
Nye's Song

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**An Entry in the 2012 Windhammer Prize for
Short Gamebook Fiction**

*To Bernard Cornwell:
as one of your millions of fans -
thank you for such fantastic stories!*

HOW TO SURVIVE 'THE BLIGHT'

In 1757, British victory at Plassey wrought a cataclysm upon the world and mankind came close to extinction. However, even Kali - dark goddess of death - was confounded by such stoic resistance. The year is now 1905. YOU play Captain William Nye of the Warwick garrison - a disgruntled veteran about to embark on his next mission...

Bear in mind certain differences in the rules compared to previous Fighting Fantasy adventures; it is strongly recommended you familiarise yourself with the following sections. Before embarking on your adventure, you must first determine your own strengths and weaknesses. Dice are used to resolve initial Skill, Stamina, and Luck scores. There is an Adventure Sheet immediately after these rules which you may use to record the details of an adventure.

Skill, Stamina, and Luck

Roll one die. Add 6 to this number and enter this total in the Skill box on the Adventure Sheet. This is your Initial Skill.

Roll two dice. Add 12 to the number rolled and enter this total in the Stamina box.

Roll one die. Add 6 to this number and enter this total in the Luck box.

For reasons that will be explained below, these three attribute scores change constantly during an adventure. You must keep an accurate record of these scores and for this reason advised to either to write small in the boxes or to keep an eraser handy. But never rub out your Initial scores. Although you may be awarded additional Skill, Stamina, and Luck points, these totals may never exceed your Initial scores, except on very rare occasions when you will be instructed on a particular entry.

Your Skill score reflects your general fighting expertise and reflexes; the higher the better. Your Stamina score reflects your general constitution, your health and fitness; the higher your Stamina score, the more likely you will survive combat and perils ahead. Your Luck score indicates how naturally lucky a person you are. Luck - and evil - are facts of life throughout the perilous trials you're about to face.

Close Combat Engagements

You will certainly cross paths with hostile monsters and evil adversaries whose intent is to destroy you at all costs! It is often a case of kill or be killed. Resolve the battle as described below.

First, record the opponent's Skill and Stamina scores in a vacant Encounter box on your Adventure Sheet. The scores for each opponent are given in the book each time you have an encounter. The sequence of combat is then:

1. Roll both dice once for the opponent. Add their Skill score. This total is the opponent's Attack Strength.
2. Roll both dice once for yourself. Add the number rolled to your current Skill score. This total is your Attack Strength.
3. If your Attack Strength is higher than that of the opponent, you have wounded them. Proceed to step 4. If the opponent's Attack Strength is higher than yours, they have wounded you. Proceed to step 5. If both Attack Strength totals are the same, you have avoided each other's blows - start the next Attack Round from step 1 above.

4. You have wounded the opponent, so subtract 2 points from their Stamina score. You may use your Luck here to do additional damage (see below).
5. Your opponent has wounded you, so subtract 2 points from your own Stamina score. Again, you may use Luck at this stage (see below).
6. Make the appropriate adjustments to either your opponent's or your own Stamina scores (and your Luck score if you used Luck - see below).
7. Begin the next Attack Round by returning to your current by repeating steps 1-6. This sequence continues until the Stamina score of either you or your opponent has been reduced to 0 (death).

Fighting More Than One Opponent

There will arise occasions when more than one enemy will attack you at the same time. In the first round of combat, you fight the first opponent normally. However, in the second round you must fight the *second* listed - having an attack strength the same or higher means you've only parried its blow. But a lower attack strength means you suffer damage! Upon defeating the first opponent you may then proceed to fight the next normally, and so on, until emerging victorious.

Luck

At various times during your adventure, either in battles or when you come across situations in which you could either be lucky or unlucky (details of these are given in the relevant entries themselves), you may call on your Luck to make the outcome more favourable. But beware! Using Luck is a risky business and if you are *unlucky*, the results could be disastrous.

The procedure for using your Luck score is as follows: roll two dice. If the number rolled is equal to or less than your current Luck score, you have been lucky and the result will go in your favour. If the number rolled is higher than your current Luck score, you have been unlucky and therefore suffer a penalty.

This procedure is known as *Testing your Luck*. Each time you *Test your Luck*, you must subtract 1 point from your current Luck score. Thus you will soon realize that the more you rely on your Luck, the more risky this will become.

Using Luck in Battles

In battles, you will always have the option of using your Luck either to inflict a more serious wound upon an opponent you have just struck, or to minimize the effects of a blow an opponent has just inflicted upon you.

If you have just wounded an opponent, you may Test your Luck as described above. If you are lucky, you have given your opponent a more severe wound and therefore subtract an extra 2 points from their Stamina score. However, if you are unlucky, the wound proves a mere graze and you must *restore* 1 point to your opponent's Stamina.

If an opponent has just wounded you, you may Test your Luck to try to minimize the wound. If you are lucky, you have managed to avoid the full damage of the blow. Restore 1 point of Stamina. If you are unlucky, you have taken a more serious wound; subtract 1 extra point.

Remember that you must subtract 1 point from your own Luck score each time you Test your Luck.

Platoon

Throughout this difficult mission you need to keep track of how many men remain under your command. Doubtless, you'll suffer casualties along the way. Certain decisions and ferocious battles will reduce these numbers; the more men you have, the more likely your chances of your success.

Army-Issue Gear

Over the years, science and technology have developed means to combat an otherwise invincible enemy. However, tactics and courage shall always have their place during times of war! It is important to read through entry 1 for more information on weapons at your disposal. Besides these you also carry anti-viral shots – whenever you are wounded in combat, you must Test your Luck. If you are unlucky, you have contracted a lethal plague and must make use of one AV shot. In such an instance, if you run short of this cure, your mission is over!

God's Protection over you in the adventure ahead!

Adventure Sheet

Skill:

Stamina:

Luck:

Gear and
Items:

AV Shots:

Platoon:

Enemy Encounters

Skill
Stamina

Skill
Stamina

Skill
Stamina

Skill
Stamina

Skill
Stamina

Skill
Stamina

Skill
Stamina

Skill
Stamina

Skill
Stamina

-1-

The dreadnought's engines cut out. *Not again...* you groan in dismay. *What have we stopped for this time?* The constant sway of the armoured vehicle traversing pot-holed terrain had sent you into a blissful doze. Then, a sudden rap at the cabin door. "Yes," you growl, "what is it?"

"Sorry to disturb you, sir. But we've picked up a distress call on the radio. You asked to be informed as soon as we'd found something..."

"Yes, yes, so I did. Thanks, Eddie. I'll be out momentarily."

You sigh heavily. Already, you regret giving such an order. *God's teeth – this had better not be a Shadow-prank like last time...* barely an hour ago three men were lost in an ambush. Good men. Left behind for that sadistic Thuggee necromancer to resurrect. *We can't even bury our dead nowadays!* Dark humour apart, it's still a troubling thought: Kali's minions must know about that musician...*curse his eyes! And just what was he thinking? Going for a stroll in Shadow-infested countryside? Is he just another blues artist with a suicide complex? Now, here we are on a joyride, demons toying with us. Ah well! Just another day in hell...*

You slosh cold water over sleepy eyes. Next, spinning tumblers – with practised ease - to the correct combination on your travel chest. Add to your Adventure Sheet: Blakrite Sabre, Pistol (with B-tipped rounds), Rations consisting of 4 meals (each meal restores 4 Stamina points), and 4 Anti-viral Shots. Then, you proceed to the operations centre.

"Right then," you sigh, "what do we have here?"

"A distress call, sir."

"Ah. You mean like the last one?"

"This one's different, sir. I could hardly hear the radio operator with all that gunfire and fireball explosions."

You rub your chin. "Could you pinpoint their location?"

"About here," Sergeant Eddie Earlstree points to the table map. "An old village called Normanton, in Rutland."

"How long until we get there?"

"Pushing pedal to the floor...about another forty minutes."

"Very good. Have the men placed on alert. Oh, and one more thing, Eddie."

"Sir?"

"Be a good fellow and brew up some tea."

Turn to 56.

-2-

Moans and groans echo throughout the dark woodland. Your heart sinks. Grimly, you draw your sabre upon sight of the first approaching enemy. "Make ready!" you snarl. "Undead – lots of 'em!" Turrets and Suffields begin to spit out Blakrite bullets with deadly accuracy; they fall as ninepins...yet keep coming! You pull the pistol's trigger, reload, then fire again, emptying round after round into this multitude. With your men distracted, *Endurance* will never be repaired and this position will certainly be overwhelmed. Is Autumn Moon wounded (turn to 85) or not (turn to 26)?

-3-

You bang on the heavy wood, snarling some Thuggee, feigning ill-temper: "Let us in! Hurry up there!" Test your Luck. If you are lucky turn to 73. If you are unlucky turn to 45.

-4-

You nod, content with a truce – for now. “Rule one: I’m in command, Miss Moon.”

“Very well,” she folds her arms. “What’s rule two?”

“That we need to get out of here. By now, they’ll have reinforcements bearing down on this place...”

Sergeant Hand interjects: “Already have, sir. Looked out the little window here - Kali-Cloaks are streaming outside, keeping a vigil.”

Your heart sinks; the Shadows must really want this young lady. *But why? What’s so important about her? Still, I’m tempted to hand her over to them...damn her impertinence!* You aren’t serious, even feel a little guilty about this last sentiment – but only just. *Still, it doesn’t make any sense...*

“All this,” you ask aloud, “just for a blues musician?”

“Are there any undead down there, Colour Sergeant?”

“Eh? Er...” he peers down once more, “...yes. Why?”

She turns to you. “Just keep watching them.”

So saying, she enters into a hard-time melody, her booted foot stomping the wooden floor, providing the rhythmic beat. Her vocal is most beautiful – yet the language is a most strange one, something you’ve never heard before. *Well, you sigh, at least I get a last wish before we all die; not a bad little tune, really...*

Sergeant Hand notices your forlorn expression. “Her grandparents were Romany,” he explains, grinning. “Gypsies. They were taken in by Dover Castle for a few nights – one of their number had been infected. In return for shelter and hospitality they performed some fantastic music. Everybody gathered round, saying how much they enjoyed it – then got talking...well, many were amazed how these wanderers had survived for so long in Shadow-infested country. Her grandfather didn’t bother to explain, more demonstrated.”

“‘Demonstrated’ what?”

He simply points down.

Peering through the small opening...you cannot believe your eyes. The zombies below are moaning, milling about, heads lolling - as if gripped in torment. You turn back to Hand, amazement written across your face. “What the-?”

“You have the honours, sir,” he grins, nodding at the pistol in your hand, “while they’re helpless, eh?”

“Oh, right.” You duly fire four precise shots, spraying blood and brain, ending their plight. “Hang on...what about demons?”

He nods, grin broadening.

Your heart races...

So THAT’S why High Command ordered this, and all those previous missions. No wonder Shadows are frothing at the maw in trying to get their hands on this girl! This is a heaven-sent gift to exploit to our advantage, we could actually WIN this war. My God – we need to get her out of here, safely away, protect her...

That Romany head of the family had passed down this blessed melody to Autumn Moon, his granddaughter, to strike fear into the heart of evil. To incapacitate the undead and transform demonic abominations into howling, thrashing, shrieking, helpless convulsions.

“I don’t want to sour the mood, sir, but it doesn’t affect Thuggees. They may be evil, but human, and of this world. Still, I reckon we’d manage those easily enough by ourselves.”

“Right,” you nod grimly. “So we’ll have to keep an eye on them during our escape.”

Turn to 58.

-5-

Having checked all the locked doors and searched the rooms, you come across a mangled pile of Thuggee and undead corpses. From entry of their wounds it seems they were shot from above...*aha!* You spot the attic hatch easily enough. Definitely someone up there – but they might have an itchy trigger finger; will you risk shouting for survivors (turn to **70**), or, fearing the presence of Shadows, prefer a more stealthy approach and instruct your men to give you a leg up (turn to **29**)?

-6-

You flail out, manage to slow your fall. However, he points the staff – spattered with your own blood – and you know what's coming next...roll two dice: if it is the same or less than your current Skill, you throw yourself to one side, evading a fireball as it comes searing down! If it is higher, lose a further 3 Stamina points as it clips your thigh. Before he can summon enough energy to incant another spell, you regain your feet, sword aimed at his throat. He snarls, prepares to defend himself:

Thuggee Sorcerer:
Skill 9 Stamina 9

If you defeat the leader, turn to **23**.

-7-

Thanks be to God, you have an AV shot available. There's little time to waste: you inject the anti-viral drug into her. She gasps, coughs, then sits bolt upright. "Hey!" she blurts.

"Come on!" you pull her up, hand her the fiddle. "We've demons and undead galore out there. Keep them off us, Autumn. Give us time to deal with those Thuggee scum!"

"This is a tour I WON'T be doing next year."

One soldier grins: "Think of it as an encore, love."

At this, she raises an alluring eyebrow. "Very well, in that case..."

Turn to **83**.

-8-

While waiting for the dreadnought's arrival, you remain in cover. Meanwhile, you can only imagine what horrors are descending upon this place...the lull seems interminable - but in reality lasts only three minutes. The roar of engines, blare of a horn, the heavy stutter of 40mm guns, followed by outraged shouts, bellows, and cries of alarm - all signifies the arrival of *Endurance*. As one, you burst through the doors. Night's darkness now rules the skies but you can see glaring headlights up ahead. Autumn Moon's jig instantly strikes up, keeping unearthly elements of Shadows busy during this flight across a thirty yard stretch of open ground. Nevertheless, your attempt to reach *Endurance* will be hindered by Thuggee snipers unaffected by the divine music. Their target will be Autumn: eliminating her will free their powerful allies of torment...and catch you out in the open; you must protect Autumn at all costs! Including yourself, how many men remain in your Platoon? If it is 6 or less turn to **65**. If it is 7 or more turn to **55**.

-9-

Just as you get within reach of the window, the pipe lurches – then suddenly you're flailing, tumbling down. Although you survive such a fall, the ear-splitting clatter of metal is enough to wake the dead – or at least, alert the *undead*. Whilst you're winded, a multitude of Shadows converge from all sides...

-10-

It's no good. There's no getting through to Autumn who's lapsed into a fevered state due to pain and loss of blood. *Oh well, you sigh, we'll have to do this the hard way.* *Endurance's* gunners will have to help out as best they can. Meanwhile, you maintain a defensive stance by your men hard at work; those Zombies which get through such sheer fire-power will have to be dealt by you at close quarters. Roll one die and add 2 - this is the total number of zombies. As they are a lumbering foe, fight them one at a time:

(Each) Zombie:
Skill 7 Stamina 8

If you survive this onslaught, remember to test your Luck against contracting the plague, administer 1 AV Shot if necessary. By the time you've defeated the last opponent, the dreadnought will be repaired and operational. Turn to **63**.

-11-

You stride onwards. Weapons concealed, but ready – just in case things turn sour. Skeletal heads turn, pits for eyes glow a malevolent amber, scythes stir. However, the Revenant Guard do not attack; merely stand their ground and await your approach. Heart pounds fiercely in your chest. Impatiently, you wave them aside with some Thuggee dialect you've picked up over years of campaigning and observing the Shadows. *God, I pray this works...* Now surrounded by twenty of these hideous abominations, a battle would certainly be short and end in your defeat. Then, you grin: they obey your command! Through these parted ranks, the platoon continues toward Heathcote Hall. Gain 1 Luck point, and turn to **68**.

-12-

Whilst you're reloading, the Kali-Cloaks will endeavour to disable *Endurance*. Each demon has a Skill of 8. You must roll two dice against each – if it is the same or less than its Skill, they score a hit. If the die roll is higher, that particular demon has missed. Turn to **61**.

-13-

Greeting you, hung on meat hooks, are several rotting carcasses. *Human* carcasses. The stench is unbearable! You and your men try to fight the nausea, retch, stagger back. Suddenly, one of the corpses twitches. Its head snaps up. Rotten lips curl into a snarl as it leaps from its hook. Your Thuggee disguise won't fool the six Ghouls here; they can smell you're a different breed to their (barely) human allies. You tackle one - or *two* if your Platoon is outnumbered. Within the confines of

this pantry, you may fight each opponent one at a time. Whilst you're struggling with nausea, reduce your attack strength by 2 for the first two rounds:

Each Ghoul:
Skill 9 Stamina 8

Remember to test your Luck against the plague these undead horrors carry. Use 1 AV shot if necessary. Also, roll one die – if you roll 'even', deduct 1 from your Platoon. Now, if you survive this nest of Ghouls, will you investigate the drawing room (turn to **62**), or head upstairs (turn to **76**)?

-14-

You head towards Normanton church whilst maintaining a high level of vigilance; hundreds of such graveyards have become macabre death-traps, a source ripe with skeletal corpses for Thuggee necromancers. Many such unwitting servants had been resurrected when the Blight began – yet some remained buried, hidden, waiting... Test your Luck. If you are lucky turn to **71**. If you are unlucky turn to **48**.

-15-

Autumn somehow finds the strength to continue playing. She is sat astride Sergeant Hand's shoulders, blood streaming down her leg, young face screwed up with pain and determination. You hack, slash, shove aside numerous enemies, the platoon covering-fire causes Thuggee marksmen to duck down. However, just yards from the *Endurance*, Sergeant Hand is clipped by a bullet. Two of your men abandon their current task to bundle their wounded comrades inside. Being last to dive through the dreadnought's hatch – you then slam it shut!

Turn to **17**.

-16-

There are twenty hellish sentries here. Your best chance is to get within close range then lay down lethal fire. Blakrite bullets hammer into their ranks, smashing bone. Such an attack takes them by surprise; your men have time to reload before the enemy can organise a counter-attack. For *each* man in your platoon, roll one die: 'odd' means his gun claims three, 'even' just two. Now total up casualties inflicted. If your platoon (including yourself) actually outnumbers the Revenants, you easily dispatch the remainder without further loss of life (and gain 1 Luck point). Otherwise, you must divide the number of enemy remaining by those (including yourself) within your platoon. If there are any left over, add one more to the list of terrifying opponents *you* must face! The foe come shrieking at you *together*:

Each Revenant:
Skill 9 Stamina 10

Roll one die – if it is even, reduce your Platoon by 1. If you survive the battle, turn to **68**.

-17-

"Pedal to the floor, Eddie!"

"Right you are, sir!"

Endurance hurtles through the estate's gateway, scattering Shadows as rag dolls. You hear countless scrapes of claws on metal. Thuggee bullets clang off its armoured chassis as the dreadnought charges along the valley floor. However, one of the gunner's spies a threat: "Kali-Cloaks fast approaching on our six!"

These incorporeal, wraith-like demons are capable of spewing black ectoplasm which can burn through the dreadnought's tough plating like acid. The *Endurance* is equipped with three 40mm cannon – each shell is Blakrite-tipped. Roll *three* dice. If the total scores 10 or less turn to **72**. If it is 11 or higher turn to **49**.

-18-

The wood of these doors are rotted through; you manage to break into the cellar. Amazingly, there's still some bottles of wine stored in racks, now caked with dust. Also several barrels are dotted about, while various furniture, crates of old crockery, and other household items (relegated to secondary status in accordance with the previous owner's whim) are stacked in one dark corner. Tattered rags are strewn across the floor...all that remains of people who took refuge when the Blight struck, hoping to re-emerge once the danger had passed. Which it never did. Sadly, all such cases either starved or committed suicide in some way. You can't blame them for trying - such folk weren't to know exactly what they were dealing with, after all - and at least they cheated an undead existence. Hiding away, until death, their bodies rotted in peace, without interference from Kali's wrath. But, over time, her minions encroached deeper into such nooks and crannies.

Before you is one such abomination: a Bloodthorn! This type of demi-demon is a hunter of the night. Its spiky, bark-like skin helps it blend in amongst wooded terrain, while two huge talons with razor-sharp claws flex in readiness, and a mouth of razor-sharp teeth parts to give a thunderous growl. The Bloodthorn's eyes illuminate a hostile yellow which intensifies upon sight of humans intruding upon its lair. It will take your entire platoon to subdue such a formidable Shadow!

Bloodthorn:

Skill 10 Stamina (see below)

How many men complement your Platoon? If you haven't yet lost a man, fight it only for *five* rounds. Otherwise: fight it for *seven* rounds if you have four men - and if you have only three men (or less), then *nine* rounds. Deduct Stamina as normal if you're wounded; the Thorn's talons carry infection, so be sure to test your Luck against contracting plague and administer 1 AV Shot if necessary. If you survive this titanic struggle turn to **59**.

-19-

One brave, honourable man has bought you all some time by throwing several grenades (salvaged from the *Endurance*). Blakrite shrapnel tears through their ranks. Suffield-fire claims a few more Shadows – before he goes down, defiant to the last. Deduct 1 man from your Platoon. However, you make good his sacrifice and, finally, reach the ruins of Manton. You prepare a hasty defence within an old tavern: barricading the door with brittle furniture, manning the windows. Your chances of survival may have improved somewhat but definitely remain rather slim; vastly outnumbered, and dangerously low on ammo, you and your men are weary in both mind and body. You grin

sarcastically: *Couldn't ask for anything better than that! Could it get much worse, I wonder?* However, your only chance of survival lies in Autumn Moon's abilities...if she's wounded turn to **66**. If not, turn to **83**.

-20-

However, at times, even Nature herself has been dealt a cruel jest by Kali's curse. You crush the mosquito beneath your hand – but the damage is done. There's no telling where the insect has been; as a precaution you must inject 1 AV shot into your system. You grit your teeth: *already I'm down on medical supplies – and we haven't come into contact with Shadows yet!*

Turn to **78**.

-21-

"Tyrants!" yells one of the dreadnought's gunners. He releases a lethal spray of 40mm. The next thing you know, these golden-winged demons – ridden by Thuggee sorcerers – have assaulted the valiant *Endurance* with ten fireballs. Kali's minions are out in force today; to have this many powerful sorcerers in one group is quite incredible. It is a merciless attack and one without warning: her engines have been severely damage.

"She's struggling!" snarls Sergeant Earlstree. "Losing power, sir, slowing right down – we won't get much further at this rate!"

Your heart plummets as a stone. *That's it, then...* You stride over to the ops table, eyes fervently scanning a map: *Is there anywhere we can take refuge?*

It seems the ruins of a village called Manton are situated half a mile to the south...

"Evacuate the *Endurance!*" barks Earlstree. "She's had it, poor girl!"

Turn to **43**.

-22-

In the dim lamplight, you discern the features of a girl no older than eighteen. She has purple spiky hair and rather overdone it on black eye-shadow – coupled with a pale white face lends her a skull-like appearance.

"Ye Gods!" you feign shock. "I thought a Shadow was amongst us!"

At this, she offers a cool, disinterested expression, but says nothing. You regard her style of dress: midnight blue shiny trousers, black denim jacket (partially concealed by camouflaged fatigues), while a pair of open-toed pumps sit beside her on the floor, exchanged for a pair of army issue boots. She continues to stare, unperturbed, during your disdainful assessment of her. *THIS is what we were sent to rescue? A 'Blues Maiden'? Well, she's certainly dressed like one. What in God's name is so important about her..?* For now, add 2 Luck points for finding the musician.

Turn to **42**.

-23-

Searching through the evil man's robes you find an egg-sized Ruby. Since jewels no longer have any monetary value, you guess it must serve some other practical purpose; note this on your Adventure Sheet. Add 1 Luck point for your victory and precious find. Back downstairs, roll one die: if it's *even*,

another one of your men has been claimed by the ambush - reduce your Platoon by 1. It's a hollow victory; the musician hasn't taken refuge here. However, at least you can strip these dead Thuggees of their robes (note that you and your men are 'disguised'). Furthermore, a quick search turns up a small stock of food: add 2 Meals to your rations. *Ah well, you sigh, not all bad!* Once ready, you set off for the Hall (turn to **41**).

-24-

Endurance's guns fail to prevent her fuel tank from rupturing; a spectacular fireball is seen for miles around. Kali-Cloaks stream across the night-sky in victory rolls, screeching their perverse delight far above the smoke and smouldering wreckage...

-25-

Several zombies have been tasked to prepare some kind of meal for their demonic masters. However, to enter the kitchen, you must have some kind of disguise (turn to **52**). Otherwise, return to the entrance hall and either try the drawing room (turn to **62**) or head upstairs (turn to **76**).

-26-

Autumn pokes her head out, and frowns. "Why didn't you call me?"
 "Oh," your mouth drops: "I must have forgotten..."
 She gives a theatrical tut. "I tag along – and you don't let me have any of the fun? Shame on you, Captain Nye!"
 Her bare feet grace the grassy woodland floor as she dances in time to the lively rhythm. Complicated riffs and dulcet tones resound throughout an eerie forest of lost souls. Eventually, with this undead horde distracted, the tyre is soon replaced.
 "About time," she purrs. "That must have been the longest performance of my life..."
 You shake your head in exasperation. "Into the *Endurance* with you, cheeky lass."
 "Huh!" she saunters back inside. "No pleasing some folk."
 Still, you cannot begrudge her a grin. *Right, let Autumn have her moment – she's earned it!* Turn to **63**.

-27-

This cottage was destroyed only recently; it bears signs of being assaulted by fireballs. *Why were sorcerers sniffing around here?* It must have been something – or *someone* – of great importance to provoke such powerful sorcery. Your heart sinks: very likely their target was eliminated in the ruthless attack. You pick your way through rubble and broken timber...

"Over here, sir!"

You find one dead soldier beneath a section of thatched roof. Special ops, part of a failed rescue attempt launched by Belvoir Castle. You regard the man's face, oddly showing an expression of peace. *Poor blighter. Must have crawled here after suffering mortal blast wounds.* He was the group's comm technician; his wireless is still nearby - no doubt the source of that emergency signal. If you wish to try and pick up a signal on its set frequency turn to **64**. Otherwise, you must try either the church (turn to **14**), or the Hall (turn to **41**).

-28-

There aren't quite enough men to ensure that no breaches will materialize; two Thuggees have managed to get in via an upstairs window. They must not be allowed near Autumn! Fight them *together* at close quarters while your platoon guard the windows:

1st Thuggee:
Skill 8 Stamina 9

2nd Thuggee:
Skill 9 Stamina 7

If you win, turn to 33.

-29-

You clamber up, precariously, then give the hatch door a few taps. After a moment it creaks open – a sergeant's grizzled features greets you. “Captain Nye, sir!” he gasps in recognition. “It's me, sir: Colour Sergeant Stephen Hand. Here,” he helps you inside, then swiftly lowers the ladder for your men. “Hurry, lads!” he hisses. “There's Shadows lurking just beyond those doors. Into sanctuary with you!” Turn to 22.

-30-

You pull the trigger once. Effortlessly, the blakrite-tipped bullet passes through his energy shield, into his chest. He gasps in shock, then sneers contemptuous defeat before collapsing to the floor, dead. However, this was a dire mistake: sound of the shot echoes from this bell-tower and across moonlit countryside to nearby Edith Weston – already, you can hear bloodthirsty demonic howls. Heart pounds hard against your ribcage. The enemy have been alerted to your presence! You curse in anger and frustration. Bounding down stone steps, ordering a swift retreat, but...too late. A horde of Shadows floods into the church. You do not survive such an onslaught.

-31-

A direct hit almost knocks the dreadnought upon its side. It skids and skews violently – but dexterous handling on Earlstree's part regains control of the *Endurance*. However, the sudden lurch caused you to lose grip and bang your head. Lose 1 Skill point and 3 Stamina points. If you are still alive, the dreadnought reaches an overgrown expanse of woodland which provides concealment from plain sight. Turn to 77.

-32-

Both rubies emit an eerie glow. Then, a satisfying click - and the doors swing inward! Warily, you step into the darkness (turn to 67).

-33-

Suddenly, the door - along with your makeshift barricade - explodes into a hundred splinters. Roll one die: if it is even, lose 2 Stamina points for receiving a nasty gash. Stood there is one of the Thuggee sorcerers, brandishing his staff. He levels this at the Autumn's unconscious form...you act quickly! He twists to confront your sudden counter-attack, sending a fearsome fireball at your chest. Roll two dice. If it is the same or less than your current Skill, you dodge the fiery missile which blasts harmlessly into the wall. If it is higher than your current Skill it smashes into your chest: lose 1 Skill point and 4 Stamina points.

Turn to 57.

-34-

Having survived this Thuggee ambush, you spy their leader escape up the tower. Will you pursue him (turn to 89) or leave and head for the Hall (turn to 41)?

-35-

Almost miraculously, the tyre is replaced in good time (gain 1 Luck point). You return to *Endurance* and, without further ado, Sergeant Earlstree accelerates from the woodland. Turn to 63.

-36-

You cannot stop yourself from tumbling downstairs...then, a sharp *crunch!* The sorcerer grins wickedly: your neck has been broken in the fall. Your adventure ends here.

-37-

"What's this?" she coughs.

"It's yours, Autumn," you explain hurriedly, "but I need you to come with me. Now."

"Wh-where?"

"See this? You're the heroine of this story. No, leave your boots behind – live the part. Grab your fiddle. Please, Autumn: we need your help here!"

She sighs, then nods, bare feet slapping the dreadnought's metal. Those lumbering undead are nearly upon you! After a wonky start, she begins the melody that halts these Shadows in their tracks. Still, you maintain vigilance for any Thuggees lurking among their dense ranks; *can't lose Autumn, not now!* You glance back at the men fevering away.

"Get that Godforsaken tyre on, lads! If you want to live, bend your backs, bleed your hands, sweat every last drop you have. *Just get it done!* Autumn, keep up the good work. Almost there, lass, almost there..." *God give her strength until we're finished.*

"There, got it!" beams Sergeant Hand, wiping his sweat-streaked brow. "Quickly, lads: inside!"

Breathing a huge sigh of relief, you are the last in, carrying an exhausted Autumn Moon in your arms. You look down at the poor girl. *We rescued her, she's saved us...what a mutual relationship we have!*

Turn to 63.

-38-

The iron pipe is over a hundred and fifty years old, rusted, with moorings so loose it could detach from the crumbling brick at any moment. One of your men volunteers to take point. He climbs to a window on the second floor and smashes the glass. You maintain vigilance, fearful nearby Shadows might hear the commotion. Nothing. You breathe a sigh of relief, then your men proceed to follow, one at a time - you being the last to brave the precarious pipe...add together your current Skill and Stamina, then roll six dice. If it is the same or lower than your scores combined turn to **80**. If the die roll is *higher* than your combined scores, turn to **9**.

-39-

A Thuggee bullet has caught Autumn Moon in the thigh. She goes down – and at once the music stops. To you, the silence is palpable. The nearest zombies regain their senses, shamble onwards, directed by Kali's twisted logic that has resumed control once more. Demons flex their claws, snarling vengeful hatred. *This doesn't look promising...* Thinking quickly, you order the others to keep the nearest Shadows at bay while Sergeant Hand helps Autumn to her feet. However, one of your men has been taken unawares; several talons claim his life – deduct 1 from your Platoon. One bull-headed demon with midnight blue scales – a Stalwart – blocks the path onwards! Sabre drawn, you must confront this threat:

Stalwart:

Skill 9 Stamina (see below)

Fight for five rounds, then test your Luck. If you are lucky turn to **15**. If you are unlucky turn to **79**.

-40-

Neither you nor your men have any such medication left. Your shoulders slump in resignation and defeat. *So that's it, then.* Without Autumn's essential help, there's no way you can hold out for long. Soon, they'll come crashing through the door, roof, windows...to end your valiant yet doomed stand. Your mission ends in failure.

-41-

Despite its ramshackle state, Heathcote Hall still poses an edifice that dominates the skyline. Most of the mullioned windows have long since shattered due to freezing winters, letting in the wind and damp, rotting this place from inside. Through neglect, brick and cement has started to crumble, weeds creeping between cracks, structural integrity severely weakened. The broken slate roof looks ready to cave in at any moment. By rights, this whole place should be condemned - but old notions of right and wrong bear no real meaning in a world turned upside-down by the Blight. What's more, you must brave such dangers (and worse!) to fulfil your mission...

Taking cover behind the shattered remnants of an ornate marble fountain, you observe the archway ahead. A motley collection of scythe-wielding skeletons are stood sentry here, barring admittance to the Hall grounds. *Kali's Revenant Guard – brilliant!* And there's plenty of them to pose a serious challenge to your outnumbered platoon. What do you reckon is the best approach here? If you are disguised and wish to bluff your way past them turn to **11**. If you trust in sheer fire-power and charge straight into their ranks turn to **16**. Otherwise, you can attempt a stealthier approach by turning to **60**.

-42-

"I would have preferred bare feet," she drones, "but, such is the price of practicality. We must all make sacrifices."

"Right," you growl. "Speaking of which, I've lost good men finding you...what's your name?"

She frowns momentarily at such anger – then smiles. "I'm known as Autumn Moon. But my real name is—"

"Never mind that! I've heard of you: a vocalist and fiddler, playing those depressing ballads over the wireless."

The smile fades: "There's nothing depressing about what's real. Only what we don't accept. This world shapes us, we should embrace that which made us, who we are now, and where we're going..."

"Well, I'd sooner embrace a hot mug of tea, a smoke – perhaps even a brighter future if there's one going. But I'd wager there's no such word as 'hope' in your warped philosophy." You thump the floor in frustration. "Good God, girl! The troops need something to believe in, something that stirs the soul. Just my humble opinion – you understand?"

She raises an eyebrow at your last sarcastic remark, then sighs, "Good. So now both of us know where we stand. Question is: what now?"

Turn to 4.

-43-

After running for some distance, you turn to witness a shocking scene: with an ear-splitting BANG! *Endurance* explodes. The death of a faithful dreadnought is truly the most heart-rending experience. Such a demise is certain to attract the Shadows. As you continue onwards to Manton, one consolation is that the Tyrants have sensibly pulled back and out of earshot from Autumn's dread melody; at least you won't have to fear sorcery whilst on foot. Add to your Platoon 3 men (former gunners of the *Endurance*), along with Sergeants Eddie Earlstree and Stephen Hand. Also, you managed to salvage some emergency rations: add 4 Meals to your Adventure Sheet (there's only time to consume *one* of these now).

The macabre chorus of howls, shrieks, and curses strikes up from behind. A combined force of Shadows – Thuggee snipers, demons, undead, with a couple of sorcerers for good measure – hounding your progress. Even with Autumn's invaluable music, it's too big a risk confronting them here, out in the open. You must protect her at all costs by reaching some kind of haven. And Manton is your best hope. There, she might be able to perform within a position of strength.

Halve your current Stamina, rounding fractions up. Now roll two dice. If it is the same or less than your score, turn to 19. If it is higher, turn to 75.

-44-

You manage to defeat these vicious Hell Hounds before the sentries get suspicious. If you were wounded, test your Luck against contracting plague. Use 1 AV shot if necessary. Your men soon join you and together you proceed towards the hall's entrance. Turn to 68.

-45-

He snarls, cursing your jest as one of poor taste, then slams shut the peep-hole. "Rude bloke," tuts one of your men in dark humour. You nod and sigh: *nothing else for it*, you'll have to search for another way in...(turn to 84).

-46-

All doors are locked tight, while few of the rooms have long since been broken into, ransacked, deserted. Having explored the hall's upper wing, you order a return to reconnoitre the other side...Test your Luck. If you are lucky turn to 5. If you are unlucky turn to 87.

-47-

With the tavern breached, and Autumn now unconscious, all is lost. There's nothing to stop the supernatural element of Shadows from dealing death in this sorry place. You make one last effort to prevent a grave situation:

"Keep them back!" you cry, rushing to her side. However, she's out cold – and no amount of trying to revive her will succeed. In despair, you sit upon the cold floor, watching the open doorway, cradling Autumn's head in your hands, awaiting the end, together...

Waiting, waiting. You frown: *What ARE they waiting for? Where's the final blow?* Instead, you can hear the blare of horns, the roar of engines, thudding of 40mm cannons, all add to a cacophony of chaos.

No. I'm dreaming – surely?

"Empress!" laughs Sergeant Hand.

"And look," points Earlstree, "here comes *Lionheart*."

Slowly, as if in a daze, you regard both soldiers quizzically. Then, you stand, peer out a window. The scene is indeed a breathtaking one: two dreadnoughts are indeed attacking the Shadows - on both flanks. Caught completely by surprise, the sorry remnants are soon in full flight back north. *A nightmare fading away...*

You emerge into a hellish scene of carnage. *Empress* and *Lionheart* have done their grim work well – it would put even Kali's efforts to shame. Both you and your men are exhausted beyond words. Yet for a great triumph...well, a few good words can always be found.

"Captain Nye?"

"Aye, that's me."

"Congratulations on a job well done, sir!" he pumps your hand vigorously. "Captain Nathaniel Richards of the *Lionheart*. Please, this way. You must be exhausted. Preparations have been made for your comfort, we're headed back to Belvoir. Oh," he signals one of his men forward, "and I'll have Miss Moon conveyed to her quarters now..."

"No, I'll do that."

"But Captain Nye, she's my resp--"

"I'll do that."

He stares in astonishment. Regards your tired but stern expression streaked with grime, sweat, and blood. He realizes there's no use in arguing; Richards relents and sighs. "As you wish, captain."

Wearily, you approach the dreadnought's open hatch. Autumn Moon doesn't stir. But...she's alive.

And in your arms.

Turn to 90.

-48-

Your heart sinks when you hear a ripping sound, followed by sombre moaning. The church is guarded by undead after all! Normally, such shambling, rotting abominations would have been devoured by maggots, their bones crumbled to nothing long before now – yet necromancy has permeated the entire land. Such corpses have been preserved into a perpetual state of decomposition and tainted by Kali's evil will. There's no time for your men to use Suffields here. You must take on two zombies *simultaneously* in close combat:

1st Zombie:
Skill 8 Stamina 7

2nd Zombie:
Skill 8 Stamina 8

As their bony claws carry plague, remember to Test your Luck if wounded and administer an AV shot should it prove necessary. If you win, turn to 71.

-49-

Your heart leaps upon witnessing a Kali-Cloak plummet to earth, dissipating into a thousand ghostly droplets. Gain 1 Luck point and note *four* demons now remain. Turn to 12.

-50-

Alerted by the sounds of battle, a dozen scythe-wielding shrieking skeletons set upon you. Your men have by now reached the wall's crest and duly pour a devastating fire into these Shadow reinforcements. Some are smashed asunder – but even this loyal rescue attempt cannot hold back the demonic onslaught. “Retreat!” you shout, fending off several wickedly-sharp blades. “Mission's failed: get back to the *Endurance!*” *I hope they make it...* However, overwhelmed by such numbers, you do not survive.

-51-

Your pistol is hardly practical for long-range targets – but you can pick off some Thuggees who are trying to break inside. Roll two dice. If it is the same or less than your current Skill, you easily neutralize the threat. Repeat this procedure twice more. If the die roll is *higher*, you must fight that particular Thuggee at close quarters – before they can get to Autumn!

(Each) Thuggee:
Skill 8 Stamina 8

If you eliminate the threat, turn to 33.

-52-

The zombies do not hinder your search of the place. You turn up some apples and cooked chicken, with fresh water (add 3 Meals to your Adventure Sheet). But you make another gruesome discovery: the zombies are cooking human flesh! Utterly sickened, will you leave here and check the pantry (turn to 13), or return to the entrance hall and search the drawing room (turn to 62), or head upstairs (turn to 76)?

-53-

The heavy, barbed metal connects with your head. Lose 1 Skill point and 3 Stamina points. Losing balance, you tumble headlong back down the hard stone steps. Test your Luck. If you are lucky turn to 6. If you are unlucky turn to 36.

-54-

At great speed, Earlstree manages evade the second barrage. The *Endurance* is momentarily concealed from plain view by an expanse of overgrown woodland. Turn to 77.

-55-

In your sudden, desperate break-out to reach *Endurance*, you must roll two dice and compare it to your current Skill. Repeat this procedure once more – if on *any* occasion the die roll is higher turn to 39. If it is the same or less than your Skill turn to 88.

-56-

The *Endurance* comes to a halt just two miles from Normanton. At this stage it would be prudent in keeping your distance in case of another ambush. Utilizing the dreadnought's periscope, you scan the surrounding the countryside...nothing stirs save a few crows flapping around the church steeple. You frown: *what could be up there?* Dead...or undead, either one would attract such carrion. Your mission objective is to rescue those trapped - or discover their bodies, at least. Either way, pulling out isn't an option. All else within the wooded vale seems pretty quiet. Too quiet, perhaps.

Further south down the broken, buckled road is a village called Edith Weston. Previous reconnaissance reports indicate this as a Thuggee outpost; you don't want to be doing anything that could alert enemy reinforcements to your presence. In and out: that's the plan. From here on in, the mission will be carried out on foot. Five men under your command have Suffields (sub-machine guns equipped with silencers) and Blakrite knives – further, your stealthy approach will be aided by the growing dusk.

It's a balmy summer's evening. Flies (owing to the marshy ground) are in abundance. Most wildlife species somehow survived the Blight; over the years plants, weeds, and grass overgrew large tracts of Britain, co-existing with nightmarish abominations.... Test your Luck. If you are lucky turn to 78. If you are unlucky turn to 20.

-57-

Snarling, you leap to attack this powerful Thuggee:

Thuggee Sorcerer:
Skill 9 Stamina 10

If you win this deadly duel, turn to 47.

-58-

This is the plan: Autumn Moon will resume her divine melody while the rest of you descend. In turn, you'll guard her descent, ready to tackle any Shadows whilst she's stopped playing. The first stage goes well enough. Next is your attempt to escape the Hall itself. "We were caught unawares," explains Sergeant Hand. "Two of my lads are holed up in the drawing room." If you haven't already, add these 2 men *and* Sergeant Hand himself to your own Platoon. Autumn shall be accompanying you, of course, but cannot be used to make up the numbers in this way; playing the melody will prevent her from using a firearm – yet her miraculous ability should be the equivalent of a *thousand* Suffields! The gypsy jig has kept Shadows at bay while you all make it to the entrance hall. Here, you radio the *Endurance* to rendezvous in Heathcote Hall's grounds. The sooner you can implement an effective escape, the sooner you'll get Autumn to safety!

Turn to 8.

-59-

You locate some stone steps leading up to what remains of a mahogany door. Ascending these, you and your men emerge inside the entrance hall. Turn to 67.

-60-

A high stone wall encloses the hall itself. Still, there's plenty of hand holds; you scale it easily, swing an arm over the summit...unfortunately, such residences often had broken glass cemented atop to deter vagrants and other undesirables of society. The Shadows have seen fit not to remove such crude yet effective protection: lose 1 Skill point and 3 Stamina points. Swearing vilely, you manage to drop down on the other side, waiting for the others to join you (turn to 86).

-61-

Sergeant Earlstree wrenches the wheel, this way and that, swerving to spoil the enemy aim. However, this tactic won't be enough on its own: the dreadnought's turrets must repel the attack with hot lead! Repeat the procedure in shooting the Kali-Cloaks, and then roll two dice against the Skill of *each* demon that remains. Keep track of how many enemies you destroy and how many times the *Endurance* is hit by ectoplasm. If it's hit a total of 12 times turn to 24. If you destroy all the enemy *before* they can achieve this tally, turn to 81.

-62-

The door opens slightly...and bangs against an obstruction. Masonry or part of the ceiling must have fallen against it at some point. Instructing your men to help shift the stubborn door further, suddenly a Suffield's barrel pokes through the narrow opening.

"Hold it!" you snap, raising your hands. "We're from the Warwick garrison."

"Warwick garrison! What in God's name are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing, private."

"We're from Belvoir Castle-"

"Right. The operation that went wrong."

He barks a laugh. "Aye, sir - though I'd say that was an understatement."

"Still, you'd better let us in...or there'll be *another* failed mission!"

They shift the makeshift barricade aside. In the drawing room, you discover these two special ops survived a Thuggee ambush that split their group. The musician they were escorting fled upstairs. Your heart skips a beat: *he's here, somewhere!*

"Any idea exactly where they might be?"

"Well," the second scratches his head, "most rooms 'ave locked doors. Others accessible, but dead-ends. Reckon the only place they could 'ave gone to..."

"Yes?"

"The attic. Sarge ain't a daft sort. They'd 'ave taken refuge up there, pulled the ladder up after 'em!"

"Still," sighs his mate, "only a matter of time 'til they starve."

You nod. "We're here to make sure it doesn't come to that." *All this trouble...for a damn musician.*

"Right. Let's try to reach them. You two, join us – show us where this attic is." Add 2 to your Platoon, then turn to 5.

-63-

Endurance bursts forth from the tree-line on a southerly course. This catches the Thuggee gunners off-guard and - by the time they've primed their artillery pieces - you've climbed to the summit. One or two shells do plough up earth nearby...then you're obstructed from view. Ahead, a vista of hills, rolling fields, and overgrown hedgerows greets your eyes...

Turn to 21.

-64-

Your own radio-man notes the frequency before trying to contact friendlies – if anyone's still alive – in the vicinity. On the third attempt, a voice struggles through heavy static: '...Copy...Wolf-tail here...trapped upstairs in h...ic. Besieged...' Then, static drowns out the rest of the message. You rub your chin in thought. *Where could they be taking refuge?* Gain 1 Luck point for discovering nearby survivors. So, will you try the Church (turn to 14), or the Hall (turn to 41)?

-65-

In your sudden, desperate break-out to reach *Endurance*, you must roll two dice and compare it to your current Skill. Repeat this procedure *four* times – if on *any* occasion the die roll is higher turn to 39. If it is the same or less than your Skill turn to 88.

-66-

That cross-country trek has taken its toll upon the poor, stricken girl. She's collapsed in a heap upon the filthy floor, gasping against the terrible pain. If you have an AV shot left its chemicals could act as a stimulant (turn to 7). However, if you've used them all up: test your Luck! If you are lucky, Sergeant Hand has a spare one left (turn to 7). However, if you are unlucky turn to 40.

-67-

There are recent signs that the hall has been in recent use. Footprints mark the dusty marble floor. Numerous magical crystals are attached to the grimy wallpaper like surreal limpets, illuminating a damp interior. The entire place seems to be creaking with age. A grandiose staircase leads to the upper floor, while to the left and right are mahogany doors, slightly warped by the cold of so many past winters.

"Blimey!" remarks one of your men. "Bleak place, eh sir?"

You nod. "Dangerous, too. Keep on your toes, lads. Those Revenants were posted here for a reason; they must be after something important. And I'd wager they weren't the only Shadows lurking around here."

"Do you reckon that musician's here, sir?"

"Probably..."

But where should we search? Will you reconnoitre the ground floor, either: the kitchen (turn to 25), or the drawing room (turn to 62)? Otherwise, you must ascend the stairs ahead by turning to 76.

-68-

Double doors of oak bar the way onwards – which prove to be locked. And there's no sign of a key-hole. Nor would it be wise in using explosives here. You all stand there, at a loss, wondering on the next course of action...

"Look, sir," points one of your men. Curiously, set within the frame is a ruby. If you also possess a ruby turn to 32. If not, but you're wearing a disguise turn to 3. Otherwise, you'll have to find another way in by turning to 84.

-69-

You reload the pistol. *Six rounds left*, you acknowledge with a sigh. *Reinforcements had better get here soon - or we've had it*. It all depends on the total count of your Platoon. Including yourself, are there six men or less (turn to 28), seven or more (turn to 51)?

-70-

Cupping hands to your mouth, you shout: "Hey there! In the attic – we're here to rescue you!"

Several clicks answer your hail. However, you're still looking expectantly at the hatch when a horde of Shadows swarm from the unlocked doors! They must have retreated from the ferocious fire-power, lain in wait, hoping to trick the resistance into thinking the coast was clear. Or perhaps simply to starve them out. Whatever the case, this mixed onslaught is now targeting *you*! Thuggees, undead, and demi-demons with blood-red eyes, shaggy grey fur, and vicious fangs – all attack you without hesitation. There's little point in stealth now; you can fire off three pistol shots before the crush makes its use impossible. Roll two dice. If it is the same or less than your current Skill, deduct 1 round of combat from a total of *eight*. Repeat this procedure *twice* more.

Shadow Horde:

Skill 9 Stamina (see above)

If you survive, roll one die. If you roll 'odd', deduct 1 from your Platoon; 'even' means you've lost 2 men. Also, you must test your Luck against contracting the plague. Inject 1 AV shot if required. The

hatch opens a fraction. Then, you find a familiar face staring down at you. "Captain Nye!" gasps a deep voice. "By all that's holy! It's me, sir: Colour Sergeant Stephen Hand. We-we're sorry, sir...we thought it was another Thuggee trick. Crafty devils, they are! Wondered what all that noise was, though. Here, let me lower the ladder, sir..." Turn to **22**.

-71-

Reaching the sorry shell of a porch, you test the latch, push on the heavy door. It opens with a dramatically ominous creak. Inside, candles have been lit and positioned along the aisle. Few of the wooden pews have survived - the remainder smashed by tremendous force. This entire place is coated by a thick layer of dust while cobwebs straddle the massive oak beams high above. Certainly, apart from a few footprints, the church shows signs of little use since the Blight struck; Shadows have only recently laid claim to this ruined village. Suddenly, one of your men gives vent a scream: a throwing knife is stuck between his shoulder blades - deduct 1 from your Platoon. Then Thuggees converge on all sides! One has ensnared you with the infamous garotte! Roll two dice. If it is the same or less than your Skill, you manage to twist, jab your pistol barrel into his gut, and pull the trigger. Otherwise, lose 3 Stamina points and keep trying to break free - or die trying! If you survive this sneak attack, turn to **34**.

-72-

The gunners' best just isn't good enough. These Kali-Cloaks swirl and twist from the tracers. Not one is destroyed (lose 1 Luck point) and note *five* demons still remain. Turn to **12**.

-73-

Thankfully, a passing Thuggee heard your rant. Through the peep-hole, his expression is somewhat quizzical but not challenging. You mutter something about losing your key. His frown deepens...Test your Luck again. If you are lucky, he nods, unlocks the doors, motioning for you to enter turn to **67**. If you are unlucky, turn to **45**.

-74-

Just in time, you dodge the sudden attack. His own stratagem backfires: he loses balance, tumbles headlong downstairs. Now - before he can recover - would be a good chance to use your pistol and finish him off (turn to **30**) or engage him in close combat (turn to **82**).

-75-

Wounded and exhausted, lungs burning, you lack the strength to outrun such a vengefully relentless pursuit. Autumn notices your plight, begins playing...a few seconds later it abruptly ceases: Thuggee bullets have struck her chest and abdomen. Once again, the hellish elements are free from torment - permanently. You don't survive against such odds. The human resistance has suffered a grievous defeat this day, one from which it may never recover...

-76-

You find yourself on a landing that branches off left and right. Doors - and open doorways with wooden fragments hanging from rusted hinges - line the wall ahead. With little else to go on, you've no choice but to investigate each room as you go. It would save time by splitting into two groups, but you don't want to divide your force in such hostile territory. So, will you all head left (turn to 5) or right (turn to 46)?

-77-

The dense shield of trees soaks up what would otherwise be an intense pounding. The few shells which do manage to get through are fired blindly, and fail to exact any real damage to the armoured hull. Eventually - and thankfully - enemy artillery ceases fire altogether; Thuggee gunners have no desire to waste ordnance on such a difficult target.

"They must be desperate to get their hands on her, sir."

"That's right, Eddie," you nod, "so the sooner we're out of here, the better." *Burst out of the trees, catch 'em napping...*

"Easier said than done," he sighs, "shrapnel's caught one of front tyres. It's shredded, sir. We're not going anywhere - at least 'til it's repaired."

"Damn it all!" you thunder. *And it won't be long until Shadows bear down on our position.* The 40mm cannon won't be able to hold off waves of enemy sneaking through a terrain thick with woodland, and at night-time too. *It'll only be a matter of time before they break into the motionless vehicle. We're caught like rats in a trap! Even with Autumn's blessed music, you won't hold against a concerted Thuggee attack.*

"Right. Get on the radio, Eddie, listen for any patrolling dreadnoughts in the immediate area. Send a distress signal. And instruct the gunners to keep any Shadows off our backs."

"Yes, sir!"

"In the meantime, I'll concentrate on helping to replace that tyre..."

Are you able to repair the *Endurance* in time? Roll two dice, then reduce this by the number of men within your Platoon *including* yourself and Sergeant Hand. If the result is 3 or less turn to 35. If it is 4 or more turn to 2.

-78-

You reach the shattered buildings of Normanton. Once a picturesque pre-Blight village, you've often wondered how those people lived their daily existence during happier times - before darkness descended, without warning, without any way of stopping it. *Poor devils.* Muskets and cannon-shot were useless in face of such a supernatural foe.

You unfold a copied map hastily drawn up by one of Warwick's cartographers - the fellow had a hard time locating those old prints from the Guild library. It's your way of tribute to the people who once inhabited these thriving communities by doing some personal research on such places. Normanton is no exception. The place had an aristocratic establishment with roots back to the Norman Conquest, and how it already faced a steady decline in population (most of whom moved to nearby Empingham) just before the Blight reared its ugly head. The cause of this decline is sat upon a nearby hill: Heathcote Hall is a shambling ruin, surrounded by parkland now choked with weeds, stinging nettles, and vines climbing crumbling walls. Relics of a bygone age. *We're all relics in our way,* you reflect. *All fighting elements, the Shadows...where will it end?* All that history to build such a settlement - and thousands other like it - reduced to glowing embers in a matter of minutes. Yours is a folly pastime, practically irrelevant, perhaps. But learning a little about them seems to keep the memory of such hapless folk alive. Nevertheless, back to the mission at hand...

Will you investigate: the hall (turn to 41), the village church (turn to 14), or the ruins of a nearby cottage (turn to 27)?

-79-

Sergeant Hand tries to shake Autumn conscious - but it's no use. Intense pain from her leg has induced a faint. She's unresponsive. Meanwhile, the ring of demons and undead tightens...Now cut off from the *Endurance*, your bid to escape has failed - Kali has won a great victory this day.

-80-

You find yourself in a private chamber dominated by a four poster bed. Oriental-style drawers sit near the window and opposite stands a wardrobe. You almost jump out your skin – only to see your own reflection in a full-length gilt mirror. On the bed itself you find the tattered, discoloured remains of a lady's silk dressing gown. *Poor woman, you frown, how many terrifying days did she spend in here, with only screams of the dying and demonic howls to keep her company?* Next to this lies a book entitled, 'The Barefoot Baroness'. Flicking through it, you learn it's about a girl from the poorer classes (at time of publication) who works her way up in society through a mix of acquaintances, education, and good fortune. You may take this Item if you wish. You open the wardrobe to reveal some mouldy dresses and elegant shoes but nothing of any use. Proceeding on to the drawers, within a jewellery box, you find an elaborate brass key. This will open the locked door here - and negate a noisy exit on your part! Turn to 76.

-81-

The night skies are clear of hostiles! A tremendous cheer erupts throughout the dreadnought, whoops of delight, men clapping each other on the back. "That'll teach 'em to follow us," growls Sergeant Earlstree. "Welcome back aboard, sir. So - this is who we've been looking for?"

"That's right, Eddie."

He rubs his chin, frowning. "She's just a blues maiden..."

"Right again. And you should have seen her perform. Let's just say you missed a treat - and those Shadows didn't request an encore!"

"Well," he rubs his brow, "it escapes me how-"

A sudden explosion rocks the stationary dreadnought. One of the gunners shouts: "Thuggee artillery has us zeroed in!"

Earlstree peers through the wind-shield, staggers against a second near miss, swears vilely. "They're positioned on the ridge all around us, sir," he grits his teeth. "Valley's heating up fast!"

"Adopt evasive measures, sergeant!"

"Right you are, sir!"

So saying, he guns the engines, shifts into gear, deliberately weaving about to confound enemy sights...Earlstree's Skill is 10. Roll two dice. If it is the same or less than his Skill turn to 54. If it is higher turn to 31.

-82-

You mercilessly set upon the sorcerer, sabre slashing down, his magical shield rendered ineffectual by the blakrite blade. Dazed and bruised, he staggers beneath such onslaught:

Thuggee Sorcerer:
Skill 9 Stamina 6

If you defeat the leader, turn to 23.

-83-

"Gentlemen? Some percussive accompaniment, if you please."

They all chuckle at her dry humour and readily comply: flicking off safety catches, slotting in fresh magazines.

"They could still overwhelm us..." you whisper.

"Perhaps not, sir." The sudden presence of Sergeant Earlstree startles you. "Meant to inform you before we left *Endurance* – I got a reply from *Empress* and *Lionheart*. They should be here within half an hour, I'd say."

You nod understanding. "We need only keep 'em busy 'til then..."

The first Suffields start spitting out hot lead; Thuggee snipers have started targeting the windows.

"Autumn," you shout above the tumult of battle, "keep down! We don't want to lose you now, lass!"

She pouts: "Your concern for me – and *me* alone – is flattering."

"Right. That's me: a lady's man."

"Who said anything about charm?"

You catch Earlstree grinning devilishly.

"What's up with you?"

"I'd say she's keen on you, sir."

"Nonsense!"

You grunt a laugh at the absurdity of his observation. You aim at a crouched Thuggee, squeeze the trigger, fire two shots. A yelp of pain causes you to smile – or perhaps there's another reason...? You shrug it off. *Me? Lovestruck? Absurd!*

Earlstree simply barks a laugh.

Huh! Glad someone's enjoying himself...

Turn to 69.

-84-

You and your men scout around the building. There are two possible ways in: via a cellar (turn to 18) or by climbing a drainpipe and smashing one of the windows (turn to 38).

-85-

Autumn is conscious yet suffering terribly from her leg wound. Such a state will greatly affect her ability to play. She needs something to perk her up – but what on earth could you use to inspire her? If you have book entitled 'The Barefoot Baroness' turn to 37. Otherwise, turn to 10.

-86-

You hear a low growling, then a snarl. Quickly, drawing your sabre... to confront two emaciated hounds which are patrolling the grounds. These demi-demons are Kali's own hellish pets! *So much for stealth...* You must defend yourself as both leap to the attack *together*:

1st Hell Hound:
Skill 8 Stamina 7

2nd Hell Hound:
Skill 8 Stamina 8

Refer to the rules of fighting more than one opponent. If the number of rounds *exceeds* 16, turn to **50**. Otherwise, turn to **44**.

-87-

You hear an ominous creak – then, the whole section of floor gives way beneath your feet! You fall into a study below. Unfortunately, the single door here is jammed solid. The only way you can escape this pit-trap is to try and climb out; one of your men braces against a wall, another climbs atop his shoulders, thus building a human ladder in order to reach (what used to be) ceiling height. You curse the fact these old Georgian rooms had such high dimensions. However, before you can reach the jagged hole, a head suddenly peers down at you. You hope it's one of the survivors from Belvoir. *No such luck*. A hand appears, holding a grenade... "Quick!" you shout. "Shoot him, before-!"

The Thuggee grins wickedly, lets go his grenade. Your men panic, hunt around for the thing before it detonates...but too late. The resulting blast kills you all.

-88-

You successfully hold off the Shadow onslaught without sustaining any casualties – except for one man with blood streaming down his arm. Gain 1 Luck point. Nevertheless, with Suffield in his good hand blazing away, he contributes to an immense covering-fire that helps you all gain safety of the *Endurance*. Turn to **17**.

-89-

With gun and sword drawn, you charge upstairs, determined not to let him raise the alarm...just as you reach the summit he suddenly turns and strikes down with his staff! Roll two dice. If it is the same or less than your Skill turn to **74**. If it is higher than your Skill turn to **53**.

-90-

"What a marvellous invention!"

"Hmm."

"Oh come sir," Sergeant Earlstree chides, "even you have to admit: this is revolutionary!"

"Well...perhaps," you wearily reply, before stubbing out a cigarette. "Still, I can't really see myself getting used to such newfangled ideas. *Cassette* tapes indeed!"

"It all helps in turning the tide against Kali. Although," he grins, obviously enjoying himself, "I can understand your missing the charming young lady, sir. Just think: we can play Miss Moon's divine melody now, any time, any place. Play it to our heart's content – drive the demons back, deal with their Thuggee chums in our own time."

"There is that," you allow.

"Aha!" he turns up the radio. "Speak of the devil."

"...and I'd like to dedicate this next song to a good friend of mine, Major William Nye. Thanks, Will...for saving my life!"

"Ahhhh, isn't that lovely?"

"Eddie, now you're pushing it."

He feigns a sheepish pose. "Sorry, sir."

No he damn well isn't!

"Well, don't just stand there, sergeant, make yourself useful. Stop admiring that cassette and use the blasted thing! We have an audience waiting. Not an *eager* one, mind you, but waiting nonetheless."

"Very good, sir." Just before leaving, he turns the wheel up a little further. *Anything to irritate me – damn his eyes!*

Once certain he's gone, you light another cigarette, then settle on the bunk. This particular song is an unusual one for Autumn – more folkish in style, with an Irish drum beating out a fast beat to match the dazzling mandolin, her fiddle playing a couple of accompaniments. And that beautiful, angelic voice...

*'...Follow me into the heart of hell,
to snatch a Maiden cold.
Such souls aren't ours to sell,
So Kali must be told...'*

Aye lass, you grin, that's better...

Author's Note:

William Nye first appeared in 'Kali's Count', a short story I'd submitted some years ago to Alternate Gateway Worlds. This website is still accessible (at time of writing 'Nye's Song'). The story contains more of an insight on the Blight, Kali's minions, and the human resistance.