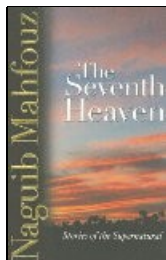


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Book Review
The Seventh Heaven
Stories of the Supernatural
by [Naguib Mahfouz](#)

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer
Posted: October 2, 2006

A few hours after I finished reading *The Seventh Heaven*, I heard that Naguib Mahfouz had died at the age of 94 — a spooky coincidence perfectly in keeping with a book concerned with the afterlife and the supernatural.

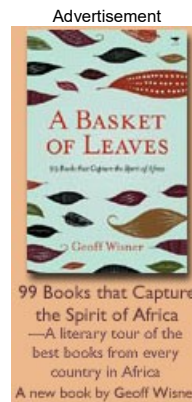
Mahfouz was the first Arab to win the Nobel Prize for literature, and he is credited with establishing the modern Arabic novel. His Cairo Trilogy — *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street* — is considered his masterpiece, though to me its grim realism and the overbearing father at its center made it heavy going. Mahfouz's shorter works, like the short novel *Adrift on the Nile*, are often more playful and accessible, and when he lets himself stray into the fantastic and supernatural, as in *Arabian Nights and Days*, he may be at his best.

The Seventh Heaven is a collection of stories published between 1973 and 1999, and arranged — like the Koran — from the longest pieces to the shortest. In the title story, a man learns how to handle the afterlife when his friend murders him over a woman. In "The Disturbing Occurrences," a police detective looks for the perpetrator of a series of mysterious crimes. (His chief suspect, as the translator explains, "possesses the one trait that in Mahfouz's fictional universe always indicates either a grave moral defect or raving depravity — blond hair.") In "Room No. 12," a woman with a strangely powerful manner checks into a hotel, then begins packing dozens of seemingly random visitors into her room — all except for Blind Sayyid the Corpse Washer, a sinister figure whom she keeps waiting downstairs.

The shortest of these stories are only two or three pages long, and many of their plots are left unresolved. Still, the sureness of Mahfouz's storytelling voice gives an eerie force to these tales of ghosts and demons.

About the Reviewer

[Geoff Wisner](#) is a freelance writer and staff member of Indigocafe.com. He is the author of [A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa](#). Visit his website at www.geoffwisner.com.



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