

MY FAVORITE BRIDGE BOOKS

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I love bridge books. Have collected hundreds of them, and they are personal friends. Many of them are instructional, and much of what I know about bridge I learned from them. Terence Reese, Eddie Kantar, Mike Lawrence, and many others have taught me so much. Perhaps most of all, the superb books on card play by Hugh Kelsey.

Then we come to bridge fiction. Who hasn't enjoyed Victor Mollo's stories of the Hideous Hog, the Rueful Rabbit, and their friends and foes? And David Bird's splendid tales of bridge excellence and human folly? To this day, the first thing I turn to in the Bridge Bulletin is the latest adventure of Bird's obnoxious Abbot.

But there is only one series of bridge books that I would describe as genius, and without hesitation.

Phillip and Robert King are a father and son team of bridge authors. Phillip is an English international, and Robert King describes himself as a keen amateur and a professional playwright. They have written about seven collections of bridge stories, each in the style of a famous writer.

The writing is pitch-perfect in capturing the writer's style. And the hands, which are fascinating and instructive in their own right, fit perfectly into the story plots. We follow Agatha Christie's famous detective, Hercule Poirot, as he solves mysterious deaths using only his "little grey cells" and clues from way the hands were played. Sherlock Holmes, partnering Dr. Watson, brilliantly outsmarts the evil Professor Moriarty, himself a bridge expert. James Bond, with help from Zia Mahmood, saves the world from nuclear destruction at the hands of an evil bridge-playing monster. And in *Play it Again Slam*, the version of *Casablanca*, the heroes save the (bridge) world from being overrun by the Nazi bidding system. More on this later.

Here, in the authors' version of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet is a brilliant bridge player who is capturing the romantic attention of the wealthy Mr. Darcy. West, Mr. Bingley, is Darcy's friend and East is one of Elizabeth's many sisters. Sitting North is Mr. Bingley's sister, who is Elizabeth's rival for Mr. Darcy's attention.

Love all, Dealer West

Miss Bingley

♠ K10852

♥ A10

♦ Q96

♣ AJ4

Mr. Bingley

♠ 63

♥ J8542

♦ 43

♣ 10962

Miss Lydia Bennet

♠ AJ97

♥ KQ9763

♦ 7

♣ K8

Mr. Darcy

♠ Q4

♥ –

♦ AKJ10852

♣ Q753

Mr. Darcy played in 6D, after North opened 1♠ and East overcalled in hearts. He won the heart lead on the table, pitching a club, ruffed the second heart, and drew trumps. He called for a spade from the table, won in hand with the queen. He then returned a spade, won by East. She carelessly returned a heart, allowing a ruff-sluff, but declarer still had to lose to the ♣K and go down.

‘What wretched fortune, Mr. Darcy,’ observed Miss Bingley. ‘But for the cruel disposition of the black suits, your accomplished dummy play would have been justly rewarded.’

‘Possibly, he replied. ‘Yet I am by no means persuaded that I managed the hand in a manner befitting my rank.’

Elizabeth could not resist a sly smile. ‘Your modesty is to be commended, Sir, particularly as in this instance you have much to be modest about.’

Darcy then suggested an alternative line, which Elizabeth explains would also have failed.

‘Admit defeat, Miss Bennet, Miss Bingley cried triumphantly. ‘The contract was foredoomed.’

‘Your admonition places me in a quandary, Miss Bingley,’ said Elizabeth. ‘To admit defeat might improve Mr. Darcy’s temper; to deny it might improve his card sense.’

‘Then deny it by all means,’ cried Mr. Darcy with passion. ‘For no man of sensibility should miss an opportunity for sensible instruction.’

Elizabeth then explains that she would have ruffed the opening lead in hand, preserving the ♥A, drawn trumps, and led a spade from dummy. This is a Morton’s Fork play. If East ducks, South

wins the queen and later discards the spade loser on the ♡A, losing only a club trick. If instead East rises with the ace, South has the entries to set up the fifth spade. He could then pitch three clubs on the two good spades and the ♡A, again making the contract.

Next the Bridgefather, the bridge expert who is the head of a New York crime family. Like the Godfather, one of his activities is to hold court and dispense wisdom to the local population.

Mr. Bolognaise is an honest hard-working baker with only modest bridge skills. His shrewish wife drags him to see the Bridgefather to show a hand that her husband had misplayed. He had taken a finesse and gone down, whereas an expert would have made it on a sophisticated squeeze.

‘Tell him,’ said Mrs. Bolognaise. ‘Tell the Bridgefather how you floored a hand so simple that my grandmother, God rest her soul, would have made it in her sleep.’

The Bridgefather patiently explains the proper play, and then proceeds to the moral of the story.

“As you know, I am in the olive oil business.”

They both knew he was in the liquor business, the extortion business, the gambling business, and all sorts of funny business, but they nodded their heads vigorously to indicate that as far as they were concerned olive oil was his sole means of support.

“Somewhere in Sicily the olives are squeezed to produce oil. But I know nothing about squeezing an olive. Why not? Because the good Lord did not put me on this earth to squeeze olives.”

She gaped at him, her brow furrowed. “I’m sorry, Bridgefather, but what is it that you are trying to tell me?”

He threw up his hands in despair. How could she not see the point of this beautiful parable? Did Jesus have problems like this?

“Signora, your husband is a fine man. He bakes good bread, he never revokes, he supports your bids. But the good Lord did not put Signore Bolognaise into this world to squeeze opponents. For him, and I say this with respect, God created the simple finesse.”

“And when this fine man takes his finesse and goes down, do you know what you should say?”

She shook her head mutely.

“You should say ‘Bad luck, my husband’.”

“I will say it, I will say it!” she almost shrieked and, after kissing the Don’s hand, bolted out of the room, dragging her husband behind her.

And finally, Play it Again Slam. Aficionados of Casablanca will recall that the heroine, Ilsa, had a never-forgotten passionate affair with Rick, in Paris many years earlier. What they may not recall, however, was that this was the scene of Ilsa’s greatest bridge triumph, partnering Rick to win the Versailles Mixed Pairs.

	Mme Dupont	
	♠ 94	
	♥ KJ9	
	♦ Q1095	
	♣ QJ93	
Rick		Ilsa
Q10752		♠ AJ3
♥ 87		♥ 5432
♦ 843		♦ A62
♣ 875		♣ A62
	M Dupont	
	♠ K86	
	♥ AQ106	
	♦ KJ7	
	♣ K104	

Contract: 3NT South. Lead: ♠2

In a crucial hand they were defending 3NT, bid by the defending champions Monsieur and Madame Dupont. On the first trick Ilsa made the excellent play of the spade Jack, causing declarer to take his king rather than holding up and thereby killing the spade suit. As Slam, the pianist in Rick’s bar, sang:

*Your partner played the two.
You wondered what to do,
And sighed a little sigh.
The good old rule of third hand high
Might not apply.*

*And when you played the knave
Declarer’s face turned grave
He had no safe reply.
And as he played the king, his chance*

Passed sadly by.

“Her tears were flowing freely now as Slam reached the highly-charged middle section”:

Your clever knave had sealed poor Dupont's fate.

He should have ducked, but now it was too late.

Needing nine tricks, he ended up with eight.

The score sheet doesn't lie ...

I won't tell you how the story ends – you will have to read it for yourself – but I will tell you that it's the greatest plot twist in all of bridge literature.