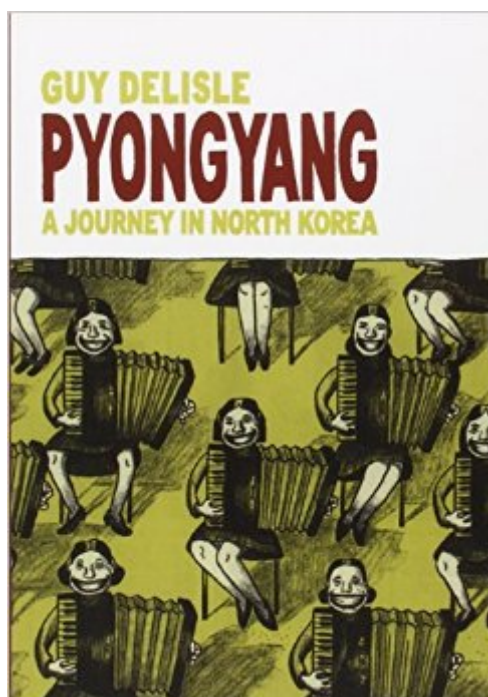


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Pyongyang: A Journey In North Korea



Synopsis

In 2001, cartoonist Guy Delisle lived in the capital of North Korea for two months on a work visa for a French film company. In this remarkable graphic novel, Delisle recorded what he was able to see of the culture and lives of one of the last remaining totalitarian communist societies.

Book Information

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Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Since the end of the Korean War, North Korea has become the most isolated, mysterious and fortified country on Earth. Unlike many other remote locations around the world North Korea is not a place many people would want to spend any time. However, thanks to globalization, North Korea's vast supply of super cheap labor and a real need for foreign investment the country has opened its doors just a crack and in peeked cartoonist Guy Delisle for a view at probably the most tightly regulated society on the planet. Mr. Delisle documents his experience in North Korea accompanied by his ever present "guide" and his translator. Pyongyang isn't really a story per se as much as a slice of life glimpse at the daily goings on in North Korea or at least as much of a glimpse as foreigners are allowed to see. The drawing style in Pyongyang is a minimalist black and white that captures nicely the mirthless life in North Korea. You get a sense that the leadership is desperately trying to maintain a good face for the rest of the world but like the bridge in the book that only gets half painted the rust is bleeding through and the cracks are growing. There could hardly be a better advertisement for Capitalism and Democracy than the sterile, dystopia that is North Korea where

airports and restaurants operate without lights and massive construction projects sit unfinished and crumbling. Freeways are built without exits and all the people listen to the same state run radio broadcast featuring music that sounds like "a cross between a national anthem and the theme song of a children's show". North Korea has the same kind of creepiness as a cult except on a massive scale where Kim Jung Il acts as patron deity and his smiling visage is ever present in society.

In recent years, North Korea has held a prominent place in our collective imaginations as a tiny, isolated Asian country that shares membership in the "axis of evil" and yet is a country of which little is known. French Canadian cartoonist Guy Delisle travels to this enigmatic country for a two month business trip and attempts to unravel some of the mystery and inconsistencies of life in Communist Korea. His experiences are depicted with simplicity and grace in the graphic novel memoir/travelogue, *Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea*. Delisle is sent to North Korea as an animator whose expertise as an animator is valued by the North Koreans. In the process, he learns how things work or don't work in this stark country. He sees and subtly critiques a country where massive buildings go unfinished, highways are without exit ramps, and airports and restaurants are without lights. Delisle's wry humor emerges throughout the story, including telling jokes that are above the heads of his humorless "Comrade Guide" and "Comrade Translator" and his habit of throwing paper airplanes out of his 15th floor hotel window. He shows the grim reality of decades of extreme Communism by depicting the monotony of having only one radio station to listen to, being surrounded by ubiquitous statues and images of dictators Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung, and choosing from a rather bland selection of restaurants and food. In an ironic motif throughout the story, he carries around a copy of Orwell's 1984 that he brought with him and eventually gives to his unsuspecting guide. The reader is constantly reminded of connections between the society Orwell describes in his dystopian classic and the realities of life in present day North Korea.

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