



## Canaan Tours of Jewish History: In the Beginning...

**Ian D. Bier, James Duprie; Ian D. Bier, illus.**

Purple Monkey Books, 2007. 199 pp. \$14.95

ISBN: 978-0-9802071-0-1

“...the first in a series focusing on Maya and Josh’s Canaan Dogs, Sephira and Shem, and the kabbalistic journey on which the dogs take their “owners.” This first journey introduces Shem and Sephira as knowledgeable talking dogs that are able to travel through “anywhen.” When Maya does not take her homework assignment for Hebrew school seriously the dogs find it imperative to show both her and her younger brother Josh the significance of creation. In order to travel to that time, they must first ask permission of the council. Embedded throughout the text are references to kabbalistic, historical, and Torah-based terms. These terms are explained in text boxes as well as a short glossary at the end of the book. The concepts range from Rosh Hodesh to a kabbalistic interpretation of *paragode*. The story and characters are geared to young students still in Hebrew school but the ideas presented are often quite complicated and difficult.

The inclusion of the dogs allows for the thinly plotted story to be more personal and light so that the book may be understood on a basic time travel level as well as the more esoteric kabbalistic plane. For ages 9–12.”

Jewish Book World

Spring 5769/2009



## The Brothers Schlemiel

**Mark Binder; Zevi Blum, illus.**

Jewish Publication Society, 2008. 245 pp. \$19.95

ISBN: 978-0-8276-0865-8

In *The Brothers Schlemiel*, Mark Binder tries to capture the community of Chelm in all its innocence, foolishness, and humor. “In this work of fiction, history lives in the footnotes,” he declares in his author’s note. When history gets in the way of the story, it is easily modified. So it’s clear from the start that there is nothing factual about this book, which traces the lives of the Schlemiel family and the community that surrounds them. Divided into forty-five chapters that were originally serialized in various Jewish newspapers in North America, the book’s individual chapters work well on their own, making this a good bedtime read for adults and young readers. But it’s the adults who will really get the humor written between the lines. “Only in Chelm could a father get so lost going to fetch the midwife that he misses the birth of his first child,” Binder writes, poking consistent fun at the antics and idiocy of those who call Chelm home. It seems that everyone in the town is in slow mode, so the mix-ups are many and the potential for laughter abundant. Zevi Blum adds colorful caricatures to the pages that help make this lengthy book a light-hearted, whimsical read. LF



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