to avoid any estate taxes on the mother's farm. They are typical Americans, typically concerned with the bottom line. Though this is the most common story in the shale region, it is one that is not told enough.

Still the story of natural gas extraction in the Marcellus Shale, millions of gallons of fracking fluid pumped into every well, is predominately an environmental tale. The poison, methane and coliform seeping into water wells in Susquehanna County are the small harbingers of devastation wrought by the carelessness and disrespect with which the gas companies treat the earth. If these are the short-term effects, what must be the long-term effects? Certainly, Aubrey McClendon and all his riches will be long gone before the chemicals of the slick water cease to pollute our waterways.

Shantel Ramlo says

I almost exclusively read nonfiction, but books like this are slowly convincing me to switch sides. It's an intelligent and moving look into the impact fracking, and really the energy industry as a whole, has had on Appalachia and its people. It presents both sides of the argument over fracking and natural gas, yet reads like a novel. Highly recommended.

Sharon Guynup says

This book is a hybrid, mixing lyrical memoir with nonfiction on one of our most pressing issues: energy, specifically natural gas. End of Country focuses on the natural gas "gold rush" in Pennsylvania, where

McGraw's family has owned land for over 40 years, where his mother and her neighbors have sold leases to various companies to drill for deep-earth shale gas using controversial fracturing, or "fracking" wells. This book explores the human side of the story, as well as the environmental: how gas leases saved some of of the area's remaining small, cash-strapped farms, how some sold out early for a few dollars an acre while others garnered thousands, ripping at the social fabric of these communities--and how the gas rush is changing the region forever.

It's obvious that McGraw inherited the Irish narrative gene: the characters are well-drawn, the writing is rich and engaging. Yet the book also raises important questions on how we're going to power our country, who pays (and how) and who benefits. An engaging, beautifully-written, thought-provoking book!

Chris Demer says

This book has special meaning for me as I lived in Northeast PA for my first 11 years, and visited there often throughout the 60s and 70s. I remember the small dairy farms and the difficulty even then of making a decent living from them, as lovely as many of them appeared to outsiders.
And then they discovered gas in the Marcellus Shale. Not just gas, but massive amounts of it. Enough to spend billions of dollars to recover.
Seamus McGraw does an excellent job of looking at both sides of this picture. The book is not a polemic against the gas drillers. However, he pulls no punches in describing the tactics of the gas companies in their thirst for mineral rights, the never-ending heavy trucks and heavy machinery, the maddening pounding of the drilling and the (not infrequent) spills of fuel and fracking fluid. The spills and contamination of wells, streams and ponds is reported by concerned local observers as much of it would go unnoticed by the DEP representatives who are few and far between.
While the dollars flowing in to the region are a godsend to many, it is clear that there are serious trade-offs, and not just in environmental damage. The changes in fortune of many, but not all, of the local inhabitants, gradually change the character of their interactions.
Thus the "end of country" refers not only to the end of dairy farming in the region, but the end of many of the social bonds and relationships that cemented these communities for generations.
It remains to be seen whether this mineral wealth will, on balance, prove positive or negative.

An added, and interesting aspect of the book for me was information regarding the geology of the region, the history of energy exploration in the area and the process and dangers of releasing the gas.

Michelle says

as a native pennsylvanian, this was probably extra interesting to me. but no matter where you're from, this is an excellent take on the conflict of politics, money and conscience when it comes to drilling for natural gas. you have to wonder what would happen if these companies would put this money into developing a smart-grid to move renewable energies around this country. most of them seem to have very little concern for what fracking does to the land or to the people who live on it. and even the people living there seem conflicted - they need the money, but the noise and the environmental impact on land they've been on for generations seems sometimes more than they can stand. mcgraw writes a beautiful story - one that all of us should read to better understand the impact of how we live.

Kathleen McFall says

Why are we also surprised by capitalism?

Which do you value most? If forced, would you choose instant riches or preservation of the hard scrabble land from which generations of you have barely farmed? Sweet fat lazy royalty checks from a demon oil company or bragging rights about your long-standing, oft-touted concern for global warming and progressive environmental principles? Would you rather have a million dollars (literally) or a myth to sleep with about rural life and pristine Penna. land (which has not really been pristine since Columbus landed anyway...).

How quickly will you knit your suddenly liberated beliefs into a new and improved rationale combining the threads of the value of natural gas as a bridge fuel with the age-old adage of who-am-I-to-stand-in-the-way-of-progress? Hell, they are gonna do it anyway, I might as well get something out of it, and they might as well use natural gas because it's less potent in terms of carbon emissions.

And he did. Get something out of it. Natural gas royalty checks and a book deal.

Ah, capitalism messes with all of our heads in the end. Even broke down writers. Maybe especially broke down writers. There are few events in life that so profoundly force a wide-open confrontation between what one says and what one does than the appearance of oil and gas men (and women, but apparently, only women with nose rings) at the screen door.

McGraw is (was?) an appealing down-on-his-luck middle-aged feature writer, living hand to mouth and wondering how he'd pay the next private school tuition bill for his kids. And then, wham, a phone call from his mother from down on the family farm opened up a new chapter. A truly great story fell into his lap and McGraw was a good enough writer to grasp the importance of the story, write it very well, enrich it with great character development, and describe the path he took to end up taking the riches that come by permitting the extraction of the natural gas that Mother Geology had randomly accumulated about a mile beneath the family farm in Pennsylvania.

The oil and gas industry is complex and the narrative device of explaining the definition and subsequent "rush" of development of a natural gas play through a cast of local players is very effective. McGraw does an admirable job of unraveling the factors - geologic, corporate, cultural, economic and personal - that slam into one another when a new oil or gas field is suddenly and rapturously deemed economic. What was once merely dense, deep and silent black shale beneath a quiet Pennsylvania town is transformed into the Mighty Marcellus Shale. This is a contemporary story. Readers of this book will gain insight into events that will continue to unfold for many years to come in this eastern state's drilling boom.

This is a good book. The writing is crisp, the characters are very well developed, and the topic is timely. McGraw reasonably considers many of the very important factors related to oil and gas development. By tracing the evolution of a disparate dozen or so individuals in the town, including his own tussle with the demon of development, as they all struggle with the decision to lease their land, he elucidates the consequences of oil and natural gas development - locally, nationally and globally - in ways that most people don't think about very much. It goes something like this: if we use it, the drillers will come for it, or we will have to get our energy from shady foreign countries, many of whom don't like us very much. If we don't use energy, new technologies might emerge. But not using energy would be too disruptive to our cushy lives.

And so all the members of the fossil fuel family, without thinking much about the rest of the equation, sign lease agreements and burn lights brightly at night.

Geologists, landowners, developers, drillers, regulators, family members, neighbors, Luddites, reluctant environmentalists...each get a page or two to share their perspective and, thus, to wisely illuminate the complexity that underlies this nation's energy use and abuse. Unlike other reviewers here, I was fascinated by the detail of delineation of a play and the history of development in the area. McGraw established a solid context for understanding the present-day development and some of the terrible, still localized, environmental consequences that ensued. I hope this book serves as a wake-up call for other individuals who are involved in this type of development to pay attention to the details and to not be afraid of speaking up. Bravo to McGraw for this achievement. The devil indeed is in the details.

My only beef with the book was its tone. There was a subtle yet persistent permeation of condescension. Most of it is slight, and probably defensible with some fatuous words about the granularity of character development, the necessity for veracity, but too much of it was superfluous. Sleight of hand tactics to demonize drillers by inserting invented nefarious thoughts into their brains detracted from what otherwise would have been a very stirring objective recitation of the facts.

Yet, still, very much worth the time to read. I recommend it.

Jim Layman says

This book is indeed a cautionary tale describing the challenges and confusion in the fracking gas industry as related to tapping the Marcellus Shale reserves deep underneath the rural towns and economically depressed counties of Northeast (particular to the author) Pennsylvania.

It’s a quick read describing the author’s family and rural neighbors caught up in the “get-rich-quick” turmoil of this 21st century energy/ conservation debate.

Chris says

Seamus McGraw's new book, *The End of Country*, is a sobering account of today's intoxicating bonanza in domestic natural gas production.

The story unfolds in the Appalachian hills and hollows of northeastern Pennsylvania. It's 2007. Advances in drilling have opened up vast reserves of gas buried in deep shale rock, known as the Marcellus formation. Landmen in shiny new gas-company pickups start turning up in small neglected communities. They knock on residents' doors and ingratiate themselves to lease drilling sites on their property. "Beautiful place you have here!"

Struggling farmers and retirees of modest means aren't prepared for their luck to change. They have what McGraw calls "permanent desperation," formed by decades of economic disappointment.

The author says he didn't know the difference between Marcellus Shale and Cassius Clay when he set out to write the book. But he was raised in the area where the story takes place and knows its social formations. As

drillers went about shattering shale more than a mile below ground, McGraw saw relationships fracture on the surface.

The community ties of shared hardship began to unravel at the first whiff of sudden wealth. The more energy companies offered, the more residents viewed each other with suspicion - wondering who was getting a better deal. Resentments grew.

The story is centered in the town of Dimock, population 1,500. There's a colorful cast of characters, but McGraw keeps them real.

The landowner who becomes a spokesman for residents' concerns over drilling-related water pollution and noise is no Sierra Club environmentalist. He's a hardscrabble logger and miner who stands to make millions from the drilling on his land.

Meanwhile, a gas company agent is ambivalent about his success in securing drilling leases from the locals. He's native to the area and knows the flood of money and industry will upend residents' values and change their way of life.

The saga is all the more real because McGraw's own mother has a lucrative gas company offer on the table. She wants her children to decide whether to open the family's 100-acre farm to drillers. McGraw battles with his sister over the question. He's an impoverished freelance writer with a family to feed. Yet he has qualms about unearned income and is uneasy about the drilling process -- an environmentally controversial method known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

The End of Country is a cautionary tale, not an attack on gas drilling. Readers unfamiliar with the current debate over fracking will find an informative and apolitical account. And those who've been following the controversy will appreciate McGraw's fresh angle on the story.

So much has been written on the environmental, political and economic implications of America's natural gas boom. McGraw is breaking new ground in examining how the stampede affects a community's sense of place and self.

Elaine Tama says

This book combines the personal stories of the author, his family, and a few of their neighbors, as they deal with the onslaught of the gas companies coming to the forgotten rural areas of northeastern Pennsylvania, with the facts about "fracking" for natural gas. I stumbled onto this book while reading a newspaper article about the increase in crime in areas of the Midwest where similar natural gas areas are being fracked. Since my family were among the earliest settlers of this beautiful, rural area of Pennsylvania, I feel personally connected to the massive changes taking place to the land and the people. Every summer, my husband and I drive through there to visit the old cemeteries and look at the areas where the family farms were. Until last summer, it had just remained the same or slightly more hardscrabble than the previous year. But last summer, we immediately saw the changes...huge water trucks and brand new pickup trucks rumbling over the little country roads, large platforms where wells were drilled, and young oil and gas men charging around the area in their pickups or larger trucks...obviously not from the area but imported from Texas or other areas of the country. This book gives the whole story that I wanted....how neighbors sometimes turned against each

other as they vied for the best leasing arrangements. Some people getting $25/acre and others $2,500/acre, then watching as the huge equipment roared in and changed their lives forever.

SwensonBooks says

The End of Country is like many other books that have surfaced in the last five or so years on the scarcity of true wilderness and the abuse of natural resources resulting from corporate greed. Seamus McGraw's story is frightening, even apocalyptic; after all, Nature's resources are finite. But it needs to be told and, for many residents in Upstate New York like me, its subject is increasingly relevant.

"Hydro-fracking" is the hot topic of the Northeast and, as McGraw so emphatically expresses in his first book, anger, fear and desperation make for an explosive climate (pun intended). Whether America likes it or not, hydraulic fracturing is here to stay. We are a nation desperate to eliminate foreign dependency on fuel and yet refuse to reduce our increasingly burdensome need for energy. New sources are imminent and natural gas is slated to provide.

Rather than preaching the benefits and perils of natural gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing, McGraw shows the reader its complexity. Glimpsing into McGraw's family history and delving into the lives of his neighbors, of landowners in Dimock, of historic oil barons and gas innovators, of geologists, and of academics, the reader pulls from the facts and figures a story about individuals who had the dumb luck to own property on top of a natural gas deposit. The Marcellus Shale brings with its wealth a lot of promises, all overshadowed by greed, reluctance, fear, and distrust. There are many players shaping Pennsylvania's land as well as the future of American energy. There's the geologist from Penn State that added fuel to the fire of corporate land leasing. The skeptical quarryman just trying to get by and enjoy the seclusion his wooded home offers – and that the gas companies take away. The teacher who moves to the country to build her dream house and agrees to lease her land, hoping to be on the crest of a movement towards cleaner, environmentally friendly fuel. The dozens, perhaps hundreds, of farmers on the brink of losing their land and to whom gas company money is a god-send, a payout that offers their family and future generations more time. Dozens more whose histories with the land (or lack thereof) shape their ultimate decision let the gas companies in and the drilling commenced. And yet all of them wish they did their homework and wonder if they made a mistake.

McGraw bemoans "the end of country" without passing judgment on those who, directly or indirectly, helped the drilling process along. He shows that most of the time people are struggling to make ends meet and to survive. And this survival story, the conflict between preserving the land and ensuring its conservation as gas companies drill and dig and hack away at it, is the book's most compelling and powerful narrative. The decision to allow natural gas drilling on one's land is not as simple as greed or environmental stewardship. There is no dichotomy, no black and white – except when a committee of landowners decides to go head-to-head with the drillers for overstepping their bounds and behaving negligently. The landscape is grey and, like the Pennsylvanian land in which the Marcellus Shale and its pockets of gas rest, there are multiple layers worth exploring. Unfortunately for McGraw and the other landowners with signed gas company leases, the ground is always shifting. Figuratively and literally.

Out of all this rich, colorful, albeit occasionally repetitive narrative, McGraw offers his reader's one caveat to sum up the experience: make your profit but protect the land. He argues for caution, oversight and control. Allow gas companies to push the land to its limit but don't let them destroy it as coal miners once did, damaging the land beyond repair. His wish, a soft whispering in the turn of the pages, is for fellow man to

rise above corporate greed and recall the workman's instincts that facilitated survival in a rougher, tougher, simpler time. Yes, this wish is buoyed by banal notions of America's early pioneers. However, it is also endearing and nostalgic. It's a wish fulfillment that in an age of $4-a-gallon fuel prices and prolonged foreign conflict is more genuine than trite. Take from the land but don't forget to give something back – like time, respite and fertility – suggests Ken Ely, one of many landowners for whom McGraw creates a heroic persona.

McGraw's project, from the very beginning, is educational. Smart decisions need to be made and the environment needs to be safeguarded. The impression is sad but realistic: make the most of a bad situation. Along the lines of that "old saw" in farm neighborhoods of his family's, McGraw counsels, "It's not how hard of a punch you can throw, it's how hard of a punch you can take."

McGraw wants Americans to take a gut-busting punch. And then get up, wheezing, to labor and toil once more so that there is something to pass on to the next generation. Wholeheartedly, I agree.

Laura says

In The End of Country, McGraw goes beyond the predictable cheering for the underdogs. He doesn't just malign the money-hungry natural gas corporations but looks with a critical eye at the costs of the choices made by all involved. This is a great read, full of humour and affection for all the varied personalities that stepped up in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania.

There was one particular part of the book that brought home to me the author's intent. McGraw, who had grown up in Susquehanna County, met up with Ken Ely, one of the ad hoc leaders in the community. "I remember you." Ely had said. "You owe me a hundred bucks for gas and bullets." McGraw recalled:

"I didn't remember that. As far as I knew, I had paid Ken every cent I ever owed him. But I wasn't going to dispute it. Ken Ely had a long memory. I didn't have a hundred dollars on me, but I promised I'd write him a check. 'Don't bother,' he told me. 'I don't need the money anymore. Wait till you get rich on the gas and then give it to someone who needs it.'"

McGraw doesn't even let himself off the hook. He, too, profited from the good and the bad though the writing of this book and owns up to it. He's a class act.

Mary says

McGraw is a very good writer. Although I always find it dubious and slightly disgusting when a writer gets acclaim for writing for Playboy magazine, which he does. He grew up in Dimock, PA which has since become the epi-center of the hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking, of the Marcellus Shale, to pull natural gas out of the ground. His mother still lives there and he and his sister will inherit her farm and her land. McGraw paints an excellent picture of the history of the place including people who have lived there for a long time and who were eking out a living or going under as farmers. He especially centers on a man named Ken Ely and a woman named Victoria Switzer, both neighbors of his mother. What I got out of this book besides the excellent portraits of people and of the fracking industry is a sense of the immensity, the

enormity, of the amount of natural gas below the Marcellus Shale. Enough to supply the natural gas needs of our country for something like 25 years. I'm already forgetting. Maybe it's 40 years. But at what cost? While McGraw is honest about the process that his family goes through in deciding whether to sign a contract or not, and while he paints a great picture of how difficult that decision is, he does not really take sides in this very controversial topic. Maybe that was written into his book contract. Maybe that is his philosophical way of getting more people to read his book.
He touches briefly but he does not really go into the amount of accidents that have happened, the amount of water ruined. The fact that no one in Dimmock can drink their water anymore. Once our water is polluted, how will we live? Water is life. He definitely does not go into how we as a country can develop alternative methods of energy.
The title of his book, The End of Country, doesn't mean the ruining of the landscape, as you might think. No, it means that the neighbors are divided from one another. Because some have gotten lots of money, some very little, some none. People that depended on each other for generations in a small rural community are now divided from each other. It reminds me of when I heard the organic farmer Percy Shmeizer of Canada speak about how Monsanto divides neighbors up in Saskatchawan because some are using GMO corn and some are not. They literally are spying on each other. Once again corporations are dividing us. Something is very disturbing and wrong with this picture. We need to make it be that corporations are not people.
And if we in New York state manage to keep fracking from polluting our very beautiful land including the Finger Lakes, it will only be because others have suffered in other places and we were able to glean lessons from those places.
We also as a country need to change our farming policies so that farmers who work around the clock milking cows, who work way harder than 98% of of the rest of us, are not getting a pittance for their milk and forced to make these terrible Faustian bargains to save their land.

Gerry Claes says

This is the story of the impact that the Marcellus Shale natural gas discovery had on the people of northern Pennsylvania from the perspective of the son of a widow that had their homestead on top of a major find. I thought that this book was going to be a slam on the companies that did the fracking however I found it to be pretty balanced. There certainly are some shysters who are taking advantage of these people however many of them have become quite wealthy and comfortable because of the find.

There is no doubt that when the drillers come onto a property they are very disruptive and do destroy the serenity of the area. The question is are they taking the necessary steps to protect the environment? I don't suppose we will know the answer to this question for decades. The amount of natural gas located in the Marcellus Shale is huge and can supply our energy for decades but it is limited and will eventually be depleted.

The message of this book is that while we do need this natural gas in the short term, in the long term we must find alternative forms of energy from fossil fuels. Hopefully we are smart enough to solve this problem.

The title of the book; "Then End of Country" comes from the changes that the Marcellus Shale has had on the community. In the past all the neighbors helped each other and worked together as a community. The money that the shale brought to some and not others changed the relationships forever. Neighbors became secretive, property lines that were loosely enforced suddenly became all important, jealously and envy

became the norm. The shale changed more than the landscape, it changed the people, probably for the worse.