



Solving Crimes

The CBS-TV program *NUMB3RS* shows modern mathematics and mathematicians at work—both instrumental each week in solving and preventing crimes. Although the series is fictional, many of the show’s episodes are based on true stories. In fact, statistics, combinatorics, and graph theory are just some of the mathematical fields being used today by real-life investigators to solve actual crimes.

One of the most impressive instances of mathematics solving a crime was a case in which an algorithm pinpointed a serial offender’s location, based on the sites of previous crimes. When DNA samples cleared all the suspects living in the area, however, the natural conclusion was that the mathematics was unsound. Then a tip led investigators to a deputy who had been above suspicion (because of his job) and who had lived in the target area. He was eventually arrested and sentenced, proving that crime doesn’t pay but checking your assumptions does.

For more information: “The Hound of the Data Points,” Bruce Grierson, *Popular Science*, April 2003.

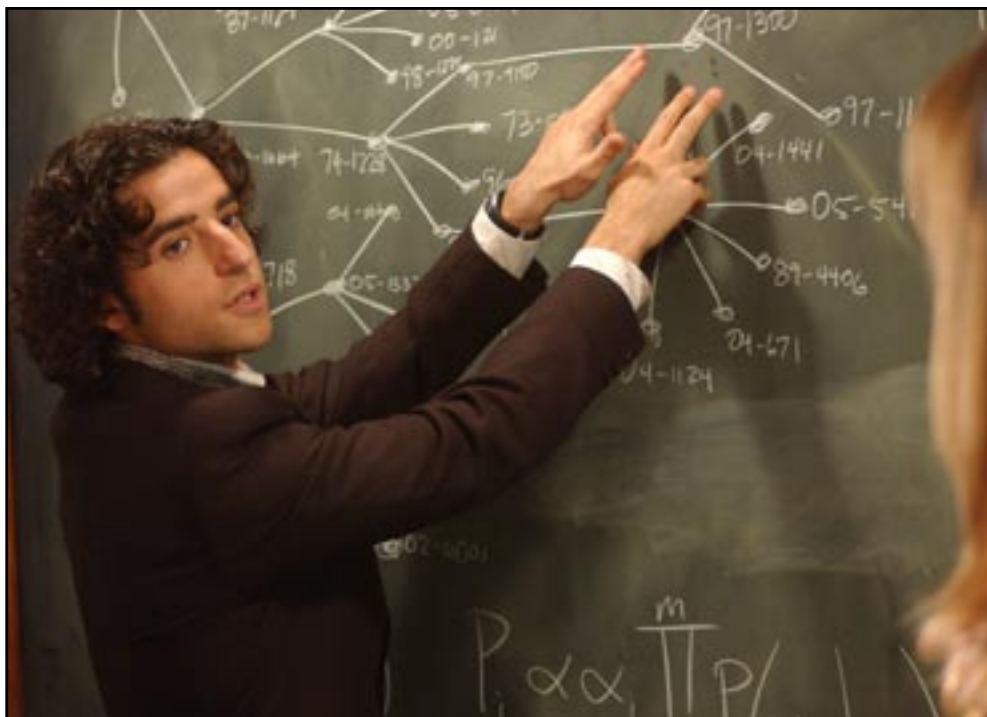


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