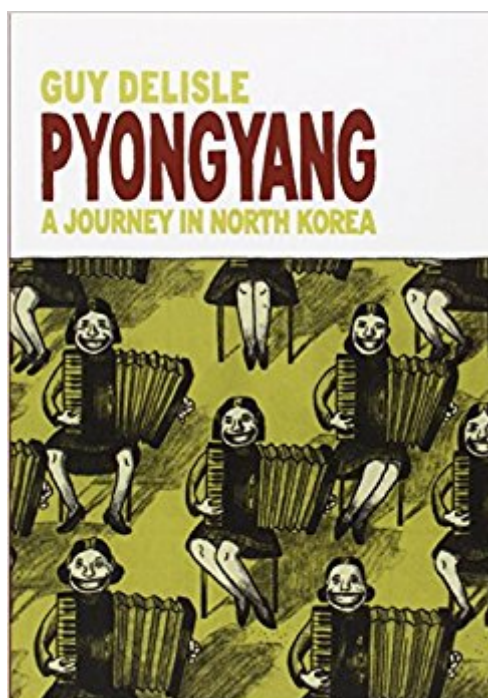


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# Pyongyang: A Journey In North Korea



## 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

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Drawn and Quarterly; 1st edition (May 1, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1897299214

ISBN-13: 978-1897299210

Product Dimensions: 6 x 11.6 x 216.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 100 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #54,513 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in [Books > Comics &](#)

[Graphic Novels > Publishers > Drawn and Quarterly](#) #2045 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Memoirs](#)

## Customer Reviews

In 2001, French-Canadian cartoonist Delisle traveled to North Korea on a work visa to supervise the animation of a children's cartoon show for two months. While there, he got a rare chance to observe firsthand one of the last remaining totalitarian Communist societies. He also got crappy ice cream, a barrage of propaganda and a chance to fly paper airplanes out of his 15th-floor hotel window.

Combining a gift for anecdote and an ear for absurd dialogue, Delisle's retelling of his adventures makes a gently humorous counterpoint to the daily news stories about the axis of evil, a Lost in Translation for the Communist world. Delisle shifts between accounts of his work as an animator and life as a visitor in a country where all foreigners take up only two floors of a 50-story hotel. Delisle's simple but expressive art works well with his account, humanizing the few North Koreans he gets to know (including "Comrade Guide" and "Comrade Translator"), and facilitating digressions into North Korean history and various bizarre happenings involving brandy and bear cubs.

Pyongyang will appeal to multiple audiences: current events buffs, Persepolis fans and those who just love a good yarn. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Pyongyang documents the two months French animator Delisle spent overseeing cartoon production in North Korea, where his movements were constantly monitored by a translator and a guide, who together could limit his activities but couldn't restrict his observations. He records everything from the omnipresent statues and portraits of dictators Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il to the brainwashed obedience of the citizens. Rather than conveying his disorientation through convoluted visual devices, Delisle uses a straightforward Eurocartoon approach that matter-of-factly depicts the mundane absurdities he faced every day. The gray tones and unembellished drawings reflect the grim drabness and the sterility of a totalitarian society. Delisle finds black comedy in the place, though, and makes small efforts at subversion by cracking jokes that go over the humorless translator's head and lending the guide a copy of 1984. Despite such humor, which made his sojourn bearable and overcame his alienation and boredom, Delisle maintains empathy. Viewing an eight-year-old accordion prodigy's robotic concert performance, he thinks, "It's all so cold . . . and sad. I could cry." Gordon FlaggCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved  
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I really enjoyed reading this book, it gave a good view of what it is like to live in a totalitarian society and how the people act just to keep out of the way of the authorities. It also showed that although North Korea wants to show that it is a state which can manage without input from western countries it actually cannot. I liked the drawing style and the humorous way the author conveyed the information. I would recommend this book and will make every effort to find other books by this author to read

For the past two nights I have had dreams about North Korea. I don't recall ever having had a recurring dream. I never dreamt about the North during the early part of this year when I read one book after another about the DPRK. I wonder what tonight's dream will be about, considering I have just finished *Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea*, a graphic novel by Guy Delisle (translated by Helge Dascher). *Pyongyang* is the first work of graphic fiction I have read. It is classed as a novel but it reflects Delisle's own two-month stay in the North Korean capital where he worked for a French animation company. Delisle's observations and frustrations in having to deal with North Korean bureaucracy made for a hilarious read. Although Delisle is in the country on a two-month work contract, he is still led by guides everywhere. Guest workers, like tourists, must pay their reverential respect at all North Korean monuments and propaganda museums in addition to working at their job six days a week. Delisle is given the propaganda tour and he depicts himself in some

drawings as barely able to contain his laughter. He expresses his frustration at not being able to find a decent cup of coffee in the whole country. I know what I have in store yet I will be prepared in that at least I have the foreknowledge to bring my own, albeit inferior, instant coffee when compared to brewed, from home when I travel there. The drawings were made with a variety of perspectives which I admired and enjoyed. In the midst of his adventures working with westerners and North Koreans at the animation studio, Delisle inserts a running joke in the form of a police line-up in which he asks the reader "Can You Spot the Traitors?". One must look at all the people and decide from almost an identical set of characteristics who is a traitor to the fatherland. A typical answer would be Figure #1 because "he let the portrait of Our Dear Leader gather dust". I do not believe that a graphic novel about North Korea would have had the same humorous touch if it had been written and drawn by someone who hadn't been there. A book like this would be a welcome addition to my collection on account of its artwork alone, and although I have already read it I would consider buying a copy. I read the hardcover edition, which was 176 pages printed on a very thick paper. I always had to ensure I wasn't turning two pages at once since it often felt as though I had multiple pages between my fingers.

The premise of this book astounded me- Western cartoons are being produced in North Korea?! More shocking, Westerners are being brought in to oversee this? Whoa. This book is something I have to get my hands on! My overall reaction - to the story - is WHOA. North Korea is every bit as freaky as the rumours, certainly the little bit the Delisle was allowed to see. (other reviewers have wasted time whining that all the author did was hang out in hotels with other foreigners- hey morons, did you miss the point? He wasn't able to do anything else!) Now here comes the disturbing bit- I lived in South Korea some years ago, and Delisle's North Korea is not entirely dissimilar. "volunteer" is a word the South Koreans did not understand either - saying "no" to a proposed volunteer activity gets you raked over the coals. Fine, it wasn't a forced activity for the state, but not participating got you black balled. There was a lot of enforced group-think going on, and while it did not reach the propaganda extremes of what Delisle saw in Pyongyang, it wasn't a million miles away either. This book was informative - it explained the Berlin subway carriages I saw in Pyongyang's subway in a recent documentary! Any book that can complement other material is worth the price! Bon travail, Guy!

Took me a little bit to get used to the art style; admittedly, I'm a bit of a comic snob. However, I absolutely loved the narrative, and the art style fit the story and more than adequately conveyed the

subtle hypocrisies Guy experienced in NK. I didn't realize how much I really was attached to it until the style changed about 4/5 of the way through the book for a few pages. It's a humorous but dark tale and definitely worth your time to check out. Rereading now after lending to a friend!

After finishing Bradley Martin's excellent *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty*, I was interested in finding out more about the DPRK. This book is pretty current, more so than Martin's book (excluding his Epilogue) and helps bring to life a lot of the facts that Martin left unanimated (no pun intended.) This book is essentially an illustrated travelogue, and a well-illustrated one at that. It was always enjoyable to read and engaging. Not only that, at the end of that day it offered better understanding of a few things in the DPRK. He documents the life of a foreigner with more access to the country than a diplomat or journalist but not as much as an NGO worker. So the life of the medium/long-term expat in Pyongyang is exposed like never before. Via that, recent developments in "openness" are shown for what they really are. Pyongyang is a strange place and Delisle exploits that for humor as well as a poignant commentary about the poor people who suffer from that strangeness. Aside from describing life in North Korea, it opened my eyes to a lot of what goes on in the animation industry--the offshoring as well as the technical challenges of bringing a cartoon to life. I lent my copy to other members of my family--some avid comic readers and others for whom this was their first comic--and they all really enjoyed it. So I recommend it, especially for the discounted price.

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