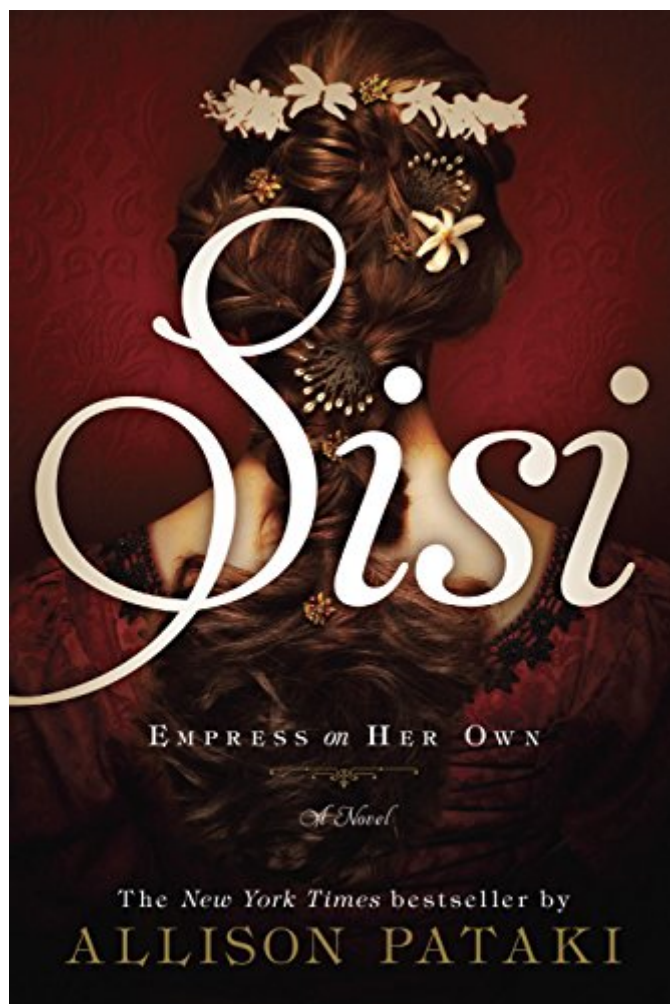


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Sisi: Empress On Her Own: A Novel



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • For readers of Philippa Gregory, Paula McLain, and Daisy Goodwin comes a sweeping and powerful novel by Allison Pataki. Sisi tells the little-known story of Empress Elisabeth of Austria-Hungary, the Princess Diana of her time, in an enthralling work of historical fiction that is also a gripping page-turner. Married to Emperor Franz Joseph, Elisabeth—fondly known as Sisi—captures the hearts of her people as their “fairy queen,” but beneath that dazzling persona lives a far more complex figure. In mid-nineteenth-century Vienna, the halls of the Hofburg Palace buzz not only with imperial waltzes and champagne but with temptations, rivals, and cutthroat intrigue. Feeling stifled by strict protocols and a turbulent marriage, Sisi grows restless. A free-spirited wanderer, she finds solace at her estate outside Budapest. There she rides her beloved horses and enjoys visits from the Hungarian statesman Count András Jassy, the man with whom she’s unwittingly fallen in love. But tragic news brings Sisi out of her fragile seclusion, forcing her to return to her capital and a world of gossip, envy, and sorrow where a dangerous fate lurks in the shadows. Through love affairs and loss, dedication and defiance, Sisi struggles against conflicting desires: to keep her family together, or to flee amid the collapse of her suffocating marriage and the gathering tumult of the First World War. In an age of crumbling monarchies, Sisi fights to assert her right to the throne beside her husband, to win the love of her people and the world, and to save an empire. But in the end, can she save herself? Featuring larger-than-life historic figures such as Bavaria’s “Mad King Ludwig” and the tragic Crown Prince Rudolf, and set against many of Europe’s grandest sites—from Germany’s storied Neuschwanstein Castle to England’s lush shires—Sisi brings to life an extraordinary woman and the romantic, volatile era over which she presided. Praise for Sisi • Pataki successfully juggles numerous political and personal plot lines while maintaining her focus on a fascinating central character. . . . Readers of Pataki’s first book will want to know the rest of Sisi’s story, but this novel stands on its own for historical fiction fans. • “Library Journal • A deeply moving book about a complex character.” • “BookPage • A satisfying saga of the late Habsburg period.” • “Kirkus Reviews • Pataki brings richness and relevance to the story of the woman who worked tirelessly to protect the face of an empire.” • “Publishers Weekly • Pataki simply stuns me with each new book. I savor each page. Sisi is her best yet!” • “Kathie Lee Gifford • Readers will enjoy the glorious dilemma of whether to turn the pages swiftly, breathlessly following Empress Sisi from one astonishing, heartbreaking adventure to the next, or to linger and luxuriate in Pataki’s vivid, sumptuous descriptions of the Habsburg court.” • “Jennifer Chiaverini, New York Times bestselling author of Mrs. Lincoln’s Dressmaker • This entire novel is

irresistibleâ€”completely impossible to put down! Pataki reimagines the reign of the nineteenth-century Princess Diana in this stunning book.â€”Michelle Moran, internationally bestselling author of Rebel Queen â€œEmotional, exuberant, masterly, Sisi swept me into the glittering, treacherous world of the waning Habsburg empire. A must-read.â€”Lynn Cullen, bestselling author of Mrs. Poe

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Customer Reviews

Sisi, Allison Pataki's third novel (and sequel to *The Accidental Empress*) is a marvelous work of historical fiction. At times this genre can be dense, but Pataki has a flair that few do. Pataki demonstrates an ability to convey a painting to her readers of some very complex, but real, characters. She creates a landscape of Europe in the late 19th Century. Her Empress Sisi, a very colorful persona, comes alive in this wonderful and fun book. While she writes in a light hearted way, there is no conceivable way that one comes out from this read without knowing (or perhaps even more likely, feeling) more about 19th Century European monarchies. Pataki takes the reader away into the drama of Sisi's complex and rigid world. Clearly some of it is her own making but, regardless, this is a clever work of writing - seeing the inner workings of a woman who is trapped in

a marriage she once she so wanted. This hierarchy of European monarchies is written of in a truly palpable sense as even their existence is questioned by revolutions and disequilibrium in the balance of power of the nation-states. Sisi's mother-in-law, Sophie the archduchess, plays a perfect role and is used splendidly for historical context stating such things as "the whole world slept soundly at night. With Austria at the helm of Europe, it was the age of the great monarchs. Dynasties were assured; all was in its proper order. People knew who their leaders were. There was none of this bickering over constitutions and revolutions and laissez-faire governments. There was peace. There was order!"

Some truly wonderful dialogue. Pataki brings Sisi and the Hapsburg Empire to light in her skilled water-colored writing. I found myself whisked away in the intrigue and the drama of it all.

4.5 stars

As we learned in *The Accidental Empress* (which one must really read in order to understand Sisi's motivations and emotional handicaps, and not ignorantly write her off simply as a spoiled horse-lover), Elisabeth was not born to the position of Empress. Her childhood was unbelievably free and unstructured; her parents allowed her and her siblings to run wild, literally, through the Bavarian countryside. She never had to deal with convoluted and constricting rules of etiquette, procedures which dictated her every move from the moment she woke to the moment she went to sleep. So when she married Franz Joseph and became Empress, and found herself trapped by this system of stultifying rules, some of which were so ridiculous as to be unbelievable (there was a top-secret "Imperial Fold" of the napkin, people, that was a guarded state secret passed down orally to only a few living people at a time; that's the kind of detail-oriented, anal-retentive system we're talking about), her response was to run away. So that's what she did, through most of her career as Empress. And when she couldn't run away, she learned to control those few things which hadn't been stripped away from her: her toilette and dress, her exercise regimen, her diet, and her corset, all of which became near-obsessive rituals as the years went on, creating a woman who was more statue than human. But a beautiful statue nonetheless, one that became a favorite of newspapers and photographers, who documented her every look and action, turning her into a fashion icon and her style into the aspiration of thousands of women.

Allison Pataki's words of great power sweep you into a deep, emotional connection with the princess and her life. While it's a story about the princess it also gives an insight to the political reign of the time. Yet anyone can relate to the plot, the pain, the loss, and the insights along the way, to the price each character pays, and to the human story told with great sensitivity. It is an emotionally

poignant historical romance that will thrill readers of any genre. This book is the second in the sequel to the author's book, "The Accidental Empress". In the first book we met the young, beautiful carefree Elizabeth of the Hapsburg family and in this book an older Elisabeth. Despite the lengthy preparations and teachings Elisabeth had received for her new life as Empress of Austria, nothing could prepare her for the rigidity of the court. She was merely too young and unprepared for what was coming. The Wittelsbachs were reputed to have a melancholy streak in them, and add this to being transplanted from an idyllic childhood to a stern household where she was nothing more than a continuing disappointment to her mother in law and the court, and Elisabeth's wish to escape was understandable. Elisabeth began to travel, each time farther and farther away from Austria, seeking any form of escape. The home of her childhood, Madeira, Corfu, were all places where Elisabeth sought to regain some of the independence of her younger years. Vain and immature, glorious and incandescent, Elisabeth of Austria remains the stuff of legends. This is an account of Elisabeth's life, a life sadly spent in search of happiness. I was given this book for my honest review. I highly recommend it.

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