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Author(s)	Penelope Houston
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ON DANGEROUS GROUND, U.S.A., 1951

Certificate: A. Distributors: R.K.O.-Radio. Production Company: R.K.O.-Radio. Producer: John Houseman. Director: Nicholas Ray. Script: A. I. Bezzerides, based on a novel by Gerald Butler. Photography: George E. Diskant. Editor: Roland Cross. Art Director: Albert D'Agostino, Ralph Berger. Music: Bernard Herrmann. Musical Director: C. Bakaleinikoff. Leading Players: Robert Ryan (Jim Wilson), Ida Lupino (Mary Malden), Ward Bond (Walter Brent), Charles Kemper (Bill Daly), Anthony Ross (Pete Sartori), Ed Begley (Captain Brawley), Ian Wolfe (Carrey), Sumner Williams (Danny Malden), Gus Schilling (Lucky). 7,243 ft. 80 mins.

Jim Wilson, a lonely, tough police detective, is becoming brutalised by his job, detesting all criminals and achieving results only by savage handling of suspects. After several warnings his superior officer, to avoid scandal, sends him out of the city to help in the investigation of a small town crime. A little girl, daughter of a farmer, Brent, has been found murdered. Brent resents Wilson's arrival, because he means to achieve his own revenge. The killer is sighted and during the chase Brent and Wilson become separated from the others and pursue him by car. After the cars have crashed on the icy roads, they follow his trail through the snow to an isolated farmhouse. Here they find, alone, a blind girl, Mary Malden. Both suspect that she is hiding the murderer; while Brent investigates, Mary admits that the killer is her brother Danny, a mental defective. She trusts Wilson to protect her brother from Brent and give him fair treatment. Wilson gives his promise. In the morning, he has almost won Danny's confidence when Brent appears; Danny runs away and falls to his death. Mary at first believes that Wilson has broken his promise to her, but he manages to convince her of the truth. He returns to her later from the city, realising that each of them needs the other.

The story of *On Dangerous Ground* attains an unusual level of pretentious foolishness; from an opening reminiscent of *Detective Story*, with a brief examination of the tough cop (played very capably by Robert Ryan) whose hatred for crime and criminals is developing into a violent, neurotic distrust of life, the film passes into an American version of the Cold Comfort Farm country—the farmer chasing the killer with a shotgun, the blind girl and her half-wit brother. Blindness, on the screen, usually appears as a condition highly conducive to the development of whimsical philosophy, and Mary Malden (played with customary high-g geared intensity by Ida Lupino) is no exception to this rule. The combination of unlikely incident and pretentious dialogue makes for a distinctly odd film.

Also remarkable is the strikingly clever and forceful technique with which the material has been put together. Dramatically effective photography, both in the city street melodrama and in the chases through the snow, the ingenious use of a subjective camera—notably in some of the car driving scenes and in Wilson's discovery of Mary's blindness—and an effective musical score give the film considerable excitement. Nicholas Ray, after the promise of *They Live By Night*, has made some disappointingly routine films; here, working with the same producer, John Houseman, a flashy but undoubted stylistic flair disconcertingly reappears. P.H.

Suitability: A.