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‘More Hollywood Than Hollywood’: Critics Slam Russian ‘Chernobyl’

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Danila Koslovsky’s “Chernobyl” tells the story of a fictional firefighter against the backdrop of the nuclear disaster. **Central Partnership**

The success of HBO’s 2019 miniseries “Chernobyl” left Russian filmmakers inspired to shoot their own version of the tragic events that took place in Soviet Ukraine in 1986.

But Russian director Danila Koslovsky’s “Chernobyl,” which premiered Thursday, has so far failed to generate the same critical acclaim as Craig Mazin’s miniseries.

Instead of offering a historic retelling of the events, Koslovsky’s “Chernobyl” tells the story of a fictional firefighter against the backdrop of the nuclear disaster.

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Firefighter Alexei Karpushin, played by Kozlovsky himself, is an attractive young fireman who quits his job in Pripyat to move in with his former flame, Olga, in Kiev.

However, an explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant throws a wrench into his plans. He is forced to return to Pripyat, where he saves his comrades from the roof of the plant and opens the water valve beneath the reactor to prevent another explosion — while walking away nearly untouched by radiation.

Russian film critics have slammed the movie for focusing on a main character saving the day rather than depicting the true horror of the tragedy, calling it "more Hollywood" than the Hollywood version.

"Danila Kozlovsky's new work is a melodramatic fantasy shot with the Chernobyl tragedy as its scenery," Vera Alenushkina wrote in a TimeOut review. "If the explosion at the ill-fated power unit is replaced, for example, by an accident in a Martian colony, then, with the exception of the filming location, costumes and surroundings, nothing in the film would change."

Meduza film critic Anton Dolin called Koslovsky's "Chernobyl" a movie where "the main character extinguishes the fire, drives an ambulance and dives under the reactor."

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"It is easy to see in 'Chernobyl' a bitter and believable parable about a typical Russian guy who is ready to climb into the heat without insurance and sacrifice his life so as not to take responsibility for a woman and a child," Dolin wrote.

However, RBC's Egor Moksvitin argued that the movie serves as a nice complement to HBO's miniseries as every filmmaker bears the right to interpret events in his or her own way.

Despite the film's weaknesses, critics praised the excellent camera work of 26-year-old cinematographer Ksenia Serda.

"A long and predictable exposition is suddenly crowned with the first action scene: The hero rushes toward the fire, dead birds fall from the sky, the green forest turns red and the people turn gray. This scene shakes the viewer up and illustrates why camerawoman Ksenia Sereda will soon begin filming a blockbuster series for HBO," Moskvitin wrote.

"A good reason to watch this film is the outstanding cinematography, which will set the tone for the visual design of domestic blockbusters for years to come," Dolin said, calling Serda the "strongest woman of 'Chernobyl'."

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