

FEAR TO TREAD

Written By
Michael Rome

96 Hazel Street
Marietta, GA 30064
(678) 778-5023
mrome55@yahoo.com

BLACK SCREEN

SUPERIMPOSE: "During the Revolutionary War 4,435 American soldiers were killed in battle."

BLACK SCREEN

SUPERIMPOSE: "Over 11,000 American sailors died aboard British prison ships."

FADE IN:

EXT. OVERLOOKING A HARBOR - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: "1780 Wallabout Bay, Brooklyn"

Overcast, autumn morning.
Wind churned waves.

Ships sail in and out of the Bay.
Others docked with sails down.

Anchored out from shore is a large vessel.

EXT. SHIP - DAY

The hulk of a once great frigate.
Stripped of its masts and riggings.

'Union Jack' hangs from a flagstaff.

EXT. SHIP'S DECK - DAY

Frozen breath of BRITISH SOLDIERS.
Some gather around a large iron kettle.
Flames dance up from inside.

Several Soldiers open a hatch.
Ranking officer approaches.

SERGEANT SAMUEL SPRINGER, 45, old by army standards.
He's surly and bitter.

Yells down the hatch...

SERGEANT SPRINGER
Rebels, turn out your dead.

Horribly thin PRISONERS emerge in tattered garments.
Feet wrapped in cloth.

They cough, groan, and struggle to carry the dead.
Stacking corpses like cords of wood.

Soldiers shield faces from the stench with their arms.

EXT. SHIP/OUTER STERN

"HMS Jersey"

EXT. HMS JERSEY - DAY (LATER)

Rowboat approaches.

THREE SOLDIERS and their prisoner, CAPTAIN THOMAS DRING, 33,
two day beard, white shirt, long boots.
Stately, even as a prisoner.

Ladder is lowered.
Party climbs on deck.

Thomas is led to Sergeant Springer.

SERGEANT SPRINGER
Welcome aboard, your majesty.
Time to join your country...men.

Kicks Thomas down the hold.

SERGEANT SPRINGER
Here's your new commander.

Hatch closes and the gates of hell open.

INT. SHIP'S HOLD - DAY

Thomas sluggishly rises from the floor.

Bearded skeleton of a man draws near.
JOHN MADISON, 27, but looks 47.

Second Mate from Thomas' ship, the Chance.

JOHN
Captain?

THOMAS
Sir?

JOHN
John...John Madison.

THOMAS
My God man, thought you'd perished.

JOHN
Might ah been more merciful.

OTHER PRISONERS stir and come closer.

JOHN
Mates, Captain Dring.
Expressionless, EMACIATED FACES.

THOMAS
Gentlemen.
The FACES stare.

JOHN
Ain't use to officers. Usually
quartered in the old Gun Room.
NUMEROUS PRISONERS lie on the floor in apparent agony.

THOMAS
Those men should be on hospital
ships.

JOHN
Small pox...no space.
Thomas turns his face away from the Sick Prisoners.

THOMAS
When does the doctor visit?
John laughs, abruptly stops.

JOHN
Sorry sir.
Not much treatment here.
Pause.

THOMAS
I'll require a needle.
John leaves and returns with a large, rusty, needle.

THOMAS
This will do fine.
Steps carefully through packed conditions.
Liens over some MEN lying nearby.

Closely examines a SICK MAN.
 Moves to a SECOND SICK MAN.
 Nods in approval.

Scratches himself with the needle between thumb and
 forefinger, creating a small wound.

THOMAS
 Pardon me, my poor fellow.

Sick Man lies in delirium.

Thomas inserts the needle into the pus of an open sore.
 Sinks the needle into the wound on his hand.

EXT. HMS JERSEY - DAY

Small sloop with THREE BRITISH SAILORS and stocked with
 supplies on deck pulls aside.

Ladder is lowered and Sergeant Springer boards the sloop.

SERGEANT SPRINGER
 I had standing orders for supplies
 to be brought ashore first for
 inspection.

BRITISH SAILOR
 Sorry sir, we weren't aware.

Sergeant Springer examines the boxes, barrels and sacks of
 food.

SERGEANT SPRINGER
 Load the rum, and half the other
 cargo.

BRITISH SAILOR
 And the rest sir?

SERGEANT SPRINGER
 Bring it back to the dock. I'll
 meet you there.

BRITISH SAILOR
 Aye-aye sir.

Sergeant Springer grabs a small sack of oranges.

EXT. HMS JERSEY - DAY

Sergeant Springer walks on deck, devouring an orange.

Several hands reach out of the bars on the top of the hatch.

PRISONER
Mercy my lord. Just a morsel.

Sergeant Springer walks over to the hatch and stomps on the hands wrapped around the bars.

EXT. SHIP (HMS JERSEY) - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: "July 4th, 1782"

Soldiers pace irritably.

From below deck CHEERS AND CELEBRATION.
Soldiers glance at each other.

Sergeant Springer pounds the butt of his rifle on the hatch.

SERGEANT SPRINGER
Put a stop to it.

SINGING about independence and British defeats.

From below...

PRISONER (V.O.)
Put a stop to it yourself, you
limey peacock.

Prisoners laugh and cheer.

Sergeant Springer unsheathes his sabre.
Motions to the others.
They lift the hatch and storm down the gangway.

INT. SHIP'S HOLD - DAY

Indiscriminate slashing.
Prisoners retreat in panic...as far as conditions allow.

Sergeant Springer approaches a sick Prisoner.
Thomas trips the Sergeant.

He falls to the floor, shouting.

SERGEANT SPRINGER
Damn it to hell.

Pulls a pistol from his belt.
Glares at Thomas.

FIRES a shot in the air.

Chaos turns to silence.

Soldiers surround their Sergeant, who stands and straightens his uniform.

The tense group of Redcoats gradually ascend the gangway.

Sergeant Springer yells down.

SERGEANT SPRINGER
There's your independence.

Prisoners CURSE and MOAN in pain.

INT. SHIP'S HOLD - NIGHT

Full Moon.
Dim light in the hold.

Thomas holds ADAM PALMER, 12.
Cabin Boy aboard Thomas' prior ship.

He's dying from sabre wounds.

THOMAS
Sorry lad.

Adam moans.

EXT. DOCKS (PROVIDENCE RI, 1779) - DAY

Ships loading and unloading.
American sailors and civilians on the dock.

Thomas stands with Adam Palmer, and his mother, JESSICA PALMER, 32.

JESSICA
You'll take good care of my Adam?

THOMAS
Yes Madam. He's on the best ship in the fleet.

JESSICA
God speed to you, and your crew.

THOMAS
He'll be my personal responsibility.

Jessica gives Adam a long hug good-bye.

INT. SHIP'S HOLD - NIGHT

THOMAS (cont'd)
I'll write your mother.

ADAM
Mum, my mum.

Sobs and gasps.

Takes his last breath.

THOMAS
No matter how long it takes, there
will be justice.

From above deck...

SOLDIER (O.S.)
All's well.

EXT. STREET (BROOKLYN, PRESENT) - DAY

PAUL RISINZKI, 44, public works manager, all business then
beers.

Stands in the street near a protective barrier.

MAINTENANCE WORKER climbing out of a manhole.

PAUL
Done already?

Worker exits the manhole.

PAUL
Hey, I'm talkin' to you.

Worker walks robotically to the sidewalk.

PAUL
Where the hell ya think you're
goin'?

Stops and turns to face Paul.

PAUL
Ya can't leave with city property.

Worker empties some tools from his pockets.
They CLANG on the sidewalk.

MAINTENANCE WORKER

You go down there.

Turns to enter the subway.
Pauses.
Looks down the stairs.
Changes direction and walks away.

Paul takes out a walkie-talkie as he moves to the sidewalk.

PAUL

We've got a big problem. Another
one just walked off.

Picks-up the tools.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

If you can't control your--

PAUL

It's not about controlling my crew.
You're the boss, figure it out, or
I'm gone too.

Stares at the tools.

INT. TV STUDIO (MANHATTAN) - DAY

ZACH KENNEDY, 28, moderately good looking, dressed in
meticulous, casual style.

Sits on a stool, speaking into a microphone.

ZACH

...and as always, you're invited to
join us on our next search for the
'Ghosts in the Machine.'

ENGINEER (V.O.)

(over intercom)

That's a wrap. By the way, last
week's ratings were five points
ahead of the other spook shows.

Zach smiles with relaxed confidence.

EXT. TV STUDIO - DAY

Zach exits the building.
He's approached by team member, RACHEL BROOKS, 23, attractive with a sassy haircut and nose piercing.

She looks up to him, literally and figuratively.

RACHEL
Just got a call from Brooklyn
Public Works.

ZACH
Very informative.

Rachel purses her lips.

ZACH
Sorry.

RACHEL
Something about the sewers.
You have an appointment with the
department head at six.

ZACH
Six? Don't civil servants leave at
five on the dot.

RACHEL
Maybe that's the point.

ZACH
Either way, it's time to do some
research.

EXT. FORTE GREEN PARK/BROOKLYN - DAY

Sitting on a park bench is JANE WORTHINGTON, 54, Director of the Brooklyn Historical League.
She's in business attire and retro, dark-rimmed glasses.

Zach strolls towards her, stops, picks-up a penny off the sidewalk, notices it is tails up, turns it over, leaves it on the sidewalk.

ZACH
Ms. Worthington, thanks for meeting
with me.

JANE
Have to admit I'm a huge fan.

ZACH

Great, you can help. We're investigating activity in the Brooklyn sewers. Could use some historical background.

JANE

Brooklyn was the first settled area in New York City. Unfortunately, it was also the site of great atrocities during the war for independence.

ZACH

Atrocities?

JANE

The British ran out of space for prisoners and began using rotting frigates moored nearby.

ZACH

An ancestor fought here. Maybe he was on one.

JANE

Hopefully not, they were floating death camps. Every morning the dead were brought ashore for group burial in shallow graves.

ZACH

What about the sewers?

JANE

The land based jails were near the sewers, and the system empties where the dead were buried.

Zach looks around at his surroundings

JANE

Ever been here?

ZACH

No.

Jane points off to her right.

JANE

See the large column above the tree line?

ZACH

Yeah.

JANE

A monument to the 11,000 that lost their lives. It sits over a crypt of bones found onshore.

EXT. FORTE GREEN PARK/MONUMENT - DAY

Zach stands alone in front of the monument. Inscription reads "THE PRISON SHIP MARTYRS MONUMENT".

There is a sudden, hard breeze. Puts his head down against the wind.

Spots a penny head's up. Puts it in his pocket.

INT. ARNOLD LATHAM'S OFFICE - DAY

Arnold Latham, 67, balding gray hair. Wears an outdated suit jacket.

From his accent it's clear he's a Brooklyn native. On the wall hang historical drawings of the City.

Zach sits across the desk from Arnold.

ARNOLD

Look, I know ya got that ghost show, but can we keep this quiet?

ZACH

First tell me what's going on.

Arnold nervously taps on the desk.

ARNOLD

We've lost men.

ZACH

What'd you mean lost men? Didn't show? You misplaced them? They walked off the--

ARNOLD

Some walked off. One went missing in the sewers.

ZACH

What?

ARNOLD
Manny Perez, a crew chief.

INT. LARGE SEWER - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Large, dark, damp sewer.

Two workers with headlamps slosh through the water.
MICHAEL HENNIGAN and CHRIS BURTON, both in their early 30s.

50 feet ahead, Crew Chief, MANNY PEREZ, 41, friend to all.

MANNY
Hey guys.

An UNKNOWN FIGURE watches from the shadows as Manny waves
over the Two Workers.

Michael and Chris struggle through the deepening water.

MICHAEL
Can you believe those fuckin' Mets?

Water above their waists.

CHRIS
Bums. They can't even--

Manny SCREAMS.

Michael and Chris shine flashlights where Manny was standing.
Reflection of lights on the water.

They retreat in panic.

INT. ARNOLD LATHAM'S OFFICE - DAY

ARNOLD (cont'd)
Eventually we had a small army
searching.

Arnold lights a cigarette.

ARNOLD
Everyone's spooked.

ZACH
Those things will kill you.

ARNOLD
Ghosts?

ZACH
Cigarettes.

Pause.

ARNOLD
Doubt it.

Takes a drag.

ZACH
I have a personal interest in the
sewers.

Arnold stares at one of the historical drawings on the wall.

ZACH
No one needs to know about Manny.

Zach holds out his hand.

ZACH
Just investigating some old sewers.

Arnold hesitates, shakes Zach's hand.

INT. LARGE SEWER (PRESENT) - NIGHT

Zach and Rachel with headlamps and flashlights.
They shuffle through shallow, rancid water

Zach stops.

ZACH
When we get here, start the
fireworks.

Rachel shoots a concerned glance at Zach.

ZACH
Live TV...can't take any chances.

RACHEL
Sewers aren't totally deserted.

An Unknown Figure watches Zach and Rachel.
ECHO of the words 'totally deserted'.

ZACH
This one is. Not a soul, especially
not Manny. He's probably living off
insurance money in--

Rachel's headlamp POPS.

RACHEL
What the hell?

ZACH
Headlamp blew. Not bad, maybe we'll
use it.

RACHEL
You hear anything else?

ZACH
Just the sound of my own--

RACHEL
Don't.

ZACH
Don't what?

RACHEL
No. I heard "don't."

Zach wiggles his fingers in mock 'spooky-ness'.

ZACH
Don't...don't....

RACHEL
Very funny.

Grabs his throat like someone is choking him and GROANS.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

GROANING in the darkness.

Shadowy outline of couple in bed.
Candlelight shines on the face of Zach over Rachel.

ZACH
Still hearing things?

RACHEL
Shut-up.

Puts her hand over his mouth.
Pulls him down on his back.

Slowly gets on top.
Holds down his wrists.

RACHEL
Love me?

Soft groan from Zach.

RACHEL
Do you love me?

Zach moans.

RACHEL
Say it.

He pants, near the edge.

She stops moving.

ZACH
Okay, okay, okay...

She begins again.

Zach explodes.

ZACH
I love you damn it.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Zach on his back with eyes closed.
Rachel on her side gazing at Zach.

RACHEL
You asleep?

ZACH
Yes.

RACHEL
Can I ask you something?

ZACH
No.

RACHEL
You never talk about your Dad.

ZACH
He was killed.

RACHEL
Sorry...how?

Zach stares at the ceiling.

ZACH
We never knew the whole story. He
left a Bar in the evening to come
home and went down to the subway.
That's were he was found stabbed to
death.

Rachel strokes Zach's hair.

RACHEL
There's something I need to tell
you.

Zach turns towards Rachel.

RACHEL
I'm pregnant.

Zach tries not to seem shocked.

ZACH
That's great.

RACHEL
I was hoping you'd say that.

Her eyes tear and she kisses him.

EXT. STREET (PRESENT) - NIGHT

FILM CREW sets-up near an open manhole.
Low hanging fog emanates from dry ice.

Zach primps.
Faces the camera.

ZACH
Welcome to a special live edition
of 'Ghosts in the Machine.'
Tonight our team investigates
unexplained phenomena in the old
Brooklyn sewers.
When we return, you'll be joining
us in a descent to the past.

INT. LARGE SEWER - NIGHT

Zach leads his team down the sewer.
 BRAD STEPHENS, mid 20s, visual assistant.
 SAMMY PATEL, mid 20s, sound assistant.

A CAMERA CREW follows closely behind.

ZACH
 (quietly to camera)
 Brad is on the night vision camera.
 Sammy has the new "white noise"
 receiver, and I will be monitoring
 the electromagnetic fields.

Sammy puts on earphones.

SAMMY
 I'm getting something.
 (to Zach)
 EMF?

ZACH
 Already fifty percent and rising.
 Can you make it out?

SAMMY
 Too many intermingled signals.

ZACH
 Brad, you see anything?

BRAD
 Just a couple of sewer rats.

ZACH
 We'll assume they're among the
 living.

Zach stops to examine a wall.

ZACH
 The brick is more eroded.

Continues to inspect the brick with his flashlight.

ZACH
 Something's scratched into this.
 (slowly)
 "Don't Tread."

BRAD
 Sounds like we found one of those
 British prisons.

ZACH

Thanks professor. See anything besides rats?

BRAD

All clear...not even rats.
(under his breath)
At least not up ahead.

Further down the sewer, Rachel waits in the shadows.

An Unknown Figure watches her.
Faint ECHO of the team's distant conversation.

EXT. HANGMAN'S PLATFORM (LONDON, 1791) - DAY

A crowd gathers to watch the hanging of Sergeant Springer, now 57. He wears a simple prison robe.

Also on the platform stands an EXECUTIONER, PRIEST, and BRITISH OFFICER.

Carnival atmosphere as vendors sell fruit and other wares.

The British Officer reads aloud from a parchment.
Addresses Sergeant Springer by his full Irish surname.

BRITISH OFFICER

Sergeant Samuel Springer Kennedy.
You have been found guilty on numerous counts of war crimes and are sentenced to hang until dead.

Rolls-up the parchment.

BRITISH OFFICER

Any final words?

SERGEANT SPRINGER

Yes sir.

Looks sadly at his WIFE and SON weeping near the platform.

BRITISH OFFICER

Well, get on with it.

SERGEANT SPRINGER

I shudder to think of the deaths I caused while stationed in New York. Thousands of prisoners starved. I sold their rations for profit.

Priest makes sign of the cross.

INT. LARGE SEWER (PRESENT) - NIGHT

Zach and team are still 50 yards from the appointed spot for the 'fireworks' to begin.

BRAD
Oh my God. A large group of ectoplasm.

ZACH
What? A group? Now? I mean Wow.

BRAD
Never seen anything like it.

ZACH
(to camera)
This is the first documented--

LOUD, HIGH-PITCHED SCREAM.

Equipment shuts-off.
Total darkness.

Sammy clicks on a cigarette lighter.

Just enough light to see Zach running ahead.

ZACH
Rachel. Shit! Rachel, say something.

Splashing trails off as Zach runs to Rachel.

Sammy turns to Brad and sees a PISTOL in his hand.

SAMMY
Put that away before you actually hurt somebody.

Brad shrugs his shoulders and tucks the gun into his pants.

SAMMY
What's Rachel doing here?

BRAD
A-hole. (to Sammy) Not you.

SAMMY
Shh.

SWISHING of water, which grows louder.
Sammy holds out his lighter.

SAMMY

Zach?

Lights come back on.

Before them stands a disheveled Rachel.
She wears a frozen look of terror.

BRAD

You scared the dinner out of me.
Where's our fearless leader?

Does not answer at first, then...

RACHEL

What?

BRAD

Zach.

RACHEL

What are you talking about?

BRAD

She's not going to be much help--

SAMMY

I've got something.

Sammy cups his hands over the headphones.

SAMMY

Hang on.

Adjusts the equipment to put it on speaker.

A VOICE in the static.
Sammy makes further adjustments.

ZACH (V.O.)

What are you doing? Stop.

Brad and Sammy stare at each other in disbelief.

They look back at the receiver.
Dissolves into the "Don't Tread On Me" early American flag.

Becomes worn and tattered.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Same worn and tattered flag hangs on the wall.
Along with other Revolutionary era antiques.

A FIGURE stands in the room.
Even from behind it's obvious he's wearing a Revolutionary
era American uniform.

FIGURE
So many men. Treated like animals.

Zach is gagged and tied to a chair.
Struggles defiantly against his restraints.

FIGURE
Last of Kennedy's seed.

Figure goes to the wall.
Takes down a rifle with bayonet.

He turns and Zach see his face.

The Figure is Arnold Latham.

ARNOLD
I've seen wondrous things over the
centuries, but I'm tired.

Muffled screams from Zach.

ARNOLD
One last task, but first, I want to
introduce you to someone.

Manny Perez enters the room.

ARNOLD
Manny was kind enough to assist in
getting you down into the sewers.

Everyone thinks you're a ghost, and
they'll be right soon enough.

Arnold rips off the tape from Zach's mouth.

ARNOLD
Any final words?

ZACH
You killed my father!

ARNOLD
Not as eloquent as your great
ancestor's last words, but true.

ZACH
You can't do this.

ARNOLD
I can't do this?

Arnold strikes him across the face.

ARNOLD
Tell that to my murdered crew.

Arnold's eyes tear up.

He thrusts the bayonet into Zach's chest.

ZACH
No. My child!

ARNOLD
Child?

Zach's eyes stare into the beyond without movement.

Arnold withdraws the bayonet, stumbling backwards.

COUGHS until forced to his knees, then on his back.

His face becomes younger.
It is the face of Captain Thomas Dring.

Quickly ages and decomposes to dust.

BLACK SCREEN

SUPERIMPOSE: "Six Months Later."

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Old, two-story Victorian.
Full moon, and a light breeze through the trees.

INT. HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Rachel watches Brad and Sammy set-up equipment.

BRAD
(to Rachel)
Because you're the boss doesn't
mean you can't help.

Sammy holds out the white noise receiver to Rachel.

SAMMY
Can you take this upstairs and see
if the computer picks it up?

Rachel pauses.

Sad eyes gaze into an imaginary distance.

BRAD

Waddle over and give us a hand.

Loose maternity blouse cannot hide her bulge.

RACHEL

Shut-up. I don't want to hear any more until you get pregnant.

BRAD

At least I'd find out the sex of my child.

Rachel ignores his comment and takes the receiver from Sammy.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

RACHEL

(into headset)

I'm turning it on.

Turns a switch on the receiver.

SAMMY (V.O.)

Got you five by five.

Hallway lights start flickering.

VOICE from the white noise receiver...

ZACH (V.O.)

Rachel. It's a boy.

Manny stands behind Rachel at the far end of the hallway. Quickly charges her.

RACHEL

Zach, is that you?

Hears steps from behind and turns. Manny lunges with bayonet.

Rachel moves to the side. Bayonet rips her blouse. She SCREAMS.

Rachel goes into a bedroom and locks the door. A bayonet blade comes through the door, just missing her head.

She backs away from the door and screams.
Manny busts the door open and faces Rachel.

He pulls back the bayonet for the killing stab.
Covers bosom with her hands.

SHOT rings out.
Then another.

Manny falls to the floor.

Brad stands behind him with a pistol.
Rachel cries.

Manny's body quickly ages and turns to dust.

FADE OUT.

THE END