

The Odds Are You Will Relate to the Book, *Struck by Lightning*, by Jeffrey S Rosenthal

Reviewed by Cheyenne Murphy

The book *Struck by Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities*, by Jeffrey S Rosenthal, was an entertaining and thoughtful book. The book has 17 relatively short chapters and includes a “final exam” at the end of the book that measures your probability perspective. The book’s 17 chapters are short and easy to read, tying one chapter to the next in a cohesive manner. The key concept of this book is probability, the odds and oddities of chance and randomness in our everyday life. The author gives an entertaining yet sophisticated look at the world of probabilities. Jeffrey S Rosenthal explains the world of probabilities, the mechanics of randomness in everyday life and teaches us how to develop our own perspective on probability.

This book contains information to strengthen our decision-making skills by examining how statistics and statistical analysis are used in our daily lives. We see statistical analysis of some sort in the everyday decisions that we make and especially in the media. This book dug deeply into the statistical analysis that is behind medical studies and how it can be skewed to make us believe what they want us to believe in order to want their product. As the authors of “Statistical Errors in Medical Research—A Review of Common Pitfalls” (2007) stated “standards in the use of statistics in medical research are generally low.” Also, that a “growing body of literature points to persistent statistical errors, flaws and deficiencies in most medical journals.” Some of these flaws and specific examples are examined in this book, which made it easy to understand this issue.

I really enjoyed the chapter that discussed crime rates and trends. This chapter was very informative, and I found that I agreed with the author when he

talked about how we need to know what we are reading when charts and other data analysis are used in a media story. This is something that many people seem to miss and can easily affect public opinions. He uses easy-to-read language that can be understood by most people, even the mathematically challenged. I did not find anything in this book that I completely disagreed with. Each chapter examined different probability aspects relating to the topic being discussed, and each chapter made sense to me. I especially like how the author uses humour in many cases to help explain the points he is making in a chapter. The author puts these humorous sections in as asides, which really adds to the experience of reading and relating to the topics being discussed.

This is a good, quick-read sort of math book that would be appropriate for anyone who wants to learn more about randomness, the world of probabilities and statistical analysis. I think that anyone in Grade 9 or higher who is interested in these topics would get the greatest value from this book. This book will allow those who read it to increase their knowledge of these topics through easy-to-read language and without all the math equations that could be involved. It is comprehensive yet clear, which should appeal to a vast audience.

References

- Rosenthal, J. 2005. *Struck by Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities*. Toronto: HarperCollins.
- Strasak, A, Q Zaman, K Pfeiffer, G Gobel and H Ulmer. 2007. “Statistical Errors in Medical Research—A Review of Common Pitfalls.” *Swiss Medical Weekly* 137, 44–49. http://pcople.stat.sfu.ca/~tloughin/Stat_Errors_in_Medicine.pdf (accessed December 1, 2014).