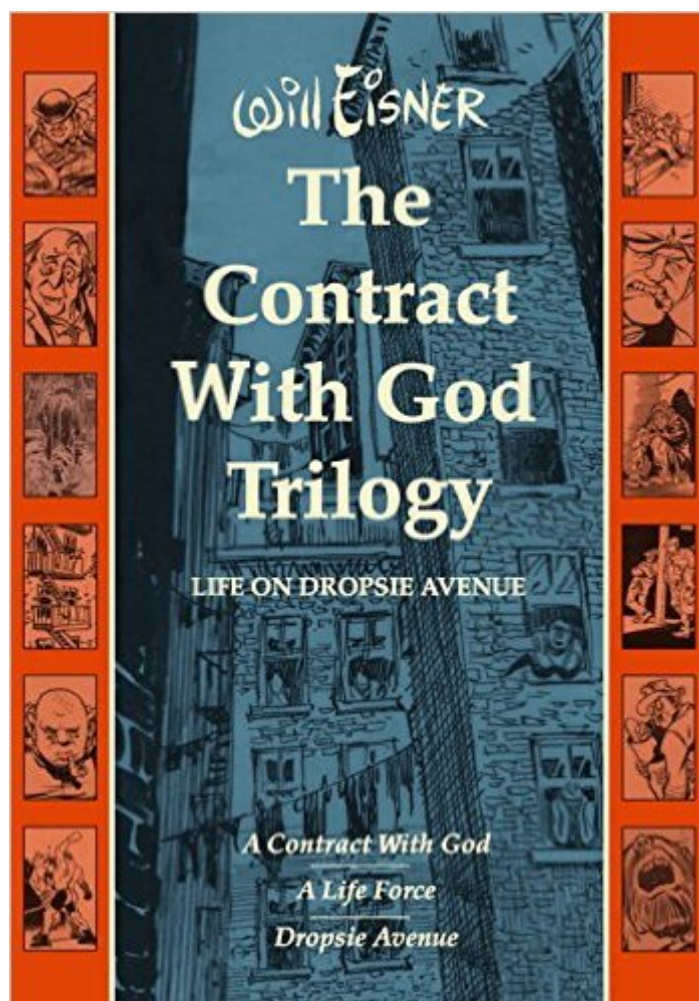


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# The Contract With God Trilogy: Life On Dropsie Avenue (A Contract With God, A Life Force, Dropsie Avenue)



## Synopsis

Published quietly in 1978, Will Eisner's revolutionary literary work *A Contract With God* marked the invention of the modern graphic novel, took on a life of its own, and inspired a generation of "sequential artists." Will Eisner (1917–2005) saw himself as "a graphic witness reporting on life, death, heartbreak, and the never-ending struggle to prevail." The publication of *A Contract With God* when Eisner was sixty-one proved to be a watershed moment both for him and for comic literature. It marked the birth of the modern graphic novel and the beginning of an era when serious cartoonists could be liberated from their stultifying comic-book format. More than a quarter-century after the initial publication of *A Contract With God*, and in the last few months of his life, Eisner chose to combine the three fictional works he had set on Dropsie Avenue, the mythical street of his youth in Depression-era New York City. As the dramas unfold in *A Contract With God*, the first book in this new trilogy, it is at 55 Dropsie Avenue where Frimme Hersh, the pious Jew, first loses his beloved daughter, then breaks his contract with his maker, and ends up as a slumlord; it is on Dropsie Avenue where a street singer, befriended by an aging diva, is so beholden to the bottle that he fails to grasp his chance for stardom; and it is there that a scheming little girl named Rosie poisons a depraved super hero's dog before doing in the super hero as well. In the second book, *A Life Force*, declared by R. Crumb to be "a masterpiece," Eisner re-creates himself in his protagonist, Jacob Shtarkah, whose existential search reflected Eisner's own lifelong struggle. Chronicling not only the Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression but also the rise of Nazism and the spread of left-wing politics, Eisner combined the miniaturist sensibility of Henry Roth with the grand social themes of novelists such as Dos Passos and Steinbeck. Finally, in *Dropsie Avenue: The Neighborhood*, Eisner graphically traces the social trajectory of this mythic avenue over four centuries, creating a sweeping panorama of the city and its waves of new residents—the Dutch, English, Irish, Jews, African Americans, and Puerto Ricans—whose faces changed yet whose lives presented an unending "story of life, death, and resurrection." The *Contract With God* Trilogy is a mesmerizing, fictional chronicle of a universal American experience and Eisner's most poignant and enduring literary legacy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Comic and cartoon artists are finally getting the respect they have deserved since the Yellow Kid wore his one piece pajama. Artists like Charles Burns and Frank Miller; Seth and Tony Millionaire, all work in a medium whose fan base is basically adult, literate and mainstream. In reading current book reviews of works like "Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid On Earth" by Chris Ware or "Blankets" by Craig Thompson, it is clear that the Graphic Novel as an art form no longer requires an asterisk. All these artists and cartoonists owe this new environment of respect in no small part to the work of Will Eisner, specifically the work contained in this volume. While Eisner was not the first artist to tell a story with pictures, he without question hammered out a stylistic language that others could learn and understand. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that he brought the concept of the graphic novel home and gave it a firm structure and a future. Also important was Eisner's unyielding believe in the graphic novel as a form of fine art, as legitimate a tool for storytelling as any of the traditional oral or written forms. All current artists working in comics owe Eisner in the same way that all Afro-American ballplayers owe a debt of gratitude to Jackie Robinson. Like Robinson, Eisner completely believed in what he was doing and refused to accept anything less than respect for his work, all done in a day when respect didn't come easily or automatically for them. Now, about the work itself - what can one say? No one will ever replace or improve on Eisner's innate ability to tell a story with pictures. His work was absolutely gorgeous and fluid, the line and brushwork immaculate and dense without every looking fussy.

**WHAT IS IT ABOUT?** Will Eisner's "The Contract With God Trilogy: Life on Dropsie Avenue" is a collection of three stand-alone graphic novels set on Dropsie Avenue, a fictional street in the Depression-era Bronx, one of the five boroughs of New York City. The first book in this trilogy, "A Contract With God," consists of four audacious and cynical stories of Dropsie Avenue's residents. In addition to being extremely entertaining, these stories probe such timeless issues as injustice and morality. In the second book, "A Life Force," numerous stories of Dropsie

Avenue's residents intertwine with each other, drawing a vibrant and realistic picture of an urban life in America during the Great Depression as well as attempting to shine the light on the meaning of life. "Dropsie Avenue," the final book in the trilogy, is a century-long biography of Dropsie Avenue itself, in which the birth, growth, decay and resurrection of the street is told through everyday lives of its inhabitants as well as the ethnic and social changes of the community throughout the decades. THUMBS UP: 1) Timeless specimen. Written in 1978, the first book in the trilogy, "A Contract with God," marks the birth of a modern graphic novel, and the whole trilogy sets high standards for the genre. In addition to being so historically important and well-crafted, Eisner's book is also timeless as it deals with eternal issues and truly seems like it could have been published yesterday. 2) Realistic. Although the stories and characters in "The Contract With God Trilogy" are fictional, the book is extremely realistic. On Dropsie Avenue, bad things happen to good people for no reason, bad guys prevail, and the boundaries between right and wrong are blurred.

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