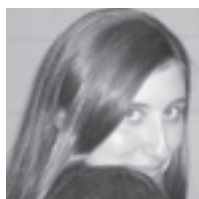


Cookeville vs. Sparta: how dare they question our superiority

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In the past few months, it seems that our little town of sleepy Cookeville has been growing into its nickname of CookeVegas. All we really need now is a Hooter's and a casino.

Growth is good, but I can't help but wonder if there will be repercussions in the future. Let's take a moment to think about it, shall we?

Everything started innocently enough, a few new clothing stores, restaurants that didn't have buffet lines, but then came the big shocker. Cookeville was considering bringing in an actual mall.

Long ago, the current mall had been turned into a center for the geriatric. Where clothing stores and knick-knack shops used to reign, orthopedic shoes and false teeth now run rampant.

The question of the mall had been raised after a shopping center (that shall remain unnamed) was the location for riots and muggings during the drought. The lack of water made people crazy, and angry mobs surrounded the grocery store that refused to sell water for less than \$20 a bottle.

The protest fire traveled in the wind, and before anyone could find cell phone service to call 911, the flames had spread across the entire area.

In the next few hours, the entire block was turned to smoldering rubble, and many clothing stores had been destroyed.

Back to the point. Cookevillians were shopping crazed, but options were limited.

The City Council then addressed the issue by suggesting a mall. A real mall, complete with escalators and more than twelve stores! The first obvious problem with the plan was the inevitable escalator-related deaths. We've all seen the Rescue 911 when Little Johnny's sweater gets caught in the escalator, and he starts to turn purple.

In spite of the risk, after the pros and cons were weighed, it was decided that the Cookeville mall would be built. Before ground could be broken though, a location was needed.

Here's where things get tricky. It had been a good while since the series of battles that decided who would control Highway 111 had been fought. The battles had left Algood severely weakened, but Cookeville had come out strong and proud.

The area needed for the mall was going to be large, and the small city of Algood would make an excellent mall. The Wal-Mart could be demolished and paved over for parking space. Even with a mall and parking lot, there would be extra space to fill. The obvious solution to the problem was to not stop at a mall, to think bigger and take it further.

Cookeville had way too many restaurants, the mall would take care of clothing needs and the only other problem was a place for the young people to go. Eureka! Where do young people want to go? An amusement park. Roller coasters and food that kills! What could be better?

Now the younger crowd would finally stop congesting coffee houses and running wild in the movie theaters. The amusement park would also become a tourist attraction, thus boosting the economy and enabling block scheduling to continue until the end of time.

The Algoodians put up little resistance, and it was only a matter of weeks before ground was broken on the new construction projects.

Construction had been slow. Despite the boom in high school attendance, instead of building a new school, three thousand portables had been put on the new soccer fields to contain all of the students.

Currently, an additional thousand portables had taken over the tennis courts and football field since the seam in our school was finally being fixed. Strong winds during tornado season had threatened to create a permanent schism between the math and science wings, and not just because of the tensions that had been mounting over sharing the third floor.

Not only were these state-of-the-art portables (for when had Cookeville High School settled for anything less than the best?), oh no; they also had living quarters for teachers. Never again would they have to leave the school. All school, all the time.

It had been sometime ago that the massive amount of work (an unfortunate consequence of the change to period scheduling) had prevented teachers from having any other life outside of school, and to cut down on commuting time, the school board had decided that teachers should just live at the school. This was offered in lieu of a salary increase, of course.

It was around this time of increased security that a top secret project was being whispered about. Cookeville was becoming a big town, and all big towns, nay, cities, had one thing: tall buildings. Cookeville would need a skyscraper. Just one though, because it was all that the budget allowed for. Maybe we shouldn't have built that gigantic golden C in the middle of the town after all.

A skyscraper would show true superiority. It would show that while Cookeville might have at one time been a small town with only one gas station, now we had thirty-seven within seven square miles and twice as many banks. Every citizen could pump gas and withdraw money from the ATM simultaneously. That was something to take pride in.

Citizens of Cookeville had taken city pride to a new level, and what wasn't to be proud of? It seemed that every few days there was a new traffic light or stop sign, a necessary measure with all of the traffic.

Cookeville was a hot-spot, and everyone was joining in the fun. Of course surrounding towns were jealous, but our superior strength quieted any murmurs of discontent. No other town posed a real threat to our growing power, with one exception.

Sparta had long been ready to discredit and drag us through the dirt. Resentment regarding its less than stellar skills in the sports arena had made them pretty bitter. The skyscraper would change all of that though.

After we had an incredibly tall building, it would become pretty obvious who the boss was. Project Tiny Tim, as the skyscraper project was called, was kept tighter than control top panty-hose.

Only after a strenuous security process could anyone enter the top secret headquarters that were disguised as an ATM. Everyone just thought it was out of order; no one ever dreamed that a secret code made the front lift out to reveal a secret staircase.

The "ATM" was located in the run-down part of town that never quite recovered from the vandalism trend



that once held the town in a state of fear and disbelief. Project Tiny Tim was finally ready and going, but to throw the attention from the odd structure being built, coverage of amusement park construction was put on the front page everyday.

It also helped that the new traffic lights zapped the townspeople's brains to keep them from asking questions. Technology had come to Cookeville at last and was being put to good use.

Time passed and it wasn't long before both the Algood (now referred to as Fun Town) and Tiny Tim projects were underway. The amusement park opening went well (aside from the one funnel cake overdose), and the skyscraper was unlike anything most Cookevillians had ever seen.

It was only when someone, let's call him Citizen C, was traveling through Sparta that a problem arose.

Citizen C was on his way home from visiting family in Chattanooga when he was cruising through 111 on his way home, and low and behold, in the middle of Sparta, a large steel object protruded from the ground. Our man on the inside of the Spartan community board had told us he had heard murmurs of a new project, but he was relatively new and not quite on the highest trust level.

But one day while manning the

paper shredders, he came across some Top Secret memos that had all the information he needed. Not only was Sparta building a steel structure, they were calling it a skyscraper, and it was to be exactly one foot taller than Cookeville's.

By this time the skyscraper was the pride and joy of Cookeville. It was like a small child, oohed and ahhed over, decorated in pretty things and fussed over. There had even been talk about building it a gigantic poncho to protect it from pollution in the rain.

When the Cookevillians heard that Sparta was trying to steal its glory, there was outrage.

An angry mob set out from the skyscraper (they had been on the observation deck looking at Sparta from one of the super-advanced telescopes) for Sparta. They were looking for a fight and planned to prevent the Spartan Skyscraper by any means necessary. After all, the Spartan Skyscraper had alliteration in its name, and that's just hard to beat.

Will Sparta become the next Algood? Or will they stand victorious on the top of their skyscraper, laughing at Cookeville's one-foot inferior tower? Find out in the next installment of: "Cookeville—in the future."

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