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Synopsis

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award On April 26, 1986, the worst nuclear reactor accident in history occurred in Chernobyl and contaminated as much as three quarters of Europe. *Voices from Chernobyl* is the first book to present personal accounts of the tragedy. Journalist Svetlana Alexievich interviewed hundreds of people affected by the meltdown---from innocent citizens to firefighters to those called in to clean up the disaster---and their stories reveal the fear, anger, and uncertainty with which they still live. Comprised of interviews in monologue form, *Voices from Chernobyl* is a crucially important work, unforgettable in its emotional power and honesty.

Book Information

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says an evacuee in *Voices of Chernobyl*, an absolutely riveting collection of oral histories of people from all walks of life, affected for eternity by the nuclear accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Reactor on April 26, 1986. "A Solitary Human Voice," the prologue, recounted by a woman whose husband was one of the first on the scene as a firefighter, will lure you in and, once there, you'll feel compelled to continue to the end, painful as it may be. She's pregnant, newly married and very much in love when she hears the news. The doctors and nurses and try to no avail to keep her away from her husband once he's done his duty at the plant and then sent to a special hospital in Moscow for victims of radiation poisoning, along with six other firemen. Her baby dies. Her husband dies, horribly, the last of the seven of his crew. These stories of "Chernobylites," the stigmatized and disdained victims of the accident, share a common theme. The government was neither truthful nor

forthcoming about the level of danger that those living near the area of the Chernobyl plant experienced. They did not provide the victims with information on treatment in a timely manner, because it would have meant admitting that a horrible accident had actually occurred. Those who tried to warn others of the danger were silenced or mocked. Men were sent to clean up the site and were given extra pay in exchange, ultimately, for their lives. Because people could not see the radiation, they kept on eating contaminated food, breathing contaminated air, using contaminated clothing and living (approximately 2.1 million people) on contaminated land. Immediately afterwards, men were sent to kill the domestic animals, evacuate the people and, using shovels and minimal protective gear, remove the contaminated soil.

Occasionally I'll read first-hand accounts about human catastrophes in the modern world, such as Sudan or Rwanda or Katrina, because it offers a window into what I as a middle class American normally would never see or experience, hopefully making me a better and wiser person without becoming numb or a "dark tourist". Books are more subtle and rich than film and more rewarding in the end. As an oral history this is a frightening experience (the term "experience" emphasized). Chernobyl has been largely hushed up and kept quiet, the scope of it is worse than most know or understand (occasionally we hear a few hundred or thousand people died and certain cancers are slightly up, don't believe it, much worse). Only about %5 of the nuclear material escaped so it was a minor accident on the scale of things. There is a %50 chance of another meltdown happening elsewhere in the world over the next 40 years (sourced in book). Had Chernobyl been a full meltdown much of Europe would be dieing off as we speak. 16 more Chernobyl-type reactors are still in operation (14 in Russia). As Alexievich says in her epitaph: "These people had already seen what for everyone else is still unknown. I felt like I was recording the future." The disaster of Chernobyl is still going today, it never ended, it is like AIDS - it just keeps getting worse, there is no cure for radiation which lasts 100s of 1000s of years. The radiated material is finding its way outside of the "Zone" and spreading slowly around the world. Down the rivers into the seas, blown on dust, carried out by hand by bandits in the form of trucks and TV's and scrap metal sold to Asian scrap metal firms which build the goods we buy, grown in food and sold on the world market.

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