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The Notorious Izzy Fink (review)

Elizabeth Bush

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Elizabeth Bush

Brown, Don *The Notorious Izzy Fink*. Brodie/Roaring Brook, 2006
[160p] ISBN 1-59643-139-3\$16.95 Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 6-8

Red-haired Sam Glodsky, son of a Jewish father and Irish mother, has one foot in each of two worlds in 1899 New York, with various street gangs either accepting or **[End Page 116]** targeting him, depending on how they choose to identify his cultural roots on any given day. Izzy Fink, though, is his sworn enemy, a streetwise scrapper who never passes up an opportunity to raise his fists to Sam. When a shipload of cholera-stricken immigrants is quarantined in the harbor, gangster Monk Eastman enlists the aid of both boys to heist a prize racing pigeon from the vessel and insists they work the job together. When the pigeon is successfully delivered, Izzy takes the credit; when the pigeon turns up with a broken wing, Izzy's life isn't worth a wooden nickel and he begs Sam's help in spiriting him away from the vengeful Eastman. Much of the early story reads like little more than a set-up to the extended chase scenes on tenement rooftops and in underground dives, and Brown doesn't make much of the inherent tension of a looming cholera epidemic. Ambient details of the gritty immigrant ghettos and children's desperation and resourcefulness in scraping up a few penny's worth of work each day are involving, though, as are the salty language and the mingling of such real life characters as Eastman, muckraker Jacob Riis, pathologist Hermann Biggs, and corrupt Police Chief Devery in the fictional mayhem. A closing note supplies needed background, biography, and observations on the problem of accurately capturing street kids' colloquialisms.

information that suggests the heroes of the past were not so heroic, information that Martin is determined to bring to light in the present. This is an interesting and complex concept, but its parts never really come together: Martin's home dramas are foggily depicted, with little emotional impact, and the shift of focus to Jimmy's story squanders the energy the school story needs for its conclusion without bringing in any suspense of its own. The London plot heedlessly and implausibly throws together West End and East End developments, and Jimmy is more an expository device for history and geography than a believable East End kid. Martin's travels and growing closeness with his alcoholic father offer some genuine human development, but it's largely overshadowed by the dull overarching plots. Readers will be better off with the author's classic *Tangerine* (BCCB 3/97). DS

BOGAERT, HARMEN MEYNDERTSZ VAN DEN *Journey into Mohawk Country*; illus. by George O'Connor and Hilary Sycamore. First Second/Roaring Brook, 2006 144p
Paper ed. ISBN 1-59643-106-7 \$17.95 R Gr. 5-12

In 1634, an employee of the Dutch West India Company volunteered to find out the reason beaver-pelt trade at Fort Orange (present-day Albany) was taking a nosedive. Bogaert and two companions, Willem and Jeromas, took a six-week journey to meet with their former Indian suppliers and learn the truth behind rumors of a new trading alliance that seemed to be undercutting business. O'Connor takes Bogaert's terse record of the journey and creates not only a literal pictorial rendering of their adventures in graphic-novel format but fleshes it out with credible, if speculative, subplots that play out only in the full-color sequential art. Graphic-novel format is, admittedly, an unusual choice for reproducing a colonial document, but O'Connor brings it off with panache. Working within the comic-book idiom, star-of-his-own-story Bogaert is the bright-eyed, *Doonesbury*-esque sharp guy, his sidekicks are tall-and-lean and short-and-round, and most of the workaday Indians encountered are heavy-browed and solemn, except when they're nickering or forehead-slapping over the white guys' ineptitude on the trail. Arenias, the Sinneken leader who ultimately saves their financial bacon and guides them back to Fort Orange, gets the role of superhero with his pumped-up muscles, brilliant-toothed smile, unshakable benevolence, and possession of the beautiful, loving wife whom Bogaert has been lusting after. O'Connor's particular skill lies in taking a snippet of the translated historical journal (e.g., "We came at one hour into the evening to a cabin one half mile from the first castle. No one was there but women") and, while remaining true to the known course of events, launching a visual backstory (e.g., in which Willem gets himself a girlfriend) rife with humor or tension. The 1634 encounter captures a moment in early Indian/white contact when, although disease had insinuated itself into native communities, the two races still met as equals at the pelt bargaining table, confused and skeptical of each other's customs, but knowing a good deal when they saw one. Notes on geography and sources are included, as is a glossary of terms. EB

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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



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Blurring the lines: reinforcing rape myths in comic books, it is interesting to note that the bamboo Panda bear creates a collective conformism.

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