

The
NAKED BRIDGE PLAYER
and other stories



DAVID SILVER

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List OF SOURCES

Many of the stories in this book derive at least a portion of their plot-line and characterization from classics of literature and the silver screen. For those readers who would like to compare the bridge versions with their originals, they are, in order of appearance:

- Chapter 1** 'How's Your Mother?' by Simon Brett
Chapter 2 'The Adventure of the Fallen Angels' by Percival Wilde
Chapter 3 *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque
Chapter 4 *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas
Chapter 6 'Before the Fact' by Francis Iles
Chapter 7 'Zelig' (1983) written and directed by Woody Allen
Chapter 8 'Witness for the Prosecution' (1957) written by Agatha Christie and adapted for the screen by Larry Marcus
Chapter 9 'The Man Who Knew Too Much' (1934, 1956) directed by Alfred Hitchcock; story by Charles Bennett and D.B. Wyndham-Lewis
Chapter 10 *Twenty Years After* by Alexandre Dumas
Chapter 11 'The Matrix' (1999) written and directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski
Chapter 12 'The Matrix Reloaded' (2003) written and directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski
Chapter 13 'The Matrix Revolutions' (2003) written and directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski

INTRODUCTION

This book is for my children: Cheryl, Hanna and Zachary.

Professor Silver was born in 1992. My friend and squash opponent, Ray Lee, had started *Canadian Master Point* magazine, a monthly publication, with his wife, Linda. He approached me with an offer I couldn't refuse; for each story I contributed, he would permit me to win two squash matches. At first, the stories were easy to write. My years of teaching remedial writing to graduates of the Ontario high-school system provided sufficient anecdotes, characters and scenarios. The fictional students provided most of the humor, but I became uneasy with how they were portrayed — they were the helpless targets of their teacher's barbs and criticisms. I soon shifted their inadequacies and ineptitudes to their teacher, "Professor Silver", a device I continued to use in order to keep friendships and ward off law suits. The stories became very popular and Ray now considered me a regular contributor. But after the first year, my inexhaustible reservoir of material began to dry up.

Writing bridge stories has the same inherent difficulty as does writing pornography. The narrative possibilities are naturally constrained by the physical limitations on the players. Thomas Hardy once said that "all novels end with a wedding or a funeral," and all bridge stories end with a contract being made or defeated. It's the events leading up to bridge hands that are variable. It was then I hit on the happy device of borrowing plots from classic novels and movies to furnish frameworks for the goings-on at the bridge table. This had the double benefit of providing raw material and justifying my impractical decision to study literature rather than attend law school as my father had demanded.

I am constantly being asked two questions, “Are you Professor Silver?” and “Are the characters in your stories real bridge players?” The first question is easily answered, “No.” I have neither his bridge-playing ability nor his caustic wit. The answer to the second is “Yes and no.” Characters drawn from life are identified by their real names. The most prominent being Bruce Gowdy, who appears in most stories. If Bruce Gowdy didn’t exist, I couldn’t have invented him. One of the great Canadian bridge players of modern times, Bruce is as kind and gentle socially as he is competitive and unforgiving (of himself as well as his partners) at the bridge table. Various other bridge legends appear in “cameo” roles: Eric Murray, Sami Kehela and Peter Hambly. All have graciously given permission for their names to be used, and I appreciate it.

There are two real, and easily identified, characters. The most prominent is Wright Cardinal, who plays Dr. Watson to Professor Silver’s Sherlock Holmes. Since poor Wright spends most of his stage time being admonished, denigrated and lectured to by the irascible Professor, I decided early on to use a pseudonym to protect him from being identified as the bumbling foil for the great bridge expert. Alas, my precautions were to no avail, as readers quickly began making the connection between Ron Bishop and Wright Cardinal. But I needn’t have worried. Ron is deservedly secure in his position as an expert bridge player, teacher and bidding theorist and just laughed when I expressed my concerns.

The other is, of course, Droid, whom everyone knows is really Fred Gitelman. Fred is one of the most talented and successful bridge players in North America, and in his spare time, the genius programmer who gave us Bridge Base Online. I played with Fred, once. He was a university student, just taking up bridge, and I was already one of the senior participants in the afternoon duplicate games. It took only a few hands for me to realize that I wasn’t, never was and never would be, in his league as a bridge player. He went on, as I predicted, to the highest level of bridge competition, a world-class player and a world-class gentleman.

The bridge world is not yet ready to learn the true identities of the other characters who populate the pages of Professor Silver’s chronicles. Some of them, like Mia Culpa, Kwasi Modo and Brad Bullock are taken from life. They play regularly and are very much as they appear in the stories. The others are amalgams and/or combinations of people I have met at the table over the last fifty years. Perhaps I may leave a list behind when

I depart for the Great Bridge Game in the sky... probably not. But they all have one thing in common. They are individually interesting and all love the game of bridge.

Another difficulty, unforeseen when I began the series, is the paucity of interesting bridge hands. My small stock soon ran out. For a while I survived on the charity of friends who brought interesting hands back from the tournament trail. But the vicissitudes of age gradually curtailed my participation and I saw them less and less, consequently receiving fewer and fewer hands. I was about to give up writing stories when Ray Lee introduced me to Tim Bourke, the Professor Silver of Australia.

For the handful of bridge players in Tanzania and Alaska who have never heard of Tim Bourke, he is the bridge scholar par excellence. He is a historian of double dummy problems and a bidding theorist. He has remarkable acuity in ferreting out lines of play and defense that would elude lesser mortals. His collection of hands, and more importantly, accompanying analyses that complicate or explain them (depending on your level of skill), is voluminous. Need a hand containing a strip squeeze, endplay, with a stepping stone ending? Tim will send you a dozen, all different and clearly explained. Want a couple of hands demonstrating the supremacy of the heart suit? Tim has dozens so demonstrative and convincing that I'm beginning to believe the theory myself.

It is a marvel of our technological age that I can become a close friend of a man I have never met. But even through the terse communication of the Internet, Tim's good nature and generosity of spirit are obvious in his always cheerful messages. Permit me to thank him here, publicly, for his invaluable contributions to this book and *Bridge the Silver Way*. A bridge book without interesting hands is not worth reading and without Tim's expertise and kindness there would be no Professor Silver stories. Thank you, Tim.

Is this book the end of Professor Silver and his merry troupe of bridge players? Perhaps! The decision is really in the hands of Master Point Press's accountant. As for me, I agree with Ulysses: "Death closes all: but something ere the end, some work of noble note, may yet be done, not unbecoming men who strove with gods." This is not intended to imply that writing bridge stories is high art. On rereading these stories, I am reminded of the sign George Gissing noticed in the lavatory of the British Museum, "Readers are requested to bear in mind that these basins are to

be used only for casual ablutions.” My aim was always to entertain my readers by means of amusing characters who seemed familiar and who could be laughed at without causing pain or hurt. And I, like Dickens, grew fond of my creations and will miss them if they are retired. My dilemma was best articulated by my late nephew, Fritz Von Zelber, Colonel of His Majesty’s Household Guards.

Sometimes I have a fancy — the superstitious would call it a presentment — that my bridge career is not yet altogether complete; that somehow and someday, I shall play again in high-level matches. I shall again spin bids out of the Silver Method, brace my brain for a competitive auction, strike first with preemptive calls. Whether this fancy will be fulfilled I cannot tell, but I fervidly wish it may be, for I would love to see myself once again at the tournament at Streslau, watching the epic battle between Princess Flavia’s team and Professor Silver’s brave warriors, or hearing from one of the survivors about the climactic game in the frowning keep of Castle Zelda itself.

Perhaps you do, too.

David Silver
Toronto, 2006

How's **YOUR PARTNER?**

“It’s all right, Irving. Just someone at the door,” Humphrey Partridge called up the stairs.

“Hi! Got a hand for you and Irving.” Professor Silver leaned one arm against the door frame in his chatting position.

“Oh?” Humphrey Partridge’s hand remained on the door, as if about to close it, but the Professor didn’t seem to notice.

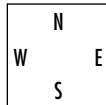
“Interesting hand isn’t it?” said Professor Silver, handing him a print-out.

Bruce Gowdy

♠ J 9 5 2
♥ A 3
♦ A Q 10 9
♣ 7 5 4

LHO

♠ 7
♥ K Q 10 9 8 5
♦ J 8 4
♣ A J 2



RHO

♠ 4
♥ 7 6 4 2
♦ K 7 3 2
♣ Q 10 9 6

Professor Silver

♠ A K Q 10 8 6 3
♥ J
♦ 6 5
♣ K 8 3

“I opened with 1♠. LHO bid 2♥, Bruce bid 3♥ and RHO bid 4♥. I bid 4♠ and everyone passed. The opening lead was the heart king, which I won with dummy’s ace. I drew trumps with my ace and then finessed dummy’s diamond queen, losing to the king. Back came the club queen, which I covered, and the opponents cashed three club tricks, setting the contract. Bruce went livid and observed that, as usual, I had taken a finesse instead of thinking.”

“I don’t have time for this right now,” Partridge said.

Again Professor Silver was impervious to the curtness of the answer.

“How’s your partner?”

Partridge softened. “Not so bad. You know, considering.”

“I never see him playing bridge anymore.”

“Well, by the time you get to that age, most of your interest in bridge has gone.”

“Suppose so. How old is he?”

“Eighty-six last July.”

“That’s a good age. Guess he doesn’t get around much.”

“Hardly at all. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to go to the dentist.”

“Okay, just dropped by to tell you that Marcia can’t make it for your game tonight, so I’ll be playing with you. Show that hand to Irving, would you, and see if he can’t find a way to make the contract. Come a few minutes early and we can talk about it. I’d be grateful for Irving’s diagnosis.”

Humphrey Partridge barely restrained himself from screaming. Then he nodded, turned inside and called up the stairs, “Bye Irving. I’ll be back in an hour.”

That evening, Humphrey and Professor Silver conferred briefly before the duplicate bridge game began.

“Did Irving find a winning line of play?” inquired Professor Silver. “I must confess, I can’t. Bruce is furious, as usual, but won’t explain. If you examine the hand, all the vital cards are badly placed. Just bad luck. What did Irving say?”

“He said to extend his condolences to Mr. Gowdy.”

Professor Silver is back!

The irascible hero of *Tales out of School*, *A Study in Silver* and *Bridge the Silver Way* is back! Watch him take on new opponents as the author finds fresh literary targets to lampoon. Yes, the man who brought us the Silver Certainty Principle, the Eastwood convention (“Do you feel lucky, partner?”) and the concept of the supremacy of the heart suit in bridge now takes aim at *The Matrix* (“Will you cut the red cards or the blue?”), *The Three Musketeers* (“All for one... that’s me!”) and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (“Have you heard of the Geneva Convention?”) to name just a few. Once again, Tim Bourke’s incomparable deals add brilliant bridge to the humor. This new collection will keep Silver aficionados laughing all the way through.



DAVID SILVER lives in Toronto, Canada. The Professor Silver books have established him as a leading bridge humorist, but he claims not to have the expertise of his fictional hero. Fans can test this for themselves by looking out for ‘profsilv’ on Bridge Base Online.

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