

# “The Monsters are due on Maple Street”

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**Themes: mob (crowd) psychology, mass hysteria, prejudice**

Both episodes open with **idyllic settings**—neighbors in a middle-class suburb/friends gathered at a birthday dinner—and then quickly devolve into chaos and violence once circumstances are altered and their lives are threatened. The **ugly truth about human nature** that these pleasant settings hide just below the surface is that man is inherently selfish. This is evidenced in the neighbors in both episodes being willing to hurt or even kill each other to maintain their safety (and the safety of their immediate families).

“As dusk falls on suburban **Maple Street**, children frolic while adults finish their last bits of work outdoors. After a sudden flash, the electricity goes down, then the phone lines, then the automobiles. When some homes mysteriously recover power, panic and fear start to set in--then a young boy declares the flash extraterrestrial, and that aliens have sent human decoys to lead their invasion. Propelled by this statement, **Maple Street** becomes an all-out violent, paranoia-driven mob scene. Ellis's evenly boxy panel sizing brilliantly breaks way into a chaotic full-page spread when the crowd reaches its fever pitch” (from *Kirkus Reviews* Abstract available through EBSCOhost).

“Here, we have the breakdown of society in the microcosm of small-town America, cautioning that we have more to fear from ourselves than any external forces. [...] the story itself remains resonant (from Jesse Karp excerpt available through EBSCOhost).

Intro: The Twilight Zone exists “between the pit of man’s fears and the summit of his knowledge”—the best & worst man is capable of.

In the opening, the narrator describes Maple Street as idyllic and we see that as neighbors wash their cars together and children run to the ice cream vendor. Serling says this is Maple Street in the last “calm and reflective moment before the monsters came.”

Soon, they are cut off from technology & other neighborhoods.

Initially, the neighbors are calm, offering up rational explanations for the power outage. Charlie seems anxious, but he’s the voice of reason—suggesting they go downtown and check with the police. He then dismisses this suggestion as silly because they shouldn’t be “flustered” over “a little power failure”.

The adults are initially reasonable—they’re going to walk downtown—until Tommy (a boy) tells them about aliens. The adults dismiss the boy’s assertions about aliens, but then they convince themselves of a threat and alien invasion. Pan shot across neighbors’ faces—they feel fear & doubt.

The neighbors’ fear leads them to need explanations & a scapegoat. As Les’ car is the only one that starts, the neighbors stand together on one side of the street, clearly fearful & separating themselves from Les.

Charlie describes Les as a “real oddball” and say his whole family is that way. Believing Les’ family may be the aliens, the neighbors almost immediately get aggressive with Les. They blame him for his car starting and ask him what the deal is.

“monsters from outer space, different from us.”

\*Fear of those who are *different* are dangerous—same as “Eye of the Beholder” and “#12 Looks Just Like You”—conformity makes people feel safe.

Female neighbor then accuses Les of odd behavior—standing on his porch at night and looking at the stars. Yet, she’s also up in the middle of the night and watching (spying on) her neighbors.

Rational explanations—insomnia, a hobby—are now cause for suspicion.

As Les moves toward the mob, they all move back—even Steve who is the most rational. Les tells the mob: “You’re sick people.” & “You’re starting something here that—that’s what you should be frightened of?”

Les Goodman—significance of his name.

Neighbors keep watch on each other all night.

Charlie’s wife says that keeping watch isn’t right—that the Goodmans are their neighbors and they’ve been good friends. However Charlie says that doesn’t prove anything and that something is wrong with Les, something not “legitimate” because he star gazes. Charlie also says that “under normal circumstances we’d let it go by, but these aren’t normal circumstances. Look at that street. Nothing but candles. It’s like going back into the Dark Ages or something.”

Dark Ages: usually considered a period of intellectual darkness.

When Steve empathizes with Les, Charlie says that Steve better watch himself because he isn’t “above suspicion.” Steve says no one is “above suspicion”, not even children. He then says Charlie is a “self-appointed hanging judge.”

The neighbors then turn on Steve—the one voice of reason in the group. Others begin to pile on, such as one neighbor who turns Steve’s harmless ham radio hobby into cause for suspicion.

Steve says maybe they should “pick out every idiosyncrasy of every man, woman, and child in this whole street.” And then set up a “kangaroo court” and a “firing squad at dawn”.

Steve’s speech to his neighbors:

“Stop telling me who’s dangerous and who isn’t. And who’s safe and who’s a menace. [...] You’re all set to crucify somebody. You’re all set to find a scapegoat. You’re all desperate to point [...] a finger at a neighbor. Well believe me friends, the only thing that’s going to happen is we’re going to eating each other up alive”. There’s a brief moment of quiet contemplation among the neighbors.

The neighbors quickly turn on Charlie after killing Pete VanHorn, yet none of them tried to stop Charlie.

### **Scapegoat:**

Charlie defends his taking a life by claiming, “I was only trying to protect my home” and that he “didn’t know it was someone we knew”. As the neighbors turn on Charlie, he quickly realizes how actions can be misinterpreted. As Charlie tries to flee, the neighbors become violent—throwing a rock & breaking glass.

When the crowd then turns on Charlie and accuses him of being the alien, he minimizes the threat, saying someone must be pulling “a gag.”

Charlie then accuses Tommy.

Shot of the neighbors’ feet as they run after Tommy—indication their individual identities don’t matter now that they’re acting as a mob.

There’s a close-up of all the neighbors’ faces—they’re all raging against each other.

As the entire neighborhood becomes violence & destructive, we get a bird’s eye view. The aliens’ comments about *patterns*:

Within less than 24 hours, the neighbors devolve into violence and murder.

One alien says: “Understand the procedure now? Just stop a few of their machines and radios, and telephones [...] throw them into darkness for a few hours and then sit back and watch the pattern.”

The alien says the pattern is always the same “with few variations. The aliens say that the people “pick the most dangerous enemy they can find, and it’s themselves.” They also say that this reaction “is not unique” and that “their world is full of Maple Streets. And we’ll go from one to the other and let them destroy themselves.” Thus, Maple Street is a microcosm.

Serling says that “there are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, prejudices [...] to be found only in the minds of men.” Importantly, he notes that “prejudices can kill, and suspicion can destroy, and a thoughtless, frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all of its own. For the children, and the children yet unborn. And the pity of it is that these things cannot be confined to The Twilight Zone.”

### **PSYCHOLOGY**

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**Mob (Crowd) Psychology:** a branch of social psychology that explains the ways in which the psychology of a crowd differs from and interacts with that of the individuals within it.

### **Types of Crowds:**

Generally, researchers in crowd psychology have focused on the negative aspects of crowds, but not all crowds are volatile or negative in nature.

- Socialist movement, crowds were asked to put on their Sunday dress and march silently down the street.
- Civil Rights Movement.
- Crowds can reflect and challenge the held ideologies of their sociocultural environment. They can also serve integrative social functions, creating temporary communities.

**Crowds can be active (mobs) or passive (audiences).**

**Active crowds:**

- Aggressive mobs: often violent and outwardly focused.
  - football riots and the L.A. Riots of 1992.
- Escapist mobs: large number of panicked people trying to get out of a dangerous situation.
  - These types of mobs are why it is illegal to yell, "Fire!" in a crowded theater.
- Aquisitive mobs: occur when large numbers of people are fighting for limited resources,
  - crowds who looted after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.
- Expressive mob: any other large group of people gathering for an active purpose.
  - Civil disobedience, rock concerts, and religious revivals all fall under this category.

**Gustave Le Bon's 3 Stages:**

- **Submergence:** the individuals in the crowd lose their sense of individual self and personal responsibility. Heavily induced by the anonymity of the crowd.
- **Contagion:** the propensity for individuals in a crowd to unquestioningly follow the predominant ideas and emotions of the crowd. This effect spreads between "submerged" individuals much like a disease.
- **Suggestion:** when the ideas and emotions of the crowd are primarily drawn from a shared racial unconscious. This behavior comes from an archaic shared unconscious and is therefore uncivilized in nature. It is limited by the moral and cognitive abilities of the least capable members.

Le Bon believed that crowds could be a powerful force only for destruction. Additionally, Le Bon and others have indicated that crowd members feel a lessened sense of legal culpability, due to the difficulty in prosecuting individual members of a mob.

Crowds foster anonymity.

Clark McPhail points out studies which show that "the madding crowd" does not take on a life of its own, apart from the thoughts and intentions of members.

**Differing Opinions:**

Norris Johnson, after investigating a panic at a 1979 The Who concert concluded that the crowd was composed of many small groups of people mostly trying to help each other. Additionally, Le Bon's theory ignores the socio-cultural context of the crowd, which some theorists argue can disempower social change.

R. Brown disputes the assumption that crowds are homogenous, suggesting instead that participants exist on a continuum, differing in their ability to deviate from social norms.

Sigmund Freud's crowd behavior theory: becoming a member of a crowd serves to unlock the unconscious mind. This occurs because the moral center of consciousness is displaced by the larger crowd, to be replaced by a charismatic crowd leader.

**Convergence theory:** crowd behavior is not a product of the crowd, but rather the crowd is a product of the coming together of like-minded individuals.

Floyd Allport argued that "An individual in a crowd behaves just as he would behave alone, only more so."

Convergence theory holds that crowds form from people of similar dispositions, whose actions are then reinforced and intensified by the crowd. Moreover, crowd behavior is not irrational; rather, people in crowds express existing beliefs and values so that the mob reaction is the rational product of widespread popular feeling. \*Note that in both *Twilight Zone* episodes, the neighbors/friends are from the same socio-economic class (similar education, income, & occupation).

**Emergent norm theory:** crowds with little unity at their outset, during a period of milling about, key members suggest appropriate actions, and following members fall in line, forming the basis for the crowd's norms.

Key members are identified through distinctive personalities or behaviors. These garner attention, and the lack of negative response elicited from the crowd as a whole stands as tacit agreement to their legitimacy. The followers form the majority of the mob, as people tend to be creatures of conformity who are heavily influenced by the opinions of others. Crowd members are further convinced by the universality phenomenon, described by Allport as the persuasive tendency of the idea that if everyone in the mob is acting in such-and-such a way, then it cannot be wrong.

+/- An antisocial leader can incite violent action, but an influential voice of non-violence in a crowd can lead to a mass sit-in.

**Social identity theory:** Crowds are an amalgam of individuals, all of whom belong to various conflicting groups. However, if the crowd is primarily related to some identifiable group (such as Christians or civil-rights activists), then the values of that group will dictate crowd action.

The group identity serves to create a set of standards for behavior; for certain groups, violence is legitimate, for others it is unacceptable. This standard is formed from stated values, but also from the actions of others in the crowd, and sometimes from a few in leadership-type positions.

**Mass Hysteria:** phenomenon that transmits collective delusions of threats, whether real or imaginary, through a population in society as a result of rumors and fear.

## “The Shelter”

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**Themes: mob psychology, mass hysteria, prejudice**

Episode opens with laughing and a dinner party in honor of the doctor’s birthday. The dinner party toasts note that all the guests owe the doctor for treating them and their children and that he’s respected and beloved.

They joke with each other—clearly they’ve been friends for many years.

Jerry remarks on how with his house, “all the wonders of modern science [were] taken into account except that thing that’s headed for us now.” A desperate Jerry begs Bill to let him into the bomb shelter. The doctor says Jerry’s family is “no concern of mine. Right now, at this given moment, it’s my family I have to worry about.”

The doctor admonishes Jerry: “I kept telling you [...] all of you, get ready, build a shelter. Forget the card parties and the barbeques for maybe a few hours a week. Forget them. And make the admission to yourself that the worse was possible. But you didn’t want to listen. [...] To build a shelter was to admit to the kind of age that we lived in. And none of you had the guts to face that. So now you’ve got to face something far worse [...]”

Marty then arrives and says Bill has got to let his family in. He even brings his children along to get sympathy.

Marty tries to guilt Bill into letting his family in. He says Bill will “probably survive, but [he’ll] have blood on his hands” and that Bill is “supposed to help people.”

As the three couples gather in Bill’s house, Jerry is reasonable—he says they should find “one basement and go to work on that [...] pool[ing] all of our stuff, pool water, everything.”

Jerry’s wife says, “It just isn’t fair. He’s down there in a bomb shelter perfectly safe while our kids have to sit around and wait around for a bomb to drop.”

Frank then says they should “just go down to his basement and break down the door” and that they should tell Bill he’s got the “whole street against him.”

Jerry advises Frank that they can’t all fit into the bomb shelter & they’d be crazy to try.

Marty then suggests choosing one family—they are acting as if the bomb shelter belongs to all of them. Sense of entitlement—Bill has done all the work, taking precautions, and now the others want to capitalize on Bill’s hard work and foresight.

Frank’s wife is willing to sacrifice all the others if it “saves the life of even one of [her] kids.”

When Marty again suggests drawing lots, Frank becomes suspicious. Frank then reveals his underlying prejudice: “That’s the way it is when the foreigners come over here. Pushy, grabby, semi-Americans.”

As Frank & Marty start to physically fight, Frank’s wife tells Marty that he’s “at the bottom of the list.” Jerry says if they “keep it up [they] won’t even need a bomb [they’ll] be able to slaughter each other.”

Frank tells Bill that he can open the door and talk to them & figure out how many of them can come in the bomb shelter or else they’ll bust their way in.

The men talk about breaking down the door and getting tools from another neighbor. Another neighbor then says they shouldn’t get him involved because “Who cares about saving him.” He insists they have to keep this between them because “[...] if we let all those people know that we have a shelter on our street. We’d have a whole mob to contend with. A whole bunch of strangers.”

Marty’s wife agrees, “Sure. What right have they got to come over here. This isn’t their street. This isn’t their shelter.”

Jerry sarcastically replies, “Oh, this is our shelter [...]? And on the next street, that’s another country. Patronize home industry. You idiots. You fools. You’re insane [...]”

Jerry tries to continue to be the voice of reason and Marty concurs, at which point Frank says that “no one cares” what Marty thinks. He then strikes Marty.

Grace asks Bill, “Who are those people?” Bill responds, “Those people are our neighbors. Our friends. The people we’ve lived with and alongside for twenty years.”

Sadly, all this violent behavior is happening right in front of all the children.

Once everyone’s safety has been confirmed, they immediately revert back to normal. Frank excuses his behavior toward Marty as the result of being *scared* and *confused*.

Jerry says they’ll pay for the damages and insists Bill won’t hold this against them. Marty says they “could have a block party tomorrow night [...] a big celebration” to, as Jerry says, “get back to normal.”

Bill says, “I don’t know what normal is. [...] Damages. I wonder [...] if any one of us has any idea what those damages really are. Maybe one of them is finding out what we’re really like when we’re *normal*. The kind of people we are just underneath the skin. I mean all of us. A lot of naked, wild animals, who put such a price on staying alive that they’ll claw their neighbors to death just for the privilege. We were spared a bomb tonight, but I wonder [...] if we weren’t destroyed even without it.”

Serling’s closing comments: “For civilization to survive, the human race has to remain *civilized*.”