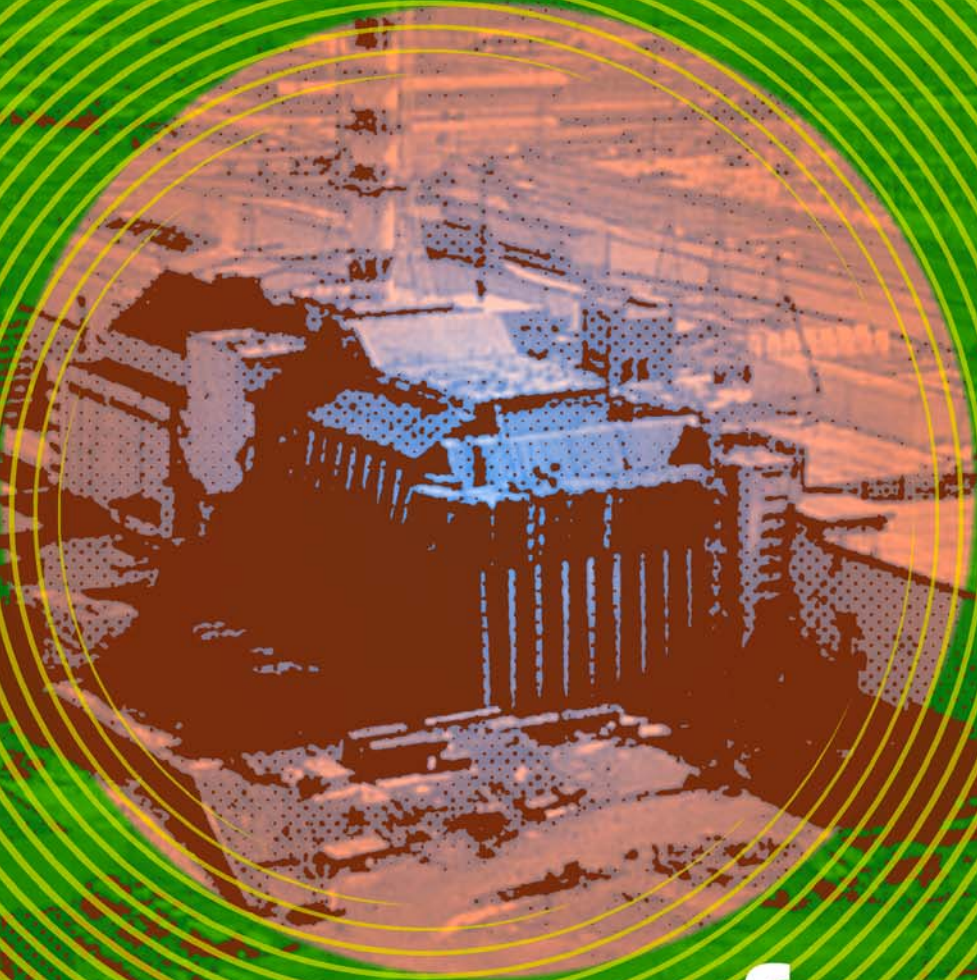


# RADIOACTIVE

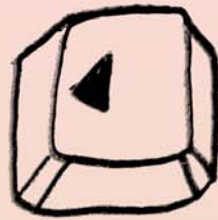


**forever**

**a comic strip essay** by Kai Pfeiffer

Please read this e-book in the *full screen mode* »ctrl + L«

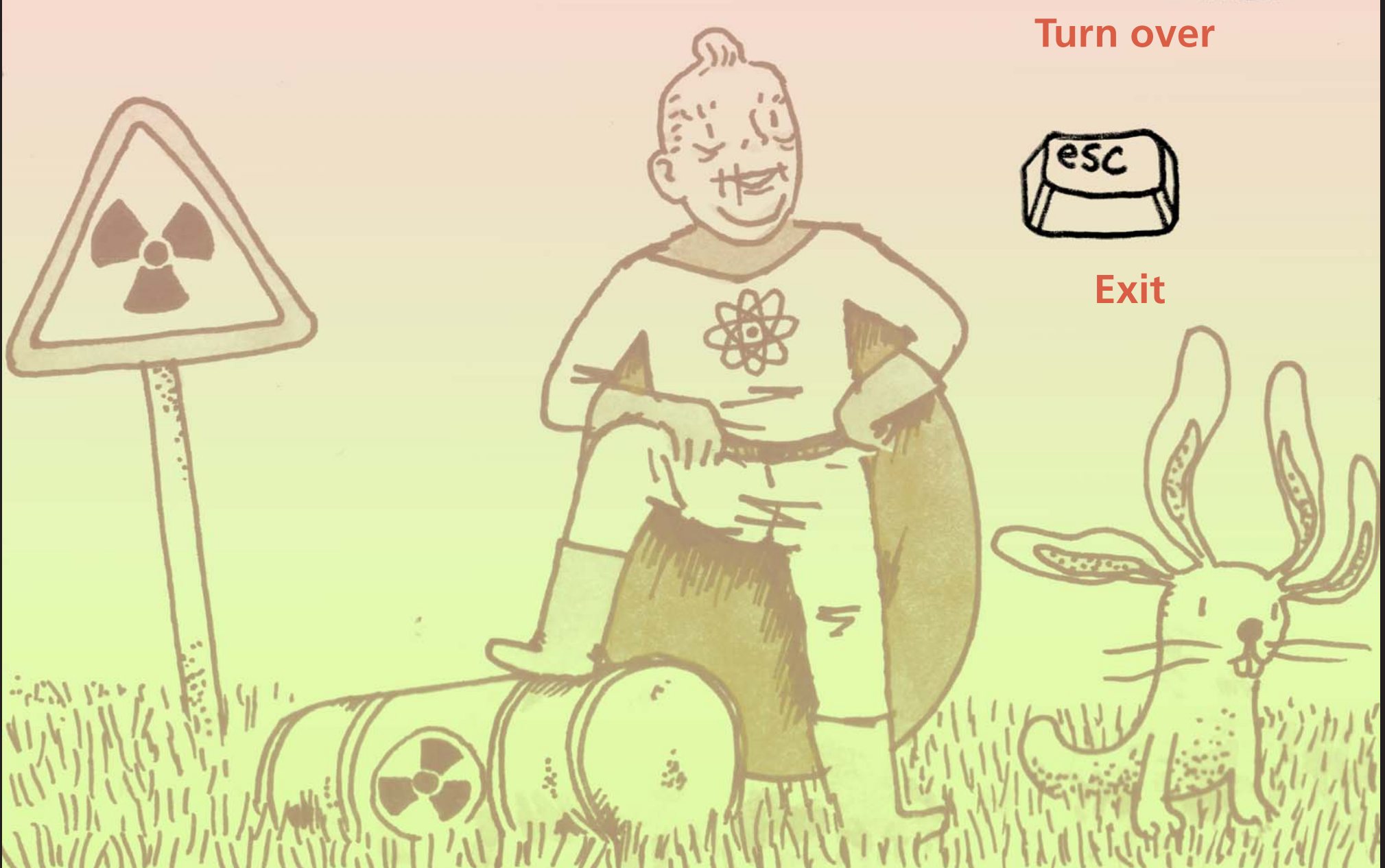
To leave the *full screen mode*, press »ctrl + L« again or »esc«



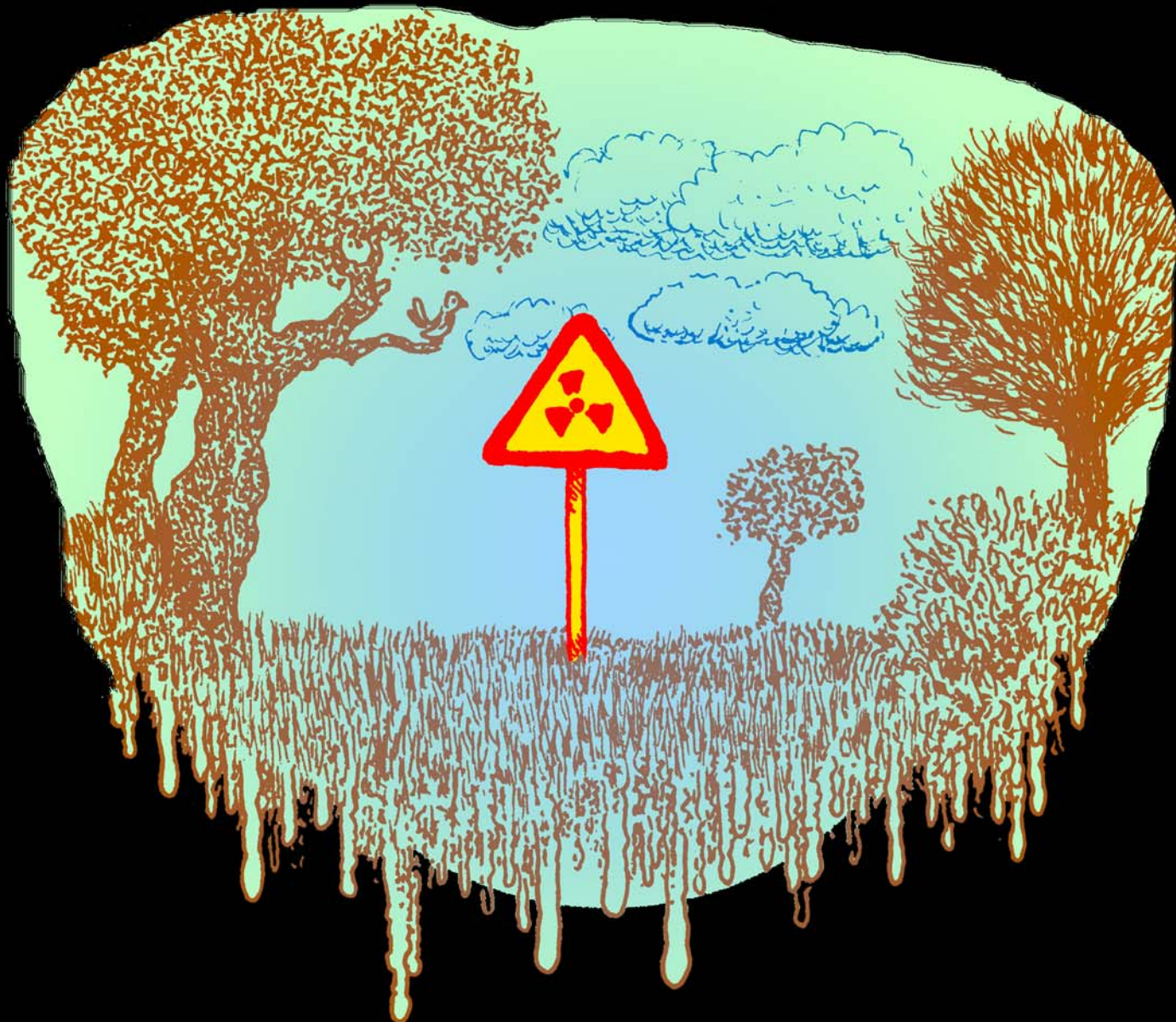
Turn over



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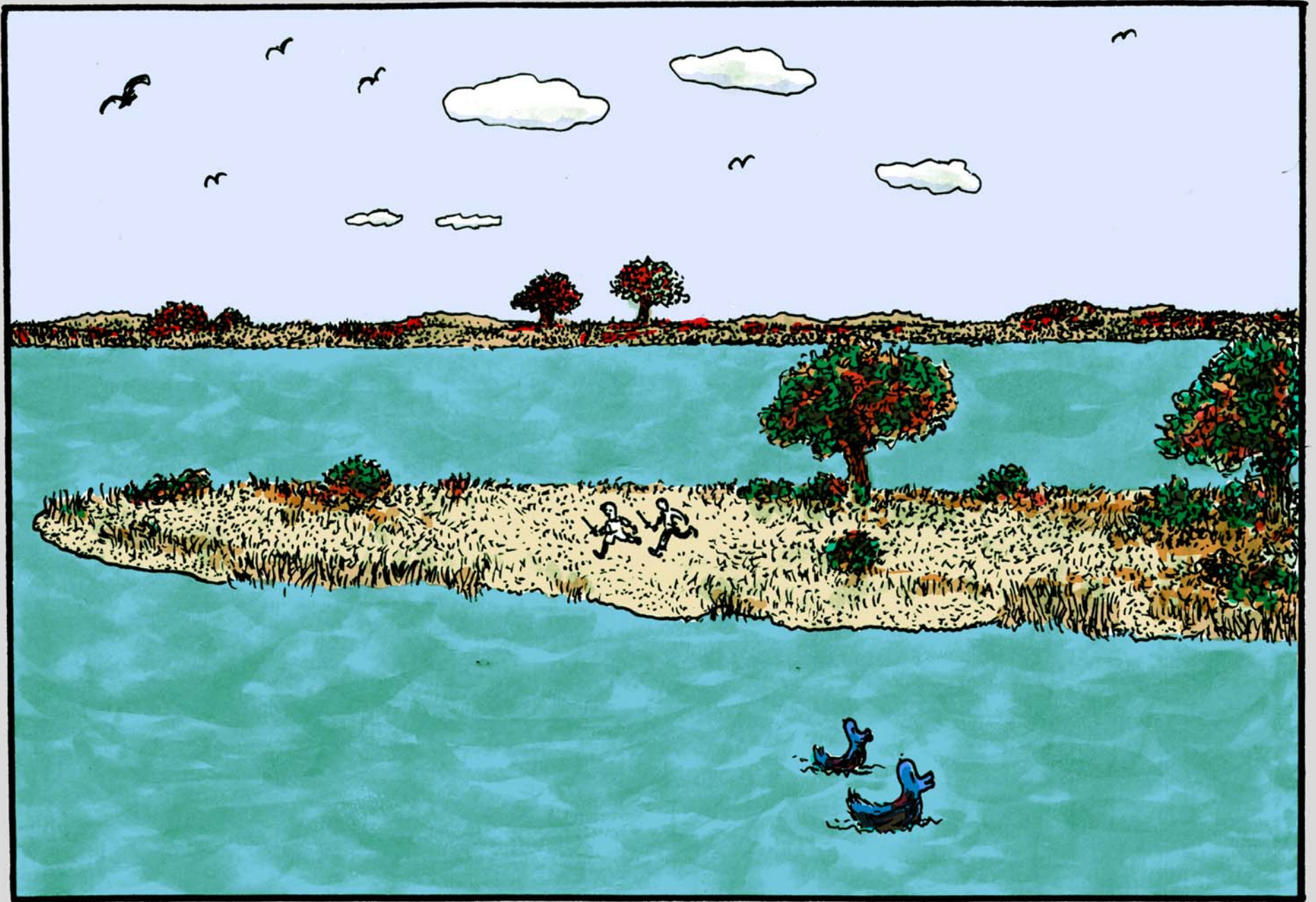
This is a short view of one of the most horrible technological catastrophes in human history so far.



Summer 1985. Somewhere near the small town of Chernobyl, in the Ukraine, or its neighbour Belarus.  
One year later, the landscape will look just the same.



But it isn't the same landscape anymore. And the mushrooms are now poisonous. All of them.

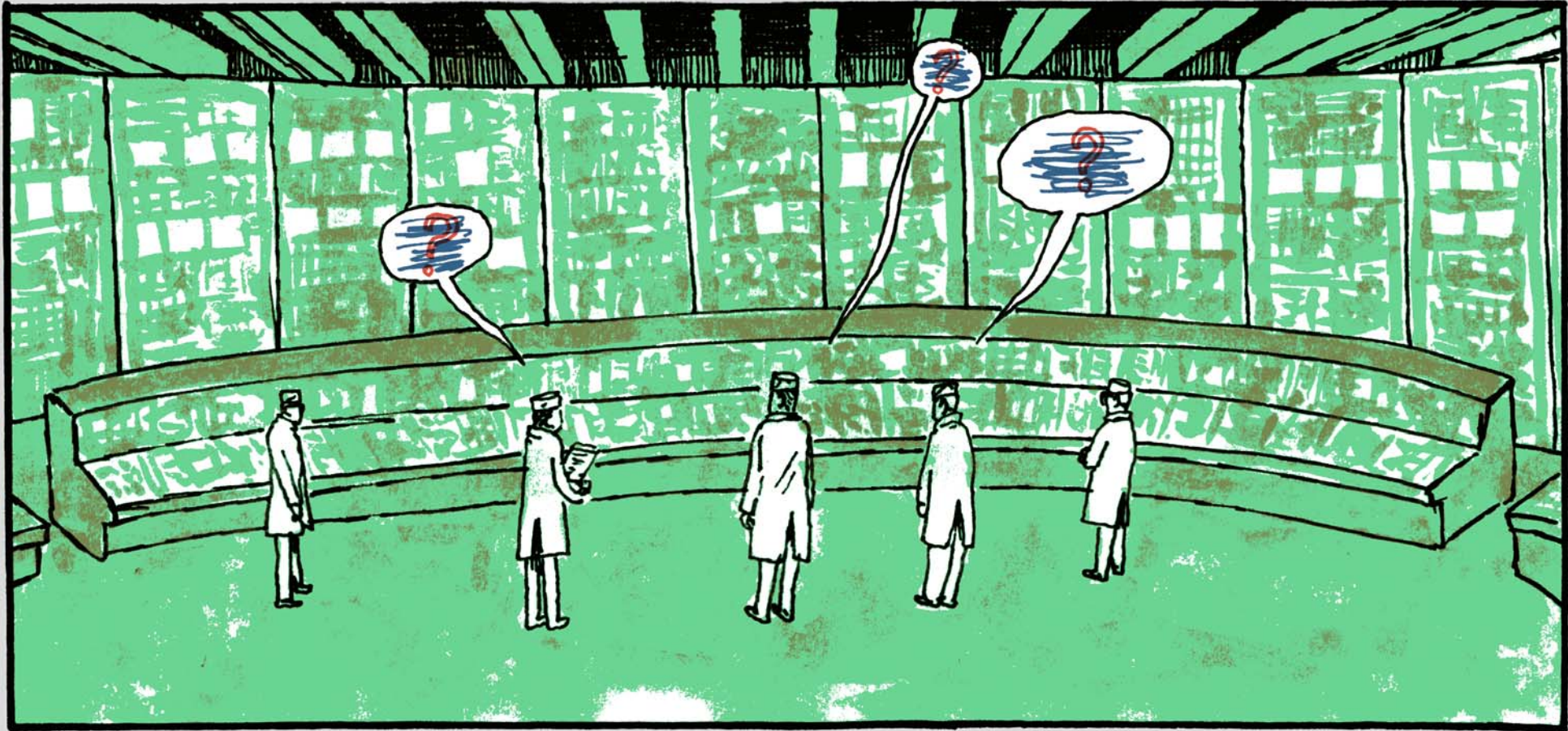


The power plant next to the small town of Chernobyl, not far from Prypjat, and roughly 56 miles from Kiev, the Ukrainian capital.



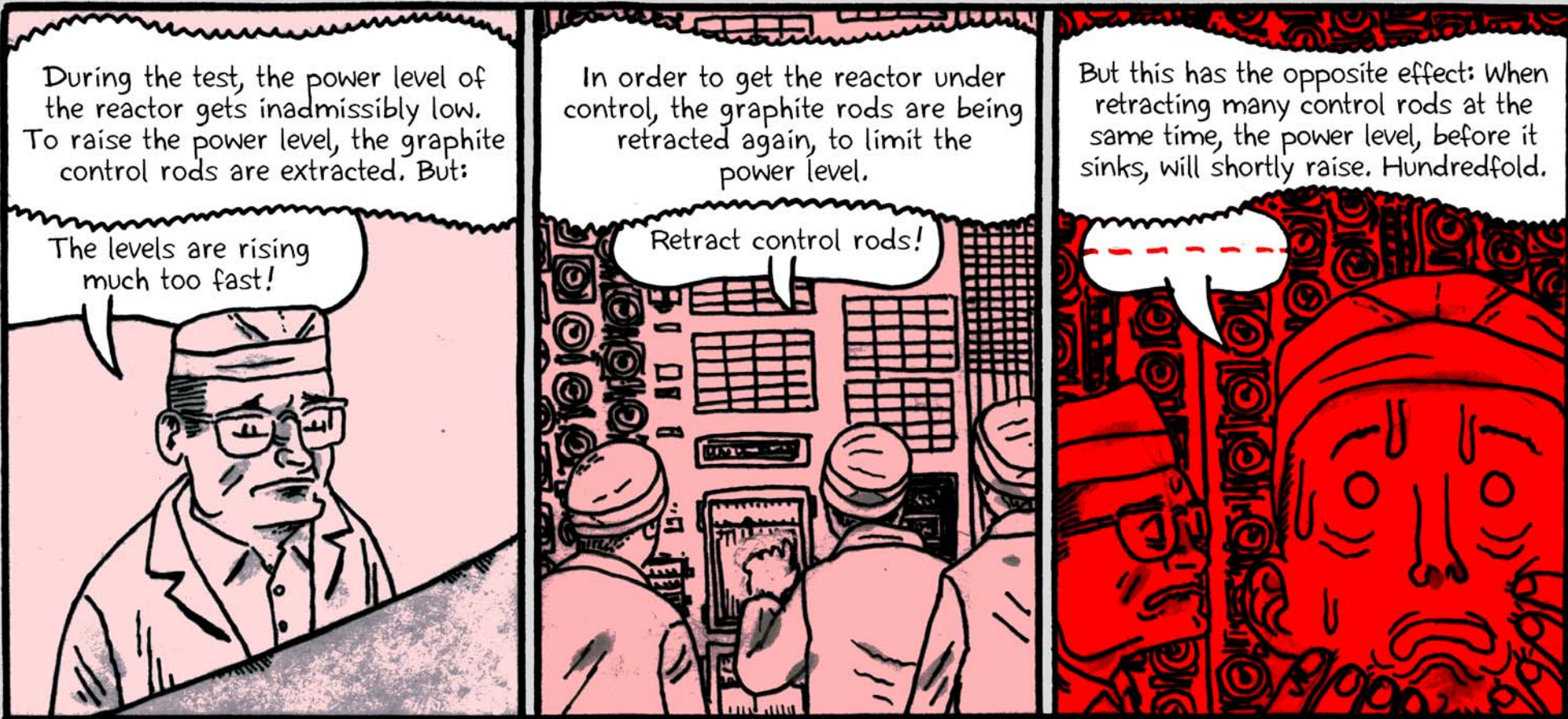
The power plant consists of four blocks. It is the most important employer and economical resource in this region.

The night from April 25th to 26th, 1986. A routine test of the reactor in block 4 is about to be executed.



In order to run the test, the engineers temporarily switch off the reactor's security system. It could get activated by the test, which would then lead to its abortion by an emergency shutdown of the reactor.

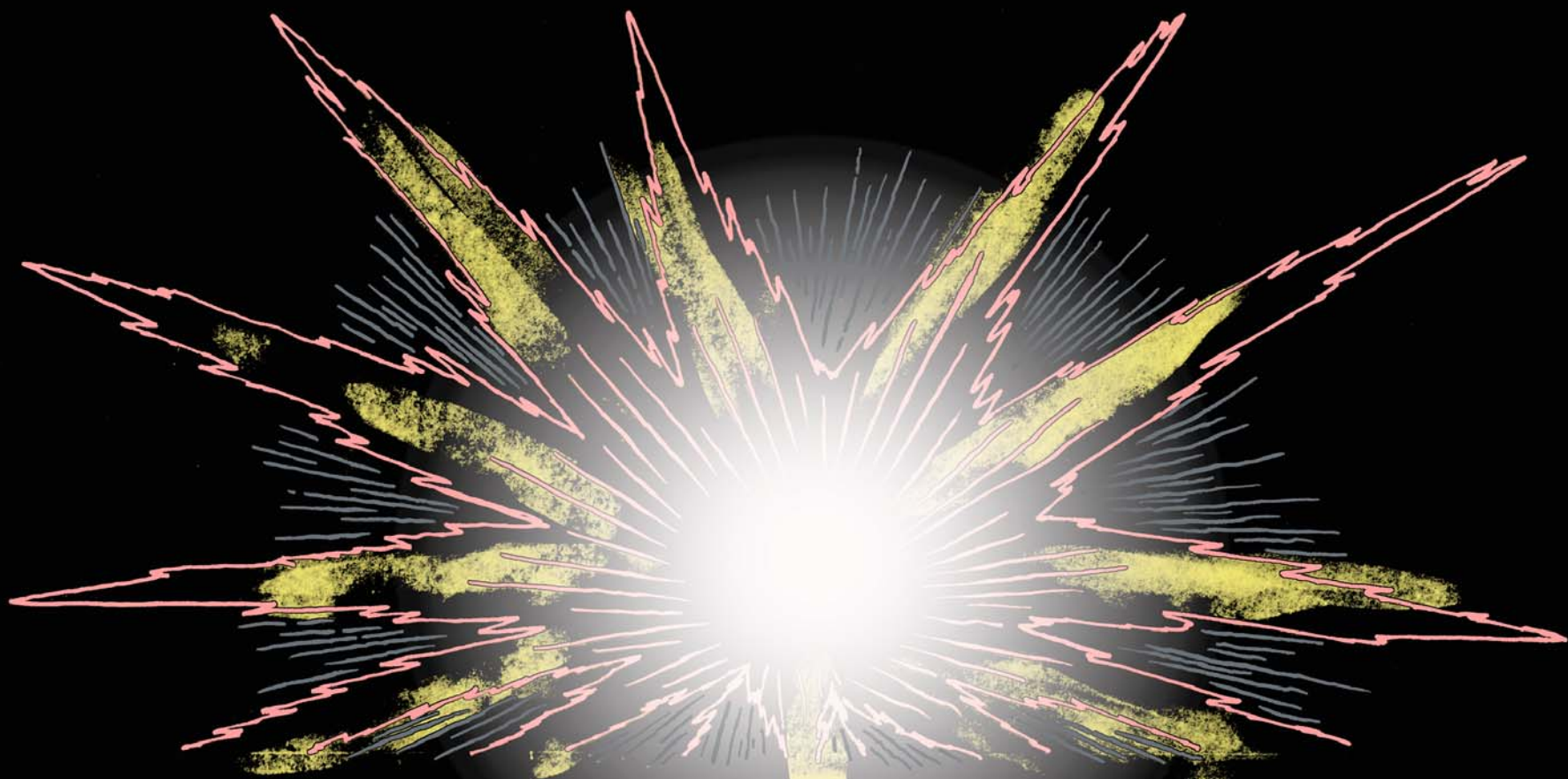
The test is getting out of control. That much seems to be sure. This is a primitive summary of the official version of the causes:



The atomic energy critic Holger Strohm is even contemplating an earthquake as a possible cause for the escalation. What ever we may or may not eventually learn about this accident, it happened, what not only according to Strohm HAD to happen, sooner or later, with one atomic reactor somewhere:



April 26th, 1986, 01:23:44



A few miles from the power plant ...

Quite a warm  
night, isn't  
it?

Hm...



Huh?

B O O O O M





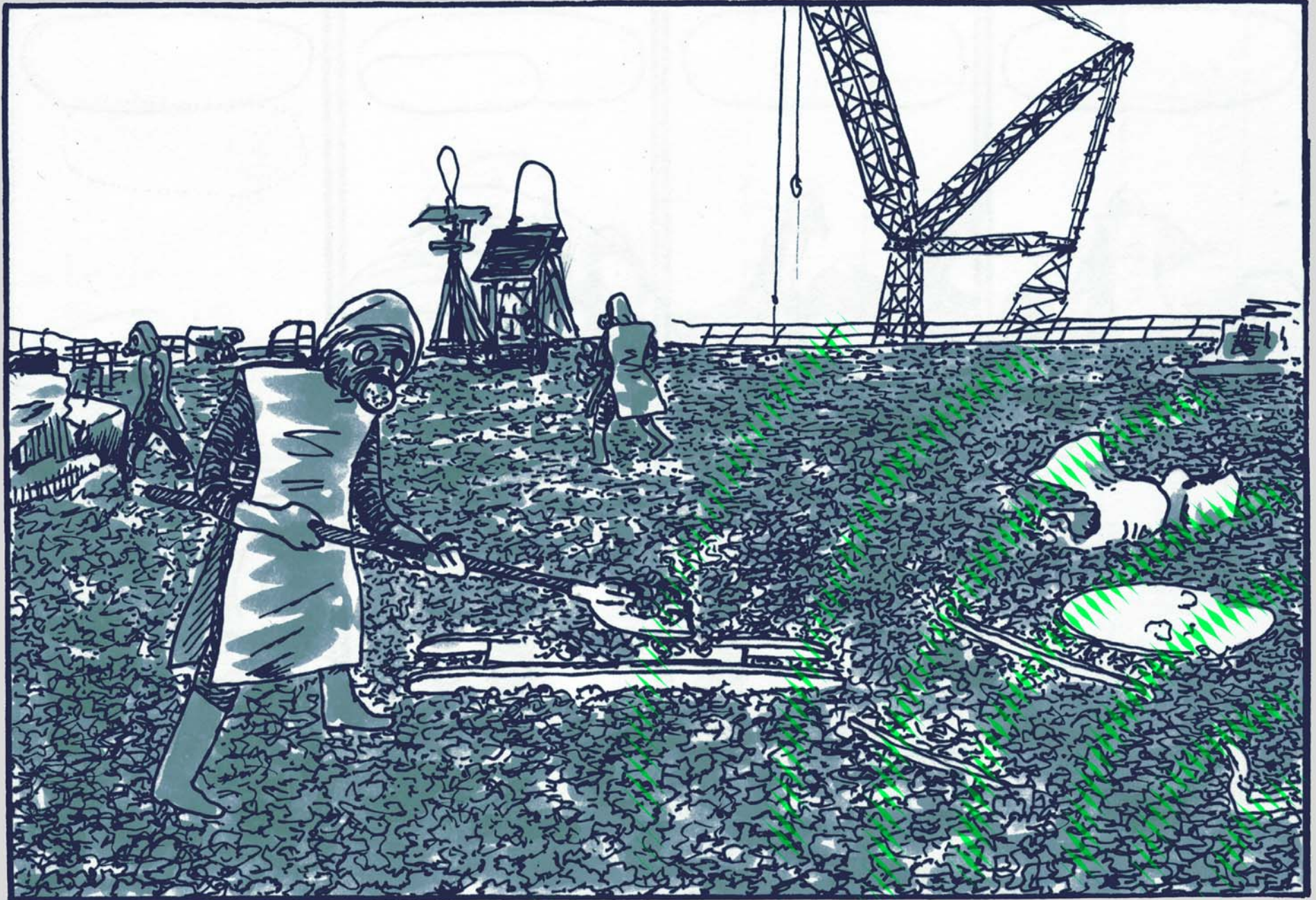
For hours that night, the anglers would watch the fire gleaming in the distance.



They get heavy doses of radiation.  
The days after, their skin will turn  
black and fall off. Not much  
later, they die.



The explosion lifted the reactor's concrete covering plate, weighing 1000 tons, into the air; it came down upright in the reactor, which was now open. Big parts of its contents got hurled outside. From helicopters, lead, boron, dolomite, sand and clay was thrown into the reactor, in order to get the fire under control and keep the radioactive particles inside.

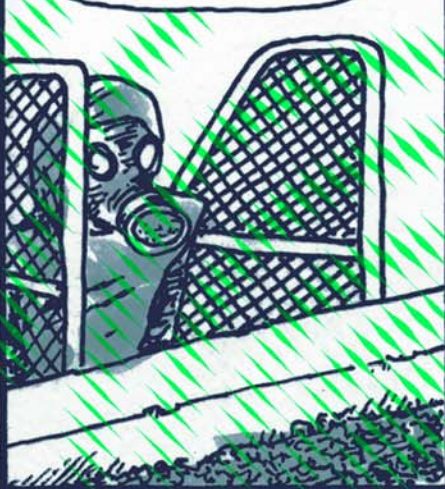


The firemen.

They were the first on the roof of the reactor.

Clad in improvised protective clothing:

Gas mask, lead apron ...



... the rest of the clothing being scantily sealed.

A ridiculous protection. They knew they were

going to be exposed to lethal doses of radiation.

They went on the roof anyway.



The burning  
graphite



from the reactor,  
hurled on the roof



by the explosion



had to be thrown  
back into



its open, burning  
mouth.



With shovels,  
or by hand.



There was no  
other possibility



Therefore, these  
men gave their lives.





In order not to damage the "human robots" too severely, they were allowed to stay at the roof for a maximum of two minutes. After that, their protective gear was useless. There are no credible records about how many of them got ill.



The first victims are the firemen. They are brought to a hospital in Moscow. The rooms above and beneath them have to stay empty. So strong is the radiation from their bodies.



The doctors suggest to drink a lot of milk, but are unable to cure the radiation sickness.



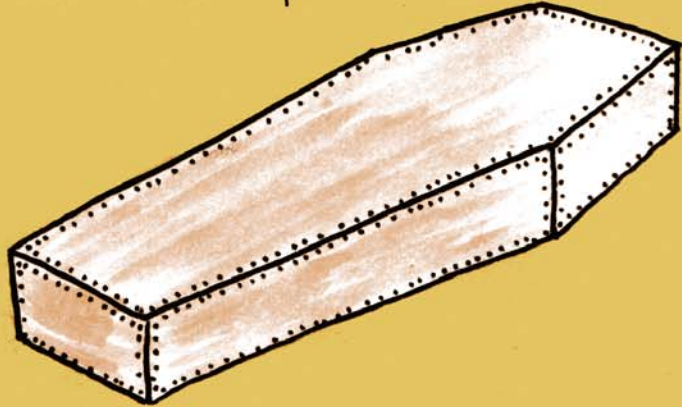
The radiation slowly separates the flesh from their bones. In the end, they spit out their own intestines.



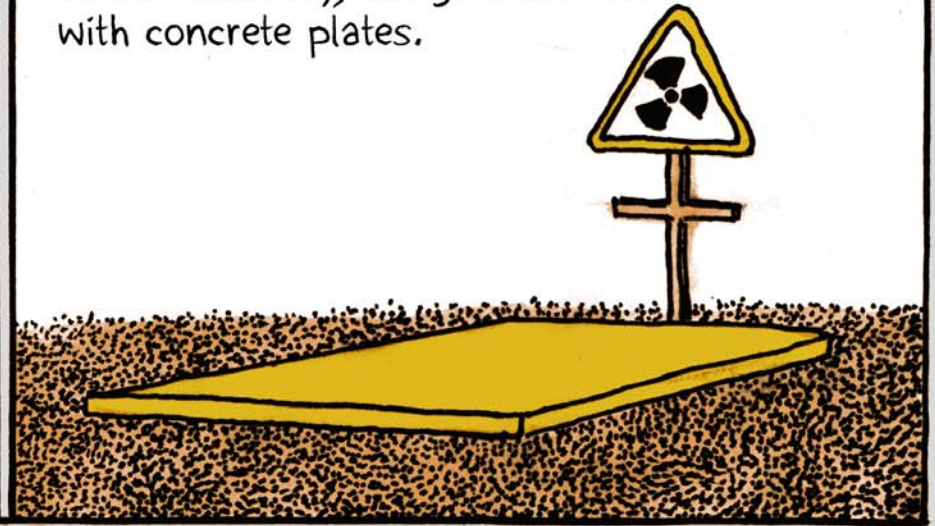
What remains of their dead bodies gets wrapped in plastic bags. Those go into wooden coffins.



Then, the wooden coffins are wrapped in plastic bags again, which are then put in soldered up zinc coffins.



They are buried in Moscow, on a special part of the cemetery, the graves sealed with concrete plates.



One of the dead firemen has a son. He keeps his fathers fur hat as a token.



In the fur hat, there is a tiny little crumb from the reactor. He gets a brain tumor.



The control room of block 4 got disemboweled, the gear torn out.

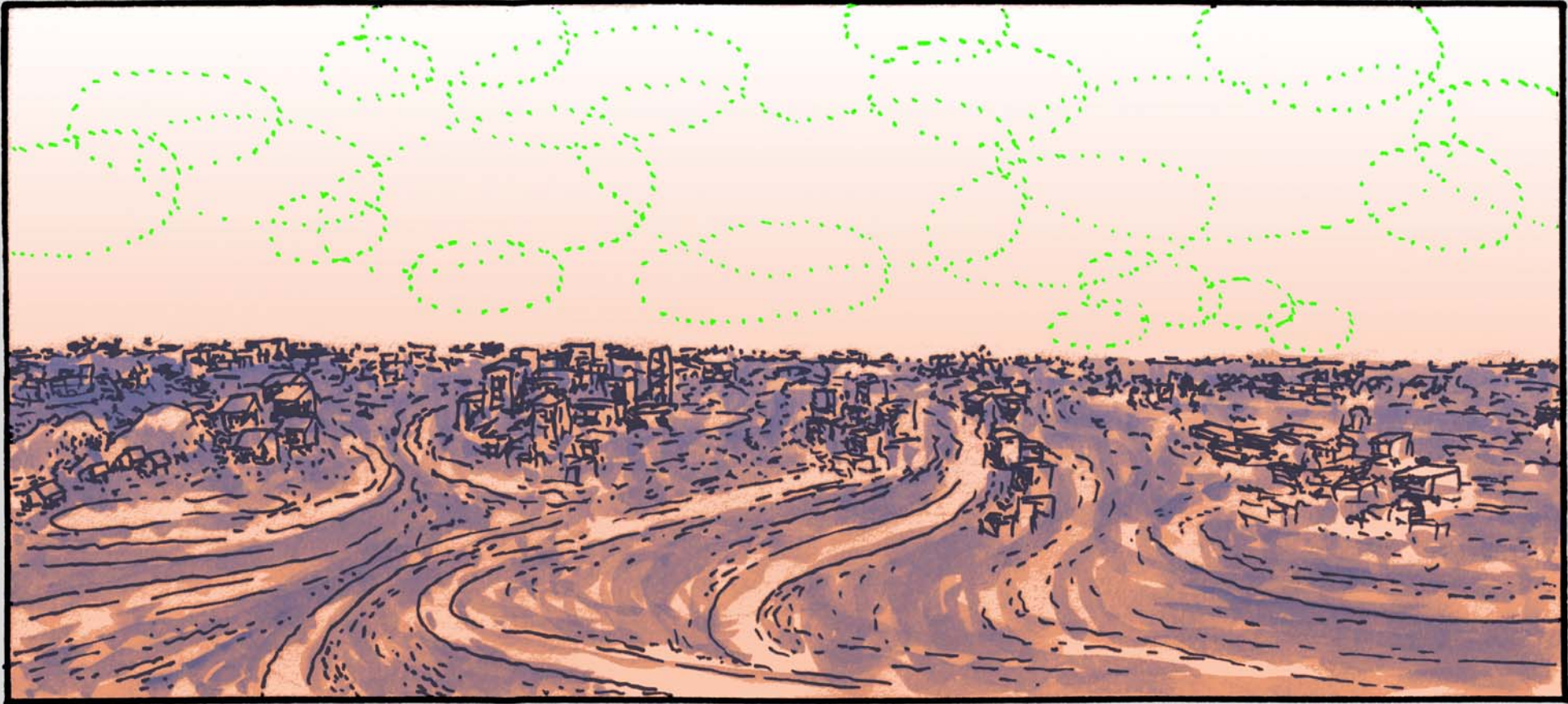


Around the control room, around the reactor a restricted area was created within a radius of 19 miles. The forbidden zone of Chernobyl. Does radiation stop outside of that ring? No. But it simply wasn't affordable to declare a bigger area uninhabitable.

Prypjat, counting 47,000 inhabitants until 1986, built for the power plants personnel. Since the catastrophe, the town is empty, in the midst of the forbidden zone. It is contaminated with plutonium isotopes, and will not be inhabitable for some 48,000 years.

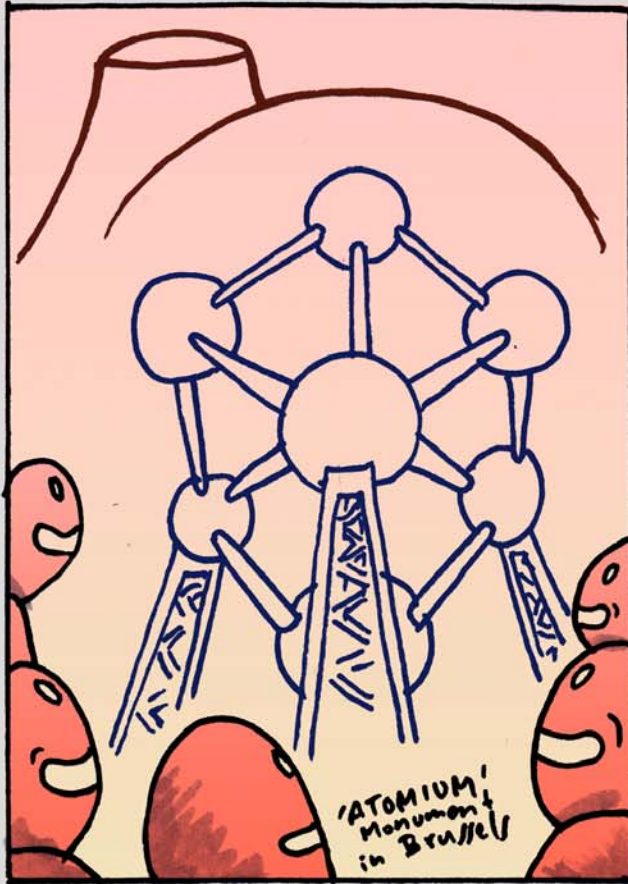


The winds spread the invisible poison cloud made of Caesium-137 on wide parts of Europe, and eventually throughout the Northern Hemisphere.

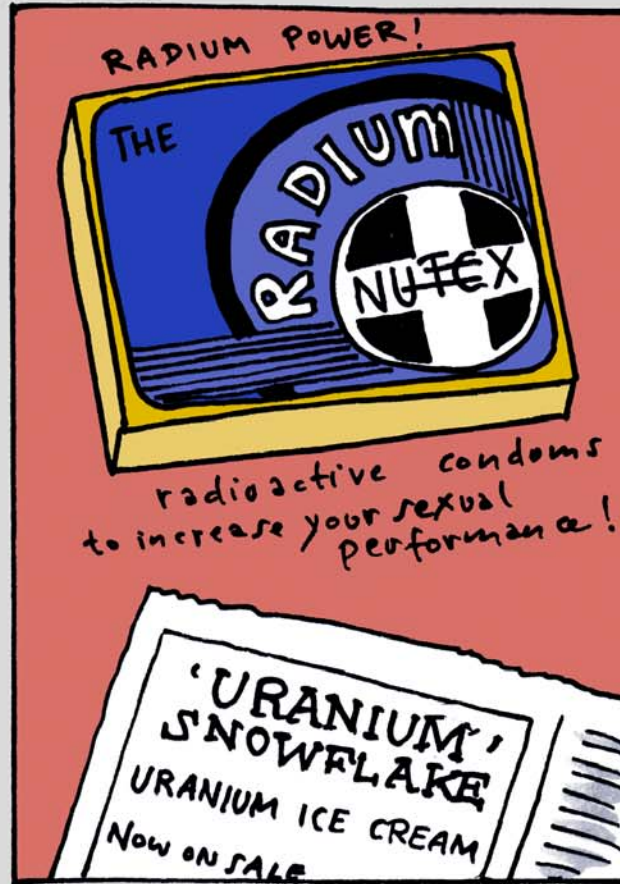


Until today, the radioactive particles of Cs-137 of the fallout remain active. What their effects are on the long term is not known with much certainty. There is an independent survey holding the possibility of many thousands of deaths in Europe from cancer due to the CS-137 against the minimizing official report of the Chernobyl Forum.

Until way into the 50ies, atomic power was an exciting vision. A diversity of products would be advertised as being “radioactive”.



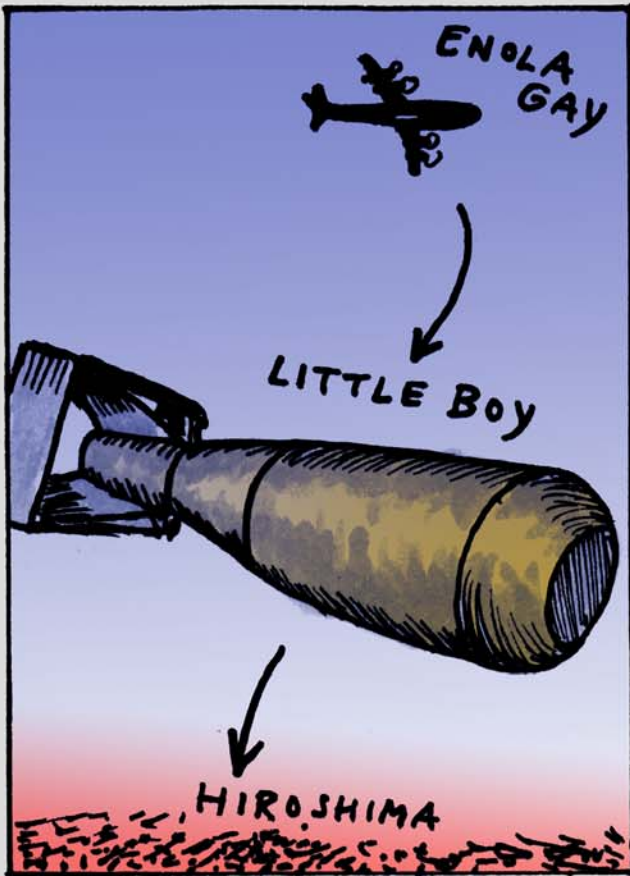
Nuclear energy was as invincible as a naïve american boy with super powers.



It was “Nuclear Boy”:  
Our awesome future!



Yet, pretty much from the beginning, atomic power would create one or two PR problems ...



By the 70ies, there were more and more critical questions, and Nuclear Boy would quickly lose his youthful charme.



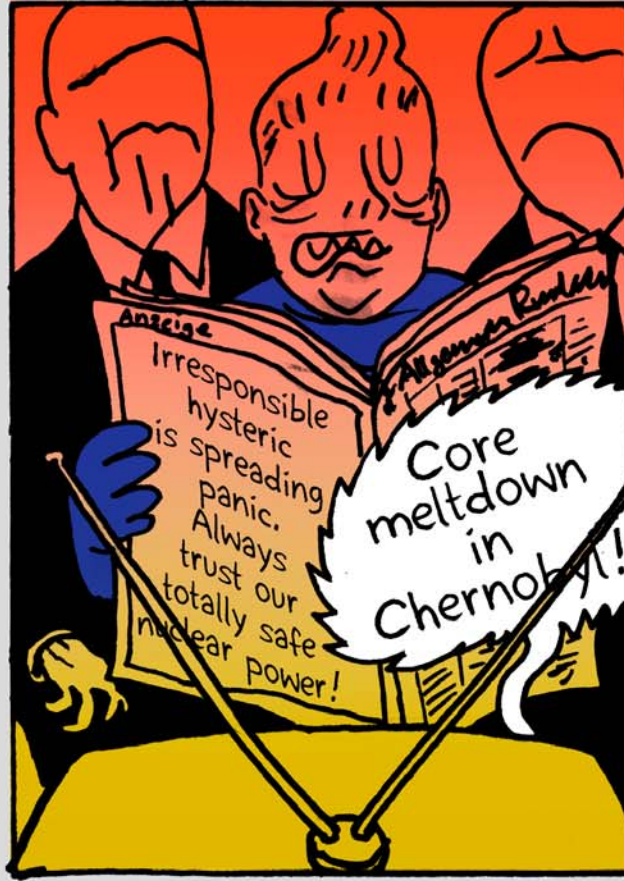
In Germany, Helmut Schmidt didn't mind getting nuclear power through by suggesting the people an imagined energy crisis.



The nuclear power lobby felt inclined to thoroughly discourage its more insistent critics, such as author Holger Stroh, whom they choose to attack personally by an advertisement in the press ...



The timing proved somewhat inconvenient: The advertisement was published, of all days, on April 26th, 1986 ...



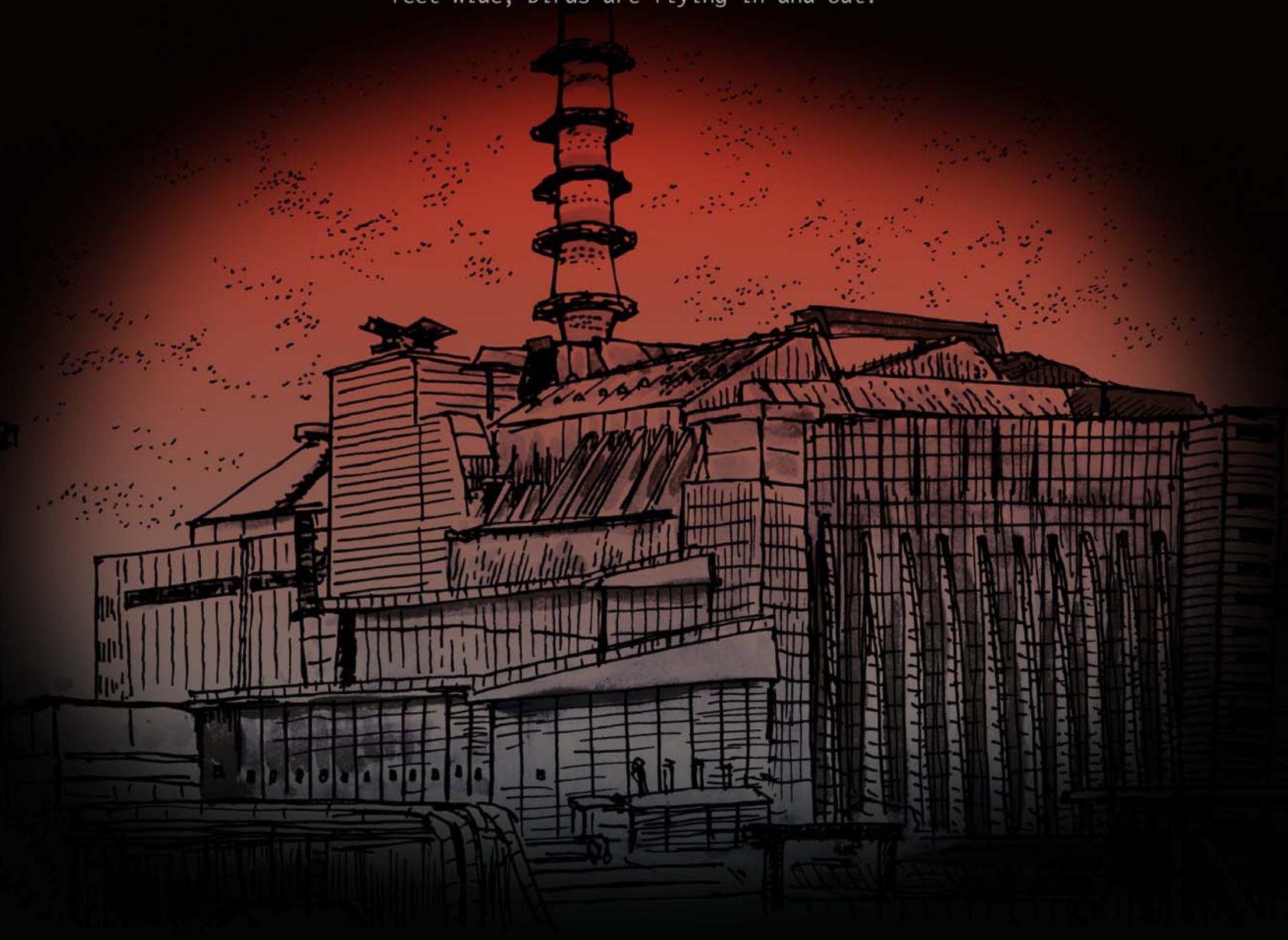
Over night, Nuclear Boy became an old man.



It is only now that many people are starting to  
see nuclear energy in a new light ...



The wreckage of the Chernobyl reactor and its forever radiant contents were clad in a concrete mantle, called the “sarkophagus”, which has been crumbling away for years now. Through many holes, some of them several feet wide, birds are flying in and out.



Nuclear Boy is visiting a village in the only “moderately” restricted area around the Forbidden Zone. Here, people are allowed to live and to cultivate the soil.

Well, I'd say things are starting to seem real merry again in the 4th zone! Just look at those splendid potatoes!

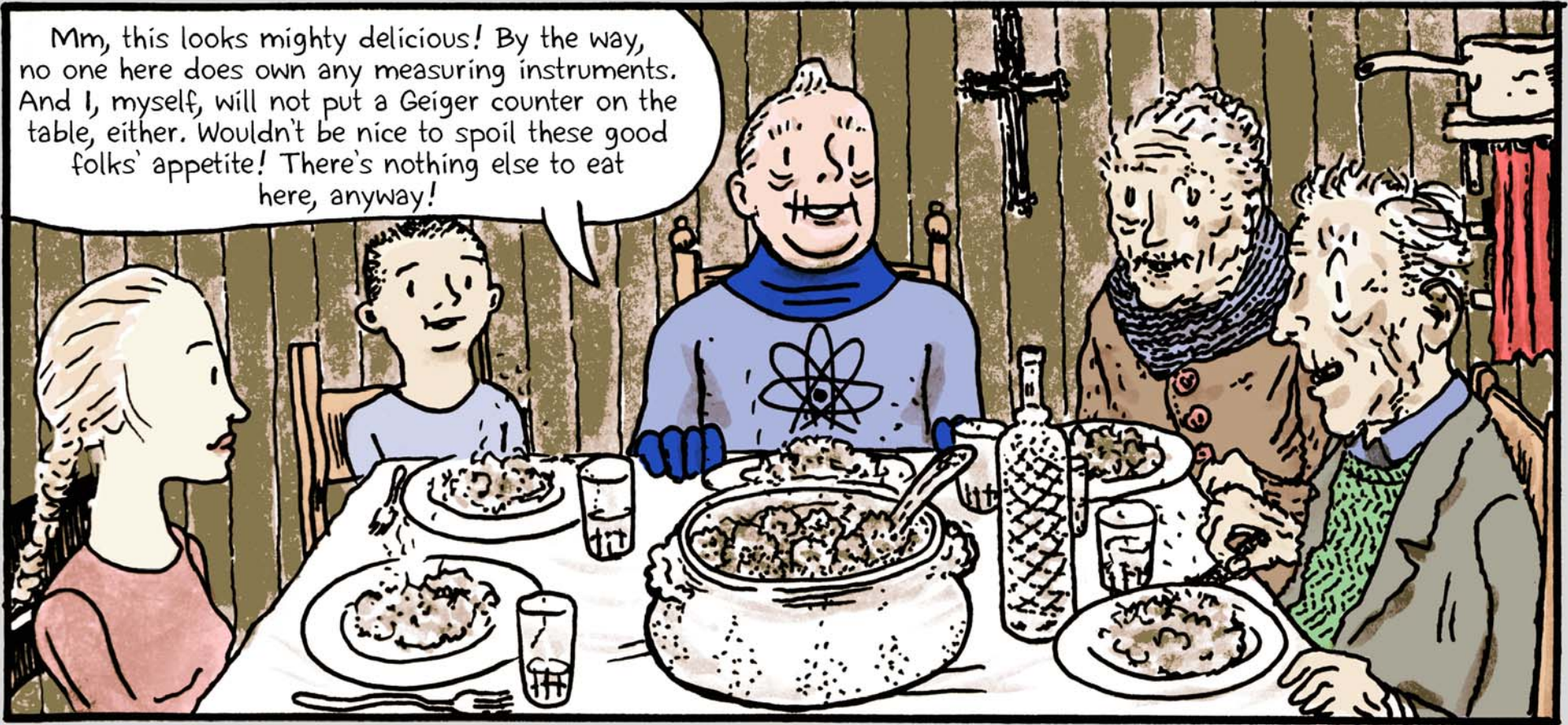


People here are producing most of the things they need themselves. As they have done as long as they can think. Now, who could explain to them that's not possible anymore, that even the ground outside the Forbidden Zone is highly contaminated?



And: What choice do they have, anyway?

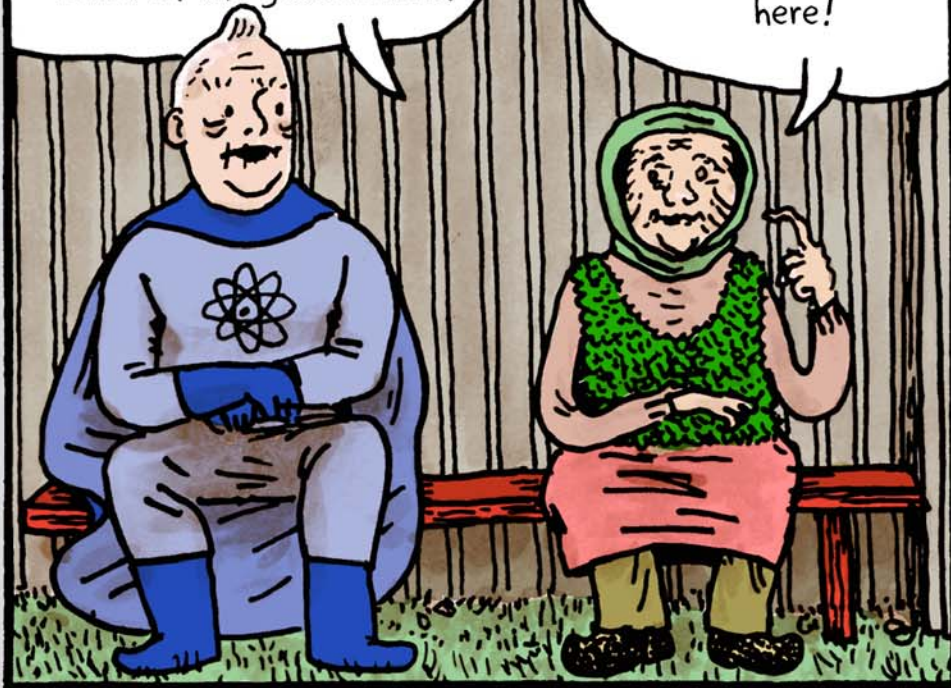
Mm, this looks mighty delicious! By the way, no one here does own any measuring instruments. And I, myself, will not put a Geiger counter on the table, either. Wouldn't be nice to spoil these good folks' appetite! There's nothing else to eat here, anyway!



Some of the elders even went back to their homes in the Forbidden Zone, where they now lead a clandestine life, without electricity or running water.

I haven't seen this „radioactivity“ yet! What's that supposed to be, anyway? That's just a scam of the government!

We will not let ourselves get expelled from here!



But the biggest problem of the Chernobyl region are not some obstinate elders who stubbornly refuse to be uprooted: It's the millions of children being forced to live in a contaminated area.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) claims that the Chernobyl catastrophe has caused a total of 56 deaths and 4000



cases of thyroid cancer. The World Health Organisation (WHO) adopted their account without any doubts.



This results in a fatal lack of medical care for those suffering from radiation sickness, mostly children.



The nuclear power lobby and its propaganda machine are still heard in the media. For an example, they were able to place the documentary "Nuclear Nightmares" in the BBC "Horizon" programme, in which "respectable" scientists are suggesting that the health problems after the Chernobyl catastrophe might just be "psychosomatic" stress syndromes, and who speculate about whether the "slightly higher" radiation in the restricted area around Chernobyl might even have a positive effect and could turn it into some kind of "health resort".

Contrary to that belief, the initiative „For an Independent WHO“ thinks that in the area around Chernobyl



one million children have gotten sick because of the nuclear contamination.



Since April 26th 2007, with a daily protest vigil in front of the WHO headquarters they remind of their cover up tactics.





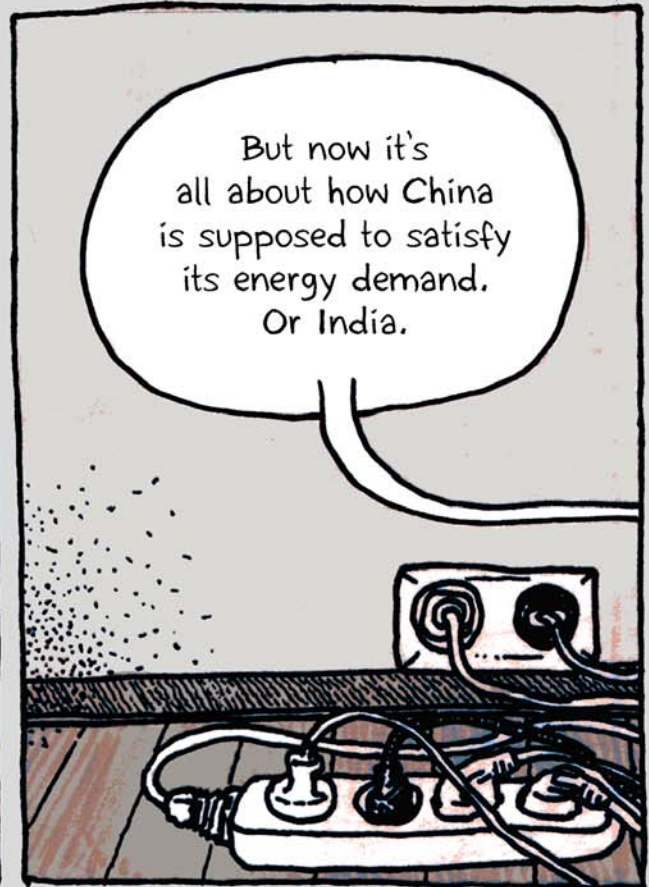
To decades after Chernobyl. The author is consuming power.



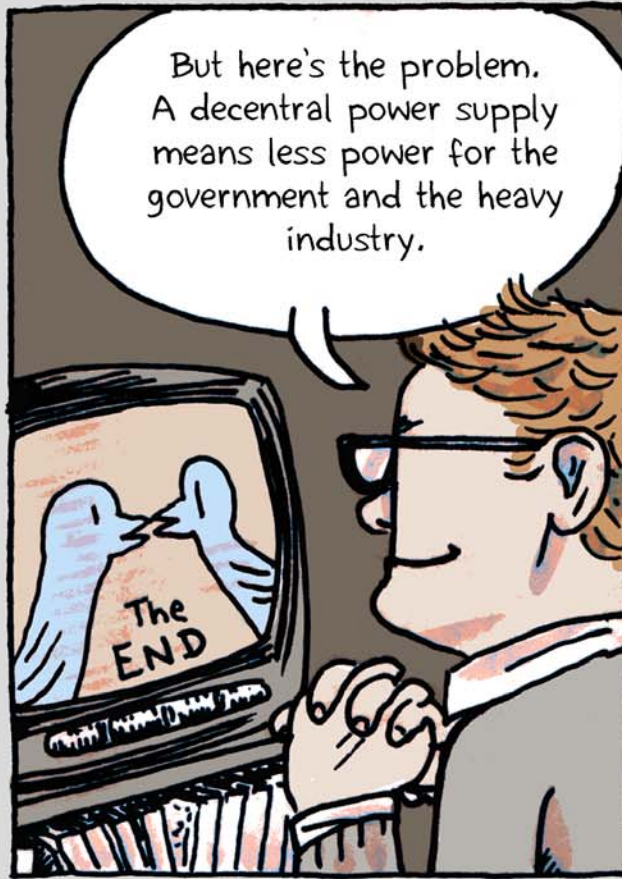
Quite some time has passed now since the core melt accident ...



It really seemed to be the last straw for nuclear power, then!



But now it's all about how China is supposed to satisfy its energy demand. Or India.



And on top of that, nuclear energy is even unharmedful to the climate. Or so they say ... Which is debatable, though:

The cooling water warms the rivers and can endanger their ecological system. But above all, there's the unsolved problem of having no safe final disposal of nuclear waste ...

And anyway, didn't we, after the Chernobyl catastrophe, vowe to think of nuclear power with nothing but contempt and total panic, from now on? ...

RRRRRRRRRR

BZZZZZZZZZZ

Normally, it's like so:  
First, you become frightened of  
something.



Then, you think about that  
something. And then you're less  
frightened than before. Or even  
not frightened any more at all.

But in the case  
of the core meltdown  
of Chernobyl, things  
seemed to be a bit  
different:



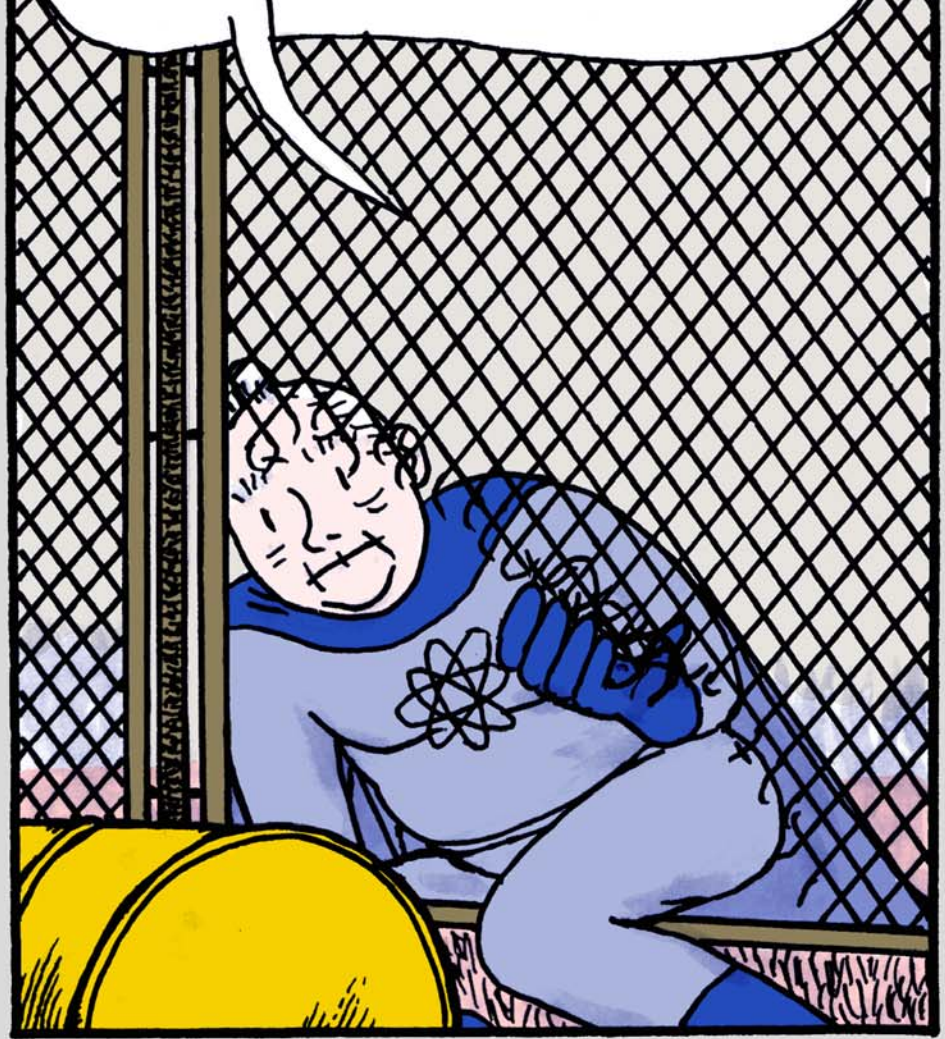
We did think about  
it and got ever more  
frightened ...



But honestly: I really don't have a clue why people would make such a fuss about Chernobyl! At least, that was just an accident!



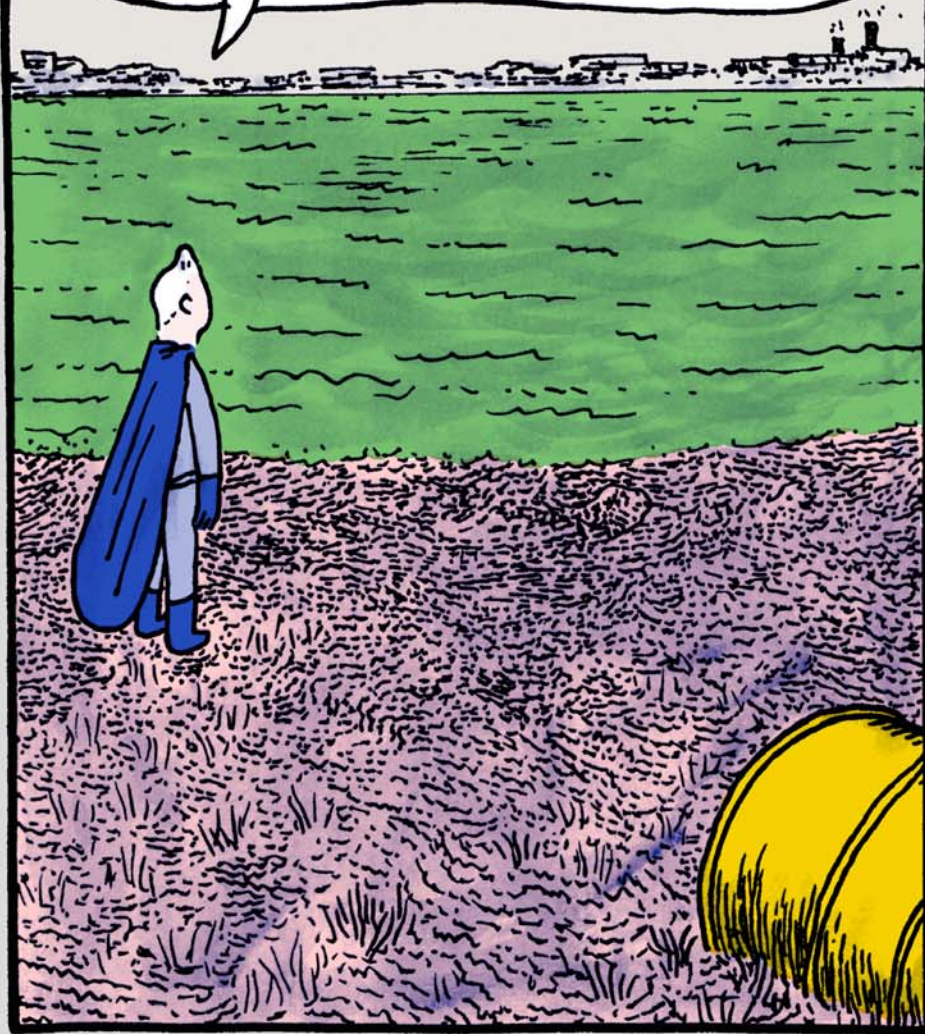
All the while things are done on purpose which are no less frightening. For instance, liquid radioactive waste is being poured into the lake Karachi in Western Siberia for decades ...



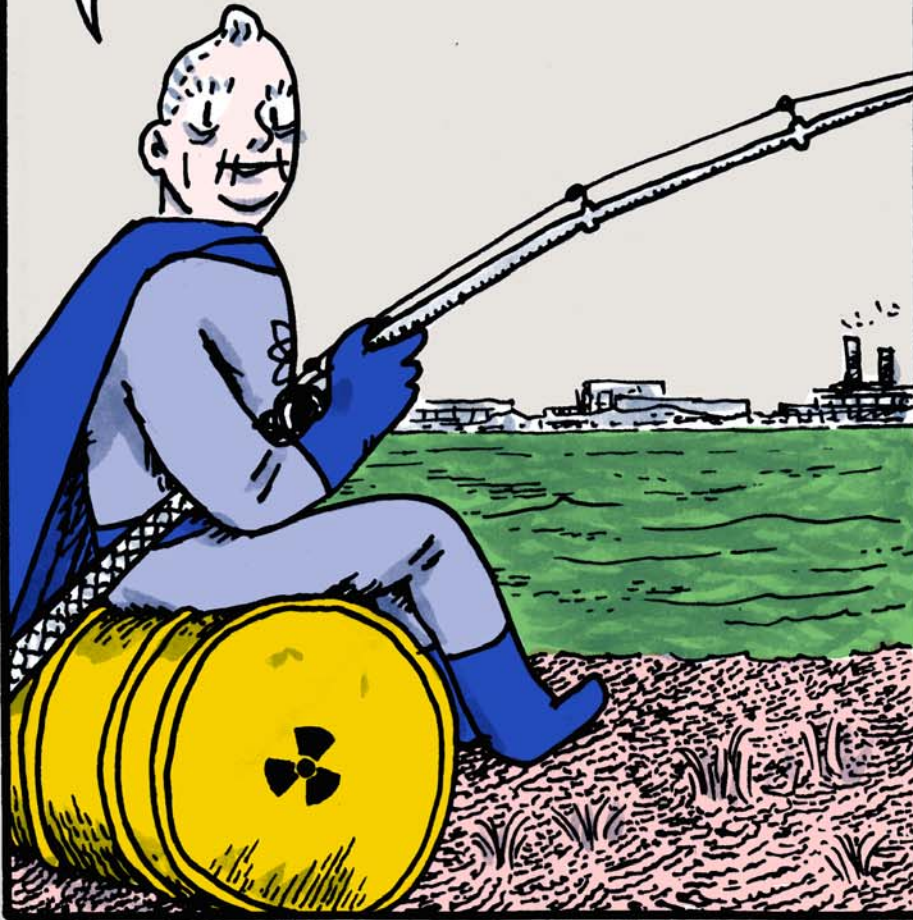
This method is also called  
"disposal by dilution".  
The British, for an example, stream  
plutonium from the nuclear site in Sellafield  
directly into the sea ...



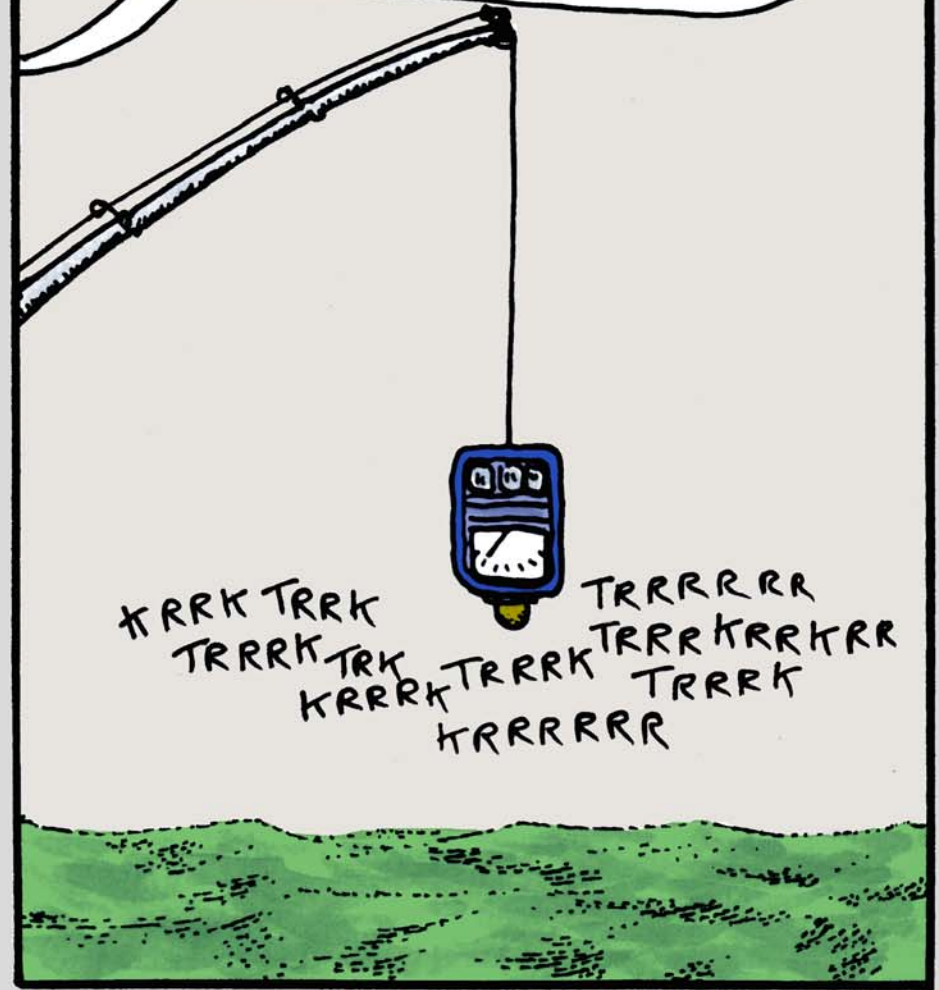
Here at Lake Karachi though, it came to  
an unexpected effect: At the bottom  
of the lake, the liquid waste has turned  
into a dune of radioactive salt.



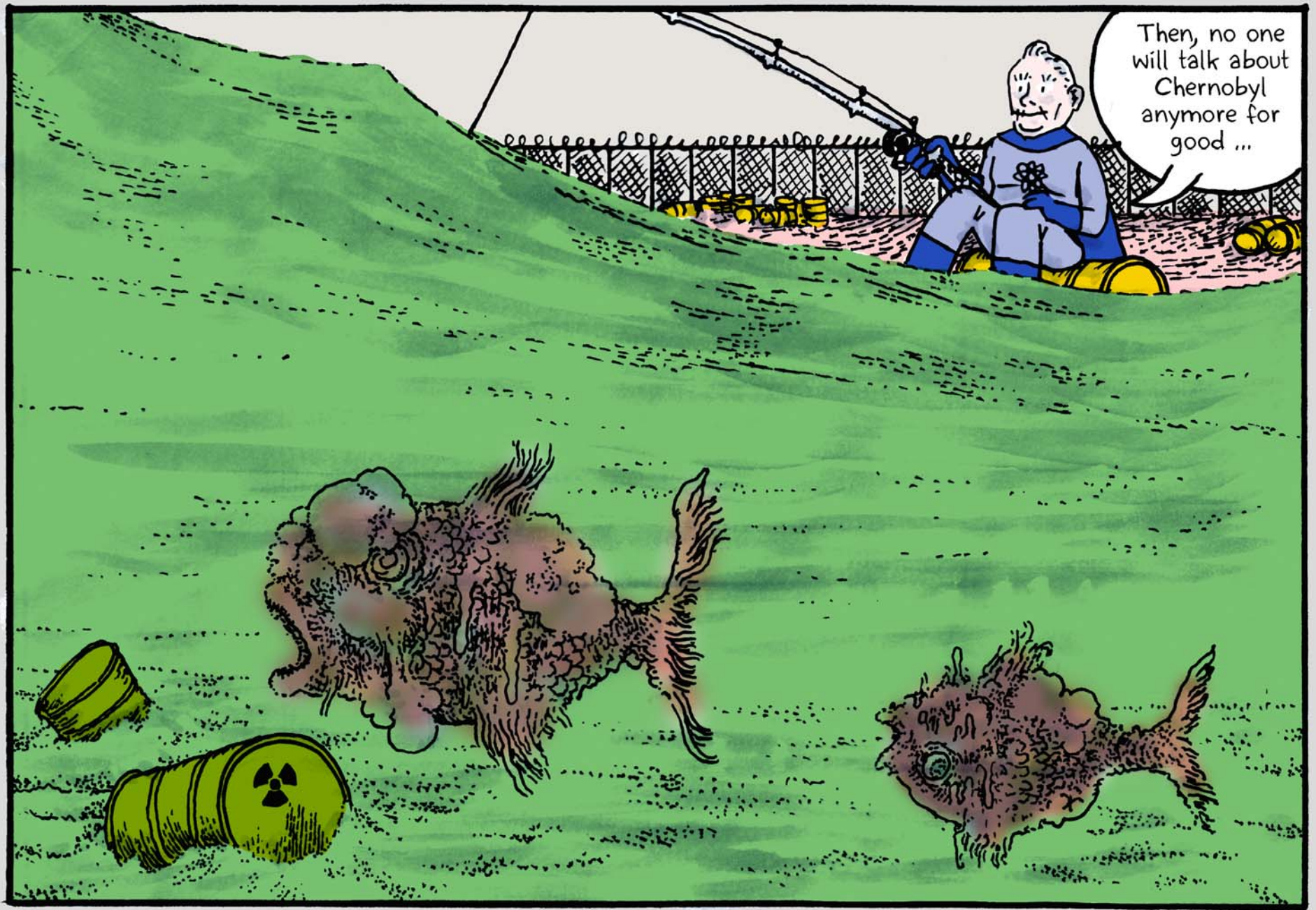
This salt dune is now wandering towards the watershed from which the sources of several Siberian rivers are fed ...

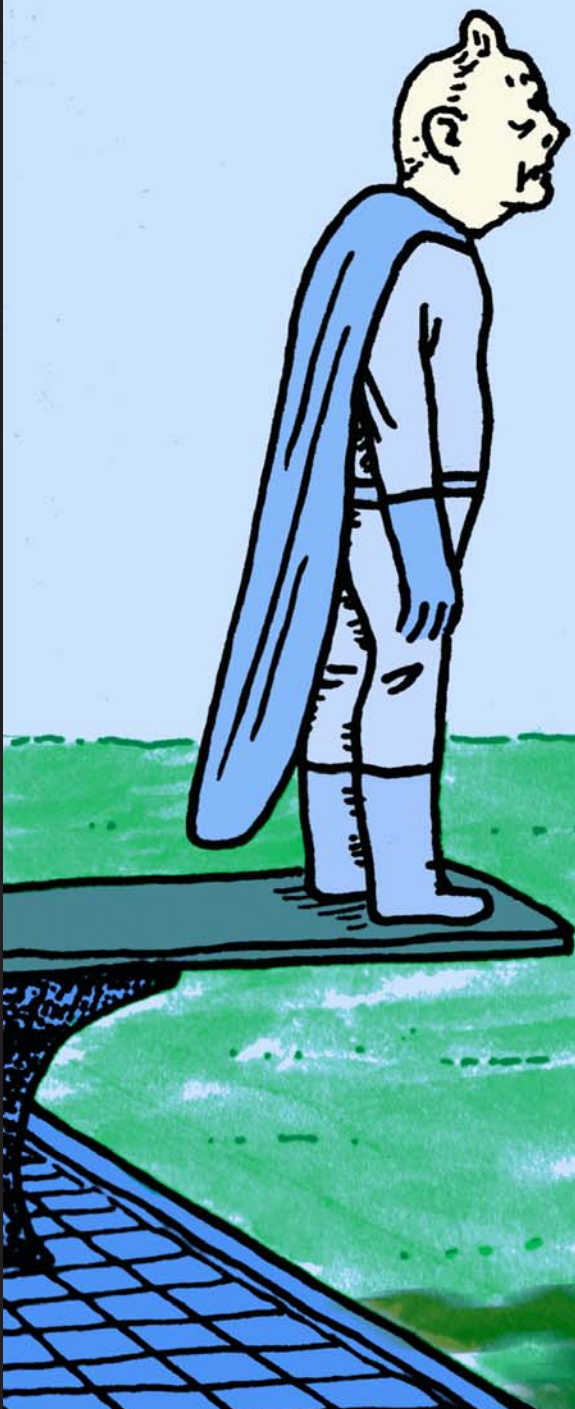


When the salt dune reaches it, its substance will be spread all over Siberia. Al-Qaida could only dream of such a terrorist assault!







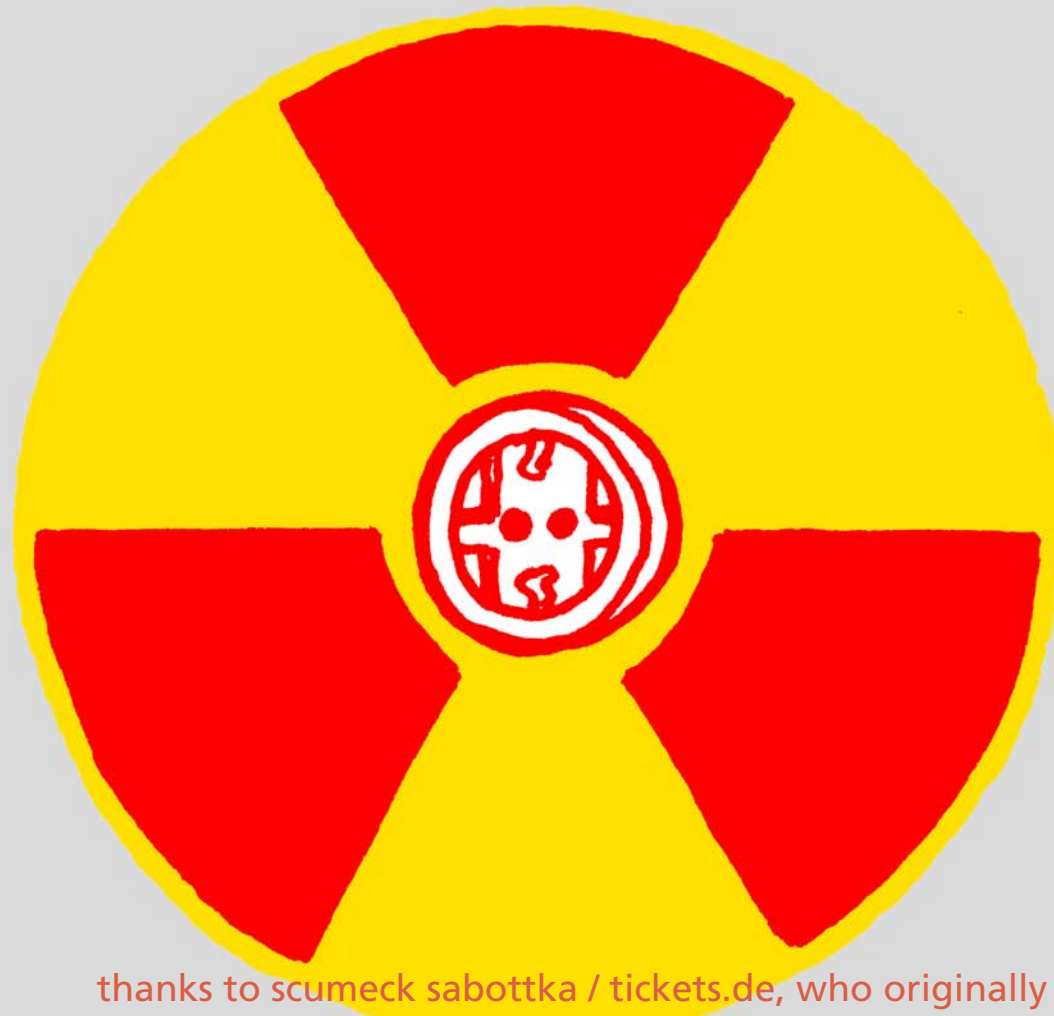


Not to say that to realize what utter madness the use of nuclear power is would save us now from what irrevocable damage we have already done. For an example, for milleniums to come we will float on an ocean of liquid nuclear waste, sloshing around in countless barrels on this planet ...

But is it really the wise thing to do to listen to those who'd like to keep on like that for ever and ever?  
Or, isn't that rather completely insane?  
Even if you refuse to be in constant terror of the next big accident:  
The nuclear power plants will poison us, and those who come after us. Even without a catastrophe.

# Chernobyl

1986 – ∞



thanks to scumeck sabotka / tickets.de, who originally  
commissioned this comic

text & drawings  
© 2008 kai pfeiffer



Read more:

Wikipedia article about the Chernobyl disaster:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernobyl\\_disaster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernobyl_disaster)

Recommended books:

Alla Yaroshinska: Chernobyl. The Forbidden Truth

Svetlana Alexievich: Voices from Chernobyl. The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster

Igor Kostin: Chernobyl. Confessions of a Reporter