

# Spoiler Alert! The Psychology Of Surprise Endings

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Writers and filmmakers hoping to hoodwink their fans with plot twists have long known what cognitive scientists know: All of us have blind spots in the way we assess the world. We get distracted. We forget how we know things. We see patterns that aren't there. Because these blind spots are wired into the brain, they act in ways that are predictable — so predictable that storytellers from Sophocles to M. Night Shyamalan have used them to lead us astray.

In recent years, some scientists have begun to ask, can stories serve as a kind of brain scan? If a plot twist works by exploiting our biases and mental shortcuts, can observing the mechanics of a good story reveal something important about the contours of the mind?"

"Stories are a kind of magic trick," says [cognitive scientist Vera Tobin](#). "When we dissect them, we can discover very, very reliable aspects of those tricks that turn out to be important clues about the way that people think."