

# OUTBREAK FACT SHEET

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The idea for the book began with a mineral known as coltan. You've probably never heard of it, but without it you might not be reading this on your computer. You might not even have a computer. For columbite tantalite - to use its full name - is the basis of tantalum which is used in almost any electrical item you can think of: mobile phones, computer chips, PlayStations... It's very valuable and anyone who mines it can become extremely rich indeed. When I read about coltan, and discovered that one of the major areas in the world where it is mined is the Democratic Republic of Congo, I realized immediately that coltan could be an excellent starting point for a great thriller - a thriller set in a part of the world I know well.



I spent time in the DRC (then known as Zaire) on several occasions in my Regiment days, both on operational tours and for survival training and exercises. It's a country where there have been a lot of local wars, where left-behind landmines are still destroying lives, and where the African rainforest can hide a lot of dangers. You need to be knowledgeable, alert and well prepared to survive in the jungle there. Many of the scenes in the book come from my personal experiences in Africa, especially with the wildlife - black mamba snakes, gorillas, crocodiles and one of the most dangerous animals of all: the hippo. Hippos won't attack a boat when the engine is running as the noise frightens them, but they will often attack a boat that is being paddled. They can run along the bottom of the river at the same speed as on land - and can cover 100 metres in 9 seconds. That's fast! So if you are paddling a boat and see a hippo disappearing underwater, you need to get away quick or it can come up right underneath you. Once on a training exercise in Botswana, I actually saw a hippo attack an inflatable boat that my mates were paddling along. It bit the end right off the dinghy. Luckily, there was a loud bang as it bit into it which scared it and gave my mates time to start the engine and get away. Adult hippos are also particularly hostile towards crocodiles, which live in the same pools and rivers, especially when hippo calves are around. Elsewhere in Africa, in Zambia on holiday with my daughter, we were riding horses along the riverbank and we saw the remains of a 17-foot crocodile that had been bitten in half by something, almost certainly a hippo. I've never forgotten seeing that, and now I've used that memory for a scene in Outbreak!

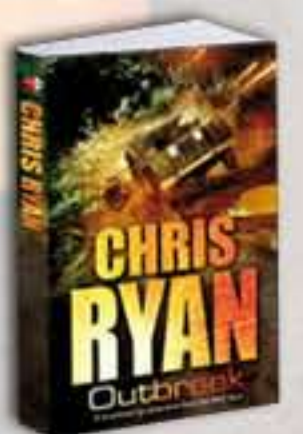


But these natural dangers aren't the only scary moments in the book. I've used a mining operation as a way of opening up an underground lake where a deadly virus has lain hidden for many years. Exposed to the air, the virus gets loose and begins to infect the local people. Just like flu can spread like mad, so can this new virus. But whereas most flu is survivable, this virus is a killer. A killer you can't even see.

To find out how Ben Tracey - who features in all my Code Red adventures - copes with this threat, simply get yourself a copy of Outbreak.

I hope you enjoy it.

Chris Ryan



# Outbreak