

ROSS KEMP ON GANGS: THE INITIATION

Written by

DAVID STEANS

Spec Script

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FADE IN:

INT. NON-DESCRIPT ROOM - DAY

The film opens on an extreme close-up of ROSS KEMP's face. His eyes, and the beads of sweat forming on the flesh around them are in sharp focus.

A blurry metal object obscures our vision of his face from below the eyes. He is shaking, though not with fear. He is focused.

The blurry metal object only gradually becomes recognisable as the barrel of an automatic rifle.

The camera cuts to the other side of that automatic rifle: a YOUNG GIRL in a balaclava pointing it at Ross's face. The framing is the same as the previous shot. Her eyes are vacant, but deep and long-lidded, emphasising her femininity.

Though we cannot see the gun in this shot we realise immediately she is the one holding it. We see the top of her shoulders, hunched and ready to fire.

ROSS KEMP (VOICE OVER)

More than anything, more than her youth, it was the girl's blank expression that disturbed me the most. I had to understand that expression, to burrow into its blankness.

The camera cuts back to Ross. Close-up of his eyes.

ROSS (VO)

Although I may not look
it, I was calmer then. I had a
method for tense confrontations.
The method worked somehow,
because I defused plenty. This
footage was shot in Rio, months
before, before the finger. I
don't know if I could do it
today.

MAIN TITLES - MONTAGE:

We see a run-down house that is being besieged by
police officers, guns pointed at it. Suddenly the front
windows explode. The camera lurches downwards suddenly.
A shower of broken glass and debris is heard loudly on
camera, amidst shouts and commotion. We hear the
breathless panic of our camera crew and a rising
crescendo of gunfire in the not-too-far-away distance.

ROSS KEMP ON GANGS: THE INITIATION

Music begins on main title. It is brooding, a slow but
urgent electronic thrum.

Inside a tiny garage, we see Ross interviewing a group
of burly men in balaclavas, all sprawled across a pick-
up truck. He is surrounded by his camera crew. He nods
patiently as the impressive gang wave their hands and
shout.

More titles intercut with images of gangsters around
the world, often jeering and gesturing towards the
camera.

A slain body covered in blood lays strewn across a dusty street as a goat walks across the foreground of the shot.

A woman, in tears, pushes the camera away with her hand.

Giant graffiti of a skeletal gangster looms from crumbling wall of a favela.

Ross looks aghast at something off-camera. The camera jerks urgently.

Music and titles end on:

EXT. CAR YARD - NIGHT

Ross sits amongst a gathering of Maori bikers. They ride around him and the camera crew, shouting and screeching and pulling wheelies. Ross seems calm and unfazed by all the activity, the centre of a maelstrom.

FADE IN:

[NOTE: This following section is provisionally set in El Salvador, but could be filmed or indeed set elsewhere in South America, depending on production logistics. It hits on broad themes of Latin gangsters in Brazil, Columbia, El Salvador and Mexico. We are interested in the poverty, the drug industry, the viciousness of the cartels, the trafficking of both drugs and gangsters to and from the United States, and the Government's collusion in it all]

EXT. EL SALVADOR - DAY

TITLE: SOUTH AMERICA

Shots of city of El Salvador. The heat shimmers off the roads. Numerous policemen or security guards survey the streets, all brandishing automatic rifles.

ROSS (VO)

El Salvador: the smallest and most densely populated country in South America. And the most dangerous.

Shot of Ross Kemp walking down a barrio street. The shots now describe the slums: dogs, small children etc. We move from the metropolis to the inner city.

ROSS (VO)

I'd travelled to this tiny region to meet a gang who had brought terror to the streets. By far the biggest and most deadly in El Salvador.

Groups of men in the barrio menace the camera. Some are masked. All are armed. The camera lingers on their faces. Some wear balaclavas, many are armed. All the unmasked faces we see are adorned with blue and black ink, the tattoos transforming the mens faces into war masks.

ROSS (VO)

That gang is *Numeros Para Arriba*, also known as NPB, or more simply and effectively just: Numbers.

Close up of Numbers gang member staring directly at camera. He raises his hands in front of his face and displays them in an elaborate configuration. His tattooed fingers interlock with his styled moustache to form a sign: 8 6. He continues to leer through it at the camera.

ROSS (VO)

I'd just arrived in El Salvador.
In fact we'd gone to San
Salvador, the capital, and were
trying to meet El Mara
Salvatrucha, or Numbers, the
biggest and fastest growing gang
on the planet and notoriously the
most violent.

Wide shot of Ross casually talking to a group of what appear to be gangsters and *favelados* (non-gangster ghetto residents), many of them children. We see the camera crew milling around but their presence is also casual.

Medium shot from within the group. Shot of Ross in profile. The heat is palpable.

ROSS

So, I know that you're not all
involved with Numbers-

Cut to handheld shots of the group laughing and joking.

ROSS (CONT'D)

(voice raised to be heard)
But I've got a question for
those of you who are-

Shots of several men throwing up signs in response. Mood still seems good-natured. Cut back to Ross.

(MORE)

ROSS (CONT'D)

If it wasn't for Numbers, for
your involvement in the gang,
what do you think you might
have done with your lives?

GANGSTER

(earnestly)

Played football.

GANGSTER

(slyly)

Nothing!

The gangsters and favelados erupt in laughter and horseplay. We see Ross's cameraman grin despite himself at the retort.

Close up of facially-tattooed gangster mugging at the camera. Throws up a complicated gang sign.

ROSS (VO)

I couldn't help but thinking
this chap could have had an
alternative career as a
contortionist.

EXT. SAN SALVADOR PRINCIPAL COURT HOUSE - DAY

Wide shot of the court house. It is bustling with people. The central gates form the centre of the shot, which emphasises the grandness of the building. The many people moving through the gates and waiting around the steps are out of focus. They are anonymous cogs.

ROSS (VO)

For twelve years El Salvador
was ravaged by a bloody and
indiscriminate civil war.
Since peace was restored in...

(MORE)

ROSS (VO) (CONT. D)
1992, that violence has been replaced by a new conflict between El Salvador's two rival gangs, Numbers and Twenty Birds, or just Twenty. What I'd want to know is how did these gangs develop so quickly and why are they so violent?

Lengthy tracking shot of Ross from behind as he walks through the gates of the court house.

ROSS (VO)
My South American journey began here, at the principal court house in San Salvador. I wanted to see for myself just how bad the gang problem was. Immediately I was struck by the number of handcuffed youths on display, many of whom proudly present themselves as gang members to our cameras.

Another tracking shot similar to the last - though this time it follows a seemingly endless line of handcuffed youths. Many are handcuffed one to the next. Our brooding electronic music hums. The camera pans up and down.

Cuts to: close ups of various youths mugging at the camera as the shot rolls past. They configure their hands and faces into the shapes of letters, numbers and patterns.

Music finishes on: wide shot of Ross and his camera crew setting up around an interviewee. They are stood just inside the court house gates.

ROSS (VO)

My contact here was Tom Gibb, a British journalist who had lived here in San Salvador, on and off, since the civil war. He was my guide, interpreter, and whilst filming, friend.

Medium shot of the interview commencing. TOM GIBBS and Ross are in profile. The cameraman and mic operator arrange themselves.

ROSS

Okay, are you ready Tom?

TOM GIBBS

Sure.

ROSS

Can you tell me a little bit about where we are?

As he gestures towards the courts and the buildings with fingers very pale:

TOM

We're at the central criminal courts for San Salvador, erm, that's these buildings, and over there that's the morgue, and thats really the two ways out for an awful lot of gang members, they're either bought here and then onto jail, or they're brought here, dead.

ROSS

One thing I've noticed in the short time I've been here... is a lot of weapons, a lot of people carrying guns.

Ultra wide shot of the criminal courts-and-morgue complex. In the shot we can indeed see lots of people carrying guns. In the middle background we can see the interview taking place.

Cut to: close up of Tom.

TOM

This is a very, very violent country. I was really hoping after the civil war that there would be peace, real peace, but the violence has carried on, at almost the same rate. There was a civil war in which 2 percent of the population were killed, that in British terms would be like a million people, and the legacy of that has continued, this war going on between the two main gangs, the Numbers and Twenty, and there are daily killings from that.

Cut to: close up of Ross

ROSS

So that Morgue over there is a busy place?

TOM

Indeed, yeah.

Ross's head begins to turn just as Tom finishes his sentence. We see a balaclava-wearing man in all-black flash past the camera.

Camera pans out to reveal a group of balaclava-wearing people, all armed with automatic rifles, marching past Ross, Tom and crew. They are escorting a single unarmed MAN IN A RED T-SHIRT to the principal courts.

Cut to: Ross, alert, scanning the surrounding activity.

ROSS

(shouting to Tom above the noise)
Who are these guys?

Slow, almost languid shots of the SPECIAL FORCES accompany Tom's following description:

TOM

These are the special forces,
the special police. They are
masked so they can't be
recognised. So that they can't
be targeted by gang members,
and so that their families
won't be targeted.

ROSS

And they've just picked up that
guy?

Cut to: medium shot of the man in a red t-shirt, sat on the steps. He does not look worried. The special forces surrounding him are tense, interlocked in a tight formation around their charge. Their stiffness electrifies his cool, imbuing him with a powerful screen presence.

TOM

Yes.

ROSS (VO)

I'd seen a steady stream of
youths handcuffed and escorted
into these buildings since
arriving at the Principal
Courts. What was different
about this guy? Why did he
warrant such special security?

Cut to: close up of Ross's face. The timing of the edit indicates that he is scrutinising the man.

Cut to: tracking shot of Ross walking over to the man in a red t-shirt. The crew is in tow.

Cut to: the man looking up to Ross from the step. His face expresses no emotion.

Cut to: medium handheld shot of Ross and the man in profile.

ROSS
(softly)
Why are you here?

MAN IN A RED T-SHIRT
I don't know, man.

Cut to: close up of the man. Shakes his head.

ROSS (VO)
I didn't believe him.

Cut to: close up of the eyes of a Special Forces agent, sweating underneath their balaclava.

Return to: medium handheld shot of Ross and the man in profile.

ROSS
What's your name?

MAN IN A RED T-SHIRT
Ernesto.

ROSS
And you don't know why you're here?

ERNESTO

No man. They picked me up and
now I am here.

ROSS

Are you involved with the
gangs here in El Salvador?

ERNESTO

No.

CUT TO:

EXT. A HOUSE - NIGHT

A MASKED MAN is slowly approaching the house. He is
creeping with a crouch that belies his violent
intentions.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

A young BOY and GIRL sleep side by side in a cramped,
bare room. The boy is older than the girl - around 12
and 8 years. Despite the late hour we can hear the song
of nocturnal birds twittering away.

Close up of the girl who is suddenly awakened by a bang
from below the room - it is surely the noise of someone
entering the front door. Followed by thudding steps
which awaken the boy in turn. The girl's face is
illuminating by the light cast from the bedroom door,
now flung open.

The scene plays out on the girl's face - we see nothing
else, but hear everything very clearly. The boy cries
out. The crying is cut short by a burst of rifle fire,
deafening in the tiny bedroom.

The fire from the gunfire that we can hear but not see illuminates the girl's face in flickers. The face registers numb shock, but does not flinch at the automatic noise violently punctuating the night and the birds.

Extreme close up of a tear rolling from the girl's eye. The camera focuses in on that tear until it fills the screen, until the camera breaks its surface and wets the lens.

FADE TO:

INT. TEAR

In the tear we can see reflected the head of her murdered brother. His disembodied head floats in her tear, bobbing in it like a swimming pool float. His head sheds tears also. The camera, plunging further into the girl's tear, focuses in on the tear of her murdered brother. In this tear we see the girl floating on her back. She is intact, floating calmly in the tear of her murdered brother. The light over her face suddenly darkens.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

We return to the shot of the girl. Her illuminated face suddenly darkens, implying the masked man has turned towards her. She closes her eyes.

CUT TO BLACK

The sound of gunfire.