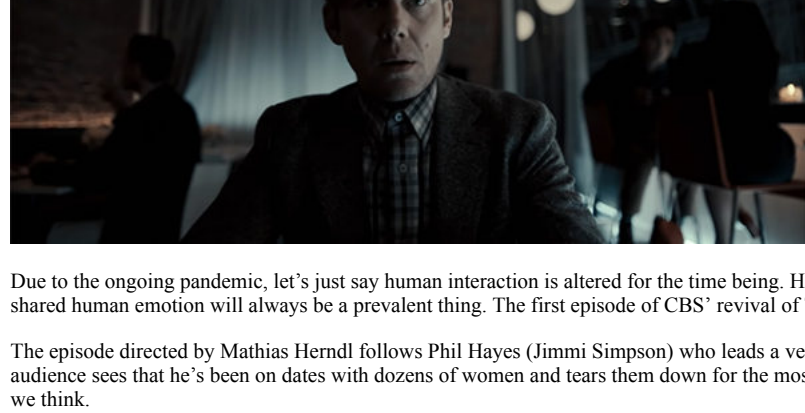


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Twilight Zone's 'Meet in the Middle' Shows the Sendor and Delusions of Human Connectivity

Published on July 3, 2020, by [Marjani Rawls](#) - Posted in [News](#)



Due to the ongoing pandemic, let's just say human interaction is altered for the time being. Handshakes and hugs have been substituted for Zoom meetings and Netflix watch parties. Who knows how long will it go? As much as we entrench ourselves in a more digital background, the craving for shared human emotion will always be a prevalent thing. The first episode of CBS' revival of *The Twilight Zone*, "Meet Me In The Middle" tries to tackle this very notion within a 40-minute container. How far would one person go to obtain their semblance of what they perceive to be true love?

The episode directed by Mathias Herndl follows Phil Hayes (Jimmie Simpson) who leads a very mundane life in the search for the "perfect" connection. Within that, he is extra dismissive of the women that he does meet – giving off a lot of shallowness. As he's talking with his therapist, the audience sees that he's been on dates with dozens of women and tears them down for the most insignificant things. It is here where he meets Annie (Gillian Jacobs), but not in person – they have a telepathic link. Once they get over their trepidation, it seems to grow into an actual connection. So we think.

Co-writers Emily Chang and Sarah Amini play with the concept of time throughout this episode. It has been said that the time to fall in love with someone varies. It could range from a few days to years. When Phil and Annie are getting to know each other because we only see it from Phil's physical viewpoint, it could very well be his delusion of grandeur. That's why only seeing his facial expressions and hearing Annie's voice is key. His character is so desperate for what he interprets love being, he blindly devotes himself to it.

When you have an episode that is so confined to mostly inner dialogue, it takes exceptional performances to pull off the overall message. Simpson and Jacobs combined do a great job within this setting. The audience is with Simpson's character for the entire episode as he carrens off the deep end. You hear Jacobs' voice and don't see her character until the very end. However, the conversations that both Phil and Annie have are good enough to carry the story. You become invested in this star-crossed, telepathic lover situation that they find themselves wrapped in.

"Meet Me In The Middle" hides Annie's red flags in plain sight. Phil is a character that is so desperate for affection and somebody who he can connect with, that he ignores some of the iffy things and scenarios that Annie presents him with. Instead of questioning, Phil sees Annie as a damsel in distress because that's what she wants him to see. It speaks to deeper questions that apply to a culture of dating through virtual appearances. Do you know who the person is that's on the other side of the profile? Do we create these "fairy tale" narratives in our heads to not see that nobody is perfect?

There are two sides to the end of the episode. Phil is left contemplating the horrible lengths he's gone for somebody he's never met. Is he crazy? Has his head led him through this on wild goose chase? If the episode ends with that thought, it would have been in line of classic *Twilight Zone*. Here's a man who fabricated an entire connection to his fault. It does this, but in a more direct way.

Annie ultimately gives Phil what he wants. Phil wanted to be the knight in shining armor and Annie uses his naively against him. The audience is able to see that Annie has less than good intentions. You may feel somewhat sorry for Phil, but the overall plot may have you question how the urge for human connection clouds empirical judgement.

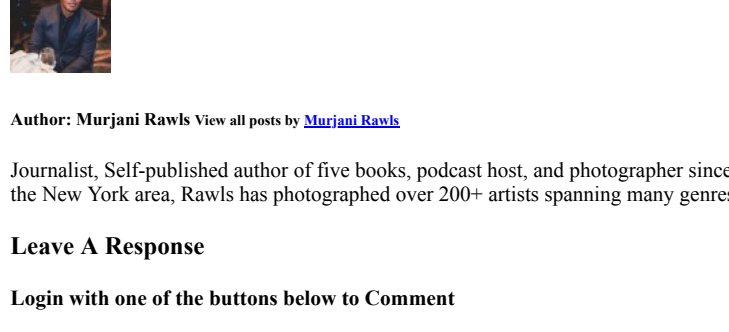


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Journalist, Self-published author of five books, podcast host, and photographer since 2014, Marjani Rawls has been stretching the capabilities of his creativity and passion. Rawls has a portfolio spanning through many mediums including music, television, movies, and more. Operating out of the New York area, Rawls has photographed over 200+ artists spanning many genres, written over 700 articles ranging displaying his passionate aspirations to keep evolving as his years in media continue.

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