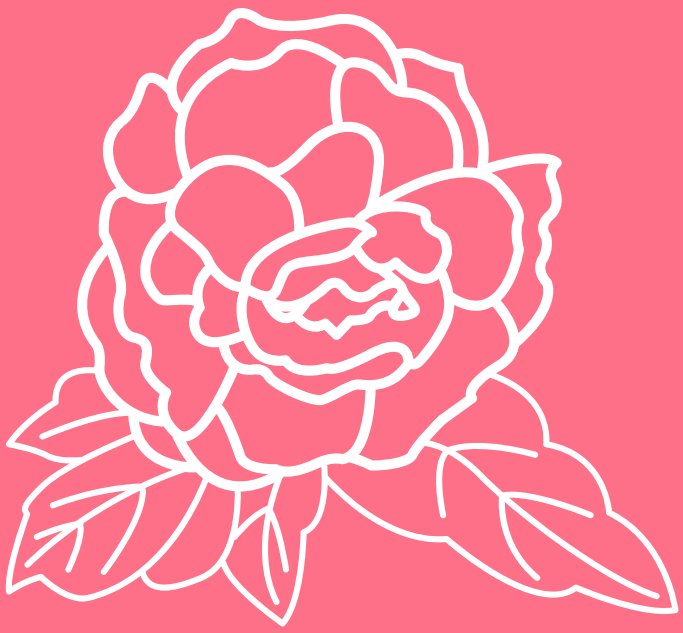
RED INK



Max Pinckers

Max Pinckers
'Red Ink'

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Edition of 850

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HoGent

RED INK

Max Pinckers


759


PEANUTS
Snack khoai tây
Vị bò beefsteak
Emerald
Alicafe


6


경애하는 최고령도자 김정은동지께서
다녀가신 천체관람실
주체105(2016)년 5월 20일
통행중입니다


태양계 행성
수성
금성
지구
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4억 만년전


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자극에 대한 우리 몸의
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시각 (눈)
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후각 (코)
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혁명일군들과 교원들이 원아들의
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정보기술학습실


미술실


그이와 하나되여


백 두 산 의 푸 른 신 호 등
우리 조국땅에 침략의 검은구름을 몰아오는 미제에게 무자비한 철추를!
승리자의 후손들은 말한다


중모리장단
굿거리장단
타령장단
휘모리장단
엇모리장단
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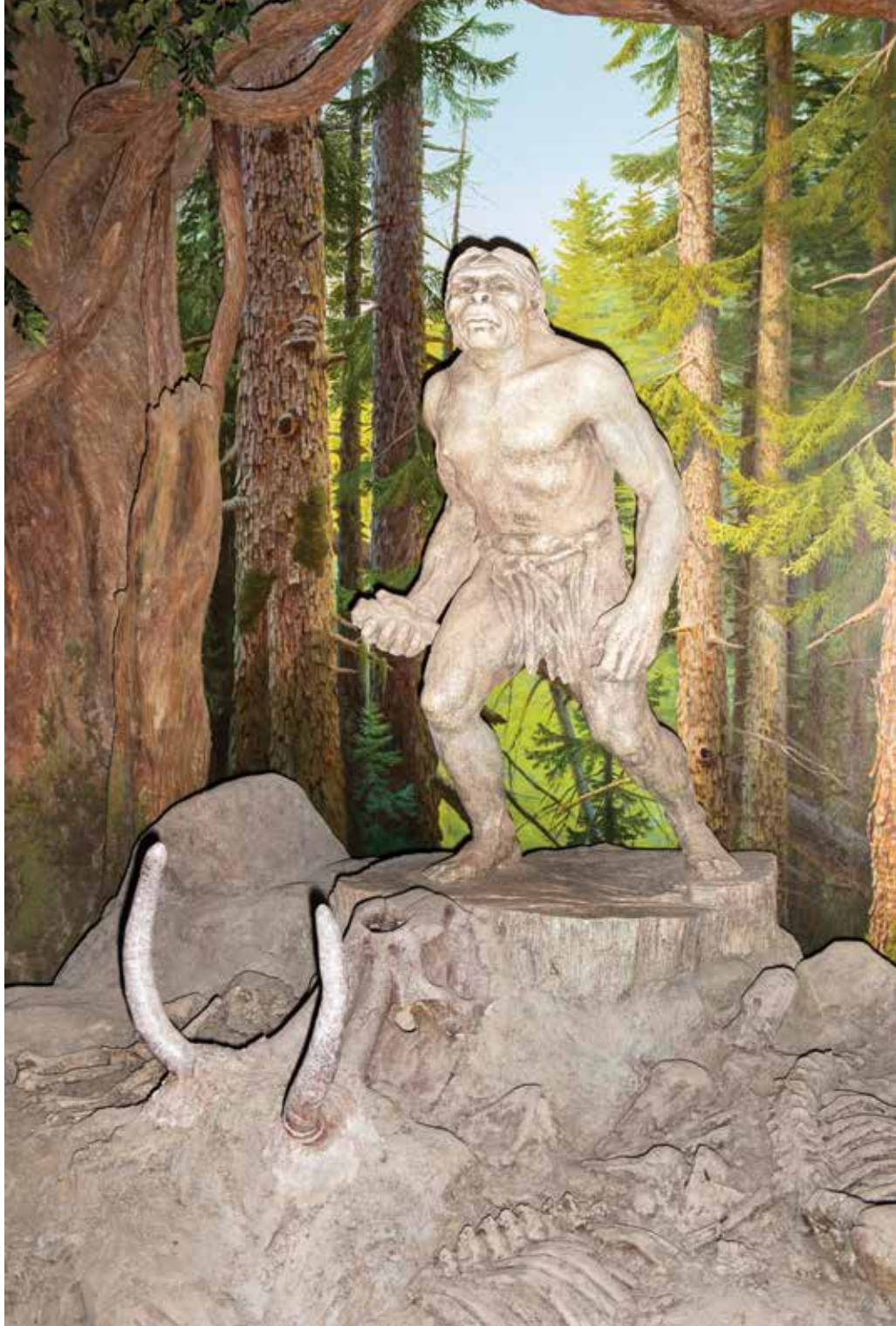


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절대로
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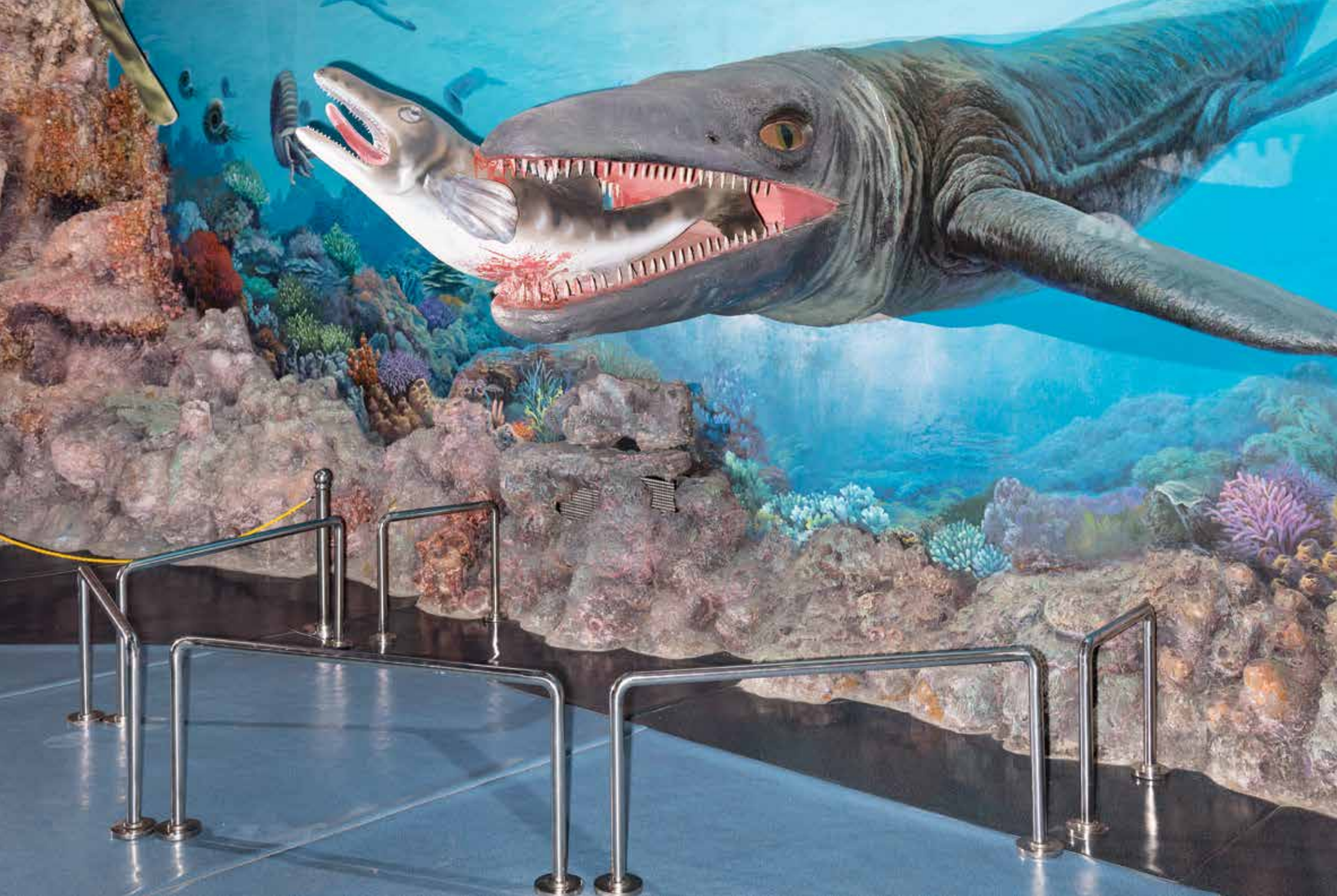


PYONGYANG'S ANACONDA IN THE CHANDELIER

By Evan Osnos

One afternoon in July, 2017, a North Korean diplomat called me with news that was – by any rational accounting – a mix of good and bad. The good news: The New Yorker magazine's application for a visit to North Korea had been approved by Pyongyang. The photographer Max Pinckers, his assistant Victoria Gonzalez-Figueras, and I would be allowed to visit. The bad news: Pyongyang and Washington were, at that moment, edging closer to war. Day by day, the situation was growing more acute; President Donald Trump threatened to attack North Korea with "fire and fury like the world has never seen." Kim Jong Un's government responded that it was prepared to launch four missiles in the direction of American territory.

I called a government source who has worked for many years in the American national-security community. "Is it safe for us to go?" I asked. North Korea was holding three Americans in detention. The source considered the question and said, finally, "It's probably fine. Just don't give them an excuse to make you into bargaining chips." But, what would that mean in practice? What are the rules in North Korea? When do they change – and would we even know that we were crossing them? In a tragic precedent, an American student named Otto Warmbier had been convicted the previous year of "a hostile act against the state," for trying to remove a propaganda poster from the wall of a hotel in Pyongyang. In June, American officials discovered that Warmbier was in a coma, and they secured his release. He died less than a week after returning to the U.S.

And yet the growing tensions between the two countries demanded to be covered. Our first encounter with the murky rules around visiting North Korea came before we arrived. In Beijing, after obtaining visas to enter the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Max and Victoria and I rode to the airport for the flight to Pyongyang. At the final Chinese security post before boarding the plane, an officer examining the photography equipment withdrew a stack of battery packs, and pointed sternly to a sign: No lithium-ion batteries allowed. Max and Victoria were aghast. Losing the ability to use flash lighting would be like trying to write the article with only half the words in the alphabet. We pleaded with the officer; we raged; we thought of offering a bribe. (We decided against it.) Nothing worked. At the final call for the flight, we gave up and scrambled aboard.

On the plane, having lost the ability to use their main flash, Max and Victoria assembled an ingenious approximation, by wiring and taping a set of smaller flashes together. It looked like a large set of antlers rising from the top of the camera, but it would suffice. While they worked on their rig, I ditched books and articles from my laptop. (North Korea strictly prohibits outside accounts of its politics and leaders. Only approved histories are permitted, and I had been warned to expect a search.) We landed in Pyongyang, and customs officers in green military-style uniforms pulled aside our

suitcases to check them for contraband. We were expecting that. But when they opened my suitcase, I encountered a sight that made my heart sink. There, on top of my clothes, was a neat stack of books on North Korea that I had forgotten to leave behind. I had been on the phone while packing that morning, and I had simply loaded them, unthinkingly, into my bag.

The officers led me to a small room and started to pose questions: Where had I obtained these volumes? What was the address of the store? Had I read them? After some back and forth, I agreed to let them confiscate the books and I agreed that I would never bring them back to North Korea. (A pledge I was happy to make.) They filed away the paperwork and signaled for me to move along. I walked glumly out to meet Max and Victoria, who had been watching the events through an open door. Our initial introduction to North Korea had been tense, and I had nobody to blame but myself. At the airport, we were met by Mr. Pak Song Il, the foreign ministry official who would be serving as our guide and minder. On his left breast, over his heart, he wore a pin bearing the image of Kim Il Sung, the founder of the nation. Pak was low-key and competent and accustomed to providing a genial answer to foreigners' questions, even if the answer was a deflection. When I asked what our schedule would be in the days ahead, he said, gamely, "We'll give you all of that information just as soon as we get to the hotel!"

After half an hour on the road, we reached the Kobangsan Guest House, a small, three-story hotel on the outskirts of Pyongyang. The hotel was often assigned to Western visitors, it seemed, to reduce the chance of any unplanned encounters with ordinary North Koreans. We were the only guests. North Korea, of course, is one of the world's poorest places. According to the United Nations, seventy-two per cent of North Koreans rely on government food rations. But the hotel was a showpiece; every slab of marble and granite had been buffed to a high shine, and it was decorated in a self-consciously ornate style. Almost every room had a chandelier. The lobby was adorned with a chandelier as large as a minivan. As an aesthetic style, it was intended to portray North Korea as unbothered by Western sanctions and isolation. It was an effortful pageant of bounty and good cheer.

We had dinner with Mr. Pak and Mr. Ri Yong Pil, another foreign ministry official, who had served in the army. He was wiry and alert, with a broad smile. He raised a glass of Taedonggang beer and toasted our arrival. A pair of waitresses, moving in synchronicity, delivered each course – ginkgo soup, black-skin chicken, kimchi, river fish, vanilla ice cream, along with glasses of beer, red wine, and soju. We talked about politics, but, above all, Ri wanted us to absorb the idea that North Korea was, in his telling, unintimidated in its confrontation with the West. "We are small in terms of people and area, but in terms of dignity we are the most powerful in the world," he said. "We will die in order to protect that dignity and sovereignty."

After dinner, Max and Victoria joined the foreign ministry officials downstairs at the billiards table. In one game, Max pulled uncomfortably far ahead, and began to wonder how hosts who had expounded so emphatically about dignity would respond to a Belgian victory on North Korean soil. But in his final shot, Max sank the eight-ball and the cue-ball. It was automatic forfeit – and a relief.

Our hotel rooms were large and sparse but intricately appointed. In North Korea, nothing is left to chance; every contact with visitors, no matter how incidental, is controlled and channeled to achieve an effect. It is the totalitarianism of small details. The coffee table was laden with magazines bearing Kim Jong Un on the cover, in heroic poses. The bathroom were portraits of order and cleanliness; the soap and toothbrush were marked with small signs for "SOAP" and "TOOTHBRUSH." Every part of the experience had been curated. It had the feel of a stage set – a Wes Anderson rendering of dictatorship – and I recalled that Kim Jong Un's father, Kim Jong Il, had been an ardent cinephile, who amassed a mountain of Hollywood films and made his own remakes of Godzilla and other classics.

In the days that followed, we were on the road from daybreak, visiting and interviewing as much as possible. Days were long and busy. Late in the evenings, when we returned to the hotel, it was never clear when we were alone and when we were being observed. At one point, Max and Victoria mentioned to one another, in the privacy of their room, that the bathroom had a minor maintenance problem; there was a missing ring of silicon around the edge of the bathtub, and water was seeping through the crack. When we returned that evening, the crack had been sealed. Was it a coincidence? Who could say? The ambiguity only added to the sense of uncertainty. We were mindful of the warnings from my contact in Washington, and we treated every communication as if it was available to be read or heard by our hosts. From Pyongyang, I sent a few emails to my wife but rarely said more than the minimal acknowledgment of our safety. I was so bland and terse that she began to wonder if my cryptic missives were, in fact, a coded request for help, she told me later.

In two decades as a journalist, I had never encountered an assignment quite like this. It was not remotely dangerous in the overt sense; nobody was shooting at anyone or threatening us. And yet, we were never sure of the ground beneath our feet. One afternoon, we strolled down a newly constructed boulevard, known as Ryomyong Street. The government wanted us to see the new buildings, and a few carefully-curated shops. At one point, Max climbed on to a knee-high ledge, to get a better angle for a picture. A commotion erupted. Our minders, suddenly alarmed, ordered him down from the ledge. There was no explanation, but it was deemed unacceptable. It was, in those moments, the briefest window into the unseen substructure of the security state – the unwritten rules and guidelines that govern the lives of North Koreans. The moment was, at once, nothing and unsettling.

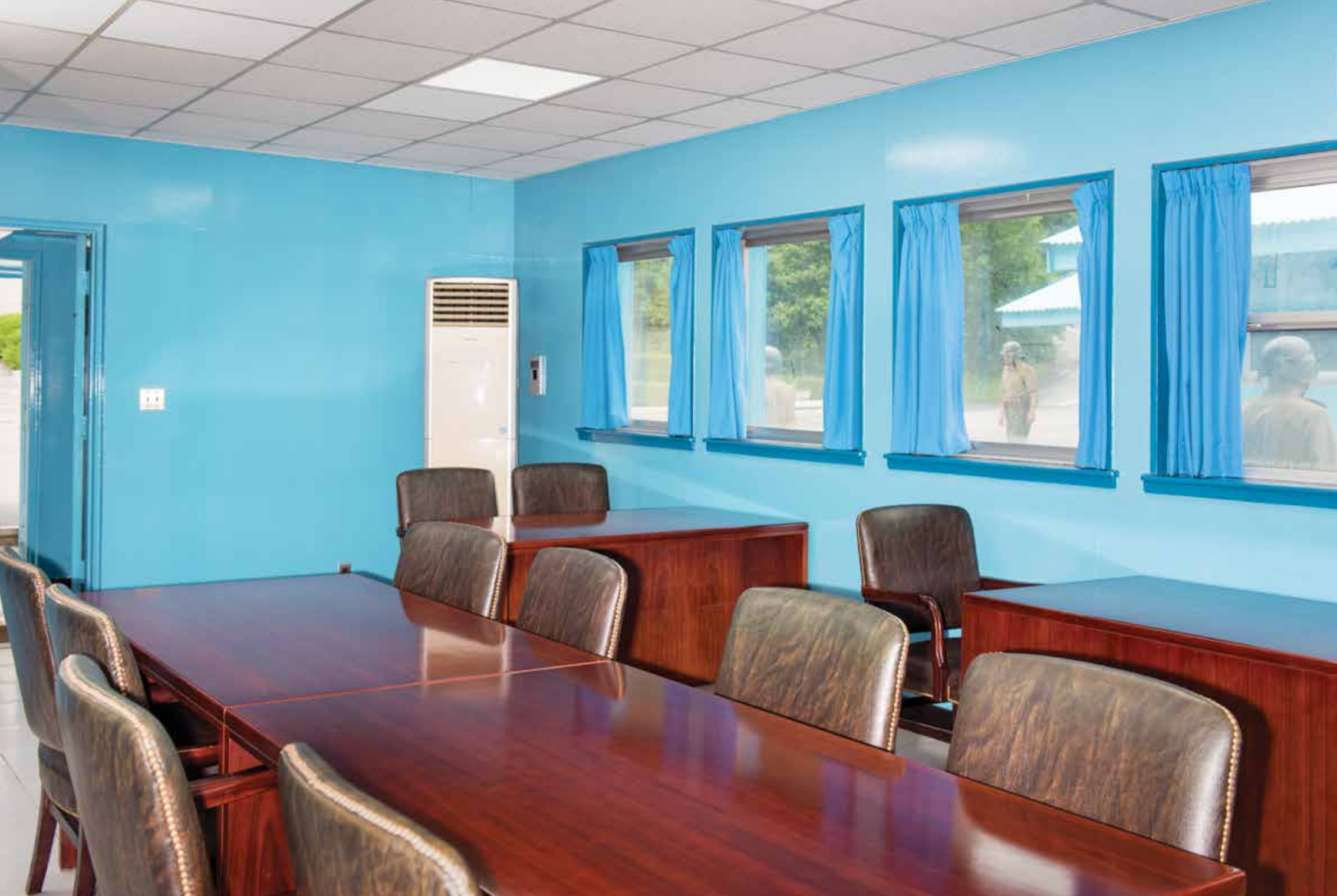
Amid the flashes of control and paranoia, there were moments of humanity, reminders of North Korea's muddled efforts to make meaningful contact with the outside world. In one of the visits intended to convey Pyongyang's prosperity and imperviousness to outside pressure, we attended a show at the Rungna Dolphinarium, in which dolphins flipped and jumped and performed tricks. Max was called up to the stage and given a hula hoop. A young North Korean woman beside him twirled hers, too, in a competition, of sorts. The more that Max twirled his hula hoop, the more the crowd roared – a mix of delight, embarrassment, and sheer novelty at the sight of a foreigner. It was impossible not to marvel at how little of the outside world the North Korean crowd actually gets to see – and how little we get to see of them.

Over lunch and dinner, we pressed the minders for information about themselves: their families and backgrounds and fears and desires. They were elusive but curious, both sides trying to understand the other, neither prepared to risk much trust. It was cordial but self-protective, wreathed in the ever-present fog of uncertainty around what stray comment might land us in trouble or spark a confrontation over which we had little control.

Until our final moments in Pyongyang, we had reason to be wary: Our passports had been taken upon arrival, and, in many cases, when foreigners have been arrested in Pyongyang, the detention has come in the final minutes at the airport, when the visitor is preparing to depart. Only then does it become clear that an unseen line has been crossed. It fosters a paranoia of a certain kind, and that, one assumes, is part of the point. Perry Link, a linguist and China expert, once compared the constant anxiety of life under authoritarianism to living with an "anaconda in the chandelier." Operating beneath it, you never know when the snake is going to strike, and so you adjust and worry and carry on.

A trip to North Korea is only that – an experience of the senses, of the surface, of minor moments. It is a theatre of the mind. Ours was a glimpse of what it means to live in North Korea, to live beneath the anaconda in the chandelier. We wait for the day when North Koreans can begin to tell the story for themselves.


세상에 부럽없어라!
위대한 선군령장을 따르는
당의 참된 아들딸이 되자!
지덕체를 겸비한 선군조선의
믿음직한 역군이 되자!




30m


위대한 해방의 은인, 그 이름도 빛나는 김일성장군!
자력자강의 기치높이 포악한 제재를 짓부시기 위한 전민총돌격전을 추동


시아노박테리아
(축소모형 1:70 000)
원생조대의 원시해파리
(확대모형 1:3)


전류계, 전압계련결방법
전류계 련결
전압계 련결

LONDON
MOSCOW
PYONGYANG
Dates
Plum
Baby Fish
Toplev
Chips Movie
Choco More
TOBLERONE


GAOKE高科
HCD737TSDL 59
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GAOKE高科
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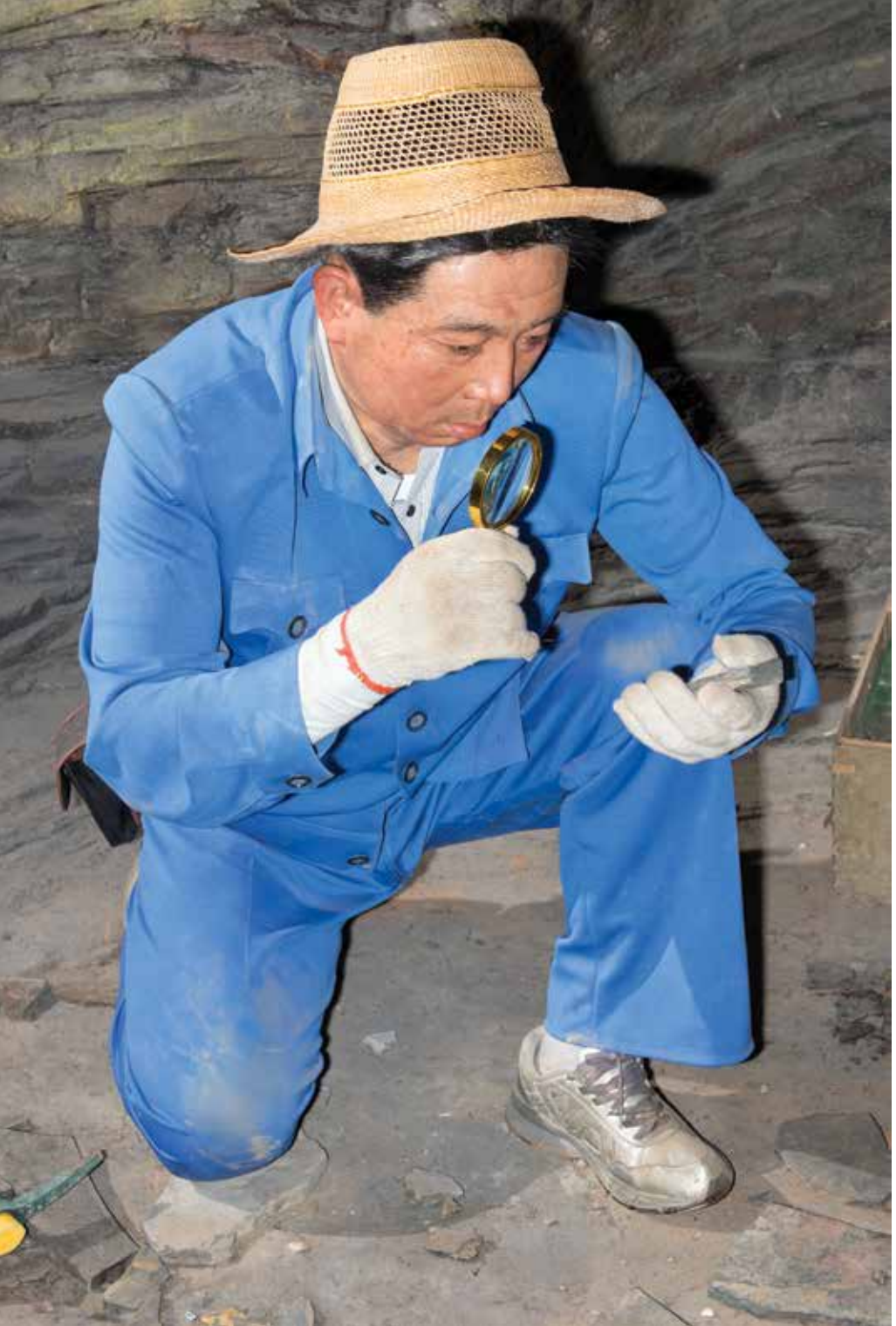
Shenyang Sanyo Elevator Co.,Ltd.
1000kg




인삼
(1년-6년생)

THE MISSING INK

In an old joke from the defunct German Democratic Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia; aware of how all mail will be read by the censors, he tells his friends: 'Let's establish a code: if a letter you get from me is written in ordinary blue ink, it's true; if it's written in red ink, it's false.' After a month, his friends get the first letter, written in blue ink: 'Everything is wonderful here: the shops are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, cinemas show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair – the only thing you can't get is red ink.'

The structure here is more refined than it might appear: although the worker is unable to signal that what he is saying is a lie in the prearranged way, he none the less succeeds in getting his message across – how? By inscribing the very reference to the code into the encoded message, as one of its elements. Of course, this is the standard problem of self-reference: since the letter is written in blue, is its entire content therefore not true? The answer is that the very fact that the lack of red ink is mentioned signals that it should have been written in red ink. The nice point is that this mention of the lack of red ink produces the effect of truth independently of its own literal truth: even if red ink really was available, the lie that it is unavailable is the only way to get the true message across in this specific condition of censorship.

Is this not the matrix of an efficient critique of ideology – not only in 'totalitarian' conditions of censorship but, perhaps even more, in the more refined conditions of liberal censorship? One starts by agreeing that one has all the freedoms one wants – then one merely adds that the only thing missing is the 'red ink': we 'feel free' because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom. What this lack of red ink means is that, today, all the main terms we use to designate the present conflict – 'war on terrorism', 'democracy and freedom', 'human rights', and so on – are false terms, mystifying our perception of the situation instead of allowing us to think it. In this precise sense, our 'freedoms' themselves serve to mask and sustain our deeper unfreedom.

Slavoj Žižek, excerpt from 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real', Verso Books, 2013, p.1-2