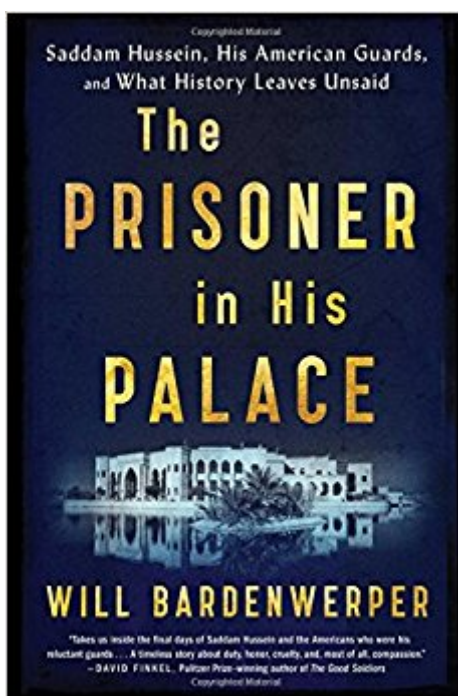


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The Prisoner In His Palace: Saddam Hussein, His American Guards, And What History Leaves Unsaid



Synopsis

In the haunting tradition of *In Cold Blood* and *The Executioner's Song*, this remarkably insightful and surprisingly intimate portrait of Saddam Hussein lifts away the top layer of a dictator's evil and finds complexity beneath as it invites us to take a journey with twelve young American soldiers in the summer of 2006. Trained to aggressively confront the enemy in combat, the men learn, shortly after being deployed to Iraq, that fate has assigned them a different role. It becomes their job to guard the country's notorious leader in the months leading to his execution. Living alongside, and caring for, their "high value detainee" in a former palace dubbed The Rock and regularly transporting him to his raucous trial, many of the men begin questioning some of their most basic assumptions about the judicial process, Saddam's character, and the morality of modern war. Although the young soldiers' increasingly intimate conversations with the once-feared dictator never lead them to doubt his responsibility for unspeakable crimes, the men do discover surprising new layers to his psyche that run counter to the media's portrayal of him. Woven from first-hand accounts provided by many of the American guards, government officials, interrogators, scholars, spies, lawyers, family members, and victims, *The Prisoner in His Palace* shows two Saddams coexisting in one person: the defiant tyrant who uses torture and murder as tools, and a shrewd but contemplative prisoner who exhibits surprising affection, dignity, and courage in the face of looming death. In this artfully constructed narrative, Saddam, the "man without a conscience" gets many of those around him to examine theirs. Wonderfully thought-provoking, *The Prisoner in His Palace* reveals what it is like to discover in one's ruthless enemy a man, and then deliver him to the gallows.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Bardenwerper deftly toggles from a nonstop supply of terror to occasional scenes of normal life throughout [The Prisoner in His Palace](#) . . . a brief, but powerful, meditation on the meaning of evil and power." [USA Today](#)"Compelling." [New York Post](#)"A moving account." [5280 Magazine](#)"Expertly examines Saddam Hussein." [Vanity Fair](#)"Takes you inside the minds of the prisoner and his protectors, whose sole task it to guard the [Vic, Vic, or Very Important Criminal](#) . . . The book is captivating . . . a study of how proximity has a propensity to be persuasive, even when the common area is a cell in the basement of a courthouse." [Military Times](#)"A behind-the-scenes look at history that's nearly impossible to put down . . . [Intersperses] tales from Saddam's past with scenes of his final days . . . As he was being led away to his execution, Hussein thanked the twelve Americans guarding him, adding that they'd become "more like family to him" than any Iraqis had been." [The Prisoner in His Palace](#) offers a mesmerizing glimpse into the final moments of a brutal tyrant's life." [Bookpage](#)"What ultimately emerges is how to comport oneself in the world . . . [Saddam] was condemned to hang, a grave and deserved insult in Iraqi eyes. But the ugliness of the old man's death, defiled in his winding sheet, kicked and stabbed after being strangled (the drop was bungled goes the story) disgusted The Twelve . . . This is no reverse Stockholm syndrome at play, Bardenwerper convincingly suggests, but a bracing affirmation of a great Whitmanesque hug of human dignity in the face of all that is harrowingly wrong." [Newsday](#)"Bardenwerper gives the reader a close look at a real-life supervillain, and how easy it is for him to gather minions at his feet . . . tightly-constructed and engaging." [The Rumpus](#)"In skin-crawling detail, Will Bardenwerper effectively captures a unique time and place in an engrossing history. A singular study exhibiting both military duty and human compassion." [Kirkus Reviews](#)"What a surprising, remarkable and deeply affecting book. By taking us inside the final days of Saddam Hussein and the Americans who were his reluctant guards, Will Bardenwerper has written a timeless story about duty, honor, cruelty, and most of all compassion." [David Finkel](#), Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of [Thank You for Your Service](#) and [The Good Soldiers](#)"Thoroughly engrossing We want to believe that Saddam Hussein was a monster, but reading this,

you'll learn that he was quite human—which is even more chilling. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in our recent war in Iraq, or in the heights and depths of human nature.

• Karl Marlantes, New York Times bestselling author of *Matterhorn* and *What It Is Like to Go to War*—“Reminiscent of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, Will Bardenwerper’s *The Prisoner in His Palace* offers a riveting and harrowing exploration into the nature of evil and the mind of a murdering psychopath—but, also, into how even the execution of a guilty man can later haunt those involved in his death.

• Like Capote before him, Bardenwerper brilliantly portrays not a cardboard villain, but a complicated man who was unquestionably sadistic but also manifested flashes of generosity and compassion.

• Bardenwerper has revealed one of the greatest little-known war stories in American history.

• Andrew Carroll, New York Times bestselling author of *War Letters*, *Behind the Lines*, and *Operation Homecoming*—“Offers shocking insights into the banality of evil—an Alice-In-Wonderland tumble through Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s dark psyche. Will Bardenwerper vividly exhumes some of the tyrant’s twisted brutalities—all true—and yet reveals the gritty humanity of Saddam through the eyes of the young American soldiers assigned to guard him in the last months before he is hanged. A disturbing and entirely captivating piece of literary journalism.

• Kai Bird, coauthor of the Pulitzer-winning *American Prometheus* and author of the New York Times bestseller *The Good Spy: The Life and Death of Robert Ames*—“In war, the enemy is always the other.

• What makes *The Prisoner in His Palace* so captivating is how Bardenwerper brilliantly juxtaposes the brutal acts that Saddam Hussein perpetrated against his own people, with the dignified, and even tender, manner in which the Iraqi dictator interacted with his American guards. What the book reveals is that our common humanity turns the enemy into someone quite unexpected.

• Peter Bergen, New York Times bestselling author of *Manhunt: The Ten-Year Search for Bin Laden from 9/11 to Abbottabad*—“Will Bardenwerper has succeeded in writing a book about the Iraq War from a wholly new perspective. This superb account of the twelve men assigned to guard Saddam Hussein forces us to acknowledge that there can be honor and courage on all sides in war. Absolutism is for people who’ve never been there.

• Nathaniel Fick, author of the New York Times bestseller *One Bullet Away*—“In the American imagination, Saddam Hussein functions as nothing more than a two-dimensional despot, a monster who terrorized and gassed and desecrated his own people. He was. He did. Will Bardenwerper’s *The Prisoner in his Palace* reveals something else about Saddam, though, something less simple

than that known caricature and certainly more troubling: he was a human being, a human like all of us, a human being with hopes and dreams and regrets that woke him in the dead of night. Saddam wrote poetry and longed for his family and treated the American soldiers tasked with guarding him during his trial with kindness and generosity of spirit. This is a brave and piercing book." — Matt Gallagher, author of the novel *Youngblood and Kaboom*"The Prisoner in His Palace finds humanity in a singularly inhuman figure, Saddam Hussein. Through meticulous reporting and beautiful storytelling, Will Bardenwerper has crafted a portrait that is both deeply moving and deeply disturbing. This book challenges the tired constructs of "good versus evil" that have led us into so many ill-conceived wars." — Elliot Ackerman, author of *Green on Blue*"An astonishing, riveting story that brings the reader face to face with the specter of Saddam Hussein in captivity. As twelve young American guards spend their days in the same room with this brutal gangster-killer, a chilling, Shakespearean portrait emerges. Intriguingly, we meet a man who, while sometimes manipulative and petty, is also avuncular, joking, charming, wistful, and physically affectionate. There is even a scene of the Beast of Baghdad hugging an American soldier in a moment of tenderness. This is an unforgettable, essential read." — William Doyle, author of *A Soldier's Dream: Captain Travis Patriquin and the Awakening of Iraq* and *PT 109: An American Epic of War, Survival and the Destiny of John F. Kennedy*"A moving and perception-altering book that exposes how wrong we are in so much of what we assume about war. In the fifteen years that America has been at war we've imprisoned, injured and killed thousands of foreign citizens. It's time we got to know some of them. Will Bardenwerper introduces us to a name we know well, but a story about which we know little. Saddam Hussein's execution was not just about the death of a tyrant. It's about the Americans who were tasked with guarding him, interrogating him, and preparing him for his death. No matter the justification, there are long lingering consequences for all involved — often, terrible ones. But rather than shouldering and sharing those consequences as a nation, we've looked away and allowed too few to carry those burdens. Mr. Bardenwerper forces us to turn our gaze not only on those we have killed, but on those who were there to see the task done." — Eric Fair, Pushcart Prize-winning essayist and author of the memoir *Consequence*"What an astonishing story. Through meticulous research and a keen eye for detail, Bardenwerper does the near impossible: convinces the reader to empathize with Saddam Hussein during his sad final days. The Prisoner in His Palace is a deeply human book, and though we all know the ending, I couldn't put it down." — Brian Castner, author of *The Long*

Walk and All the Ways We Kill and Die” Will Bardenwerper has written a bracing account of Saddam Hussein’s final months through the eyes of those who guarded and interrogated him—eyes that are uncomfortably opened to the complexity of evil. Reminiscent of 20th century Nazi character portraits such as Gitta Sereny’s *Into That Darkness*, Bardenwerper’s *The Prisoner in His Palace* will be many things to many people. To this writer and combat veteran, it is an exhilarating, extraordinary, and damning look in the mirror.

Adrian Bonenberger, author of *Afghan Post* “The Prisoner in His Palace” is an important contribution to the literature from America’s 9/11 wars. Will Bardenwerper has written a concise and engrossing account of the final days of Saddam Hussein. The stories of the American soldiers who guarded the Iraqi leader serve as a sharp reminder of war’s complexities, contradictions, and costs.

J. Kael Weston, author of *The Mirror Test: America at War in Iraq and Afghanistan* “The Prisoner in His Palace” is a searing, beautifully crafted exploration of humankind’s capacity for both boundless savagery and awe-inspiring perseverance. By tracking down and listening to the soldiers who stood watch over Saddam Hussein during the dictator’s final days, Will Bardenwerper has done far more than just commit a heroic act of journalism; he has also created an extraordinary work of history that should be read by all who seek to understand how evil can flourish, and how it can be defeated.

Brendan I. Koerner, author of *The Skies Belong to Us and Now the Hell Will Start* “Bardenwerper’s examination of how soldiers, trained to focus on the inhumanity of the enemy, struggle to frame and reframe that inhumanity, is the focus of *The Prisoner in His Palace*.” The book’s action will pull you along like any great military adventure, but bubbling underneath is an absorbing and sometimes heartbreaking survey of young men grappling with a moral certitude that begins to shift below the desert sands they’re standing on.

Tim Townsend, author of *Mission at Nuremberg*

Will Bardenwerper has contributed to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. He served as an Airborne Ranger-qualified infantry officer in Iraq and was awarded a Combat Infantryman’s Badge and Bronze Star. In 2010, he joined the Pentagon as a Presidential Management Fellow, where he spent the next four years. He has an MA in international public policy from The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and a BA in English from Princeton.

This is an incredibly accurate account from the perspective of our soldiers that is presented in this book. I appreciate that this story was brought to light by such a well written book Thank you for your work Mr. Bardenwerper.

Great literature challenges the mind while being pleasing the eye - and this is great literature. The humanization of an infamous villain takes true skill in the art, and WB has delivered the goods. This book reminds me that beneath our stereotypes and black-white categorizations, each and every one of us is a complex story waiting to be told. Bravo to the ornate dressings constructed around this window into the world of a human monster - a truly great read.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book in which Bardenwerper brings a new dimension to a well covered topic. It shows the struggle between the absolute cruelty of war, the ruthlessness of a dictator and human sentiments of dignity and honor.

Very well written and a great read, also very educational! Would recommend!

What an amazing book. It was very well written. I found myself having to continuously read on to see what happen the next page had in store. Probably the fastest I've ever read a book due to the grabbing story being told about such a historic moment. Well done!

An amazing, untold story. Bardenwerper's writing is deeply compelling.

What a fascinating story of a complicated man. This book is a page turner. As a working mom with two kids, I finished A Prisoner in His Palace in record time.

Bardenwerper transports you into the personal space of a madman and tyrant, shedding light not only on his darkness but his humanity as well.

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