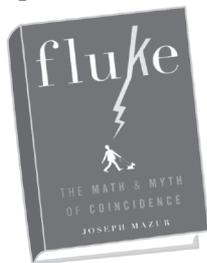


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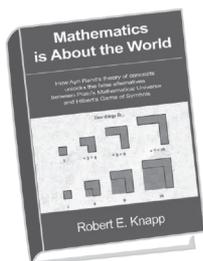
A man is known by the books he reads. —Emerson

New and Noteworthy Titles on Our Bookshelf April 2016:



Fluke: The Math & Myth of Coincidence, by Joseph Mazur (Basic Books, March 2016). After being cast in a movie based on the book *The Girl from Petrovka*, Anthony Hopkins scoured London bookshops trying to find a copy of the book. Returning home empty-handed on the Under-

ground, he spotted a book lying on a bench. Not only was it *The Girl from Petrovka*, it was a copy that the author, George Feifer, had lost. This is one of ten coincidence stories that Mazur recounts near the beginning in his latest book *Fluke*. After several chapters in which the reader learns a bit about probability and statistics, Mazur comes back to those ten stories to analyze them in the light of the mathematical tools just presented. In the last part of the book, he presents five totally different kinds of coincidences—such as Röntgen’s discovery of X-rays—that he says “completely escape analysis...they seem to come to us through serendipity.”



Mathematics is About the World: How Ayn Rand's Theory of Concepts Unlocks the False Alternatives Between Plato's Mathematical Universe and Hilbert's Game of Symbols, by Robert E. Knapp (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, August 2014). “Eratosthenes, in 200 BC, demonstrated the power of indirect measurement when he estimated the circumference

of the earth by measuring a shadow at noon, in Alexandria, on the day of the summer solstice,” says the website for this book. The book argues that mathematics does not provide glimpses into a Platonic universe of ideal objects, nor does it consist merely of meaningless symbols and rules for manipulating them. Rather, “mathematics, however abstract, arises from and is shaped by requirements of indirect measurement.”



The Perfect Bet: How Science and Math Are Taking the Luck Out of Gambling, by Adam Kucharski (Basic Books, February 2016). “Every autumn, recruitment teams descend on the world’s best mathematics departments,” writes Kucharski in his chapter “Pundits with PhDs”. He notes that in recent years, a different kind

of company has joined the usual group of banks, oil firms, and the like: “Instead of discussing business or finance, they focus on sports such as soccer... They are using scientific methods to take on the bookmakers. And they are winning.” The book is chock full of interesting tidbits supporting Kucharski’s main point: “From the statisticians forecasting sports scores to the inventors of the intelligent algorithms that beat human poker players, people are finding new ways to take on casinos and bookmakers.”

The AMS maintains a comprehensive list of reviews of popular mathematics books on its Reviews page at www.ams.org/news/math-in-the-media/reviews. The list highlights current books that have mathematical themes and are aimed at a broad audience potentially including mathematicians, students, and the general public.

Suggestions for books to include on the list should be sent to notices-booklist@ams.org.

Twenty Years Ago in the Notices

April 1996

Group Representations and Harmonic Analysis from Euler to Langlands, by Anthony W. Knapf.

Master expositor Knapf traces the threads of contemporary research in harmonic analysis back to the eighteenth century (the first of a two-part article).

www.ams.org/notices/199604/knapf.pdf