

"DANGEROUS GROUND" FROM THE BARREL OF A GUN

BY PIERS BECKLEY

FADE IN:

CLOSE ON A CHILD'S PICTURE

The sun, as drawn by an eight-year old.

Bright and yellow, rays beating down from it upon a stick figure of a MAN HOLDING A GUN IN THE AIR.

And as we pull out further from the picture, there's another man with a gun, firing it.

The picture-bullets fly from the gun across the paper towards a STICK FIGURE CHILD.

By the foot of the child is another STICK FIGURE ADULT, lying on the floor, lurid red crayon blood pooling around their head.

Across this, incongruously, the sound of a woman speaking Portuguese.

CASS (O.S.)

(in portuguese)

If you find an unexploded bomb or mine, never touch it, play with it, or kick it.

There's another picture next to the first. A jeep driving down a road is caught in a YELLOW CRAYON EXPLOSION. More stick figures lie on the ground next to it.

And more, and more of these pictures blu-tacked to the rough-plastered pale-blue-painted wall in

INT. AFRICAN SCHOOLROOM - DAY

Bright sunlight streams in through the windows of the room where a class of 8 year olds watch with their teacher as ANDY WARREN - 40, black Londoner - leads the show-and-tell. A doctor by trade, he's got a temper like a summer storm, quick to rise and quick to fall.

ANDY

Be especially careful if you're playing in an overgrown area, an old military base, or anywhere that's been used to store weapons.

CASS RYAN - 30s, mixed-race British, new to the job and still hasn't settled in yet, is translating.

CASS
(in portuguese)
Be especially careful if you're
playing in an overgrown area, or an
old military base or... or a...

She's lost the word. It's on the tip of her tongue.

She should know this.

The kids are looking at her expectantly. The teacher too.

ANDY
Everything OK?

CASS
I'm sorry. I just...

She leaves the classroom.

ANDY
Um. Be right back.

But no-one there speaks English. The kids start chattering
among themselves until the teacher hushes them.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE AFRICAN SCHOOLROOM - DAY

Cass leans her forehead against the coolness of the shadowed
wall. Andy comes out after her, worried.

ANDY
What happened?

CASS
I've lost the word. Supposed to be
the translator and I can't even
remember the word for - damn,
paiol, it's paiol, how can I be so
stupid.

Andy grins, relieved.

ANDY
Back on the horse.

TIME CUT TO:

EXT. MINECLEAR BASE - DAY

A jeep with a MineClear logo on the side pulls up outside the
base, a small collection of one-storey buildings with tin
roofs.

Cass and Andy get out and start hulking their bags back to
the main building.

CASS
I'm so sorry. I just froze.

ANDY
Nothing to apologize for.

CASS
(and I fucked it up)
The one thing I do here.

They walk across the wooden verandah and into

INT. BASE REC ROOM - DAY

Passing Stuart Prentice, Ordnance Officer, known to one and all as HEADCASE - white British, 20s, caffeine-molecule t-shirt matched with bluejeans - on the sofa, his head in the Economist.

HEADCASE
(not looking up)
Boom boom talk?

ANDY
Could've gone better. But we made it to the end.

CASS
I screwed up.

Find ROSIE BRYDON, spiky and hard to befriend, crossing the room to the kitchen counter. Early 30s, white British, short hair, combats. Knows the signals this sends - and dresses accordingly.

ROSIE
Surprise me.

And the last member and boss of the MineClear team IAN COPELAND - late 40s, white British, sees every side of a problem - is at the table filling out paperwork, a cup of tea by his side.

IAN
Play nice everyone.

A muffled RING RING from the telephone. Everyone looks around.

ROSIE
All right, who had it last?

CASS
I took a call last night.

ROSIE
And?

CASS
I put it down somewhere.

Rosie glares. Ian gets up.

IAN
Come on, can't be far.

Everyone starts casting around for the phone. Headcase stays where he is.

Rosie homes in on the sound.

ROSIE
You too Headcase. Move your arse.

HEADCASE
Eh? Oh.

He dives down the back of the sofa with his hand, pulls out the handset - it's a radio-handset-plus-base-station job, so it doesn't have a line into the wall - and hands it to Rosie without looking up from his magazine.

ROSIE
MineClear.

EXT. WEAPONS CACHE - DAY

NAOMI is on the other end of the line. 30s, local girl made good. Beside her stands VICTOR, 20s, shifty.

NAOMI
Looks like we've got a live one.

INT. BASE REC ROOM - DAY - INTERCUT AS REQUIRED

ROSIE
What is it?

NAOMI
I've only had a quick look inside but I saw small arm and anti-personnel crates. When can you come over?

ROSIE
Not got anything planned. Maybe a couple of hours to get to you?

NAOMI
That would be lovely.

ROSIE
See you soon then.

She hangs up, throws the phone onto the sofa.

ROSIE (CONT'D)
Who fancies a road trip?

ANDY
I'm only just back.

ROSIE
Ian?

IAN
Let me finish my tea first.

ROSIE
Be round the front in five.

She pats her pockets. Nothing there. Looks at Andy.

Andy throws her a bunch of keys which she catches mid-air.

ROSIE (CONT'D)
Thanks.

She heads off to the garage.

IAN
Cass?

CASS
Don't think I was invited. Besides,
I'd just get in the way.

IAN
You need to see how we safe a
cache. Might as well be today.

ANDY
There's nothing to it. Quick stock
take and secure anything you can't
destroy on site. Walk in the park.

CASS
Right.

HEADCASE
(doing scare quotes with
his fingers)
"Rebels" or "Government"?

IAN
Yes.

CASS
So neither of them will want that
any more, then.

IAN

We're still here. We should still be doing our jobs.

CASS

As long as it's safe.

HEADCASE

We blow things up for a living to stop people blowing things up for a living. In what world will that ever be safe?

IAN

Come on, let's get going. We've got small arms to cut up.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Blue sky.

Bright African sunshine beats down on a dusty road.

A LAND ROVER is parked by the side of the road.

In the back of the jeep sits LUC, a local boy of about 12 dressed in scrappy trousers and faded t-shirt. Once he would have had a surname, but it's long gone. All he has with him now are the memories of the long civil war.

Lying on the corrugated floor of the jeep beside him is a craft gun - a pistol made by a local blacksmith. It's not very accurate. It doesn't need to be.

He wears an iPod, and taps his feet to the beat.

Come over now to the side of the jeep and find CAPTAIN YVES MUTUMBUKA. Black, local, professional soldier. Looking through binoculars.

Next to him, REMY MOLOTO. Black, local, Kalashnikov propped up against the side of the jeep.

REMY

Well?

EXT. MINECLEAR BASE - DAY

Grainy and jerky. Cass, Ian, and Rosie load up the jeep, climb in and drive off.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Yves pulls down the binoculars.

YVES

Give them an hour to get a very long way away. Then we move in.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

A couple of hours later.

Naomi waves at the approaching plume of dust on the sandy track. The jeep pulls up beside her and Ian gets out of the driver's seat.

NAOMI

Ian, this is Victor. Victor, Ian, Rosie and...

CASS

Cass.

NAOMI

Good to meet you Cass. Victor's the one who told us about the cache.

IAN

What've we got?

NAOMI

Most of the houses in this village were destroyed, and the minefield means it's a ten-mile hike to the nearest water. So no-one's re-settled, which is why we didn't know about it.

ROSIE

How'd you get in?

NAOMI

I asked Victor for the key.

ROSIE

You're not just a pretty face then.

NAOMI

I have brains and beauty. But not for you.

She links arms with a surprised-looking Victor.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

This way.

The two of them lead the way into the warehouse, the other three following at a distance behind.

IAN
(sotto)
Crashed and burned.

ROSIE
Ah, she's just playing hard to
get.

IAN
In your dreams.

ROSIE
You'd better believe she's in my
dreams.

CASS
Is Naomi your type then?

Rosie glares at her.

ROSIE
None of your business, new girl.

Cass falls back.

CASS
(sotto)
Just making conversation.

And by now they've crossed the threshold into

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Concrete floor, rusting tools. An open trapdoor is set into
the floor next to an old brick wall.

VICTOR
Down here.

ROSIE
Come on then Victor. Let's see
what you've got.

INT. WEAPONS CACHE - DAY

Rosie climbs down an iron ladder leading into a cellar area
filled with boxes stacked on freestanding metal shelves.

Ian climbs down. Clocks one of the boxes on the way - PRX-
13 ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINE. 5 UNITS.

Pauses. Doesn't like it. Carries on down.

INT. BASE REC ROOM - DAY

Headcase hasn't moved from the sofa. Though he's now reading Doctor Who Magazine instead of The Economist.

Andy is making himself a sandwich at the kitchen counter.

THE SOUNDS OF A CAR driving up outside.

ANDY
Expecting anyone?

HEADCASE
No.

ANDY
Not even interested to see who it is?

HEADCASE
No.

ANDY
Fine, I'll go.

He puts the sandwich down and heads towards the door to the verandah.

Before he's halfway across the room the door's kicked open. Remy enters, points the AK-47 he's holding at both of them in turn.

REMY
Don't say a word. Don't move.

Andy freezes in his tracks, stops moving.

Headcase stays on the sofa, mouth open.

Luc comes in on the left, craft gun in his hand, big toothy grin.

LUC
Bang bang.

And then from the other door, Yves enters.

YVES
Gentlemen. We have business to discuss. Specifically, you have something that we want.

ANDY
There aren't any guns, and all the ordnance here has been made safe.

YVES

We have guns already. We're after something a little more portable.

ANDY

Money? I'm going to reach for my wallet, if that's OK with you.

YVES

Fine.

Andy - very slowly - pulls the wallet from his back pocket.

Yves nods to Luc, who goes and takes it from Andy. Passes it to Yves.

Yves pulls a bunch of US dollars from the wallet, tucks them in his pocket, and throws the wallet into the bin.

YVES (CONT'D)

Thank you. It all helps. But I'm afraid we aren't after your money either.

ANDY

What do you want?

YVES

One of your staff is a medical doctor.

ANDY

Is someone injured?

YVES

No. But we need the tools of his trade. Antibiotics, painkillers and so on.

(beat)

All of them.

ANDY

I don't understand.

HEADCASE

The ceasefire broke a couple of weeks ago. Suddenly it's all become valuable.

YVES

Just so. Everyone needs to stock up again. There are still plenty of guns in the country despite your best efforts. Antibiotics, though. Morphine. Right now those items are better than cash.