

# Edward Rutherford gives NYC the treatment in 'New York: The Novel'

By BOB SALSBERG  
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New York City wasn't born a grand metropolis and world financial center.

In 1664, the year in which Edward Rutherford begins his latest sweeping historical novel, "New York: The Novel" (Doubleday, \$30), New York is New Amsterdam, a modest Dutch trading post of about 1,500 residents on an island the Native Americans called Manna Hata.

It starts with Dirk van Dyck, a fur trader, returning to the settlement on the great North River, which some preferred to call Hudson's River, in honor of the great explorer, Henry Hudson. Also in the canoe is Pale Feather, a half-Indian girl of about 10, conceived during one of Van Dyck's frequent trips up the river to trade with the Algonquins.

Van Dyck loves the girl but is regretting his decision to bring her on this visit to New Amsterdam. How could he possibly explain his illegitimate daughter to his wife, the attractive and self-assured Margaretha de Groot? He cannot, so he passes her off as a young Indian servant, nothing more.

When Van Dyck returns the girl to her home, she surprises him with the gift of a Wampum belt. It will become a family heirloom, passed from generation to generation, a link between the city's future and its past.

Van Dyck also has a gift for his daughter, a silver dollar purchased from an ambitious and scheming Englishman named Tom Master, banished by his Puritan family in Boston for being far too ungodly. No matter to the young man, who knows of England's designs on New Amsterdam -- the king's intention to seize the settlement in the name of his brother, the Duke of York.

Master will go to New Amsterdam -- soon to be New York -- to make his fortune.

Readers of Rutherford's other works, notably "London," "Sarum" and "Russka," know the formula from there. In the tradition of James Michener, Rutherford unfurls more than three centuries of the city's history as seen through the eyes of the descendants of Van Dyck and Master -- and the many other colorful characters he introduces along the way.

From slave traders to commodity traders, there are those who come to New York in search of wealth. And from the Irish, Italians and Jews, there are the waves of immigrants who come in search of a better life.

Fictional characters mingle with real ones and experience the city's greatest triumphs and greatest tragedies, the 2001 World Trade Center attacks among the latter.

"New York: The Novel" is the first foray into America for the British author, who as in previous works never hesitates to pause the narrative to explain to readers, in an easily understood way, the historical context of the time in which the action is unfolding.

The result is a book as accessible to the casual reader as it is to the history buff.