



UKRAINE

SuperNatural

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The abandoned city of Pripyat, overrun by nature.

Chernobyl 35 years on and nature is alive and kicking

Nature is always the first to pay the price for man's impact on planet Earth. But she's also the first to rise up and reclaim what's been taken from her. And that is what's happening right now inside the Chernobyl exclusion zone, considered by many to be a dead zone, 35 years on from the most disastrous nuclear accident in history. On 26 April 1986, an explosion inside the nuclear power plant's No. 4 reactor released tonnes of radioactive material into the air which, after being carried by the wind and deposited by the rain, contaminated large swathes of the planet, putting the health of 65 million people at risk. It has been calculated that the contaminated areas, totalling around 260,000 km², will not return to normal radioactivity levels for 100,000 years.

However, even at the catastrophe's epicentre, nature is not dead. Over the last three decades Chernobyl's ecosystem has come back strongly, although it has experienced a number unprecedented mutations during this process. Plants have taken over the city of Pripyat and the abandoned villages, and wild animals like wolves, foxes, bears, wild boars, horses and moose have repopulated the area. There are also hundreds of stray dogs in the woods, which have multiplied and evolved into a new wild breed. The Chernobyl exclusion zone has, somewhat paradoxically, become a nature reserve, even if it's completely unnatural. As a result it is now the world's only open-air laboratory, used by a hundred scientists to study the long term effects of radioactive contamination. "In an environment such as this" explains the biologist Elena Buntova "nature has maintained the ability to self-regulate, selecting the strongest species and eliminating the weakest. Here it's just humans that succumb".



A stray dog wanders the streets of the abandoned city of Pripyat.



Doctor Victor Krasnov is the director of the Chernobyl Institute of Nuclear Power Plant safety where the scientific laboratories in the city of Chernobyl are located.



A tree that has grown inside the Polessya Hotel in the abandoned city of Pripyat.



The abandoned Duga military radar system inside the Chernobyl exclusion zone, now swamped by nature.



Fish in one of the Pripjat River's reservoir canals.



The Chernobyl exclusion zone.



Wild Przewalski's horses wandering around the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



The scientific laboratories in the city of Chernobyl. A laboratory technician works on samples collected from the area.



A tree grows outside the front door of an abandoned house in the town of Poleskoe, in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



A fox roams the streets undisturbed in the ghost city of Pripyat.



The abandoned city of Pripyat, overrun by nature.



Ex-residents of Pripyat as they walk through the city's main square that's now overrun by nature. Once a year, on 9 May, ex-residents are allowed to return to their old houses and visit the areas they used to live in.



The abandoned city of Pripyat, overrun by nature.



A moose in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



The scientific laboratories in the city of Chernobyl. A laboratory technician shows the analysis of a sample collected from the exclusion zone.



The entrance arch, now swamped by vegetation, to the abandoned town of Poleskoe, located within the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



Graffiti depicting a wolf in the ghost city of Pripyat, one of the most commonly found species in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



Abandoned playground equipment overrun by nature in the main square of the ghost city of Pripyat.



The abandoned city of Pripyat, overrun by nature. In the background, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.



Farm machinery swamped by nature in the abandoned village of Kopachi, in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



A stray dog wanders the streets of the abandoned city of Pripyat.



The abandoned city of Pripyat, overrun by nature.



A wild Przewalski's horse wandering around the Chernobyl exclusion zone.



The scientific laboratories in the city of Chernobyl. A laboratory technician shows a sample of uranium collected from the exclusion zone.



The Ferris wheel in the city of Pripyat, surrounded by the nature that has now taken over the city.



A shot from inside the scientific laboratories in the city of Chernobyl.



The Izumrudny children's summer camp is located a few kilometres from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, within the ten-kilometre-radius zone. It consisted of colourful houses with characters from Soviet fairy tales and was used during the summer as a place for the plant workers' children to spend some time.



The Ferris wheel in the city of Pripyat, surrounded by the nature that has now taken over the city.



A propaganda poster surrounded by nature in what was once a walkway in the ghost city of Pripyat.



A tree that has grown inside the Polessya Hotel in the abandoned city of Pripyat.



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