

# Dawn of Prypiat

The van is rattling along the way, making everything in the camera vague and trembling.

‘Say, Artyom, hold it tight! Our research relies on your recordings!’ Mr. Freeman laughed in excitement, his laughter multiplied especially after seeing Artyom frantically trying to stabilize the camera. In front of him is their guide, Anton, also the driver of the van, he doesn’t even realize it when the camera is pointed on him. Beside him sat Alice, who kept on looking outside from the car window, curiosity flows out from her eyes.

Mr. Freeman’s smile quickly froze, especially when the van passed some deserted settlements.

‘Where is everyone? Why the settlements are abandoned? I even received their communication requests last year!’ He whispered in dissatisfaction ‘Why they just retreated? All the news and scientific reports have shown that Prypiat is becoming safe and friendly to people!’

‘Well, sir.’ Alice sent her drone out from the window, said ‘The Ukrainian government have already stated in 2032 that there would be a general lockdown in Prypiat to prevent more effects coming from human activities and all the current residents here will be evacuated and settle down to another place. Prypiat is becoming quite.’ Mr. Freeman frowned in puzzle, because from all the knowledge he had ever learned, humans were the hero on the stage, always able to deal with all kinds of disaster and always able to turn a wild place or a complete wasteland into a habitable area. ‘Wait, was Alice implying that I am ignoring the current world situation?’ He frowned again, only to see Alice buried her smiling face into the screen of her cogitator (a device appeared in 2025 that combines computer and radio together, obviously imagined) ‘We will see who is right’ He thought, both to Alice as well as his thoughts, glancing at the images of abandoned buildings flashed away.

‘Alright, professors’ Anton smiled humorously ‘The destination is in sight and rules are simple. Don’t pick up things. Don’t enter buildings or you want to be buried by rubble. Don’t hunt and touch any animals. And, like all the doomsday fictions, if you hear your Geiger counter going mad... just run’. Though all of them burst into tacit laughter, Alice was staring at the strangely tall and thick bushes, unwilling to admit that those who cut the freeway in half are actually trees. With the absence of humans’ maintenance, those trees and bushes quickly learned how to take care of themselves. ‘Seems that nature has taken this place back’ she thought. Not only the freeway, the whole avenue actually turned into a forest, concealed its conjunction with the freeway. If there hadn’t been a drone deployed in advance, nobody would believe that the whole party went into the avenue.

Suddenly a brake shut down Alice’s wandering mind. Before she complained about hitting her forehead on the window, she heard Anton said ‘We’re here, madam. It seems that even in 2052 there are still screen addicted’ He smiled and continued, ignoring the slight unhappiness on her face ‘That is how far the van can go, the rest of the road is occupied by trees. Do you have anything to say, Mr. Freeman?’ Mr. Freeman lengthened the conversation ‘What we need to do is simple, record what we see so we can make it clear whether this place is suitable for humans again decades after Chernobyl accident. Do I make it clear? And do pay attention to your Geiger counter’ Then all people, with Anton leading the way, they soon walked into the abandoned but vibrant city.

Where they first reached seemed to be a community. The once prosperous and crowded Khrushchyovkas were empty, what became its new residents of those free apartments were plants,

all kinds of plants. They squeezed and tore their way out from the cracks of the cold cement walls, making the whole community moved further from human civilization. Artyom didn't focused much on those concrete remains of the community. Instead, his camera and himself were stunned at one scene—a tree. More precisely, a tree pierced the roof of a shattered house. The roof of a house can be pierced by a lot of things, it can be happiness, property, and war. But it is unimaginable that a tree can do the same thing, especially in a pure mankind creation. Artyom turned his camera at Anton, who was drawing a sketch of a bush of yellow rose near him 'You mean the flowers? Thanks to radiation, they blossom all year round except winter' He then pointed at someplace farther while Artyom quickly adjusted the camera's zoom 'Look at that, this place used to be a theater, selling tickets of movies and dances. At least that's what my grandma told me. But now it is completely bushes and relics, hence everything in it was removed and taken away shortly after the accident happened.' He drew for seconds and continued 'Now it's only grass and moss in it. And if you are lucky, you will see animals searching for food nearby.' This triggered Artyom's interest, he focused his camera on that area. At the same time, a strange thought came into his head. 'Maybe nature had already taken this place back?'

In the depth of this forest, the previous community. Alice, accompanied by Mr. Freeman, deployed a drone to scan this region and record the geographical and environmental status of it. Compared with their team members they had gone too far. But their cogitators prevented them from getting lost. 'It seems that the radiation level is much lower than the past decades.' Alice murmured as she directed the drone into a deserted hospital. Alice was really familiar with it, on books and other literatures she learned that this hospital was known for high technology and massive medical treatment to radiation patients after Chernobyl accident. As a result, its radiation level became so high that it was beyond management and had to be abandoned. Even for a long time after the accident, the radiation level was beyond Geiger counter's measurement. But now, surprisingly, without human's intervention. The level had lowered to a tolerable amount. At least can be measured by Geiger counter and the function of electronic devices like drones wouldn't be disturbed. 'Maybe the future visitors won't have to wear radiation-proof equipment and obey nuclear safety guidelines anymore' Mr. Freeman sighed with emotion. He could still remember how the Soviet firefighters risked their lives to stabilize the reactor. How people were evacuated from the city. To him, it was ironical that humans' work, to a disaster like this, only acted as a Bond-Aid. Who paid the most effort to recover from such wound was still the nature itself. 'Professor?' Alice's sudden interruption pulled Freeman's out from his deep thought 'I have completed the scanning, maybe we can pull back? I possibly hear the wolves crying' 'Maybe you're right. It's getting late now, let's go and see what they are doing.'

'What are you doing, Anton?' Not long after Alice and Freeman come back to the camp, they noticed Anton was showing the team something, explaining it to them. But he was so devoted that he didn't actually hear Freeman's call. 'We will be heading along the river tomorrow. And besides that, if we still have time, we would see this' He took out a time-worn book, inside it there is a photo of a rusted ferris wheel. 'You may all have heard about this' he continued 'This was originally designed for the kids in Prypiat. But before it can be open to them, Chernobyl accident happened. So it was abandoned, and was regarded as the broken hope and expectation of the people.'

After all the people had a quick supper, research party members began to wonder about the silent cameraman Artyom, especially when they read closely about the research plan, and learned from

their guide Anton that Artyom, just like him, whose grandparents were actually born and bred in Prypiat. They all pled him to say something. 'Poor Artyom, he is the shyest one of us all' Mr. Freeman said to himself. 'Uh huh' Anton saved him from this embarrassing situation 'Artyom and I, to be honest, came to this place for several times before, especially when I have to guide a tour group during the holidays long time ago.' He continued 'I can feel that during the past decades, the radiation level becomes lower in fact. In the past, we thought about solving this problem by force, we sent a lot of troops and resources to Prypiat, what we get at last is the growing number of radiation patients. And you know, the war weakened our control on Prypiat nuclear pollution as well. But even after that, the government still thought that this place can still be re-exploited and kept sending exploration parties to cleanse the area and set up settlements, and sometimes even worse, send tourists into it. These actions turned out to be of little avail, also hurt the weak biological balance of this area as well. Then more and more people come to realize that the previous attempts focused too much on humans. If what the government had focused on is recovering the nature condition and biological diversity to normal stage instead of making the whole region suitable for mankind to live in again. And as a result of that, the biological balance is gradually recovering and more animals are moving to places where radiation pollution is less serious.' At that time, he pointed out some areas on the map. While he reached out for a cup of water for a break. Artyom continued 'Well' he said in shyness 'Now is far better, there are no more careless exploration parties seeking dwelling points in it. Instead, the government only takes an unimportant role in Prypiat, what they do is only sent troops around its borders, preventing tourists and unauthorized visitors from it. And thanks to the half-life period, the bio-friendly areas have expanded a lot.' After saying that, he projected a folder onto everyone's cogitator. It is a series of photos that describe the animals in Prypiat. Though a considerable number of whom suffered from mutation caused by radiation, their number is still rising. And in Prypiat places suitable for animals and other creatures were becoming more and more. Obviously coming to this situation was definitely not without cost. With tourists and visitors coming to this area less and less frequently, tourism in that region withered, which led to notable decline in economy. And the abortion of the re-exploit project also left an unignorable amount of infrastructure and land unused or rusting, which also led to considerable low efficiency of resources using. Those information, together with the geographical and other data, were all recorded into everyone's cogitators. When Anton and Artyom finally emptied their desire to talk. The rest of the team members remained silent, some of them turned back, seemed to be thinking about what those two men had shared with them, or they were just sorting out everything they recorded during the day. The images of the research party and their tents were strangely small compared to the silent, deserted but life-abundant city, like adventurers amazed at the corpse of a lost civilization. This day was only the beginning to the whole journey, but all of them had already witnessed the staggering self-recover ability of nature.

'It's sunset now' Mr. Freeman sighed with relief, looking at the falling sun, which casted unexpectedly red and piercing light through the forest on the bank of the river. After hearing what Anton and Artyom said, he started to realize that it could be right for mankind to withdraw from Prypiat, without the interference of mankind, this city still prospered in a biological way. That is quite unlike what he had experienced in his life.

'It might be the sunset of humans in Prypiat' He said to himself 'But it is a dawn for you, Prypiat' 'Good morning.'



