

FACING THE ENEMY

A play about fear and conflict

by

Tony Diggle



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INTRODUCTION

Many years ago I was on holiday in a country abroad which had been through two brief wars in its recent past. One afternoon the group I was with had occasion to have tea with a community leader who had done his national service in the army during a relative “peace time”. He told us how on one occasion on border patrol they had got into a fire fight with some enemy insurgents and had had to kill them. Up until then he had always regarded fighting for his country as a noble cause to be proud of: after this experience he saw the insurgents only as fellow soldiers doing the same thing for their country. From that moment on he had regarded the continuing conflict as pointless and not the way to try and move the situation forward. Although he had become a successful businessman, it was clear that the trauma left by that encounter remained.

The story he told that afternoon made such a strong impression on me that I have finally fictionalised and elaborated it into this play.

The play deals with a number of themes including: the difference between fighting for yourself and fighting against somebody else; the question of what happens when conflict at state level becomes the latter and how to stop it festering and growing until it can only be solved by some sort of cataclysm; the difficulties of making moral decisions when no single player can see the whole picture; and the wider dangers inherent in such situations.

INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that there is little that is new to say about such topics. But if that is the case, why are there so many conflicts of this nature still going on? The play has been written as a fable for modern times.

Tony Diggle

PRODUCTION NOTE

Staging

The play is complex from the staging point of view with the action taking place in many locations, sometimes more than one in the same scene. In one scene, (Act 1 Scene 12), the action is taking place in four separate locations simultaneously, one of which is behind the audience (a voice must come from this point). Basic, symbolic or illustrative set items are all that is necessary: only the set for “A Room in Tiger’s House” needs some specificity.

Casting

The play has 7 main characters and 9 minor characters. Tefalka Quemoda, the father, and Tefalka Quemoda, the son, should be played by the same actor. With doubling the play can be performed by a cast of 10.

The action of the play takes place in Herenow and Postydia,
two neighbouring states.

Time: The Present

ACT 1

- Scene 1: Filmed Report
- Scene 2: The Prime Minister's Office
- Scene 3: Filmed Report
- Scene 4: The Prime Minister's Office
- Scene 5: A Hotel Room
- Scene 6: A ridge near Tiger's house
- Scene 7: A room in Tiger's house
- Scene 8: A ridge near Tiger's house
- Scene 9: A room in Tiger's house
- Scene 10: Flashback: A room in Tiger's house
- Scene 11: A room in Tiger's house
- Scene 12: Flashback: A Border Area
- Scene 13: A ridge near Tiger's house

ACT 2

- Scene 1: A room in Tiger's house
- Scene 2: A detention cell in Herenow
- Scene 3: A room in Tiger's house
- Scene 4: Flashback: A room in Tiger's house
- Scene 5: The Prime Minister's Office
- Scene 6: A room in Tiger's house
- Scene 7: A ridge near Tiger's house
- Scene 8: The Prime Minister's Office
- Scene 9: A Hotel Room
- Scene 10: The Prime Minister's Office
and the Central Square in the Postyidian Capital
- Scene 11: The Central Square in the Postyidian Capital
- Scene 12: A room somewhere in the centre of the
Postyidian Capital
- Scene 13: The Prime Minister's Office

LIST OF CHARACTERS

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

John STEADFAST

Aged 75. Prime Minister of Herenow

General “TIGER” RABANN

About 50, Minister of Supply in the Herenovian Government, retired from the army

Commander WILLARD RABANN

Just under 50, younger brother of TIGER, Commander in the Herenovian Special Forces, also an auditor in the Finance Ministry

ALTHEA

About 50, wife of General TIGER RABANN

ALPHA

Head of Herenovian Intelligence

Captain ASHLEY

A captain in the Herenovian Special Forces

TEFALKA QUEMODA (The Son)

A nomadic leader in opposition to the Postydian Government

LIST OF CHARACTERS

MINOR CHARACTERS

NEWSCASTER

TECHNICIAN

Nick COLWYN, a Western Journalist

AIDE to John STEADFAST

GUARD

TEFALKA QUEMODA (The Father)

The most senior nomadic tribal leader

A CAPTAIN

A SOLDIER

Dr ZABAC

A scientist

Other parts and voices to be played by members of the company.

ACT 1

Scene 1 Filmed Report

(An empty stage is in darkness. A news jingle plays.)

VOICE OF NEWSCASTER That's the news tonight, and now we can go back to our main story, and Nick Colwyn. Nick, I think – oh, we seem to have lost the link ... Well he is reporting from one of the most far-flung areas on earth ... *(sound fades)*

(Lights up on COLWYN centre stage left.)

VOICE OF TECHNICIAN We've lost the link, Nick.

COLWYN It's hardly surprising really. Where we are doesn't exist, or rather, it's where we fear to find ourselves. It exists in many places and nowhere. Nowhere, now there's a good word. *(The word NOWHERE appears on a sign upstage right.)* It's greek. It comes from utopia: ou meaning not, and topos meaning place. No place. Nowhere. Welcome! Yes. Let's say we're nowhere. Let's call this country Herenow, because it is here and now. *(The sign becomes HERENOW, an anagram of nowhere.)* Let's say it has a neighbour that's the opposite. The opposite of no place, the opposite of utopia: Dystopia. *(The word DYSTOPIA appears on a sign upstage left.)* We'll call it Postydia, for that is here too. *(The sign becomes POSTYDIA, an*

ACT 1

anagram of dystopia.) Herenow has forged ahead, for a long time ago when there were fewer people and more open land, settlers came and took it forward with outside knowledge. Herenow is a nascent democracy with capabilities in some areas to rival any in the world. Postydia hasn't done so well: far less developed it has a military dictator and far more people too. And the settlers that brought knowledge to Herenow have left land disputes with Postydia in their wake. Let's say that in the southern-most part of Herenow, there lies a plain. Let's say that the nomadic tribes of northern Postydia have land rights over it. Let's say that this situation has led to a tale of conflict and violence that has gone on for the last forty years. And today's story? (*Enter STEADFAST centre stage right.*) The main story?

STEADFAST I'm the main story. (*COLWYN turns to face STEADFAST.*) That's to say I'm the main story tonight. I'm the Prime Minister of Herenow. (*Looking at COLWYN.*) But as for the real story, I'm just the fulcrum of that.

VOICE OF TECHNICIAN Link's back, Nick.

STEADFAST I must get ready for my cue.

(*Exit STEADFAST.*)

COLWYN You get the general idea. So ... off we go.

(*COLWYN moves downstage left.*)

SCENE 1

VOICE OF NEWSCASTER And now we can go back to the story on Herenow, and Nick, I think that the Prime Minister is about to appear.

(Lights come up to suggest a balcony: an AIDE is looking into the adjoining room. There is the sound of an expectant crowd.)

COLWYN Yes, and as you join us, we can see one of his aides at the balcony door, and here comes the announcement now.

(The AIDE comes centre stage.)

AIDE Ladies and gentlemen, The Prime Minister and saviour of Herenow... John Steadfast.

(Enter STEADFAST who comes centre stage to tumultuous cheers. The AIDE applauds and then slowly goes back into the inner room. STEADFAST smiles and waves.)

COLWYN Well, what can one say? The Prime Minister acknowledges the cheers. A few days ago war seemed inevitable, but today another treaty has been signed between Herenow and its neighbour Postydia. And all because of this man. Of course there's a lot we don't yet know... but tonight the Prime Minister can only be savouring what must be the greatest triumph of his long career.

(The crowd continues to cheer. STEADFAST waves. Then suddenly silence with the just a spotlight on STEADFAST. Exit COLWYN. During the next

ACT 1

speech TIGER, WILLARD, ALTHEA and TEFALKA QUEMODA enter and stand behind STEADFAST.)

STEADFAST I watched the recording later. I wasn't thinking about triumph at all. I was thinking about the personal tragedy of a handful of people caught up in the crisis, and what had happened between us on a day forty years earlier. They're the real story.

(STEADFAST comes forward.)

It was the day another treaty was signed, the treaty that ended the last of the old wars. I was a senior combat pilot then. But my commanding officer, Marshal Rabann, he was our real air ace. He wanted his two young sons and the daughter of his deputy to see the leaders arrive for the signing ceremony, in particular the most senior tribal leader, Tefalka Quemoda, rarely seen in the capital. I was deputed to make sure the children could see all the arrivals from one of the government buildings.

(A spotlight comes up on TEFALKA QUEMODA, who waves impersonally.)

'Look, children,' I remember saying, 'there he is, the man in the flowing robes. That's Tefalka Quemoda, the great tribal leader.'

(The spotlight fades down on TEFALKA QUEMODA. During the next speech, STEADFAST moves to indicate the characters he is talking about, and they are lit and react accordingly.)

SCENE 1

Afterwards the children were allowed to play in the official garden. When I went to collect them to take them home – well, they'd got out of control: the boys were fighting, the girl was screaming and things had to be said. All quite normal for excitable children. I never gave it a second thought. I had no idea how my encounter with the children that day would play into the crisis forty years later.

(Enter COLWYN downstage left. STEADFAST turns to him.)

It's time we really got going.

(A news jingle. Exeunt ALL. Lights up on COLWYN centre stage.)

COLWYN I'm standing on the edge of the border plain. Earlier today, the President and military dictator of Postydia announced that new documents just discovered showed the original border treaty to be invalid and that the plain should never have been ceded to Herenow at all. He said that he would tell the Herenovians to go from the plain, and if they did not, he would declare war and evict them.

(During the next speech, STEADFAST and General TIGER RABANN enter downstage right.)

COLWYN So far there has been no response from Herenow. As I speak, their Prime Minister is meeting with his top advisers. But it's not what the region's most prosperous country wants to hear. This is Nick Colwyn reporting.

(Exit COLWYN.)

Scene 2

The Prime Minister's Office

(Enter AIDE and ALPHA)

AIDE The Head of Intelligence, Prime Minister.

STEADFAST Come in, Alpha.

(Exit AIDE.)

ALPHA I was expecting the Minister of Defence, not the Minister of Supply.

STEADFAST General Rabann is here in his capacity as an elder statesman. This is an informal meeting, Alpha. I need wise heads at the outset, before the hysteria starts. All right, you've both got copies of the documents. What's this about?

TIGER They are crude mock-ups designed purely to give the Postyidian dictator an opportunity to declare war.

STEADFAST Alpha, why has Intelligence given us no advance warning of this threat?

ALPHA Because the threat was not created in advance. Postydia's economy is in a state of collapse and the country's threatening to implode. The President appears to have decided that his only chance of survival is to create an issue in an attempt to unite the country behind him.

SCENE 2

STEADFAST I find that rather glib, Alpha.

TIGER He's right though, Prime Minister. For weeks now, army units have been continually redeployed. There's so much unrest in the country, the army's all over the place. Even his commanders can't keep track of what's going on.

STEADFAST And will he survive, Alpha?

ALPHA Initial reports show a surge of public support.

STEADFAST You say his army's dispersed. How long before he's ready to invade?

ALPHA Two weeks. Less if we're unlucky.

STEADFAST What about the state of our own forces and equipment?

TIGER We have been on the highest alert for some time in case a crisis broke. We can only prepare for so many eventualities. Subject to those provisos we are at maximum readiness with no shortages.

STEADFAST That's something... I can't believe this is all going to happen again.

ALPHA I'm not sure it's that simple, Prime Minister. If it comes to war we shall win. We always do. But the President of Postydia doesn't have to win: all he has to do is to convince his people that he's making a stand on behalf of the poor and oppressed. We suffer huge

ACT 1

casualties and all our hard-won progress is set back. The Postyidian people may be rallying behind their President, but I'm not sure that our people will be so supportive this time. They don't want a war, and if it can't be avoided they'll want us to attack first.

STEADFAST Yes, well, we can't just invade. What about the opposition groups in Postydia?

ALPHA He's too well protected by his pampered elite corps: no faction believes that they can get away with assassinating him.

STEADFAST What about the elite corps themselves?

ALPHA They are afraid of what will happen if he falls. It's the usual story. They are going to cling on for as long as they can and hope for the best.

STEADFAST One stupid man! He's just needs a push, a little push.

TIGER What about Tefalka Quemoda?

STEADFAST What about him?

TIGER He is the most senior nomadic leader.

ALPHA Yes, but he won't do anything. He's a pacifist wimp. A fat lot of good it was giving him political asylum. He's even worse than his father.

TIGER We may have to get him on board.

SCENE 2

STEADFAST What do you mean, General?

TIGER I've just been thinking. In two weeks' time, it will be the tribes' annual "gods of the fathers" ceremony on the border plain.

STEADFAST *(Pause)* Thank you, General Rabann, I hadn't got that far.

ALPHA So that's what he's thinking of! Postyidian troops massed at the border. Our troops in reserve positions. The tribes in the middle on the battlefield. One spark: conflagration. Very clever.

STEADFAST Yes, very clever. Not what our intelligence has been. It's obvious that it has been planned all along. He has been containing the situation just below crisis level until he could time his move to perfection. This is a massive failure, Alpha...

ALPHA It was not planned, sir. General Rabann has already confirmed that.

STEADFAST I am not interested in denial, Alpha.

ALPHA Sir, it may well be that he has had this and indeed other similar ideas locked away at the back of his mind for occasions when he felt under immediate threat. He may even have discussed them with one or two members of his family or inner circle, circles that even we can't penetrate. But if it had formed any part of planned strategy, our deepest sources would have known about it. We may value such things, but

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the President of Postydia is just a wicked, cynical opportunist. *(Pause)* Prime Minister, we have to break out of this. *(Knowingly)* We do have another option now.

(TIGER starts.)

TIGER That's a bit of a leap, Alpha.

STEADFAST Yes, well, gentlemen, let's not get overwrought now. There'll be a full meeting of the Cabinet tomorrow morning. We have a fortnight. A week is a long time in politics, two an eternity. Let's not get too far ahead ourselves.

(Exeunt ALL.)