



UKRAINE

## THE RADIOACTIVE GOLD OF CHERNOBYL

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Pavel fixing the engine of the ventilation system inside the warehouse for the recycling of the radioactive metals.

They are loading rusty metal all day long, but a hot shower is not enough to be clean at the end of the day, as the metal is the radioactive one of Chernobyl. There is still a million of tons of it abandoned in the Exclusion Zone: it comes from Reactor One but also from ships, vehicles, rails. Recycling all this metal is a billion US dollars business, something handled for decades by smugglers, and just since 2007 (the disaster occurred in 1986) ruled and legalised by the Ukrainian state. Those "dead men walking" are just a dozen of people, led by Victor and working for one of the three organizations allowed by the Kiev government to operate in the area.

They work with very scarce, even though mandatory, protections, walking for hours in the middle of toxic clouds generated by the sandblasting process to decontaminate a metal soon to be sold at 10 Eurocents per kilogram (about 30% less than normal market price). Their work is terribly dangerous, almost a death sentence in slow motion, as it forces the workers to continuously inhale radioactive particles like caesium, strontium and plutonium. They keep on going, anyway, for free room and board, a salary higher than average (8,000 hryvnias can be earned monthly, almost 280 Euros) and a sadly false certainty, in the words of Sasha: "... and then vodka cleans it all..."



Looking for metals to recycle.



Victoria, 3 years old, playing at home. She's the daughter of Victor, the manager of the site where radioactive metal is recycled. The whole family lives in the village of Kovalivka, located at 5 km from the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.



The harbour of Chernobyl with some half sunk ships ready to be dismantled.



Pavel preparing for a shower after his day at work.



Yuriy while sandblasting some contaminated metal.



The resting room of the workers inside the warehouse for the recycling of the radioactive metals.



Victor inspecting Reactor Four to list the different metals to recycle.



Yuriy checking the level of contamination of a metal bar after the sandblasting.



Valeri, 16 years old, and his sister Victoria, 3 years old, are Victor's children and live in Kovalivka, a contaminated village located at 5 km from the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.



An abandoned train with the metal parts taken away by the recyclers.



Trassar sandblasting metal objects.



A contaminated armoured vehicle used during the disaster recovering and dismantled by the metal recyclers.



A worker coming home in Chernobyl.



The protective suit, worn by workers when sandblasting, protects them from the sand particles but not from the radioactive aerosol emanated by the cleaning of the contaminated metal surfaces.



The cooling tower of Reactor Five and the warehouse where the contaminated metals are recycled seen from the roof of Reactor Five.



Pavel loading decontaminated metal on a truck.



A Lenin statue in a square of the town of Chernobyl.



Sasha during a break from work in the warehouse for the recycling of the radioactive metals.



The warehouse where the radioactive metal is cleaned, immersed in the radioactive powder.



Vladimir during a break from work.



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