



Struck by Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities

By Jeffrey S. Rosenthal

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From terrorist attacks to big money jackpots, *Struck by Lightning* deconstructs the odds and oddities of chance, examining both the relevant and irreverent role of randomness in our everyday lives. Human beings have long been both fascinated and appalled by randomness. On the one hand, we love the thrill of a surprise party, the unpredictability of a budding romance, or the freedom of not knowing what tomorrow will bring. We are inexplicably delighted by strange coincidences and striking similarities. But we also hate uncertainty's dark side. From cancer to SARS, diseases strike with no apparent pattern. Terrorists attack, airplanes crash, bridges collapse, and we never know if we'll be that one in a million statistic. We are all constantly faced with situations and choices that involve randomness and uncertainty. A basic understanding of the rules of probability theory, applied to real-life circumstances, can help us to make sense of these situations, to avoid unnecessary fear, to seize the opportunities that randomness presents to us, and to actually enjoy the uncertainties we face. The reality is that when it comes to randomness, you can run, but you can't hide. So many aspects of our lives are governed by events that are simply not in our control. In this entertaining yet sophisticated look at the world of probabilities, author Jeffrey Rosenthal--an improbably talented math professor--explains the mechanics of randomness and teaches us how to develop an informed perspective on probability.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Statistics and probability made fun, easy and useful for everyday life? Rosenthal does just that by explaining common uses of statistics (such as polling), demonstrating how probability can lead to better decision making (should you ask your cute co-worker out on a date?) and getting downright silly (chapter nine is a noir mystery). The author maintains that our fear of untoward events can be eased with the logic of probability and knowing how to evaluate what the real odds are of such an event occurring. A multitude of applications of "the Probability Perspective" are laid out: calculating average losses at gambling, deciding which coincidences are truly surprising, understanding studies that show that a new drug reduces fatalities from a given disease, playing silly party games and using uncertainty for one's own benefit.

Anecdotes—some personal stories, some universal situations—illustrate ways that the probability perspective can set one's mind at ease and help in navigating all aspects of life. The lighthearted presentation ensures that readers will not feel burdened by all the knowledge they are gaining and the concluding summary—disguised as a final exam—is sure to deliver an A to everyone, which is what Rosenthal deserves for this clever book. (*Mar.*)

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About the Author

Jeffrey S. Rosenthal

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