

Light and Dark... White and Black... Good and Evil

No matter what the story, the age-old battle between opposing forces always seems to be crystallized within this same recurring theme. From the moment Adam & Eve's black and white stones were held in Jack's palm, we knew that dark and light sides would be represented within the overall story. But look a little closer, and you can go back even earlier than that. Just minutes into the Pilot episode, we get the show's very first reference to dark and light. As Kate's about to stitch Jack's wound closed with the sewing kit, Jack can have any color thread he wants. But which one does he choose? "Standard black."

This seemingly unimportant moment also marks one of the first concrete choices a character makes, all on his own. As the Flight 815 survivors work to eke out a life for themselves on the beach, The Others are scrambling to draw up lists and choose up sides. Some of the crash survivors would be marked as good, others would be labeled as bad. This seemed pretty important back in seasons one and two, with Goodwin actually "making a case" for Ana Lucia (according to Ben), and The Others targeting Mr. Eko as desirable... at least until he killed two would-be abductors with a rock. After that, Eko fell into a whole different category as far as The Others were concerned,

which seemed to align their interests not just in terms of black and white, but also of saints and sinners.

But for the moment, let's assume the most logical thing: white represents good, and black represents evil. With The Others claiming to be the "good guys" does that make them part of the white team? At Colleen's funeral they're all wearing white robes, and at the end of season three they're marking tents with white rocks. By seasons four and five, the Flight 815 survivors and even some of the freighter crew are working right alongside The Others. Adding everything up, you could draw a rough conclusion that the team of people aligned with the island's interests (either willingly or unwillingly) seem to be associated mostly with the color white.

Taking that into consideration, it makes Jack's choice much more significant. Right from the very first episode, before the spinning engines of Flight 815 had even grown cold, he chose the color black. Is this what Isabel meant when, in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, she commented on Jack's tattoo? "He walks amongst us, but he is not one of us." Is that because on some unknown level, Jack's really a member of the opposing side?

We could go crazy knocking ourselves out with all the black and white references throughout LOST. While not everything is always significant, some clues stand out as just too big to ignore. The black and white stones Jack finds at the cave complex are seen replacing Locke's eyes during Claire's dream in *Raised by Another*. Interpreting this, it could mean that John Locke is a man divided: torn between both sides, perhaps even

haunted (or occupied?) by forces both light and dark. Ditto for Sawyer's glasses, which Sayid creates by melting white and black plastic frames together. This is symbolic of Sawyer being on the fence; a bad man about to turn good. Of all LOST's characters you could argue that Sawyer has undergone the most radical of all transformations, a five-season metamorphosis from career criminal into upstanding citizen and head of Dharma security.

One of the more dramatic settings of black vs. white occurs at the end of *The Shape of Things to Come*, as Benjamin Linus confronts Charles Widmore in his own penthouse bedroom. Shadows are expertly manipulated to fall across Ben's face, bisecting it neatly down the nose line into two halves: one side falling into darkness, one exposed to the light. As Charles sits up in bed the same thing happens to him, only the opposite sides of his face are light and dark. Ben's right side is cloaked in darkness, but for Charles it's his left. This continues LOST's "mirror" theme, representing the constant duality of the two sides and players in addition to continuing the black and white imagery.

This sort of visual ying and yang is constantly given nods in the black and white colors of the Swan's countdown clock, the design of the Dharma logos, in Charlie's checkered shoes, even in pairs of characters such as Rose and Bernard - two people who many fans already speculate will turn out to be the Adam & Eve skeletons we find in the caves during season one. From dominoes to dice, from one side of the chessboard to the other,

the black vs. white theme has become symbolic of two opposing sides struggling against one another, as if one big game were being played.

And then finally, in the season five finale, we're given Jacob in a white shirt, and his nemesis in a black one. With all the twists and turns we've seen for the last five years, we can't expect to have been handed something so brutally obvious. It's little wonder that fans instantly began arguing over who's really good and who's really evil - it's not like we can trust the writers to make something this easy to figure out. But then again, maybe that's the genius of it all. After having thrown us curve ball after curve ball, maybe the writers thought a change-up was necessary to keep things interesting.

Mirrors and Reflections

Other symbols of contrast are peppered throughout the show, particularly through the use of mirrors. We see an extraordinary number of mirrors in LOST, and some shots are even opened by shooting a character's image through a nearby mirror or reflection. There's the mirror used to reflect Jack's appendectomy, the one Ben uses to signal his people, the adjustable mirrors of the Swan hatch's security system, and at least a half-dozen scenes where a character (usually Jack without a shirt on) is reflected in a bathroom mirror, to name only a few. The reversed effects produced by mirror imagery do a great job of illustrating the flip-flopped, often backwards

themes we see all through the show.

But in some cases, mirrors also seem to reflect back unwanted visions of a character that cause them great anger or sorrow. This is probably because the mirrored images represent something a little deeper for each character: the truth. Jin cries into a mirror during *In Translation*, when he sees himself covered in the blood of the man he's just beaten. Although he angrily tells Sun he's only doing what needs to be done to provide for his family, the mirror is unconvinced. It reflects back the truth of the matter: that Jin is no longer the good, innocent man he once was.

Kate looks into a full-length mirror in *I Do*. Upon seeing her reflection in a bridal gown, the truth hits home: she's still a fugitive wanted for murder. The inescapability of her situation strikes Kate hard at that very moment, and she makes the decision to leave her fiancé Kevin.

The same revelation happens in *The Economist*, where Sayid is playing out a similar lie in his relationship with Elsa. As that situation blows up violently, Sayid smashes the mirror from which Elsa is watching him before shooting her dead. In both cases the mirror is representative of a life each character inwardly knows they can never have: their own lies are reflected back at them, showing them what they look like from the outside in. This causes them to realize the errors of pretending, and seems to drive them back along a predetermined (predestined?) path. Sayid's smashing of the mirror was indicative of him finally accepting the truth, and

refusing to continue buying into the lie.

The mirror parallels are continued in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Juliet is playing the happy hostess and getting ready for her book club meeting. Once she looks into her mirror however, she begins to cry. Her reflection reminds her of who she really is: a prisoner being held against her will. Since arriving on the island everything in her life has been a lie, from her affair with Goodwin to Ben's never-ending deception that keeps her from leaving. No amount of pretending can cover up the real situation, reflected back upon her with brutal honesty by the mirror. And as if to pull her away from such truth and draw her back to the land of illusion, the island then has the balls to burn her muffins.

Facing the truth is a recurring theme on LOST, and the mirrors seem geared toward revealing a character's daydream or fallacy. In *The Beginning of the End*, Hurley drives his Camaro into a whole freestanding array of mirrors set up in the middle of nowhere, almost as if trying to show him the real deal... and if you believe another theory later on in this book about the off-island world of the Oceanic Six, those mirrors were placed there as an attempt to reflect one of the biggest lies of all. The same thing applies to the mirrored shot we get of Kate running desperately through the grocery store, trying to find Aaron in *Whatever Happened, Happened*. What we're seeing is the truth - the mirror is showing us things as they really are. Up until that point we were seeing the sugar-coated fantasy world of post-island Kate, one in which she gets let off

the hook for murder and tries to play the role of super mom, potential wife, and happy homemaker.

Opposing Episode Titles

The titles of the episodes themselves often reflect polar opposites. After being given *The Constant* we eventually get *The Variable*. For *One of Them*, we have *One of Us*. Opposite *The Whole Truth* we're given an episode called *The Lie*.

We've even seen opposites within the same title: *Fire + Water*, *Hearts and Minds*, *Live Together Die Alone*, and *The Beginning of the End*. Throughout the show we've always been given the impression that there are two distinct sides being played upon one another, as if in a game. The writers have cleverly perpetuated this concept in choosing the names of each episode.

Two Different Smoke Monsters - Black and White

LOST's dichotomies may even extend all the way to the smoke monster itself, and once again in terms of black and white. It's almost as if we've seen two different versions of the creature: one that rips trees out by the roots, and one that

takes the form of tendrils of black smoke. It's possible that both of these are actually the same monster, but it's just as possible that we're lumping together two separate entities with two separate goals. In rewatching the older episodes and knowing what we know now? There's more and more evidence that there may be two monsters.

The first clue comes with the descriptions given by both John Locke and Mr. Eko. Locke claims to have looked into the heart of the island, telling Jack "what I saw was beautiful." When he later tells Eko that he saw a "very beautiful bright light", Eko's disagrees completely with his account of the monster. He tells Locke simply, "That is not what I saw."

If there are two smoke monsters, one dark and one light, it would symbolically seem to fit right in. We already know that the black smoke monster appeared to Eko in the form of his brother Yemi, right before judging and then subsequently killing him. This would be the dark form seen also by Charlie, the monster that attacked Keamy's mercenaries in season four, and the one called "Cerberus" by the Dharma Initiative that chased Juliet and Kate through the sonic fence in *Left Behind*. Its ability to scan thoughts and represent itself as the dead also seems to indicate it has some kind of agenda all its own.

But what if there were an opposite creature, like the one John Locke saw and described? Was it another form of the smoke monster that morphed itself into Christian Shephard, leading Jack to both shelter and water in *White Rabbit*? Even the very title of that episode can be used to solidify the theory

of a white smoke monster. Maybe this is the same creature that manifested itself as Kate's horse or Sawyer's boar, representations of freedom and guilt downloaded straight out of their past memories to help the characters along on their way to enlightenment. This would be the good monster - the one working to aid the Flight 815 survivors in passing the harsh judgment of its dark counterpart, much the way Locke helped Ben pass Cerberus' ultimate judgment in *Dead is Dead*.

Drawing connections to Jacob and his nemesis, think back to their opening scene on the beach. The dark-shirted man emerges from the jungle and Jacob offers him some fish. "No thanks", he tells him, "I just ate." This is an eerie and ominous statement... one that should remind us sharply of pilot Seth Norris getting torn through the cockpit window of Flight 815, or of Nadine's body falling to the ground as Rousseau's science expedition first ran from the monster. If Jacob and his opponent turn out to be some sort of ageless demigods pitted against one another, maybe they control or are actually representations of the smoke monster(s) themselves? Not much to go on here but a gut feeling, yet at the same time the two entity theory seems to make sense, especially when you consider that there's two of virtually everything else on LOST.

Of course the possibility also exists that there's only one monster, but it looks different to everyone who sees it. If this is the case, each individual character would have his or her own perception of what it looks like. What Locke saw in the jungle would be very different from what Eko perceived the

monster to look like, and that explanation gels nicely with the perception theory discussed later on in this book.

Red... The Third Grand Master

Another color that can't be ignored is red. It shows up less frequently, but in a more important capacity. When we first meet Mikhail at the Flame Station, we're given hints of a third player as he makes mention of "three grand masters." If LOST is a big game with the characters being used as game pieces, maybe Locke's dead wrong about there only being two players.

Taking the game dynamic a little more literally, we could assume the white pieces are being controlled by one player and the black pieces controlled by an opponent. There are times however, when we see evidence of red influence. It's a third party that seems to show up throughout the show, most notably visible during the launch of the raft at the end of season one when Jin is wearing white, Sawyer's wearing black, and Michael is wearing red. Later on, we find out that Michael gets manipulated - by both The Others and by the island itself - into doing all kinds of things, from shooting Ana Lucia and Libby to returning on the freighter to play a vital part of that whole scenario. It's almost as if Michael's playing two sides of the game board, at least for a little while. This also lends significance to the seemingly meaningless joke Michael tells his nurse in *Special*: "What's black and white and red all over?" Maybe the answer is *him*.

Benjamin Linus is another character that's walked both sides of the fence, even when he didn't know it. His kitchen is black and white, but with a solid red backsplash. If red is the color that represents a third player, or third possibility, maybe that's why the Swan timer's warning hieroglyphics contain red characters in contrast to the black and white numbers of the countdown clock. Maybe when we see red, we're seeing influence from a third party - someone or something not associated with the cut and dry duality of the rest of the show.

Just seeing the color red appear by itself may not mean anything at all, but when it shows up alongside its black and white counterparts we're getting an intentional glimpse of a third side. As Locke rolls up his father's driveway in *Deus Ex Machina* there's a black car, a white car, and Locke driving a bright red VW bug. We know for a fact that Locke is probably the most manipulated of all our main characters, and his puppetry continues both off-island and on. Maybe the shiny red color of his car denotes an outside influence from forces we haven't even seen yet.

Science and Faith... Free Will and Fate

Mirroring the outward struggles of good and evil, LOST also deals with the inner battles between science and faith. In season one we watched a show about a bunch of survivors trying to get rescued after a plane crash, but by that season's finale we realized we were into something much deeper.

Similarly, characters like Jack who were slow to accept the island's miracles held strong stances on what was possible and impossible, while champions of faith - Locke for instance - worked on converting them into believing otherwise.

A big moment comes in *Orientation*, where Locke convinces Jack that he needs to be the first person to push the Swan timer button. "You do it, Jack", he tells him. "You have to do it. It's a leap of faith." And with one second left on the clock Jack finally hits the button, his internal pendulum swinging in the direction of faith for the first time since arriving on the island. This is the first in a long chain of events that finally turns Jack from a man of science into, several seasons later, a man who begins to believe in something a lot more unsubstantial.

As it became obvious to the Flight 815 survivors that they were dealing with some undeniably crazy stuff, even those offering the most staunch resistance had to give up their position. In time even they had to admit that, on the island at least, science played little part in things. Faith ruled, and it also rewarded. John Locke's legs were a gift granted him by the island under the condition that he remain faithful, but the very second he started to doubt its motives in *Deus Ex Machina*, the island took the ability to walk right back from him. Along the same lines, Rose's faith that Bernard was alive could be the very reason they had a reunion at all.

By seasons two and beyond however, the battle between science and faith further evolved into something else: free will

vs. fate. The writers bludgeoned us over and over with huge clues on this one, starting with the strange set of rules The Others seemed to abide by. As we learned more and more about the island's native protectors, we found out there were things they just couldn't do. More specifically, for all their power and total control over the island, they still seemed unable to *make* anyone do anything.

In *Three Minutes*, Ms. Klugh tells Michael he needs to help them secure the release of Ben. When he asks why The Others don't just march into the 815er's camp and rescue him, she tells him "We can't do that." She goes on to give him specific instructions to bring four people back with him: Jack, Kate, Sawyer and Hurley... three of which The Others had already captured not too long ago in *The Hunting Party*. So what's changed? Why do The Others suddenly need Jack, Kate, and Sawyer when they'd already had them surrounded at gunpoint? Perhaps the answer lies in the issue of free will: The Others couldn't take them the first time around because they need these characters to come *freely*, all on their own accord.

Some of the best evidence of this theory occurs during *The Cost of Living*, where Ben explains the long con he was trying to use in order to get Jack to perform his spinal surgery. He tells Jack his plan was to "Get you to trust us. And then of course we'd lead you to believe that you were choosing to do...whatever we asked you to do. All of this of course assumed that you would get... invested." When Jack finally realizes Ben's intentions, he asks "You want me to save your

life?” To which Ben replies, “No, I want you to *want* to save my life.”

As far as how the island works in terms of faith and hope, there appears to be a huge difference between getting someone to do something, and getting them to *want* to do it. Ben uses the word ‘invested’ here because there’s no other easy way to explain it. It’s likely that if Jack hadn’t needed Ben’s surgery to go well, he probably would’ve died on the table. As with everything else Jack’s touched during his lifetime - going all the way back to repairing Sarah’s own impossibly damaged spine - Ben knows that Jack’s success rate is directly proportional to his belief in succeeding. Ben can’t force Jack to do anything because the island simply doesn’t work that way, which is why he needs Jack to *choose* to do the operation of his own free will.

Ben however, is a master illusionist. In the game of LOST he bends the rules almost to the breaking point, yet still staying within the scope of his Book of Laws. If the island were a giant pinball machine, Benjamin Linus knows exactly how much he can tip things in his favor before causing it to TILT. The fact that he manipulates Kate and Sawyer’s situation in order to strong-arm Jack into choosing to operate could be described as borderline cheating... but all throughout the show this is traditionally Ben’s way of getting people to do things. Alex even tells this to Locke in *The Man From Tallahassee*: “That’s what my father does. He manipulates people. He makes you think it’s your idea, but it’s his.”

It also seems that free will plays a huge part in how LOST's overall game plays out. No matter who the two (or three) major players turn out to be, it seems they only have partial control over the playing pieces. Black and white aren't necessarily cut and dry, and sometimes we see evidence of a piece switching sides, or colors. This happens often throughout the show, in the form of internal manipulation as well as part of natural character development. As Jack turns from a man of science into a man of faith, Sawyer goes from bad guy to good. And as Ben goes from sinister leader of the Others to sharing a candy bar with Hurley, we could make the assumption that although each player controls a side, he doesn't have complete control over any of the pieces. Not as long as free will exists, at any rate.

Leaping back again to Jacob and his opponent, it would seem that each of them must abide by whatever choices the characters make. However, they also seem to have their own set of methods for manipulating free will. In some situations, you could even say that free will is twisted into a pre-determined fate, all by convincing the characters of LOST that no matter what they choose to do, the outcome of their actions has already been decided.

Take Ms. Hawking for example. She intentionally meets up with Desmond to convince him that he's got no shot at making a life for himself, and that he needs to return to the island. In season five, she also guides her son Daniel on his own path of "destiny", even though she knows it leads to his death. She's a

firm believer that things need to play out a certain way, and that free will has no part in the end game. At the same time however, it's somehow her responsibility to manipulate people despite her belief in fate. She guides them into doing her bidding by letting them *think* they're making their own choices. She tweaks the game board a little, as she does in showing Desmond the red-shoed man who gets killed outside her shop. Ultimately though, the final decisions on what to do seem to lie within the characters themselves.

Some of these game pieces actually rebel against this manipulation, shunning the idea of a predetermined fate. "Don't tell me what I can't do" is a common theme, and a variation of this phrase is uttered by almost every major character in the show at one point or another. Desmond alters the natural course of fate by saving Charlie's life numerous times, despite the island's attempts to course-correct him dead again. And Hurley takes an even tougher and more comical stance against not being able to change destiny by attempting to rewrite *The Empire Strikes Back*.