

"THE MAWR PNEUMONICA"
(Part 1 of The Mawr Pneumonica Trilogy)
By Steve Garry

info@integerentertainment.com
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THE MAWR PNEUMONICA

FADE IN:

EXT. BIRD BAZAAR (VIETNAM) - DAY

Music blares over the transactions and fierce bargaining of hundreds of tourists and residents at vendor stalls.

SUPERIMPOSE: "Viet Nam"

Scooters and bikes can navigate the masses, but taxis, older Corollas and newer Premios are almost immobile in traffic.

Chatter in multiple languages overlaps the din, among a blaze of vendors' signage in English, French and Vietnamese.

Feathers fly from mountains of birdcages behind the stalls. More feathers litter where the sales and slaughter occurs.

Vendors toss carcasses to and fro, and plenty of food sampling and finger-licking happens, as customers dig into their wallets and handbags for cash.

We focus on six women tourists, 40's, in apparel of a higher quality than that worn by residents and the sales people.

One of the six is ANNE BARLOW, 45, slim, average height, blonde. Her companions are a mix of redhead and dark, taller or shorter, thinner or heavier, and of various races.

We'll meet them again soon, but only Anne's truly important.

More bird bazaar: Endless tied, skinned carcasses suspended from poles over tables. Blood splatters as butchers whack at dead birds with hatchets. With one mighty swing...

CLOSE-UP - ANNE BARLOW'S LOWER BODY AND LEGS

She reacts with a groan as a spatter meets her neat attire.

ANGLE ON the slaughter and consequence, as it continues.

Below one table, a cat licks drippings. At another, piglets rip at bird remains on the ground. The vendor shrieks at them, as he tosses a carcass atop a pile of a hundred more.

One live bird escapes, and butchers chase it. Customers back out of the way, as kids laugh and chase it with sticks.

When a customer pays a vendor in return for another live fowl, the frightened creature snaps at the buyer's fingers.

And last of all, behind one stall, a rooster secured on a dog leash paces witlessly in circles at its owner's feet.

CLOSE-UP - ROOSTER'S HEAD, AS IT CAWS FRANTICALLY

The chopping sounds o.s. send the bird into clucking frenzy.

A wail of a preternatural, vicious howling windstorm begins.

FADE OUT.

The shrieking wail morphs into an air raid siren.

MUTE SOUND EFFECTS.

A WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
The tempest. The tempest is
upon us.

The voice is of DR. ROSE MORRISON, whom we'll meet soon.

FADE IN:

INT. NOI BAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT/ATRIUM (VIETNAM) - DAY

Anne Barlow tips a baggage handler, and checks her watch as she stands with two of her tour pals, PLUMP MARCELLA, with an Italian accent, and TALL JANE, with an British accent.

ANNE
What's with those guys?

TALL JANE
I was at the pool all last night.
Did you see them, Marcie?

PLUMP MARCELLA
I hit the sack early. Nine hours
on a plane? I need my beauty rest.

ANNE
Wait, there's Shirley now. Hey!

Flustered SHORT SHIRLEY trots up, pulling luggage and gifts to take home. Shirley's Black, with an Australian accent.

SHORT SHIRLEY
Hey, girls. Didn't Lisa call you?

TALL JANE/PLUMP MARCELLA
No, what?!

SHORT SHIRLEY
Marlene's sick as a dog. Her
sister drove her to the hospital.

ANNE
What?!

TALL JANE
Thank God for travel health
insurance. Is it food poisoning?

SHORT SHIRLEY
No, just a bad headache. I mean,
really bad. She said --

She turns her face away and sneezes, but she doesn't raise
her elbow in time and she sprays the whole concourse.

PLUMP MARCELLA
The water. Can't trust the water.

SHORT SHIRLEY
So anyway, Lisa's staying behind
with her till she's let out.

Anne hands departure tickets to her pals.

ANNE
I sure wouldn't want to do the
hospital thing here.

TALL JANE
I know! Leg in a cast? I.V. drip?
Just get me on a plane home.

ANNE
What are you worried about, Jane.
Your vacation's only half over.

PLUMP MARCELLA
Right, off to Brazil for a week in
the sun! Lucky shit.

They aim toward Departures.

TALL JANE
Oh, poor me! But poor Marlene.
Hope she's better soon.

ANNE
Poor Lisa, having to babysit her.

SHORT SHIRLEY
Yeah, the only one with kids at
home. Ron'll flip when he hears he
has to mind them all by himself.

ANNE
That's why I don't want kids,
dearies. Unless I find a man
willing to do the job for nothing.

PLUMP MARCELLA
And that's all he gets for nothing.

They chuckle and launch a round of big hugs.

ANNE
Well, it was great seeing you guys!

EVERYONE (OVERLAPPED)
You too! Bye bye! Keep in touch.
You got my new email address? Next
year, Hawaii! Right on! Wherever
the men wear those skimpy swim
suits! Well, the good looking men.

Anne goes under a sign saying "American Airlines". Tall
Jane and Short Shirley make for a waiting area under
"Aeromexico". Plump Marcella heads to "Qatar Airways".

The airport clatter, the chatter of thousands of laughing
voices, and o.s. jet engines, morph into a drawn-out scream.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

MONTAGE - CHRISTMAS SCENES - NIGHT (DREAMSCAPE)

- A) In big towns and little cities, there's all manner of
last-minute shopping and Christmas festivities.
- B) Parks full of decorative lights. Lovers arm-in-arm on
cold, tranquil nights.

- C) In peaceful snowy scenes, happy music greets. Cheerful, red-cheeked carolers wake up quiet streets.
- D) Big family get-togethers with Mom, Pop, aunts and gramps. Unending good mood accompanied by way too much food.
- E) Finally, in windows here and there, lights begin to dim.
- F) In darkened rooms, a little girl's heavy eyelids try to resist, but she surrenders to a peaceful sleep. Expectant of the Big Day. But unvigilant. Unprepared.

CONTINUE DREAMSCAPE:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET/HOUSE - NIGHT

On a quiet street that faces a pretty house, a FIGURE in a parka stands with bags of presents, at a car, at the curb.

The door of the modest home is festively adorned, well-lit and welcoming in a beacon of peace on this sleepy avenue.

The figure now approaches the door. It opens, and a Girl, 4, and a Boy, 6, greet the visitor with squeals of delight.

INT. HOUSE/FOYER - NIGHT

The Figure, with its face obscured in shadow under a hood, stomps snow off boots as the kids dance about and shriek.

This bearer of gifts rests bags of presents to the floor. The excited kids tear at the bows and wrapping, with a crescendo of giddy squeals that now sound like screams...

MONTAGE - CHRISTMAS SCENES - NIGHT (DECADES LATER)

Echoes of the screams play over, but diminish to a deafening silence. We revisit the opening scenes, but all is broken, overgrown, and windswept. Something is missing: People.

- A) In big towns and little cities, unshovelled snow blankets the avenues and fills the doorsteps of shops.
- B) Parks are waist-deep in snow, and now-ancient and unlit decorations droop from tipped, broken lamp standards.
- C) In a brief echoing reprise of Christmas carols in a quiet, snowy, suburban street, no one is there to listen.
- D) In an abandoned home, dust and ruin surround tipped furniture that includes a table with dishes still on it.

E) A dark bedroom, with torn wallpaper and a bed with messed blankets, reveals only silence and stillness. No one.

F) Wait... there is someone. Someone with the p.o.v. of this empty urban wasteland. Deep, frantic breaths begin. From the tone, it's a woman. Like a terrified animal, her view aims down streets, around corners and into dark doorways, as she searches for something, someone, anyone.

The breathes quicken. She seems to want to scream but can't get it out. Her throat constricts with fear as...

END DREAMSCAPE.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Doctor ROSE MORRISON, 35, awakens from the nightmare. She inhales sharply as though she'd stopped breathing. Her hand flails over to shut off a beeping clock that blinks "6:10".

But she fumbles, and knocks over a stand-up frame, which slaps face-first onto the tabletop.

Rose is attractive, but worry lines show. She scratches her head, pushes comforters aside and swings out her feet. She sighs, collects her wits, and takes the frame in her hands.

ROSE
(reads Mythistorema,
by George Seferis)
"I woke with this marble head in my
hands. It was falling into the
dream as I was coming out of the
dream."

She replaces the frame to the table, and finishes by heart.

ROSE (CONT'D)
So our life became one and it will
be very difficult to separate
again.

INT. WASHROOM/SHOWER - DAY

INSERT - WATER FROM A SHOWERHEAD SHUTS OFF

ANGLE ON Rose's shoulders as she leans against the shower wall. Her face is away - her hair wet against her head and neck. She turns her face to us: Her eyes are open, blank.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

In her robe, Rose shuffles past a wall-full of frames:

INSERT - A MEDICAL LICENSE, AND LETTERS ON ANOTHER SAY "CDC"

From somewhere else, a monitor beeps, a centrifuge whirs, and technical sounds play over...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GOVERNMENT CENTER (BOSTON) - DAY

The sounds continue as we tour a snow-dusted monolithic complex of office buildings, completely devoid of movement.

SUPERIMPOSE: "Boston"

Gray, impersonal, angled, corrugated concrete buildings, with windows little more than slits, surround a vast bricked courtyard in an unpleasant illustration of the people-dwarfing qualities of Brutalist architecture:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=boston+government+center&source=lnms&tbn=isch>

Lawns or trees - everything that is natural - is extinct amidst the expanse of stone and brick. The sounds grow louder and clearer. We see steam escape from a roof vent.

INT. BIOLOGY LABORATORY - DAY

This dim room is full of electronics, computers, a rumbling generator, and cages - birds, hamsters, rats and bugs.

Two dozen technicians work the place. Among them, a balding man, 55, East Indian, tinkers with someone's computer.

A lab coated woman is the leader: PROFESSOR LETICIA BARONSKI, 50, gestures directions to others, to and fro.

A tall man in a lab coat tags along with her, nods and ticks off items on a clipboard. This is the EPIDEMIOLOGIST, 55.

A girl, BEFANY, 12, trots up to him and taps his elbow. He smiles, she hands him a file, and she hurries off.

Behind them, HazMat-suited men step through a high security door. A whooping siren sounds and a strobe light flashes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THURGOOD MARSHALL AIRPORT (BALTIMORE) - DAY

As a 747 swoops in to land, other jets taxi on the runway.

INSERT - ARROWED SIGN TO "BALTIMORE ARRIVAL GATE"

ANGLE ON Rose Morrison as she disembarks the 747.

INT. AIRPORT CONCOURSE - DAY

With a laptop bag in-hand, Rose strides against the grain of hundreds of other travelers and tourists.

EXT. STATE BUILDING (BALTIMORE) - DAY

A large Christmas tree decorates the courtyard, as dozens of staff and visitors enter or exit. A sign out front reads:

"Baltimore Department of Health and
Mental Hygiene, 300 W Preston St"

It includes a listing of departments. CLOSE ON a listing:

"Office of Preparedness & Response"

INT. OFFICE/HALLWAY - DAY

NORA ROBINSON, 32, tall, slim and professionally-dressed, strolls through an open door into an office. As we gaze in after her, we come face-to-face with a sign on the door:

"Nora Robinson, Incident Commander
Pandemic Influenza Planning"

INT. OFFICE/NORA ROBINSON - DAY

Nora sits at a table where two men are already seated:

STEVE TAMBLYN, 40, in a lab coat over a suit and tie, is a Senior Researcher. He's relaxed, and calmly taps a pencil.

DETECTIVE JIM HOPKINS, 35, Baltimore Police, is on loan to the Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Outbreak Response (IDEOR), of which Nora and Steve are main players.

Jim's a handsome fellow, but he frowns as he rubs his brow over a report in his hands, as he tries to understand it.

CLOSE-UP - IN JIM'S HANDS - TECHNICAL WATCHLISTS OF DISEASES

ANGLE ON Jim, as he looks up and reacts to spooky music as it plays on a video monitor at the front of the room.

INSERT - AN ANIMATED VIDEO

Show a few seconds, such as 0:30 to 0:35, of a video that shows antigenic shift of Avian flu infection in the lungs of a victim: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yizH5FY3Ak&.

ANGLE ON Nora, as she punches a remote to pause the video.

NORA
Sorry. Our H5N1 specialist is just signing in at the security desk.

Jim rolls his neck, and returns to the graphs before him.

STEVE
Don't worry about the watchlists, Jim. That's our meat and potatoes.
(Jim grunts)
But there'll be a test tomorrow on the video we just showed you.

JIM
One look at this stuff and I'm not sure why I'm even --

Rose marches in. She double-takes at his unfinished remark.

NORA
Oh, Rose! You've met Steve Tambllyn, haven't you?

Rose slams her notebook computer onto the table, and plops into a chair that Steve swivels over. She shakes his hand.

ROSE
Sure. Hi, Steve. At the E.D.C.P. Conference last Spring?

STEVE
Right. Nice to see you, Doctor. Are you presenting again next year?

ROSE
No, I'm doing the Emerging Infections Conference in Atlanta. See you there? You too, Nora?

Finally, Rose and Jim lock eyes. He blinks first, and likes what he sees: Assertiveness, brains, looks. He initiates.

JIM
Um, Doctor...?

NORA
Sorry Rose, this is Detective Jim
Hopkins. Homeland Security
Division. Baltimore City Police.

STEVE
On loan, to give us a little "law"
for the "order", eh, Jim?

Rose and Jim reach across and shake hands.

NORA
Jim, Doctor Rosalyn Morrison's a
senior Infectious Disease
Specialist with the C.D.C.

JIM
Doc. Understand you were prominent
in the Swine Flu warning in O-nine.

STEVE
Uh, oh. I should have warned --

ROSE
Detective. Nice to meet you, too.

JIM
No no, didn't mean anything --

ROSE
We think our global warning for
Swine Flu did what it was supposed
to do, Detective. And that's why
there weren't as many casualties.

JIM
As with COVID? So lots say the
warnings were too much for Swine
flu, then COVID comes along and the
CDC waits months before declaring.

Rose sits back and seems uninterested in engaging, at first.

ROSE
Yet, if a white powder shows up in
an envelope, call Homeland Security
right away. No expenses spared.