“What is the cost of lies? It’s not that we’ll mistake them for the truth. The real danger is that if we hear enough lies, then we no longer recognize the truth at all.” This quote, muttered in the first seconds of the episode, sets the tone of the entire series. The explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine was a horrific manmade disaster, but the politics, cover-ups, and confusion that followed were just as devastating. This series had been on my list for quite a while, as I was hearing nothing but absolutely amazing things about it, even to the point of it rising to the top 5 of the *Top Rated TV* section on IMDb. After finishing it, I can safely say that I totally understand.

By focusing the first episode on the actual Chernobyl meltdown, there is no wasted time in getting straight into the action. We are given the perspective of the scientists inside as it happens, as well as the firefighters called into action, and the citizens of Pripyat, who are clueless as to the magnitude of the disaster they are witnessing before them. This show does not shy away from any of the gory and gruesome details of what radiation can to do to people, and it can be downright terrifying at times to watch. Yet despite this, it never feels overboard or exaggerated, and the gorgeous cinematography from Jakob Ihre makes it difficult to look away. You would have no idea that this was his first foray into television! Long wide shots keep all the action in frame, and he knows when to hold an image just long enough to create suspense, especially with the human drama in boardrooms and meetings that in a lesser show would be considered the boring parts.

Following up the actual disaster in the first episode seems like an impossible task, but things manage to escalate up until the very end. We are introduced to the scientist Legasov (Jared Harris), who struggles to convince the Soviet politicians that there is something to worry about, as they only want to brush it off as hysterics and propaganda that will damage their reputation. What makes this especially smart is that since viewers were already placed directly in that situation, we know what kind of fate awaits those that continue to deny it, None of this would be successful though if the actors did not expertly portray the characters, which further draws viewers into this bleak and scary world.

Another thing that I really loved about it was the different perspectives that we are shown. Sometimes we are following the scientists and politicians in their attempts to slow the spread of nuclear fallout and sometimes we are following one of the firefighters that was on site when the meltdown happened with his wife. This subplot is truly tragic and hard to watch, but the characters make a few silly decisions that took me out of it and made me question how someone could think certain things were good ideas. This bouncing between characters and their situations creates a feeling of frenzy and hysteria that makes you feel what those on the screen are. This is what makes it such an engaging watch. The entire time, my eyes were glued to the screen wondering how things would progress, as I actually felt for the people involved. Even the Soviets that make things harder for our scientists are developed enough to make them more than just the one-dimensional people standing in the way of fixing everything.

I have read some articles questioning the validity of some situations portrayed in the show, but I am not here to talk about those. Looking at this show purely as a piece of cinema, it is seriously phenomenal. It is a masterclass in suspense and keeping viewers clicking next episode until the final credits roll. Even with its bleak themes, scary situations, and graphic imagery, it is a show I recommend to anyone with interest in just good old television. The acting, cinematography, set design, makeup, and writing come together to create a world that nobody would want to be in, but one that is hard to leave.