

NUMBERS GAME

An apocalyptic thriller

Semi-finalist International Screenwriters Association
Emerging Thriller Comp 2025

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BLACK SCREEN. A FRANTIC HEARTBEAT THUDS...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

An AMBULANCE speeds through a VIOLENT DUST STORM, past crop fields on either side.

INT. AMBULANCE - DAY

ALICE (26) grips the wheel, struggling to see through the dust. A NAME BADGE is pinned to her PARAMEDIC UNIFORM, the SHIRT IS UNTUCKED. There's a PORTABLE RADIO in her lap.

Her PHONE sits in a holder, the screen shows a COUNTDOWN from the "DEPT OF DEFENCE" -- 10 MINUTES until "THE INVASION". The phone suddenly RINGS -- it's "MUM". Alice answers.

MUM (V.O.)
(panicked)
Where are you?

ALICE
Almost there.

MUM (V.O.)
But how long?

ALICE
Five minutes. Tops.

MUM (V.O.)
Well put your foot down. Is everything ok with...

ALICE
Yes, fine. Don't worry.

MUM (V.O.)
Oh Alice, I can't believe this is happening...

A JARRING WHINE fills the air.

ALICE
Gotta go, mum. I'll be there soon.
Love you.

She hangs up before HOWLING WIND smashes the driver's side. The ambulance mounts the shoulder, heading straight for an ABANDONED POLICE CAR.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Shit!

She yanks the wheel, SKIDS back on the road and over the crest of a hill, past a SPORTS CAR wrapped around a tree.

There's a FRANTIC BEEPING from behind -- in the mirror Alice sees SAYEED (30s) stagger from the car. Middle Eastern, crisp white shirt, expensive suit and shoes.

NINE MINUTES left. She eyes A PHOTO OF HER PARENTS on the dash.

ALICE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

Then SLAMS on the brake and SCREECHES to a halt.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Seeing the AMBULANCE reverse, Sayeed grabs his BRIEFCASE and PHONE, plugged into the car's charger. NADIA (30s) is still inside taking pictures through the window, with an EXPENSIVE CAMERA. She's Middle Eastern, but wears alternative clothes.

SAYEED

Nadia!

A couple more SNAPS and Nadia hurries outside.

INT. AMBULANCE - DAY

Sayeed jumps in, Nadia follows and SLAMS the door behind her.

ALICE

Either of you hurt?

SAYEED

No. Just drive.

Alice whips through the gears, they ZOOM through the dust.

SAYEED (CONT'D)

Where are we going?

ALICE

A cellar. Friends of my parents.

SAYEED

How far?

ALICE
About... five kilometres.

He checks the speedo, then the SAME COUNTDOWN on his phone.

ALICE (CONT'D)
We'll easily make it.

The JARRING WHINE gets louder, raging wind slows them.

SAYEED
But not in this!

A turning for a scenic route is fast approaching. Alice looks from the road to the turning, then pulls the wheel at the final second.

SAYEED (CONT'D)
Surely this way is longer?

ALICE
Trust me.

The ambulance rounds a corner -- forest trees line both sides of the road, acting as a wind tunnel. A massive gust hits from behind, sending them over top speed.

NADIA
Fuck yeah!

They fly over a hill to find... a TOPPLED TREE blocking the road. Alice brakes and they SKID to a halt, inches away.

SAYEED
Turn it around!

She GRINDS it in reverse, but another gust smashes them into the tree. The AMBULANCE SIREN WAILS.

SAYEED (CONT'D)
Ya Ibn el Sharmouta!

Alice grabs her phone.

ALICE
My parents can get us.

SAYEED
There is no time.

ALICE
Well there must be something...

SAYEED
Quiet! Let me think.

NADIA
You be quiet, Sayeed!

Alice breathes deeply, wracking her brain for an answer, when POLICEMAN HUNTER (60) emerges from the dust fifty feet ahead.

ALICE
Hey!

Hunter stares at the WAILING AMBULANCE, then sprints into the forest. Alice snatches the PHOTO and RADIO, enters the rear of the vehicle, stuffs a MEDICAL BAG with extra supplies...

SAYEED
You're going to follow?

She throws two surgical masks at them.

ALICE
I don't think we have a choice.

She affixes her own MASK, slides the back door open and runs.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Alice races after the FLASH OF BLUE UNIFORM, darting between trees, leaping over logs. But she trips, lands in the dirt, and by the time she rises he's gone. She lifts her mask.

ALICE
Hello?

Her voice ECHOES around the forest. Panic starts to rise...

ALICE (CONT'D)
HELP US!

Then... an EXPLOSION and a SHOUT in the distance. She speeds towards the sounds and bursts through the forest's edge to...

A MAJESTIC FIELD OF RED POPPIES

The flowers are trampled all the way to a CONCRETE GUARD POST on the edge of the field -- a metre high and three wide, with a NARROW HORIZONTAL WINDOW facing the poppies (a LOOPHOLE). Hunter's lying beside it, clutching his leg. He spots Alice.

HUNTER
Wait! Land mines. Follow my path.

She darts down the trampled poppies towards him. His NAME BADGE reads 'SERGEANT HUNTER'. A smashed radio lies in the dirt. His trousers are torn at the thigh, soaked with blood.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
Around the back.

EXT. REAR OF GUARD POST - DAY

Alice supports Hunter down a steep slope to a METAL DOOR.

INT. GUARD POST - DAY

Alice heaves the METAL DOOR open, helps Hunter down a few steps to a sunken floor, a metre below ground level. A MACHINE GUN is mounted by the LOOPHOLE, at the perfect height to stand and fire. He points to a HATCH in the floor.

HUNTER
Over there.

She lowers him beside it, he tries in vain to heave it open.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
Help me.

She pulls her mask down, so it hangs around her neck.

ALICE
I need to see your leg.

HUNTER
There's no time!

She checks her phone -- *SIX MINUTES* left.

ALICE
We're fine. I don't want to make it worse. Pain? Scale of one to ten.

HUNTER
Er... six.

She slips on a latex glove, calmly examines the wound.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
Blast was small. Must've been old.

ALICE
It can wait. I'll get the others.

HUNTER
Others? What others?

ALICE
By the roadside.

She rips off the glove. He heaves at the hatch.

HUNTER
Open this first!

ALICE
I won't be long.

There's a THUDDING outside, Alice peers THROUGH THE LOOPHOLE -
- a mask-clad Sayeed is storming down the flattened poppies,
with Nadia taking pictures behind him, mask in hand.

ALICE (CONT'D)
They made it.

Sayeed bursts inside, gawks at Hunter, then the machine gun.
He rips off his mask.

SAYEED
What... is this place?

HUNTER
Just help me lift this fucking
hatch!

INT. ENTRY ROOM - BUNKER - DAY

PITCH BLACK. The HATCH in the ceiling opens with a CLANG, a
pool of light revealing a LADDER beneath, bolted to a wall. A
MILITARY PARAFFIN LAMP hangs nearby. Sayeed clammers down in
socks, flicks a switch on the wall, a bulb flickers to life.

The room is ten metres square, brick walls, fresh white
paint. There's a ventilation shaft in the corner and FOUR
DOORS, two on one wall, two opposite, painted MILITARY GREEN.

An OLD CERAMIC SINK with yellowing cake of soap sits between
two of the doors. Sayeed turns the tap -- water gushes out.

SAYEED
We have water.

He sticks his head under the tap and guzzles. Nadia's the
next one down the ladder. She takes Hunter's weight, with
Alice helping from above.

An oblivious Sayeed opens a door by the sink -- a RUSTING ARMY TOILET. The adjacent door leads to a POKY STOREROOM -- shelves carrying BOTTLES OF PARAFFIN, MATCHES and OLD WOODEN CRATES filled with "MILITARY RATION, SUPPER PACKS".

SAYEED (CONT'D)
 There's lamp oil, matches, food.
 Eurgh! Made in nineteen forty-four!

A sudden BANG BANG BANG on the Guard Post door. Alice pauses halfway down the ladder.

ALICE
 I'll let them in.

SAYEED
 Are you sure there's time?

She pulls out her phone -- *TWO MINUTES* left.

ALICE
 Plenty.

SAYEED
 But... that food won't last long.
 If it's even edible.

ALICE
 So?

NADIA
 He's saying we should keep it all
 for ourselves.

ALICE
 And let them die out there? No!

She races up the ladder and through the hatch.

SAYEED
 But you do not know who you're
 letting in!

The JARRING WHINE gets louder...

INT. GUARD POST - DAY

Alice unbolts the door, the wind SLAMS it open -- a skinny, unwashed man aims a SHOTGUN at her. BAIT (25) wears a singlet, combats and a bandana. BINOCULARS hang around his neck. CLINGWRAP covers a NEW TATTOO on his bicep.

LILY (8) grips his leg. Wild hair, sundress, wellington boots. PLUSH DOG BACKPACK with WATER BOTTLE in a side pocket.

Bait eyes the open hatch and SAYEED'S SHOES beside it.

BAIT
Who's down there?

ALICE
There's... three others.

BAIT
You know them?

She shakes her head, before a second LAND MINE EXPLODES and a DOG HOWLS. Lily runs to the LOOPHOLE -- sees a DOG WITH A BRIGHT ORANGE COLLAR limping off through the dust.

LILY
It's the doggy. We need to help it.

BAIT
No, come on!

He heads down the ladder and she runs after him. Before Alice can close the door, JOAN (75) staggers in. Blouse buttoned to the neck, cardigan and sensible shoes.

ALICE
Quick. Down there.

She SLAMS the door, yanks the bolt across. Joan freezes on the step, eyes the hatch in terror.

ALICE (CONT'D)
You have to move...

She checks her phone... 10 SECONDS left. The JARRING WHINE is almost deafening...

ALICE (CONT'D)
Move! Now!