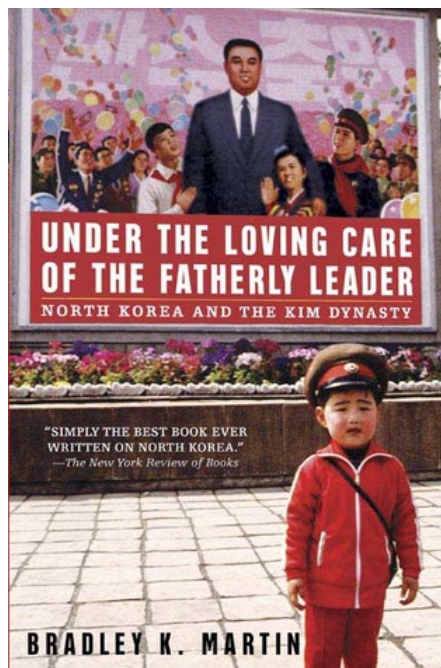




Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty

Bradley K. Martin

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Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty Bradley K. Martin
Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader offers in-depth portraits of North Korea's two ruthless and bizarrely Orwellian leaders, Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il. Lifting North Korea's curtain of self-imposed isolation, this book will take readers inside a society, that to a Westerner, will appear to be from another planet. Subsisting on a diet short on food grains and long on lies, North Koreans have been indoctrinated from birth to follow unquestioningly a father-son team of megalomaniacs.

To North Koreans, the Kims are more than just leaders. Kim Il-Sung is the country's leading novelist, philosopher, historian, educator, designer, literary critic, architect, general, farmer, and ping-pong trainer. Radios are made so they can only be tuned to the official state frequency. "Newspapers" are filled with endless columns of Kim speeches and propaganda. And instead of Christmas, North Koreans celebrate Kim's birthday--and he presents each child a present, just like Santa.

The regime that the Kim Dynasty has built remains technically at war with the United States nearly a half century after the armistice that halted actual fighting in the Korean War. This fascinating and complete history takes full advantage of a great deal of source material that has only recently become available (some from archives in Moscow and Beijing), and brings the reader up to the tensions of the current day. For as this book will explain, North Korea appears more and more to be the greatest threat among the Axis of Evil countries--with some defector testimony warning that Kim Jong-Il has enough chemical weapons to wipe out the entire population of South Korea.

Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty Details

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Author : Bradley K. Martin

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From Reader Review Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty for online ebook

Jeff says

A very good book, albeit with a few flaws that keep it off my list of elite-level nonfiction. This is a topic I've wanted to learn more about for a while and certainly filled in some gaps in my historical and cultural knowledge.

As far as the nit-picking:

- I don't usually call for books to be shorter, but this one could have used a bit of trimming. I certainly wanted to read interviews with defectors, but there were so many of them that it started to become repetitive.
- I tend to like my big nonfiction to be somewhat impersonal; the author inserted himself into the narrative more than I'd like.
- There were some strange inconsistencies in style, e.g. a bunch of interviews are related in narrative form then others are just dumped as straight Q&A interview transcripts.
- The book wanders off a bit from a straight chronological organization, particularly from the Korean War to the early 1990s. This may or may not bug you.

Still, if you want to commit the time and wade in there's a lot to like.

Dillon Font says

This book is THICK and even at my pace, I'm only 650 pages through in about 3 weeks of reading.

Regardless of whether you know/have an interest in Korea/Asia, the details it discusses on a closed, hermetic regime is a fascinating read

Hadrian says

Most detailed book on N.K. that I have read. Chilling and powerful in its detail.

Brian says

This was the other book recommended to me at the same time as *The Cleanest Race*, but it took me much longer to get to just because of its size. Almost a thousand pages, though admittedly with nearly a hundred pages of footnotes, took a bit for me to work up to, but I'm glad I did and I recommend this book to anyone whose view of North Korea is formed mostly by Best Korea memes and pictures of Kim Jong-il looking at things.

The main impression that *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader* gave me is that for all North Korea's claims of being the vanguard of the people's revolution spirit, it's actually just another occurrence of the oldest large-scale governmental type on Earth--the Mesopotamian god-king. At the top is the god-king, the descendent of Heaven, and he is surrounded by his relatives, who also have high positions by virtue of their divine blood. Below them are the nobility--in the Korea context, high ranking Party members and military leaders--which under Kim Jong-il has become more of a warrior aristocracy. Below them are the common people, and below them are the field slaves, composed of political prisoners.

And "Political prisoners" has a hugely expansive definition in North Korea. The policy of "three generations of punishment" means that a single crime can send an entire family to the internment camps or prevent them from ever getting a good job or university position. Much of the book is interviews with defectors, and the constant refrain in their testimony is that a single careless remark, or a single action taken in haste, or the behavior of a parent or child, or even simple descent from pre-revolution landowners or the *yangban* nobility, locked the defector out of ever being more than a poverty-stricken farmer, so they fled the country. Which means that their family became guilty by association and probably ended up in the camps.

Actually, looking at the wikipedia article on the *yangban*, it seems like the Kims have basically recreated feudal Korea, just with themselves at the head. Some revolution.

That comparison was the most interesting part of the book for me, because much of the rest of it is just information that we already know. North Korea's economy is a complete mess, the country went through a terrible famine in the 90s where millions starved, the seemingly-insane actions of the leaders are actually calculated to create an impression of a dangerously unstable regime that must be appeased lest they nuke Seoul, all of these are common knowledge, or at least they seem so to me and so reading multiple interviews where these facts were repeatedly touched on slowed my reading considerably.

The other problem is that *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader* tries to be multiple books at once. It's about the lives of defectors and what caused them to defect, but no individual defector is dealt with for very long and the end effect is more of a wall of misery and large-scale disenfranchisement, which is a good description of North Korea but lacks a personal touch that made me want to read another story of someone who fled after they said that South Koreans have cool watches and thus were banned from all the good jobs forever and ever. It's also a history of the Korean War, which is definitely an important part of Korean history, but it focuses a lot more on the actions of the U.N. Americans in the war than it does on Kim Il-sung's actions. It's a history of the Kim dynasty, but most of the official history is lies, Kim Il-sung's biography is full of lies, and his memoirs are also lies *and* most of the later volumes of his memoirs were published by his son, who obvious has his own motives.

The end result is that the book tries to do too much and ends up not really doing anything all that well. *The Cleanest Race* is better on the subject of whether North Koreans actually believe all the ludicrous propaganda that the regime puts out (answer: "it's complicated"), and I have to assume that there are better books about defectors' lives or the Korean War out there. For sheer comprehensiveness it wins, but at the cost of long digressions, some rambling, and a lack of focus throughout much of the text. I'm not sad I read it, but I wouldn't necessarily recommend it to anyone else.

Bex Smith says

I've read a lot of books written by North Korean defectors and foreign visitors. Every single one of those books only provided the tiniest of snap shots in to day to day life within the country. Documentaries are all the same.

This book covers much what other books and documentaries have but it also looks thoroughly, like so goddamn detailed, at the history of the country, how it ended up the way it is and provides information on the politics of the country step by step up until fairly recently. One of the most in depth books I have ever read on North Korea. You start to understand the county and it's people, and dare I say, even feel for North Korea as an entity.

I'll echo what others have said that it needs serious editing. It's all over the place. All of the information is great, but it can get a bit repetitive and I feel like just rejigging some of the information could have prevented that and cut the book down drastically.

Stefanie says

This is a good informative book about North Korean history, economy, politics and especially the Kim family up to the year 2004. It gave me many insights, I had not had before. It also thoroughly tried my patience. The first seven to ten chapters seemed to drag out endlessly in a much too detailed description of the Korean War and the utterly irrelevant experiences of the author's uncle as an American soldier in it. Add to that a much too detailed account of Kim Il-sungs early life as a partisan fighter in China with frequent sprinklings of anecdotes straight out of Kim Il-sungs autobiography. I found it quite hard at times to keep track of the overall important events of the Korean War and to separate actual facts of Kim Il-sungs life from his own propaganda tales.

After that my reading enjoyment improved very much however. I feel I have a much deeper understanding now of how the Kim family shaped the country and why North Korea acts like it does towards the outside world. All in all a must read, even if you have to work for the information sometimes.

Aaron Arnold says

I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that most Americans think of North Korea as a wacky punchline, if they think of it at all. This is really unfortunate because North Korea has such a sad story, like Haiti-level sad. Of course, since North Korea is one of the most secretive societies on Earth, if not the most, it's difficult for anyone to really try to educate themselves on it, but Bradley Martin has done an astonishing amount of research, and if anyone qualifies as a "North Korea expert", it's surely him. The book begins with the story of Kim Il-Sung, the eventual Great Leader. It's common for countries to invent myths about their founders (think George Washington and the cherry tree, or Romulus and Remus), but Kim has whitewashed his past so thoroughly that it took decades of serious digging and discarding of propaganda to uncover even the most basic facts about his early years. Part of this seems to have been nothing but vanity (telling people he was born on Mount Paektu under a double rainbow and so forth), but part of it was due to the fact that he was more culturally Chinese than Korean, having spent the majority of his formative years there.

He seems to have started off as your typical Maoist revolutionary - a natural leader, skillful in choosing between valor and discretion, and above all fortunate to have survived the complete chaos of World War 2 in northern China. Once installed as the leader of the "temporary" state in the Soviet-occupied northern part of Korea thanks to some meetings with the head of the NKVD, he set about purging his rivals and fine-tuning the obsessively nationalist juche personality cult the DPRK would eventually become famous for. It's funny how the "workers of the world unite!" universalist ethos of Marxism is so flexible in the right hands. After his disastrous invasion of the south, Kim turned to rebuilding his shattered country, and I was interested to learn that until the late 60s, the north was actually much more developed than the south, thanks to endemic

corruption in the south and the short-term benefits that the northern command economy brought.

Once South Korea pulled ahead, though, Kim's habit of building useless monuments to himself, maintaining a gigantic "defensive" army, and sidelining reformers in favor of his idiot son slowly dragged the country to the nightmarish poverty it's stuck in today. Did you know that during the early 90s famine, political prisoners received a grand total of 33 grams of food per day? An ounce is 28 grams. Just think about that. Thankfully a large portion of the book is interviews with defectors, so you get to hear fascinating details of everyday life, potentially biased though they may be. An especially interesting interview he conducts involves an exchange that captures one of the greatest tragedies of North Korea's unique brand of Marxism: a defector reveals that many people admired the meritocratic ethos of socialism, and were happy to move away from the often-suffocating Confucianism that characterized Korean society before and dedicate their lives to the regime's ideology. However, the leadership in general and the Great and Dear Leaders in particular were anything but meritocratic, and simply populated the upper echelons of DPRK society with the descendants of the original revolutionaries. So in abandoning the filial system, the people found neither family nor meritocracy, just an endless claue of Kims, and in shunning the chaotic but lucrative opportunities of capitalism for the safety and egalitarianism of *juche*, they got neither prosperity nor equality.

Overall it's an extremely depressing book, not merely because of the endless interviews discussing how horrible life there is, but also in the sections where Martin discusses diplomacy. The rest of the world never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity to open up the DPRK, feeding the Kims' paranoia every step of the way. Hopefully the next 60 years will be better for the people of North Korea than the last 60.

Erik says

A few months ago, I reread 1984 and wondered whether such a society could survive. The answer is yes. Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il have done it. The personality cult is indeed a cult. It's like the whole nation is David Koresh's compound. We are not going to know the full truth about North Korean life until it falls, but until that happy day, Martin has set the standard for books about this crazy country. He has synthesized everything from the ghost-written memoirs of Kim Il-Sung to the testimony of former concentration camp prisoners to produce a definitive study that delves into everything from teenage gangs to the sex life of Kim Jong-Il to future prospects for North Korea. He reaches the depressing conclusion that Kim Jong-Il might indeed be the North Korean Gorbachev, which tells you a lot. Cinephiles will be interested in how Kim Jong-Il got his start in running North Korean film (and opera, too).

Virginia Rand says

It took my almost three months to get through just over 200 pages, then my computer went on the fritz and I finished the last 500 or so in less than a week.

I was intimidated by the size and the compactness of the text at first, but Mr Martin has a real knack for making this comprehensive history understandable and interesting. It's really re-awakened my interest in the subject and I'm going to look to see if he's published anything else I might like.

Charles Harper says

This was an excellent read! Off the cuff, I will tell you that Mr. Martin pulls the "lazy journalist" trick by filling the last few hundred pages with transcriptions of a conversation between him and more than several NK defectors.

If you are a giant weirdo, one thing you may do is read as many books about NK as you possibly can. This book fills in a huge gap in my reading of the DPRK. Basically, everything so far has covered the present situation, with very little by way of the history of the DPRK. This text will amaze you with its telling of the extremely fucked up adolescence of Kim Jong Il. It will bring you back to when Kim Il Sung was playing the organ for a church, and sort of battling the Japanese in the colonial era. The biographies of KIS and KJI are excellent, and the lives of these two men are fascinating. Basically, KIS was the warrior, and his short, flabby, arthritic and movie-obsessed panzy of a son was a "genius." That's how KJI was sold to the DPRK public. The primary achievement of KJI's genius was his revolutionizing the NK film industry. If I remember accurately, MR. Martin states that KJI's cinematic prowess was regarded favorably both inside and outside the DPRK.

In one anecdote, KJI is hard at work in the editing booth, punching up some propaganda flick about war and how glorious things are. The director of the picture walks in and sees him hard at work, snipping away at the reels. KJI, after having spent four hours working his magic, stands up and sez something like "see if it is good and if you like it" or some shit. The director is then blown away by KJI's genius cuts.

KJI has many stories that flow in this way. He is a genius and does brilliant things and people are really quite astounded by his work. And you know what, in a land that denuded itself of any authentic culture, and that allowed itself to be manipulated by the state in such a thorough way, maybe he is the smartest dude in the country. No, he isn't. He was a dumbass and his movies probably sucked.

The story of the DPRK before the famine of 91 is one that you don't hear much. I hate to say this, but it does seem like the lives inside the hermit kingdom were somewhat okay before that famine, and that goes against the narrative. What narrative? Any mention of "narrative" should only indicate that the person writing about the narrative is unhinged and paranoid. But there is a narrative out there that life in the DPRK is hell. And it is. But for a while, they had it better than SK. That is because SK was a hell hole for a long time, run by dictators, and frequently beset by student uprisings. But then they turned into the SK of Gangnam Style. Maybe. Ignore all this.

Good book, I suggest you give it a go. If you crap out in the last hundred pages or so, that is Mr. Martin's fault because he phoned it in and padded out the ending. So now that you know that I have not actually read this whole book, you can strike your own head for reading all of this review. ha ha.

Brian says

(3.0) Tried to fit 3 or 4 different books into one, and it suffered

My primary criticism of this book is that Martin didn't stay focused on one project. He starts off with a tertiary source historical account of North Korea since World War II. That's fine, and he adopts a very objective tone, citing arguments on both sides of many unanswered questions (at least in the West) about North Korea's policies and leaders. We then shift into defectors' narratives, along the lines of Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea (which is so so much better--read that!). We downshift into interview transcripts of more defectors, and it starts to feel like he just got lazy/sloppy or just ran out of time as we just read interview after interview. He has some organization about which interviews he includes when, but the structure is weak and he should've just made his arguments using snippets of interviews as evidence...or just

let them tell their stories. It was a poorly executed hybrid. We then start a brief section of speculation as to what the future holds for the Korean peninsula, who Kim Jong-Il's successor will be (this was published in mid-2000s), and what the US, South Korea and Japan should do to reduce the risk of war. This was all very weak, felt much like an afterthought and detracted from the book.

If he had focused on any one of these, he could've produced a good piece of work. Well, actually, I think the history of North Korea was pretty good...perhaps where he spent the majority of his time (certainly so if you judge by number of citations...several early chapters had more than 100 citations per chapter...which fell off dramatically in the later sections). I might've given this early section (~300 pages' worth?) a 4 star rating, the well-crafted defector narratives 3 stars and the rest just 2 stars. So it kind of averages out to 3.

I'm not sure why he did it this way. He could've had several books, spaced them out, probably gotten paid better if he had just broken them up into more digestible pieces. As it is he spent 13 years on an unfinished book.

Okay, but I did learn some interesting things:

- Kim Song-ju was Kim Il-sung's birth name
- good quotation from a defector that I think sums up DPRK: "Of course, we have people who dissent; that's why we have police" (p. 15)
- There were many ethnic Koreans who repatriated to DPRK in the 60s (e.g. from Japan). They were a little disappointed with the direction their lives took. I really liked Chong Ki-Hae's story, for example.
- Kim Jong-il is rumored to be responsible for his younger brother's death... 'accident' while 'playing around' in a pond. His brother drowned. when KJI was 6, brother was 4.
- There's an enormous unfinished 105-story hotel in Pyongyang (even told me about that before)
- During the floods in South Korea in 1984: DPRK offered rice to help and was shocked when ROK took it. contributed to malnutrition/famine, then got far worse in the 90s.

And given my frustration with all of this, my nit-picking antennae were up. Here are some highlights of what I found:

- more bad ebook hyphenation, missing hyphens, inserted hyphens (I don't know if this is a problem in particular or a common ebook problem, but it looks like the book text comes in with hyphenation from line breaks and then in the ebook conversion they frequently get fouled up when those hyphenated words end up in the middle of a line...hyphens get left in the middle of words, two words usually hyphenated get concatenated, or a word suddenly has a space in the middle of it)
- there was at least one missing/broken footnote (the superscript number is there, no link. footnote text is there, but collapsed against previous note)
- bad blockquote indentation in interview transcripts. if an answer had more than one paragraph, 2nd and subsequent paragraphs often double-indented. looked terrible.
- spelling, e.g. 'forbibly' and at many doubled letters... (e.g. military p.643, unlimited p.650, meee p.649, borrowed p.705, skiing p.714)
- he had this "I thought about fleeing from DPRK" moment while visiting the DMZ at the beginning. it was forced, injected himself into a history, silly. He even brings it up again later (p. 406), implying he could identify with a defector's experience while in political prison as a result
- inappropriate and unnecessary Dave Barry reference: teacher telling that they were taught to watch student Kim Jong-Il's eyes, so that if he got bored, something needed to change...quoted Dave Barry to say "I am not making this up"
- some odd/creative constructions: "peddled anecdotes", "retailed anecdotes"
- Chongryon is mentioned well before he says what it is (p. 398)
- tries to take credit for Kim Jong-Il not traveling much outside country by giving bad review to a documentary of his trip to China...
- "fish row" (roe) p. 463

- made big deal (mentioned several times) about gold watches on defectors' wrists. so what?
 - refers to a map of which counties could be visited by inspectors at one point, but doesn't include the map in the text. It would've helped, as he kept referring to the map, people were pointing, discussing the different colors used to mark the counties. Then he went on and on about the 'mystery' of why certain counties were excluded, proposed a sinister hypothesis and then found no evidence for it.
 - a footnote that was misplaced (clearly didn't refer to the right text), another without the actual citation (maybe just had the article title?)
-

Daniel says

This is an interesting read. Unfortunately, it lacks structure. The author jumps back and forth from biographies of the Kims, history of North Korea, observations and reflections from his journeys, interviews with refugees and anecdotes. Most of the chapter titles don't tell you anything at all about what the chapter is going to be about. Generally, the book follows a chronological order, but I found that there are many things in between that I was not very interested in and had rather skipped. Given the many details and anecdotes, the book ends up being too long. All the more necessary is it to give it a clear structure and clear chapter titles to allow you to focus on reading what is the most interesting to you. Instead, the author leaves you in the dark with his lack of structure and focus and useless chapter titles.

However, the book is quite well researched. The author has traveled to North Korea several times and combines the knowledge he gained there with academic research and interviews with refugees/ defectors and others - including Western diplomats and officials who know half-brothers of Kim Jong-il. Martin does not only give you the background knowledge and his anecdotes, but also addresses many important questions, such as: Why did NK under-estimate the ability of the South and the US to counter its invasion? Why did policy not change after it failed so clearly? Did the Kims not know about the situation on the ground? Or did they not care?

Generally, I found the way Martin makes sense out of what he saw in North Korea not as compelling as the approach taken by Myers in the book "The Cleanest Race". Martin seems to generally focus on sympathy with common North Koreans and their exploitation by a parasitic and ignorant ruling elite. Myers gives you a whole new approach on how this propaganda works, how North Koreans see themselves and why they will not give up nuclear weapons.

After all, it is a good read. I think that a clear structure and useful chapter titles are a must for a book of more than 700 pages, but if you're not bothered by this, you might still want to buy this book.

Kyle says

I didn't realize how HUGE this book was when I got it, but I decided to give it a go. I couldn't put it down. I've always been hungry for more information about North Korea. This book satisfied many of my curiosities, but more impressively, opened up many other areas of interest I would like to study in relation to North Korea. It's also a good mix of interviews, anecdotes and straight-up facts. Not sure this is a 5-star book for everyone, but it was for me.

Sandy says

After I read *Nothing to Envy*, a book about six ordinary people in North Korea, I was even more intrigued about this secretive country. I reserved *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader* at the library. I was so surprised to see a 700-page book (with 100 pages of footnotes) waiting for me. No way would I read such a thick book, but I decided to check it out anyway and maybe skim parts of it. Wrong. I am reading every page and can't wait to get back to it every chance I get. Bradley Martin is taking me through the history of North Korea from the Korean War to 2004 (when the book was published) and has interviewed dozens of defectors as well as traveled to the DPRK, which is rare. His emphasis is on the lives and personality cults of Kim Sr. and the current Kim Jong-il and how the indoctrination affects the country and its citizens. I am at times incredulous, fascinated, shocked, sickened, amazed. Even the footnotes are interesting! As a result of reading about this extreme government control, I am more grateful for my country's freedoms and more concerned about losing them.

Phil says

An interesting but uneven account of the post-WWII history of North Korea and the Kim regime. The author has had extensive exposure to the North Korean government and has a lot of keen insights into how the government functioned or didn't function.

Abbe says

From

Under different circumstances, North Korea could be the subject of a Marx Brothers satire, with the elements of a pompous, ego-driven patriarch, a worshipful population, and a general aura of fantasy and illusion. But North Korea has a superbly equipped million-man army and an expanding nuclear weapons program. So this comprehensive examination of this totalitarian society and the two men who have dominated it is often terrifying. For a quarter century, Martin has covered North Korea while working for the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, and *Newsweek*. Using newly available material from Russian and Chinese sources, Martin offers surprising insights into the career and character of both Kim Il-Sung and his son, Kim Jong-Il. He strives, albeit with moderate success, to unveil the reality from the mounds of myth and distortions with which both men have surrounded themselves. But Martin's account is most chilling in his descriptions of contemporary North Korean society. And yet, as Martin eloquently illustrates in this important book, the control of the Kim dynasty may well be tenuous. *Jay Freeman*
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Review

"_Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader_ is, from all I have read, simply the best book ever written about North Korea. Relying largely on extensive interviews with defectors, Martin portrays North Korean life with a clarity that is stunning, and he captures the paradoxes in North Korean public opinion."--Nicholas D. Kristof, *The New York Review of Books*

"Martin's massive book provides as useful a set of insights into life in North Korea as can be found anywhere."

- *L.A. Times Review*

"As an AP correspondent covering South Korea in the 1970s, I learned quickly how difficult it was to discover any reliable information about that secretive, threatening regime to the north. Brad Martin's book is testimony to the thoroughness of his work, and the high level of his ability as a journalist and researcher.

" North Korea is one of the least known, least understood countries in the world. Its leaders have always been enigmas, both frightening and fascinating, but almost impossible to decipher. Again today, it becomes vitally important that we do both, yet there is almost nothing of importance being written about the subject. *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader* is important, as well as fascinating. The research is impeccable, the writing excellent. This is a major and timely contribution, and essential to anyone who hopes to deal sensibly with a vital region of the world."

-Terry Anderson, former AP correspondent and author of *Den of Lions*

"Brad Martin's *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, a careful, penetrating analysis of North Korea, is more than just a book. Given the levels of secrecy which surround the Pyongyang regime and the danger it poses to its neighbors, Martin has rendered a considerable service to us all."

-bestselling author, David Halbertstam

"Brad Martin's book on North Korea is at once enlightening and frightening. It is lucid in writing, balanced in analysis, and comprehensive in its meticulous research and anecdotal evidence. The detailed exposition of the narrow life of luxury and the devious character of the 'Dear Leader,' Kim Jong-il, is scary. So is the description of North Korea as a corrupt, secretive, stagnant fief of the Kim family. Brad Martin, with his long years as a Pyongyang-watcher, is eminently qualified to write a book that should strip away any illusions America and the West have about Kim's dangerous regime."

-Richard Halloran, former correspondent for *The New York Times* in Asia and Washington, D.C.

Nicholas says

Despite being flawed in certain aspects, Martin's work is an interesting one. Even though it brings us "new" information from the northern wasteland of the Korean peninsula, at times I found this book hard to read. Is the DPRK totalitarian? Certainly. Is the DPRK's economy dead? Without question. These questions were never in doubt. To this, I feel Mr. Martin has only added a level of gossip as to why this has occurred. Are defectors testimonies important? Certainly. However can a junior officer's stories on rumours floating around the DMZ about Kim Jong Il be trusted as fact? Absolutely not. Time and again I found myself frustrated that A) more time wasn't spent on high level defector's information and B) more background information on his interviewees wasn't published so proper bias couldn't be obtained. As one other review here has mentioned, it was surprising that footnotes were in this book at all. I feel that the poster felt shocked as they did not feel this would be such an academically strict book. I on the otherhand felt that there was nothing new in this book that could be cited to begin with and therefore were never needed. It was especially surprising that in some instances he even took North Korean propaganda as the basis of fact. In addition to this, his "memos" to the Kims at the end of the work destroyed what little credibilitiy Mr. Martin had left.

Mr. Martin's problem from the outset is he thought he could take what would've made good news (he would've been right) and turn it into a 700 page scholarly work. In the end, he proved that any such endeavour would be a complete failure. The reason for this is not his fault. In the final section of the book he comments on Kim Jong Nams eventual succession to the throne. Of course with hindsight we now know Kim Jong Eun will succeed Kim Jong Il. With the information Mr. Martin had at the time this would've been easily the best guess one could muster. However, this is the problem in and of itself. Almost no information that comes out of North Korea is correct. The correct information that does come out of the Hermit Kingdom

can also change in a moment's notice. That's just life in dealing with a despotic and truly authoritarian dystopian nation where most people don't even know man has landed on the moon. The sad fact of the matter is that, as was the case with the Soviet Union, the only real information we will ever see out of North Korea is when the regime collapses. Until then only best guesses can be applied.

Until such time, I fully recommend readers to turn elsewhere. I cannot recommend enough Barbara Demick's work "Nothing to Envy." The refreshing aspect of this work is that it actually makes no assumptions. It follows the lives of defectors in North Korea until their decision to defect and their life after making that journey. It remains a very personal work dealing with personal experiences and is exceptionally well written. Furthermore, the author does not make wild guesses as to what is happening inside the palaces of the Kims or who has the audacity to take over power based on information that most people dealing with North Korea should know to be spurious.

Matt Hooper says

Every five to ten years, the world finds itself in dire need of an expert on North Korean history and politics.

Such was the case in 1994, when war threatened to break out between the U.S. and North Korea over the latter's nuclear weapons development program (a summit meeting between former President Jimmy Carter and Kim Il-sung resulted in a deal that temporarily reduced tensions).

Such was the case in 2000, when U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with Kim Jong-il to discuss mothballing the North's ballistic missile program (the meeting was substantive, but no deal was reached).

Such was the case in 2006, when North Korea tested a nuclear weapon (confirming that their adherence to the 1994 disarmament deal was, in modern parlance, fake news).

Such was the case in 2009, when former President Bill Clinton negotiated the release of American journalists being held in captivity by North Korean government.

Such was the case in 2011, when the second generation of Kim leadership gave way to the third.

And such is the case today, days after President Donald Trump hastily agreed to a face-to-face meeting with North Korean leadership.

Then and now, you're likely to hear from Bradley K. Martin – who is as close to an expert on the Hermit Kingdom as one can be. A long-time print journalist for *The Baltimore Sun*, the Asian edition of *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek* and other publications, Martin has made four trips to North Korea as a credentialed reporter (1979, 1989, 1992 and 2005).

His intrepid reporting took him beyond the (by North Korean terms) cosmopolitan borders of Pyongyang and into more remote regions of the country – where very few outsiders are allowed to roam. His observations, plus information gleaned from countless interviews with defectors, Korean government officials and other NoKo watchers are compiled into "Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader" – a cinderblock-sized tome that chronicles the history of North Korea and the first two generations of the Kim dictatorial dynasty.

"Under the Loving Care" is, beyond question, the top of the mountain as far as North Korean history books are concerned. Published first in 2004 and slightly revised in 2006, it remains the most comprehensive scholarly examination of the Kims – mainly because no other objective journalist has managed to out-access

Martin. But they don't call North Korea the "Hermit Kingdom" for nothing – there are limitations on what it means to be an expert in this field.

For instance, when Martin published his book in the mid-2000s, Kim Jong-il was still firmly in power and his successor was unknown. Jong-il himself had outlasted and outwitted other brothers from other mothers to inherit the dictatorship from his father, Kim Il-sung. Martin was not alone in assuming that Jong-il's oldest son from his first wife – Kim Jong-nam – was likely to wind up following in his father's footsteps as North Korea's next autocrat.

Jong-nam's only serious competition (these transitions tend to be phallogocentric in nature) were his two younger male stepbrothers – Kim Jong-chol and Kim Jong-un. Jong-chol had two strikes against him in that he was awfully young and (apparently) too feminine for his father's tastes. Even further down the totem was Kim Jong-un, who was even younger than Jong-chol and, according to insiders, too "ferocious" and inhumane to be considered for the role of dictator. Who knew one could be too inhumane to qualify as a serious candidate for dictatorship?

Of course, history – particularly recent history – has a tendency to come at us in curveballs. Jong-nam lost his father's favor after an ill-fated trip to Japan that involved falsified passports and a planned excursion to Tokyo's Disneyland, as well as some other impudent behavior involving guns and nightclubs and coffeehouses. Jong-un became the successor-in-waiting in 2010 and assumed the mantle of leadership on December 17, 2011, days before Jong-il's death.

As a fitting end to this chapter of palace intrigue, Jong-un then allegedly authorized the audacious assassination of Jong-nam, which took place in 2017 in the Kuala Lumpur International Airport at the hands of two young women armed with VX nerve agent.

So, yes, it's not easy – perhaps it's impossible – to be an expert on North Korea.

Still, Martin does a fabulous job re-telling and analyzing the history of this insular nation, beginning with the brutal reign of the Japanese in 1910, to the split between North and South following World War II, to the Korean War of the late 1940s and 1950s and the subsequent consolidation of leadership under Kim Il-sung, to the continuation of autocratic rule under Kim Jong-il.

Along the way, he explains how the North Korean commitment to "juche" (basically, self-reliance) was initially successful as postwar North Korea developed at a slightly quicker pace than their southern neighbors. And then he chronicles how hubris and mismanagement eventually led to famine, economic stagnation and increasing separation from the rest of the world (not to mention, from reality itself.)

Relevant to today's news cycle, here are some takeaways from Martin's 719 pages of historical narrative and context:

- One, at various points during the past several decades, North Korea has been both written off as a doomed, soon-to-collapse state, and hopefully portrayed as open to modest reforms and foreign engagement. Present-day indications of either outcome must be tempered by this historical context. In short, we've been here before and nothing much has changed.

- Two, North Korea's nukes are likely going nowhere -- for two reasons. First, the nuclear warheads provide a deterrent against U.S. military action in the area. In the olden days (1994 to 2017), the deterrent was that a provoked North Korea would unload its nuclear payload on Seoul, causing millions of casualties. Now, of course, we know that the regime has developed ICBMs that can reach American soil, making the nuclear threat much more serious and direct. Second, in the event that the Koreas reunify, nukes give the North leverage in negotiating their representation within a new, combined government. So it seems rather fanciful

to believe that anyone, much less a bombastic Donald Trump, is going to be able to convince the North Koreans to part with their atomic security blanket.

- Three, speaking of bombasticness, North Korean leaders do not respond well to threats – and they definitely do not respond well to physical insults. George W. Bush reportedly referred to Kim Jong-il as a “pygmy” – which didn’t win Korean hearts and minds. And no one needs a refresher on the nature of the insults lobbed at Kim Jong-un by President Trump via Twitter. The North Koreans tend to respond best to serious, mature overtures, if they respond at all.

In short, what we learn from Martin’s book is that it’s a safe bet to assume that nothing much will change in North Korea in the short term – and that any direct talks between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, if they take place, will likely lead nowhere.

But, as Martin illustrates in his failed prediction of who would succeed Kim Jong-il as the newest incarnation of The Dear and/or Great Leader – North Korea remains largely unpredictable. And Kim Jong-un in particular is an unknown quantity. The trend in the North over the past few decades has been one of opening – albeit very a slow opening. At some point, the flow of outside information into the country will be uncontrollable and the Kims’ house of cards will come crashing down at the hands of the people they have long oppressed.

Let us hope that, as the tipping point approaches, the attitude within the country is different from what it was in the mid-1990s when Jong-il was at the height of his power. At that time, Jong-il’s father (the country’s founding leader/dictator) asked his son what would happen in the event North Korea went to war with the outside world and did *not* win?

Kim Jong-il reportedly told his father, “If we lose, I would destroy the world.”

Amanda Van Parys says

Finally finished this beast, and yeah, it was worth it.

Joselito Honestly and Brilliantly says

So the new Pope recently went to South Korea and, with his haloed head turned towards the North, uttered a solemn prayer for peace and reconciliation. He was probably dreaming of something similar to what his predecessor John Paul did, in Europe, bringing down communist states with papal visits and prayers said out loud among ecstatic crowds.

I do not think it’ll be the same with North Korea, however. For out there, they have the same type of religions as the Pope. If Christians have the triumvirate of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, North Koreans also have their holy trio of Kim Il-sung (the Father), Kim Jong-il (the Son) and now Kim Jong-un (the grandson). Christians have images and the cross; North Koreans have statues of the Kims everywhere, and each house have their photos prominently displayed, pins bearing their images worn on the lapels of shirts and jackets. A Christian says grace before meals, a North Korean, from childhood, is taught to give thanks to the Kims before eating anything. While Christians blame their weaknesses and the devils for all the world’s ills, North Koreans--despite the harrowing deprivations they suffer (eating wallpapers and grass for lack of food)--would blame their own inadequacies and the evil tandem of the USA and South

Korea. The Kims are deities, with stories explaining how that was, like in the Holy Bible. It does not matter that these stories are mostly fiction--they believed them anyway. Their faith is strong and unwavering.

It may even be better in North Korea. As one defector had explained in an interview:

"The mechanics of Kim Il-sung's ideology and religion are the same...In Christian society if you say I'm an atheist they'll point their fingers at you. It's the same in North Korea. If you say I don't believe in Kim Il-sung you'll get into trouble. In religion, though, God is invisible. In North Korea, Kim Il-sung is alive and you can see him."

This is a fascinating read, I tell you. But needs an updating because it was published at the time Kim Jong-il was still alive.
