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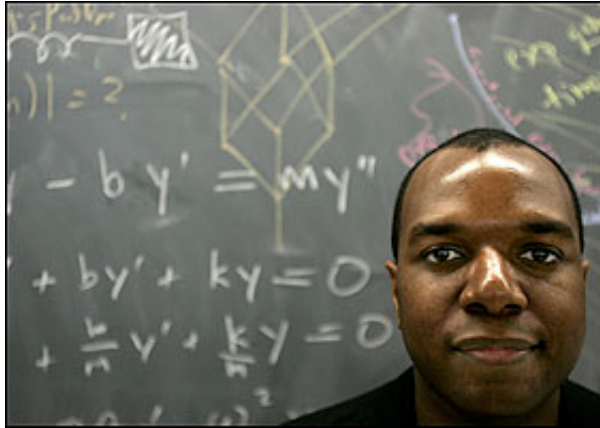
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HOME > NEWS > BOSTON GLOBE > LIVING / ARTS



Jonathan Farley (left) created a consulting business that supplies technical advice to filmmakers and writers on science-driven projects such as CBS's "Numb3rs" (right, with David Krumholtz). (Globe Staff / Bill Greene; Photo / Randy Tepper)

Divide and conquer

The Boston Globe

May 17, 2005

Page 3 of 3 -- The idea for Hollywood Math began to jell after "A Beautiful Mind" came out in 2001. Burns and Farley were fellows at Oxford, and over coffee Farley mentioned to Burns that he thought the movie would spark a mini-trend of mathematician films. Then Farley, who was in the United Kingdom as a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar, wrote an essay about how math was portrayed in "A Beautiful Mind" for Britain's Guardian newspaper. He promptly received a call from screenwriter Kilgour, who asked for Farley's technical help.

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The local movie publicity company, Allied Advertising, reached out to Farley for his next consulting job -- the discussion Harkin led about the film "Primer" -- but Farley decided to actively campaign to get work on "Numb3rs." He does have an agent, Caron Knauer, who's also an agent for one of his three brothers, Christopher, an editor at Time magazine. But Farley's initial contact with the producers of "Numb3rs" was in the form of persuasive e-mails sent after the show began airing in January. It just so happened that five episodes into the show's run, says consultant Lorden, the producers hired a researcher, Andy Black, who was expanding the show's crew of math advisers beyond Lorden and his Caltech peers.

By February, Farley was on a plane to the Los Angeles set of "Numb3rs" to watch scenes being shot for an episode about copycat train derailments. He met the show's creators, writers, and two of its stars, Morrow and Sabrina Lloyd, who also plays an FBI agent.

In his closet-size office in Harvard's Science

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Center, Farley pulls a thick stack of papers from a manila file -- one of three scripts he and Harkin have read to make sure it contains correct mathematical jargon and depicts mathematical or scientific ideas in a clear and correct manner. Scribbled in red ink are some of the suggestions he's made. One back page is covered with dialogue that he suggested as a way to delve more deeply into one mathematical idea.

"I found that the TV writers don't like that," Farley says. "Because they think what they write is perfect." ■

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