

The rights to Will Eisner's work are up for sale

Eisner's estate hopes someone else will take good care of The Spirit and his other work.



By **Christopher Chiu-Tabet**

The New York Times reports Will Eisner's estate is planning to sell the rights to the late cartoonist's work, including his most famous character, the Spirit. Carl Gropper, the nephew of Eisner's widow Ann Weingarten, and his wife Nancy, have been in control of the estate since Weingarten's death in 2020, and the couple, both in their seventies, hope the sale – which is being handled by investment bank Greif & Co. – will continue to keep his work in the public eye, and lead to a new movie for the Spirit.

Works the new rights holders would gain access to would include The Spirit Returns, an unpublished 72-page story Eisner wrote and illustrated in 1996, nine years before his death. A satire of the grittier tone of the decade's superhero comics, the book sees the Spirit battle "a superpowered vigilante who fancies himself judge, jury and executioner."

Maggie Thompson, a judge for the Eisner Hall of Fame, expressed delight at the news of an unreleased Eisner book, saying, "I'm so excited to hear there's still more that we haven't seen. I hope that this will mean that people who don't already really know who he is [will] familiarize themselves, and enjoy the work he created over decades and decades and, by the way, decades."

Other works a buyer would acquire are the seminal graphic novel A Contract With God, the semi-autobiographical The Dreamer, Dickens pastiche Fagin the Jew, and antisemitism exposé The Plot. Additionally, it would grant the rights to rerelease comics other companies published with the license from Eisner and his estate, like The Spirit series from DC, IDW, and Dynamite Comics, including **Darwyn Cooke's** acclaimed run from 2007.

Amusingly, **Lloyd Greif**, the president and chief executive of Greif & Co., took aim at **Frank Miller's** failed movie version of The Spirit from 2008, while discussing the family's hope for a reboot. He states, "You need to have a good story that's consistent with the character, and that film clearly was not consistent with the essence of the character. And frankly, the story didn't make a whole lot of sense."

Having been created in 1940, The Spirit comics will begin to enter the public domain in 2036. For more in the meantime, such as law firm Simpson Thacher & Bartlett's thoughts on estimating the value of Eisner's work, head to the Times.