



Dark Spell: Surviving the Sentence

Mara Leveritt, Jason Baldwin (Assistant)

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For many who've heard of the West Memphis Three--especially through "Devil's Knot" and/or the feature film based on that book, the story of their trials ended when the court handed down their sentences. For the teenagers, though, that moment marked the start of yet another story, one more dangerous than the first. Jason Baldwin was sixteen, the youngest of the three teenagers, when he heard himself sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole. "Dark Spell" is the account of what it was like to be taken in handcuffs and shackles into Arkansas's adult prison system, where inmates and guards alike saw him as a Satanic child-killer. Many of those who sent him there did not expect him to survive. Prison officials shared the same, realistic fear. More than once, death hovered perilously near. But Jason survived. He survived, day by day and year by year, in one of the harshest environments on American soil. This would be a hard story to bear, save that it is brightened and transformed by Jason's insight and upbeat persona. "Dark Spell" illuminates the many ways America's justice system, once having gone wrong, can fight to sustain that wrong. It celebrates the countless ordinary heroes who rose up, using art and new technology, to challenge trials they perceived as mockeries of justice. At its heart, "Dark Spell" walks readers into prison with an innocent teenager and reveals how he managed to forge a life of honor by not abandoning his personal integrity, demanding an education, and discovering the peace to be found in kicking Hacky Sack.

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From Reader Review Dark Spell: Surviving the Sentence for online ebook

Daniel Esquivel says

Great count from the perspective of one of the West Memphis three and how this legal miscarriage as some call it was done by the authorities. What you read in this book plus what you see on the videos correlates very well and Jason proves to be very eloquent and well spoken.

If this is your first approach to the case I suggest you at least watch the HBO documentaries to get a perspective since the book does not contain the final outcome of it, but the count of how Jason was living behind bars, his struggles and wins.

Very good book.

Allison says

This is a follow-up to Devil's Knot, following the West Memphis Three (but mostly Jason) after they are convicted and in jail. The book was really compelling because most of the West Memphis Three story is focused on the trials and the unique circumstances surrounding their release. There were a lot of typos in the book, which is a major pet peeve of mine. In this case, it pulled me away from the facts and made the book seem less professional, so I hope it's something that can be fixed in later copies. I'd even be willing to copy edit it myself, for the cause, because I think the errors, as minor as they may be, really diminish the credibility of the book and make it seem hastily thrown together.

Scott Miller says

After reading The Devil's Knot, I needed to know more. How could such an injustice occur in a society where justice is to prevail? This book focuses the youngest of the Memphis Three, Jason. Entering the prison system in disbelief, Jason struggled to find his place in this unpredictable world. His courage in handling the fights, challenges, and loneliness of the prison system shine through in Leveritt's words. Despite all of Jason's struggles, he maintained his faith in humanity and developed a sense of self both of which helped him survive his 18 year ordeal. His hardships and frustrations are shared open as well. As his story unfolds, one can't help but develop a sense of admiration for his perseverance and a connection to his genuineness. While the situation is one that makes you question the essence of our justice system, Jason exemplifies the power of the human spirit to overcome.

Andrea says

I'm not a huge fan of her writing style, but the content of the book makes it worth the read.

Rachel Williams says

amazing story,intelligently told.

Darlene Payne says

Amazing book. Jason Baldwin has survived many storms in his life, and emerged a strong, compassionate person.

Leigh says

The story of the West Memphis 3 is gripping. I've seen all the documentaries, poured through the case files, and read other books on the case, including Damien Echols' memoir. I was hoping to get a clearer picture of what Jason went through, but the book kind of falls flat to me. Along with a number of grammatical errors, the author doesn't even come close to delving into Baldwin's experience and background when compared to what Echols gave us with his book, *Life After Death*.

I'd love to see Baldwin actually write his memoir as promised through his KickStarter campaign. It's been over a year since he reached his campaign goal, but I'm waiting over here waiting patiently to hear some news about when it will actually be released. I'm hoping he can deliver more effectively when writing his story himself instead of relying on a third party.

Kate says

Poorly edited, some factual errors, and somewhat haphazard in what is covered. Leveritt's prose is certainly nothing to write home about. Still very interesting.

Katherine Coble says

This book is the worst.

If you've never read anything ever about the WM3, this book has a lot of useful information.

If you've read even one other book about the case, you'll find at least 60% of this book to be a complete rehash of everything out there.

I specifically wanted to read about Jason, about who he is and how he handled his time there. About halfway through the book it becomes apparent that Leveritt cannot write a book without writing about Damien. I just got done reading Devil's Knot (which she name-checks at least a dozen times) and after awhile I began to feel like I was rereading DK. Instead of reading about Jason's life, I got to read yet another recap of the dry legal wranglings, mixed in with some babble about how great the internet is.

Then she'd have one of her weird turns where she'd go into how sad it was that Jason couldn't have Internet access. I swear to you this right here is like a third of the book:

1. Long, detailed rambling about some website run by "ordinary people" to bring attention to the WM3.
2. Quotes pulled from website forum or chat room.
3. Anecdote about some awareness stunt pulled by the Ordinary Website People Who Make A Difference™.
4. A paragraph about how sad it is that Jason had no idea about any of this because he couldn't have access to the Internet in prison.

She spends more book time bemoaning Jason's lack of web experience than she does bemoaning the severe beatings he received. It was just WEIRD.

I've been a WM3 supporter since the first film aired on hbo. Unlike Jason I was on the Internet from about 1988, so I was one of the first visitors to the wm3 site. I have to say I find it a bit grating at this point to see Leveritt using the case as some sort of piggy bank. There was no reason for this book--ostensibly a biography of Jason's time in the Arkansas corrections system--to turn into another blow-by-blow account of Damien's Rule 37 hearing. Yes, I know Leveritt counts herself a personal friend of Echols and Davis, and she probably feels left behind as they published their own memoirs without her assistance. But this book really feels like she is yet another person lining up to exploit Jason, as she uses this book to communicate just how important she and other volunteers were in getting the three men released. It seems like the subtext--sure you may be buddies with Peter Jackson now, but don't forget those who helped you FIRST--becomes text. This ceases to be Jason's story and instead becomes Leveritt's not-so-subtle- guilt-trip to Echols and Davis.

Aurora Dimitre says

- a) this book hurt me
- b) by main character obviously i mean the subject of the book, jason baldwin, who is an actual person and not a character but i don't see the point in making a separate shelf for that
- c) i think i'm too emotionally involved to really rate things objectively but that's life man

Madly Jane says

Really useful and good insights into Jason Baldwin, the youngest of the West Memphis Three who was accused and convicted of murdering three eight year old boys in West Memphis, Arkansas in 1994. He was released with an Alford Plea in 2011. A must read for the mystery and puzzles of the murder case and the social justice issues facing our country.
