

# GILGANESHI

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The Flavour and Sweetness  
of Place and Time

**Fiction :**

A Cage of Space  
Abid Ann Al-Rodhan

**INTERVIEW :**

Film Director Qassem Hawal



**Afifa Luaibi's women**



**Terror Strikes**

at Baghdad's Cultural Street !!

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## Al-Muttanabbi Street Targeted by Terror

Just as you think that violence has abated the evil forces summon up their dwindling strength and set their sick minds on a new target, one that hurt most. This time the casualty was al-Muttanabbi Street, heart of Baghdad's cultural life. On March 5, the explosion of a car driven by a suicide bomber reduced al-Muttanabbi Street which has been a meeting place for Iraq's intellectuals and men of letters and the heart of Iraq's culture to a pile of debris. Tens of thousands of books were burnt in the explosion. The car bomb, which went off on that sad Monday, claimed the lives of more than 30 Iraqis and injured about 65. Under the mountains of burnt books, the rescue teams found nine unrecognised bodies that could not be identified by their families and friends, who gathered in the place along with the bookshop owners, because the bodies were charred burnt. Al-Muttanabbi Street lies at the entrance of al-Rasheed Street, which is the oldest in Baghdad

and one of its most distinguishing features as well. During the Ottoman era, the street had been called the 'Khammi' (a Turkish name that means 'army barracks'). It was later named 'al-Mutanabbi' after the renowned Abbasid poet (303-354AH). The street dates back to the Abbasid era during which thousands of books were written and translated and Arabic poetry as well as arts flourished.

Most of the shops in al-Muttanabbi Street are small. Its market is most active on Fridays when booksellers spread the dusty sidewalks with various Arabic and non-Arabic publications, which are browsed by book lovers.

Ni'reen al-Shatri, the owner of the most popular bookshop in al-Muttanabbi street, says that on Fridays he holds a book auction when he displays rare versions and books that had been banned under Saddam's regime, for example the collection of Iraq's renowned poet, Muhammad Mehdi al-Awadi.

"15 years ago the idea of holding an auction hit me; so I did it and it was hailed by Iraq scholars and intellectuals. I started the auction on al-Awadi's book with 104500 (=55). 'al-Shatri says. Being so keen on books, al-Shatri had sold his bookshop in Iraq's southern city of Basra and had moved to Baghdad to trade in books since 1965.

### The Suffering of al-Mutanabbi

In 1967, al-Mutanabbi Street started to bloom as an official centre for book trade in Baghdad. On the two sides of the street, booksellers displayed the best publications in the Middle East. For decades, the street had been one of the main centres of Iraq's intellectual life; it was the meeting place for intellectuals, clerics, professors and even laymen who would gather to discuss different issues and ideas. Then came the 1970s and Saddam's security tightened up on Iraq's intellectual life.