

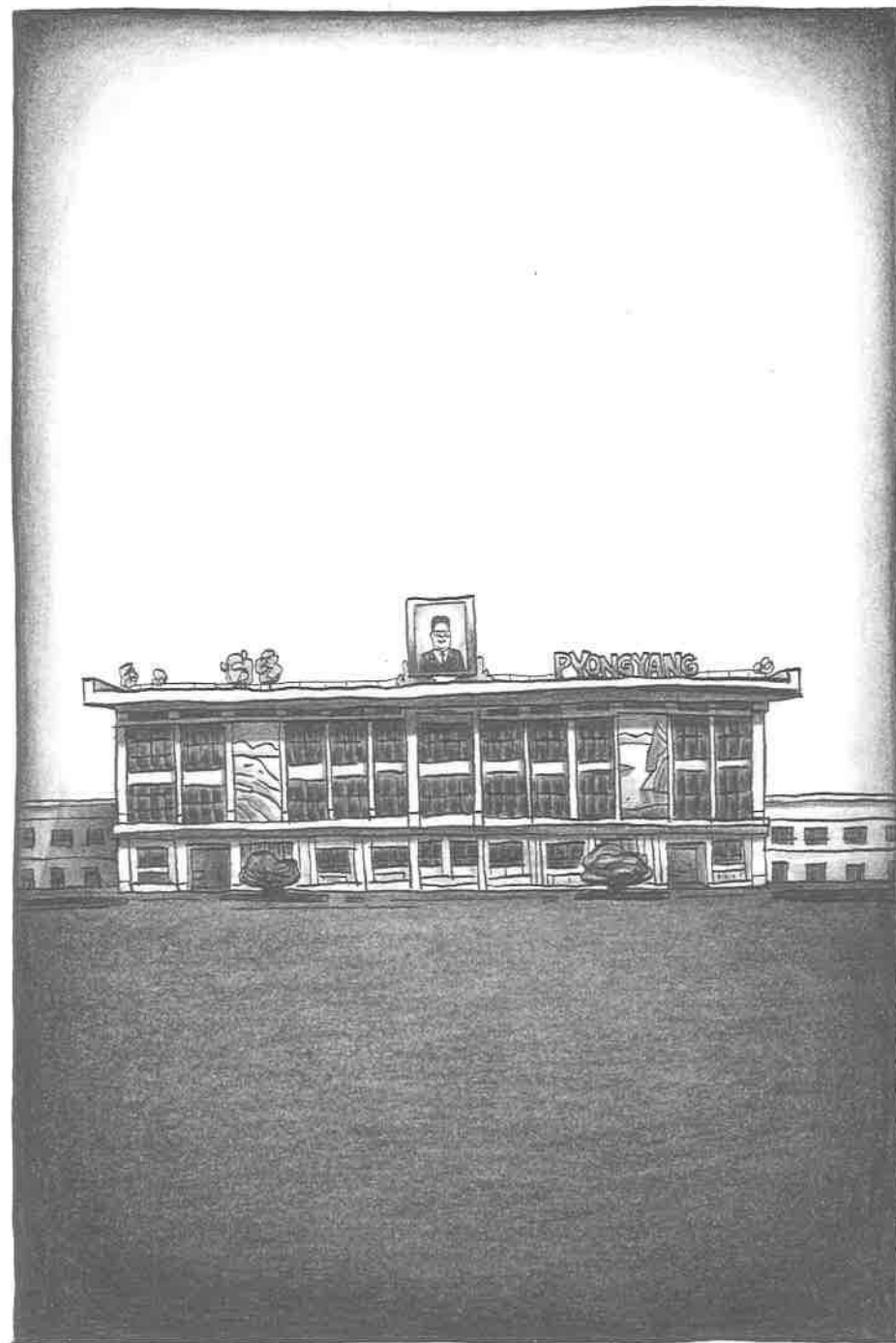
# PYONGYANG

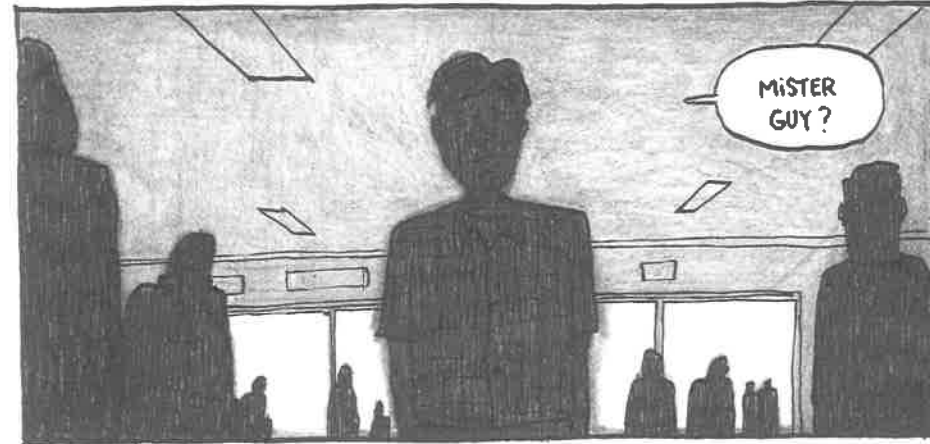
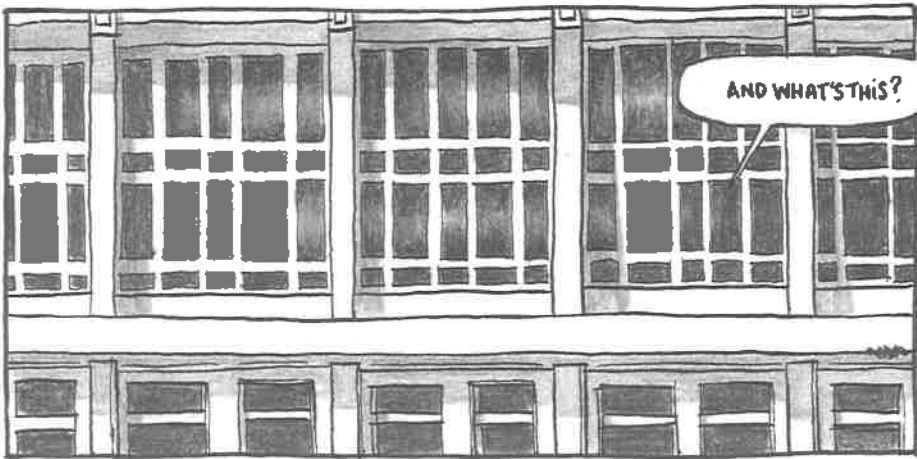
A JOURNEY IN NORTH KOREA

# GUY DELISLE



DRAWN & QUARTERLY BOOKS  
MONTREAL

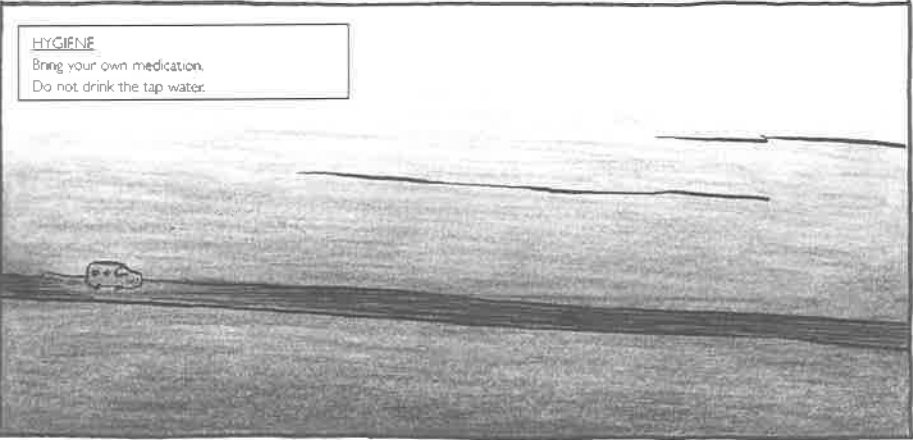




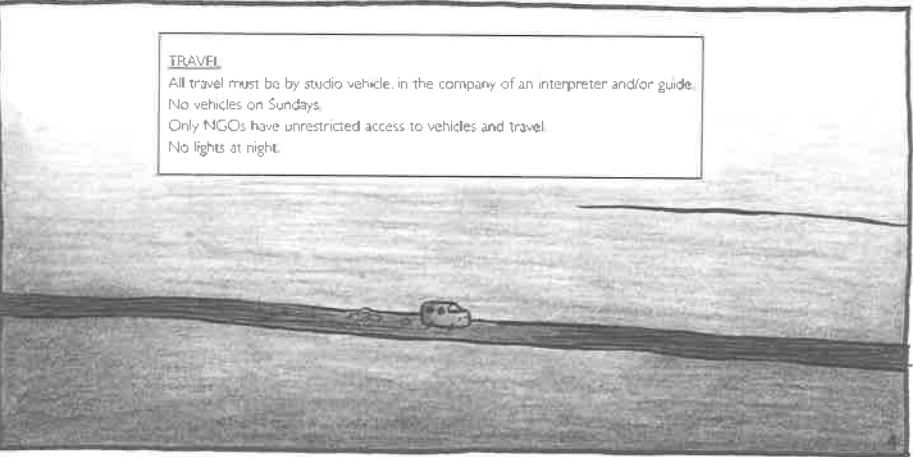


**THE DRIVER HANDS ME FLOWERS THAT I KNOWAREN'T REALLY MEANT FOR ME.**

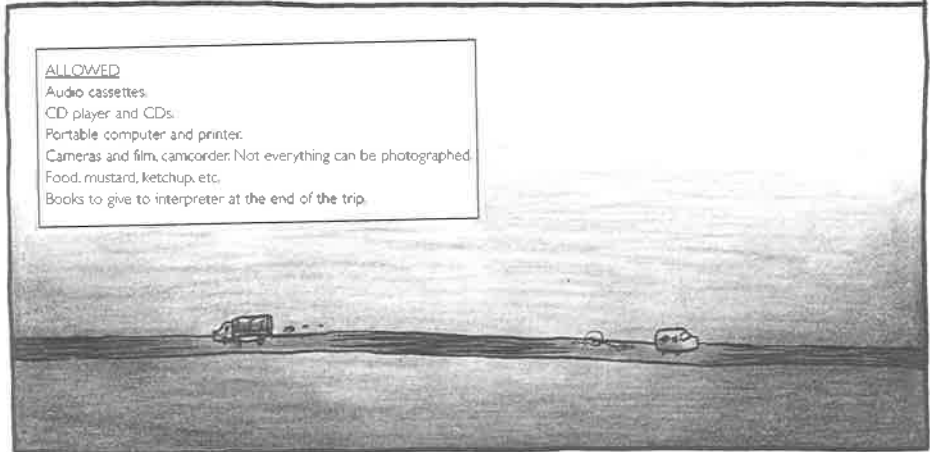
**TO HELP ME PREPARE FOR THIS TRIP, I WAS GIVEN A BOOKLET OF TRAVEL TIPS.**



**HYGIENE**  
Bring your own medication.  
Do not drink the tap water.



**TRAVEL**  
All travel must be by studio vehicle, in the company of an interpreter and/or guide.  
No vehicles on Sundays.  
Only NGOs have unrestricted access to vehicles and travel.  
No lights at night.



**ALLOWED**  
Audio cassettes.  
CD player and CDs.  
Portable computer and printer.  
Cameras and film, camcorder. Not everything can be photographed.  
Food, mustard, ketchup, etc.  
Books to give to interpreter at the end of the trip.

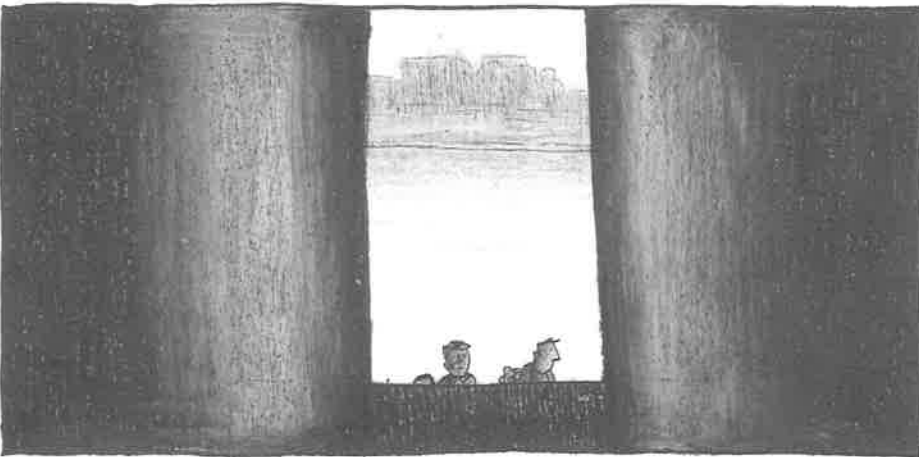
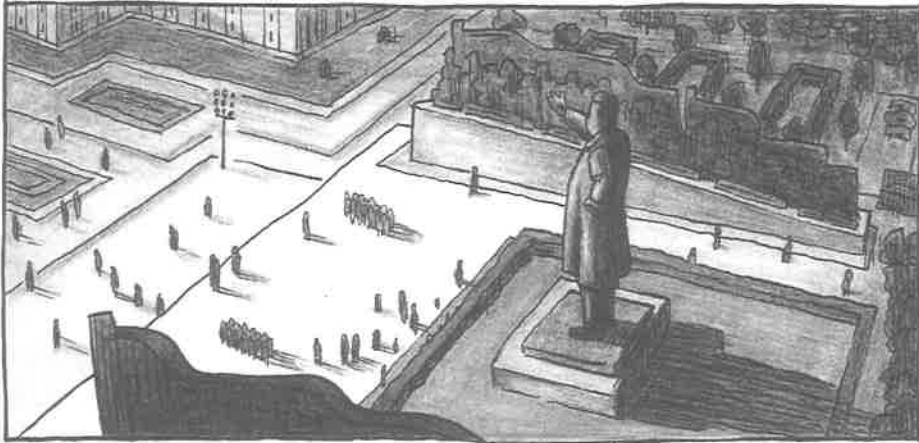
**PROHIBITED**  
Mobile phone (confiscated at airport and returned on departure.)  
Pornography.



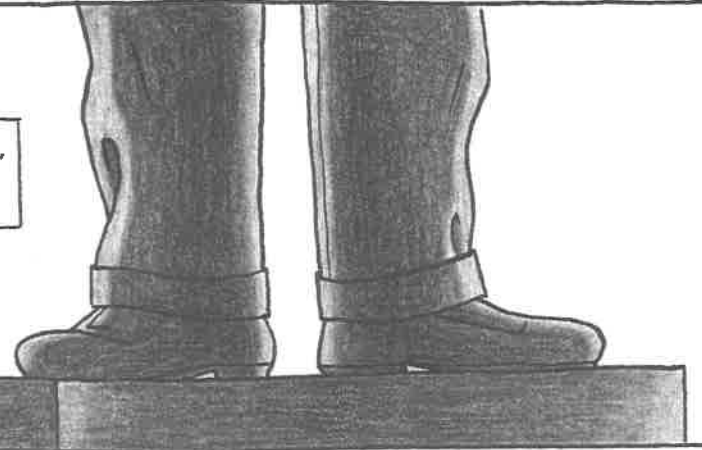
MY GUIDE SUGGESTS WE VISIT THE HIGHEST POINT IN THE CITY TO ADMIRE THE VIEW BEFORE GOING TO THE HOTEL.



AN ELEGANT WAY OF TAKING ME ON A STOP THAT'S OBLIGATORY FOR NEWCOMERS WITHOUT BEING OBVIOUS.



KIM IL-SUNG,  
22 METERS  
OF BRONZE.

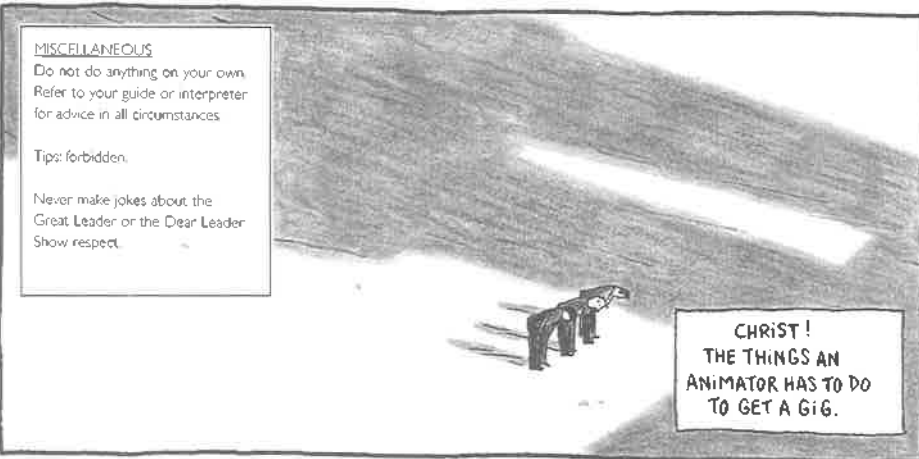
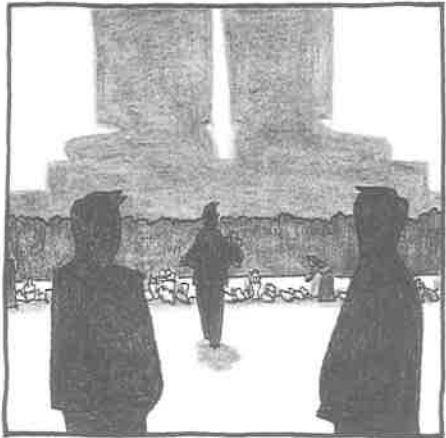


FOR VISITORS, IT'S A DISPROPORTIONATE ONE-ON-ONE WITH THE GIANTIC FIGURE OF THE FATHER OF THE NATION.

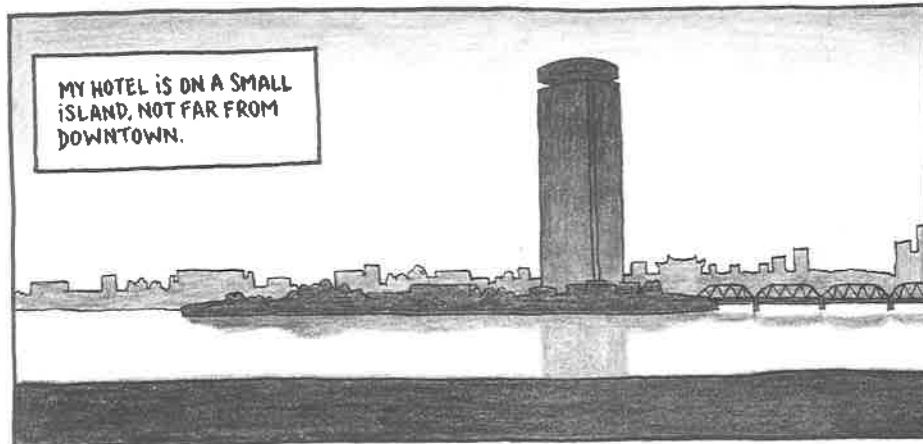
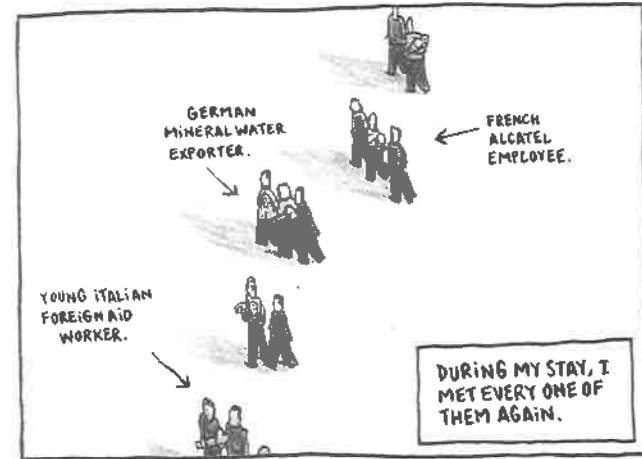


WHO, DESPITE HIS DEATH (1912-1994), IS STILL PRESIDENT.



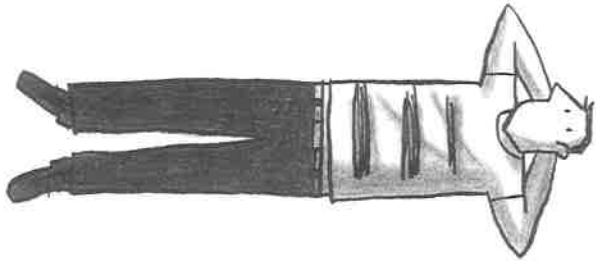


BACK IN THE PARKING LOT, I COME ACROSS ALL THE FOREIGNERS WHO WERE ON THE FLIGHT, ALONG WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE GUIDES.





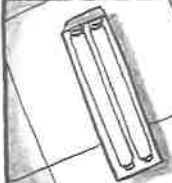
NORTH KOREA IS THE WORLD'S MOST ISOLATED COUNTRY. FOREIGNERS TRICKLE IN. THERE'S NO INTERNET. THERE ARE NO CAFÉS. IN FACT, THERE'S NO ENTERTAINMENT. IT'S HARD TO EVEN LEAVE THE HOTEL AND MEETING KOREANS IS NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE.



LUCKILY I'VE HAD PRACTICE BEING ALONE BECAUSE THIS WON'T BE A FUNHOUSE.



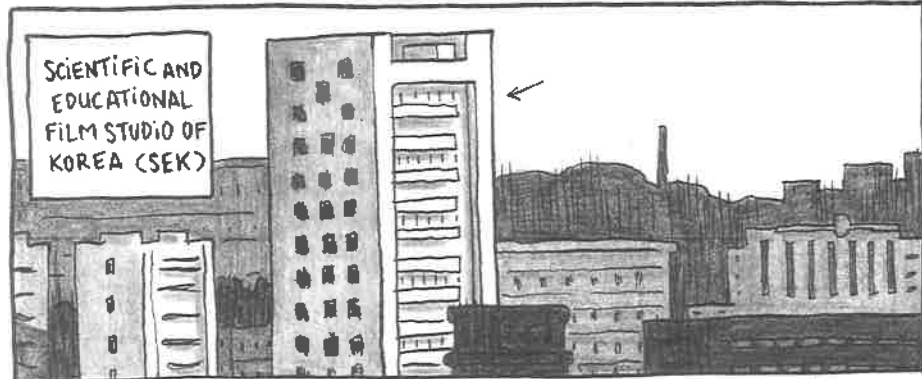
WELL, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, BUT I WAS WRONG—WHICH JUST GOES TO SHOW THAT YOU'VE GOT TO BE READY FOR ANYTHING WHEN YOU TRAVEL.



**KNOCK  
KNOCK**

MISTER GUY?  
READY TO GO TO  
THE STUDIO?

SCIENTIFIC AND  
EDUCATIONAL  
FILM STUDIO OF  
KOREA (SEK)



THE STUDIO MIGHT HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO EDUCATE THE MASSES, BUT THESE DAYS IT'S USED TO ATTRACT FOREIGN CURRENCY, MOST OF IT FRENCH.



HEY, ISN'T THAT  
KARL UP THERE?

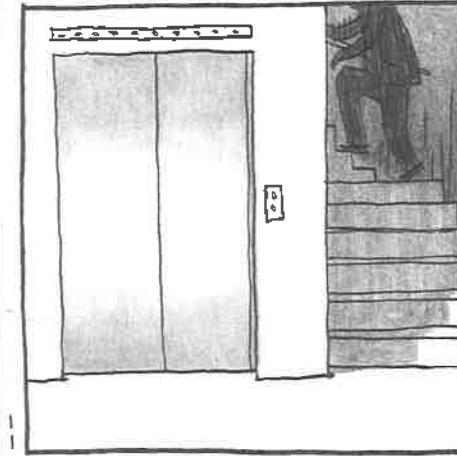


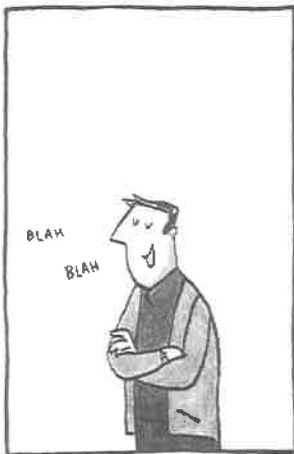
YOU  
KNOW MARX?  
VERY  
GOOD.

A BIT... DOESN'T  
EVERYBODY?

OH NO, NOT  
MANY CAPITALISTS  
DO.

REALLY.









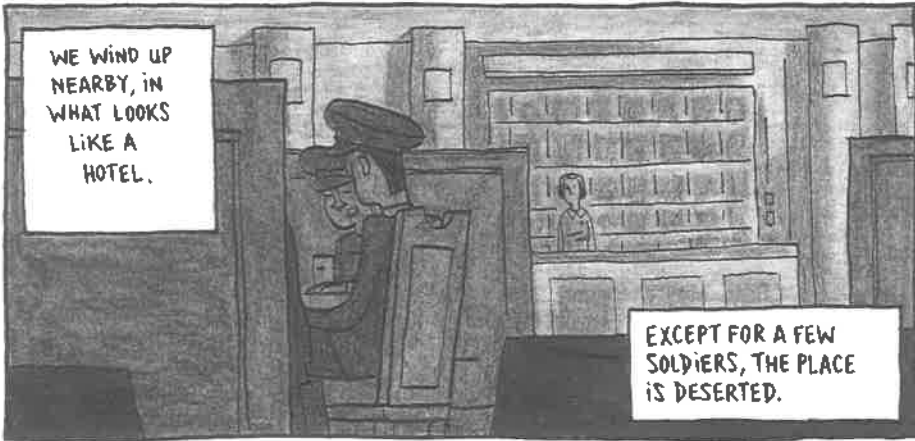
WANNA HAVE A DRINK?



RICHARD, WHO WORKS TWO FLOORS UP FOR ELLIPSE (ANOTHER FRENCH STUDIO), SUGGESTS WE TAKE A BREAK.



A DRINK! ... WHERE?



WE WIND UP NEARBY, IN WHAT LOOKS LIKE A HOTEL.

EXCEPT FOR A FEW SOLDIERS, THE PLACE IS DESERTED.



WE SIT DOWN NEXT TO THE WINDOW TO HAVE SOME LIGHT.



SHIT, WE FORGOT TO TELL THE GUARDS ...

AFTER 3 MONTHS IN NORTH KOREA, SANDRINE HAS DEVELOPED CERTAIN REFLEXES.



WHO CARES? WE'RE RIGHT NEXT DOOR.

THIS IS RICHARD'S SECOND WEEK.



I HOPE THINGS GO BETTER HERE...



OUR FRIEND HAS COME TO WORK ON CORTO MALTESE.

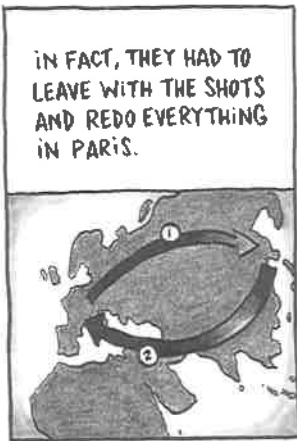


CORTO MALTESE

MONUMENT TO THE 9th ART



SEOUL WAS A HUGE WASTE OF TIME...



IN FACT, THEY HAD TO LEAVE WITH THE SHOTS AND REDO EVERYTHING IN PARIS.



BUT SINCE WE'VE RUN OUT OF CASH...

...THEY'RE WRAPPING UP PRODUCTION IN PYONGYANG.



ALL WE'RE DOING HERE ARE THE TWEENS...

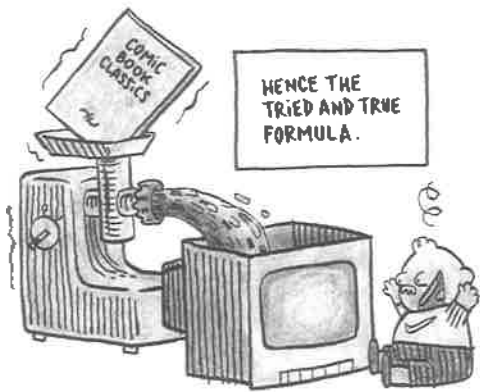
REALLY?

Quiz: Which of these are key frames?

MINI GLOSSARY

KEYS: DRAWN BY ANIMATORS IN PARIS.

TWEENS: TO BE DRAWN BY ASSISTANTS IN NORTH KOREA.



HENCE THE TRIED AND TRUE FORMULA.



GREAT, THAT WAY KIDS DON'T HAVE TO BOTHER READING THE BOOKS. THEY'LL JUST THINK EVERYTHING STARTED ON TV, LIKE TINTIN.

MMM.



RICHARD'S GUIDE TURNS UP. HE LOOKS RELIEVED TO SEE US.

SANDRINE AND I DECIDE THAT WE WANT TO WALK BACK TO THE HOTEL.

OUR GUIDES DON'T ACTUALLY OBJECT, BUT THEY'RE NOT HAPPY, EITHER.

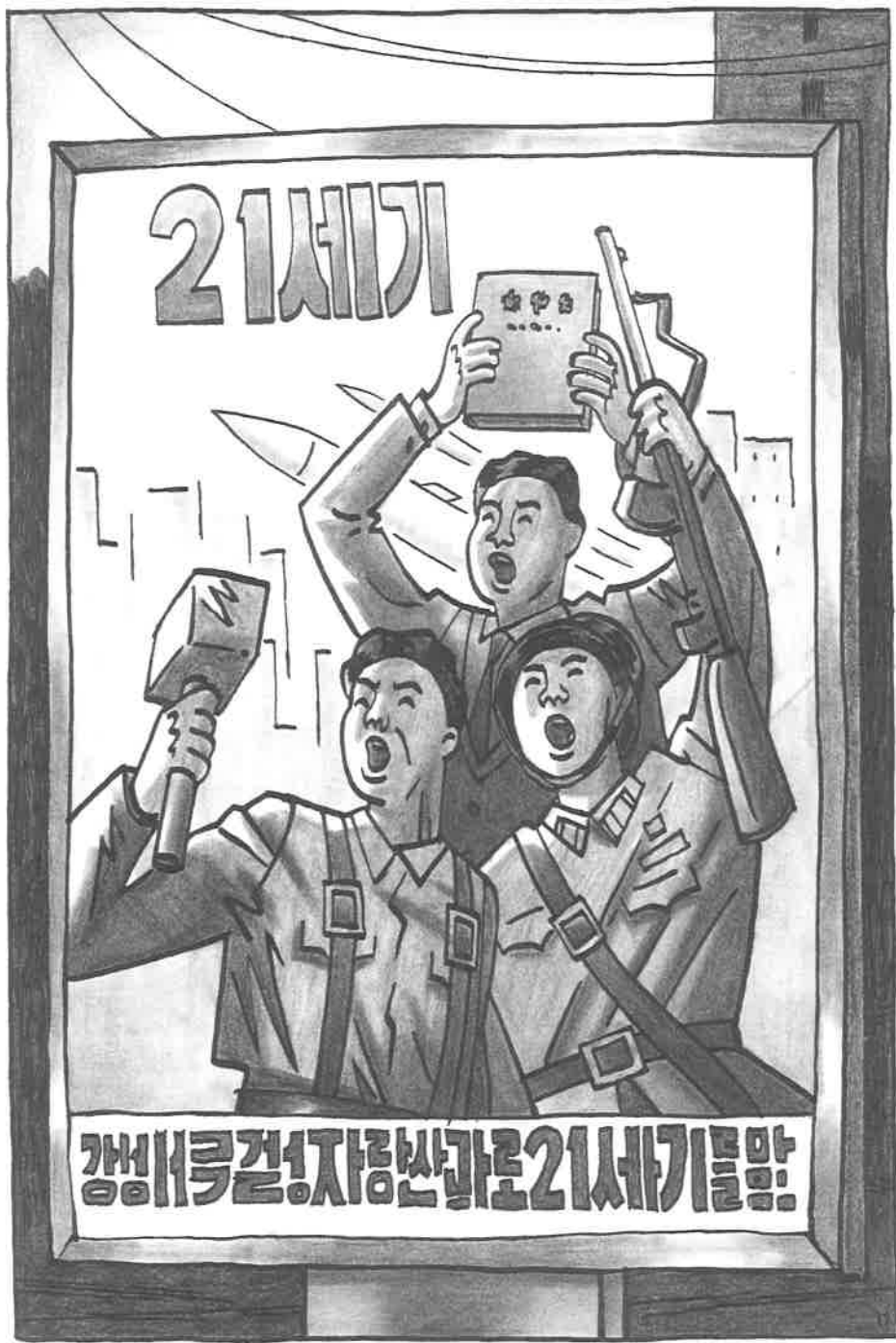


ARE THEY FOLLOWING?

NOPE, I DON'T SEE THEM.

WELL, COOL... THEY'RE NOT SUCH A PAIN AFTER ALL.

A MOMENT LATER, WE FIGURED OUT THEIR SYSTEM: THEY WERE WAITING FOR US DOWN THE ROAD, AND WHEN WE CAUGHT UP THEY ADVANCED AGAIN, ALL THE WAY TO THE HOTEL.



FORGING AHEAD INTO THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY!

PYONGYANG HAS THREE HOTELS FOR FOREIGNERS.

EACH HAS ITS ADVANTAGES.

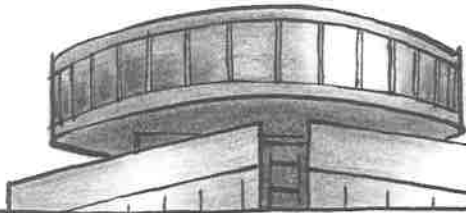
THE POTONGGANG, WITH ITS CABLE TV (CNN).

THE KOKJO, IN THE HEART OF TOWN.

THE YANGAKKDO, WHERE SANRINE AND I ARE STAYING.

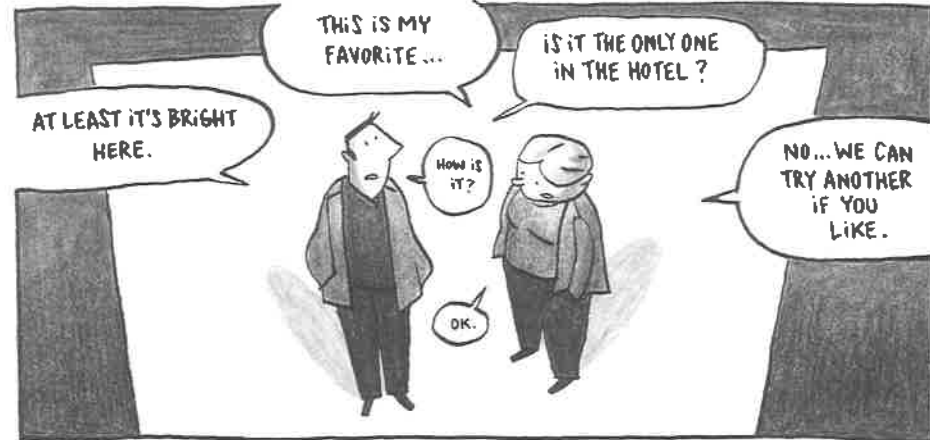
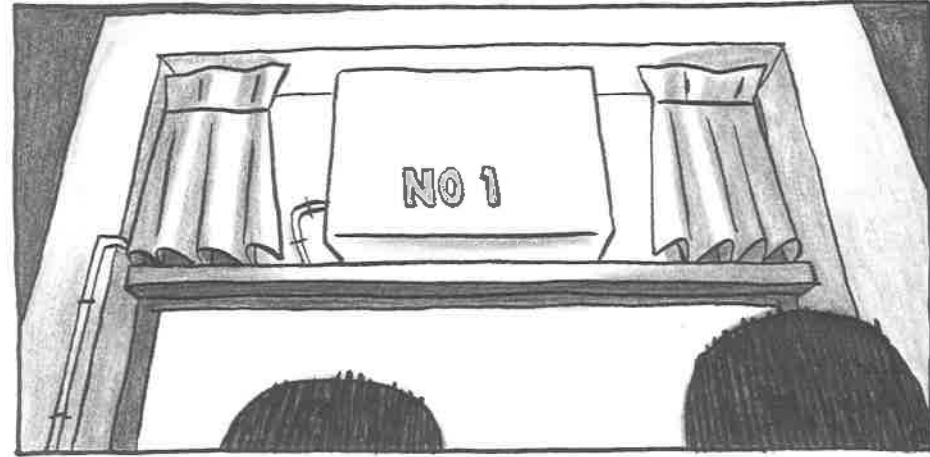
IT'S A MASSIVE 50-STORY TOWER WITH A REVOLVING RESTAURANT, BUILT IN THE 1980s BY A FRENCH FIRM.

THAT EXPLAINS THE FRENCH DESIGNER TOILETS.



AAAH! FRENCH QUALITY!

ALL FOREIGNERS ARE ON THE 15th FLOOR, THE ONLY ONE THAT'S LIT.



ARE THERE ANY MORE LIKE THIS?

THE NO. 3 - IT'S BEING RENOVATED.

I DON'T MEAN TO COMPLAIN, BUT THIS IS THE FILTHIEST TABLECLOTH I'VE EVER SEEN...



ARGH! AND IT'S WET, TOO! MY ELBOWS ARE SOAKING!



UGH! THIS STUFF IS SWIMMING IN OIL!



THERE'S A CAFÉ IN THE LOBBY. WE GO THERE FOR DESSERT. IT'S DRIER ON THE ELBOWS.



WHAT? THEY CALL THIS ICE CREAM?

WE MEET TWO TELECOM ENGINEERS FROM FRANCE.



THEY'RE HERE FOR A WEEK, LONG ENOUGH TO INSTALL A HIGH-DEFINITION TRANSMITTER...

FOREIGN ADMIRERS OF THE KIM REGIME WILL SOON BE ABLE TO WATCH THE DEAR LEADER'S HEROIC EXPLOITS IN HIGH-DEFINITION SPLENDOR WITH DOLBY SURROUND SOUND.



BEFORE (HERTZIAN)



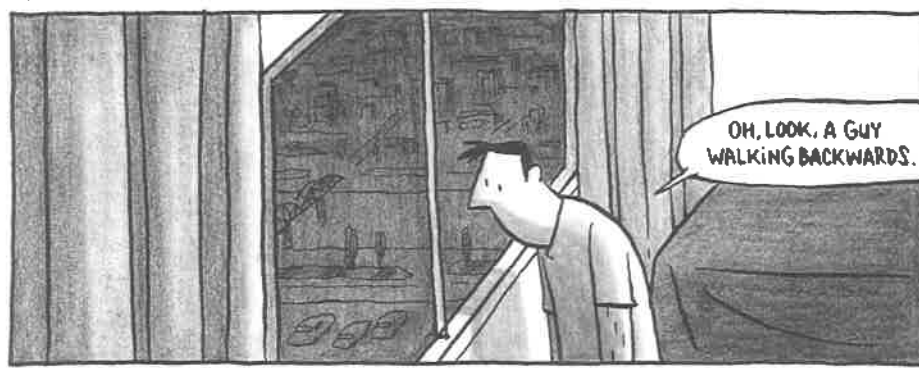
AFTER (DIGITAL)



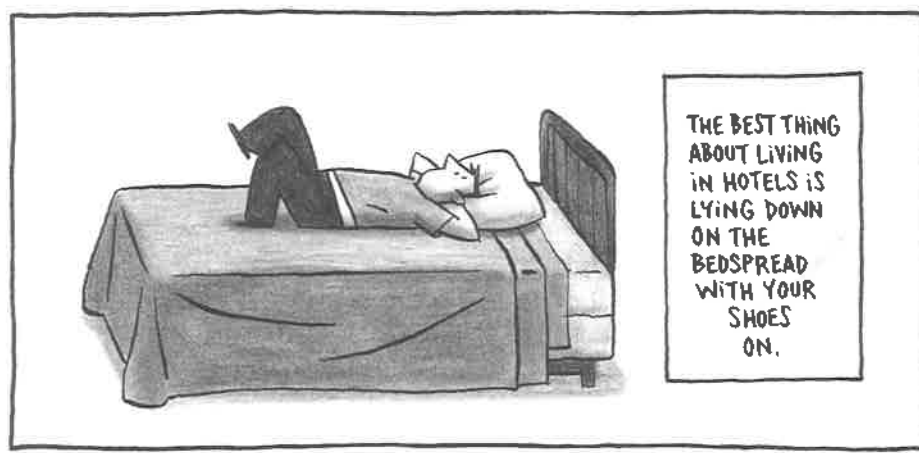
AN OBVIOUS PRIORITY FOR A COUNTRY GETTING THE MOST AID IN THE WORLD!



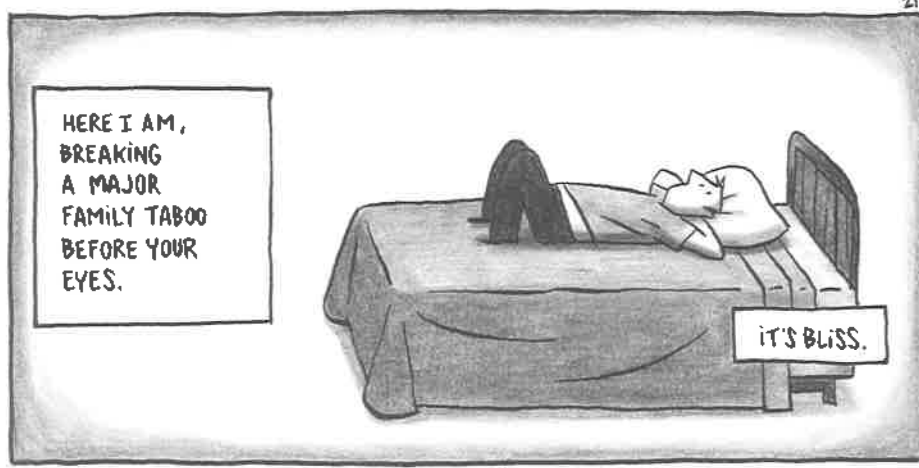
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, I WATCH A PERSON WHO'S WALKING BACKWARDS. I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S THE JET LAG OR THE FACT THAT I'M BRACED FOR ANYTHING HERE, BUT THE SIGHT DOESN'T SEEM ABNORMAL OR EVEN SURPRISING.



OH, LOOK, A GUY WALKING BACKWARDS.



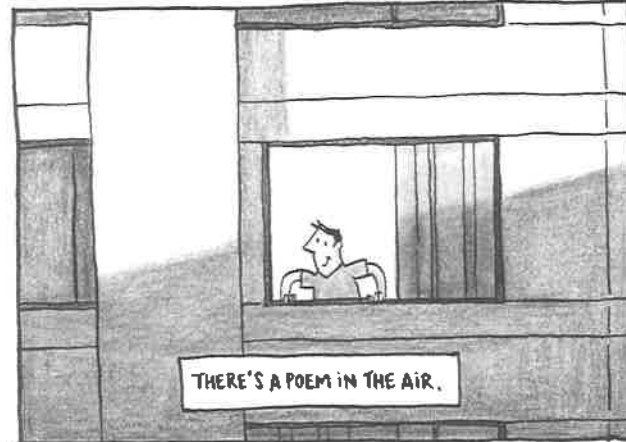
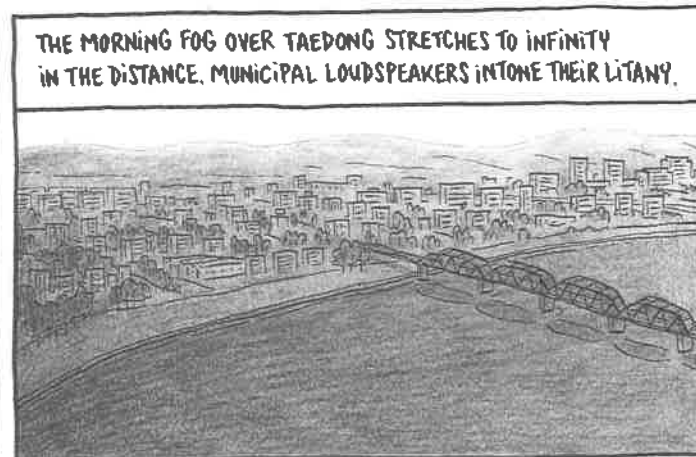
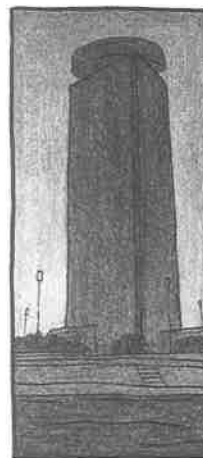
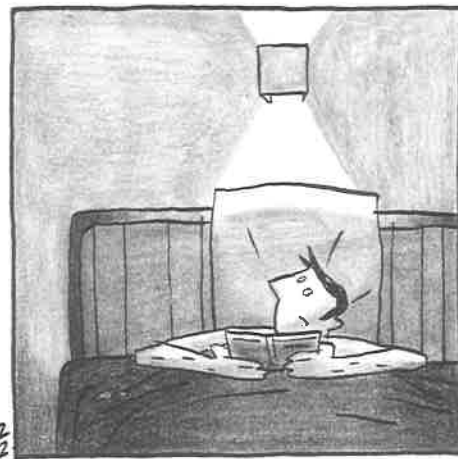
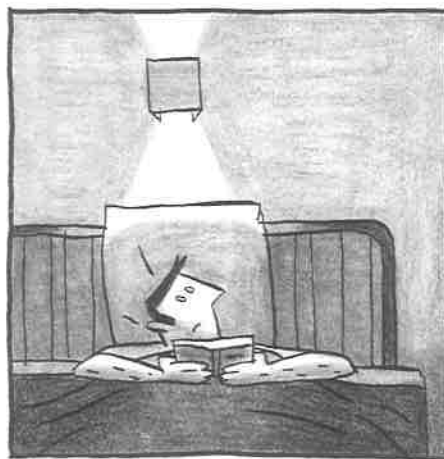
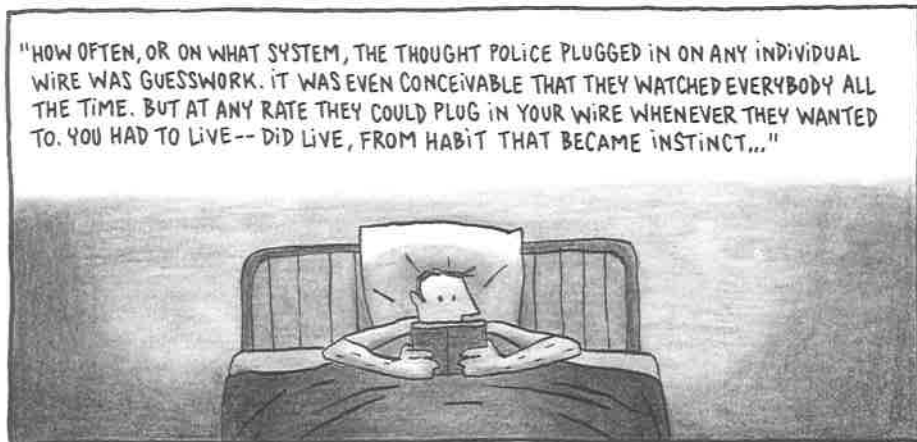
THE BEST THING ABOUT LIVING IN HOTELS IS LYING DOWN ON THE BEDSPREAD WITH YOUR SHOES ON.



HERE I AM, BREAKING A MAJOR FAMILY TABOO BEFORE YOUR EYES.

IT'S BLISS.









AH, SCREW THAT. WHY DRIVE MYSELF NUTS ALL DAY MAKING UP RHYMES.



FORGET IT.



I JOIN SANDRINE AT THE FAR TABLE.



DID YOU SEE? THERE'S MELON TODAY.

OH RIGHT.



LOOK, THERE'S A BUNCH OF CHINESE DOING THE "REVERSE".

THE WHAT?



THEY'RE WALKING BACKWARDS. DIDN'T YOU KNOW? IT'S A TRADITIONAL FORM OF EXERCISE.

OH, SO THAT'S IT.



AS USUAL, THE VAN, DRIVER, GUIDE AND TRANSLATOR ARE WAITING TO TAKE US TO THE STUDIO.



24

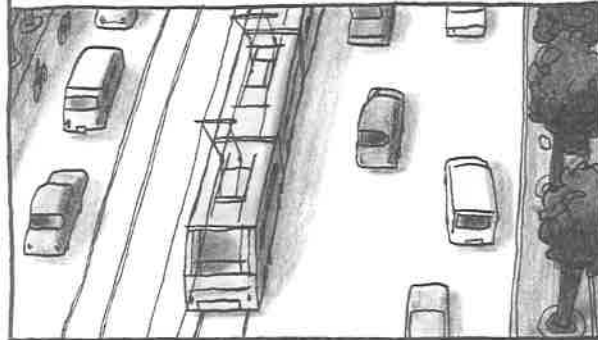
PYONGYANG: PHANTOM CITY IN A HERMIT NATION.



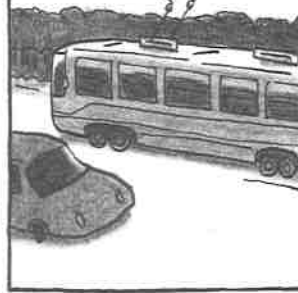
THE FEW DISMAL PICTURES YOU SEE IN THE WEST HAD ACTUALLY LED ME TO EXPECT WORSE.



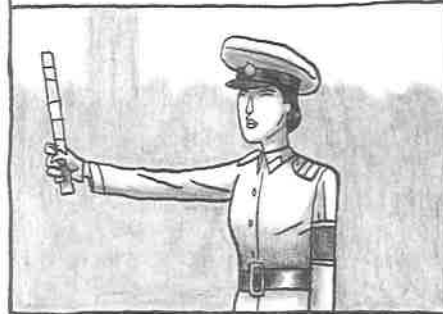
TRAMWAYS, CARS, BUSES, TRUCKS... IT TURNS OUT THE STREETS AREN'T DESERTED AFTER ALL.



EVERYTHING IS VERY CLEAN. TOO CLEAN, IN FACT.

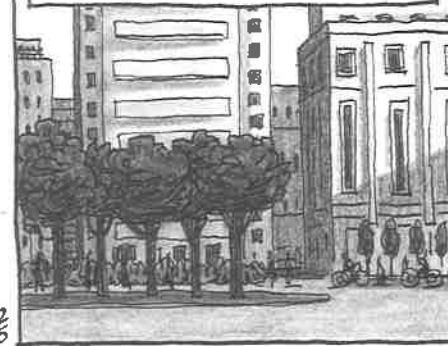


NO ONE LINGERS IN THE STREETS. EVERYONE HAS SOMEWHERE TO BE, SOMETHING TO DO.



25

NO LOITERING, NO OLD FOLKS CHATTING. TOTAL STERILITY.

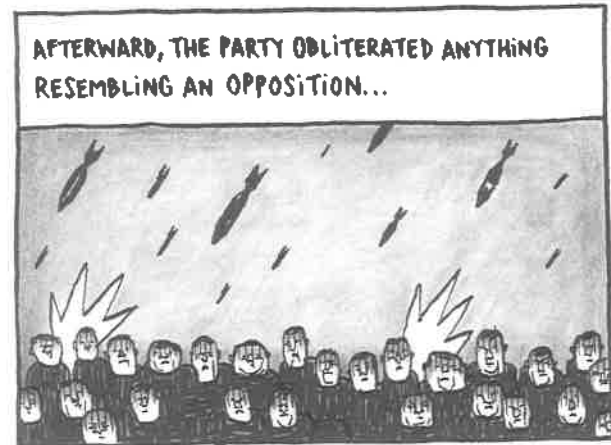




IT'S ALL NEW.



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



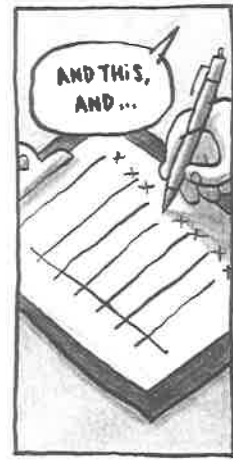
AFTERWARD, THE PARTY OBLITERATED ANYTHING RESEMBLING AN OPPOSITION...



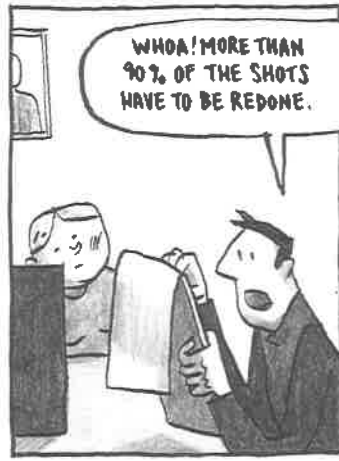
AND SEALED OFF THE COUNTRY TO ALL SIDES.



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



AND THIS, AND...



WHOA! MORE THAN 90% OF THE SHOTS HAVE TO BE REDONE.



I KNOW. WE HAD A LOUSY TEAM ON EPISODE 2.

OH.



OK, MARK UP THE REST AND I'LL GO CHECK THE RETAKES.

SURE.



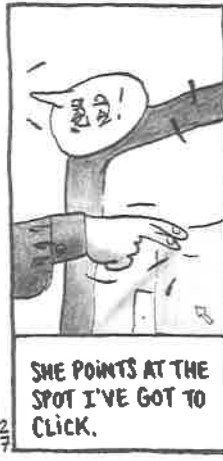
TO CHECK THE ANIMATION, I WORK ON A COMPUTER THAT'S USED FOR PRODUCTION THE REST OF THE TIME.

WITH IT, I'VE INHERITED A TECHNICIAN WHO HELPS OUT WITH GREAT ZEAL INSTEAD OF TAKING A BREAK WHILE I DO MY STUFF.



WHenever I HESITATE...

UH...

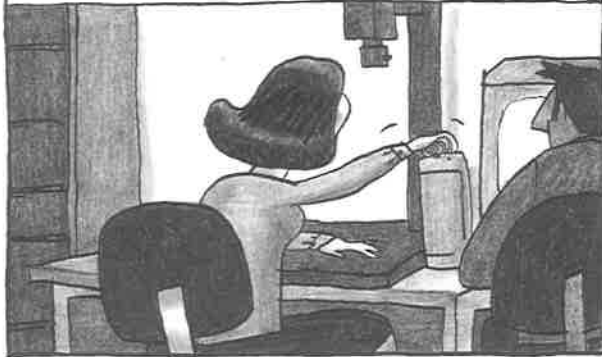


SHE POINTS AT THE SPOT I'VE GOT TO CLICK.

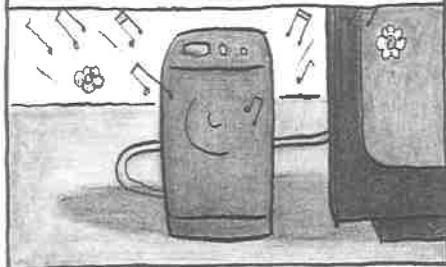
IT GETS TO BE ANNOYING.



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



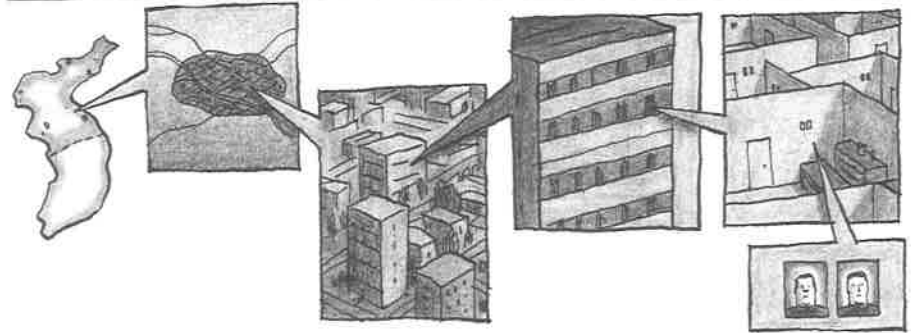
THE TUNES SOUND LIKE A CROSS BETWEEN A NATIONAL ANTHEM AND THE THEME SONG OF A CHILDREN'S SHOW... LIKE A BARNEY REMIX OF "GOD SAVE THE QUEEN" OR "OH CANADA".



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.



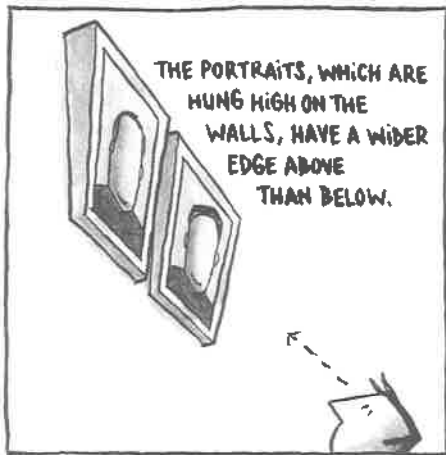
AS ARE KIM JUNIOR'S GLASSES AND EXCESS WEIGHT.

SAME SIZE, SAME AGE, SAME SUIT.

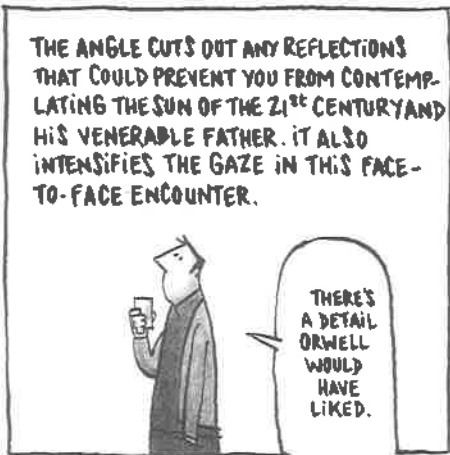
THAT WAY NOTHING EVER CHANGES - IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME HEAD AT THE HELM.



MY COFFEE BREAKS LEAD TO A FEW MORE OBSERVATIONS.

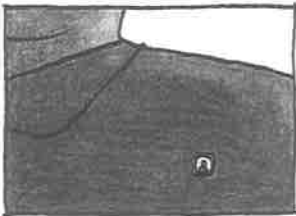


THE PORTRAITS, WHICH ARE HUNG HIGH ON THE WALLS, HAVE A WIDER EDGE ABOVE THAN BELOW.

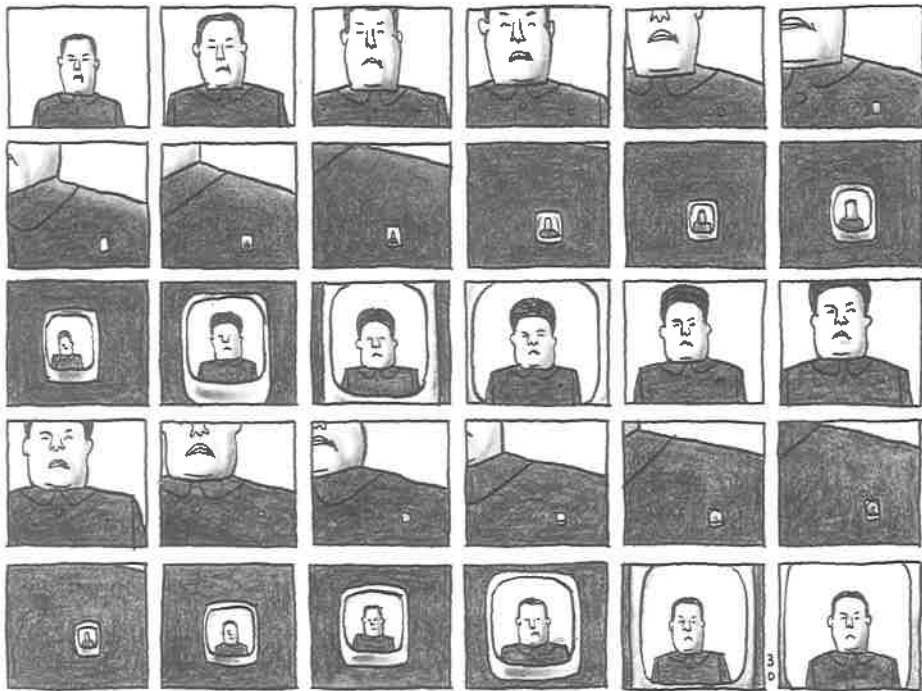


THE ANGLE CUTS OUT ANY REFLECTIONS THAT COULD PREVENT YOU FROM CONTEMPLATING THE SUN OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND HIS VENERABLE FATHER. IT ALSO INTENSIFIES THE GAZE IN THIS FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTER.

THERE'S A DETAIL ORWELL WOULD HAVE LIKED.



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...



SHOT (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.

MISTER GUY.



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



THE PYONG-YANG SUBWAY.



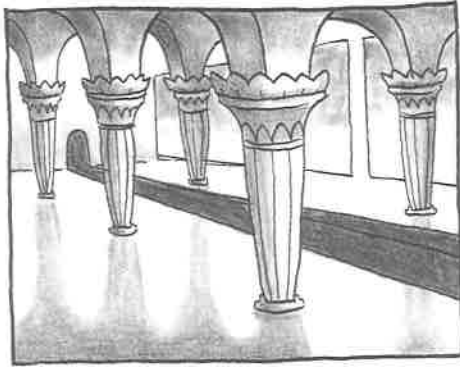
BURIED 90 METERS UNDERGROUND, THE PYONGYANG SUBWAY CAN DOUBLE AS A BOMB SHELTER IN CASE OF NUCLEAR ATTACK. WHAT BETTER WAY TO CULTIVATE A CONSTANT SENSE OF THREAT?



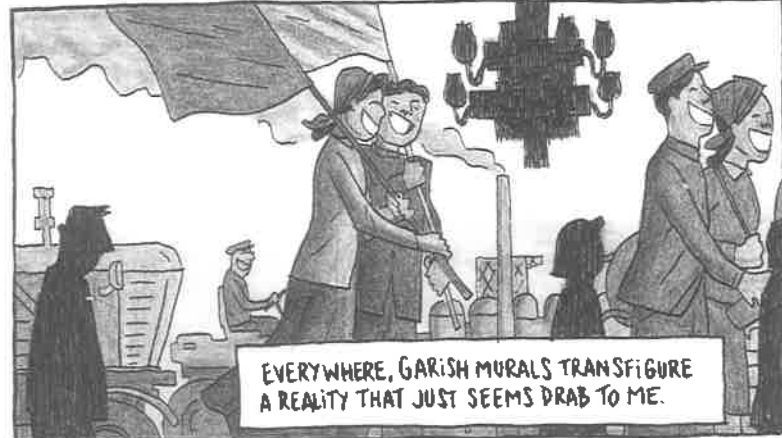
THE  
LONG  
WAY  
DOWN.



A  
REGULAR.

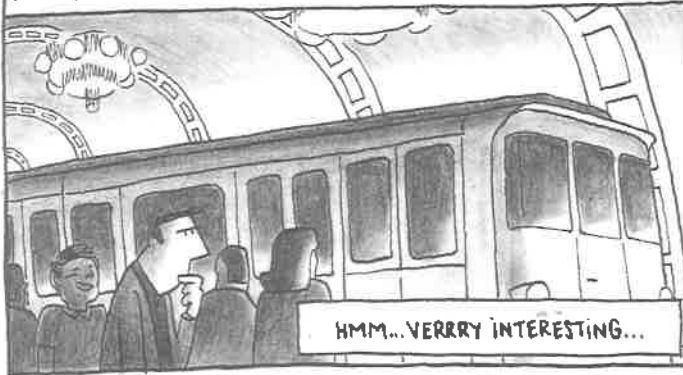


MARBLE FLOORS, CHANDELIERS, SCULPTED COLUMNS. IT'S A SUBTERRANEAN PALACE TO THE GLORY OF PUBLIC TRANSIT.



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!



HMM... VERRY INTERESTING...

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.

