

# CARD PLAY

OR THE ART OF BEING LUCKY

# TECHNIQUE



REVISED EDITION

VICTOR MOLLO & NICO GARDENER

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Victor Mollo** was born in St. Petersburg into a rich Russian family. When he was eight, the October Revolution occurred and his family fled Russia, traveling on a purchased train with forged Red Cross papers, crossing into Finland, then on to Stockholm, Paris and finally London. There he neglected his studies and devoted himself to bridge. As an editor in the European service of the British Broadcasting Corporation, he began to write books and articles on the game. After his retirement in 1969, he started to write even more extensively, and from then until his death in 1987 he wrote thirty books and hundreds of articles. He was also active in developing bridge cruises, mostly in the Mediterranean.

His lifestyle was unusual. He would play rubber bridge at his club each afternoon, enjoy dinner and wine with his wife ('the Squirrel'), and then work all night until 6 a.m., when he would take a nap. While he occasionally competed successfully in the major duplicate bridge tournaments, winning four national titles, he preferred rubber bridge. Many of his daily achievements at the rubber bridge table would become elements in his fictional stories.

He is best known for the *Bridge in the Menagerie* series, which started with the book of the same name, first published in 1965. Most of the pieces had previously appeared in either *Bridge Magazine* or *The Bridge World* and that pattern was repeated in the works that followed. Mollo was recognized as 'the most entertaining writer of the game' in a poll among American players in the 1980s. His many significant books on different aspects of bridge include *Bridge Psychology*, *The Bridge Immortals*, and this present volume.

**Nico Gardener** was a British international bridge player, born in Riga, Latvia (then part of Imperial Russia). After the Russian Revolution his family moved to the Ukraine, and then to Moscow, where he trained as a ballet dancer. He later moved to Berlin, where he read languages and history at Berlin University, and played chess rather than bridge. He moved to London in 1936, where his bridge career began. His partners included some of the great players of the day, such as Pedro Juan, Victor Mollo, Louis Tarlo, Iain MacLeod and Adam Meredith. As a tournament player he won the World Mixed Teams in 1962 with Boris Schapiro, Rixi Markus and Fritzi Gordon. He won the European Championship twice out of five attempts, and competed in two Bermuda Bowls (1950 and 1962) and the 1960 Olympiad.

In domestic competitions he won the Gold Cup six times, and the *Sunday Times* Invitational Pairs in 1970 with Tony Friday. His wife Pat (the first Mrs. Mollo) was also an international player who played in four European women's championships and his daughter Nicola is a multiple world champion.

Nico opened the London School of Bridge in 1952 in the King's Road, Chelsea, above a women's dress shop. There he supervised the bridge teaching and the rubber bridge rooms where beginners could practice at the game for small stakes. The teachers were some of the best players in the country, and there were about 2000 students each year. Another of Nico's ventures was the bridge cruise, of which he was an early promoter. Each summer would find him hosting on a Mediterranean cruise ship, conducting lessons and practice in four or five different languages, accompanied by an attractive assistant.

In addition to *Card Play Technique*, Nico and Victor Mollo also co-authored a classic introduction to the game, *Bridge for Beginners*.

## FOREWORD TO THIS EDITION

In many ways Nico Gardener (my father) and Victor Mollo had a symbiotic relationship.

Nico was born Nico Nehemi Goldinger, in Riga, Latvia in 1908 and Victor was born a year later in St. Petersburg, Russia. Apart from bridge they had an amazing amount in common: their first language was Russian (my father also spoke Latvian as a child), both were polyglots (Victor spoke three languages and my father seven), both were Jewish, both had fled their homeland and both were married to my mother.

Victor had the easier early life. He told my father about his family's audacious escape from the Russian Revolution — at one point on a whole train his wealthy mother had bought to expedite their departure to England. Thus he came to be educated at Brighton College and the London School of Economics.

My father was forced to leave four countries as a youth. At the age of eleven, upon the death of his mother, he took his elderly grandparents and forsook the war and deprivation in Latvia for the Ukraine, only to have to flee pogroms there for Moscow, where he buried his grandparents. The Russian revolution forced him yet again to decamp and, having learned that his father, formerly in the Russian Army, was remarried and living in Berlin, he went there. He attended Berlin University but fled the rise of Nazism and ended up in England.

Victor and Nico met in England in the 1930s.

Victor's skill with languages gained him a job at the BBC where he worked until he retired as editor of the European Services. He continued to write books and newspaper columns on bridge for the next twenty years. He told me that he was greatly saddened and frustrated not to be allowed, as a White Russian, to work in the war effort — he saw himself in MI5 or MI6 working as a master spy.

Victor's marriage to Pat lasted seven years before they divorced. It was an amicable separation. He found love again with his Jeanne (known as 'Squirrel'), whom he met at the BBC, while Pat did the same with my father — and I grew up surrounded by them all.

Nico and Victor both had sharp minds, wit, humor, an elegant 'old world' charm and were both consummate teasers. They had pet names for each other. To Victor my father was 'The Cat', perhaps an allusion to my father's early ballet training. My father called Victor the 'Subcarpetian' (under the carpet), referring to his lack of height. Not sure Victor was that pleased with it.

Whilst Victor was married to Pat, she bought a watch from Harrods that never worked. He returned the watch to the store with this note: 'This timepiece, throughout its inglorious career, has rushed forward at a giddy pace and lagged languishley (*sic*) behind but has always maintained its lofty contempt for time!' Harrods rewarded him with a new watch and a case of wine.

When my father suffered a heart attack Victor rushed to his bedside, whereupon my father said, “Victor, you smoke more than I do, you drink more than I do, you eat more than I do, how come *I* had the heart attack?” A week later, after Victor had his own heart attack, they were convalescing together in Brighton.



*Nico Gardener*

My father was often to be seen sporting a clove carnation or a red rose in his lapel, so much so that in the after-dinner speech at a Camrose event in Belfast they talked about the British team traveling Aer Lingus — all except Nico, who came Interflora! My father was very amused.

My father worked for P & O, lecturing on bridge on board their liners, for over forty years. One of the greatest moments for him came when, in his late seventies, the ship he was on docked in Riga, his first time back there since he had left as a child. The Russian passport officials came on board and when they saw my father's place of birth in his passport, three of them stood up and hugged him saying, “Welcome back, comrade!”



*Rixi Markus, Boris Schapiro, Fritz Gordon and Nico receive the trophy for winning the World Mixed Teams in Cannes 1962.*

As far as bridge careers go, my father was a competitive player *par excellence*, playing board after board and rarely faltering. Victor did not enjoy competitive bridge, preferring the cut and thrust of the rubber bridge table, though he did deign to partner my father once a year in the Devonshire Cup, representing the RAC. My father founded the London School of Bridge and became as fine a teacher as he was a player. Victor used his skills — along with his wit he had a deft turn of phrase — to write his books. They ended up collaborating on two, *Card Play Technique* in 1955, followed in 1956 by *Bridge for Beginners*, which sold over half a million copies. My father gave me a copy of *Card Play Technique* when I was fifteen and told me how lucky I was to have safety plays at my fingertips, when he and Victor had had to work them out. It is an amazing book.

My father told me the story of how a lady, clutching a copy of this book, asked him for his autograph.

“You are Mr. Mollo?” she enquired anxiously.

“No, I am the other one...”

“Oh well,” she said, “I suppose that will have to do... Sign!”

Which I am sure he did with his usual flourish!

Nicola P. Smith, M.B.E  
London, June 2012



Nico and Nicola Gardener



*Nico Gardener*

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION, 1955

Fortune only smiles on the brave. She positively beams on the skillful, versed in the technique of wooing her. For to be lucky is an art which can be mastered like any other. You, dear reader, can hold much better cards than you do at present, not by dealing yourself more aces and kings, but by getting a higher return from your existing ration. Persuade the cards to work harder for you than they do for your opponents. Therein lies the formula of success. The purpose of this book is to point the way, to enlist on your side, whether you be declarer or defender, fifty-two sturdy and loyal allies.

Can it be done? That bridge lends itself to the written form is shown by a cascade of volumes on both sides of the Atlantic. But can the expert pass on his secrets? Can he impart his judgment, his flair, his sense of timing? We say that he can, because we have put it to the test and we have seen it work, at the card table, where it matters.

The approach to expert card play in the pages that follow is based on the Advanced Correspondence Course of the London School of Bridge. Through this medium many players have been introduced already to the technique of the masters. Their cards, of course, have improved out of all knowledge, for they have learned the 'lucky' plays. What is more, they know just *why* they are lucky and in that lies the guarantee of continued good fortune.

Does a mischievous gremlin haunt you at the table, bewitching every finesse, spoiling the distribution of every suit? If so, you can exchange him for a friendly leprechaun. He will sit behind you, averting bad breaks, warning you against impending ruffs and inspiring the luckiest leads. Better still, if you propitiate him, he will pierce the linen curtain and reveal to you the holdings of your opponents. The art of card-reading, 'seeing' the hands of the other players, is one of the secrets of being lucky. That is why we expound it in some detail, and engage the ever-friendly leprechaun to assist you.

Complex coups, which happen once a decade or so, receive little prominence in these pages. Our concern is essentially with the plays that win team games and bring in the matchpoints, not with the spectacular deals which sometimes astound, but rarely instruct. We have endeavored to describe all the moves in the thrust and parry of the eternal struggle between declarer and defense. But in every chapter, and in the exercises which follow, the spotlight is on everyday situations and on how to handle them. Leaving double-dummy problems in the shade, keeping the focus on the real, vibrant deals that recur again and again, we seek to make theory the handmaiden of practice.

Cards have their magic. We pass on the incantations and ask you to weave the spells. Our success will be measured by yours.

*Victor Mollo  
Nico Gardener*

## *The Exercises*

Weaving their pattern through this book, dummy play and defense counter one another in alternating chapters. Each one is followed by Exercises. Their purpose is not to tease or puzzle the reader, but to provide him with material for practice. As the book unfolds, the plays and defenses grow more advanced, and the Exercises with them. But easy or difficult, every example is designed to illustrate a method, to bring out a specific point in the mechanics of card play. No problems are intended, no riddles and no mystification. For success in bridge lies not in solving problems, but in finding none. In the manifold situations to which the distribution of the deck lends itself, no element of mystery is present, only a challenge to technique. Every card combination carries within itself the key to its solution. Approached with the right password, it will yield it readily enough. The object of the Exercises is to let the reader pick up the key for himself. It may grate a trifle, at first, but as he learns the secrets of the lock, he will find that it fits every time.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW EDITION

When Nicola Smith and Su King (Squirrel's granddaughter) asked me to edit this new edition of *Card Play Technique*, I was immediately transported back to my embryonic bridge-playing days in Nottingham. I had traveled to a tournament in Derby and on one deal I held (amongst other cards) ♦AQ6. Partner led this suit against 3NT and dummy had ♦85. I had the wit to put in the queen and declarer won with the king. When my partner (Scotland's Ron McEwan) regained the lead, he played another diamond and we were able to cash four tricks in the suit and defeat the contract. Had the tournament taken place a day earlier I would doubtless have put up the ace, enabling declarer to hold up the king and then (with a different line of play) make nine tricks. Luckily, the night before I had read a chapter in *Card Play Technique* that described this elementary defensive stratagem.

It was a delight to work through the book, because it is a classic introduction to the basic techniques that must be mastered if you are to move on to more advanced concepts and possibly become an expert player. Indeed, at whatever level you play this most complex of card games, it is never a bad idea to remind yourself of the fundamentals.

For the most part the text remains as it was originally written (it bears the inimitable stamp of Victor Mollo); it is as fresh and amusing as it was when first published. The deals and examples reflect the analytical clarity with which Nico Gardener was able to approach this demanding subject, and only a few required any correction or additional analysis. However, in this edition the spot cards are no longer represented by 'x' in all the diagrams, but have been assigned actual values. Bidding is a not a major feature of a book on card play, but nevertheless I felt the auctions should be modernized. Except where noted, the examples now employ a Standard system, with five-card majors, 15-17 notrump and Jacoby transfers. I have also added a glossary which explains the bridge language that is an essential part of the book.

Victor and Nico worked out the simplest and clearest way to convey the technique of bridge. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did editing it.

Mark Horton  
Bath  
June 2012

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# LEARN TO BE LUCKY!

Yes, being lucky is an art that can be mastered like any other. You can hold much better cards than you do at present, not by dealing yourself more aces and kings, but by getting a higher return from your existing ration. Persuade the cards to work harder for you than they do for your opponents. Therein lies the formula of success. The purpose of this book is to point the way, to enlist on your side, whether you be declarer or defender, fifty-two sturdy and loyal allies.

First published in 1955, *Card Play Technique* offers a comprehensive survey of declarer play and defense, and is widely regarded as the best intermediate-level book on card play ever written. Gardener's technical expertise and Mollo's witty writing style combine to provide a unique instructional experience. This new edition has been updated and modernized by *Bridge Magazine* editor Mark Horton.



**VICTOR MOLLO** (1909-1987) was one of the best-loved authors ever to write about bridge. He wrote many excellent how-to books on the game but is best remembered as the author of *Bridge in the Menagerie* and its sequels.



**NICO GARDENER** (1908-1989) was a distinguished international player, winner of many British national events, and founder of the highly successful London School of Bridge.



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