



# psych

and philosophy



**SOME DARK  
JUJU-MAGUMBO**

**EDITED BY ROBERT ARP**

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# Psych and Philosophy

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# Psych and Philosophy

*Some Dark Juju-Magumbo*

Edited by  
ROBERT ARP



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George A. Reisch

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# This Is the Introduction . . . But I Knew that You Knew That Already

ROBERT ARP

I know what you're thinking. No, I'm not *psychic*—but I still know what you're thinking. Why mix *Psych* with philosophy? Well, first off, philosophers are always honing their “powers” of observation, inference, and deduction in the same way Henry Spencer helps Shawn do this with his obnoxious challenges and games at the beginning of every episode. In fact, these critical thinking skills are essential to the philosophical life, and philosophers—like any good thinker—have hunches and hypotheses that they test out to see if they're true or not. Unlike “Lassie” Lassiter, who's always skeptical of “Spencer's stupid hunches,” philosophers welcome such splendidly speculative suppositions (you like my alliteration?).

A big difference between Shawn and your typical philosopher is that philosophers aren't (generally) charlatans! I don't understand how people can be so naive and downright stupid enough to believe in psychic abilities, or in any kind of paranormal BS. I lump ghosts, the afterlife, and gods there, too. That stuff's all either magic, sleight of hand, smoke and mirrors, or wishful thinking. Since the dawn of humanity, clever people have been *abusing* powers of observation and deduction to get other not-so-clever people to believe something that's false or crazy, or act in horrible and heinous ways, or do their self-serving bidding. As the original *consigliere*, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) put it in his famous work, *The Prince* (1532):

Men are so simple and so ready to obey present necessities, that one who deceives will always find those who allow themselves to be deceived.

Another reason to mix *Psych* with philosophy is the fact that lots of episodes touch upon many of the basic areas of Western philosophy. In this book you'll see chapters dealing with logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, political philosophy—even some feminism and ideas from the dead German philosopher who's famous for claiming that “God is dead,” Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900).

One ethical issue that comes up in numerous *Psych* episodes is whether it's really immoral to lie. When you tell a typical lie, you intend to deceive someone else, usually so that you—the liar—can gain profit, pleasure, or advantage (or to avoid hassles, pain, or disadvantage) as a result of the lie and deception. The whole premise of *Psych* is that Shawn's psychic detective agency is built on the lie that he's really psychic, so that he can avoid having to go to jail. Here, Shawn's lying to avoid the hassle of having to explain and prove to the cops that he's just really observant.

But, you can also lie to someone to avoid a perceived negative, detrimental, or painful physical or psychological consequence—or to promote a perceived positive, healthy, or pleasurable consequence—for the person to whom one is lying. In other words, you can lie to them for their own good. F

example, let's say Shawn's mother dies in a horrible accident and Henry witnessed it, and he literally knows "all of the gory details." And one day, a young seven-year-old Shawn asks his dad point blank "Dad, I know you were there when mom died, can you tell me exactly what you saw?" No one would think Henry did anything wrong if he simply lied to seven-year-old Shawn by saying something like "I honestly don't know, son, I blacked out . . ." or made up some other baloney story.

You can also lie to promote a positive, healthy, or pleasurable consequence *for the sake of a whole bunch of people*. So, if you lied to a terrorist by telling him that you'll let him go free if he reveals where he hid the bomb, and after he reveals where it's located, you still throw his arse in jail, hard as anyone would say, "Tsk, tsk . . . shame on you! How *dare* you lie to that terrorist?" Your lie just saved several lives, so most would say you were right to lie!

Given that Shawn's lies always seem to have the benefit of solving the case—and helping to save lives, bringing criminals to justice, restoring order, and other good things—they might not be such a bad thing, in the end. Still, it seems that Shawn could get the same positive results without telling lies and there's a part of us that wishes he would just "come clean" and do his job as a talented detective rather than as a lying hack.

I could go on and on explaining all of the various ways that *Psych* is a perfect match for my philosophy, but I *still* know what you're thinking. Enough of this intro stuff! Let's get to it!

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# **In Between the Lines**

# I've Heard It Both Ways

NICOLAS MICHAUD

Shawn Spencer lies . . . a lot. For a man who solves crimes, he spends an awful lot of time deceiving law enforcement and, well, just about everyone else. For the most part, Shawn seems to enjoy his deceptions, and it almost seems as if coming to the truth of a crime is just part of the game. However, in Shawn's defense, some might argue that Shawn isn't so much lying as he is indulging in logical fallacy—misdirecting others with bad logic.

In other words, Shawn simply throws people off the trail and plays with logic to get what he wants. What he's doing isn't really deceptive, because he uses these irrelevancies of his in order to lead people to the truth instead of away from the truth.

## Gus, Don't Be a Fallacy

The first thing we need to consider is what logical fallacies are, and in order to do that we need to understand what logic is. Most people assume that they have a pretty good grasp of logic. However, consider how easily Shawn is able to deceive those around him. He has no magical psychic abilities, and logic seems to demand that those around Shawn accept that fact, but many people are quite content to believe in Shawn's "powers."

It's a rare case indeed where someone takes the time to consider how Shawn manages to solve his crimes without magic—like the student at the school for the gifted who points out that Shawn may just be hyper-observant, and they need not assume that he is a psychic ("If You're So Smart, The Why Are You Dead?"). As a matter of fact there's a great deal of evidence against the existence of psychics, but many people are not willing to push hard enough on Shawn's lies to get to the truth. Most people may not be as logical as they think!

Logic is really just a way of describing reasoning. Not all logic is good logic. It really isn't that difficult to see that there are examples of bad logic. If Shawn were to tell us that a mummy walked out of a tomb and strangled a man to death, we would be a bit skeptical. Imagine that you asked Shawn why you should believe his outrageous claim. He would reply, "Because I'm psychic." When you think about it, that really isn't great reasoning. We probably shouldn't believe that claim—not without good evidence. But logic isn't just about the quality of the evidence; it's about *the way we use the evidence*.

The primary concern of logicians is *how* we use evidence to substantiate our claims. Good logic means that our evidence connects directly to our claims. And while it seems obvious that our evidence should connect to our claims; it isn't always easy to catch—hence the problem of logical fallacies. Consider an easy example: If I were to say that I know that the murderer was wearing black, and m

evidence for it was, “Because the sky is blue and the grass is green,” you would think I had given you evidence to my claim. Consider, however, the fact that “The sky is blue and the grass is green,” is true (at least, it usually is).

So is the problem that my evidence was bad? Not really; the problem with my argument isn't the falsity of my evidence, but that *the evidence doesn't connect to the conclusion*. In other words not only should my evidence be true, . . . it must also be directly connected to my conclusion!

Consider another example about the connection of evidence to conclusions. Imagine I make the following argument:

1. If Shawn and Gus see a ghost, they will run away
2. Shawn and Gus are running away
3. Therefore, Shawn and Gus have seen a ghost

Take a look at the argument for a moment. Can you see where the problem is? Can we conclude, from the argument above, that, *if Shawn and Gus are running they must have seen a ghost*? No! There is nothing in that argument that tells us that they can only run away from a ghost. All we know from the argument is that *IF* Shawn and Gus see a ghost they will run, but there is nothing about *IF* they are running! They could have been running for many reasons—from murderers, mummies, or Shawn's father!

Notice that, once again, all of the evidence in an argument can be true, yet the conclusion can be false! That is a very powerful realization—it is possible to have an argument with all true evidence and yet the conclusion can be completely false! So you might think to yourself, “Yeah, but even Lassiter could find those flaws,” but with some bad logic—some logical fallacies—it gets a little more tricky. Logical fallacies often *seem* like good reasoning, when in fact they are really poor reasoning.

## Gus, Don't Be an Ad Hominem

So, to understand what it is that Shawn does that is a logical fallacy, we now need to consider one of the most common fallacy types—fallacies of relevance. Fallacies of relevance are cases in which the conclusion seems to connect to the evidence when, in fact, it does not. Shawn loves to use fallacies of relevance, and really his whole Psych career is based on a fallacy of relevance called “The Red Herring.” We will consider Shawn's Red Herring in a bit. Let's first consider an even more obvious—and beloved by Shawn—fallacy of relevance, the Ad Hominem.

An *Ad Hominem* (translated “to the man”) is a fallacy in which we attack the person instead of the claim that the person makes. Lassiter is a favorite victim of Shawn's Ad Hominem. Lassiter, especially early on in the series, would attempt to point out that Shawn is a fraud and, generally, Shawn refused to even engage Lassiter's claims. He would simply call Lassiter a name of some kind or make fun of some neurotic quality of his, and move on. Lassiter is often taken aback and dumbfounded by these comments, and before he can recover, Shawn has already moved on. When we think about it, though, we realize that Shawn has never really addressed Lassiter's claim—he has avoided it by making fun of “Lassie.”

Most of us engage in Ad Hominem often. Politicians are especially fond of Ad Hominem—Why answer a question when you can simply attack your opponent, instead? Think of the criminals caught

by Shawn: how do they generally respond when accused of their crimes? In many cases, they respond to the charges with an insult of some kind that doesn't answer Shawn's powerful (though usually florid and overly dramatic) accusation. Calling someone a name instead of addressing his or her point prevents us from getting to the truth of the matter. An Ad Hominem may not even be a case of a name calling; when we attack someone's motive, character, or fashion sense, instead of answering the question or addressing their conclusions, we engage in bad logic—we have introduced something irrelevant into the case.

## **Gus, Don't Be a Red Herring**

When it comes to introducing an irrelevancy into an argument, Shawn is the king. And now that we have a better understanding of how important relevance is to logic, we can consider Shawn's own biggest fallacy—his Red Herring.

A Red Herring can be thought of as a distraction from the argument at hand. Shawn knows that he will get into trouble if he tries to stick with the truth because his talent for solving crimes can get him in trouble: it seems like he knows too much for an ordinary citizen. So, when the show first begins, he must come up with a lie that will convince others that he is not, in fact, a criminal himself. So he tells the police that he's psychic. Notice, though, this isn't just a lie. This claim of Shawn's is a distraction; it leads people away from the truth specifically in order to avoid having to deal with it.

The term "Red Herring" originates from foxhunting. Back in the day it was often too easy for the hunting dogs to catch the fox's scent and then follow its trail. So in order to make the hunt last longer the hunters would have someone drag a dead fish, a red herring, on the ground to distract the hounds and so the hunt would be more interesting and go on longer. We can see now how this relates to logic: when we introduce an irrelevancy or a deception into an argument in order to distract people, we're using a metaphorical dead fish to lead them off the scent.

Politicians are very adept at this kind of fallacy. When someone asks them questions to which they don't know the answers or don't want to give the answers, they will often reply with something like "The American people will know what to think about that. I respect the intelligence of the American people!" As a result, the audiences will often stand up, clap and cheer, because they agree with the sentiment, and what they never notice is that the politicians haven't answered the questions about war or policy, or their shady pasts.

## **Gus, Don't Be a Hypocrites!**

Shawn uses a pretty huge Red Herring to avoid being arrested. By pretending to be psychic the hounds are thrown off his scent. While the cops and press are amazed, astounded, and intrigued by Shawn's psychic powers, he is able to go about solving crimes under their radar using old-fashioned logic and observation. So there's a real irony in Shawn's career: he uses logic and observation to connect the dots to solve crimes, but in order to do so he must distract others with bad logic! So, we can't help wondering, "Is Shawn doing what's right or is he doing wrong?" Is it okay for Shawn to use bad logic to accomplish his aims?

At first, it's hard to justify Shawn's actions outside of selfishness. He uses his Red Herring largely to keep himself out of trouble and because it's fun! Neither his father nor Gus trust Shawn because they believe that Shawn's unlikely to really work on something diligently and is likely just playing

game at the police's expense. But, as time goes on, Shawn comes to really love his work and the good that he does. And, so, the question of whether or not Shawn's use of bad logic is right becomes a bit more complex.

What are some of the arguments against bad logic? One philosopher who immediately comes to mind is Socrates (around 469–399 B.C.E.). Socrates's student Plato wrote a whole lot about Socrates and paints a picture of a man who was very concerned about bad reasoning and the misuse of logic. Socrates lived at a time when philosophy and logic were being used as a means by which people could gain power and prestige. Rhetoricians called “Sophists” who had training in argumentation and persuasion could be convinced to argue any side of a case, and train anyone in argumentation, for the right sum of money.

Socrates, though, was very disturbed by these Sophists. He was a big believer in the Truth with a capital T. Socrates thought that we should all seek the truth as the highest end, and that seeking—what we now consider philosophy—would lead to wisdom, beauty, and justice. Socrates has little patience with the use of a fallacy that we call “inconsistency,” and it is for this reason that I think he would not approve of Shawn's “harmless” deceptions. In fact, Socrates made a career out of finding and exposing the inconsistencies of people like Shawn.

An inconsistency is a case wherein our beliefs or actions contradict each other—it's a way of proving our own beliefs wrong. In other words, we're inconsistent when we say we believe in one thing, yet act in the opposite way. Inconsistencies can be very dangerous. Think of cases like Thomas Jefferson who wrote about slavery being wrong, and, yet, never freed his own slaves because it would cost him too much money. Shawn is similarly inconsistent; he seems to love coming to the truth, and finding out what really is the case (he himself would not want to be deceived; his observational skills and the way he uses them, indicate that he has a keen eye and taste for what is true), however, Shawn is willing to deceive others in order to convenience and amuse himself.

In a very famous dialogue written by Plato, called the *Crito*, we see Socrates tempted by an inconsistency not so dissimilar from Shawn's. Socrates is condemned to death by the judicial system (largely for telling people the truth, which they *really* don't want to hear) and is offered the chance to escape by his friend Crito. Crito tells Socrates that he can bribe the guards—a common practice in Athens at the time—and Socrates can escape before justice is served. Socrates refuses, though. He argues that he would be inconsistent and do justice itself a disservice.

We must be consistent even when it's inconvenient, argues Socrates. He doesn't want to be the person who tells *everyone else* that they should seek the truth and be consistent, and then himself break the law and use bribery to save his own life. And, so, Socrates is willing to sacrifice his life to preserve the truth. Shawn, on the other hand, seems to take great pleasure in misdirecting the police. Could Socrates be right? Could Shawn actually be helping to make the world a worse place through his deceptions?

## **Gus, Don't Be One of Those Little Flies that Buzzes Around Your Head and No Matter How Much You Swat at It You Can Never Get Rid of It and Eventually You Just Give Up and Run Away**

In Shawn's defense, there is good reason to think that his deceptions really aren't that bad. The best argument in his favor is that by stopping murderers, he is likely saving lives. Yes, perhaps he is deceiving the police, the press, and the public at large, but how many people are saved through his

actions? So what if he enjoys it too and makes a living of it?—That’s irrelevant. What matters is that Shawn is helping to clean the streets and save lives, and bring justice to others through his actions.

And we really should be as fair to Shawn as we can. He is selfish, childish, and thoughtless. But he also cares about people and wants to help them. Shawn is far more likely to take a case when someone desperately needs his help, money aside. Yes, we have seen Shawn clearly use his observational gifts to benefit himself, but it can’t reasonably be argued that he shouldn’t also benefit from helping others. Generally, it’s a good thing when helping others also benefits us—it makes us more likely to do it again, not to mention that it raises the total amount of happiness in the world, for everyone!

But I don’t want to move past Socrates’s point too quickly. Granted, if we give Shawn the benefit of the doubt, he is doing real good, and only at the expense of a small evil. Let’s imagine, though, a Platonic-style dialogue between Shawn and Socrates. Can Shawn really get out of his own inconsistency?

*Shawn and Gus enter their Psych office; it is dimly lit. There is a woman lying dead on the ground clothed in white. Standing over her is a grizzly-looking, ugly old man with a beard. He has a pug face, red-rimmed eyes, and is clearly distraught.*

**SHAWN:** Okay, I’m impressed, Gus. I never thought you’d manage a surprise party without me psychically fortelling it.

**GUS:** You’re not psychic, Shawn.

**SHAWN:** So who’s Doc Brown over there? [*points at Socrates*]

**SOCRATES:** I am Socrates. I do not know this Doc Brown, of whom you speak.

**SHAWN:** Really? Old guy, white hair . . . from the future?

**GUS:** The past. And Doc Brown didn’t have a beard, Shawn.

**SHAWN:** I’ve heard it both ways.

**SOCRATES:** [*Points sadly at the corpse*] Look what you’ve done.

*Shawn and Gus look down at the body.*

**SHAWN:** [*Points back towards Gus with his thumb*] I’m sensing he did it. I’m Shawn Spenser, psychic with the SBPD, and this is my assistant, Sophie Magilicutty.

**SOCRATES:** You’ve killed Truth!

**SHAWN:** [*Scans the room*] No I didn’t. I wasn’t here. Not to mention that there are no abrasions on her or any sign of struggle. I’ve never seen her before. Looking at her, I’d say she is more into the aging rocker kind of a guy than me, anyway.

**SOCRATES:** You killed her through your deception.

**SHAWN:** What do you mean?

**SOCRATES:** Why is it that you claim to be a Psychic?

**SHAWN:** Well mostly for the free mints at the police station, but also because it helps people.

**SOCRATES:** And how does deceiving them, help them?

**SHAWN:** I solve crimes, using my psychic powers.

**GUS:** You aren’t psychic.

**SOCRATES:** You aren’t psychic, Shawn. You are deceiving hundreds of people, maybe thousands. What reason can you give them for lying to them like this is right?

**SHAWN:** Well, because it benefits them. I help solve crimes and catch murderers, and it does no harm.

**SOCRATES:** Would you say that you help bring criminals to justice?

**SHAWN:** Exactly! Now that we are done, who wants a Toblerone?

**GUS:** Really, Shawn? There’s a body here: we should do something about her!

**SHAWN:** Why? She’s not going to want a Toblerone; she’s dead. Don’t be silly, Gus!

**SOCRATES:** You are avoiding the question, Shawn. Why do you bring criminals to justice? Not all of them are cases in which



they would kill again. Some of them are even cases in which the criminal is already dead. . . . Why do you still solve them?

**SHAWN:** It doesn't matter if everyone in the case is already dead. We all want to know the truth.

**SOCRATES:** Why do we want to know the truth?

**SHAWN:** Well, in this case, because it helps save lives.

**SOCRATES:** And in the cases in which no life is in danger?

**SHAWN:** I don't know. I suppose just because I want to know what really happened. I'm good at finding the truth. It's a gift, really, . . . almost a curse.

**SOCRATES:** And you don't think those people trusting you with their jobs and lives deserve to know what really happens when you solve a crime?

**SHAWN:** My lies are fun and harmless! At worst, they make me mysterious and alluring.

**SOCRATES:** But wouldn't you agree that you don't want to be lied to?

**SHAWN:** Well that depends on the lie. If it's about my father's date last night, please do lie.

**GUS:** [*looks nauseous*]

**SOCRATES:** Wouldn't you agree that lying causes more lying?

**SHAWN:** Well yes, often a criminal will have to lie more to cover up his other lies.

**GUS:** Sounds like someone I know. . . .

**SHAWN:** Not now, Sophia!

**SOCRATES:** And is it bad if there are more and more lies in the world?

**SHAWN:** Possibly.

**SOCRATES:** Why?

**SHAWN:** Lies sometimes . . . may . . . in some cases, do harm.

**SOCRATES:** So you agree that the point of your job is to help save people from harm, and you agree that harm is a bad thing. You also agree that lying often causes harm, and that lying often causes more lying. So then you have to agree that by lying, you yourself are helping to create a world in which there is more lying, and, therefore, at least more potential for harm. Through your hypocrisy you have killed this poor woman here on the floor . . . her name is Truth!

**SHAWN:** Maybe. [*Observes the lipstick on Socrates's collar, and the redness of Socrates's eyes and touches his own temple with two fingers*] And I can see that you have been having an affair with the Truth for many years, Socrates! Shame on you! You are a married man!

*While Socrates, caught, stumbles for a retort, Shawn and Gus quickly exit the office. . . . Shawn never has to face Socrates's accusation.*

## Gus, Don't Be a Conclusion

Shawn's use of fallacies is largely just amusing. He seems to do little, if any, harm when he uses them. In fact, he seems to do a whole lot of good. The fact is also, though, that Shawn never really helps to answer a question. And there's something that Shawn is always going to have trouble with, . . . trust. As Socrates pointed out, there are people who are trusting Shawn with their careers and lives, and it's awfully hard to trust someone who lies.

Looking at the problem of using bad logic to help people, we can now see the two sides of the argument. On the one hand, Shawn is helping people, but on the other, he is deceiving them. The real question is: Does the deception really do harm? I can see at least four general ways that deceiving people with bad logic will do harm:

1. It helps reinforce people's bad logic, thereby reducing the chance that they will be able to come to the truth without our help.

2. They are more likely to be easily deceived in the future by others with less harmless motives.

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3. They won't understand *why* something is the truth.
4. The deception helps increase the overall level of poor reasoning in the world.

More specifically, when Shawn uses bad logic:

1. He helps reinforce his co-workers' and clients' own ignorance of logic, reducing the chance that they will use good crime-fighting techniques themselves, and thereby making them more dependent on him.
2. He makes it so that they now believe they have good evidence that psychics really do exist and now they will be more willing to believe other "psychics" who may be conartists and criminals.
3. Those who observe his techniques won't benefit from learning the real ways the crimes are solved, and therefore won't benefit from learning his techniques.
4. As his success hits the newspapers, more and more people in the world will believe that crime should be solved by psychics rather than by hard-working detectives who keep their noses to the ground and their eyes peeled!

So I'll leave the verdict to you. Is Shawn just being cheeky and cute, helping make the world better?

Or is he really just helping make it easier for criminals to get away with deception in the long run? I've heard it both ways.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to dedicate this chapter to my grandmother, Nelkis Cobas. Keep writing, Grandma!

## What's the Story?

MICHAEL J. MUNIZ

Imagine being confined in a room in which all four walls, the floor, and the ceiling are completely sealed. There is no way in, nor a way out. And, to top it all off, it's pitch black. This could be a rather frightening reality for most people, if not all. Of course, this reality is highly unlikely as it raises a series of very important metaphysical questions such as: How did I get here? Who built this room? Will I ever be able to get out? Why am I here? Where's the TV remote? Did I miss *Psych*?

Perhaps these last two questions might give some clue as to where I'm going with this. The dark room of reality isn't so unreal as we sit in front of our TVs. Consider the ideal environment: you're sitting alone (or between friends and family) on your comfortable living-room couch. The lights are off while a floor and a ceiling surround you. Although you know how you got there, the truth is you don't know what's going to happen next. When the bright light of the TV begins displaying images of a young boy and his police officer of a father, in color (no this isn't *The Andy Griffith Show* circa 1965), you're experiencing the illumination of the fourth wall.

Typically, the fourth wall is a term mostly associated with theater, or other live performance shows. It's where stage performers pretend the audience doesn't exist. However, the breaking of the fourth wall is when those performers become aware of the audience and include them into the performed story. Thus, this begs the question: is it possible for TV characters to break the fourth wall and interact with us, the viewers?

When Shawn and Gus are snooping around the office of wildlife television host, Randy Labayd in the Season Three episode "Six Feet Under the Sea" you can see that the "window" is nothing more than a thick pane of glass separating the office from several dolphins swimming in a large aquarium. Soon after, Gus is seen in the background waving and speaking to the dolphins as if they could actually hear him or as if Gus had the super power to actually communicate with the graceful sea mammals. Perhaps if the dolphins were given lines to talk back to Gus, then the scene would be a bit more interesting.

Given our circumstances and our reality, how are we different from Gus trying to talk to the dolphins? Haven't we sat at the edge of our seat in our living rooms, yelling at the screen to tell the character in peril to "Get out" or "Don't go upstairs"? Perhaps there's a slight chance that they might hear us . . . or at least we hope they do.

The makers of most sitcoms try to incorporate the breaking of the fourth wall by allowing the laughter of a live studio audience to be heard throughout each episode. The issue of whether or not *Psych* is a sitcom isn't important. However there are a lot of moments, in each episode, where the characters seem to pause after some sort of comedic action, to allow us to laugh or chuckle without missing the actions that follow it. Is it me, or is it possible that Shawn, Gus, and the other characters are aware of their comedic effect and that they pause to allow some outside viewer to laugh at the

(or with them), even though there is no sound of a laughing studio audience? If so, this would mean that they know that I exist and they're actually acknowledging my presence.

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Unfortunately, (or fortunately . . . it depends on how you look at it) the level of obscurity that separates our reality from that of *Psych* is so much that there is no way this could actually occur. But what if it were true? How could it be done? Perhaps we need to look at how the stories (the episodes) are told.

## Fake Philosopher or Real Narratologist

If Shawn and Gus can have an office in Santa Barbara that provides the services of Psychic Detective, then why can't there be a place (like Hialeah, Florida) where someone can provide the services of Narrative Investigator? The cheesy slogan would read: "Having problems with a story? Then I'm your guy!"

Perhaps this service may not ever exist, but the reality is that narratologists do exist. Think of a narratologist as a philosopher of stories. He'll sit back on his big comfy couch and study how a story is told—as opposed to what the story is telling. Every story has small connecting elements that make up the whole. The fun part is when they examine why every element is so important.

Narratologists aren't there to explain symbolism or uncover hidden meanings. That's for underpaid high-school English teachers. Narratologists reveal the structure—the form—of the story and explain how it works.

The purpose of all fictional stories, no matter how serious or lighthearted, is to entertain. Whether that entertainment includes a moral message or some hidden agenda is not the issue. The way the story is structured determines its effect. So, if a *Psych* episode is structured poorly, then the episode won't be as entertaining as those that were structured properly. For *Psych* to have the appeal that it does, it's inclined to meet audience expectations by having particular plot elements present in every episode.

Every episode of *Psych* has one or more of the following plot elements:

- A. A prologue (opening sequence) usually set in the 1980s featuring a young Shawn and his father giving a clue as to what the theme of the episode might be.
- B. An instance where Shawn gives either himself or Gus a funny pseudonym to disguise their real identities.
- C. A pineapple (though not necessarily a plot element, it's a recurring visual element).
- D. Shawn and Lassie disputing over details in a case, usually resulting in some insult where Lassie resigns to Shawn's level of maturity.
- E. Gus providing a random piece of information that the average person may not know (usually involving pharmaceuticals).
- F. Shawn performing a fake spiritual possession that reveals clues about the case in front of the Chief, Jules, and/or Lassie.
- G. Shawn and Gus solving the case.

All of the above elements don't necessarily make up the show *Psych*. They are all secondary. That's why you'll never see all of them at once in every single episode. However, there is one necessary element that I didn't put on the above list. What is the one element to every episode that if it were not

there, *Psych* itself would absolutely fail?

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## X Marks the Spot

If I were to add seventeen more elements to the above list, and save the most important for last, the letter X would be Shawn's hypersensitive photographic memory—his eidetic memory. His ability to see and remember the tiniest details is essential for both the plot and function of the whole series. It's also pretty cool! I think our memories would be more than just all right if we all had this special gift. Then you could say, "you're an adult disguising himself as a teenager" from twenty feet away, just like the episode "If You're So Smart, then Why Are You Dead?" from Season Two. Or you could see all of the blemishes and disturbing marks or dirt on everyone's faces, including your own. Now, that just sounds wrong.

Like Shawn, I digress. I'm not here to provide a medical or scientific explanation of what eidetic memory is or how it could be used in real life. However, I would like to show how it's important for the *Psych* series. But if it gets too confusing, just wait till the end, this mystery will get solved.

Have you noticed how Shawn's eidetic memory sequences are presented? It usually involves a close up shot of Shawn's face, first. His eyebrow raises and eyes squint. Then, it cuts to an extreme close up shot of some specific object that the average eye would not be capable of spotting. Depending on the reasons why this object is important, it is usually shown in some pale coloring (black and white, sepia, or some other faded colors). Then, specific elements of the object itself are highlighted rather quickly. A slight chime-like sound can be heard every time something is highlighted. Afterwards, Shawn will usually bounce his head around to indicate that he has thought of something.

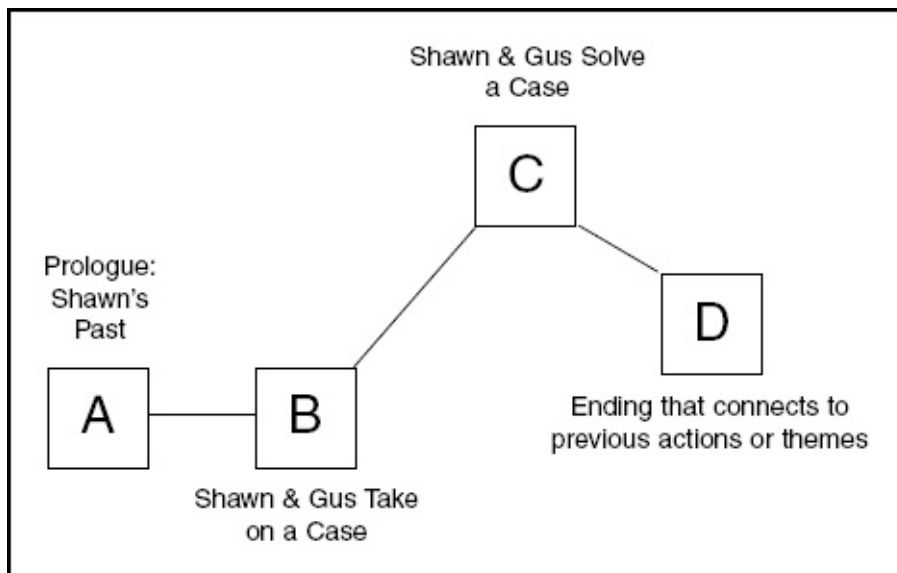
The above sequence is mandatory for *Psych* to be properly functioning. Shawn must focus for brief moments, observe, and deduce. He must do the same thing every single time, though it never bores us. Does it? In fact, it's quite likely that we sit and wait for these eidetic memory sequences to take place to see what Shawn sees, to be able to experience what Shawn experiences, to focus on the details, to make some bizarre explanation, to show Lassie that Shawn gets it right in the end every damn time!

## Doodles Are the Window to the Soul

In the episode "65 Million Years Off," Shawn and Gus are inside the shed of a paleontologist who has been trying to dig up a large collection of dinosaur bones. Inside the shed, Gus points out that there is nothing but a bunch of drawings and doodles. Shawn picks up what looks like the world's worst tic-tac-toe board and says: "Doodles are the window to the soul."

X			X		X
			X	X	
		O		X	X
X			X		X
	X	X		X	

Taking Shawn's point to a more philosophical level, watch how the following doodle shows the structure of *Psych*. Not including the show's theme song.



If there's any change with the above doodle, then the show's structure changes. The majority of a typical episode occurs between B and C. This area is called the conflict, or rising action. Typically this is where you'd experience a majority of the humor with some minor eidetic memory sequences. However, at section C is where we get the most important eidetic memory sequence that allows Shawn to make a deduction that ultimately solves the case. The shortest time in every episode is the section between C and D. This is called the falling action, or denouement, and is usually about a minute or so long.

Although this might seem rather elementary, there is a reason why the story is structured this way. Storytellers need to form their stories in a way that allows for the audience to experience it properly. However, we need to understand, just like a narratologist would, that it is not the story that matters; it's the storyteller, or how the story's told.

Here's another example: we all know the story of the *Three Little Pigs*. Without changing the basic idea of the *Three Little Pigs*, ask yourself: what would happen if Stephen King or Alfred Hitchcock told that story? Or what would happen if the makers of *Glee* told it? We would get an entirely new

experience with the same story! Therefore, we should consider the storytellers and their structuring the stories whenever we're about to experience it.

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So what does this have to do with *Psych*? Haven't you noticed that the whole of *Psych* is nothing more than a retelling of old Sherlock Holmes mysteries? Shawn and Gus are alternate forms of Holmes and Watson. I won't get into the details; I'll let you run with it.

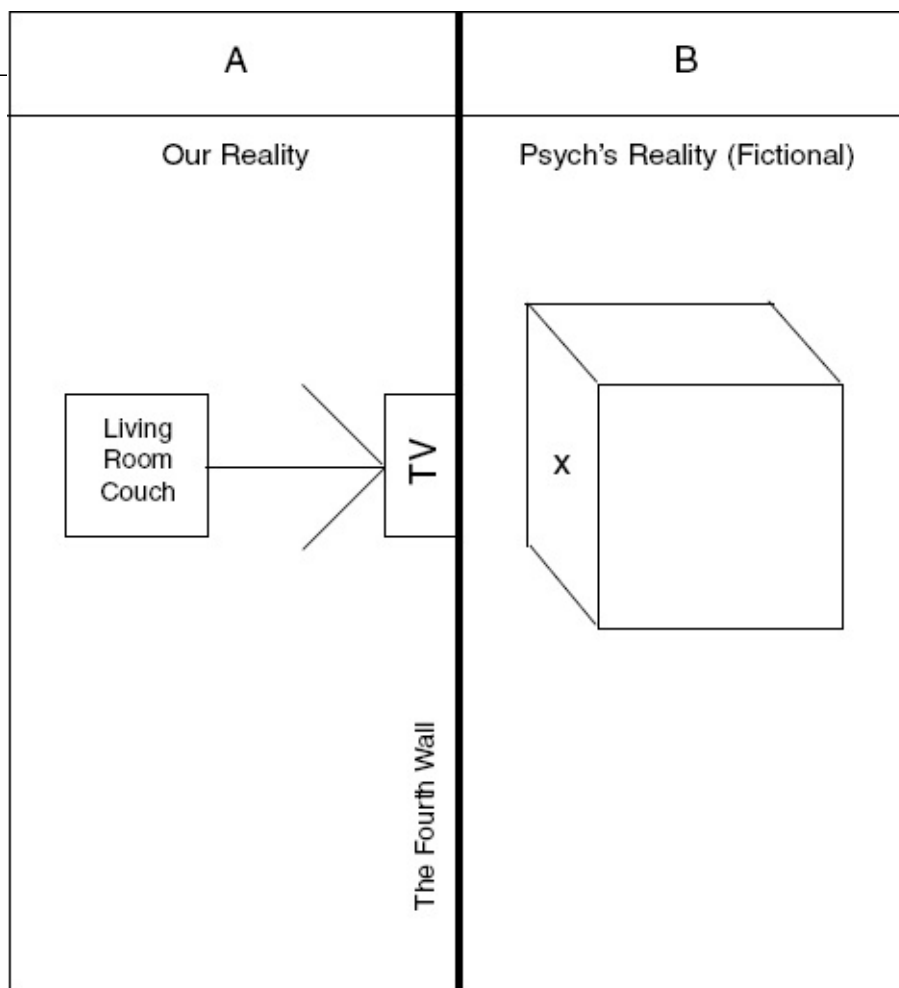
## The Climax of This Chapter

What if I told you that this whole chapter is written in the same format as a typical *Psych* episode? No, this isn't a fictional story, but there is a prologue: the section on the dark room; the rising action: the previous three sections; and now the climax. Afterwards, I'll bring this chapter to a close. When you sit and watch a *Psych* episode, or any other TV show, or movie, consider the storyteller (who made the show) and why they made it that way.

Well, for *Psych*, the storytellers wanted to include you in the story. They don't have to acknowledge this statement as a fact. They may even deny it. However, the truth is that in every episode we get to become Shawn and see the world through his eyes, literally.

Remember that part on the breaking of the fourth wall? Well, every time that Shawn has an eidetic memory sequence, it's at that precise moment that we become Shawn. We literally see what he sees. Hopefully, we're able to draw the same conclusions that he does. However, there is a downside: you can't actually stay as Shawn, nor exist in the fictional reality. However exciting or boring your life might be, you can never exist in the world of *Psych*. That's like diving into the aquarium and swimming with dolphins as a dolphin. Maybe, as we crawl into our beds and dream about it, we can get closer to that reality, but then there is still that part of waking up. So was the wall ever broken?

What we've been experiencing throughout the forty-two-plus-minute episodes (not including commercials) is called *projective illusion of cinematic image*. There are three other kinds of illusion (Reproductive, Müller-Lyer, and Trompe l'Oeil), but they aren't relevant to the show. According to the above doodle, we're only watching what the show projects: X marks the spot. The show actually psychs us into believing that we're a part of it. In other words, the illusion of *Psych*'s reality is so good, that we believe we're there, or that it is here.



## Psyched Out

The mystery is now solved. The fourth wall was never broken. It only feels like it's broken, but never really is. Like I said before, the only proper instance of the wall being broken is if it were a live setting. The structure of *Psych*, as designed by the narratologist, is also its function, which means that you're supposed to be psyched out in the end, just like the show's theme song says.

Have you noticed that I've been writing directly to you, the reader? Does that mean that I've been breaking the fourth wall? Perhaps you should use your inner narratological skills and determine if I have deceived you into thinking that I've been talking directly to you.

That voice in your head that you hear when you read this chapter could actually be mine! The conscious experience (or awareness) that is occurring right now is like you swimming with the dolphins. By allowing it to happen means that you gave in to the structure and function of this paper . the same way you give in to *Psych*. Hopefully, you'll be a bit sharper now, as well as narratological stronger, to be aware of what it is you're watching or reading.



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