



## **The Silla Project**

*John C. Brewer*

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*Finalist for the 2013 Eric Hoffer Awards, Montaigne Medal!*

Mitch Weatherby was at the top of his game. A scientist at Los Alamos, he was married to the love of his life - until a botched government raid left his wife dead in his arms and him accused of constructing an illicit nuclear weapon in his basement. Though Mitch knows he is innocent of the charges, evidence says otherwise and he's convicted and sent to prison for the rest of his life. So when black-clad commandos abduct Mitch during a prison transfer it feels more like a rescue. Until he learns that his saviors are from North Korea.

Transported to a secret nuclear lab in the rugged mountains of the Workers Paradise, Mitch is given a choice- and after what his country did to him, he's in no mood to be tortured to death. And his captors are nothing like he thought, lampooned by the same media that labeled him a terrorist. Industrious and hard working, most of them are just trying to avoid malnutrition and the secret police. The only person who doesn't accept him is a fanatical and equally beautiful scientist, Chun Hyon-hui, who's mixed North Korean and Western blood leaves her ostracized by all.

Forced to work together for the good of the fatherland Hyon-hui begins to realize that perhaps her zeal is misplaced, and Mitch's unexpected affection for the brilliant scientist begins to melt his stony heart. When the North finally tests their bomb, developed with Mitch's help, he knows that he must somehow undo what he has done and escape with the woman he's come to love, impossible as it seems. But how can Mitch break out of the most repressive nation on Earth, and will Hyon-hui even want to go with him?

Nearly a decade of research went into writing The Silla Project, providing a glimpse into the nuclear program and the political tyranny of North Korea, one of the most threatening and enigmatic nations on Earth.

## The Silla Project Details

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Author : John C. Brewer

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## From Reader Review The Silla Project for online ebook

### Jeffrey Miller says

For someone who has been a North Korea observer the past 25 years—both as a writer and the instructor of a course on Northeast Asian Politics/History at an international business school in Daejeon, South Korea—I was keenly interested in *The Silla Project*. Although it is fiction and the product of the author's imagination, the book does have its share of "Eureka" moments when the author deftly describes the North's attempt to build a nuclear bomb. The author has clearly done his research—both on nuclear engineering as well as North Korea's desire to join the world's nuclear club—and in the process creates a chilling and riveting Cold War thriller. There are plenty of twists along the way which keeps you on the edge of your seat as you hurry to get through one chapter after another to find out if the protagonist is going to sell out his country for love.

For the most part, the story works. It is quite plausible that North Korea could kidnap a nuclear scientist; after all, the North captured Japanese actors and actresses and had them brought to North Korea to star in movies. However, after the fast-paced and well crafted first half of the book I was let down as I got closer and closer to the end. Although there's plenty of action and a lot of twists and turns which kept me on the edge, I expected much more as I got closer to the end of the book.

Nonetheless, I would recommend this book for readers who enjoy a thought-provoking Cold War thriller. At the very least, the book, though fiction, offers a glimpse into this Stalinist country and Cold War holdout.

Jeffrey Miller,  
War Remains, A Korean War Novel

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### Katherine says

DISCLAIMER: I received a free copy of this book from the author (via the Shut Up & Read / Read It & Reap group) in exchange for an honest review.

Synopsis: Mitch Weatherby was just an average man. Due to government cutbacks, his career as a nuclear physicist had basically become a desk job. However, he enjoyed life, and especially enjoyed sharing it with the love of his life, Beth. That all ends when his wife is killed in a raid, and the subsequent cover-up by the government has left him convicted of crimes he did not commit -- including manslaughter, high treason, and conspiring to construct and use a nuclear device. Bitter, angry, feeling betrayed by the country he loves, abandoned by God, and still mourning the loss of his beloved wife, Mitch is looking at 42 years at a Federal Correctional Institution. While en route to Terminal Island, the bus is ambushed, and Mitch is rescued by a group who wants him for the things he knows. Can he help the group without betraying classified information? Can Mitch make a life in a strange land where the people both fear and despise him? Can he really even trust anyone?

This is an interesting story describing the lengths a government / regime would go to become a nuclear power. There were lots of technical terms, but the gist of the story was one of an Asian government gone mad with the desire to possess a nuclear weapon (in this case, North Korea). The masses are cowed under the totalitarian rule of a mad leader, and corruption abounds. Americans are painted as evil, and history is frequently rewritten.

Once the main character, Mitch, reached North Korea, he goes through several trials, including systematic brain-washing and manipulation by Major Lee, Pak Yong-nam, and several others. However, he grows to care about the hard-working masses, as well as the people on his team, including the Russian, Dr. Max Tarasenko, Professor Yang Song-jin, Kim Sun-gun ("Sonny"), and the lovely Chun Hyon-hui, a green-eyed Korean woman of mixed heritage, who hates Americans with a passion. Sparks fly between Mitch and Hyon-hui. Little by little, she learns to trust him, and in time, romance blossoms between the two of them.

However, this is no paradise, and betrayals and backstabbing abounds. Mitch realizes that he needs to escape, but how? And will Hyon-hui come with him, or is she too wedded to the Party and her own personal agenda?

My thoughts: Overall, I thought the book was extremely well-written, though I was disappointed by some of the glaring errors and typos, such as "decent down the mountain" (er no, "descent"), "served for desert" (um, "dessert"), etc. There were other typos scattered throughout -- the stuff normally missed by spell check. (Hence, the need for editors who actually read the book.) In another instance, Mitch referred to "his mother", when clearly he should have been referring to "her mother".

The book had a bit of technical jargon in it as well as words in Korean -- which both kind of slowed the pace down at times. I am unfamiliar with the politics of North Korea, but if even one-tenth of what was in this book is their reality -- that is one scary place! (I remember going through checkpoints and getting hassled by "officials" when I travelled through some Eastern Bloc countries back in the day, including armed guards coming on the train and/or searching vehicles, etc., so some of this was very real to me.)

Overall, I felt this was a good read. I hope there's a sequel.

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### **Michelle says**

#### **Good book**

You people should just read this book yourselves and write your own review on this novel yourself and I really enjoyed reading this book very much so. Shelley MA

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### **Vivian Spicer says**

#### **Very nice story**

My first look at the Koreas and building an atomic bomb. Very interesting storyline. I did figure out the real story behind Mitch but it was fun.

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### **John Brewer says**

If you are looking for something to scratch that Crichton itch, this may be it. I wrote The Silla Project based on an idea I had when I was working a SECRET missile task for the government some years ago. The Silla Project began life as a pure thriller focusing on the horror of nuclear weapons in the hands of lunatics. I hadn't researched for long when I realized the story wasn't bombs at all, but people. The North Korean

people are not fanatical lunatics but are an agonizing study in what happens under the most extreme oppression and brutality imaginable where all forms of self-expression are utterly suppressed and only the mandated worship of one man is tolerated.

The Silla Project is the story of an American nuclear weapons designer, Mitch Weatherby, abducted by North Korean operatives. Through his eyes you will get a first hand look at not only how a North Korean nuclear program works, but how a state uses political ideology to maintain an iron grip on it's people. You will discover why few buck the system and instead of seeing North Koreans as crazed fanatics, you will begin to see them as brutalized and terrified people who collectively behave much like the children of an abusive parent.

While it makes sense to think of a novel about North Koreans and nuclear weapons as a brinkmanship thriller that takes the world to the very edge of an abyss, this is not that kind of book. While the bombs and their radioactive spectre provide a compelling backdrop to the story, The Silla Project is very much a psychological thriller that reveals what happens in the mind as the the cognitive dissonance associated with brainwashing begins to peel away. What happens when the citizen of a personality cult-nation, maintained through a vicious secret police force, realizes their entire life, their world view, all they know, is one huge lie?

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### **Amber says**

Never thought about some of the issues in this book before, but it's a very intriguing book dealing with espionage and moral conflict. Has an unexpected twist in the plot and makes you really question some of your values, morals and ideas in general.

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### **Donna says**

#### **Political Intrigue**

Political Intrigue at it's best. Mitch thought he had it all, until he watched his wife die and was charged with treason. Saved by North Koreans for the science in his brain, can Mitch reconcile the apparent treachery from his own government with the North Koreans need of nuclear weapons? Will he betray the country that betrayed him? A great read that makes you want to find out how it ends.

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### **Frederic (Ric) Vinhage says**

This book I picked up as I am a big fan of far eastern stories, and even more specifically korean culture. I decided to give it a try and found the book to be somewhat underwealming.

There are spoilers in this review, so be forewarned.

First the plot moved a long pretty shakily in the beginning. The string of events leading to Mitch's capture and exportation to North Korea was thinly done and an astute reader realized that NK was responsible for everything from pretty early on. I think more time in the backstroy would have been well spent and allowed a more believable situation drawn where his wife was killed and his subsequent incarceration. I believe this wasn't done as the US justice system would have either uncovered the plot through forensic science or the case would have been trhown out. To me it just didn't work.

Next in the nuclear bomb development phase I really felt that mitch was not written well. It just seemed so easy for him to break down and help develop a bomb. I have more faith in those people who do this kind of work, that he would not be that susceptible. He caved so easily it was unbelievable. Also I do believe that kidnapped scientists would be treated much better than was depicted. If we believe what we are told about NK, there would be little expense spared for an atomic weapon development team.

Then it really gets crazy and unbelievable. The idea that NK would field a test of a working bomb in an outlying antarctic island is mostly ludicrous. I would also hazard that if NK did such an event the crew would not make it home. The us would have a spy sat over the areas within 24 hours and the transport would have been intercepted. a 150KTON explosion in an above ground test would be dealt with very very quickly. and the world would swoop down on NK pretty darn quick. Its proximity to Africa, australia and realatively central asia would make the idea of a ship getting back pretty slim. More unbelievable is the path the story takes from there. The unlikely romance and escape from NK is so unbelievable. everything from inept military to running a Mercedes on unimproved roads in NK was really bad.

Other problems dealt throughout the book was some problems with the cultural aspects of Korea. I have a lot a familiarity with Korean language and culture. Firstly the few instances of North Korean speech should have at least reflected the aspect of the language. Their is a North Korean accent than any south korean can describe and that should have been evident. Sam-Ge-tang (The chicken) is a korean nation dish that is a soup. There is a sweet rice and tuber stuffed chicken in the soup with dried plums and chestnuts. The recipees vary over the peninsula. Major problems ran in my face as one, its not backed. It is braised in a stoneware pot. This could be done in a fired oven, but to describe it as a baked dish is improbablke. Second it would never ever have carrots in it. Also while kimichii is universal to the koreas it is probably scarce in the north, as NAPA cabbage is a hard crop for the impovershed north to grow. Even in SK, 2 years ago they were kall.ing kimchee, gin chee replacing the kim with sino-chinese gin meaning gold. It is not a base staple. It would not be central to diet in famine ravaged NK.

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## Laura says

Good read! I wasn't sure about it at the beginning, but once I was into it I found that I didn't want to put it down. More interesting to me than the beginning of the story when he's convicted and abducted on his way to prison was life in North Korea... what completely crazy thing is going to happen next? In what other way do North Koreans have a totally wackadoo vision of the world? It is an unpredictable place, and it keeps your attention.

This novel really captures a lot of the things I remember about North Korea from *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*. This story, though fictionalized of course, seems well-researched and if you don't know anything about North Korean society, I think it will serve pretty well to give you a general picture. I have to say, it's a really interesting place to set a story, especially one about building nuclear weapons. I think the author did a good job with making the reader understand how "normal" people might believe in, or at least go along with, all the propaganda and craziness inherent in that society, and how people deal with the cognitive dissonance. I even surprised myself by being more sympathetic with Mitch participating in *The Silla Project*. I enjoyed seeing his relationship with the people around him develop.

Things other reviewers have mentioned...

I of course couldn't understand all the technical details of what they were talking about in reference to the nuclear project, but I at least got the general gist of what the scientists were doing (i.e. identifying a problem, finding a solution, running a test, etc.) and that was enough to keep the story going for me. There was not so much technical scientific speak that it put me off of the story. (Don't let it put you off either!) I mean, if

you're listening in to some scientists they're bound to talk in tech-speak at some point, right? It's part of the work environment and adds some realism. Like I said, you still know the big picture of what's happening.

There were a few typos I noticed in the book, but it wasn't egregious.

Religion does play a part in Mitch's story, but I didn't think it was too preachy or out of place. I think it was integrated well and made sense with his character. It's part of his background, and God is one of those things you contemplate when you've had a rug-pulled-out-from-under-you life-changing type of experience.

A bit disappointed that...(view spoiler)

My favorite part: (view spoiler) :)

I do wish we had an epilogue or something at the end to let us know what happened after the end of the story.

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### **Jill says**

North Korean operatives break an innocent Los Alamos nuclear-weapons scientist out of prison. He was the fall guy in an American government raid that went horribly wrong and left his wife dead. But is it worth his life to betray the country that betrayed him?

Sometimes you find love in the strangest places.

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### **Lisa Baird says**

Truly exciting! I learned much I didn't know about North Korea and it's society, while enjoying this gripping story. Really enjoyed and highly recommend this book.

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### **Ed Morawski says**

First I'd like to congratulate the publisher PlotForge Ltd. on the eBook formatting. The Silla Project is actually arranged like a real book, unlike so many other eBooks the title and copyright data, etc are first instead of last. But unfortunately that's about as far as they went. There are so many typos, missing, and misspelled words it's hard to believe either the author or the publisher ever proofed it. I can overlook a few typos here and there, it seems to be all too common these days, but the Silla Project has at least one on every other page - literally hundreds of them - and they really detract from the reader's enjoyment. The missed words cause more than a few twisted sentences and there are glaring misspellings like MeW Mexico. All this is all the more unfortunate because the Silla Project is actually a darn good book. It could easily be a five star book if someone took the time to proof and edit it. And such a good story deserves so much better.

Now on to the review: the book is simply unique and original. The author took a society that almost no one knows anything about: North Korea, and fleshed out the culture and people so well that I felt sorry for its citizens and especially the well drawn characters. The book was obviously very well researched which I really appreciate. And not just the science of atomic bomb making, but Korea as a whole and its geography

and customs. Within a few pages the author about had me convinced North Korea was the most misunderstood country on earth. I appreciated the depth of immersion into the shadowy North Korean society.

There are quite a few religious references and at first I was afraid this was going to be some kind of Christian fiction genre, but in fact the main character Mitch begins to lose his faith because of all that happened to him and this made the story all the more believable. The pace was mostly gripping and I felt for the characters. The plot fell down a bit in the last quarter and I wish the scientist characters would have been a bit trickier like using radiation to scare the political officials (I think a great story line was lost there) but overall except for the proofing it was a great read.

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### **Terri-Lynne Smiles says**

I read suspense novels for their tight, well-conceived plot lines, but it isn't my favorite genre because the characters are usually flat and don't change much. Well, author John C. Brewer has blown that out of the water with his new novel, *The Silla Project*. This science thriller grips the reader from the outset with the despair of Mitch Weatherby, a Los Alamos scientist who has been wrongfully stripped by our government of everything he thought gave his life meaning. The reader will understand the reasons why he attempts a wholesale rejection of every value and belief he has held, and why he fails. Even the secondary character, a beautiful but fanatical North Korean scientist, becomes not only understandable but sympathetic as the novel progresses.

But don't be misled. *The Silla Project* is still a suspense novel, entwining the encumbrances of bureaucracy, machinations of political climbers, and evils of ideological zealots into a thoroughly researched plot that will leave the reader cheering for the freedoms of our society and shocked at the plight of the North Korean people. Most readers will like *The Silla Project*. Fans of military or political suspense or of science thrillers will love it!

*The Silla Project* is very different from Mr. Brewer's prior novel, *Multiplayer*, but the same strength for story-telling and character still shines through. Well done. *The Silla Project* John C. Brewer

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### **Marco Peel says**

Convicted of a crime he didn't commit, nuclear scientist Mitch Weatherby has just lost his wife and everything he believed in and lived for. On his way to lifelong imprisonment, his transport is assaulted by a group of armed men, and he is squirreled off to North Korea. Emotionally scarred and betrayed, Mitch tries to find a semblance of order and purpose in the only thing that still makes sense - physics - while he is set to work on the nuclear program of a nation he'd always seen as evil.

Author John Brewer manages to pull off this seemingly unlikely premise nicely in a well paced and developed narrative, where the main story is not so much the bomb, but the relationship between Mitch and his brilliant and belligerent counterpart Hyon-hui, as both are slowly forced to decide which convictions are worth standing up for, and which simply blind us.

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## **Bob Michaels says**

### **More of a religious and political rant than a novel.**

It started off good then went absolutely nowhere for the majority of the book. It was a political statement with religious overtones and a vast majority of the book was like a text on how to build a nuclear bomb. The last 20% of the book at least showed some excitement but the ending just sucked. It just ended so we have no idea what happens to the main characters. Complete letdown after suffering through the entire book.

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