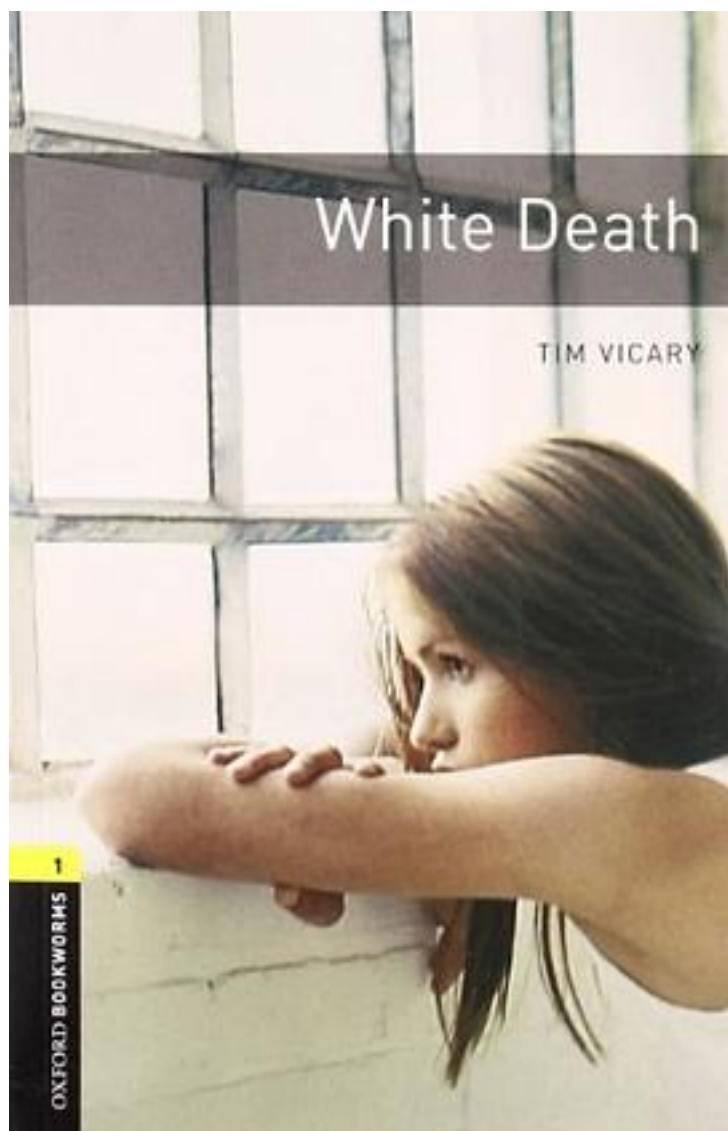


White Death



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著者:Robert Edwards

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The Russian invasion of Finland in November 1939 was a critical turning point in world history. Only now, with the opening of the Russian archives can this extraordinary story be told in full. Two months after his cynical alliance with Hitler and their joint invasion of Poland, Stalin ordered the Red Army to crush the Finns. Everybody expected a walk-over: the odds were 10:1 in Stalin's favour. But the Finns fought bravely, and the Red Army - its high command decimated by Stalin's purges - fumbled to defeat after defeat. Tens of thousands of Russian soldiers died in the snow. Only after four months and the massing of over a million men and thousands of guns did the Russians break through and force the Finns to accept terms. The 'Winter War' revealed Stalin's army to be as badly led as it was poorly equipped. Hitler's generals, previously so nervous about their leader's plan to invade Russia that they contemplated a coup d'etat to remove him, were now convinced they could win. Stalin's blunder in Finland led directly to the Nazi invasion of Russia the following year. In Britain and France, the spectacle of Russia invading a neutral neighbour shattered the left-wing political parties (although the DAILY WORKER's headline on the opening day of the invasion was 'HEROIC RED ARMY SMASHES MARAUDING FINNS'). Attlee expelled one pro-Russian MP and cleared the way for a coalition with the Conservatives. Paradoxically, the 'Winter War' also saved the Red Army and Stalin. With the results of the purges all too clear, Stalin promoted outspoken technocrats like Zhukov and accepted reforms that would enable the Russians to survive the German assault in 1941 and ultimately stop them at Stalingrad.

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