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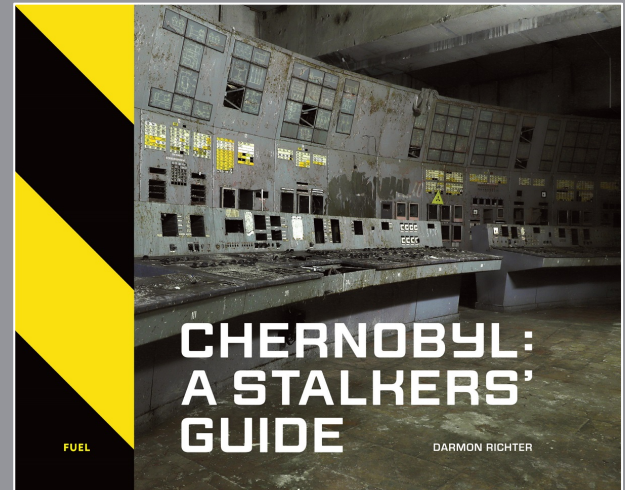
Chernobyl

A Stalkers' Guide

Darmon Richter

Written in a travelogue style, this photography-led book reveals the story of Chernobyl today. With unprecedented access, the book reveals the secrets of the Zone, taking the reader into previously undocumented areas to examine and explain our enduring fascination with Chernobyl

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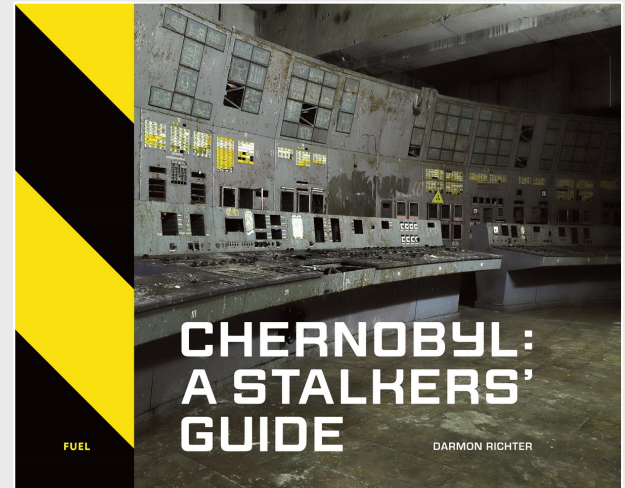


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Book

Key Sales Points

- Amazing photographs including previously off-limits high security areas inside the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, and never before documented areas of the Exclusion Zone
- Eyewitness accounts of the Chernobyl disaster and its aftermath offer new perspectives, never published before
- Over 200 colour photographs taken across twenty trips into the Chernobyl Zone, showcasing ghost towns, industry, nature and wildlife, by day and by night, in summer and in snow
- Published as part of FUEL's collectable Russian series



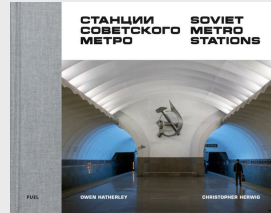
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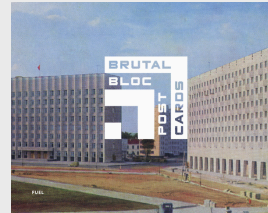
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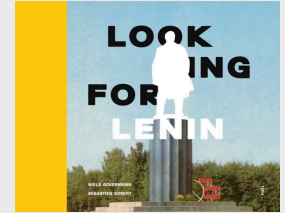
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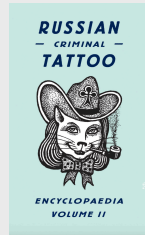
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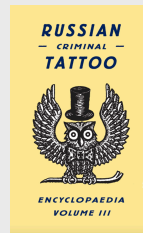
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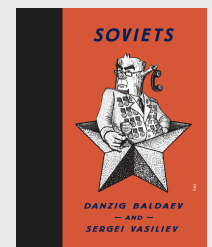
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NIGHTMARES AND PREMONITIONS

ATOMIC CINEMA

Had it been a work of fiction rather than a real-life event, by 1986 the Chernobyl disaster might almost have seemed clichéd; so perfectly did it manifest the Cold War insecurities of the time. Cinema did not predict Chernobyl, per se, but it did a lot to prepare a place for it in the public consciousness.

What we refer to now as the 'Atomic Era' began with an event too small for the naked eye to see: the smallest unit of matter, a single atom, was smashed apart. The power it released ruptured other atoms around it so they too burst, causing a chain-reaction release of raw, boundless energy. The detonation of the world's first nuclear bomb – the Trinity test – took place at Los Alamos on 16 July 1945. The blast was felt from a hundred miles away, with witnesses describing a ball of light glowing purple, green, and then white. A mushroom-shaped cloud rose seven-and-a-half miles high above the desert of New Mexico.[1] Just weeks later, on 6 and 9 August, similar bombs were detonated over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Hiroshima, more than 70,000 people were killed by the blast and the fires that followed. Most of the city's buildings were destroyed. The bomb that fell on Nagasaki killed tens of thousands more and the ensuing sickness would linger for a generation.[2]

On 14 August 1945, Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of Japan: "the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do

damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization." [3]

The world had witnessed the birth of a power unlike any seen before and it was quickly harnessed. The X-10 Graphite Reactor at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, first generated electricity in 1948.[4] The Soviets developed their own atom bomb in 1949 and by 1954 their Obninsk Nuclear Power Plant was the first to be connected to a national power grid – followed two years later by Calder Hall in England.[5][6] Still, it wasn't until 1957 and the creation of the Shippingport Atomic Power Station in Pennsylvania, that a nuclear reactor was built solely for the purpose of energy generation: all previous reactors had also produced weapons-grade plutonium.[7]

As nuclear-generated electricity made its way into people's homes, American cinema developed a morbid fascination with the implications of splitting the atom. Radioactive mutants became the film antagonists du jour. In *Them!* (1954), fallout from the Trinity tests created an army of mutated, eighteen-foot ants; in *Tarantula!* (1955) the monstrous mutant was a spider, while *Beginning of the End* (1957) featured locusts bloated to gargantuan scale by the use of radioactive fertiliser. The stakes were



as it became known, occurred when cooling system failures caused a chemical explosion in a waste storage tank. The tank burst with the force of over seventy tons of TNT, spreading hot particles across an area of some 52,000 square kilometres and necessitating the evacuation of 10,000 citizens from at least twenty-two villages.[13][14] According to 'Boris Komarov' (the pseudonym of a 1970s Soviet whistle-blower), "all crops, all animals, and houses were destroyed, and the population was evacuated 200 and more kilometres from the point of the explosion." [15] At the time, Kyshtym was the worst nuclear accident the world had ever seen (it now ranks third, behind Chernobyl and Fukushima). It left behind a contaminated zone known as the East Urals Radioactive Trace, and for thirty years the Soviet regime attempted to keep the episode secret.

How much the Strugatskys could have known about the Kyshtym disaster by 1959 is impossible to say; but what the *The Forgotten Experiment* reveals - with its focus so much closer to home - is that all the ideas of evacuation, invisible poison and genetic mutation that would eventually come to characterise *Roadside Picnic*, initially grew out of a fear of radio-ecological disaster within the USSR.

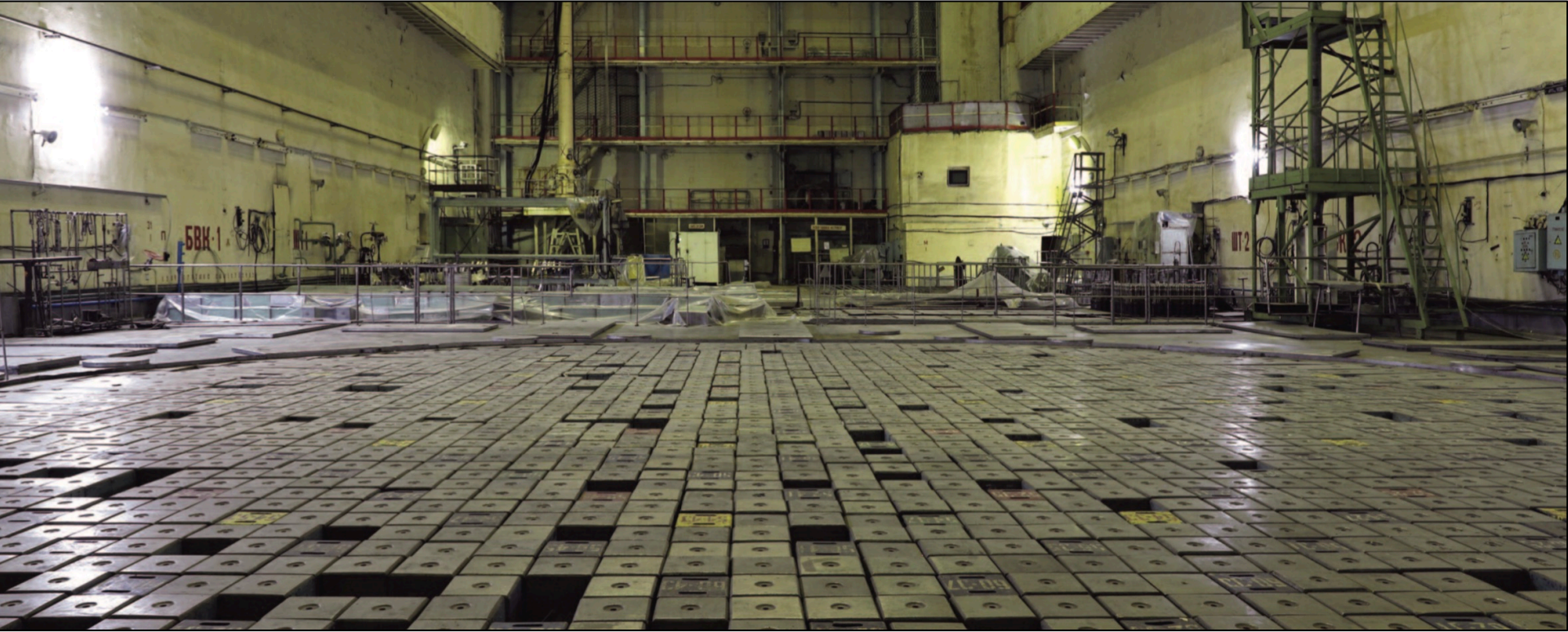
STALKER

Andrey Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*, based on *Roadside Picnic*, was released in 1979, with the Strugatskys writing a screenplay for what they thought would be a science-fiction feature. However, Tarkovsky ended up making extensive changes. In his hands the story of *Roadside Picnic* became less dystopian narrative science-fiction, and more shamanic journey into ideas of spirit, faith and communion.

Whereas for decades Japan and the US had been making films that explored the idea of nuclear apocalypse, Soviet censors had ensured that their cinema, much like their literature, presented only wholesome scenarios that upheld the notion of present and future Soviet success. *Stalker* was something very new. Tarkovsky's work had been scrutinised by Soviet officials in the past (Andrei Rublev faced aggressive censorship in 1966, being deemed "too negative, too harsh, too experimental, too frightening, too filled with nudity, and too politically complicated" [16]), yet despite its controversial subject matter, *Stalker* was approved. Tarkovsky's reputation for winning coveted international film awards had surely helped appease the censors; Western film companies were already agreeing distribution rights for *Stalker* before the film finished production.

Tarkovsky, like the Strugatskys, set his dystopia on foreign







"would be unemployed." [22]

In December 1986 – eight months after the Chernobyl disaster – Tarkovsky died from lung cancer. He was fifty-six years old. There were rumours claiming that he had been assassinated by the KGB in retribution for his role in creating 'anti-Soviet propaganda', but his sound editor Victor Sharun

later wrote: "Up the river was a chemical plant and it poured out poisonous liquids downstream. There was even this shot in *Stalker*: snow falling in the summer and white foam floating down the river. In fact it was some horrible poison. Many women in our crew got allergic reactions on their faces. Tarkovsky died from cancer of the right bronchial



tube. And Tolya Solonitsyn [who played Writer] too. That it was all connected to the location shooting for *Stalker* became clear to me when Larisa Tarkovskaya [Tarkovsky's wife, and assistant director] died from the same illness in Paris." [23]

In *Stalker*, Tarkovsky left behind a film that seemed to

simultaneously condense and invert all preceding themes of post-apocalyptic fiction. The Strugatskys' novel had detailed the chaos and mutation that followed a colossal ecological catastrophe, the creation of a militarised Exclusion Zone to keep out trespassers, and the stalkers who nevertheless ventured inside on treasure hunts. It showed



