A Man in Full
by Tom Wolfe
$29.95, FSG

Charlie Croker is a bull-headed mammoth of a man. A former Georgia Tech Yellowjacket football star, Croker holds an enviable position in life. He has achieved legendary status for his gridiron heroics. To boot, he runs his football field. Granted he is now sixty years old, the old farts still sing songs about him. “Charlie Croker was a man in full! He had a back like a Jerry Built!”

The mayor of Atlanta, Wes Jordan, a graduate of Morehouse college, is contacted by a college fraternity buddy, now corporate lawyer Roger White II (sired to become in college as Roger Too White). This is to discuss the claim that the newly claimed star running back for the Georgia Tech football team is privately accused (not in the court of law) of raping the daughter of a big-time white establishment businessman. What follows is a clever set of maneuvering to keep the case out of court and out of the public press. And when failing the latter, which is anticipated, Roger Too White, the counsel for the running back Farek Fanon, solicits the aid of one Charlie Croker, another white establishment businessman.

If the story were simply this, then it would be difficult to say that A Man in Full is all that different from Bonfire of the Vanities. It would be the same old story about America’s obsession with power, except this time through the pursuit of status and money. Sometimes the two are interchangeable but I believe it is fair to say this time around, Wolfe emphasizes the former. There are some who make the case that this novel exposes and in some, if not explicitly, secondarily explores racial relations in this country. No doubt racial politics is an important tool for Wolfe. But the principal characters in this novel, even those who profess race to be important to them, however sincere they may be, are still using racial politics as a means towards status and financial gain. It is clear that this is the primary thrust of Roger Too White’s development as a character.

Unlike Bonfire of the Vanities, which is strictly satire and therefore unreeling in its depiction of contemporary American society, A Man in Full does offer something a little deeper, reaches a little farther. Wolfe seems to betray something. Some might say, a spiritual yearning. The story of Conrad Hensley, he is imprisoned after being hauled from a Croker Global Foods Warehouse, is often times wrenching and inspiring. Certain passages involving Croker’s ex-wife, Martha, are beautiful and tender. And though the ending of the novel is meant, I believe, to serve as a warning to our apathetic and insincere attitude towards the spiritual growth of others, there is a Tom Wolfe here who is much more humane and caring than we have given him credit for. In a recent luncheon before the National Press Club, Wolfe was asked to name the ‘90s like he had named the ’80s. The ’80s, according to Wolfe, was a decade of “money fever.” The ’90s, he said, with only a slight hint of hesitation, is the decade of “moral fever.” A Man in Full is an attempt to show that even in all its empty rhetoric. And though he has written a classic darkly comic novel, Tom Wolfe is not laughing.

If you’re a lesbian but not yet a DTWOF reader, I urge you to dip into these ill-fated ills that currently plague the computer software and other industries. This deal would make independent bookstores virtually dependent upon their largest competitor for their books. It’s as if Burger King and Wendy’s had to buy their french fries from McDonald’s.

The acquisition will be reviewed in Washington. Representatives can be asked that the Fair Trade Commission and the Anti-Trust Division of the Justice Department thoroughly investigate the implications of the B&N/Ingram deal. Petitions to block the acquisition and sample letters to representatives are available at Common Language Bookstore.
"The success of Alison Bechdel's 'Dykes To Watch Out For' is impressive for any comic strip and unheard of for one with a lesbian theme". - - Boston Globe.