



The Judges

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En route from New York to Israel a plane is forced down in snowbound rural Connecticut. Small groups of passengers are sheltered by scattered local residents, and five end up in the isolated home of a man who calls himself the Judge. The passengers are: beautiful Claudia, who has left her husband for a new lover; Razziel, an introspective religious teacher; Yoav, a former Israeli commando dying of cancer; George, a shy scholar carrying a secret document revealing the identity of a German Holocaust criminal; and Bruce, a playboy and philanderer.

In this Kafkaesque tale, the Judge, served by a sinister hunchback, tells his guests he intends to execute the one found least worthy to live. All are required to plead for their lives by trying to answer the question, "Why do you want to live?" They themselves will be forced to select the one to die.

Although at first the captives refuse to take the Judge seriously, they gradually become absorbed in his gruesome game and try to justify their existences. In flashbacks and interior monologues highlights of their former lives are revealed. The reader expects Bruce, the narcissistic playboy, to become the victim. In a surprise ending, however, it is the Judge himself who dies.

Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, an internationally famous writer who has published more than forty books, including best-sellers *Night* (1960) and *A Beggar in Jerusalem* (1970), received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. *The Judges*, an intensely serious but unsettling and uneven book apparently pieced together from character sketches for earlier abandoned works, is sure to make readers examine their own consciences.

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