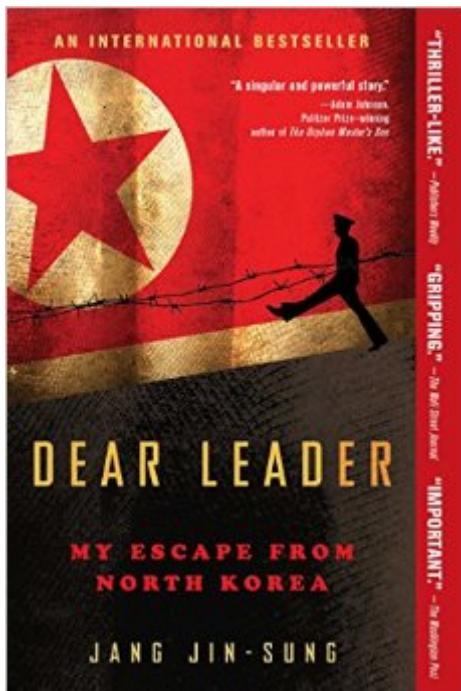


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Dear Leader: My Escape From North Korea



Synopsis

THE STORY THEY COULDN'T HACK: In this international bestseller, a high-ranking counterintelligence agent describes his life as a former poet laureate to Kim Jong-il and his breathtaking escape to freedom. As North Korea's State Poet Laureate, Jang Jin-sung led a charmed life. With food provisions (even as the country suffered through its great famine), a travel pass, access to strictly censored information, and audiences with Kim Jong-il himself, his life in Pyongyang seemed safe and secure. But this privileged existence was about to be shattered. When a strictly forbidden magazine he lent to a friend goes missing, Jang Jin-sung must flee for his life. Never before has a member of the elite described the inner workings of this totalitarian state and its propaganda machine. An astonishing exposé told through the heart-stopping story of Jang Jin-sung's escape to South Korea, Dear Leader is an impeccably dramatic story—one of the best depictions yet of North Korea's nightmare. • (Publishers Weekly).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is the sort that can save lives — hopefully even 25 million of them. It is the most absorbing read that this reader has had in many years. Why is it better than the many noteworthy books on North Korea that have been published before? Because it was written by a high level insider - one of the country's chief propagandists - who also happens to be an articulate and sensitive writer, with a vastly different perspective from that of a Westerner or a "common" (if there can be such a characterization) North Korean escapee. It's not just a searing indictment of the Kim

dynasty or a political dissertation that details the organization and functioning of a Stalinist dictatorship. It's not just an intimate account of unimaginable human suffering that has been inflicted on a nation's population over the past few decades by an evil regime. It's not just a thrill-a-minute international espionage story that follows two high-value defectors as they flee, starving and penniless, across the winter landscape of Korea and Northern China, hunted by security forces from both countries. In fact, it is all of these story lines, plus more. The range of its setting stretches from privilege to privation. It is a depiction of a place that seems surreal and hallucinogenic, though it is only too real. It is a story of a man's awakening from a blinkered life to a wide world beyond his imagining — both its horrors and beauty. It is about his coming to terms with terrible truths and the equally terrible lies that he had helped to perpetrate. It is a buddy story about two young men on the run who share every human emotion possible — from valor to shame to frailty to brotherly love. And perhaps most importantly, it is an epic poem, written by a talented story teller. As such, the book touches the reader in ways that no other account of North Korea has done before. By interweaving original poetry and lyrical descriptions of artistic expression into a John le Carre thriller, there is something for everyone. It runs both wide and deep. As such, it has the potential to reach an audience that is broader than any book on the subject. One can only hope that it does, and that by burrowing deeply into millions of readers, it changes the perspective and energy of the global dialogue on North Korea.

This book is an absolutely mesmerising account of how a senior propagandist in North Korea fled to China. Reading almost like a thriller, rather than a memoir, Jang Jin-Sung, a talented writer who came to the attention of Dear Leader himself, explains how he felt increasingly compromised working for the regime, until he had to run for his life. The tension just doesn't stop, and interwoven in his personal story is an account of life in North Korea. Some of this we all know - the starvation, systematic abuse and unrelenting propaganda. But there are a lot of surprises - like how much the North Korean leadership hates China. Even if you have no particular interest in North Korean politics (like me) this book is an outstanding read. It also comes as a startling reminder of the incredible reality that we share a planet with a whole nation of people whose lives are an ongoing torment beyond anything we can imagine. I'd love to read another book by Jang, about how he found adjusting to life 'on the outside' ...

This was the most beautifully written and moving account I've ever read of an escape from N. Korea. It is an incredible story from a man who enjoyed a life of privilege compared to the privation

that the majority of NK is suffering. One can see why Mr. Jang was such a well respected poet laureate (and at such a young age) from his home country. He is an incredible writer. This book moved me to tears so many times. So often, I visualized his pain and despair, his courage, and his indescribable exhilaration when he finally succeeded in his hard fought quest for freedom. All Americans should read books about this country because while we complain about our own petty suffering, most of us have really no idea what true human suffering is all about. It's interesting because I was in the midst of a deep depression when I picked up another book (Nothing to Envy by Barbara Demick) about regular North Koreans and that book--plus the subsequent (perhaps 20) others I read, lifted me completely out of my depression. This is a fascinating read. Most people in his position would have never dreamed of escaping such a privileged existence--if only for the sake of loved ones. It was only *after* he had given a forbidden book to a trusted friend who had subsequently lost it, did he and his friend realize they had no other solution but to escape. For them to stay would have certainly meant their detention at one of the famous 'gulag' prisons of NK but it would have likely meant the persecution of his loved ones. I believe his primary motive for leaving NK was to spare his family--although I cannot imagine how he must suffer to this day wondering about their health and safety. The book really does read like a thriller--I couldn't put it down. My tears at the end of this book were for Mr. Jang's final successful escape into the South Korean embassy in Beijing, as well as the tears I shed for his friend who wasn't able to successfully complete the journey with him. My heart broke for his friend, while it rejoiced for Mr. Jang. Never has an account of escape, determination, a will to survive, and gratitude moved me to such an extent. I also can't stop wondering what might have happened to the lovely Cho-rin, who helped him in a way that all of us should help a fellow human being. I admired her so much from Mr. Jang's account of their fateful meeting. All of us have a duty to stop ignoring the suffering of so many. I want to do more--in what shape or form that comes, I am not yet certain but I believe in fighting for wonderful causes and I can't think of a cause more worthy than helping these oppressed and suffering people. Mr. Jang, congratulations on your wonderful, well-received book that deserves every accolade it has gotten. Congratulations on the personal happiness you have found with your wife and a new baby. I am so happy you made it to freedom so you could share your incredible, heroic story. Moreover, thank you for spreading the word of the plight of so many North Koreans. We in the west tend to forget how truly lucky we are. I am a better person for having read this book. Amazing.

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