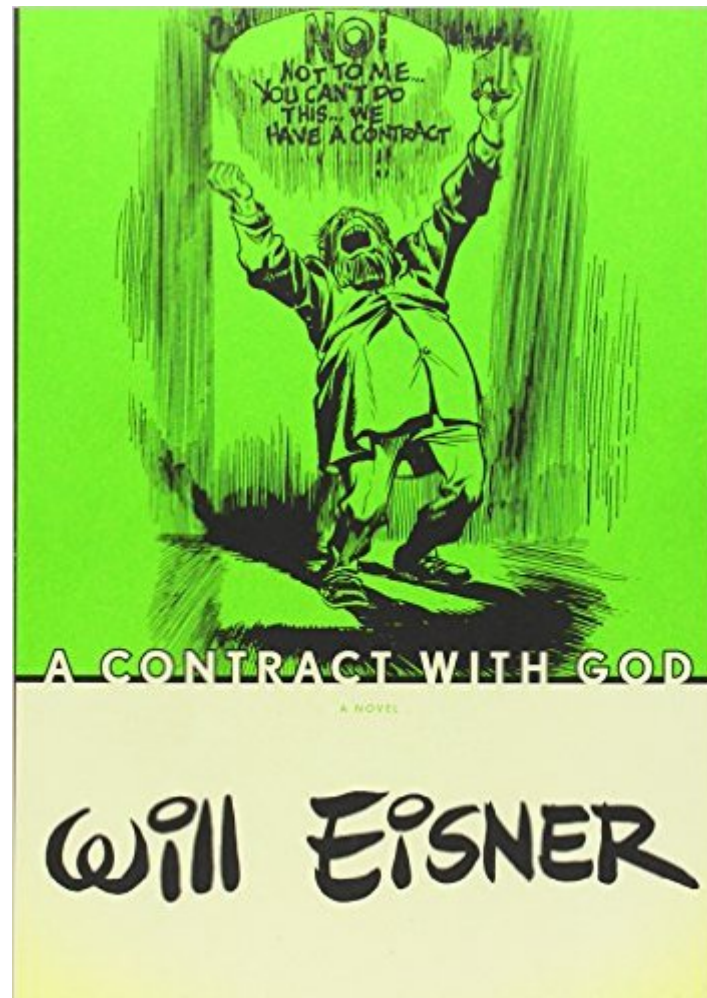


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# A Contract With God



## Synopsis

The first graphic novel—a mesmerizing fictional chronicle of a universal American experience. Through a quartet of four interwoven stories, *A Contract With God* express the joy, exuberance, tragedy, and drama of life on the mythical Dropsie Avenue in the Bronx. This is the legendary book that launched a new art form and reaffirmed Will Eisner as one of the great pioneers of American graphics.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is an accepted fact in the comic book world that Will Eisner is one of the giants. He has pushed the envelope, single-handedly transforming the medium from one only capable of churning out simplistic kid's fantasies into an accepted vehicle for Art (with a capital "A!"). The comic book industries highest award, The Eisner, is named after him. All possible accolades are piled upon Will Eisner. Strange, then, that so few comics fans (myself included) have actually read his comics. I decided to change that by buying this book. "A Contract with God" is a deliberate attempt, the first actually, of using the combination of words and pictures to relate a story of the human condition on par with any works of great literature. It is the first ever "Graphic Novel," printed solely in book form and not merely a collection of serialized stories. Eisner had lofty goals for this slim volume.

Semi-autobiographical, he told stories of the Jewish slums of New York around the time of the Great Depression. Being neither Jewish, nor from the East Coast, nor alive during the Great Depression, I was not sure how well I would relate to the book. Well, because he is one of the giants, Eisner uses words and pictures to bridge the gap between his experience and mine, finding common ground

and understanding. "A Contract with God" is entertaining, addictive and enlightening. I can honestly say that I am better for having read it. Go ahead, give it a try.

Most of us think of Will Eisner as the creator of a terrific comic of the 1940s called *The Spirit* -- which he is. But we forget that in this book, first published in 1978, he also practically invented the modern "graphic novel." No superheroes here, just ordinary Jewish immigrant families in a tenement building in the Bronx. There actually are four stories here. "A Contract with God" is the story of Frimme Hersh, who made a deal with the Almighty when he was a boy in Poland, that he would do his best in life and God should look out for him in return. He comes to America, becomes quietly successful, is respected by his neighbors and his synagogue, and things are going okay. Then his adored adopted daughter dies suddenly. God has broken the contract, and Frimme is no longer bound by it, either. It's a very satisfying, Sholom Aleichem sort of story. "The Street Singer" tells of an out-of-work bookkeeper during the Depression who finds he can earn a few thrown pennies singing in the allies of tenement buildings. An ex-diva decides to promote him (for her own purposes), but the money she gives him goes for booze instead. This one is interesting -- there really were street singers in New York -- but I found it much less readable. "The Super," about an authoritarian German building superintendent, is a cautionary tale, sort of, about not messing with Lolitas when they come a-calling, and it's rather a lightweight piece. "Cookalein," however, is a superior work, about the escape of young city-dwellers to the Adirondacks in the summer, searching for social and financial advancement through marriage. There's some delicious irony here. Eisner is generally a very good storyteller of this milieu, and he does it all in black-and-white pen work. He's a master of characterization through facial expression and other detail, and there's a reason this volume has been reprinted so many times in the past quarter century.

Will Eisner is, unquestionably, the best comics artist in the world. This book is historically significant because it is called "the first graphic novel." Four stories, each with their own pacing, visual style, and themes. This would make a great gift for anyone who likes comics or Jewish stories. There is, however, nudity and sex (which is treated with the utmost realism -- this isn't pornography!), so beware of that. This and all other Eisner is highly, highly recommended. // koby c.

Magnificent simplicity yet concentrated in humanistic mechanics. Will Eisner's creation delivers the 1930s in a single drop - the culture, the depression, human relations, the dynamism of emotions. The stories of Fremme Hersch, the Jew who had a contract with God, the saga of the street singer's

ill fortune, the tale of emotions as chance intertwines people - all tied by the common element of tenement dwellers gives a glimpse of life in 1930s almost in its exactitude. As the first of its genre, you will be proud to own it and after reading it, you will be saddened to learn that not much has changed for relationships and delighted that not all needs to die.

A Contract with God tells the stories of people living in a tenement in 1930's New York. The format is similar to comic book, but more like illustrated text, because there is about one frame per page. Maybe this is because the stories are more serious than the comic genre usually deals with, and altering it here is a way to get this to a different audience than the usual comic book crowd. The stories: The Super tells about the super in a building and shows different kinds of monsters in society. A story about a street singer - in the 30's out of work people might go from block to block and sing in the streets in the hopes of money being tossed out the windows to them. A story following people's vacations. Single people pretend to be rich on vacation in the hopes of snagging a rich spouse. I particularly liked this one (and it ends happily). The stories here are not for kids since there is a lot of sex and desperation. However these are well done comic book stories, and would be good for someone who is into or new to the genre.

I did research A Contract With God before I read it and understand its iconic place in the genre. I didn't like the drawings at all, although I could tell there was a lot of detail in them. And I didn't find the stories all that good either. Perhaps they were dated, but the entire experience of reading my first graphic novel disappointed me. It just didn't meet my expectations.

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