

Star of the North by D B John

5 stars

A well-written thriller and a frightening expose on what is really happening in North Korea

1998: Soo-min (Susie) – twin sister of Jee-min (Jenna) – disappears with her boyfriend from the beach of Baengyeong Island, South Korea – both presumed drowned. The family is devastated by the disappearance and it takes its toll over the ensuing years.

2010: Twelve years later, Dr Jenna Williams is still suffering the loss of her ‘mirage-image’ sister, but she has re-built her life somewhat and is now teaching as an assistant professor in the School of Foreign Service when she is approached by someone from the CIA. With Jenna’s knowledge of Korea and fluency in the language the ‘Company’ want to use her expertise following the latest missile launch from North Korea.

Parallel to Jenna’s work for the CIA and the possibility that her sister might still be alive, D B John works in another story line – that of Cho Sang-ho, a lieutenant colonel in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pyongyang. The skill with which the author winds the parallel stories and the perfectly-fitting back-stories are a pleasure to read. Less so, is the treatment of ordinary village folk by the regime.

With the summit between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un just having taken place, and the impending meeting of the latter and President Trump, this is a book very worthwhile reading. The author is extremely knowledgeable concerning North Korea and has co-written ‘The Girl with Seven Names’, Hyeonseo Lee’s New York Times best-selling memoir about her escape from North Korea.

At the end of the book he gives details about North Korea’s ‘Abduction Program’ (admitted by Kim Jong-il at a meeting in 2002 with the Japanese PM), the ‘Seed-Bearing Program’, ‘Gangster Diplomats and Bureau 39’, attitude to Christians, the Gulags and Camp 22 and Human Experimentation. He also includes a glossary of Korean words used in the book – very helpful.

This is a book which has made a deep impression on me and I would urge you to read it too.

Sméagol

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to read