



A Contract With God

Will Eisner

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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.

A Contract With God Details

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Author : Will Eisner

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Preethi says

I didn't know I was picking up the master of graphic novels when I picked up this one. Such beautiful artwork, with details to show what the protagonist feels in every panel, gripping narration making you feel for the characters and interwoven plots on the same panel - this book is different from every other graphic novel I've read. And now I know why Eisner has awards named after him.

The preface sets the tone for the book, and you know the stories are real, the people are too.

And that makes it hard to just read this book and forget, coz now these people are in your mind and you cannot forget them when you are similar protagonists around you. Who knows what tragedies the rich, grumpy man has seen? Who knows how lonely and sad that supervisor is? And who can imagine the misery a few people go through to find love!

These are not just stories, but slices of someone's lives and hence needed to be dealt with care, all of it done with ease by Eisner.

Oriana says

book #10 for Jugs & Capes! And essay #3 for CCLaP! In fact, someone from Will Eisner Studios actually contacted me to say they enjoyed the review. Neat!

Ah, Will Eisner. Undoubtedly the father of the modern graphic novel, his influence has been huge and sweeping. I mean, that's what they tell me; I'm sure that 90 percent of the people reading this review know a hell of a lot more about Will Eisner than I do. But I *do* know that 1978's *A Contract With God* is an incredibly important work in a way that many pieces of art struggle with—it has remained fresh and relevant for all these decades, and even I, as chick and a lit buff and a graphic novel neophyte, could relate to it, and be made devastated and furious by it, and appreciate it wholly.

A few months ago, my book club read Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. I didn't like it, hardly at all. The book just didn't jive at all with the image I'd been handed about its game-changing-ness. I mean, it's supposed to be this pinnacle and groundbreaker of its form, and I kind of understand how that might have been true when it was first published. But now? In 2010, for me to come to *Dark Knight* with no knowledge of comic-book history and tropes, living in a CGI world, an indie-fabulous world, a YouTube world, a world where everything Miller ever did has been exponentially permuted and shifted and reconsidered from every possible angle...well, his efforts just weren't that impressive.

But in the case of *A Contract With God*, I felt just the opposite. Despite—because of?—how uncomfortable and upset this book made me, it was an absolutely riveting read. It didn't feel remotely out of date. It didn't even feel *old*. I mean, the stories take place in the twenties and thirties, of course, but it felt like could have been *written* last year. There was nothing stilted in the language, nothing clunky in the design, nothing old-fashioned in the pictures. Maybe this is because Eisner really did set the standard, and everyone in the last forty years has just been working off of his template? If so: *man*. A genius, indeed.

I'm going to go ahead and admit that I was not intending to be very moved by this book. I guess I was kind

of expecting saccharine, Disney-type feel-good stories, or superhero-inspired tales of beautiful people doing wonderful things. Surely everyone in the world knows how totally wrong I was. There's a shocking amount of meanness and ugliness in these stories—cruelty and misanthropy and anti-Semitism and adultery and spousal abuse and rape—and very little of it is remotely punished, which I found totally unnerving. So even though I was expecting to be disappointed by this being a sappy morality tale, I have to admit that a part of me really *does* want to see the good guys rewarded and the bad guys get what's comin' to 'em.

Let me give an example. In a subplot in the story "Cookalein," we have a little case of mistaken identity. Benny and Goldie, who have both gone to a summer resort explicitly to bag a wealthy mate, each think the other is loaded. After courting for a few days, they steal away into the woods in the middle of the night to cement their union, but then—surprise!—they find out they're both poor. After she cries, "Benny, if you love me, nothing else matters!," he drops his pants and growls, "It's a whole new ballgame now, baby," then lunges at her, ripping her clothes and taking her by force. So how does the story end? Goldie winds up with a doctor (whom she had previously scorned because she thought he was poor), and Benny seduces an heiress. Neither is punished. Everybody wins.

And that wasn't even the most upsetting example! But I don't want to get bogged down in summary; the real point is that these stories are extremely lifelike, and real life doesn't come with just desserts, or punishments that fit crimes. Real life is messy, and cruel, and mean, and ugly. And, for me, even worse than when things are ugly is when they're just totally unfair. While it would have annoyed me if these were bland stories about good people being happy and bad people shaking their fists, I was far more upset by the moral ambiguity, the idea that—even in fiction, even in art, where the creator has the power of choice—some people are just awful, and sometimes they get ahead anyway. Eisner has left everything unvarnished, unglossed, and unmended. I get that, and I have great respect for his evocative realism. But I'd be lying if I said I *liked* it.

Artemy says

Will Eisner's legendary graphic novel (one of the first of its kind) is a semi-autobiographical collection of four sad, sometimes downright bleak and depressing stories centered around the residents of one tenement in the Bronx in or around 1930's. Eisner's storytelling is masterful, the characters are full of life and the stories still resonate despite being decades old at this point. It's not a very pleasant read since most of these stories are about human suffering and misery, but there's no artificial melodrama — the stories feel authentic, and the emotions are very real. *A Contract with God* is a great book, and every comics reader should read it at some point.

Helen says

This is a grim graphic novel consisting of four intertwined stories of characters and lives in a 1930s Bronx tenement - basically autobiographical, by the great comic book artist and graphic novel genre creator Will Eisner.

The introductory essay by S. McCloud was well-written and placed the work in context, as well as conveying information about the life and career of Eisner. The lead off story ("A Contract with God") reflects the author's anguish at having lost his only daughter at age 16 eight years before he wrote and drew the book. The bitterness of this experience - transmuted into the fantasy story of Frimml - informs the 3 subsequent

tenement tales in the book. There are few likable characters, and most characters' flaws and contradictions are painfully exposed - usually leading to some comeuppance or hubris denouement. The effect of the overall sad book is in the end grim.

The book is wonderfully drawn - obviously, Mr. Eisner was a master of capturing scenes economically, using a fantastic pen & ink style, often with strong black shadows inked in to render additional foreboding or danger. The dialog & narration are well-written - yet there is little variation in the world depicted, you can almost predict what the almost 100% venal, greedy, status-hungry, scheming people will say and how they will act. The book overflows with emotion-driven action and debacle after debacle - as hopes are shattered, there are even scenes of violence and rape. Since I usually do not like violence, or to be shown violence in an in-your-face manner in a graphic novel, this aspect of the book was somewhat disturbing. Several women are beaten in the book. One is beaten by her husband and then engages in "make-up" sex with him, in front of a 15 year old boy that she has just slept with. Women seek out rich men, or resign themselves to marrying men that are not so rich to escape exploitation by relatives (being turned into virtual slaves helping in the relatives' household). They are then seemingly resigned to a lifetime of further drudgery, as they stay at home to take care of kids, the household, and endless chores, while having to make ends meet on the few dollars the husband brings home. This is really a grim, merciless, totally un-romantic look at the reality of family life for low income struggling immigrants in the Bronx in the first half of the 20th Century.

The overall effect is one of teeming, sick, humanity, probably as a result of not earning enough to escape tenement life, and having to live on top of each other in railroad apartments, with very few amenities such as adequate heat, no air conditioning, no laundry room, etc.

I'm sure I'd read the story "Super" in another collection by Eisner previously since it seemed very familiar. It's a creepy story about a nasty super who is driven to suicide by a thieving minor - both the victim and the schemer are disasters as people. Most of the characters in these stories have few redeeming qualities. Some appear to be caricatures of evil qualities, such as the gold-digging girls attracted to any man who seems to have money, the man of modest means who tries to pass himself off as a rich man to attract a rich girl. One of the only endearing characters is in the last story - the medical student who "rescues" a fellow Grossman's (~Grossinger's) guest after she has been raped by another guest, by promising to marry her and keep the rape a secret. The bucolic "wholesomeness" of the summer in the mountains contrasts sharply with the seedy, phony, or for some hopeless social scene.

I suppose by the time Eisner wrote and drew this book, which mocks so many "types" mercilessly, he probably did want to get a lifetime of revulsion at much of humanity off his chest. It reminds me a bit of Goya's grotesque prints on war - a reaction to the horrors of war, dynastic succession struggles and in the French (Napoleonic) invasion of Spain. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dis... The bitterness at least in Eisner's book is similar albeit Goya's works are much darker and violent, and the exaggeration, caricature quality of drawings mocking venal types, and greedy types, also reminds me of Daumier's prints <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honor%C....> It is sometimes important to show people the horrors of humanity - writ large. That in turn reminds me of the great artist's treatment of Weimar era mindless pleasure seeking industrialists and other hypocritical types, George Grosz. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_...

"A Contract with God" moves quickly - can be read in a couple of hours. It conveys the author's impression of life in a Bronx tenement, essentially, what he escaped in making a success of himself as a professional graphic artist and writer. When he wrote "A Contract with God" he must have felt he had nothing to lose in skewering the social scene of his youth - perhaps this was his payback for the misery of his childhood. He was about 60 years old when he wrote it - and probably felt professionally confident enough to write a totally grim book about his recollections of life in the Bronx in the 1930s. There couldn't possibly be any negative

repercussions by the time he wrote the book, since the main characters were probably all dead by the time he wrote it, and the world he depicted had at any rate mostly vanished, as demographic change and the march of technology inevitably lead to the disintegration of the village-like Bronx tenement scene. Eisner probably felt free to criticize that world as much as he liked, even though it was the world he grew up in (or perhaps he grew up in it despite it). He had nothing to lose by the time he wrote it - and then went on to astound the world of publishing, by writing & drawing 20 more graphic novels by the time he died in 2005, contradicting the commonplace that creativity dries up the older one gets. For Eisner, he never stopped being creative, and in fact, made some of his greatest creative contributions after standard retirement age. Eisner certainly had the secret of youth in a way - his work remained fresh and new, even as he aged.

"A Contract with God" is obviously a landmark graphic novel - the first graphic novel ever written/drawn. To be honest, I didn't much enjoy this book since the depictions of women were almost 100% negative - even the long-suffering wife in the story called "Cookalein" is eventually seen to have been abandoned by her philandering husband in the last scene, as her melancholy son gazes grimly down from the fire escape into the building's courtyard. The entire book is grim - except for some few flashes of joy, although even they end or are destroyed or cheapened in the course of the book. Grimness, death, tackiness, degradation, depravity, all these facets of humanity are packed into "A Contract with God." The book is the opposite of an escapist story - the grimness and all too human quality of the book, leaves the reader with a bitter aftertaste, although as noted, both the dialog/narration and the drawings are superb. This is an anti-Valentine to mankind, perhaps Eisner's commentary about man written by the time he had nothing more to fear or lose.

Christopher says

When I read really old comics, I'm usually unenthused. Before reading Hergé's Tintin, I heard all about its groundbreaking and influential place in the history of graphic books. But reading Tintin is an altogether disappointing experience. The art is dull and simplistic, the stories are poorly written, and the whole experience is uninspiring. I'm sure that someone smarter than me can explain its merits, but they are not self-evident.

A Contract with God, however, is the exact opposite. It does not feel like the first graphic novel ever produced. It feels fresh and utterly creative. The art is wonderful, the story is intriguing, the writing and pacing is masterful. It's so well done that I'm hard-pressed to find any way in which the genre has progressed since this volume.

George K. says

Βαθμολογία: 9/10

Υποθ?τω ?τι δεν θα ε?μαι ο?τε ο πρ?τος ο?τε ο τελευτα?ος που γν?ριζε τον Will Eisner μ?νο απ? τα σχετικ? βραβε?α που δ?νονται κ?θε χρ?νο. Δεν ε?χα διαβ?σει τ?ποτα δικ? του μ?χρι τ?ρα. Να, ?μως, που πριν λ?γες μ?ρες αγ?ρασά την ?κδοση της Απ?πειρας στην τρομερ? προσφορ? που μπορε? να βρει κανε?ς σε Πρωτοπορ?α/πολιτε?α, και σ?μερα την δι?βασα και την απ?λαυσα μ?σα σε δυο ωρ?τσες. Εξαιρετικ?τατο κ?μικ, απ? πολλ?ς απ?ψεις.

Πρ'τα-πρ'τα, το σχ'διο! Ασπρ'μαυρο, ρεαλιστικ', σε σημε'α 'ντονο και ωμ', μας μεταφ'ρει στην δ'σκολη δεκαετ'α του '30 στις Ηνωμ'νες Πολιτε'ες, στις λα'κ'ς συνοικ'ες της Ν'ας Υ'ρκης (συγκεκριμ'να σε μια πολυκατοικ'α, που υποθ'τω 'τι θα 'ταν παρ'μοια με αυτ' στην οπο'α μεγ'λωσε ο 'διος ο σχεδιαστ'ς). Απ' την αποτ'πωση των προσ'πων και των κιν'σεων των χαρακτ'ρων, μ'χρι τα κτ'ρια και τα δι'φορα σκηνικ', το σχ'διο ε'ναι 'παιχτο. Απ' κει και π'ρα, 'χουμε τις ιστορ'ες. Και οι τ'σσερις ε'ναι εξαιρετικ' ενδιαφ'ρουσες, 'ντονες και ρεαλιστικ'ς, αποτυπ'νουν την αν'χεια, την φτ'χεια και την ελπ'δα για μια καλ'τερη ζω', σ'μα κατατεθ'ν της δεκαετ'ας του '30 στις Ηνωμ'νες Πολιτε'ες για εκατομμ'ρια ανθρ'πους.

Γενικ' μου αρ'σει να διαβ'ζω διηγ'ματα ' μυθιστορ'ματα που να περι'χουν δραματικ' στοιχε'α και κοινωνικ' μην'ματα, και που να αναδεικν'ουν με τον 'ναν ' τον 'λλο τρ'πο την εκ'στοτε δεκαετ'α, και οι τ'σσερις αυτ'ς ιστορ'ες κατ'φεραν σε τερ'στιο βαθμ' να μου παρουσι'σουν τον λαουτ'ζ'κο, τις φτωχογειτονι'ς, τις καθημεριν'ς δυσκολ'ες και τα 'νειρα απλ'ν ανθρ'πων. Ο Γου'λ 'ισερ τα 'ζησε 'λα αυτ', ' 'ξερε 'τομα που τα 'ζησαν, ' τ'λος π'ντων 'ταν πρ'γματα που θα μπορο'σε να τα ζ'σει κ'ποιος, γ'αυτ' και η ρεαλιστικ'τητα των ιστορι'ν.

'σον αφορ' την ελλ'νικ' 'κδοση, 'ψογη, με καλ' μετ'φραση, προσεγμ'νο lettering, και 'λα τα κε'μενα που θα μπορο'σε να ζητ'σει κανε'ς για το συγκεκριμ'νο κ'μικ (εισαγωγ'ς, πρ'λογοι κ.λ.π.). Δε το συζητ'ω, στα λεφτ' που μπορε' να το βρει κανε'ς πλ'ον, ε'ναι ανεπ'τρεπτο να μην το 'χετε 'δη αγορ'σει. Αν το 'χετε αγορασμ'νο αλλ' αδι'βαστο ακ'μα, μην αργ'σετε και πολ', τσιμπ'στε το απ' την βιβλιοθ'κη σας και αρχ'στε το δι'βασμα.

Josh says

Considered to be the first graphic novel, this tells the story - in 4 parts - of New York circa the Great Depression. The characters are caricatures of lives from Eisner's past, and while it is a primarily Jewish neighborhood, I think anyone with a brain and heart pumping blood, etc can identify with the scenes painted here. It tackles those subjects that stuff like "The Wire" still tries (and fails) to capture today - those sinews that bind each life together, and ultimately keep them bound if not to each other, then certainly rooted to the Spot, which in this case, is a Bronx ghetto, and more specifically, a tenement building at #55 Dropsie Avenue. Part 1 of Eisner's "Contract With God Trilogy," with part 2 being "A Life Force," and part 3 being "Dropsie Avenue."

While somewhat dated scripturally (1st published in 1979 by a guy who'd been writing comics for a times much less sophisticated audiences for the 40 years prior), it's really Eisner's pencils that kept me glued to this, especially in the title chapter. No matter how you slice it, this is a good, quick read, where every character exists in that gray area between good and evil called modern urban living. I'm curious to see where this goes. And I hope David Lapham at least bought Eisner a beer.

João Carlos says

A 26 de Fevereiro de 2015 teve início a publicação do primeiro volume da nova Coleção de Banda Desenhada "Novela Gráfica" do Jornal "Público" em parceria com a Editora Levoir - **“Um Contrato com Deus”** de **Will Eisner** (1917 – 2005).

No prefácio da edição Will Eisner refere: **“Este livro contém histórias tiradas daquela corrente infundável de acontecimentos tão típicos da vida na cidade. Algumas são verdadeiras. Outras poderiam**

ser verdadeiras.”

São quatro contos gráficos – **“Um Contrato com Deus”, “O Cantor de Rua”, “O Zelador” e “Cookalein** – com um denominador comum: o prédio do número 55 da Avenida Dropsie, no Bronx, Nova Iorque, nos anos de 1930, na época da Grande Depressão.

1 – **“Um Contrato com Deus”**: *a primeira parte deste livro, examina o tema da relação do homem com Deus... Dizem-nos de início que Deus nos irá castigar ou recompensar, dependendo do nosso comportamento, e de acordo com um pacto... Criar esta história foi um exercício de agonia pessoal. A minha filha única, a Alice, tinha morrido oito anos antes da publicação deste livro. A minha dor ainda estava a nu. O meu coração ainda sangrava.* - **Will Eisner**;

2 – **“O Cantor de Rua”**: *foi uma criatura da era da Grande Depressão. Eram tempos desesperados, em que nenhum expediente para ganhar dinheiro era censurável. Os cantores de rua eram homens que apareciam nas vielas estreitas entre os edifícios de apartamentos para dar concertos de improviso. Em criança, atirei muitas vezes um penny para a viela atrás do nosso prédio, para o homem que aparecia regularmente para cantar canções populares... Mas o mistério sobre quem ele era vinha trazer um pouco de brilho teatral àquela viela triste.* - **Will Eisner**;

3 - **“O Zelador”**: *é uma história construída à volta do guarda misterioso e ameaçador que tomava conta do prédio de apartamentos do Bronx em que vivi em criança. Como nunca tínhamos contacto com o senhorio, que nem sequer conhecíamos, o zelador era a pessoa com quem tratávamos no dia-a-dia sobre as questões do prédio. Vivia na cave, não era casado, e parecia perpetuamente irritado... Normalmente, o zelador era temido e evitado, e culpado por todos os eventos invulgares, reais ou imaginários.* - **Will Eisner**;

4 - **“Cookalein”**: *o título da última história deste livro, é uma palavra ídiche-inglesa, que significa “cozinhar sozinho”, e refere-se a um tipo de férias numa quinta, em que os veraneantes cozinhavam as suas próprias refeições... “Cookalein” é uma combinação de invenção e memória. É um relato honesto do meu crescimento.* - **Will Eisner**.

Will Eisner conclui: **Esta novela gráfica representa um dos momentos vitais da minha obra.**

Quatro excelentes contos gráficos, ambientados à zona de Bronx, Nova Iorque, num dos períodos mais negros da história norte-americana, anos 30, Grande Depressão, num registo, simultaneamente, autobiográfico e ficcionado, numa reflexão profunda sobre a fé ou a ausência dela, o judaísmo, memórias dolorosas da infância e da idade adulta, que vão condicionando as atitudes e os comportamentos, com uma forte componente sexual, incluindo a pedofilia e a luxúria, num contraste exacerbado de diferentes estilos de vida.

Alex Cunningham says

Eisner himself admits in his multiple introductions to this volume that "A Contract With God" was in some

ways an experiment which led him to develop the skills he'd use in a far more serious way on "Dropsie Avenue." "Dropsie Avenue" is indeed the superior work.

That caveat out of the way, "A Contract With God" is one of the more moving, deep, and visually surprising graphic novels ever, despite it being the first. The writing is sensitive, empathetic, and poetically simple. The images are masterful. (Look at the full portrait of the superintendent - frightening and real and sad in the extreme.) The story as a whole and in its parts takes us precisely where great novels should - into a truth beyond facts, reflecting our own lives just as it reflects Eisner's.

It may be unnecessary to say anything nice about this book, given the praise heaped on it over the decades. Tough situation then, to find oneself to gushingly enamored.

Henrique Vogado says

Uma excelente iniciativa do jornal Público/Editora Levoir, por publicar uma coleção de novelas gráficas. E começa bem com um inédito em Portugal do Will Eisner.

As histórias são muito boas, à volta do bairro da juventude do autor nos anos 30 do século XX. Gosto muito do grafismo, da composição e do desenho. Ponto negativo para as alterações nas feições dos personagens em cada situação. As personagens não estão muito bem definidas visualmente.

Um livro pioneiro.

Greta says

Review of A contract with God

This was one of the first Graphic Novels I've read, and it has always stayed with me. I'm not sure why. I've reread it a few days ago and I still don't know why this story affects me. The story wasn't that great, and it was also rather short.

In the book, an orthodox jew loses his faith after his daughter dies. He doesn't understand, because all he ever did was serving God and after all, he had a contract with God, written on a stone.

I think the mere idea of a contract with God is intriguing. Some people do lose their faith when something really bad happens to them. Some people find faith in times of hardship. Others doubt their entire life. But believers do expect something of their faith.

So who can be blamed? God? Or was it only a faulty contract?

Pramod Nair says

‘A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories’ written and illustrated by *Will Eisner*, one of the giants in the sequential arts arena, is a perfectly executed graphic novel, which provides the reader a peek at

the American experience during the early 1930s. Through four interconnected graphic stories, Eisner provide *insights into the human condition* while drawing on the memories of his growing up in New York during that time period.

A brief look at Will Eisner as a master graphic artist

Born in 1917, *Will Eisner* was heavily influential in the comic art form and stands tall in the pantheon of all-time sequential artists with such luminaries like *Milton Arthur Paul Caniff* and *Jack Kirby*. He started with his contributions in this medium through “*The Spirit*”, a weekly newspaper insert comic book, in the early 1940s. He utilized “*The Spirit*” as a launching platform for experimenting his ideas and expressing stories in his mind through comic art form.

At that time the sequential art form and comic books were not considered seriously and was often ridiculed by expert artists. “*The Spirit*”, with its crime, adventure and drama stories featuring a masked vigilante published every week got popular and it had an influence on the *noir* genre movies produced during the 1940s.

Jules Feiffer, whose career began with Eisner and who wrote “*Comics are ‘junk’, but that junk is good, even necessary*” in a 1965 essay on comic book history, made these observations on the the graphic arts created by Eisner:

“... the world was redefined by his camera eye. More than anyone else, Eisner was able to squeeze more human interest and more dimension and take heroes and use them—as he used the *Spirit*—as side characters to telling another story...”

After finishing with “*The Spirit*” series in 1952, Eisner left the sequential arts arena for other pragmatic ventures. After 25 years he returned to the comic book scenario with a series of ‘*graphic novels*’ – a preexisting term, which was popularized by Will Eisner – of which “*A Contract with God*”, released in 1978 cementing his reputation as a master in the comics arena.

‘A Contract with God’ and the return of a master artist

In the preface to ‘*A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*’ Will Eisner narrates about his return to the comic art scene with this new book:

“Twenty five years later, given the time & opportunities, I embarked on the effort, which you hold in your hands; a harvest at last from the seedlings I had carried around with me all those years.”

This book is based on the memories that Will Eisner has about his own and his contemporaries’ experiences while growing up in New York. The book presents a selection of four stories, which are interconnected and based on a fictional tenement situated in *55 Dropsie Avenue*, the Bronx, New York and narrates the personal and intimate memories that the author have about a bunch of characters from his past.

The tenement was built around 1920 when the flow of immigrants after *World War I* to New York was like a

flood. By the 30s low paid city employees, laborers and their families thrived in these tenements, which became home to a whole first generation of Americans born to their foreign parents. There was no privacy within these apartment buildings and these stories that Will Eisner narrate in the graphic medium is based on the life as it was in these tenements during “*the dirty 30s*”. You can detect the *dynamics of relationships, the culture, the depression and state of economy* and everything that prevailed in the 30s within these frames.

In the first story titled “*A Contract with God*” we witness the story of *Frimme Hersh* - an immigrant who fled the terrible anti-semitic pogroms of 1882 after the assassination of Alexander II of Russia as a child and who became a prominent religious and social figure in the Hassidic community in the New York City - giving up his religious faith after the death of his young adopted daughter. This is based on Eisner’s own loss of his 16-year-old daughter and reflects some of his inner feelings towards god and faith he felt during those times.

In “*The Street Singer*”, we meet an alcoholic street singer - and one with some serious domestic violence issues - who is seduced by a retired diva. She tries to mentor him by giving him an opportunity to train under her and have a career in the show business. In “*The Super*” we come to know about the dark tale of ‘*Mr. Scuggs*’, who was the superintendent of the tenement. Both these stories are ironically tragic and are dark in their soul with “*The Super*” having overt signs of pedophilia.

In the final story in this book, “*Cookalein*” we meet Eisner himself as a fifteen year old and is an intertwining tale of a lot of characters in which the author describes his own “*honest account of coming of age*”.

We can meet characters *who are ambitious, who are lonely, who have dreams and anxieties about future, who fight against despair & poverty* in these depictions of the plain true-life brimming with sights of desires, frustrations and cynicism happening among the tenements which the author fishes out of his memory. Will Eisner blend past and present to create an artwork based on realism in which he fuses together words and illustrations to give them a similarity to the world of dreams or memories. Since these memories about the people and his views about the surroundings are from way past, they have a certain amount of dullness in his mind, which he recaptures in the illustrations through caricature like figures and a monochrome tone which mimic the world of dreams perfectly on the paper.

The Sequential Art in ‘A Contract with God’

Will Eisner follows a rule of realism while producing the artworks in “*A Contract with God*” and he uses exaggerations on the depictions of his characters – especially their facial features – to allow for the limitations of actuality. Since these are memories from decades back, he resorts to caricature to illustrate the characters as his memory regarding their exact features are hazy.

The way in which he utilized the space and format that he used in this comic book medium to meet this realism is expressed by his following words:

“Accordingly each story was written without regard to space, and each was allowed to develop its format from itself, that is to evolve from the narration. The normal frames (or panels) associated with sequential art are allowed to take on their integrity. For example, in many cases an entire page is set out as a panel. The text and the balloon are interlocked with the art.”

The picture and copy are so interdependent and are inseparable even for a moment, so he fuses them together

in such a manner to create a smooth flowing narrative. In many pages the traditional box frames are not used; instead the full page is utilized in a manner to maximize the visual impact on the reader.

These four *social dramas*, which are interconnected with their common setting, presented within this graphic novel are at times *heart warming* and at times *heart breaking*. They are told with so much candidness so that we can witness almost everything related to life with in these comic panels.

“A Contract with God” was always a special book for Will Eisner and he held it close to his heart through out his life, which can be recognized from his words:

“After many subsequent works, I can still look back at this maiden effort without embarrassment and I retain for it the special affection one has for his first child.”

Totally worth reading for the sheer candidness of the narrative and the clever use of illustrations to convey the spirit of a story, but be warned that there are **strong** depictions of sex and nudity within these frames even if they are not portrayed in a perverted manner.

Roberto says

Dio esiste e vive nel Bronx

Cosa rappresenta Contratto con Dio di Will Eisner?

1. il primo libro di un genere, quello della Graphic Novel. Anno 1978
2. Un fumetto dove per la prima volta non ci sono eroi in calzamaglia, ma persone comuni che vivono, pregano, sognano, soffrono
3. Un insieme di disegni con uno stile inconfondibile che esce dai soliti canoni del fumetto
4. Un libro con interessanti riflessioni sulla fede (le persone passano la vita a pensare che se rispetteranno le regole, ossia il cosiddetto accordo con Dio, saranno ricompensate. Anche se tutti sanno, dentro di loro, che questo non è affatto vero)
5. Un libro a fumetti che per la prima volta si rivolge agli adulti e non ai ragazzi

Un libro cardine, per gli amanti del genere, che segna il passaggio tra il fumetto e l'arte sequenziale. Anche se, purtroppo, letto oggi risente dei quarant'anni passati.

||Swaroop|| says

"They are true stories. Only the telling and the portrayals have converted them to fiction."

Will Eisner's A Contract With God and Other Tenement Stories is **simple, intense and deep**.

An amazing storytelling with wonderful art!

Joni says

El cómic que puso en el tapete el término novela gráfica. Para entonces estaba a mitad de camino entre un cómic y un cuento ilustrado. Tres historias en sepia que pueden ser autobiográficas o circundantes del autor en su infancia. Tres historias sobre la primer generación nacida en territorio americano descendiente de la gran inmigración de hace ya más de cien años. La ambientación es la Brooklyn pobre en un momento mucho más pobre, la gran depresión. Dan la sensación de que pudieron haber sido la historia de muchos en aquel entonces. Escrita en la última etapa de su vida, cuando Eisner se dedicaba a los proyectos que él mismo quería, sin ninguna imposición editorial, nos lega uno de sus mayores trabajos.

Karen says

This is intense. The storytelling is strong and is matched with expressive art. Among other things, I appreciated the use of space: the arrangement of panels and the interplay of lettering and drawing. The subject matter, the characters, the setting make this a substantial collection of tales--real stories, human stories. My favorite was the multifaceted drama of "Cookalien." The title story, "Contract with God," was intense, thought-provoking. "The Street Singer" I didn't like as much but for the twist at the end. "The Super" just made me sad. All in all, I haven't read many graphic novels and am impressed that such excellent work can be made of such "mundane" subject matter.

Romain Blandre says

Un pacte avec Dieu est le nom d'une des quatre nouvelles qui composent cet ouvrage au format bien connu maintenant des amateurs du créateur du genre roman graphique. Quatre histoires qui ont toute la particularité de se situer dans le Bronx, dans cette fameuse Avenue Dropsie, si chère à l'auteur, où vit dans des conditions précaires, toute une population cosmopolite, issue de l'immigration.

La première histoire, celle qui donne son nom au recueil, débute pourtant dans la Russie tsariste, à la toute fin du dix-neuvième siècle, où Frimme Hersh, jeune garçon serviable d'une communauté juive en proie à des pogroms de plus en plus fréquents reçoit de la part des anciens du village la possibilité de fuir ces contrées dangereuses pour aller se réfugier en Amérique, à New York, pour y faire sa vie. En échange de ce sauvetage, Frimme mène une vie de quasi saint, faisant le bien autour de lui, selon le pacte qu'il à lui-même fait avec Dieu. Mais dans cette Avenue Dropsie, tisser un lien particulier avec le Créateur n'est pas suffisant pour échapper aux aléas de la vie et Frimme perd sa fille adoptive des suites d'une maladie dont on ne saura pas vraiment de quoi il s'agit. Triste au point d'en devenir furieux, Frimme impute ce grand malheur à Dieu qui n'a pas respecté les termes du contrat. Dès lors, celui qui menait une vie exemplaire décide de sombrer dans l'égoïsme et l'usure, n'hésitant pas à détourner l'argent de la synagogue à ses propres fins, pour devenir

propriétaire de nombreux immeubles de l'Avenue Dropsie et s'y comporter comme un capitaliste sans aucun scrupule. Poursuivi par la malédiction, Frimme va connaître encore bien des péripéties, car il est évident que les nouvelles de Will Eisner ne se terminent jamais très bien pour qui vit dans la célèbre avenue du Bronx.

Les deux nouvelles suivantes mettent en scène deux personnages bien différents de prime abord, mais à la fin tout aussi tragique l'une que l'autre. Le premier est un chanteur de rue sans le sou et écrasé par une mégère qui ne cesse de lui reprocher de ne pas subvenir aux besoins de la famille: le peu d'argent qu'il récolte, il le dilapide en achetant des bouteilles d'alcool qui le font sombrer pour oublier sa vie misérable. Mais un jour de 1930, son destin va changer quand, par hasard, il poussera la chansonnette sous les fenêtres d'une diva de seconde zone, Marta Maria, qui décide de le prendre sous son aile et lui promet monts et merveilles. L'autre individu est ce concierge, procédurier et sans pitié, toujours râleur et donneur de bons conseils, qui vit dans un sous-sol du 55 Dropsie Avenue, avec pour seule compagnie son molosse à quatre pâtes qui terrorise tous les habitants de l'immeuble dont il a la charge. Sa vie va définitivement basculer le jour où, par faiblesse et perversion, il cédera au chantage d'une jeune fille de l'immeuble qui le mènera à sa perte...

Enfin la dernière histoire est celle d'habitants de l'Avenue, où plutôt de leur lieu de villégiature: Cockalein, sorte d'Eldorado, où chacun espère y faire carrière ou au moins y trouver la personne qui lui permettra de s'enrichir. Ainsi, tous les moyens sont bons pour y parvenir: entre duperies, trahison, rôles joués et faux-semblants, tout est bon pour qui n'a pas de scrupules à mentir pour tenter de s'enrichir. Ici encore, rien ne fonctionne et la malédiction s'abat sur tous ces paumés de la Dropsie Avenue.

Quatre histoires qui mettent en scène destins individuels et vie communautaire. Les lieux, plus que les personnages sont les véritables héros des nouvelles. Une vision sans filtre et sans pitié des relations entre des gens au sein de quartiers défavorisés où la volonté de s'enrichir, de faire carrière et de sortir de la misère priment sur toute humanité ou solidarité. Tragique, d'autant plus que Will Eisner puise ses scénarios dans la vie quotidienne réelle des habitants du Bronx où lui-même a vécu.

antónio says

"(...) em muitos casos deixei que uma página inteira se transformasse em painel. O texto e os balões ficaram interligados com a arte. Vejo-os a todos como fios de um tecido único e exploro-os como uma linguagem. Se tiver tido sucesso, então não haverá interrupção no fluxo da narrativa, porque imagem e texto estarão tão interdependentes um do outro, que se tornarão inseparáveis, nem que seja por um momento." (do prefácio, pelo autor)

Rui Alves de Sousa says

Quatro histórias sobre vidas, ambições e modos de pensar distintos. Tal como no magnífico "New York: Life in the Big City", Will Eisner elaborou um mosaico de personagens e situações delirantes, mas simbolicamente representativas de todos nós. Um espantoso e genial retrato das ambiguidades humanas e das injustiças sociais, através de um único prédio e de todos os seus habitantes (e daqueles que o rodeiam), numa avenida banal da América do passado.

Artur Coelho says

Um homem pio e virtuoso, de luto pela morte da filha adoptiva, rasga o contrato que firmara com o seu deus e dedica-se a prosperar. Mas a venalidade não o satisfaz e regressa aos caminhos do virtuosismo, para falecer fulminado por um ataque cardíaco quando decide renovar o seu contrato com a divindade. Uma diva perdida, afastada de fenecidas luzes da ribalta, encontra na voz de um cantor de rua uma possibilidade de regressar aos palcos. Oferece-lhe comida, promessas e o seu corpo, que o homem esfomeado aceita de bom grado. Este, ao regressar à casa e à família impossível de sustentar no meio dos tempos duros da depressão, começa a sonhar com um futuro melhor, mas a mente toldada pelo álcool recusa-se a deixá-lo recordar a morada da mulher que lhe prometera um melhor futuro. Um solitário e amargo zelador de um prédio tem no seu cão o único companheiro que lhe alivia uma vida feita de imensas queixas dos inquilinos irritados. Cruza-se com a perversa sobrinha de uma inquilina, que se aproveita da sua solidão para se insinuar, roubando-lhe o dinheiro, assassinando-lhe o companheiro e deixando-o sem outra escolha senão suicidar-se, suspeito de a tentar violar. Quando o verão chega à cidade chega também a época das fugas e dos sonhos, em que as famílias saem da cidade para apanhar os ares do campo. As jovens casadoiras procuram os melhores partidos, os chico-espertos buscam a melhor mulher para encantar e dar o golpe que lhes permite fugir ao destino de meros empregados de negócios sem futuro, os casais desavindos aprofundam as suas tragédias, ocultas pela necessidade de criar os filhos. E um jovem rapaz descobre nos braços de uma mulher mais velha as delícias e as incongruências da sexualidade. O livro termina com este jovem, agora a sentir-se mais homem, contemplando a chuva outonal que cai sobre a cidade. A mesma chuva imponente com que o livro abre, no início das desventuras do homem que ao perder a fé lança como palco o edifício que será sempre a peça centrar destas histórias.

Um prazer, graças à Levoir, de regressar à Nova York de Will Eisner nesta que foi a primeira das graphic novels com que encerrou uma carreira dedicada aos comics que nos legou não só personagens clássicas como uma nova forma cinematográfica de entender o espaço visual da banda desenhada. Tal como Woody Allen no cinema e Isaac Bashevis Singer na literatura, Eisner inspira-se nas idiosincrasias multiculturais da comunidade judaica nova-iorquina para contar histórias onde o apontamento nostálgico toca na tragédia e no humor. Mas mais dos que as aventuras e desventuras de personagens com forte toque auto-biográfico o que ressalta é a mestria do seu traço, liberto dos ditames do comic de mercado, liberto também dos espartilhos da vinheta, oscilando entre o bloco de apontamentos e o registo mais formal.
