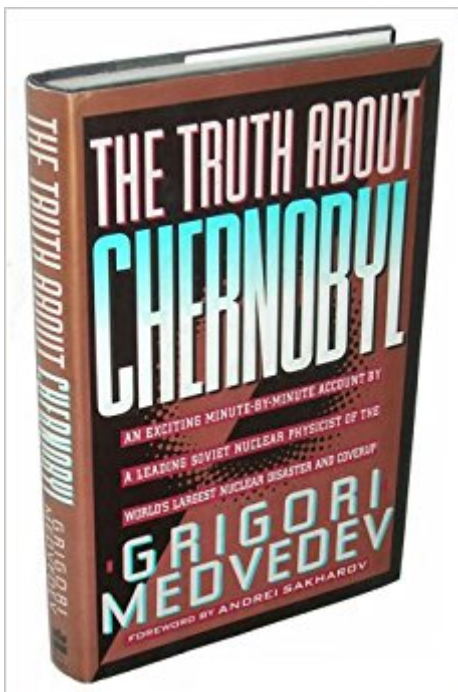


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# Truth About Chernobyl



## Synopsis

An exciting minute-by-minute account by a leading Soviet nuclear physicist of the world's largest nuclear disaster and coverup--Chernobyl, April 26, 1986. Grigori Medvedev was a chief engineer at Chernobyl during the 1970s. The Truth About Chernobyl won the Los Angeles Times Book Award and was featured on the front page of the New York Times Book Review. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This dramatic, minute-by-minute account of the Chernobyl meltdown and its aftermath provides a detailed analysis of the causes of the disaster at the Soviet power station which became a "gigantic nuclear volcano" in April 1986, spewing out radioactivity. Former deputy chief engineer at Chernobyl, Medvedev cites design flaws that could spell catastrophe for similarly built plants. He also blames the accident on plant operators' faulty decision-making, made worse by flagrant safety violations; arrogant, careless managers; the "sheer insanity" of the plant's administrative system; and negligence at the highest levels of the Soviet energy bureaucracy. Interweaving the jolting testimony of eyewitnesses, participants and victims, this volume is invaluable. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Medvedev, a chief engineer at Chernobyl when it was built in 1970, graphically describes the events leading up to and following the world's worst nuclear accident. Asked to conduct an investigation

less than two weeks after the explosion, he interviewed most of the major participants, including many who died within weeks from radiation sickness. In lucid detail and with an insider's understanding, Medvedev describes the human and technical failings that led to the accident and, with enormous compassion, recounts the efforts of firefighters and many of the reactor's operators who gave their lives in the struggle to contain the disaster. An authoritative primary document, this book is also an important rumination on the technological and political hubris that led to this disaster. For another Soviet account, see Zhores Medvedev's *The Legacy of Chernobyl*, LJ 6/15/90--Ed.- Jennifer Scarlott, World Policy Inst., New York Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The events of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant explosion left only a slight imprint on my memory back in 1986. As a college sophomore, my attention was focused mostly on the happenings within the insular world that a college campus seems to provide most nineteen year olds, and for the most part, world events didn't factor into the equation. My recollection is that Chernobyl did not resonate with most Americans as it should have; the Challenger disaster (several months earlier) still consumed a healthy share of news coverage and the highly secretive nature of the Soviet Union rarely gave the rest of the world a glimpse of occurrences behind the Iron Curtain. Ironically, it was a video game (more specifically, the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. video game series that lets you explore Pripjat and the exclusion zone) that generated a strong desire to learn more about Chernobyl and its aftermath. My quest to learn more started with Grigori Medvedev's *THE TRUTH ABOUT CHERNOBYL*, a book that delivers a before-and-after account of the Chernobyl explosion, as well as a peek into the dark heart of the Soviet Union and its efforts to downplay and conceal a disaster of epic proportions. There were two things I considered in choosing this book: 1) Medvedev's expertise as a Soviet nuclear engineer and 2) the year the book was first published (originally in 1991 ... five years after the event). I was interested in hearing the voice of an expert from within the Soviet Union at a time when the events were still relatively fresh. Medvedev is not merely an outside expert with an opinion, but someone with first-hand knowledge of the Chernobyl plant, before and after the explosion (as an investigator). His words carry a degree of authority that resonates throughout the book. His criticisms of the Soviet state regarding its lackadaisical approach to safety at nuclear power plants, as well as the rampant political "cronyism" that led to unqualified people being placed in positions requiring expertise is quite revealing ... and bold (considering his attempt to publish some of these criticisms prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union). I found Medvedev's book to be a slow start as the first two chapters focus primarily on nuclear science and operational

details of nuclear reactors. Those untrained in the nuclear science field may discover this material (being presented by an expert in the field) as educational, but also rather complex. While these first chapters are a difficult read, they provide a base knowledge that proves beneficial as the book progresses and the events leading up to the explosion and its aftermath are discussed. While the exact causes of the explosion(s) still present somewhat of a mystery, it is quite clear that critical procedural errors were made which assured the likelihood of a disaster. This is where Medvedev focuses on the political influence and lack of expertise among those in crucial positions ... political appointees that had no business being even near a nuclear power plant. The details of the explosion itself are quite chilling in that it is easy to envision the dark serenity of town of Pripyat sleeping through the near-distant explosion(s) at the reactor in the middle of the night ... only to be preyed upon by the ensuing radioactive plume quietly emanating from the reactor No. 4. Knowing that this quiet and deadly plume leaves Pripjat as a massive, modern-day ghost town following the forced evacuation its 50,000 inhabitants only intensifies the eeriness of the Chernobyl story. It is the events following the destruction of the reactor that I found particularly interesting and exciting to read about. Most notably was the naiveté of those responding to an explosion at a nuclear plant ... it was quite apparent that such an event was never considered as the burning reactor was treated no differently than an ordinary structure fire (I did not know that a nuclear fire is not only impervious to water, but is intensified by it). Medvedev paints a bleak post-explosion picture as radiation spreads not only by the smoke plume, but by anyone and anything leaving the "zone" (the area immediately affected by the radiation). Filled with eyewitness accounts and as well as his personal visit to the plant and the town of Pripjat, Medvedev details the futility and limited capacity of the Soviet Union to handle the enormity of what was unfolding (simply putting out the fire was a monumental task, let alone dealing with the massive and deadly radioactive emission). We also see the political efforts to cover-up and marginalize the catastrophe. Most telling, however, are the numerous accounts of those who succumbed to high levels of radiation and the utmost misery they experienced prior to their deaths. THE TRUTH ABOUT CHERNOBYL may be dated, but I found it extremely helpful to place it in its proper context. Chernobyl occurred in an era when the Soviet Union could keep most internal troubles from being exposed to the outside world. While the rest of the world was made aware of the situation, the details were still mostly left to one's imagination. Medvedev's book is an eye-opener for sure; he does an excellent job in providing much needed clarity on the subject matter and delivers it from a neutral point-of-view. It serves as a sobering warning to the lethality of using such an energy source, but does not in any way suggest that nuclear power is wrong. My only wish is that there would have been pictures and maps to enhance

the text (although there were relatively few pictures released of the site at the time). While THE TRUTH ABOUT CHERNOBYL does satisfy my curiosity to a degree, there still exists a chilling sense of mystery as to what has occurred and what still occurs in that exclusion zone surrounding the destroyed plant.

A well translated book. Recommend some background understanding of nuclear physics or power generation because the author is an expert and depends on the reader to understand common industry terms. The book is an extremely detailed account of the Chernobyl accident from someone who previously worked at Chernobyl and returned as an investigator of the accident. He shares many first person accounts and ties them to his understanding of nuclear reactors.

This is a great book IF YOU UNDERSTAND NUCLEAR POWER. I am a career naval officer that is nuclear trained and I have worked and operated nuclear reactors my entire 20 year career. The author explains everything in terms of the physics on how this happened, why this happened in terms of leadership of a team, and what decisions were made by wrong information from the team on site. It was truly a sad day in world history and should have never occurred but for me, having the experience of being in a shipyard, behind schedule and working for harsh management leaders that do not understand the science, I can understand on how the CHernobyl watch team got into the situation they did. It is too bad no one had the courage to stand up and say "This is wrong." This was the genius of Hyman Rickover and the US Navy Nuclear Program; he established a culture where everyone can input, everyone will have a high level of knowledge and anyone can counter anyone else. In the USSR, this culture did not exist and bad decisions were made by people that had no business being in nuclear power field. A true must read if you understand engineering process and nuclear power.

Amazing insider's accurate history of the immense failure. Humanity will suffer forever because of the disaster.

This book is an excellent account of the accident. Besides being personally knowledgeable, the author quotes NUMEROUS eye-witnesses to the disaster. He goes minute-by-minute (sometimes second-by-second) with virtually all the individuals who were present during the accident, and the politicians who, before and during the accident, made things worse. However, in order to fully appreciate this book, some prior knowledge is needed. For example, terms like roentgens (a

measure of radiation exposure) were never explained in laymen's terms - although even a layman can understand that, as the author points out, an instrument whose scale only goes up to 3.6 roentgens is inadequate to measure radiation in the range of 20,000 roentgens! Thus, most of the most important facts are fairly easy to deduce from context, although a glossary of nuclear terms would have been helpful. Because the author has such a detailed knowledge of the subject, his account can occasionally lose the forest for the trees. For this reason, I say that it is an EXCELLENT second book to read about the disaster. If you already know the outlines of the events and have had the major terms defined for you (the "forest") by some other book, you cannot find a better book to explore every "tree" in detail. You don't need a physics doctorate, just some basic background. But, even without any prior knowledge - my situation - the author's writing style is excellent. He captures the drama and the heroism with crackling intensity. He jumps from person to person, all around the plant, but he keeps the context, so the reader can see all these different groups and individuals working desperately in lethal conditions. And his pacing is excellent. Every person's experiences are described in detail, yet no one's account is sacrificed for anyone else's. In conclusion, go get some basic background first, then READ THIS BOOK.

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