Understanding English Grammar

Linguistic Problem of the Month, April 2011

An Italian Borrowing

English has borrowed many words from other languages. This logic problem hinges on a key English word that was borrowed from Italian. Yes, you can solve this problem even if you don't know any Italian!

The following are three multiplication equations in Italian:

tre × tre = nove

cinque × cinque = venticinque

sette × sette = quarantanove

Problem: For how many days were ships detained by the authorities in Italian ports in the 14th century if they had arrived from plague-stricken regions?