

The Chelm Comicbukh—A Bestseller

By Philip *Fishl* Kutner

The publisher of the New York Tsayt called in his redactor and noted that there should be a feature story about the success of The Chelm Comicbukh. After all, the Yiddish version was #1 on the Tsayt's Fiction Bestseller's List, #2 in the English version and #3 in the Mandarin version. This had never happened in all the time that the list had been published.

The redactor agreed and it was decided to send their dynamic young cub reporter, Yingele, to cover the story. They figured it would take a month for Yingele to travel, get established, make the proper contacts, do the interviews and send back the installments to be featured in the special zuntik zhurnal opteylung.

Yingele Travels to Chelm

Word soon reaches Chelm un ale meydelekh fun 14 biz 19, un ale alte moyds 20+ began to primp, for Yingele's picture was published in the Chelm Freiheit and the news announcer on WNAR told how handsome Yingele was—and that he was single.

This was Yingele's first major assignment. He decided that to be successful his mind had to be 100% on the task and not to be detracted by any female overtures—mainly mames.

Yingele's flight to Warsaw on Lot, the Polish Airline, his train trip to Chelm took him through Lublin and his arrival went without a problem. It was especially planned that he would arrive at night—quietly and go directly to the Kamena Hotel.

Yingele Meets Gimpel, Der Groyser Knaker

Early the next morning Yingele walks down ??????, the main street of Chelm and enters Shternbucks. He walks to the back to a small table where Gimpel is waiting. The owner had been untergeshmirt to put a sign outside that read The Chelm Shternbucks will be closed a month for renovations.

Yingele was surprised, for he saw a young boy who had just recently begun to grow facial hair. How was it possible that Gimpel could be the famous cartoonist of the Bestselling The Chelm Comicbukh?

Gimpel explained that he was kicked out of every cheder in Chelm and even in Lublin where his

parents had sent him. He would not study and only wanted to draw funny pictures of the melamed. This annoyed the melamed and even being it with a kontshik didn't help.

Luckily, one day an alter Lublin lerer saw Gimpel's caricatures and was instantly impressed. He sent a letter home to Gimpel's parents and suggested that Gimpel's talents would be wasted at any Yeshiva and to immediately enroll him in the Warsaw National Art Resource (WNAR).

Suddenly Gimpel's fame began to spread and he published his first Comicbukh. It was only a small book of caricatures. One day Gimpel saw a comic book, in English, at a newsstand. He immediately got the idea to create Yiddish stories from his drawings. The rest is history.

Gimpel Characters (GCs)

Gimpel admired Chaim Schmaltz and his GCs. So he called them Pishke Shvarts, Fistashke, Shnapsi, Serkele, Ketsese, and Hintele.

Their adventures in Chelm were the source of Gimpel's cartoons. Don't be surprised when you find Pishke Shvarts sending e-mail messages to his pet kesele and she meows him back.

Another series of episodes in modern-day Chelm takes place in the string of cafes, kave hayzer, bikher kromen and boutiques surrounding the old town square.

How to Get Your Very Own Copy

The Chelm Comicbukh can be purchased at your local bookstore. If they don't have a copy, ask them to order it. The book has 256 pages of cartoons and a comprehensive Yiddish-English-Mandarin Glossary in the front. The cost is only 12 Tsarist rubles and includes shipping and handling.

If you have trouble purchasing your own personal copy, and would like to receive a Fishl's autographed copy, please send Fishl 14 Tsarist rubles and a self-addressed, stamped, brown envelope. The envelope must be 9"x12", for the book is 8.5"x11".

For librarians, the ISBN has not been assigned; however, it does have a CSBN (Chelm Serial Book Number) which is chelm1-0000-1. This will assist the person at the bookstore.* Because of its difficulty in ordering, YIVO, NYBC and the WC do not stock it.