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**RIVER CITY STAR JACQUELINE ON SHIELDINCH DRAMA**

# I can't believe my stunt double isn't dead after blast

**Actor admits she was blown away by latest scenes.. but not as much as expert stand-in**

BY **RICK FULTON**  
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**AFTER reading the script for last night's River City episode which saw Lydia Murdoch caught up in a huge explosion, the actress who plays her, Jacqueline Leonard, reckoned she could do the stunt herself.**

How difficult could it be?

Lydia just had to walk up some stairs to the Shieldinch Portacabins to meet gangster hubby Lenny (Frank Gallagher)

and be thrown backwards from the explosion.

Jacqueline, who has also starred in EastEnders and Coronation Street, said: "When I got the script for it, I thought, 'All you have to do is fall backwards. I could do that. It'll be fine'.

"But when I watched the stunt, which I didn't do, I had my mouth open. It was incredible. I don't think any of us could speak for five minutes. We were



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gobsmacked.

"There's no way I could have done it. I don't know how the girl isn't dead."

That's thanks to stunt coordinator Abbi Collins, who has worked on films such as Braveheart, Harry Potter and Star Wars as well as TV shows like Doctor Who and is one of only five female stunt coordinators working in the UK. She made sure stuntwoman Donna Williams, who doubled for Jacqueline, was safe.

Jacqueline, 52, who was brought up in Bonnybridge in Stirlingshire and played Lorraine Wicks in EastEnders in the 90s, has done small stunts before but has never been involved in anything as big as the River City explosion, which was filmed at the soap's Dumbarton set.

She said: "It's very exciting to be involved in something so dramatic but I didn't have too much to do. Lydia was on her way to see Lenny because she is worried that his son Alex, who she is having an affair with, is going to spill the beans to his dad."

"After hearing a noise outside, she went up to the Portakabins to check it out. There was an explosion and at the end of last night's episode, you don't know whether she's going to make it."

"My only responsibility for the stunt was seeing how Donna was going to fall. When I went up the stairs, I had to put myself and my arms in exactly the same position that Donna put herself in to make it safe for her to do the stunt."

"Once they'd filmed me going up the stairs, I reacted to the explosion, which didn't go off when I was there. I took a step backwards and then Donna went into position and did the real thing."

"I didn't know what I was going to see at first. She was dressed like me with a wig. I thought she'd just fall backwards on to the mat and maybe I could have done that. But when the explosion happened, she was thrown backwards."

"There was smoke everywhere. Our ears were ringing. It was gobsmacking. I was in complete awe."

"She then had to do it again because the explosion was so big you couldn't actually see her."

Abbi has been doing stunts for 31 years. Of the 400 people registered to do stunts in the UK, only 65 are females and only three are full-time stunt

coordinators. She said: "River City hasn't had many big stunts but when they do, they are big and they really push the boat out."

"Last night's explosion looked very real, because it was very real."

To create the scene, Abbi and the director worked out what they wanted to achieve then got the art department to create a wooden railing to look like a metal one Donna falls through.

They also needed an air mortar to blast dust and earth to make the explosion look more realistic.

Abbi said: "The explosion supposedly comes from the flames but we couldn't put the stunt girl thorough that so the air mortar acts as the explosion, blowing the door into pieces and throwing Donna onto the air mat below."

They couldn't test the air mortar until they were filming. Abbi said: "The first time we did the explosion, it forced Donna back against the rail and off her feet. She didn't have to throw herself back. But there was too much dust and earth in the air cannon and you couldn't see her too well so the director decided we had to do it again."

"After the second one, everyone was shocked, which was a good sign. They were open-mouthed and going, 'Oh my God.'"

Abbi became a stuntwoman after the horse riding school she ran had to fold when she got divorced from her first husband.

As well as doubling for Catherine McCormack in Braveheart and working on Bridget Jones – including the scene when the hapless Bridget parachutes into a pig pen in 2004's Edge of Reason – she began coordinating stunts for TV series The Royal and worked with David Tennant on Doctor Who.

Abbi will be back in Scotland this week



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to co-ordinate stunts for the last series of Still Game. She's in demand and actress Jacqueline can understand why.

She said: "The cast and crew are amazing and I wish there was more recognition for River City. It's a shame there isn't. Storylines like this – with the explosion and what comes after it – show River City is as dramatic as any other soap."

While Lydia is at death's door, she's not the only one in danger as the explosion also trapped feuding sisters Theresa and Scarlett (played by Maureen Carr and Sally Howitt) in the building.

With the flames getting close to gas canisters, Shieldinch's explosive scenes haven't been extinguished just yet.

● River City is on Tuesdays, BBC One, at 8pm.

“  
The stunt  
was  
incredible.  
We were  
gobsmacked  
JACQUELINE LEONARD  
ON RIVER CITY EXPLOSION



**DOUBLE** Stuntwoman Donna with Jacqueline





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**PREP WORK**  
Crew set the scene, above, for the big explosion, below

**ROLE PLAY**  
Dust-covered stuntwoman Donna after the explosion, above. Donna, Jacqueline and coordinator Abbi, below

**BLAST OFF**  
Lydia is thrown through a railing as an explosion rocks Shieldinch. Pics: Alan Peebles