

The Knave in the Night

In which the Mudhens learn an interesting rainy day game

By Hank Hufnagel

BINKY HENDERSON was bored.

"This stinks," he said with disgust.

"You mean the cabin or the weather?" replied Bacon Wallace.

"Both, and maybe you, too... you had a bath lately?"

"What d'ya mean by that crack? I'm doin' the best I can. It's not as if there are showers out here or anything."

"There's a shower right outside the door there."

"More like a storm than a shower, and it's too cold for my taste. What's your problem?"

"Aw, I'm just bored. Look at the eight of us, the famous Mudhen Patrol, hah! We came out here to hike and swim and look for muskrats, and here we sit in this rotten old cabin... been here for hours and likely to be here all day. This isn't my idea of fun."

"Yeah, well your crabbin' doesn't make it any better, I can tell you."

"Hey you guys," came a deeper voice from across the room, "can it!"

"Can it? Where do you get these expressions, old black and white movies?" shot back Binky.

"It's somethin' Gramps says when he wants some peace and quiet," said Peewee.

"Well, alright *Mr. Patrol Leader*, I'll *can* it if you can come up with something better for us to do than sit around on our cans watchin' the rain fall and the day wash away."

"You know, maybe I could. You ever hear of a game called *Mafia*?"

"No. Some sort of board game your gramps plays?"

"Lay off of Peewee Senior. He knows more about Scouting than any of us."

"Yeah, yeah, let's not get into that again. So what's *Mafia*?"

"It's a game you can use to kill a rainy afternoon, but Gramps tinkered with it a little and calls his version *The Knave in the Night*."

"Well, that sounds OK, I guess. I'll give it a try. Beats doing nothing or playing Euchre."

"OK, how about you other guys?" said Peewee, looking around.

"Good, we need six to twelve people for the game to be fun. Eight is a good number. Get into a circle on the floor. Here, Willy, hand me that deck of cards. Let's see, we need an ace, a king and a knave, that's another name for a jack, Binky."

"Yeah, yeah, I know."

"Well, let's see. That's three cards. Now I pick five number cards to make eight in all. That's what we need, one card for each person."

"This some sort of card game?" asked Ramen Noodle. "I don't like card games."

"Naw, it's not a card game," said Peewee. "It's just a game that has cards in it."

"What's the difference?"

"Just watch, OK."

"Alright, but I don't like card games."

"Ramen, it's not a card game."

"You have an ace, a king, a jack, and five number cards, and it's not a card game?"

"No. Just let me shuffle the cards, deal 'em out and explain how to play, OK?"

"You're going to deal the cards?"

"Yeah."

"You're going to deal the cards, but it's not a card game?"

"Yes, I'm gonna deal the cards and it's NOT a card game."

"Seems hard to believe."

"It's TRUE! Will you just listen?"

"Well, OK, no need to get huffy. I just don't like card games."

"Shhh!" cried the circle of scouts. Ramen was famous for this sort of nonsense.

"OK, everybody has a card now?" asked a somewhat flustered Peewee. "Take a look at it, but don't let anybody else see it. If you have the ace, you are the *Boss* of the game for this round. If you have the king, you are the *detective*. And, if you have the knave, you are the *assassin*. Everybody else is a *villager*."

"What's the knave?" asked Binky.

"It's the jack, remember? The knave is the assassin, the hit man, the bad guy," said Peewee with great exasperation. "Between you and Ramen this is going to take all day."

"OK, OK. I got it. Ace is boss. King is detective. Knave is bad guy. Anything else, you're a villager."

"Right. So now the Boss starts the round. Who has the ace? If you have it show it."

"I do," said Jerry Goss, the newest and smallest member of the patrol, turning the card over to show the truth of his timid statement.

"OK, Jerry, you're the boss."

"Got it, I'm boss," said Jerry with a grin.

"Boss Goss," chuckled Binky. "That's a good one. I think you just got a nickname."

"OK, OK," said Peewee, "that makes it easy to remember, can we get movin' here? Next, the boss says, *The villagers sleep*, and we all close our eyes. Do it, Jerry."

"Boss. You mean, *Do it, Boss*," said Binky.

"The villagers sleep," said Jerry.

"OK, everyone but Jerry, uh Boss, should have his eyes shut now. No peeking, Scouts Honor. Is everybody sleeping, Boss?"

"Yes."

"Next the boss says, *the knave awakes* and the guy with the knave opens his eyes, points to the villager that he wants to get rid of and then closes his eyes again."

"The knave awakes," said Boss.

A few quiet seconds slipped away with only the sound of the rain on the roof to be heard and then Peewee said, "OK, Boss, did the knave point to someone?"

"Yes, he did."

"OK, now you say, *the detective awakes*."

"The detective awakes."

"Now the detective points to whoever he thinks the knave is and the boss uses hand-signals to tell him if he is right or wrong."

A few more seconds pass, then Boss said, "OK, I did it."

"All right, now say, *the villagers awake*, and everyone opens their eyes."

Eyes popped open around the circle and everyone looked suspiciously at the others around them.

"OK, Boss, now you have to tell how the villager that was pointed out by the knave died. Use your imagination, and don't make it too short or too long. Don't say the name of the person until the end either, 'cause that adds to the suspense."

"Um, late last night, a murder was committed. This morning we found the body with a knife in its back. Willy is dead," said Boss. "How was that Peewee?"

"It was OK... you'll get better. Willy, turn up your card. You are dead and can keep your eyes open from now on, but you can't talk or hint who the knave is. Got it?"

"Yeah, I got it," said Willy, turning over the 7 of spades, but it does seem sort of hard to die so early, and they are my cards, too."

"Don't worry, a round doesn't last that long, and you'll get to know who the knave is the next time he kills someone."

"Well, OK. I guess that'll OK, watchin' everyone tryin' to figure it out."

"Right," said Peewee. "Now for the fun part. The villagers have to decide who the knave is. Who killed Willy?"

"How can we tell that?" said the ever-serious Legs Carnahan. "What evidence do we have? It could be anyone."

"Yeah," said Ramen. "All we know is that Willy is dead. Can't the detective at least tell us who he thought it was, so we can eliminate one person as a suspect?"

"Yeah," said Legs. "Then we could rule out the detective, too."

"No," said Pewee. "That's not how the game is played. The detective can't reveal himself. He can only use the knowledge he gains to try to secretly guide the villagers to finding the knave."

"Well, then," replied Legs, "how can we villagers know who the culprit is? We have no evidence to use in reaching a decision."

"Look at each of the guys, talk about it, and use your intuition," said Peewee. "For instance, look at Binky there. Doesn't he look suspicious? Couldn't he be the knave?"

"Now that you mention it, he does look pretty shifty."

"Hey," protested Binky, "I'm not shifty at all. I'm not the knave. I'm nothin' but a villager."

"That's what you say. Let's vote. Everyone who thinks that Binky is the knave, raise your hand. Ha! Binky you're dead."

"Dead? Why am I dead? I didn't do anything?"

"Maybe it's because you were complaining so much earlier. Maybe it's 'cause you look like you're hiding something. Anyway, half of us voted you dead for this round, so you are dead. Turn up your card."

"Doesn't seem fair to me," grumbled Binky. "I'm the reason we are playing this stupid game, and I get killed in the first 30 seconds. See! I had a 4 of Hearts... I was nothin', just like I said."

"Not nothin', a villager. You were a villager."

"Yeah, and now I'm a dead villager."

"Better luck next time. OK, since we killed the wrong guy, it's time to sleep again. While we sleep, the knave will get rid of someone else and the detective will make another guess. Then, we wake up again. Go ahead and say, *the villagers sleep*, Boss."

"Wait a minute. What about the detective?" asked Bacon.

"I told you about the detective already, Bacon. He can't reveal himself. If he finds out who the knave is, then he has to try to convince the rest us, but he can't say anything like, 'I'm the detective and the knave is Bacon'."

"I'm not the knave, and I understand that part, but what happens if the knave kills the detective."

"Then he is dead, Bacon, and the villagers have to find the knave without his help. Any other questions?"

"Well, what happens if the villagers kill the detective? Does the game end then?"

"Boy, you are full of question all of a sudden. OK, listen, this is the last of the rules. If the villagers kill the detective, then he is dead but the game continues. The game only ends when the villagers get the knave, or he gets all but one of them."

"Wow, he'll have to be lucky to do that," said Bacon.

"Yeah, but you wouldn't want things to be too easy for the bad guy."

"OK. Let's keep playing."

"Do it, Boss," said Peewee.

"The villagers sleep," intoned the boss.

Then, "the knave awakes."

Then, "the detective awakes," and finally, "the villagers awake."

With everyone's eyes open again, Ramen asked, "Why the smile Binky?"

"Oh, I know who the knave is now, and you don't. He can't get me, but he can still get you."

"Aha!" said Bacon. "That pretty much rules out Ramen. Be careful what you say Binky. You are not supposed to help us. You are dead you know. You can see, but you cannot speak."

"OK, OK. Sorry."

"Hey, wait a second," said Peewee. "The boss hasn't gotten rid of anybody yet. Remember that he has to do that each time we wake up. Go ahead, Boss."

With a deep voice, Boss Goss said, "Last night, about three o'clock, there was a storm and lightning struck and killed one of the villagers. This morning we found him and thought it was an accident until we saw the wire connecting his big toe to the lightening rod on the roof. It's very sad, but Bacon is dead."

"What! How did he know?" said Bacon, turning red as he turned over his card. "See, the king! I was the detective, but how did he know?"

"Maybe you asked one too many questions," said Peewee"

"OK," said Legs. "Let's go at this scientifically. So far Bacon and Willy are dead, and it can't be Binky, 'cause he is dead too. Also, Boss is boss, so it's not him."

"Right," agreed Ramen.

"That leaves just four of us -- me, Peewee, Ramen and Mike."

"Right."

"I can tell it's not Mike, 'cause he looks too calm... he'd look guilty if he was."

"Yeah? It's not me alright, but if it was, I bet I could fool you," protested Mike.

"And it's not Ramen 'cause Binky just talked to him like it was someone else."

"Yeah," said Ramen. "It's not me, but Binky won't give it away like that next game."

"Yeah, but he did this time. So the way I figure it, it must be Peewee, 'cause it's sure not me. I deduce that Peewee is the knave!"

"I'm not either," protested Peewee. "What could make you think that I, your honest Patrol Leader would stoop to such a thing?"

"Ha! Jokes! Now I am sure of it," said Legs.

"Well, I think it's you, Legs," said Peewee, turning the attack. "You are just an evil genius who is trying to turn us poor villagers against one another."

"Am not!"

"How can we trust you? Look at your sneaky eyes," continued Peewee.

"How can I look at my own eyes? Look, you guys. I know Peewee is the knave. Come on, let's kill him."

"Well, we do know he likes card games," said Ramen. "You can't trust people like that. I'll vote to kill him, Legs."

"How about you, Mike?"

"Let's kill him."

"Yeah!" said Legs with glee. "OK, Peewee, you're dead."

Peewee turned over his card to reveal the knave, and with a grin splitting his freckled face from ear to ear said, "Let's to play again."