

Ablaze: The Story of the Heroes and Victims of Chernobyl

By Piers Paul Read

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A moment-by-moment account of the events that immediately preceded and followed the devastating explosion of the nuclear reactor at Chernobyl describes what has happened to the survivors and the neighboring countryside since the disaster. 40,000 first printing.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Read's taut, riveting probe of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant explosion and its aftermath reveals the full magnitude of the disaster as perhaps no other book has done. The English journalist (*Alive*) spent months in Russia, Byelorussia and Ukraine in 1991 interviewing scores of survivors, officials and scientists. Focusing on the human side of the catastrophe, he gives a blow-by-blow account of the accident, complete with reconstructed dialogue, then explores the Soviet cover-up and Western experts' efforts to estimate the effects of a disaster that may ultimately claim more victims than WW II, suggests Read. Instead of acknowledging reactor design flaws and poor safeguards, Soviet officials brought scapegoats to trial, in what Read likens to Stalin's show trials. Drawing on interviews and on newly declassified Soviet medical records, he assesses the plight of residents in the far-flung contaminated zone and discloses that most of the 600,000 cleanup and rescue personnel suffered severe damage to their immune systems. Photos. 50,000 first printing.

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From Library Journal

The Chernobyl disaster gets the James Michener treatment from *Alive* author Read, who characterizes all the main participants in the tragedy and grippingly shows the mix of ineptitude and heroism with which the Soviets responded to it. More detailed than earlier Western accounts, more readable than any Soviet account (including Grigori Medvedev's *The Truth About Chernobyl* , LJ 6/15/90, and his recent *No Breathing Room: The Aftermath of Chernobyl* , LJ 4/1/93), Read shows how human error (which the Russians acknowledged) and a faulty reactor design (which they tried to conceal) led to dozens of deaths and widespread contamination, but it's the Soviet system that emerges here as the key villain in the story. For all informed readers. Previewed in *Prepub Alert*, LJ 12/92.

- *Robert Decker, Palo Alto, Cal.*

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From Kirkus Reviews

A dispassionate yet mesmerizing survey of atomic-electric power in the Soviet Union, whose centerpiece is the 1986 explosion at Chernobyl. While Read (*On the Third Day*, 1991, etc.) never says as much, his detailed, human-scale account could serve as an allegory for the concurrent chain reaction that resulted in the USSR's meltdown. Drawing on previously classified data and on testimony from participating principals, Read recalls Moscow's post-WW II drive to showcase Communist physics through a network of nuclear generating stations. Moving on to the construction of the Chernobyl complex, he documents how material shortages, technical incompetence, bureaucratic snafus, Communist Party interference, and allied constraints ensured the facility's eventual failure. Although operator errors contributed to the accident, Read leaves little doubt that design deficiencies were primarily responsible. Moreover, he reports, after the explosion, the immediate instinct of most apparatchiks was to cover up the fact that the country and its vaunted scientific establishment were neither ready, willing, nor able to respond effectively to a nuclear emergency: Since Soviet reactors were deemed perfectly safe, for example, no evacuation plans had been drawn up. The official death toll was put at 31, while scapegoats were quickly identified and imprisoned. By contrast, Read cites estimates that Chernobyl ultimately could claim more lives than the Soviets lost in WW II, and he notes that fallout has made large areas of Belorussia, Russia, and the Ukraine uninhabitable, perhaps for thousands of years. Partisans on both sides of the nuclear/environmental issue may take exception to the author's agenda-free narrative: Read allows the story and his sources to speak for themselves, eschewing any hint as to whether he believes atomic power to be a blessing or a bane. A top-notch take on a man-made catastrophe

and its chilling consequences. (For a look at Chernobyl's aftermath by the plant's former chief engineer, see Grigori Medvedev's *No Breathing Room*, p. 207.) (Sixteen pages of photos, three maps--not seen) --
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Darlene Trevino:

The book *Ablaze: The Story of the Heroes and Victims of Chernobyl* can give more knowledge and also the precise product information about everything you want. So just why must we leave a good thing like a book *Ablaze: The Story of the Heroes and Victims of Chernobyl*? Several of you have a different opinion about book. But one aim that book can give many info for us. It is absolutely proper. Right now, try to closer with your book. Knowledge or facts that you take for that, you can give for each other; you are able to share all of these. Book *Ablaze: The Story of the Heroes and Victims of Chernobyl* has simple shape however, you know: it has great and large function for you. You can appear the enormous world by open up and read a reserve. So it is very wonderful.

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James Edwards:

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Susan Swain:

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