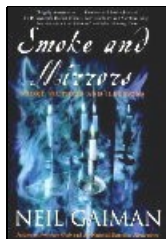


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Book Review
Smoke and Mirrors
Short Fictions and Illusions
by [Neil Gaiman](#)

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer
Posted: December 4, 2006

As with a box of chocolates, there are two ways to take in this book. You can savor it bit by bit over several months, as Jenn did, or you can devour it in a couple of days, as I did.

Smoke and Mirrors is packed with stories of the supernatural: some long, some short, some somber and some wildly playful. One story, a disturbing take on Santa Claus, is exactly 100 words long. Another is a bizarre conjunction of *Beowulf* and *Bay Watch* that somehow, strangely, works. There are blood-chilling moments and some funny ones. Here is the opening of "Shoggoth's Old Peculiar," a tribute to the world of H.P. Lovecraft:

Benjamin Lassiter was coming to the unavoidable conclusion that the woman who had written *A Walking Tour of the British Coastline*, the book he was carrying in his backpack, had never been on a walking tour of any kind, and would probably not recognize the British coastline if it were to dance through her bedroom at the head of a marching band, singing "I'm the British Coastline" in a loud and cheerful voice while accompanying itself on the kazoo.

Like many brilliant writers, Neil Gaiman makes what he does look easy. In his Introduction (don't skip it, because one of the best stories is embedded there), Gaiman reveals where his ideas came from. Some come from familiar fairy tales, a couple were inspired by the sculptures of Lisa Snellings, and another ("We Can Get Them for You Wholesale") combines the subjects of two radio stories Gaiman heard before and after falling asleep. One was on buying things wholesale and the other was about hired killers.

Simple, right? You almost feel as if you could have done it yourself. But if it were that easy, there would be a lot more books like *Smoke and Mirrors*.

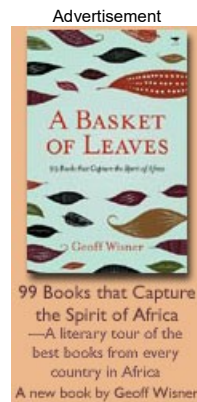
About the Reviewer

[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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—Mahatma Gandhi