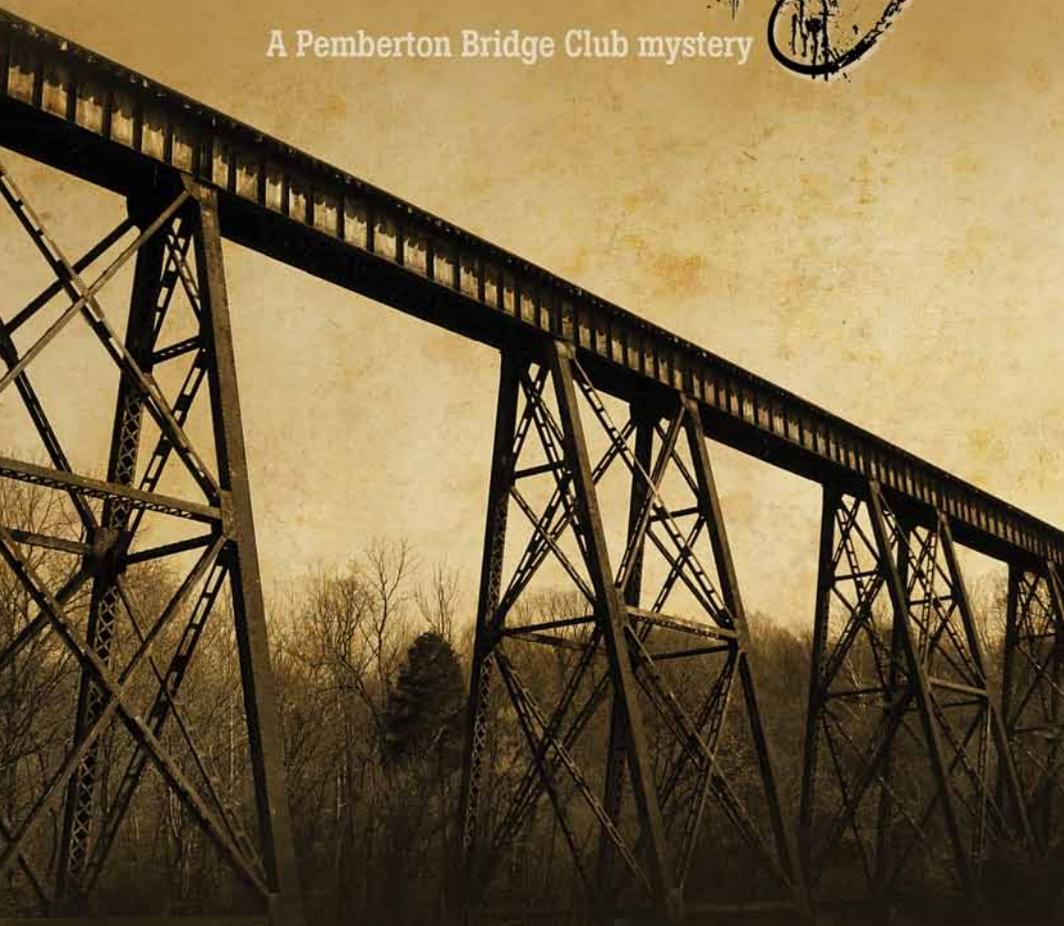


Deadly Endplay

A Pemberton Bridge Club mystery



Ken Allan

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A Tenbent Ken Allan

MASTER POINT PRESS • TORONTO, CANADA

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Master Point Press

331 Douglas Ave.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5M 1H2

(416)781-0351 Email: info@masterpointpress.com

Websites: www.masterpointpress.com
www.teachbridge.com
www.bridgeblogging.com
www.ebooksbridge.com

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Allan, Ken, 1940-

Deadly endplay [electronic resource] : a Pemberton Bridge Club mystery / Ken Allan.

Electronic document issued in PDF format.

Also issued in print format.

ISBN 978-1-55494-169-8

I. Title.

PS8601.L42778D42 2011b C813'.6 C2011-901587-0

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) for our publishing activities.

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Suzanne Hocking

Interior format

Sally Sparrow

Cover and interior design

Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

This book evolved over a period of about thirty years, until I had a small number of copies printed in 2008. The manuscript was read at various stages by Don Kersey, Paddy Allan, Mark and Shona Donovan. They made numerous suggestions to make the final draft much better. The evolution has continued. This is much the same story, but now it is told somewhat better as a result of feedback from readers, reviewers and, especially, many suggestions to improve the flow of the story from Ray Lee and Suzanne Hocking.

Special thanks to Joy Allan and Bert Weir for the physical appearance of that first version of this book.

A U T H O R ' S P R E F A C E

Ian Fleming, in *Moonraker*, has James Bond deal the following bridge hand to the villain, Hugo Drax:

♠ A K Q J
♥ A K Q J
♦ A K
♣ K J 9

You could play a lifetime without holding a hand this rich in high cards. Drax accepts it as his due, doubles Bond's grand slam in clubs and doesn't suspect he is being swindled until it becomes apparent that he is not going to take a single trick. The hands of Bond and his partner are:

M	Bond
♠ 10 9 8 7	♠ —
♥ 6 5 4 3	♥ —
♦ —	♦ Q 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
♣ 7 6 5 3 2	♣ A Q 10 8 4

This is a variant of a famous whist hand (the Duke of Cumberland's hand) and while it helps, in following the action, to know a little about bridge (or whist), you don't have to know much about cards to appreciate that Drax has a pretty good hand and that it would be unusual, not to mention deflating (and, when the high stakes have just been doubled and redoubled, expensive) to lose with such a hand.

It is very unusual to find a bridge hand in a popular novel. Bridge slows down the narrative and there are very few deals where the effect of the bidding and the play on the characters is as easily understood as with Drax and Bond.

Bridge deals and storytelling are an uneasy fit. Some writers of bridge novels avoid bridge deals entirely in the hope that they can reach a larger audience. Some bridge players could follow the bidding and play if they encountered a bridge deal in a novel, but generally choose not to read such novels.

And yet... and yet... bridge hands get under your skin. Some players exhibit a personality when they are playing bridge that is quite different from their personality away from the table. The same hand can provoke quite different responses depending on the personality of the player. This has practical implications in bidding and play. Recognizing and making use of the way different personality types respond to bridge deals is the main subject of the bridge classic *Why You Lose at Bridge* by S.J. Simon. Likewise, in *Bridge in the Menagerie*, the peerless Victor Mollo uses personality traits to bring about unexpected and entertaining twists in the play of bridge deals. Both authors are fun to read. Both write about characters that can be found in every bridge club. Both have characters that can be defined by a single stroke of the pen. Both authors stay pretty much at the bridge table.

Duplicate bridge players seldom leave bridge behind when they leave the table. They always have a story to tell if asked about interesting or challenging hands, and they spend time thinking about triumphs and disasters when they should be doing something else. The rare exceptions are players who play the game purely to relax and who expend very little mental energy on the game. In this novel, Russell and Doc are such characters, but they are unusual in that respect and even they are not impervious.

This novel takes place in a fictional town wedged into an actual landscape located north of Bruce Mines and east of Sault Ste. Marie. The story is a mystery of sorts, but with just one serious suspect, it is not a whodunit. It is more of a whether-anyone-dunit and, if so, howdunit.

S.J. Simon concentrated on four personality types. The average bridge club has many more than that. Appendix A (p. 213) has a short description of the Pemberton Duplicate Bridge Club members who appear most often.

C H A P T E R



THE PEMBERTON CHRONICLE

Friday, November 26, 1982

THE JAY'S NEST

by Jane Seabrook

South dealer

Neither Vul.

North (Corey)

♠ K 10 9
♥ K 5 4
♦ K Q 10 3
♣ 6 5 2

West (Kit)

♠ Q 5 4 2
♥ Q 2
♦ A J 9 5
♣ 9 8 4



East (Jake)

♠ 7 3
♥ 10 8 7 6 3
♦ 7 4 2
♣ K J 3

South (Jay)

♠ A J 8 6
♥ A J 9
♦ 8 6
♣ A Q 10 7

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Opening lead: ♦ 5

This was the second hand out of the box. On the first board our opponents, Kit and Jake, got a top because I made a mistake on defense and let them make a game contract that nobody else was in.

"I was pushy," said Kit to Jake, "but I knew you'd play it well."

What he meant was that Corey and I could be counted on to defend poorly. Honestly, these experts assume that anyone who is inferior to them at bridge is too dumb to understand when they talk in code.

The second hand cheered me up a little. I could see right away there were finesses all over the place and I just love finesses. The experts say a finesse should be taken only as a last resort but I'll leave them to their strips and squeezes — just show me a finesse and I'll take it. I won the diamond lead with the king in dummy and led a club, finessing the ten, which held, and I got that warm feeling you get when you just know everything is where you want it to

be. I led a spade to the ten, which won. Bliss. Then I noticed there was a two-way finesse in spades – if the spade queen had been on my right, I should have finessed toward my hand rather than toward the dummy.

It was a good thing I didn't see it sooner or I would have gotten it wrong. As much as I love finesses, I hate two-way finesses. With the simple finesse, you just take it and if it wins you get an extra trick and if it loses... well you were never going to win that trick anyway so it doesn't matter. With two-way finesses, there is a right way and a wrong way. With an unerring sense of misdirection, you can go wrong every time.

Fran says if there is no other indication, two-way finesses should be taken toward the longer hand. I'm sure she gave a reason but I forgot it long ago. The catch in this is the 'no other indication.' I'm not sure I would recognize an 'indication' even if there was one. Finessing toward the dummy was backward, sort of, but it was right this time so who cares – besides Kit, of course. He sat there squirming and I could tell he was not enjoying this hand, which cheered me up no end. Maybe the 'indication' was that I wanted to get back over to dummy to finesse in clubs again so I might as well take the two-way finesse in the direction that was most convenient for my plan.

Still, if I had noticed the two-way spade finesse I would have gotten

it wrong. It was a narrow escape, but I didn't let it slow me down. A club to the queen and a spade to the nine got me two more extra tricks. With every successful finesse, I was enjoying myself more and more. I cashed dummy's spade king and played to my club ace, leaving me in my hand with these cards left.

♠ –		♠ –
♥ K 5 4		♥ 10 8 7 6
♦ Q 10 3		♦ 7 4
♣ –		♣ –
♠ Q		♠ –
♥ Q 2		♥ 10 8 7 6
♦ A J 9		♦ 7 4
♣ –		♣ –
♠ A		
♥ A J 9		
♦ 8		
♣ 7		

Next I played a diamond toward the diamond queen in dummy and when Kit went up with the ace, I was almost ready to forgive him. Kit returned a spade to my ace. I was about to lead small to the heart king when I had an inspiration – maybe I should take the heart finesse backward too. So I played the heart jack and as soon as Kit covered with the queen I realized that I had acted too quickly. The finesse had worked, but I didn't have an extra trick. When a finesse works, it's supposed to give you an extra trick. That's one of the rules of bridge!

Then I saw there was another finesse available in hearts – with the king, queen and jack gone, and

the ace-nine in my hand, I now had a finesse against the ten. This is what I love about bridge. Just when the deal seems to be over, another finesse appears out of thin air. I was pretty sure my club seven was good, but there was no need to take a chance. I just pitched it on the queen of diamonds and took the heart finesse.

There were only two other players to make three overtricks on this deal, so Corey and I had a tie for top.

Kit Know-It-All McCrea was fit to be tied, muttering about practice finesses, but I figured a bottom served him right after what he had said. I told him "You buttered your bread, Kit, now lie in it."

He just stared at me with a blank look on his face. Honestly, I don't think he understood a word I said. It's just amazing how some people can be so good at bridge and so bad at life.

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Death in a small town

Elsie Carmichael's death occurred months ago, but there are questions that still bother Dan Cogan. Dan is a retired policeman who plays bridge with Clayton – Elsie's widower and the only possible suspect if there was indeed foul play. Yet the charming and well-liked Clayton has a rock-solid alibi. Slowly, as befits the pace of life in a small rural town, more pieces of the puzzle come to light, and the mystery deepens.

If Miss Marple's village had boasted a bridge club, it might have been very much like the one in Pemberton. Everyone knows everyone else, and the personalities the players reveal at the table are often quite different from those they exhibit in everyday life. So is it possible that Clayton, notorious in the club for his 'pseudo endplay' tactic, has somehow used the same idea to engineer his wife's death?

Deadly Endplay is way better than most bridge fiction. Ken Allan's character development is excellent, and the way he interweaves the bridge deals to achieve this is also excellent. **ACBL Bulletin**



KEN ALLAN (Kingston, Ontario, Canada) is an expert bridge player with many Regional wins. This is his first bridge book, although he has written extensively about his other passion, vegetable gardening.

