

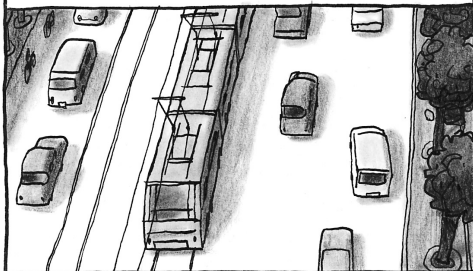
PYONGYANG: PHANTOM CITY  
IN A HERMIT NATION.



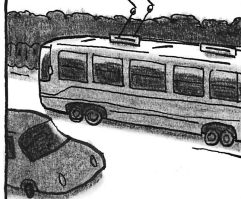
THE FEW DISMAL PICTURES YOU SEE IN THE WEST HAD  
ACTUALLY LED ME TO EXPECT WORSE.



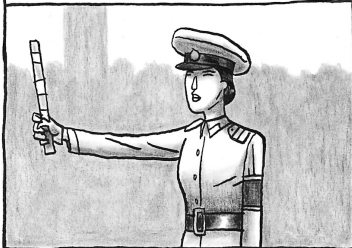
TRAMWAYS, CARS, BUSES, TRUCKS... IT TURNS OUT THE  
STREETS AREN'T DESERTED AFTER ALL.



EVERYTHING IS VERY  
CLEAN. TOO CLEAN,  
IN FACT.



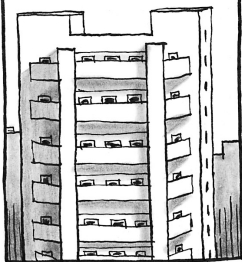
NO ONE LINGERS IN THE STREETS.  
EVERYONE HAS SOMEWHERE TO BE,  
SOMETHING TO DO.



NO LOITERING, NO OLD FOLKS  
CHATTING. TOTAL STERILITY.



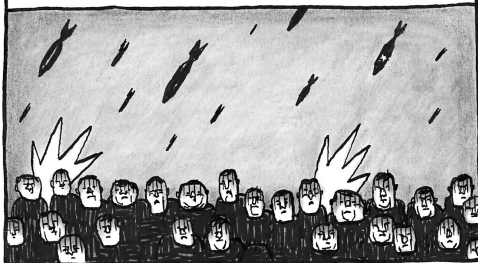
IT'S ALL NEW.



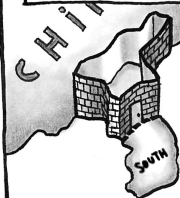
DURING THE KOREAN WAR, BOMBS RAINED ON THE CITY FOR 3 YEARS, FLATTENING IT.



AFTERWARD, THE PARTY OBLITERATED ANYTHING RESEMBLING AN OPPOSITION...

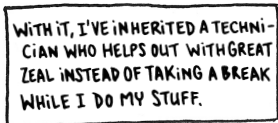


AND SEALED OFF THE COUNTRY TO ALL SIDES.



THE CITY WAS ENTIRELY REBUILT ACCORDING TO THE GREAT LEADER'S PLANS.





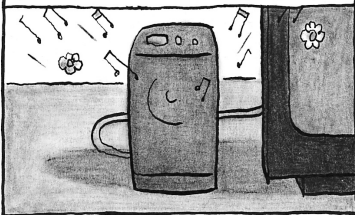
IT GETS TO BE ANNOYING.



AFTER A WHILE, SHE LETS UP AND DECIDES TO GIVE ME A TASTE OF HER COUNTRY'S MUSICAL GENIUS INSTEAD.



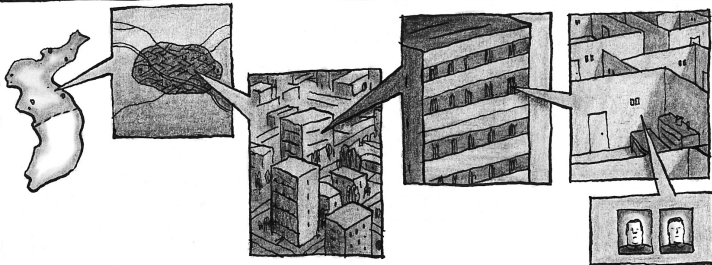
THE TUNES SOUND LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN A NATIONAL ANTHEM AND THE THEME SONG OF A CHILDREN'S SHOW... LIKE A BARNEY REMIX OF "GOD SAVE THE QUEEN" OR "OH CANADA".



MY NEW FRIEND IS JUST SINGING RIGHT ALONG, LOOKING MY WAY TO GET ME GOING, TOO.



IN EVERY ROOM, ON EVERY FLOOR, IN EVERY BUILDING THROUGHOUT NORTH KOREA, PORTRAITS OF PAPA KIM AND HIS SON HANG SIDE BY SIDE ON ONE WALL.



EXCEPT IN THE SHITTERS, OF COURSE.



AND SINCE "KIM IL-SUNG IS KIM JONG-IL AND KIM JONG-IL IS KIM IL-SUNG", THEY'RE MADE TO LOOK ALIKE.

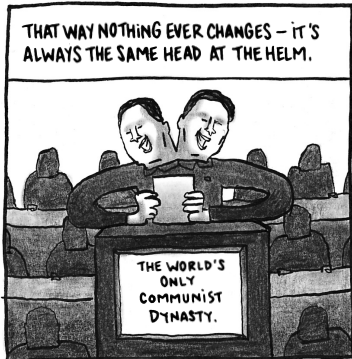
KIM SENIOR'S GRAY HAIR AND DEFORMING NECK TUMOR ARE GONE.



AS ARE KIM JUNIOR'S GLASSES AND EXCESS WEIGHT.

SAME SIZE, SAME AGE, SAME SUIT.

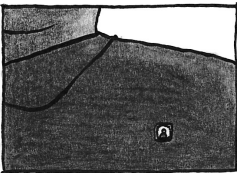
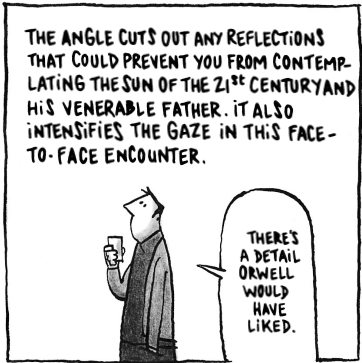
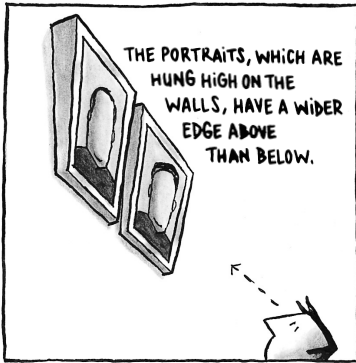
THAT WAY NOTHING EVER CHANGES - IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME HEAD AT THE HELM.



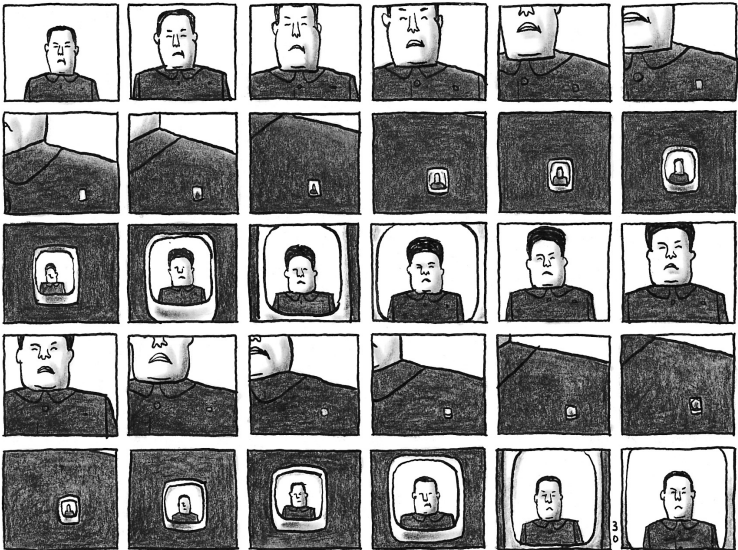
HUH.



MY COFFEE BREAKS LEAD TO A FEW MORE OBSERVATIONS.



BOTH WEAR ONE OF THE OFFICIAL BADGES THAT INVARIABLY DEPICT KIM JUNIOR OR KIM SENIOR. YOU CAN'T TELL FROM THE PORTRAITS, BUT IT'S TEMPTING TO THINK THEY'RE WEARING EACH OTHER'S IMAGES, CREATING THE KIND OF SHORT CIRCUIT ANIMATORS LOVE...



SCENE (17): When the character pulls on the ribbon, keep it tight as the bow unravels.



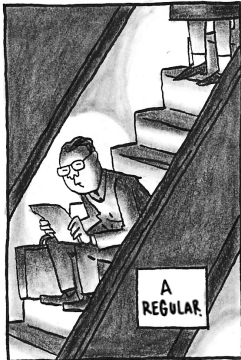
Or else he looks like he's holding a snake and playing with it.



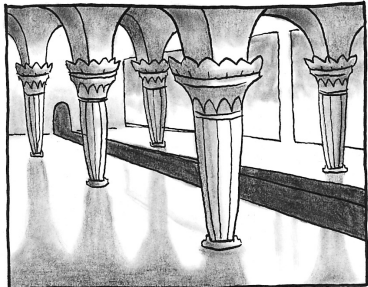
AFTER ASKING TWO DAYS AGO, I'M BEING TAKEN TO VISIT ONE OF THE PRIDES OF THE NATION...



BURIED 90 METERS UNDERGROUND, THE PYONGYANG SUBWAY CAN DOUBLE AS A BOMB SHELTER IN CASE OF NUCLEAR ATTACK. WHAT BETTER WAY TO CULTIVATE A CONSTANT SENSE OF THREAT?



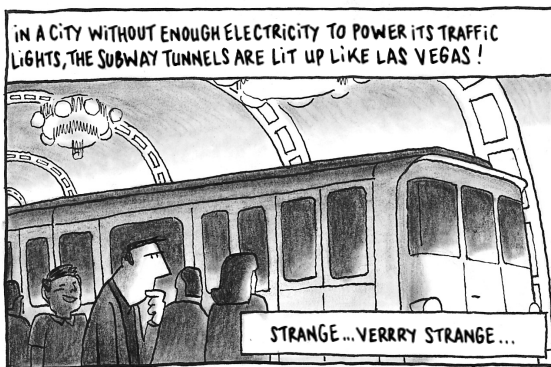
A  
REGULAR.



MARBLE FLOORS, CHANDELIERS, SCULPTED  
COLUMNS. IT'S A SUBTERRANEAN PALACE TO  
THE GLORY OF PUBLIC TRANSIT.



EVERYWHERE, GARISH MURALS TRANSFIGURE  
A REALITY THAT JUST SEEMS DRAB TO ME.



IN A CITY WITHOUT ENOUGH ELECTRICITY TO POWER ITS TRAFFIC  
LIGHTS, THE SUBWAY TUNNELS ARE LIT UP LIKE LAS VEGAS!

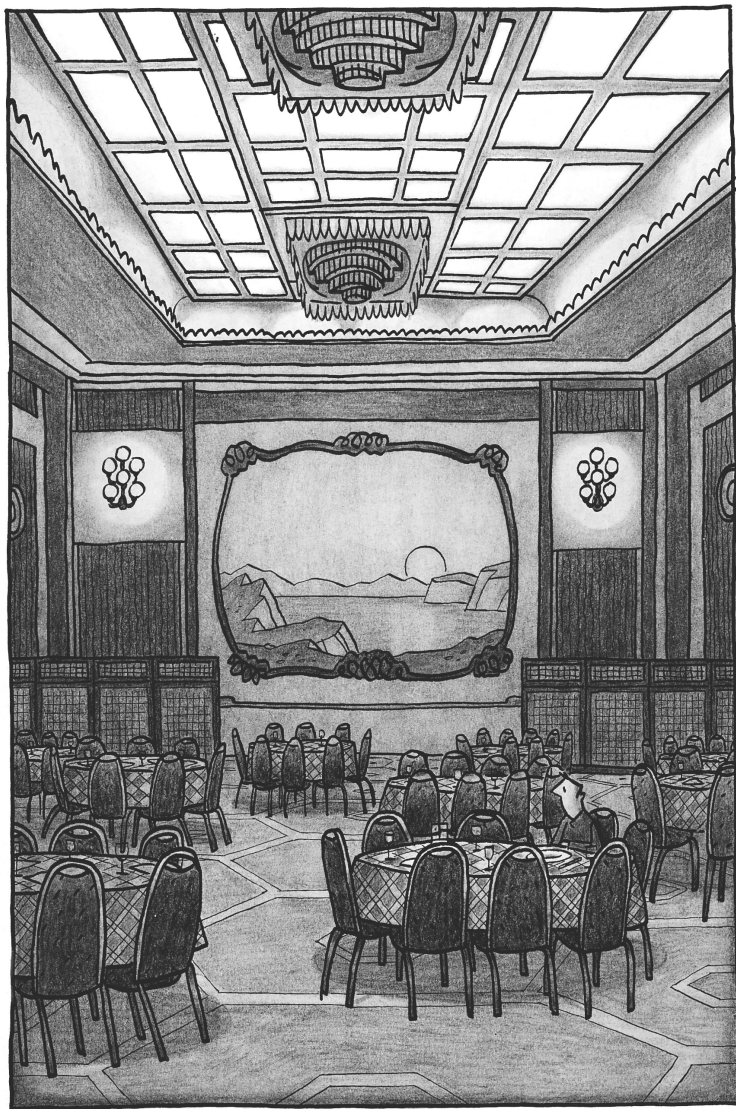
STRANGE... VERRY STRANGE...



THE TOUR ENDS AT  
THE NEXT STATION.  
OUR DRIVER PICKS  
US UP AT THE EXIT.

I'VE NEVER MET  
ANYONE WHO'S  
SEEN MORE THAN  
TWO STATIONS.





TO SAY GOOD-BYE, SANDRINE HAS ORGANIZED A FAREWELL DINNER IN RESTAURANT NO. 2...



IT'S QUICK AND EFFICIENT. START OF MEAL: 8:30 P.M. PILES OF FOOD, BEER ALL AROUND, A FEW BOTTLES OF RICE WINE, CONVERSATION, BILL, END OF MEAL: 9:30 P.M. WE LEAVE, SOME OF US RED-NOSED AND OTHERS RED-EARED.

... CHOSEN BY OUR KOREAN FRIENDS, PROBABLY FOR THE PRIVACY THEY ENJOY IN A HOTEL FOR FOREIGNERS.



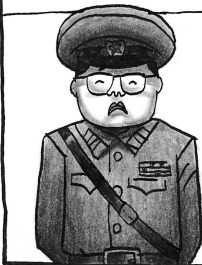
AS PART OF THE HAND-OVER, I GET MY VERY OWN TRANSLATOR.



MISTER SIN.



FRESH OUT OF EIGHT YEARS OF MILITARY SERVICE IN THE COUNTRY'S ARMED FORCES.



LOOKS LIKE WE'RE IN FOR A GREAT TIME!

BUT I DON'T MIND. WE'RE A LITTLE FAMILY NOW AND THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS.

