



## **Sondok: Princess of the Moon and Stars, Korea, A.D. 595**

*Sheri Holman*

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In the late seventh century, the land that we now call Korea was embroiled with political and religious conflicts. Three kingdoms (Silla, Koguryo, and Paekche) fought for supremacy, and three faiths (Shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) battled for dominance. Princess Sondok, the eldest daughter of King Chinp-yong of Silla, must contemplate problems that few other 14-year-olds ever to think of. Another expertly crafted addition to the Royal Diaries series.

## **Sondok: Princess of the Moon and Stars, Korea, A.D. 595 Details**

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## **From Reader Review Sondok: Princess of the Moon and Stars, Korea, A.D. 595 for online ebook**

### **Angelique Sapone says**

All the Royal Diaries books portray these princess as trying to triumph over their sex. This is a prime example of why your title doesn't totally matter...because you have a vagina. Sondok wasnt hearing any of it though...good for her.

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### **Hannah Testa says**

This was another Royal Diaries book that taught me a lot about an ancient culture, but ultimately left me feeling meh about it. It's not that it's a bad book - it's not at all - it was just...okay.

Sondok struggling to be true to herself while also being what other people wanted of her is a problem I hold very dear to my heart. I'm so glad she finally got to build her astronomy platform and do what she loved, all the while proving women could be in fields of science. Her frustration felt very relatable and I'm glad she was able to get her comeuppance, and that she did it with grace.

I thought it was very interesting that she wrote to her grandmother on scraps of paper and put them in the Ancestors Jar. That was a new way of spinning the diary format, and while logically it was odd (How many scraps of paper are there in that jar along with the rice? And how big are they? Did she ever take them out?), I thought it was a nice sentimental touch to add.

I'm not sure how I felt about her non-romance with Chajang. She was so sure she didn't see him that way, and then one of her sisters makes a joke and suddenly she likes him? I don't know, that was a little nitpick I had. I'm glad they remained friends and erected monuments together, though.

All in all, this was a very simple story. Sondok was the most interesting...I think because she was really the only one with a fleshed-out personality. I always love learning about other cultures, and I did learn a lot about ancient Korea. (I had no idea they used a similar zodiac like the Chinese, for example.) It wasn't my favorite book, but I'm glad I read it.

Unrelated side note: I need Disney to make an adaptation of Princess Pari. I feel like that would be an excellent movie!

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### **Angie says**

I loved these books as an adolescent, I collected them all, I read and re-read them. I went on to be a history major and librarian and I think that it is in no small part due to books like these that made history feel alive to young women in a way that many/most of the books at the time did not.

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## **Carmen lopez says**

i hated the way how they treated women back then other than that it was a great story.

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## **Lucinda says**

A really good book. Loved that last line.

Perhaps Father's new wife will bear him a son, and I will never have a chance to govern well. But judging from the sky today, the heaven's seem to think differently. The Entire court has come outside and stands staring upward. Their jaws drop and they cast awed glances at me. Even Lord Lin Fang looks at the sky and trembles. The planet Kumsong is shining in the daytime, Grandmother. What is normally only seen at night is now perfectly visible in the brightest day. And as you know, the legend say that when Kumsong shines by day a woman is to rule. And there Kumsong shines. And here I stand. - Excerpt from "Sondok: Princess of the Moon and Stars"

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## **earthy says**

Great characters, but the diary format works even less well here than it does in other books in this series. Sondok's diary is made up of notes written to the jar containing her grandmother's ashes--a clever idea, except that Sondok spends much of her time explaining things that her grandmother would already have known about culture and customs.

Awkward structure aside, Sondok's life and times are extremely interesting, and I wish there was more informationa available about this woman and her extraordinary talents!

Similar to other books in this series, the book ends right when Sondok's story really seems to start (we never actually get to see her become ruler of Korea or build her still-standing observatory and pagoda). Still, what's there is intriguing.

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## **Emily says**

This book was just ok. I enjoyed it because I learned a little about ancient Korea, but the journal entries were confusing. If it weren't for the historical info in the back go tie it together I would've been confused about a lot of it. Obviously sondok was an interesting person but I wish that the story written of her in this diary was more interesting. I learned about people in her life but the events were obviously fictitious and the places and things mentioned were so confusing. I wish I had realized before finishing the book that there was a glossary and more info in the back. But I read books from front to back. So why would I page to the back first? There should've been some announcement in the beginning that we should reference the back of the book as we read. They even had all the italicized words in the back as a glossary. Would've loved to have known THAT before finishing the entire story. Overall, confusing and uneventful :/ disappointing read.

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## Katrin von Martin says

I read "The Royal Diaries" series a lot as a kid. They were my go to books and I often reread the few that I had over and over again, never becoming bored with them. Then I got older, discovered other books, and packed my "Royal Diaries" novels away to make room for new reading acquisitions. I recently got an itch to read some historical fiction. My (admittedly brief) foray into the adult examples of the genre left me disappointed...and then I remembered these books. Granted, they're meant for a younger reading audience than me, but that's never stopped me before. Better yet, I did some quick research and learned that quite a few more had been published since I had stopped reading this series in my youth. I hurriedly acquired most of the books I didn't already have and decided to begin with "Sondok: Princess of the Moon and Stars." This novel features a country I'm not very familiar with and a time that I know very little about, so it seemed a good place to start. I'm pleased to say that the quality of these books is exactly as I remember them and I was completely satisfied with the novel both in terms of reading experience and educational quality. Spoilers follow.

Sondok's mother has failed to produce a male heir, which puts Sondok next in line for the throne. While Sondok's father, the King of Silla, stands by his decision of naming his daughter his heir, not everyone is pleased with the idea of a woman ascending to the throne. Silla's enemies are sure to attempt an invasion, which prompts Sondok's father to facilitate an alliance with the powerful Chinese Empire through ambassador Lord Lin Fang. Though initially excited to meet with the foreign diplomat and fellow astronomer, Sondok's opinion of Lin Fang quickly drops when he makes it clear that he disapproves of Silla's future ruler being female. Worse, he declares that Sondok's greatest love, astronomy, is a pursuit unfit for a woman...and the King of Silla agrees, banning Sondok for studying the stars. When the Chinese astronomers predict an eclipse on a different day than Silla's, Sondok is determined to prove that her measurements and calculations are correct, even if her father refuses to listen. And when Lord Lin Fang encourages even bigger changes in Sondok's life, she finds herself struggling to please everyone while battling with her own conflicting emotions. How can she train to be the future ruler of Silla with Lin Fang changing everything and seemingly turning her father against her?

I'll be honest, despite my love for this series as a youngster, I went into this with lowered expectations, expecting a simplified story with light themes...but I ended up being very impressed with the plot. Page-count wise, the book may seem a little short, but the author has packed a lot of content into the pages. It's a great story with big themes. While the main conflict is the Chinese astronomers versus Silla's and, as an extension, Sondok versus Lin Fang and their respective cultures, a lot of other issues are hit on, too. There are questions of religion in the form of Buddhism versus Shamanism versus Confucianism; gender roles with Sondok trying to balance the often conflicting expectations put upon her as a woman and as Silla's future ruler; rank and maintaining the social hierarchy when neither Sondok's father nor sole uncle has produced a male heir, which complicates the continuation of the royal family line; family with the changing the dynamics within Sondok's household and eventually forcing her mother to leave, and love, as, tragically, Sondok is in love with her best friend Chajang, but their positions in society will not permit them to marry. Not a page is wasted and it all boils down to a positive message for readers to take away: it is more important to trust yourself than it is to please others who will never accept you as you are. If you're looking for a more action-focused, fast-paced plot, then this book isn't for you. This is definitely more of a personal story of self discovery and is as a result a little slower. It's not boring, mind you, but the goal is to put you in Sondok's head and really make you understand her world, not tell a tale of riveting excitement and page-turning action. This is a beautiful story, full of big themes and conflict all working together to help us understand Sondok

and her situation. Sure, it's not action-packed, but it's difficult to put down since every page is significant and the story is so interesting.

Perhaps more than any other girl I can remember from the "Royal Diaries" novels (heck, even more than any other protagonist I've read recently), Sondok faces prevalent sexism on a daily basis with her interest in astronomy and her future as Silla's ruler often coming into direct conflict with the traditional gender roles practiced by her people. A younger reader likely wouldn't be concerned with this, but as an adult reader, I was pleased to see that the author wasn't intent on shoving the "feminist" angle down the readers' throats. Rather than further an agenda (like other recent historical novels and movies), the story is simply meant to tell us Sondok's story, that of a strong young woman who stands up for herself in the face of opposition in a world that can't accept the concept of her ruling in her own right. Granted, this book was written over ten years ago, but I was pleased to see that the trends I've noticed in more recent historical novels and movies weren't present here: that is, characters that act like modern women spouting off about how unfair their society is as a result of the gender roles. Instead, the characters think and express themselves like women of their times, not women of ours, and the idea that woman deal with a huge inequality of the sexes is fully expressed without being preachy. It's incorporated into the narrative rather than being used to bludgeon the reader over the head. Again, younger readers likely won't notice this or care beyond the fact that Sondok provides a good role model, but as an adult, I appreciated seeing the issue being treated with the finesse it deserves without taking the reader out of the setting with modern opinions.

A majority of the "Royal Diaries" books I read as a kid took place in European countries, so the setting of "Sondok: Princess of the Moon and Stars" was completely unfamiliar to me. The author does a great job of explaining the customs, culture, and atmosphere of early Korea. She weaves it into the story rather than just dumping it on the reader, which makes for a smooth reading experience while still ensuring that the reader is learning about Sondok's world. That being said, the method of presentation is sometimes a little corny. The diary is framed as Sondok putting the entries into the ancestral jar containing her grandmother's remains as an offering and plea for guidance, so a lot of the cultural information is introduced with "as you know, Grandmother..." which launches into explaining to "Grandmother" (and the reader) things she would already know. The overuse of this lead-in aside, I ultimately came out of the book feeling like I had learned a lot about Sondok's world (the 20-some page historical note at the end is also incredibly informative). I also liked that the realities of Sondok's Korea aren't sugar coated; while this is solidly a book for a preteen audience, the darker aspects of the culture (Sondok's father wanting to kill Chajang after he turns down a position on the Council, for example) are still there, present enough to make themselves known but not expanded upon to make the book unsuitable for its audience. A lot of research went into this, and it definitely shows!

Sondok is a highly intelligent, mature, level-headed girl. Though she exhibits the occasional outburst born out of the frustration of being pulled in so many directions at once, she usually conducts herself in a calm, dignified manner that demonstrates the positive qualities that eventually make her a successful ruler. If anyone was up to the task of ruling in a country in a time that opposed the idea of a female sitting on the throne, it was Sondok. Her resilience is truly admirable; she continues to fight for what she wants even when it seems hopeless. And if things don't work out for her, she doesn't fall into despair and instead strives to make the best of her new situation. Her feelings, as revealed in her "diary," are often tumultuous and strong, but she hides it well, knowing that she has to prove that she is prepared to come into her birthright when the time comes. I was particularly impressed by her interactions with her father's new wife. Rather than be bitter towards the new queen, Sondok acknowledges that she can't be mad at her because she is simply a pawn in the greater game of Silla needing a male heir. Instead, Sondok helps her become adjusted to her new life and a sort of friendship forms between them. She's a wonderful protagonist and a great character for younger readers to look up to.

On a random note, I love the covers of these books, and this one is no exception. The colours are so rich that they draw the eye, yet the design is simple. I've always enjoyed just looking at the covers to get a feel for who this particular princess might be (or in this case, rather, how the artist depicts her since there are no known images of Sondok). It's an elegantly designed cover, so kudos to the artist.

"Sondok: Princess of the Moon and Stars" is a book that, while aimed at a younger audience, can provide a satisfying reading experience for adults. Regardless of your age, this novel is definitely worth a read, and I'm personally very pleased that I enjoyed a "Royal Diaries" book now just as much as I did when I was a kid. Don't let the target age scare you away - this is a great example of historical fiction. Five stars.

This review is also posted on Amazon.com.

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### **Nicole Gaudier says**

I think this would have worked better in more standard narrative.

It really liked it when I read it but i'm sure if I reread it now it'd be a bit problematic.

I remember thinking it was cool to see a different princess aka non European one but I didn't know how to express that.

I have to reread this series and give my adult post graduate degree perspective but what I remember liking was:

- the characters in this series were roughly my age when I read the books (YA)
- it gave you an idea of what life may have been like back then
- they did have an afterword with historic information that gave you more context on their real lives and often photos or paintings

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### **Charlyn says**

Looking at my reviews in "cloud" form, I realized that most of my reviews are on fantasies and that is because it is one of my favorite genres. However, I know I need to be more inclusive, so I remembered that I had not reviewed any of the books from "The Royal Diaries" series and I picked this one up.

This book is narrated by young Sondok in messages she writes to her grandmother's spirit living in a sacred jar. Sondok's father is king and her mother has provided no male heir, so that means Sondok will have to serve if a male heir isn't born. She realizes her importance and her role and believes that her interest in astronomy should be valued by her father. Instead, the Chinese ambassador chastises the young girl for interests that are clearly alien to his idea of the "proper female" and he appears to affect her father's decisions about her activities. Throughout the book there is the struggle of what Sondok wants to be versus what others want her to be.

I enjoyed this book because it provided another glimpse into the history of Korea, a country that I first visited through the wonderful fiction of Linda Sue Park. Historical information, including images, provided at the close of this book help the reader make the connection to a history with which most Americans are

unfamiliar.

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## **Tally says**

I would 100% consider this a feminist book. Queen in her own right and the first woman to rule an Eastern Asian country. Not as quick of a read as the others but just as informative and fascinating!

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## **Carlyn Brody says**

Sondok is one of the books from the Scholastics Royal Diaries range. I've been collecting the books for a couple of years now and you can see all my reviews here. The Scholastic Royal Diaries series are fictionalized diaries of real historical royal women. As the series is aimed at teenage girls, the books are set during the royal women's adolescence. There's some creative license to the dates and facts in the books so further research is required if you want to know the real story. For instance, Sondok's original name was Dok-man and when she became queen, her name changed to Sondok. Sheri Holman states in the Author's notes that she used the name Sondok instead of Dok-man as Sondok is more known by her queenly title. Just so you know Sondok is sometimes spelled Seondeok and Dok-man as Deokman but I am going with the spelling in the book.

The story begins in 595 AD. Sondok is the eldest daughter of King Chin-pyong and Queen Ma-ya. Sondok's father is the ruler of Silla, one of three ancient kingdoms of Korea. The other kingdoms are Konguryo and Paekche. The three kingdoms are constantly at war with each other. King Chin-pyong is worried that Paekche will invade Silla so he courts an alliance with China to protect his kingdom. He invites Lord Lin Fang, an ambassador of China to stay in the palace.

Sondok is interested to meet Lord Lin Fang when she learns that they both are interested in astronomy. She's notices that the Chinese lunar calendar predicts a lunar eclipse and based on her calculations there will not be an eclipse. When Sondok finally meets Lord Lin Fang, she is severely disappointed. Lord Lin Fang thinks it's unladylike for a woman to have an interest in astronomy. He dismisses her opinions and tells her that she should focus on women's work. The king is required to do certain rituals to scare the eclipse away but if there is no eclipse, he will look like a fool. In order to win favour with the Chinese, the king decides to adopt the Chinese Lunar calendar and forbids Sondok from astronomy.

Sondok spends more time doing domestic chores with her mother and sisters. She finds the work demeaning and that causes a rift between her female relations. As the months past, Sondok learns to respect her female family members and have the courage to voice her opinion on the day of the lunar eclipse.

I enjoyed reading about Sondok. I think that she is a character that teenagers can relate to as she was searching for her own identity and wanted to be taken seriously by the adults in her life. I had not heard of Sondok before reading the book. It was fun learning about an Asian princess as most stories focus on European princesses. I found out that there was no Lord Lin Fang in real life. He was added as a story point.

His character annoyed me a lot and it was hard reading about Sondok's despair and anger towards him. Although I thought she handled herself pretty well against a repulsive character.

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### **Kelsey Hanson says**

This story had one of the best "I told you so moments" I ever read. Princess Sondok was clearly trapped in a very tough position. She was obviously very intelligent, but because she was a girl she was constantly set aside even though her advise was good. The fact that she was able to have as much impact as she did was pretty impressive. I also found many of the Korean traditions interesting, especially the role of the ancestor jar with becomes her diary writing to her grandmother.

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### **Cassie says**

Here I am, 31 years old, and I am still working at the Royal Diaries series. I have a few on my own TBR shelf and my library has the complete collection. Ever so often, I pick one up for a quick read. Since I needed to read a book set in Korea for a reading challenge I'm doing, I learned a bit about Sondok! I didn't know about this royal figure, but rock on Sondok! The first woman in Asian history to rule in her own right (as far as I could tell from this book, anyway.)

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### **Anna says**

The latest in my series read-through project. This one was fine. Some parts were interesting, such as Sondok's family dynamic and some of her interest in constellations and astronomy, some parts were more on the boring side. Not bad, not great. I think I have more personal interest in tales set in Japan or China vs. Korea, so different strokes for different folks.

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