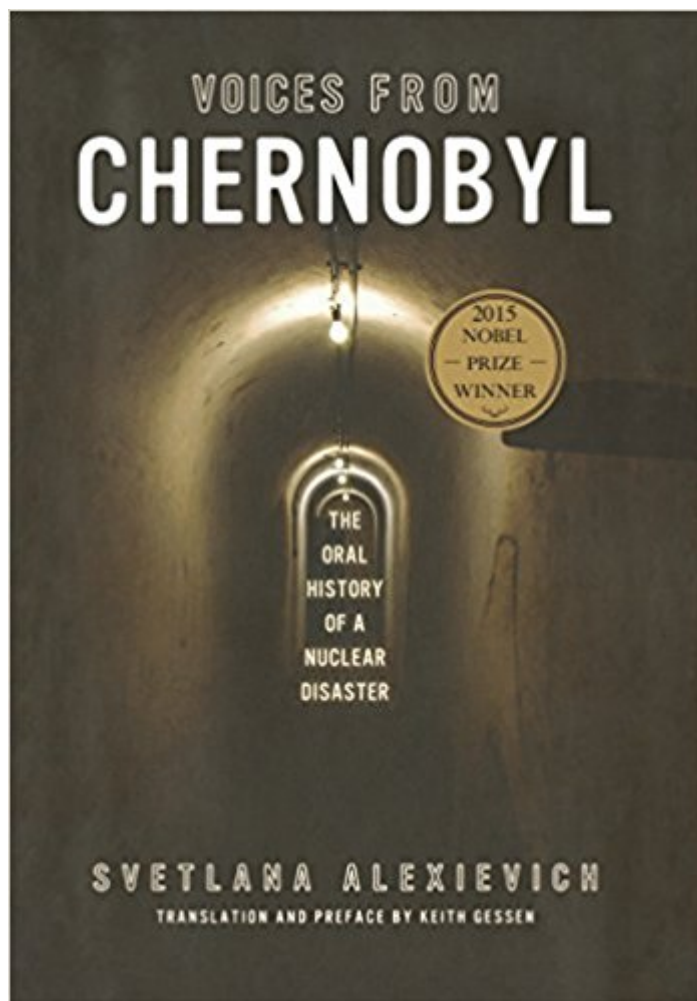


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Voices From Chernobyl (Lannan Selection)



Synopsis

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award A journalist by trade, who now suffers from an immune deficiency developed while researching this book, presents personal accounts of what happened to the people of Belarus after the nuclear reactor accident in 1986, and the fear, anger, and uncertainty that they still live with. The Nobel Prize in Literature 2015 was awarded to Svetlana Alexievich "for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A chorus of fatalism, stoic bravery and black, black humor is sounded in this haunting oral history of the 1986 nuclear reactor catastrophe in what is now northeastern Ukraine. Russian journalist Alexievich records a wide array of voices: a woman who clings to her irradiated, dying husband though nurses warn her "that's not a person anymore, that's a nuclear reactor"; a hunter dispatched to evacuated villages to exterminate the household pets; soldiers sent in to clean up the mess, bitter at the callous, incompetent Soviet authorities who "flung us there, like sand on the reactor," but accepting their lot as a test of manhood; an idealistic nuclear engineer whose faith in communism is shattered. And there are the local peasants who take this latest in a long line of disasters in stride, filtering back to their homes to harvest their contaminated potatoes, shrugging that if they survived the Germans, they'll survive radiation. Alexievich shapes these testimonies into novelistic "monologues" that convey a vivid portrait of late-Communist malaise, in which bullying party bosses, paranoid propaganda and chaotic mobilizations are resisted with bleak sarcasm ("It wasn't milk, it

was a radioactive byproduct"), mournful philosophizing ("[t]he mechanism of evil will work under conditions of apocalypse") and lots of vodka. The result is an indelible X-ray of the Russian soul. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Starred Review "Chernobyl is like the war of all wars. There's nowhere to hide." On April 26, 1986, the people of Belarus lost everything when a reactor at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station exploded. Many people died outright, and many were evacuated, forced to leave behind everything from pets to family photographs. Millions of acres remain contaminated, and thousands of people continue to be afflicted with diseases caused by radiation as 20 tons of nuclear fuel sit in a reactor shielded by a leaking sarcophagus known as the Cover. For three years, journalist Alexievich spoke with scores of survivors--the widow of a first responder, an on-the-scene cameraman, teachers, doctors, farmers, Party bureaucrats, a historian, scientists, evacuees, resettlers, grandmothers, mothers--and she now presents their shocking accounts of life in a poisoned world. And what quintessentially human stories these are, as each distinct voice expresses anger, fear, ignorance, stoicism, valor, compassion, and love. Alexievich put her own health at risk to gather these invaluable frontline testimonies, which she has transmuted into a haunting and essential work of literature that one can only hope documents a never-to-be-repeated catastrophe. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

The stories that make up this book are the actual words of the survivors of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986. Those were the last days of the Soviet system of government. And in that system the reader sees the stoic Russian persona, acting as "we" rather than "I". The deprivation, death, victory and sadness of the WW II experience still permeates their hopes and expectations and outlook even three generations later. Ten years after the radiation leak and they remain stunned in surprise at the way the accident, the "clean-up" and their subsequent treatment turn out. From the preface, "...the Soviet system had taken a poorly designed reactor and then staffed it with a group of incompetents. It then proceeded, as the interviews in this book attest, to lie about the disaster in the most criminal way." But it's not about the defeat or triumph of political systems - it's about the lives of the proud, the scared, the confused, the heroic, the loving, all of whom die very, very sadly. For the most part these are "common" people - a PhD or two - but for the most part the people who lived there, or were sent there were perfectly naive about strontium, cesium, tritium, alpha particles, beta particles or gamma rays, and yet sophisticated about their own culture, history, and literature. Pushkin, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Solzhenitsyn are part of the makeup of even the "common" people, and

in an odd way this horror is another volume of the suffering of the people long documented in Russian literature. Easily 5-Stars because of its insight, relevance, readability and lessons!

A must read. This is a collection of accounts of people (some of them are the survived spouses) who loved through the Chernobyl nightmare. People's accounts give grave details in simple terms that were otherwise not known or published at that time and even since then. Two of the accounts are from those times top positions at the Belarussian Academy of Sciences. One of the accounts is from a surviving wife of a local firefighter who was a first responder to the fire, and how he was called, him and his brigade, and then came back and treated at a local hospital and then flown to Moscow and treated there for the remaining several weeks from a lethal dose of radiation. Accounts of other liquidators then and later and even much later. Accounts of people who fled, and then some who came back later, and some who never fled, and some who fled from other conflict zones and ended up settling there. Chilling, just chilling. Bad decisions that regular people were making because of lack of information, and bad decisions that the people in charge were making because they were afraid to make a decision and be liable for it, and then lack of judgement of the part of experts who had the information and should have known better but were still unprepared and not fully comprehending. Details on how safety instruction were routinely disregarded, dosage norms were being changed, what was done as part of the cleanup effort, for example how while people were being relocated, the fields were still used for crops and then the crops were still used locally and for export, how the machinery that was used in the cleanup effort was supposed to forever stay there but has been stolen later for individual resale at other regions. All paid with lives, sometimes years later.

This book was a great emotional rollercoaster. I have studied and read many books and articles on the subject of Chernobyl, but now I can see and feel the emotions of the people that lived it. No, I take that back, I can just slightly feel and see...these people went through more pain and anguish than any person should ever go through. What a testament to a generation that doesn't seem to grasp the concept of fear. They don't fear anything but their government. They "fear the state more than the atom". What a great book...everyone should read this. It makes your problems seem very small in comparison. There is nothing I didn't like about this book. This literature flows into your soul and then steals your breath and comes out again and leaves you feeling sadness and empathy. We need to be careful in the future with what we are doing to nature and Earth. Its our home...our only logical one, anyway. Excellent. Just bravo.

There are similar and equally chilling stories I've heard about the construction of Three Mile, Plymouth, Japan, and Chernobyl that are chilling to think about. The horror of Chernobyl could happen to any one of our 'cheap' energy sources. What Board of Governors would explain to its investors how critical quality work and maintenance are to the safety of the land and people. There is similar talk of man's less desirable trait of skimming money and cheating on first class construction. Reading Svetlana's award winning book draws graphically the very worst of humanity and the most courageous side of people clinging to their land assuming that what they see is hopeful and harmless...once the people and animals die off, official's secrets are safe..I liked Svetlana's human memoirs. But in her Zinc Boys and Chernobyl she really illustrates how Russia regarded it's simple ground soldiers and the trauma it brought down on its citizens. Memories of Viet Nam come to my mind.

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