Versailles: A Biography of a Palace

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The behind-the-scenes story of the world's most famous palace, painting a picture of the way its residents truly lived and examining the palace's legacy, from French history through today

The story of Versailles is one of historical drama, under the last three kings of France's old regime, mixed with the high camp and glamour of the European courts, all in an iconic home for the French arts. The palace itself has been radically altered since 1789, and the court was long ago swept away. *Versailles* sets out to rediscover what is now a vanished world: a great center of power, seat of royal government, and, for thousands, a home both grand and squalid, bound by social codes almost incomprehensible to us today.

Using eyewitness testimony as well as the latest historical research, Spawforth offers the first full account of Versailles in English in over thirty years. Blowing away the myths of Versailles, he analyses afresh the politics behind the Sun King's construction of the palace and shows how Versailles worked as the seat of a royal court. He probes the conventional picture of a "perpetual house party" of courtiers and gives full weight to the darker side: not just the mounting discomfort of the aging buildings but also the intrigue and status anxiety of its aristocrats. The book brings out clearly the fateful consequences for the French monarchy of its relocation to Versailles and also examines the changing place of Versailles in France's national identity since 1789.

Many books have told the stories of the royals and artists living in Versailles, but this is the first to turn its focus on the palace itself---from architecture and politics to scandal and restoration.

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