

## 62 Why Do We Create Monsters?

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visions. Audiences can reflect on them, reject or embrace them, take inspiration from them, and otherwise be enriched beyond the entertainment aspect. Good monster stories can transmit moral truths to us by showing us examples of dignity and depravity without preaching or proselytizing.

But imagining monsters is not just the stuff of fiction. Picture yourself in the following scenario. On the evening of August 7, 1994, Bruce Shapiro entered a coffee bar in New Haven, Conn. Shapiro and his friends had entered the cafe and were relaxing at a table near the front door. Approximately 15 other people were scattered around the bar, enjoying the evening. One of Shapiro's friends went up to the bar to get drinks. "Suddenly there was chaos," Shapiro explained in the *Nation* the next year, "as if a mortar shell had landed." He looked up to see a flash of metal and people leaping away from a thin, bearded man with a ponytail. Chairs and tables were knocked over, and Shapiro protected one of his friends by pulling her to the ground.

In a matter of minutes, the thin man, Daniel Silva, had managed to stab and seriously injure seven people in the coffee shop. Using a six-inch hunting knife, Silva jumped around the room and attacked with lightning speed. Two of Shapiro's friends were stabbed. After helping some others, Shapiro finally escaped the cafe. "I had gone no more than a few steps," he recalled, "when I felt a hard punch in my back followed instantly by the unforgettable sensation of skin and muscle tissue parting. Silva had stabbed me about six inches above my waist, just beneath my rib cage."

Shapiro fell to the pavement and cried out, "Why are you doing this?" Standing over him, Silva plunged the knife into Shapiro's chest, beneath his left shoulder. "You killed my mother" was the incoherent response that Silva offered his victim. Silva then pulled the knife out of Shapiro and rode off on a bicycle. He was soon apprehended and jailed.

Was Silva a monster? Not exactly. He was a mentally ill man who snapped and seemed to think that his mother had been wronged and felt some obscure need to avenge her. (She was, in fact, in a nearby hospital at the time, being treated for diabetes.) But from the perspective of raw experience, this horrifying event shares many qualities with the imagined monster attack. Shapiro and his unfortunate company were suddenly presented with a deadly, irrational, powerful force that sent them reeling for mere survival. And yet the victims demonstrated an impressive ability to reach out and help each other. While the victims were leaping away

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