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U.S. Film Industry Losses are Russia's Gains

Russian viewers will have instant access to new films.

By Ali Sar

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HOLLYWOOD--Theaters in the U.S. are closed. Studios are on hiatus. The film industry is in freefall. But in Russia, movie fans will be the beneficiaries of Hollywood's troubles.

Theatrical blockbusters like the James Bond franchise, Disney-branded films and "Star Wars" remakes will skip the movie houses and will be available on streaming platforms in Russia and elsewhere. Netflix, HBO and Disney Plus are rushing to overseas markets.

The shortage of films also creates opportunities for foreign filmmakers. Movies from all corners of the globe have flooded the marketplace, especially the awards venues in an effort to gain international exposure.

For example, more than 130 foreign films, including a half dozen Russian productions, are competing for Golden Globe and Oscar awards.

Frontrunners among the foreign movies appear to be Andrei Konchalovsky's "Dear Comrades" and Yegor Abramenko's "Sputnik."

One disappointment has been the absence of Moscow producer Alexander Rodnyansky's "Chernobyl: Abyss," directed by Danila Kozlovsky.

It is the first major Russian feature film about the aftermath of the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power station that tells the story of a firefighter's heroic efforts.

The picture was originally scheduled for worldwide release this fall, but it became another victim of Covid-19.

Rodnyansky, foreseeing the magnitude of the virus on cinemas early on, pulled Chernobyl out of release. And he decided not to join the streaming wars.

"Things with Covid-19 were not going well in Russia, and we had a full-blown second wave. This is why we have pushed Chernobyl to next year," Rodnyansky told The Moscow Times.

Winner of both Oscar and Globe awards for past movies, Rodnyansky said he and his team will start a vigorous marketing campaign for Chernobyl in the coming days. It will be released April 15, 2021 in Moscow.

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Meanwhile, streaming of major Hollywood movies around the world will start in January.

Telecom giant ATT, which acquired WarnerMedia, announced that it will release the entire slate of 17 Warner's 2021 theatrical output both in movie houses and on the HBO Max worldwide streaming platform simultaneously starting in January.

HBO has a contractual arrangement with Amedia in Russia to broadcast its content. HBO Max, which is part of WarnerMedia, will have more than 2,000 films available.

Disney Plus, which includes Lucas' "Star Wars," Marvel, Pixar and Disney-branded productions, already has 137 million global household subscribers and it is already catching up with Netflix's 195 million households. It plans to launch its service in Russia in February 2021.

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