



# Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster

By Svetlana Alexievich

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**Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster** By Svetlana Alexievich

**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.

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**Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster** By Svetlana Alexievich **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

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.

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#### From [Booklist](#)

\*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*

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#### Review

"This collection of narratives about the world's worst industrial accident reads like an apocalyptic fairy tale. . . . The monologues . . . are exquisite in their plainspoken anguish. And as such, they are beautifully unbearable to read." *Time Out Chicago*

"A chorus of fatalism, stoic bravery, and black, black humor is sounded in this haunting oral history. . . . The result is an indelible X-ray of the Russian soul." *Publishers Weekly*

"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."

?Booklist (starred review)

“Devastating . . . Essential, powerful, and brave.” ?John Freeman, *The Star-Ledger* (Newark)

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