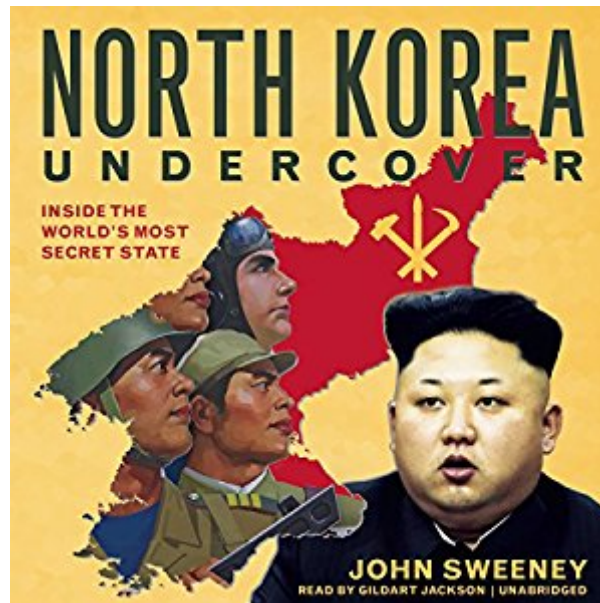




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# North Korea Undercover: Inside The World's Most Secret State



## Synopsis

An authoritative and frightening investigation into the dark side of North Korean society North Korea is like no other tyranny on Earth. Its citizens are told their home is the greatest nation in the world, and Big Brother is always watching. It is Orwell's 1984 made reality. Award-winning BBC journalist John Sweeney is one of the few foreign journalists to have witnessed the devastating reality of life in the controversial and isolated nation of North Korea. Having entered the country undercover, Sweeney posed as a university professor with a group of students from the London School of Economics. Huge factories with no staff or electricity, hospitals with no patients, uniformed child soldiers, and the world-famous and eerily empty DMZ - the Demilitarized Zone, where North Korea ends and South Korea begins - are all framed by a relentless flow of regime propaganda from omnipresent loudspeakers. Free speech is an illusion: One word out of line, and the gulag awaits. State spies are everywhere, ready to punish disloyalty at the slightest sign of discontent. Drawing on his own experiences and his extensive interviews with defectors and other key witnesses, Sweeney's North Korea Undercover pulls back the curtain, providing a rare insight into life there today while examining the country's troubled history and addressing important questions about its uncertain future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I am glad I read the book. It is very eye opening. However, it is not very well written and the kindle version has many many words that were pushed together with no blanks between the words,

making it a bit more challenging to read. I haven't read *Nothing to Envy* but I understand that it is a better book

John Sweeney was a good friend during our LSE days (regrettably quite a few years ago) so I would probably have rated the book highly regardless, but I genuinely loved it. It is a unique blend of careful, well-documented analysis and gripping narrative. North Korea undoubtedly wins the prize for most totalitarian regime, and for those fascinated -- as I am -- by it, this is a totally must read. A great complement to the book is the documentary film that Sweeney and colleagues shot during their trip. I am also going to turn to John's other books, notably his account of the life and times of Ceausescu, communist Romania's famed dictator.

I am enjoying the author's perspective on North Korea and its people. However, the Kindle edition that I purchased is absolutely riddled with typos. There are letters missing from words, and more often than not, words that run together without spaces. This makes reading somewhat annoying, though the content itself is quite interesting. This edition of the book really does need some editing and revision.

An excellent coverage of a nation I would never ever visit. Being the son of a Korean War combat vet who fought to keep South Korea free from this form of rule I could never go to a country where they have tourists bow to statues of the ego maniacs who have brought death and misery to their own people, kidnapped citizens of various other nations, and threatened the peace of nearby nations and the U.S.

I bought this book looking for information on what life is like in North Korea and some history on it. I got a little of that and a lot of dry humor and info on Mr. Sweeney's other works. I wasn't completely disappointed, and did learn a lot of information I didn't know, but I probably wouldn't have bought it knowing it was going to be written in the manner that it has.

Great book written in really readable style. Sometimes maybe a little too detail-oriented and wanders from the point, especially for non-British readers (e.g. the IRA section). Great to watch also the BBC Panorama documentary from the same trip.

Having read Paul Fischer's *A Kim Jong-il Production* (also a 2015 pub), I was looking

forward to another exciting true tale of life in this tyrannical country. This isn't it. Whereas Fischer wrote about the people caught up in Kim Jong Il's net, Sweeney writes mostly about himself. His "undercover" consisted of touring the country as a history professor, instead of identifying himself as a journalist. Sweeney tells about his experiences touring other dictatorships and places North Korea at the bottom of the list. Because he presents a lot of historical facts about the war, he doesn't tell us a lot about North Korea we haven't read elsewhere. Moreover, his writing style is snarky and somewhat repetitious. For an exciting read, pick up the Fischer book or Blaine Harden's *The Great Leader and the Fighter Pilot*, which is an exciting history of the formation of the contemporary North Korean state and the rise of Kim Il Sung. Both are engrossing.

This is an excellent overview of the North Korean regime and the Kim dynasty. John Sweeney mixes history, interviews with defectors, and his own personal experiences on a tour of North Korea to create a fascinating and compelling study of the most reclusive, and probably the most repressive, country in existence. This book is an excellent primer for anyone interested in a general historical and political overview of the regime and a useful although brief biography for Koreaphiles interested in the new leader Kim Chong Un. [NOTE: It is not easy wading through the tidal pool of myths, inaccuracies, and regime-produced propaganda to obtain an accurate biography of the the three Kims or a historical reality of the founding of North Korea; however, John Sweeney has done a superb job in pulling together that narrative. I spent twenty-three years with the U.S. intelligence community, a good portion of that time spent against the North Korean target, and can say that Sweeney's book is one of the most accurate I have read.]

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