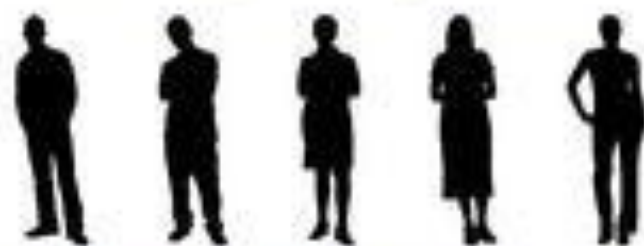


THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER



*'Mind-bending' Fortune 'Delightful' Guardian*



## THE DRUNKARD'S WALK



HOW RANDOMNESS RULES OUR LIVES



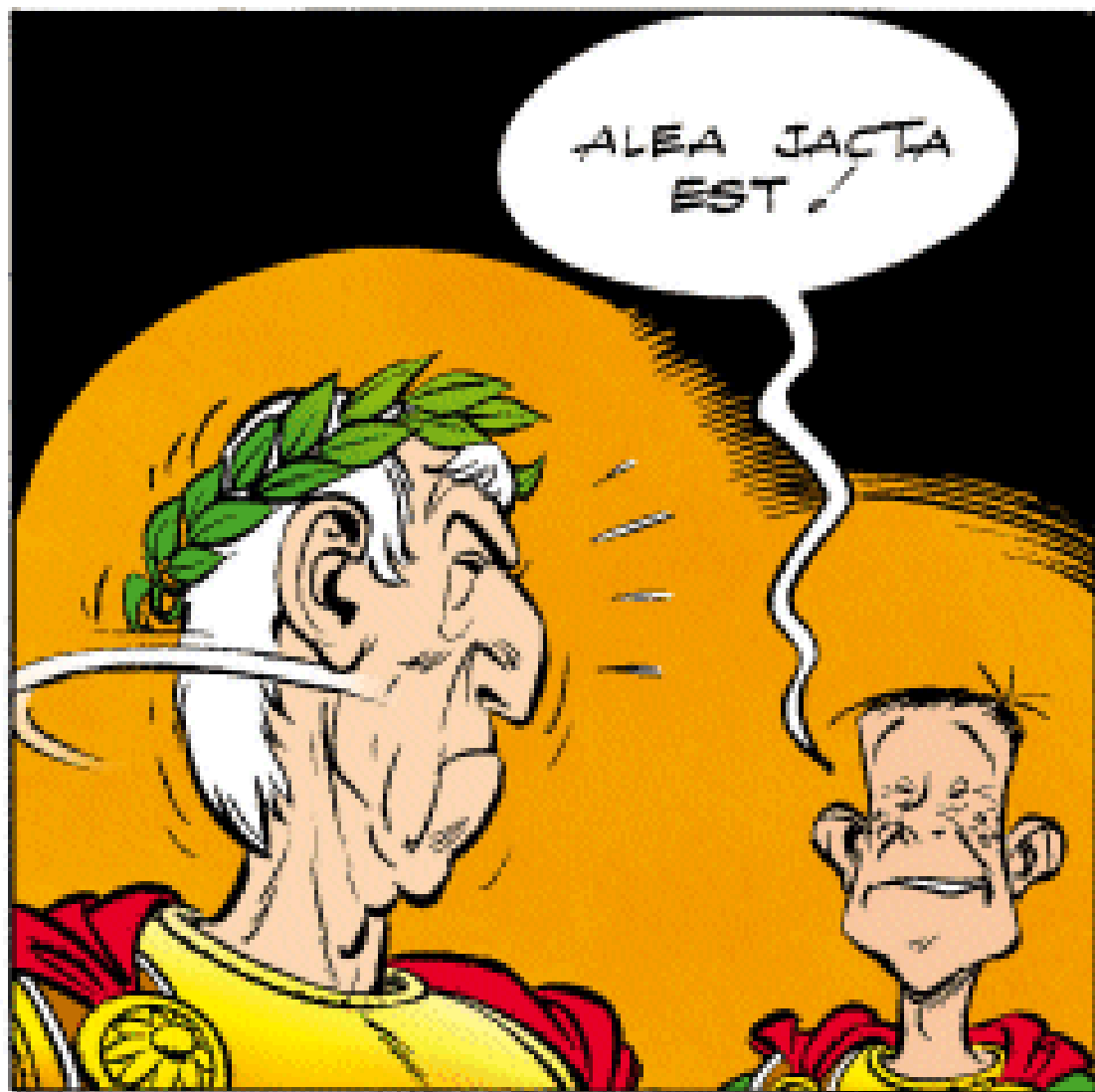
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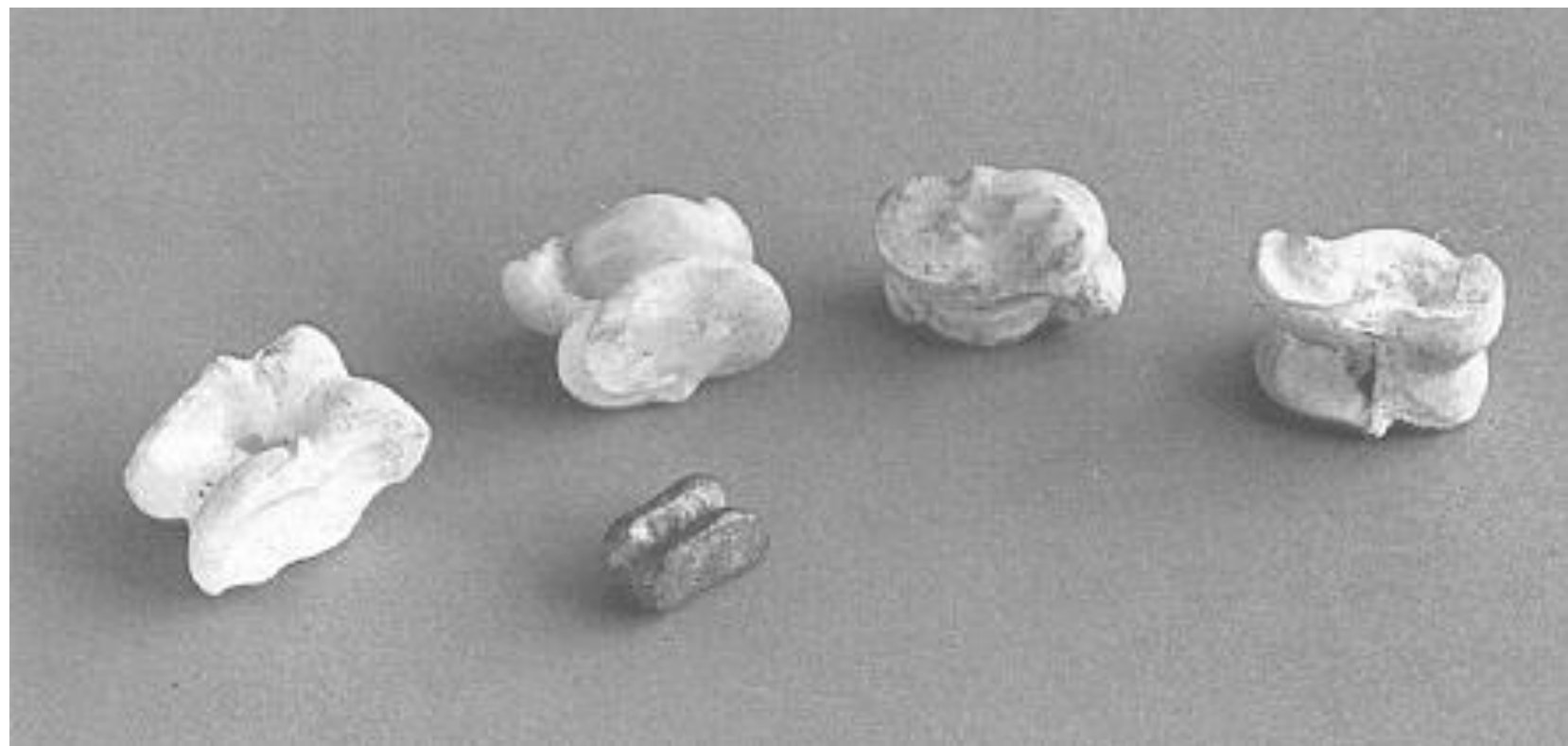
WHEN MATH BECOMES A  
MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH,  
YOU'D BETTER CHECK YOUR SUMS

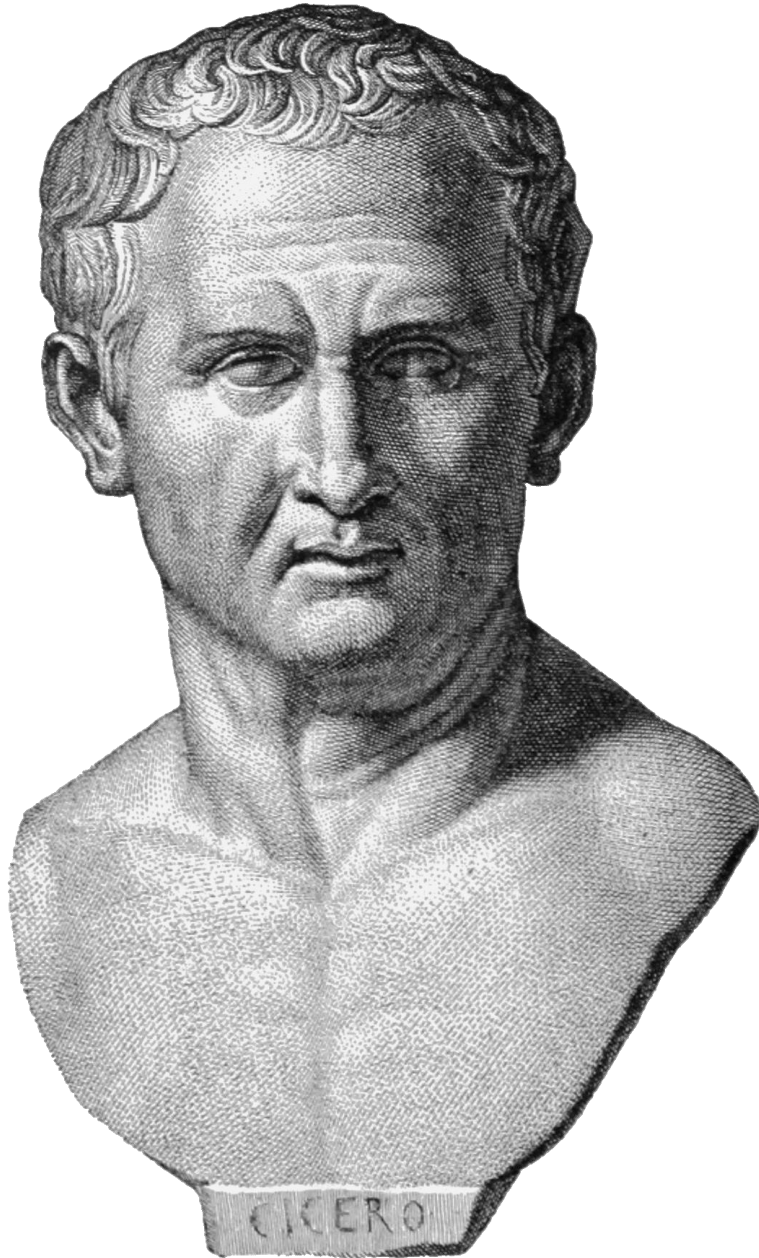
# MATH *on* TRIAL

HOW NUMBERS GET USED AND ABUSED  
**IN THE COURTROOM**

LEILA SCHNEPS & CORALIE COLMEZ







***"Nothing is so uncertain as  
a cast of tali and yet there  
is no one who plays often  
who does not sometimes  
make a Venus and  
occasionally twice or thrice  
in a row."***

















BETTING ENDS

















**KEEP  
CALM  
AND USE  
THE  
FORCE**



# Epic Fail

I find your lack of win disturbing.  
May the fail be with you.

FIX @ SeCuRiTy NoObz







**Yes, I crossed your path.  
Deal with it.**





















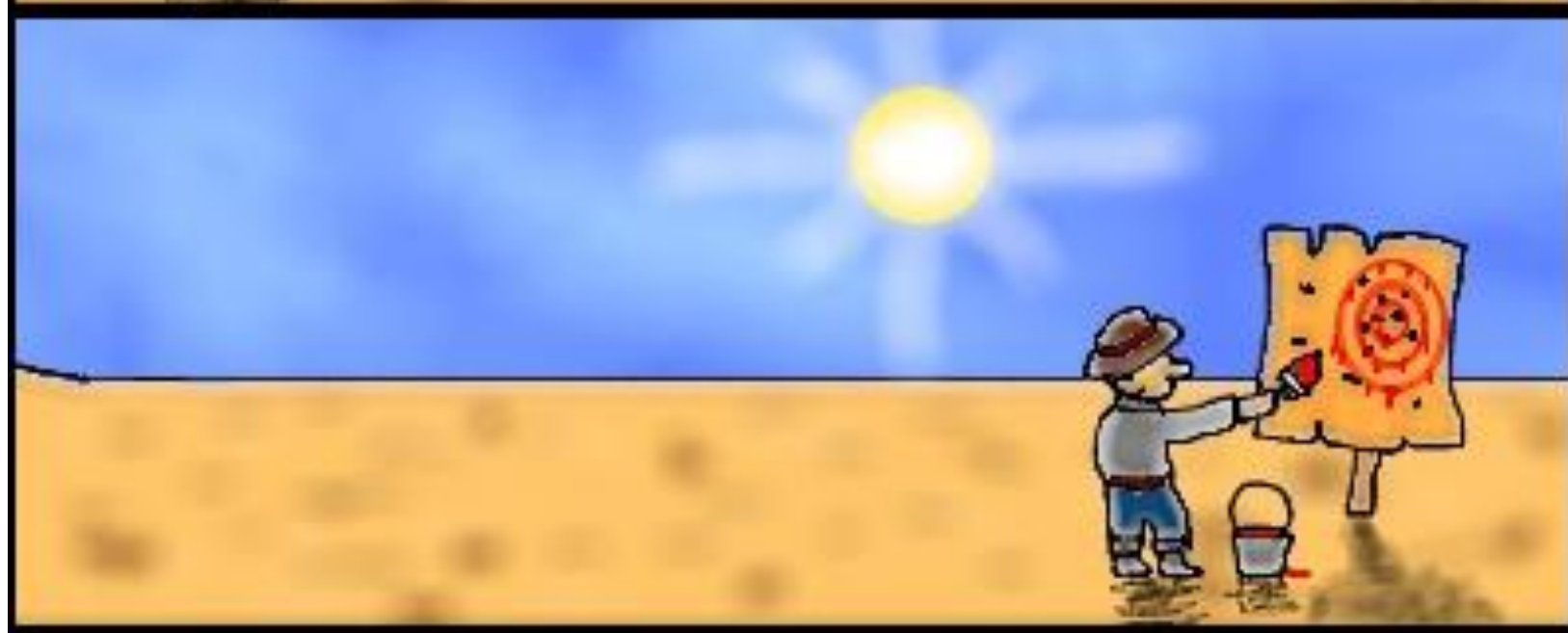
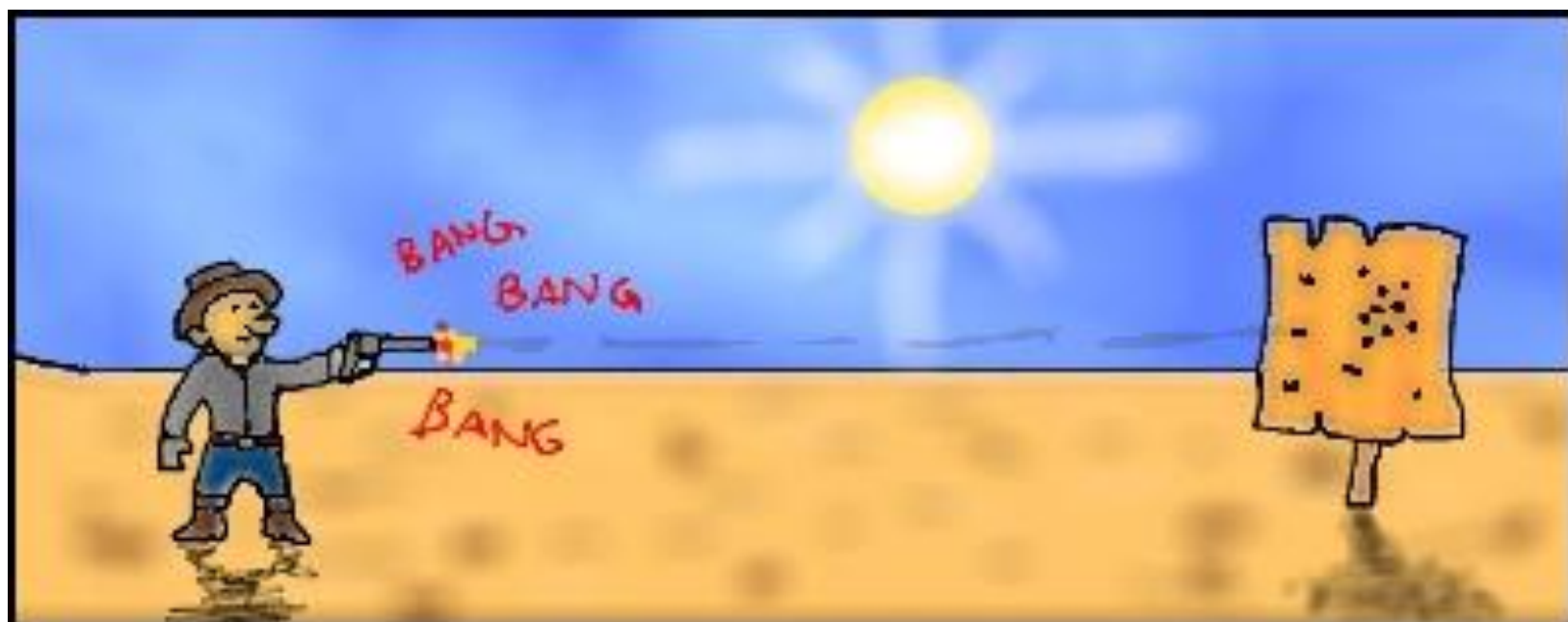
- The most famous example of the gambler's fallacy occurred in a game of roulette at the Monte Carlo Casino on August 18, 1913, when the ball fell in black **26 times in a row**.
- This was an extremely uncommon occurrence, although no more nor less common than any of the other 67,108,863 sequences of 26 red or black.



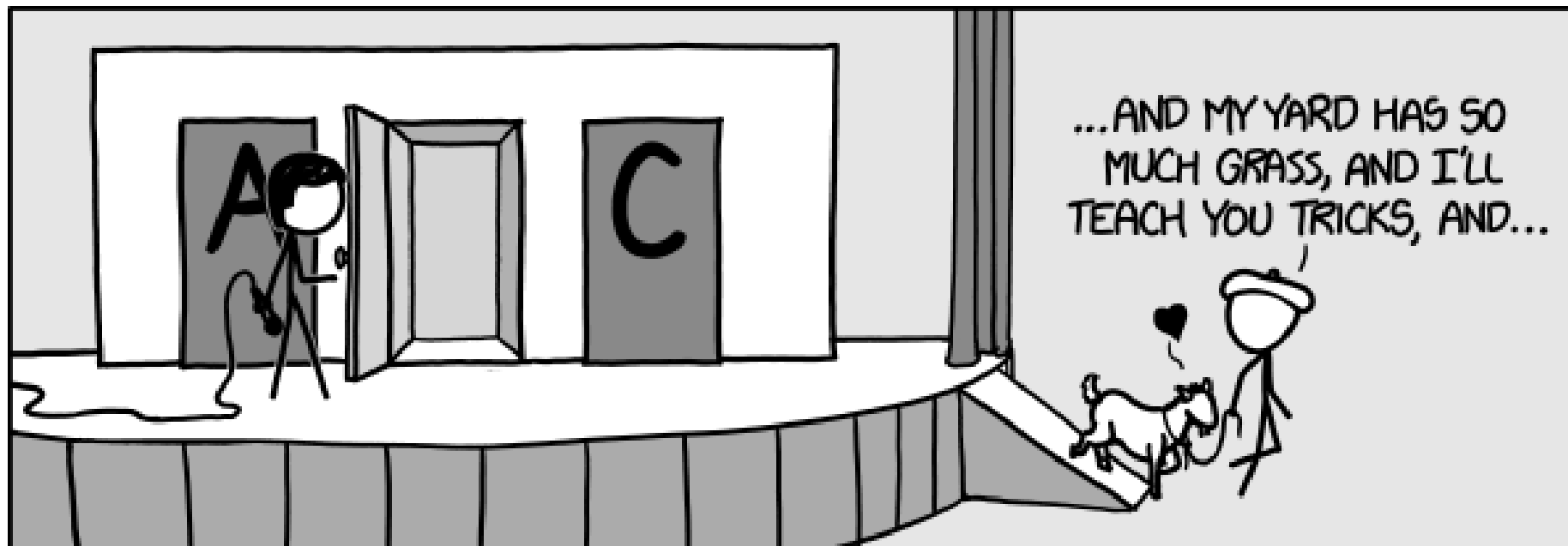
- Gamblers lost **millions** of francs betting against black, reasoning incorrectly that the streak was causing an "imbalance" in the randomness of the wheel, and that it had to be followed by a long streak of red.

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## Game Show Problem

*(This material in this article was originally published in PARADE magazine in 1990 and 1991.)*

Suppose you're on a game show, and you're given the choice of three doors. Behind one door is a car, behind the others, goats. You pick a door, say #1, and the host, who knows what's behind the doors, opens another door, say #3, which has a goat. He says to you, "Do you want to pick door #2?" Is it to your advantage to switch your choice of doors?

**Craig F. Whitaker**  
*Columbia, Maryland*

Yes; you should switch. The first door has a  $1/3$  chance of winning, but the second door has a  $2/3$  chance. Here's a good way to visualize what happened. Suppose there are a million doors, and you pick door #1. Then the host, who knows what's behind the doors and will always avoid the one with the prize, opens them all except door #777,777. You'd switch to that door pretty fast, wouldn't you?

Since you seem to enjoy coming straight to the point, I'll do the same. You blew it! Let me explain. If one door is shown to be a loser, that information changes the probability of either remaining choice, neither of which has any reason to be more likely, to  $1/2$ . As a professional mathematician, I'm very concerned with the general public's lack of mathematical skills. Please help by confessing your error and in the future being more careful.

**Robert Sachs, Ph.D.**  
*George Mason University*

You blew it, and you blew it big! Since you seem to have difficulty grasping the basic principle at work here, I'll explain. After the host reveals a goat, you now have a one-in-two chance of being correct. Whether you change your selection or not, the odds are the same. There is enough mathematical illiteracy in this country, and we don't need the world's highest IQ propagating more. Shame!



*We've received thousands of letters, and of the people who performed the experiment by hand as described, the results are close to unanimous: you win twice as often when you change doors. Nearly 100% of those readers now believe it pays to switch.*

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- Many readers of vos Savant's column refused to believe switching is beneficial despite her explanation.
- After the problem appeared in Parade, approximately 10,000 readers, including nearly 1,000 with PhDs, wrote to the magazine, most of them claiming vos Savant was wrong (*Tierney 1991*).



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***Scott Smith, Ph.D.***

***University of Florida***

Your answer to the question is in error. But if it is any consolation, many of my academic colleagues have also been stumped by this problem.

***Barry Pasternack, Ph.D.***

***California Faculty Association***



You're in error, but Albert Einstein earned a dearer place in the hearts of people after he admitted his errors.

***Frank Rose, Ph.D.***

***University of Michigan***

I have been a faithful reader of your column, and I have not, until now, had any reason to doubt you. However, in this matter (for which I do have expertise), your answer is clearly at odds with the truth.

***James Rauff, Ph.D.***

***Millikin University***

May I suggest that you obtain and refer to a standard textbook on probability before you try to answer a question of this type again?

***Charles Reid, Ph.D.***

***University of Florida***

I am sure you will receive many letters on this topic from high school and college students. Perhaps you should keep a few addresses for help with future columns.

***W. Robert Smith, Ph.D.***

***Georgia State University***

You are utterly incorrect about the game show question, and I hope this controversy will call some public attention to the serious national crisis in mathematical education. If you can admit your error, you will have contributed constructively towards the solution of a deplorable situation. How many irate mathematicians are needed to get you to change your mind?

***E. Ray Bobo, Ph.D.***

***Georgetown University***

I am in shock that after being corrected by at least three mathematicians, you still do not see your mistake.

***Kent Ford***

***Dickinson State University***

Maybe women look at math problems differently than men.

***Don Edwards***

***Sunriver, Oregon***

You made a mistake, but look at the positive side. If all those Ph.D.'s were wrong, the country would be in some very serious trouble.

*Everett Harman, Ph.D.*

*U.S. Army Research Institute*

- Even when given explanations, simulations, and formal mathematical proofs, many people still do not accept that switching is the best strategy (*vos Savant 1991a*).
- ***Paul Erdős***, one of the most prolific mathematicians in history, remained unconvinced until he was shown a computer simulation confirming the predicted result (*Vazsonyi 1999*).





# DOUBLE FACEPALM

FOR WHEN ONE FACEPALM DOESN'T CUT IT

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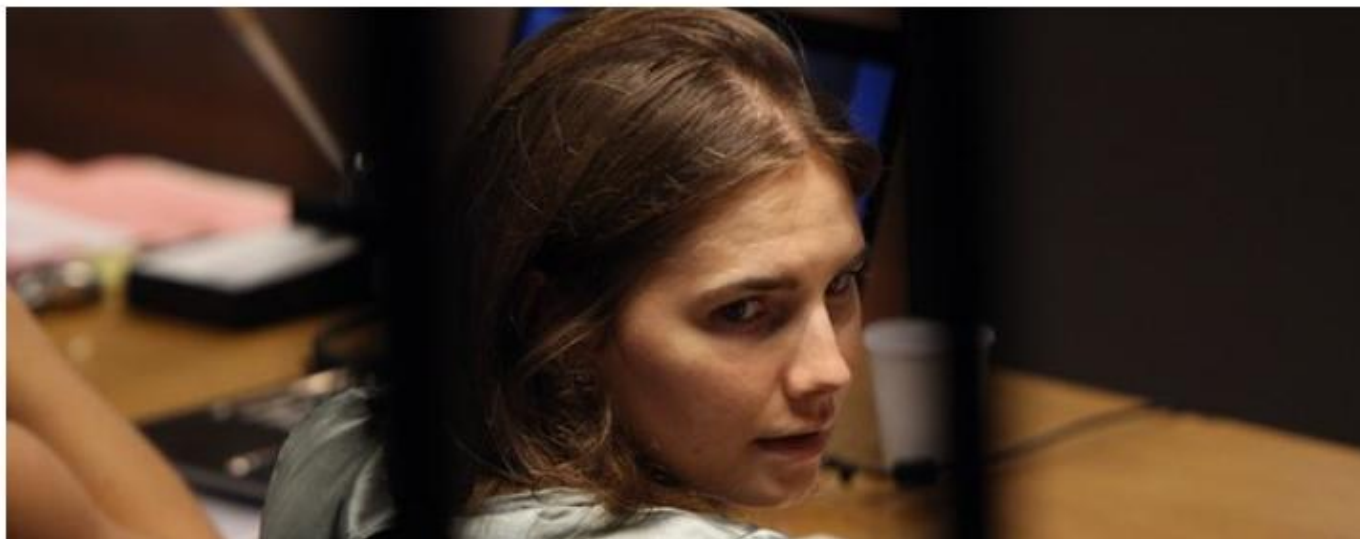
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# Amanda Knox and bad maths in court

**By Ruth Alexander**

BBC News



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## Features &



*As an Italian court prepares to try Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito for a second time on charges of killing Meredith Kercher, an expert says a judge failed to grasp the maths of probability involved in the case - and that courts often struggle when it comes to statistics.*

- *<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22310186>*

## SALFORD UNI MAN SAYS SALLY CLARK CONVICTION MAY BE WRONG

## Maths professor challenges double baby murder case

A SALFORD University Maths professor will challenge evidence used to convict a mother of murdering her two baby sons in a courtroom as his doubts over the case.

Prof Ray Hill, from Salford, head of the University's Applied and Clinical Mathematics Research Unit and statistical evidence used to convict Sally Clark, from Walsby, Worsley, in 1999, was not only quoted out of context and widely used to imply guilt, but was actually wrong.

Watching her trial on the TV he became furious and told us: "I doubted it the week that figure was

wrong". They looked delighted to see for the first time of our two children they had agreed to get this case to a public challenge. That's not allowed, unless you're sure the courts are independent. A judge wouldn't give you this case.

He has now visited the Conference on Enquiry into Sudden Infant Death in Salford, which gave evidence to the murder of double baby deaths in 1999.

He said: "It seems the chances of two cot deaths in the same family are much higher than the prosecution led the jury to believe."

Prof Hill has written in several

national newspapers and is speaking with Sally Clark's defence team at the Court of Appeal in London.

He will give his full criticism of the evidence at a Psychological Psychology Conference on cot deaths organised by Salford University on June 20.

The Criminal Cases Review Commission has been looking at the case and is expected to report within the next few weeks. With their report, presumably, Sally Clark's defence team and family do not feel it is appropriate to comment.

For more information on the Sally Clark campaign visit [www.sallyclark.org.uk](http://www.sallyclark.org.uk)



Evidence Challenge: Prof Ray Hill says it is

## Gene find casts doubt on double 'cot death' murders



An expert said there was a one in 73 million chance Sally Clark's babies died naturally – and a jury agreed. Now new genetic research could help to clear her. **John Sweeney** and **Bill Law** investigate

CLARK'S CASE WAS A SHOCK TO THE NATION. A MOTHER OF TWO BOYS, SHE WAS CONVICTED OF MURDERING THEM IN 1999. THE CASE WAS A SHOCK TO THE NATION. A MOTHER OF TWO BOYS, SHE WAS CONVICTED OF MURDERING THEM IN 1999.

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- "Is Lucia de Berk, a Dutch nurse, a serial killer or the victim of shoddy statistics?"



## A Probable Killer?

Is Lucia de Berk, a Dutch nurse, a serial killer or the victim of shoddy statistics? Dutch courts sentenced De Berk to life in prison for murdering seven patients and attempting to kill three others. But dozens of statisticians last week petitioned the Dutch justice department to reopen the case. Suspicion first arose in 2001 after a

5-month-old girl died under murky circumstances while De Berk was on duty. Prosecutors found that nine other suspicious incidents had occurred during her shifts at three hospitals. Although no direct evidence implicated De Berk, the courts decided that it was unlikely—only one chance in 342 million, according to one witness—that so many deaths could have occurred accidentally while she was nearby.

That conclusion is based on "every statistical mistake in the book,"

says Leiden University statistician and petition organizer Richard Gill. For instance, he says, several deaths were deemed natural and only later declared suspicious by doctors who knew De Berk had been on duty. And fewer people died during De Berk's 2-year stint at one hospital ward than during the prior 2 years. "Nobody was murdered by anybody," Gill concludes.

Last month, a justice department panel recommended that the case be reopened. The decision now rests with the Supreme Court.



De Berk shown as witchlike in cartoons.





- Also at the O. J. Simpson murder trial, the prosecution presented evidence that Simpson had been violent toward his wife
- The defense argued that there was only one woman murdered for every 2500 women who were subjected to spousal abuse, and that any history of Simpson being violent toward his wife was irrelevant to the trial.

- However, some regard the reasoning behind the defense's calculation as fallacious.
- The correct probability requires the context—that Simpson's wife had not only been subjected to domestic violence, but subjected to domestic violence and murdered—to be taken into account.
- Gigerenzer writes "the chances that a batterer actually murdered his partner, given that she has been killed, is about 8 in 9 or approximately 90%".



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