# The Monsters Are Due On Maple Street



*UPDATED 11/23: Correcting one grammar error that allows me to add a gratuitous Trump insult; correcting one misplaced footnote that made Gwen Graham look worse than she is; and adding one detail that makes Trump look worse, but not quite all the way as bad as he is.*

There be dragons, and they're coming to get you. Hide! Be afraid!

Many nights I wake up,  between 2.30 and 3.30, and endure an hour or so of free floating terror. I'll never again write a good sentence or play the guitar well. Maybe I'm completely out of ideas. I'll never get hired again. Or if I am working, they'll hate what I'm doing and they'll never hire me again. My children will starve, my wife and I will live in a refrigerator box under a bridge. My dog will die. My dog will get sick, and because I don't have enough work, I won't have the money for treatment, and she will die. My kids will….

So you get the idea. After an hour or so, I'm so exhausted with worry and fear that I fall asleep for a couple more hours. Then I wake up, pull on my pants, and set out to find work, do good work, attempt creativity, strive. It's not that I forget the various terrors that plague me, but I still try. It ain't over til you quit.

And so, Paris.

People are terrified that it will happen here. A reasonable fear, but one that has been ginned up by various actors who stand to profit from our fears.

Be afraid. And CNN/Fox/MSNBC will be here around the clock to be sure you stay that way.

Be afraid. Only the stalwart leadership of {insert name here} can keep you safe. That other guy is going to let the evil-doers kill you in your sleep. Stalwart leader will keep them out! If only he can figure out how to tell the difference between a good guy and a bad guy.

Be afraid. Buy guns, more guns, and carry them everywhere, because you never know when you need to be a good guy with a gun who needs to stop a bad guy with a gun. As long as everyone can figure out how to tell the difference between a good guy and a bad guy.

Be afraid. Go ahead and assume that everyone is a bad guy until proven otherwise. Stand your ground! Ban everyone who looks/thinks/comes-from-somewhere different. Open fire if you feel threatened by someone who fits your idea of what a threat looks like. Sort out the bodies later. You can’t make an omelet…

And so, Paris. They could come here next! They might be here already! You know that they hate us for our freedoms, so how about you give up a bunch of those freedoms so we can keep you safe.

Lock the doors! Pull up the ladder. You can’t give a 100% guarantee that you can screen out evil-doers? Don’t let anyone in. That’ll fix everything.

Some of the pandering is not so extreme. Some of it is “moderate”. Maybe let in only the refugees who can prove they are Christian. That way we’ll be safe, because Christians never use violence to achieve a goal. Or maybe, as one pundit

suggested, only let in the women and children. That's the compassionate approach, to break up families.

But then we hear from Uber Panders who not only think letting women in would be unsafe (they blow themselves up, too!), but that letting in "orphans under the age of five" is also too risky. You can't be too careful.

Round 'em up and ship 'em back. Build fences. Bomb the whole dang shebang.<fn>"Trump: "I would bomb the shit out of them."</fn> All under the guise of "keeping us safe".

Lots of terrible ideas are floating around, and the goatfuckers of ISIS are laughing their asses off.

Paris. Now we are supposed to be afraid of going to a great city, or to Europe overall. Cafes and concerts? Jesus, a guy could get killed there. Swarthy immigrants who may or may not believe in the god of our fathers? Round em up and ship em back. You can't be too careful, amirite?

Now we are supposed to refuse basic humanitarian considerations, to abandon our purported national ideals and values. We are asked, in the name of fear, to do exactly what the terrorists hope for: overreaction, cruelty, inchoate violence.

We keep hearing about ISIS being an "existential threat". It's a stupid phrase, but people who speak it seem to believe it affords gravitas, a seriousness of purpose. But it's bullshit. There is no threat to our existence from a ragtag army of lunatics. Sure, they can disrupt, sow fear. And then they rely on us to lose our collective shit. If history is any guide, they will not be disappointed.

ISIS cannot destroy our civilization, our "way of life", much as they might wish otherwise. But we certainly have the means to do it. They need us to do the dirty work of abandoning the very elements of our society that make it worth protecting. On

Saturday, "[a]bout a dozen protesters – most carrying long guns, some masked and one with his mother" marched outside a mosque in Irving, TX. Calling themselves the Bureau of American Islamic Relations, these brave protectors of the Fatherland insisted their guns were not to threaten, but merely a means of protecting themselves from the evil musselman within.

Also on Saturday, at a rally in Birmingham for the increasingly inexcusable Donald Trump, Tribble Top declared, "I want surveillance of certain mosques if that's OK. We've had it before." A week earlier he had called for shutting down mosques, so perhaps this is Trump being 'moderate'.

We won't shut ya down, but we've got our eyes on you. And maybe a few yahoos with hunting rifles patrolling the perimeter.

(Also at that rally, a Black Lives Matter protester was beaten, knocked down, and kicked as their Fearless Leader shouted, "get him the hell out of here", followed by Trump mocking the man as "a loser." Just another conveniently identifiable *other*.) *UPDATE: In a interview the following day, Trump said the guy deserved to "get roughed up". Very mid-century retro, nein?*

The news is full of stories like these. They all have one, or both, of the key ingredients: ill-informed (and perhaps sincere) people engaging in dangerous and counter-productive behaviors and/or the demagogues using the fear to enhance their own personae and power.

As Winston Churchill said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste."

As usual, the things we end up freaking out about (ebola, immigrants from wherever, terrorism, bacon fat) are typically not that big a threat in the scheme of things. We are all more

likely to experience injury or death in these United States due to reckless driving (our own or someone else's) or falls in the bathtub (around 50,000 deaths or hospital-level injuries per year). Texting while driving claims 6000 lives per year. Shit, 450 people die each year from falling out of bed. Even sleeping in you own bed is more likely to do you in than a terrorist attack.

But there's no political upside in making you afraid to take a shower or a nap.

Last week, the GOP house – the same group of bedwetters who passed a cruel and useless bill to make it harder for refugees to come to America – attached two riders to the new budget bill that would cut the CDC's anti-smoking budget in half. Nobody<fn>I think even the tobacco companies have quit fighting this.</fn> disputes the carnage caused by tobacco. Tobacco deaths in the US each year outnumber terrorist related deaths worldwide by a factor of about fifteen. In 2014, almost a half-million people died in the US – more than 40,000 from secondhand smoke. Terror-related deaths in 2014 totaled around 33,000, up from around 18,000 in 2013. That's a lot of death, and the rising toll is something to be concerned about. But.

Most of those terror deaths occurred in places like Kenya and Mali and other places that most Americans don't care about. No demagogue worth his salt is going to try to gin up the rubes over a place like that.

But Paris is different. Western. White. So it's easy to conflate fear of terrorists with generalized fear of dark skin. It also makes them easy to target, to separate them from the core. It's why we imprisoned Japanese-Americans during WWII, and not German-Americans and other overt Nazi sympathizers like Charles Lindbergh.<fn>Or Prescott Bush.</fn>

It's an easy fissure point for a clever communicator like Trump. In the mouths of less-skilled demagogues, maybe not so

much; the execrable David Vitter tried to salvage his gubernatorial campaign over the past weeks with blatant fear mongering and lies<fn>He even threw Catholic Charities under the bus; his wife is their General Counsel. Nice guy.</fn>, but got thumped anyway. But here's the thing: his loss was because of his other "qualities", not because he played the racist/terror card. I'm frankly surprised it didn't work out for him. After all, what are a few tawdry prostitute scandals compared to the good old boogity boogity?

Some of our political figures are keeping their heads on straight in all this. Obama is demonstrating an admirable resolve to not let the hysteria drive his policy over the refugees. (The decision to send more troops back into the desert shitshow is more troublesome, as is the flow of arms we keep pumping into the Middle East.) As far as the vote in the House last week to punish refugees – because reasons – I guess I should be happy that only 47 Dems<fn>Just a few dozen quisling Democrats like our local congresscritter, Gwen Graham.</fn> joined the wannabe revanchists, especially compared to the cowardice on display post-9/11.

Locally, our Governor has predictably pandered to his bible banger base of rubes. In response, our Mayor was asked his thoughts on the refugees, and he admirably said that we should welcome them with open arms. This naturally led the comments section of our local fishwrapper to explode in a veritable orgy of fantasy hypotheticals and nativist bigotry more-or-less openly expressed. It is to weep.

This is not going to get better any time soon. Recall post-9/11, how every rumor led to panic led to changes in the color-coded oh-my-god-we're-fucking-doomed Official Terror Alert system. It's back. Last time, it led us into a war that has still not ended. And with a dozen-plus power hungry nitwits trying to win the Republican nomination (not to mention all the House/Senate numbnuts up for re-election), the calls for extremist reaction are not going to slow down.

Because, as always, they’re only selling what they know people will buy.

I might crawl under the bed myself. It’s not the terrorists that scare me. It’s us.




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# Validation is Not Just a River in Egypt



Validation. Some people crave it. Some could care less. Most of us probably fall in the muddy middle, swinging willy nilly between craving and caring less.

Sometimes, Your Narrator is reasonably content – yea, even fully satisfied – to do something well and enjoy the doing for its own sake. A well-written post. A nicely turned phrase. A lyrical, melodic line on the guitar. Mastering a new tune. That sort of thing.

Sometimes, YN is r/c – yea, even f/s – with a household chore done well. A clean toilet. A well trimmed hedge. Freshly cut grass. And so on.

Doing something well truly offers its own rewards. Really. No, really.

Usually.

Other times, invisibility seems to have taken over. The good post, the nicely turned melody, the simple chore…if a positive act falls alone in the forest, has it really happened? And even if it has….so the fuck what? Somebody pay attention!

So knowing well that the doing should be sufficient, what swings me to the opposite pole of neediness, of craving the validation? Is this a fundamental weakness? Or is a core need to be *seen* – and dog forbid, maybe even appreciated – a natural part of the human condition, something as inevitable as hunger or thirst or lust or a desire to lay on the sofa and watch old movies with bags of chips and such?

Whichever is true, the need for validation combined with an ongoing absence of validation is one of my triggers, that set of conditions that puts you off your game, in a funk, down the hole, around the bend, {your preposition here} the {wherever}. And then it gets dark.




It's been a rough year. The remnants of that damned tick have at last receded into the memory mist, but employment remains elusive. (The news stories we've heard about how tough it is for someone over 50 to get work are not fairy tales. It just plain sucks out there.) Some plans and hoped-for outcomes fell to the ground. Other plans and h/f/o hang like undropped shoes. Hope began to feel banal and futile; at best, hopelessly naive. Pessimism became its own reinforcement.

The prescribed remedy – go ahead and do the work anyway – is easier said than done. Some people always seem to be able to muster the energy to persevere. (Or perhaps it only seems that way?) I'm not one of them. Sometimes, despair wraps its bony fingers around my neck and stops me in my tracks.

But.

Things are looking up, it's always darkest just before the dawn, I can see clearly now, &c. The feelings of dread pass, and of course they always have, so no big surprise there. It's not as though I've been lying on the floor counting ceiling tiles. Life has been pretty busy. There is an article commission – a musicological exposition that has never been made in such detail or with such care – that has occupied most of my writing time. It's going to be pretty great. I know this because I've had two good readers give me the reality check. Validation! I knew (or thought) it was good, but the doubt crept in. The Greek Chorus knew just which tune to call

to undermine confidence.

I really sweat blood on this article. A true labor of love, very important to me in so many ways. And now that it's turned the corner, I've got my belief back. I can't wait for everybody to see it.




Along with that, a couple of other h/f/o have turned my way. And even though none of it amounts to a nickel of income – yet, anyway – there are glimmers of light down the tunnel that might not be an oncoming train. Not gonna get too far out on the optimist limb just yet, but there might be, dare we even whisper it….hope.

Maybe even for the i2b blog. Or maybe not.

My first post at this little bloggy vineyard went up around a year ago. My last post went up about two months ago. Up until that last one, Your Narrator had been doing pretty well, keeping the entertainments rolling and the rants roiling. And then….

And then, the well just seemed to run dry. The Writer could not. Or did not. It's unclear.

One of a thousand cuts: it seemed that there was no real interest in the blog. A handful of visitors here and there, the gears wouldn't catch. Attention must be paid!

Mostly, the blog has been a great experience. My writing improved week to week, and at its (my) best, the knowledge that I had to generate something more or less reasonably kind of readable and interesting triggered me to be more engaged with the world, always on the eagle-eye to spot another cool story.

But dammit, now I needs me some validation.



Who? Lil ol me?

I had to turn off the Comments function on the blog because I was getting 50-60 spam comments on every post. Actual reader comments averaged well below one per post. Not validating!

But strangely enough, the most validating of all comments ever posted here actually came from a spam bot. To wit:

> *What i don't understood is in reality how you are not actually a lot more neatly-appreciated than you may be right now. You are so intelligent. You know therefore significantly in terms of this subject, made me in my view consider it from a lot of various angles. Its like men and women are not fascinated except it is something to accomplish with Girl gaga! Your individual stuffs excellent. At all times care for it up!*

That was from Tanya3756dc from Uzbekistan. God, how I miss her unwavering support.

Eventually, I added a **Donate** button to allow grateful readers to show their love – measured in dollars, naturally. That generated exactly zero responses. Zee. Row. Along with the other rejections and dead ends (real and perceived), it all just felt pointless. I was a young Alvy Singer facing the inevitable outcome of an expanding universe. Homework? What's the point?

But I’m open to reasonable persuasion. This is your chance to ensure that the hard-hitting social commentary and enlightening cultural musings that you’ve grown accustomed to over the past year keep on coming. After all, as Tanya3756dc reminds us: “At all times care for it up!”

Do you, patient reader, love me the way my T3756dc does?

If you send me an email (rob at jakelegg dot com) – imploring me to, for god’s sake, don’t stop the blog, the world will be a bitter and barren place without it – I will take your plea under advisement and perhaps send you a commemorative tote bag. (No, I won’t.) The more you beg, the more you fawn, the more your vote will count.

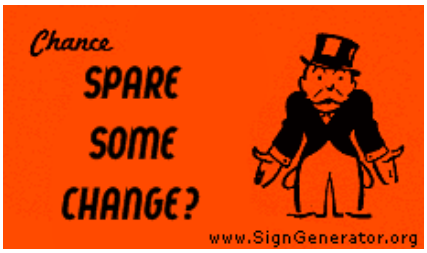
If you really want your vote to count, click on that **Donate** button at the top of the right column and drop a few shekls in the tip jar, I will come to your house and recite a blog post written specifically for you while I massage your neck and shoulders with essential oils. (Much as I’d love to, no. Not really.) Remember, the more you give, the more you truly love me.

I’ve done some calculating, and I figure if ten of you donate about $5000 each – or if 50 of you donate $3246 (that’s less than ten dollars a day!) – everything is gonna work out fine, the blog will continue, my dog will get to eat again, and I can get a new coffee mug that does not leak.

Give, or the blog gets it.



Operators are standing by.




Actually, the jangle of coins makes me nervous. Quiet folding money only, please.