

"Brighton and Hove"

By Steve Garry

info@integerentertainment.com
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BRIGHTON AND HOVE

EXT. ABANDONED CITY - DAY (25 YEARS OR SO FROM NOW)

It's Springtime, many years after a pandemic devastated the world - including the City of Brighton and Hove in the U.K.

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE AFTERMATH OF THE CATAclysm

Let's float over the city for a post-apocalyptic tour:

- A) The weather is pleasant and sunny, but the silence is deafening. Trees and vegetation have overgrown what was once a modern, clean, bustling city of a quarter million.
- B) The only movement is when a common barn CHICKEN appears. Not much of a specimen, it's thin and its neck feathers are worn off. It bobbles aimlessly, oblivious to its peculiarity, till it squawks at a sudden noise o.s., and flutters off like the proverbial chicken with its head...
- C) We arrive at an industrial facility, once a great pumping station, surrounded completely by a flint wall topped by flimsy nets - evidently strung up to keep something out.
- D) We enter the place, to see vast stonework chiselled from the Victorian Age of Britain's Industrial Revolution: A 100-foot chimney, windowless warehouses, dumpsters full of scrap iron, coal storage sheds, rail cars on a track, some sort of pumping machinery in the overgrown yard, and a cooling pond perpetually full of putrid black water.
- E) Through a large ajar garage door, we glide. Inside are damp floors, giant flywheels and turbines, analog dials, massive pipes, and windowless walls that tower up black and silent to a splintered roof where sunlight peaks in.

The silence yields to faint mechanical-electronic sounds.
- F) We pass a huge steam engine, into a corridor of mildewed wood and rusted metal, with broken windows that let in bits of light, to a door and a stairwell, and up, up, up.
- G) To a landing, where a speaker on a wall crackles with marching music. Then to a door, half open, through which emerges indistinct human chatter and man-made lighting.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY (SCOPE MATTE)

Our p.o.v. is via the lens of a videocam, but at first it's nothing but static. Gradually, to the sound of an operator who slaps the side of the camera, an image comes into focus.

Before us, PROF. REGINALD PHILPOT, 70, Epidemiology, with a mike at his neck and obsolete surgeon's head mirror at his forehead, slumps at a desk cluttered with books and papers.

Behind him are instruments: Some have moving parts, such as a spinning centrifuge, and others make noises including a beeping monitor with green text displayed.

PHILPOT
All set? No. Dammit, close that door, will you?

A squeaky door shuts o.s., to drown out the marching music.

Also in the room, but unseen for now, are DR. MAAYA MICHICO, 65, Biometrics and Physiology, and ROGER MACCHITORE, 50, who also has a Doctorate - but we're unsure what field it's in!

Philpot enters performance mode: He moves his glasses to the tip of his nose, hums, and pretends to scribble notes in a pad from calculations on a slide rule he manipulates.

ROGER (O.S.)
Okay Professor. Start rolling now.

Philpot only now pretends to become aware he is on video.

PHILPOT
Hello? What can I do for you?
(pulls up his glasses)
Oh, I see, it's you.

He removes his headgear and gives a great, cracking stretch.

PHILPOT (CONT'D)
I understand some of you have doubts about the super-bug that is the reason for our current predicament. That you wonder how twenty-first century Man could have been defeated by a virus that wiped out so many of our fellow citizens - except of course the smart ones like us who hid behind these walls.

Lights flicker. He squints. The lights go out completely.

PHILPOT (O.S.)
Curses to this damn place...

The lights flicker on: His face is contorted, mid-frown.

MAAYA (O.S.)
Still rolling, Professor.

Philpot resumes his pleasant, but sarcastic, lecture-mode.

PHILPOT
Well, for those doubters, I shall
now elucidate what transpired in
order that future generations --

ROGER (O.S.)
Ain't nobody left, doc!

PHILPOT
That future generations --

ROGER (O.S.)
Martians, after we all die out?

PHILPOT (CONT'D)
(sighs)
May understand. My fee for this
shall be arranged separately.

MAAYA (O.S.)
Professor!

Philpot rises creakily, and approaches a chalkboard.

PHILPOT
Firstly, I'd like to overwhelm you
with esoteric terms so you do not
doubt my academic qualifications.
(points in the air)
I may refer to auto-immunity,
horizontal gene transfer,
convergent evolution. Impressed?
Okay, how about a transmissible
allergic cross-reaction?
(flips chalk in the air)
For those convinced of my veracity,
you may remain for the lecture.

MAAYA (O.S.)
Professor! You're using up our
allotment of electricity.

PHILPOT
The rest, go away and don't return.
No refunds provided. Finally? No
chit-chat, no munching on snacks,
and no interruptions, please.

ROGER (O.S.)
Chickens! Where'd it come from?

PHILPOT
Oh, right. Fine. The chickens...

He draws a crude bird pictogram, and labels it "Chicken".

He turns to us with a feather in a test tube, and strikes a pose like a killer wielding a knife. This is accompanied by a silly soundtrack of people gasping and children crying!

He resumes, intercut with archived video, as indicated.

PHILPOT (V.O.)
Billions of the foul creatures were
interbred in massive processing
factories, where they never saw the
light of day nor inhaled fresh air.

Scenes of warehouse-sized factories here, and cramped cages piled high there, with row upon row of squawking chickens crowded together like sardines, walled-off by barbed wire.

PHILPOT (V.O. CONT'D)
No "free range chickens", these.
It created generations of what may
genetically have been chickens, but
were so horribly unhealthy as to
inevitably breed something truly
abominable - and I don't mean the
famous two-headed critters we saw.

Dead, sickly, wobbly, mutated birds are grabbed by the neck or shovelled up by men and tossed into bins or fire pits.

PHILPOT (V.O. CONT'D)
Hundreds of millions of these birds
were slaughtered daily, to satisfy
our ever-increasing demand for
chicken wings, chicken breasts,
chicken giblets, chicken soup,
chicken eggs - not to mention their
feathers, for coats and pillows.

Dissolve through images of pre-cooked and fast-food chicken products, including a sign of "Trillions Served", ending at a plate of leftover blobs covered with yucky green spots.

ANGLE ON Philpot as he sighs, shakes his head, and sits.

PHILPOT
And now, here we are, a quarter
century after four waves of disease
swept the planet, as far as we know
only I, Reginald Philpot, and a few
other scientists, survive. Oh, and
a hundred regular folks living with
us here in our blessed Topia --

RECORDED VOICE (V.O.)
(filtered over speaker)
Attention. Attention.

PHILPOT
Ah well, there goes that one.

RECORDED VOICE (V.O.)
In one minute, we commence the
broadcast of today's message from
our Great Loved One, the Most
Democratically Beneficent, the --

PHILPOT
Lord, we need a hero to rescue us.

Maaya appears at his side. She's tiny, Asian and unsmiling.

MAAYA
Shhh! That's enough, Professor.
We have real work to do now.

She unwinds the mike from his neck. Behind them, Roger appears and wipes the board. Terminally happy, he twitches, whistles, and seems generally incapable of standing still.

EXT. LARGE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - DAY

This imposing structure is better maintained than any other in the facility: A sign reads "The Ministry of Ministries".

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE/PROCTOR, THE LEADER - DAY

PROCTOR, 55, regally-moustachioed, munches from a tray as he sits in a sumptuous chair at a desk. Snuggled at his feet is CHI CHI, a twitchy, bug-eyed, aggressive-looking Chihuahua. MURPHY, about 80, stands behind. He's rather shrivelled up, but still looks proud to be in his royal servant's uniform.

With his mouth full, Proctor turns to an old desktop computer. It refuses to cooperate, and he pounds the keys.

PROCTOR
Locked up again? Oh, this blasted thing. We brought scientists and military people in with us - and of course political leadership - but no computer repair people?

MURPHY
I'd say that a twenty-five-year old computer that still operates at all is quite impressive, Guvner.

PROCTOR
Guvner. That's okay for you to say, Murphy, but are the people out there still using that old term?

MURPHY
I think not, sir. I do know they're still looking for some sort of hero to show up someday.

PROCTOR
Oh, not that fantasy again.
(pause)
Maybe it's time for a new title for me. That'll distract them. Hmm...

He pokes at the computer, and raises his arms in victory.

PROCTOR (CONT'D)
Ah, here we go!

INSERT - OLD COMPUTER SCREEN

A list of synonyms for "Leader" scrolls onto the screen.

PROCTOR (O.S.)
I liked "Preeminence", but it never caught on.

MURPHY (O.S.)
They never called you that, no sir.

ANGLE ON Proctor, tapping his chin, analyzing the synonyms.

PROCTOR
They still call me Minister. Mmm, Director? Commander? Oh, I like that. How about Custodian? The Big Cheese? Ha, Chairman. Oh, no, that suggests something corporate or an extreme ideology. We're not extreme, are we Murphy? Executive. Oh, that's nice. Superintendent?

MURPHY
(checks watch)
The morning announcement, sir?

PROCTOR
Yes yes, mmm... Mogul? Autocrat? Despot? Oh, no no no... wait!

Chi Chi and Murphy cock their heads. The boss moves up to a microphone on the desk. He clears his throat and readies to press a button, but casts a quick glance back to Murphy.

PROCTOR (CONT'D)
 "Luminary!" That's the one! It's
 perfect. Where is my Magistrate?
 We need to codify this, right away.
 Get me Charles Freeman!

Wherein he rolls his chair over Chi Chi's tiny tail, the dog whines, nips Proctor's ankle, who yelps into the microphone.

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE REACTION

The screech on the speaker circles the complex, and beyond:

- A) Scruffy-looking Citizens poke heads out windows or doors.
- B) A mangy-looking dog darts fearfully across the courtyard.
- C) Two surprised guards in a watchtower lean over a railing.
- D) Outside the compound, the echo of the boss's yelp echoes across the entire devastated, motionless city.

INT. RESIDENCE/BEDROOM - DAY (SAME TIME)

The final amplified warble of Proctor's agony awakens one CHARLES FREEMAN, 45, his aforementioned magistrate.

Arms-flailing, Charles painfully raps an elbow, and knocks a water glass off a bedside table. A picture frame tips flat.

He untangles himself wearily from the blankets - and groans when he lowers his feet right into a pair of soggy slippers.

He sits here and squishes his toes and rubs his lined brow. Charles appears burdened, as if he worries about everything.

Slowly and respectfully, he rights the tipped-over frame:

INSERT - FRAMED PHOTO OF PLEASANT, PRE-APOCALYPTIC TIMES

It's his smiling parents, and apparently him as a ten-year-old, alongside an older sister in her teens.

EXT. CHARLES' RESIDENCE - DAY

Charles, in a suit and tie and a nice overcoat, locks up as he exits his dwelling. It's a decent-looking place compared to the warehouses-converted-to-apartments everywhere else.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Charles crosses the courtyard and nods and smiles at other citizens, but the responses are restrained or nonexistent.

We see that the regular people are dressed like serfs in the Middle Ages: Most are males, except for a few old women - grandmothers and older moms who tug young boys by the hand.

Among the filth and squalor, all the buildings need repair. Graffiti is everywhere: "The Guv stinks" and "Where's God?" A dozen maintenance workers slap paint over it with rollers.

Charles passes bumbling Keystone Cop-like Gendarmes, who get in each others way as they switch anarchic home-made posters for ones of "Fear the Birds" illustrated by chickens, "Obey and there will be Plenty, Disobey and there will be Hunger", and "Love the Guv", that feature Proctor cradling Chi Chi.

And for a moment Charles pauses to admire a STREET MUSICIAN, a tiny, toothless elf of a man about 75 years of age.

STREET MUSICIAN
Topia is my home, my home, my home,
but my heart, my heart, my heart
is in Liverpool... owww!

The solo is interrupted by pebbles thrown from up above. We follow Charles' eyes up: It's the guards in the watchtower. From his p.o.v. they chuckle derisively, then turn away...

INT. WATCHTOWER - DAY (SAME TIME)

Two 50ish Cockney men move from one railing and shuffle over to the other. This one looks out over the desolate city.

TULIO is chunky and short, with severe eructation (burping), and capable of snippets of esophageal speech. WALLACE, slim and tall, has trouble at the other end - severe flatulence.

Wallace puts binoculars to his eyes, and gazes out.

TULIO
Anything out there today, Wallace?

Tulio burps loudly, and tries to take the binoculars.

WALLACE
Leave it! I can see the racetrack.

TULIO
(esophageal speech)
What's happening?

WALLACE
What, you got a chicken bone caught
in your throat, mate?

TULIO
Look there! It's that bird again.

Now it's Wallace's turn to show off: He aims the binoculars
to follow Tulio's point, and lets loose a loud, ripe fart.

EXT. OUTSIDE CITY WALLS - DAY (SCOPE MATTE)

It's the scrawny chicken from the opening scene.

WALLACE (O.S.)
There, that's what I think of you,
you stupid clucker.

TULIO (O.S.)
That was a good one, Wallace.

WALLACE (O.S.)
Felt it ripple all the way down my
pant leg, Tulio.

The bird bobs aimlessly about, until pebbles rain down from
the guards on high, who laugh and crow as they torment it.

INT. WATCHTOWER - DAY

Wallace returns to the courtyard railing to peer down. From
his p.o.v., Charles has turned and is walking off somewhere.
Tulio, still looking out to the city, pulls up a megaphone.

TULIO (V.O.)
(through megaphone)
You back again, you atrocious-
looking piece of meat?

WALLACE
What're you shouting at?

He rejoins his mate, and peers over the railing to the city.

WALLACE (CONT'D)
Oh. It's just Scabby. Gimme...

EXT. OUTSIDE CITY WALLS - DAY

SCABBY, 30, a surprising survivor, dips between car wrecks
and tipped mailboxes to scrounge for whatever he can find.

TULIO (O.S.)
 (shouts hoarsely)
 Here Scabby-Scabby, come here boy!

WALLACE (O.S.)
 He's back to beg for food.
 (filtered over megaphone)
 Nothing for you, you skanky pig.

Scabby ignores his detractors, and focuses on the task at hand: He targets a rabbit with a home-made bow and arrow.

TULIO (O.S.)
 He ain't here for food. He wants
 to converse with us.

WALLACE (O.S.)
 Or play poker.

TULIO (O.S.)
 Right. That one surprised me.
 Imagine looking for poker partners
 - while the world's ending all
 around him. Ain't that nutty?

Scabby rises from a squat, to nail the rabbit with one shot.

He shoulders his bow, and squints in the sunshine as he
 peers up to acknowledge his critics in the watchtower.

WALLACE (V.O.)
 (filtered over megaphone)
 And you'll stay that way! We ain't
 gonna play cards with nobody
 outside the gates.

TULIO (O.S.)
 Out there with the chickens!

The hair on Scabby's head is filthy and matted, though he's
 clean-shaven on the chin. But facially he's all horrible-
 looking - with hairy warts, and scabs, and dirty smudges.

SCABBY
 But I'm so bored!

His voice strains, to sound husky, since he's such a waif.

TULIO (O.S.)
 You ain't getting in.

WALLACE (V.O.)
 He just wants our food, don't he.