

Synopsis: *White Armada*

White Armada is a highly realistic thriller from the barren, frozen border between Norway and Russia. The story begins with an accident at a factory in the Russian border town of Nikel, driving hundreds of inhabitants to flee towards Norway. The accident is staged by the Russian authorities in order to put Norway and NATO under pressure. Their plan succeeds. Internal strife splits the alliance and in the subsequent political and military power struggle, the Norwegian town of Kirkenes is at risk of becoming the new Crimea.

The story's central drama relates to how under extreme hardship the main character, Norwegian special forces operative Ida Vinterdahl, and her unit, prove to be the only ones who can stop Russia from annexing a region of Norway.

Key characters

Ida Vinterdahl: Lieutenant and squad leader in Group Alpha, Norway's foremost elite forces. She has seen tours in Afghanistan and learned Russian at the Army intelligence Training College. She knows that as a woman, the spotlight is always on her. Ida is strong-willed, loyal and determined, and carries inside her an anger she doesn't always manage to control.

Frank Halvorsen: Major and leader of Group Alpha. Legendary marine, marked by events from the past, who now has doubts whether he is still cut out to be on active duty.

Gry Utvik: Undersecretary to the Norwegian delegation at NATO in Brussels. Experiences the splits in NATO from the inside. She's also the one who picks up the first traces of a solution to how Norway can extricate itself from the crisis with Russia.

Alexander Ivanov: Ivan is a security guard at the factory in Nikel. He soon understands that the accident has been staged by the Russian authorities and quickly becomes someone who both Norwegian and Russian marines want to get their hands on. Ivan dreams of a job and residency in Norway.

Key supporting roles

Cornelius Mørken: Petty officer and marine. IT specialist on Ida's team.

Amir Esfhanian: Staff sergeant and marine. Norwegian-Iranian. Marksman on Ida's team.

Lasse Brox: Conscripted border guard. Stationed at Bjørnshundhøyden observation tower on the border.

Huuva: Sergeant and border guard. Ethnic Sámi. Knows the border region like the back of his hand. Becomes Ida's vital back-up support.

Dimitri Volkov: Russian major and Spetsnaz (Russian special forces). The brains behind the accident at the factory in Nikel and the unrest in Kirkenes. Hunting for Alexander Ivanov.

Paasche: Ambassador with the Norwegian delegation to NATO.

Åsa Michalsen: Chief of Police in East Finnmark police district.

Isak Lindt: Civil engineer. Is on board the frigate KNM Otto Sverdrup to trial a new missile that is eventually fired at a target in Russia.

Plot

In the depths of winter, an accident at a factory in the Russian city of Nikel sends a stream of refugees across the border to Norway. Under demanding conditions, Norwegian support services work to full capacity to solve the situation while the Russian government acts with unusual passiveness. Major Frank Halvorsen of the Military's Special Forces suspects that everything is not quite as it seems and sends Lieutenant Ida Vinterdahl's squad up to Kirkenes. Halvorsen's suspicions turn out to be correct, and in the course of a few hectic days relations between Norway and Russia go from business-like to hostile. For the first time since the Cold War, armed conflict between the two neighbours is not just possible, but likely.

Part one – Case Yellow

Norwegian intelligence is warned by a trusted informant in the Russian Ministry of Defence that something serious is underway in the north. In Nikel, security guard Alexander Ivanov discovers unidentified men inside the factory works. The intruders see him, and Alexander barely escapes with his life. The subsequent explosion and fear of radiation sends hundreds of refugees towards the Norwegian border. Without informing the Norwegian government, Major Halvorsen sends Lieutenant Vinterdal and marines Cornelius Mørken and Amir Esfhani up to Kirkenes to keep an eye on the situation.

Part two – Russian peace

The stream of refugees threatens to overwhelm reception services in Kirkenes. At the same time, mobile and other communications networks stops working and several power outages occur. Ida suspects that the Russians are behind it. In Oslo, the government calls a meeting of the crisis committee. The foreign minister is able to dispel her colleagues' fears – she has received assurances from her counterpart at the Kremlin that the Russian government is doing its utmost to solve the crisis. In Kirkenes, Ida sees little evidence of that promise. A statue of a Russian soldier that was erected in memory of the liberation of Kirkenes in 1944 is defaced. Incited by Russian special forces disguised as civilians, the local Russian population protests. Things go from bad to worse when a carefully scripted provocation planned by Major Volkov leads to a Russian refugee being shot by a Norwegian soldier. The situation in Kirkenes explodes. Russian civilians occupy the police headquarters and blockade all major roads out of the city. The electricity supply, mobile phone

network, landlines and internet goes down all over the municipality. The hashtag #KirkenesisRussia trends on Twitter. Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, warns the Norwegian government that when it comes to rescuing Russian citizens, national borders are of no concern. Ida finds an alternative means of communication and makes contact with the Armed Forces Special Command to request new orders. Frank Halvorsen travels north, but is delayed by the collapse of the IT systems at Norwegian airports.

Part three – Corps diplomatique

At NATO headquarters, Ambassador Paasche has requested an extraordinary meeting of the North Atlantic Council, where he petitions for allied help for Norway. Gry has been given the task of making sure that none of the allied countries vote against the motion.

On the way from Tromsø to Hammerfest, a helicopter carrying Frank Halvorsen is nearly shot down by Russian fighter jets. Frank is shaken by the experience, and begins to doubt whether he is still cut out for these kind of missions. Ida's team ends up in a skirmish with Russian Spetsnaz. One Russian and one Norwegian policeman are killed in the crossfire. Ida receives orders to track down Alexander. With him as a witness, the Norwegian government can prove that the Russians are behind everything – but Major Volkov is also looking for the young Russian. Back at NATO headquarters, Gry, to her surprise, learns that France is going to oppose the Norwegian request. Norway is on its own.

Ida locates Alexander at a hospital on the outskirts of Kirkenes. She gets there at the same time as Volkov. In the following exchange of fire, Volkov manages to escape with Alexander. The Russians flee in a car towards the border. Ida and Huuva pursue on snow scooters, but once again, the Spetsnaz major slips away. In the meantime Frank Halvorsen arrives in Kirkenes and liberates the police headquarters. Chief of Police Michalsen immediately launches a purge of Russian provocateurs from the city. Norwegian fighter jets patrol the skies above East Finnmark. Just as it seems that Norway is about to take back the initiative, one of its aircraft is shot down by Russian anti-aircraft fire.

Part four – Deep Strike

The United States provides Norway with guarantees that American forces will be sent to the country as soon as possible. However, it will be more than a week before they arrive. Between now and then, Norway has to fend for itself. As long as the airspace above Finnmark is under Russian control, it is not possible to send in Norwegian reinforcements. Ida and Frank are therefore given responsibility for a bold plan involving a Norwegian long-range cruise missile being used to knock out Russian air defences. Ida is sent across the border to guide the missile to the target while Frank takes command of a defensive position to cover her retreat. The missile hits its target but the damage is far more serious than feared. The Russians strike back, and during an intense battle at a frozen lake literally on the border between the two countries, Ida barely escapes with her life. Amir is wounded and Frank Halvorsen goes missing, presumed drowned in the one of the open fractures in the ice after a bombing raid. In the aftermath of the hostilities, Russian forces occupy parts of Finnmark. In Brussels, Gry receives sensitive information from a Ukrainian

contact. It turns out that Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, visited the forward Russian military HQ during the invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014.

Part five – The writing on the wall

Russia declares its willingness to pull out of Finnmark if Norway gives the country greater rights on Svalbard. In a final, desperate attempt, and without permission from either the Chief of Defence or the government, Ida Vinterdal and her team are sent behind enemy lines to kidnap Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister who, according to information obtained by Gry Utvik, they have reason to believe is at Russian military HQ. If they succeed, the prominent Russian politician can be used as a bargaining chip. But the chances of success are slim.

***White Armada* is the first freestanding novel in the series of Ida Vinterdahl and the Norwegian special forces.**