



CONSERVATION OF PROBABILITY

by BROOK WEST

Illustrated by Finlay

Brows knit with concentration, Kendra rolled the two dice on her kitchen table for her twenty-third eleven in a row. Her head ached dully with the effort and, tasting blood, she realized she had bitten her lip. "I've done it!" she said, and winced. "I've figured out telekinesis. Now for a string of boxcars."

As she rolled the seventh boxcar, she heard

screaming tires, followed by what sounded like an entire junkyard falling out of the sky. She shuddered as her headache intensified, but stepped outside and gawked at the twisted remains of four large vehicles crammed together in the four-way-stop intersection two houses down the street.

"Wow!" she heard young Stewart Olsen say. "All four of them ran the stop signs at once."

By late afternoon Kendra felt well enough to try again. Though it gave her another headache, she managed to roll eight snake-eyes in a row.

Lightning struck the manhole cover in front of her house three times, bypassing the trees. That night, her son did the dishes without being asked.

I've got to try this in Las Vegas, Kendra thought. She called a travel agent and arranged for a weekend excursion. Thursday, she rolled three consecutive sets of snake-eyes through boxcars. A freak storm dumped six inches of hail all over town. The local teachers' union settled without a strike.

On Friday, Fred McMa'am visited Kendra's brother, the people across the street, and her next door neighbor with large checks. Unprecedented, he called it. The chairman of the university math department refused to compute the odds.

That night Kendra flew to Las Vegas and checked into her hotel. She got up early the next morning and hurried downstairs to play. She cleaned up at the dice tables, and so did several others. The noise from slot machine jackpots made it hard for her to concentrate. The gaming areas rapidly filled with worried-looking people in suits, who became quite agitated as people won more money. Dealers were changed every few minutes.

The casino closed its doors at 12:30 Saturday afternoon. Kendra tried two other nearby casinos before finding one further away that was still open. She was there for half an hour before it closed, too. The rest of the

weekend was a drag. Thirteen casinos declared bankruptcy Sunday morning. A freak sandstorm buried the airport. Las Vegas was closed until further notice. Kendra bought a Bronco with some of her winnings and drove home Sunday afternoon.

On her way, she heard on the radio that some astronomers had noticed unusual solar activity: an unprecedented number of solar flares. Glancing up, she could swear she actually saw flares streaming away from the sun in all directions. Not to worry, said the announcer. The odds of the sun doing anything serious were astronomical. It should last for several billion more years.

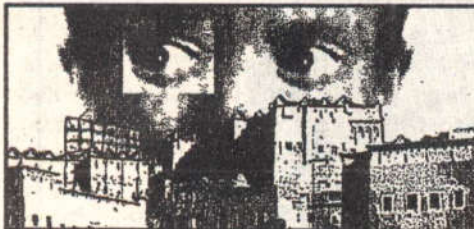
Monday night, after she got home, Kendra rolled eighteen sixes, just to keep in practice. Three local dams burst. Six planes were involved in a spectacular midair collision near the airport. A meteor hit home plate at the city ballpark.

On Tuesday, Kendra rolled forty-two elevens in a row. Another meteor hit the ballpark. The IRS announced that it was returning everything it had seized during the past year. The surface of the sun was not visible for all the solar flares.

On Wednesday, the sunrise was spectacular. Kendra rolled eighty-seven threes in a row.

There was no Thursday.

—BROOK WEST



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