

A Pemberton Bridge Club Mystery



**SHADES
OF GREY**

Ken Allan

*Author of **Deadly Endplay***

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Dedication

The district of Algoma occupies a central position on the north shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior. Though I have not lived there for fifty years, I located the fictional town, Pemberton, in the middle of Algoma.

This book is dedicated to my relatives in Algoma and in particular to my sister, Joy Allan, my brother, Pat Allan, and my cousin, Lynne Flood, who make a greater effort than any of the rest of us to maintain family ties.

Acknowledgements

For the different perspectives they bring to ethics and cheating, I wish to thank the players who are quoted briefly at the beginning of each chapter.

Most of my tournament bridge has been played either with my wife, Paddy Allan, or friend, Don Kersey. My thanks for many discussions about ethics and unauthorized information and the dilemma that is unique to bridge—it is difficult to use the limited language of bridge without added color from body language, tempo or tone. And it is difficult to ignore that color. This makes it almost impossible to be completely ethical. Bidding screens help, but for club games and the majority of tournament games, screens are not practical. Without a serious attempt by all players to be ethical, these games would be a sham.

My thanks for comments from Mark and Shona Donovan, Noreen Sugarman, Rod Lindsay, Clem Nabigon, Lynne Flood, Pat Allan and Joy Allan. Thanks to Master Point Press fiction editor Suzanne Hocking for helping me make it a better story. Ray Lee has been encouraging throughout and, in the final stages, Sally Sparrow has been a pleasure to deal with.

PROLOGUE

“Bridge is the most entertaining game that the art of man has ever devised. I would have children taught it as a matter of course, just as they are taught dancing; in the end it will be more useful to them, for you cannot with seemliness continue to dance when you are bald and potbellied; nor, for that matter, can you with satisfaction to yourself or pleasure to your partner continue to play tennis or golf when you are well past middle age. But you can play bridge so long as you can sit up at a table and tell one card from another. In fact, when all else fails—sport, love, ambition—bridge remains a solace and an entertainment.”

W. Somerset Maugham

This is the second bridge novel about members of the Pemberton Duplicate Bridge Club. Pemberton is a fictional Northern Ontario town wedged into an actual landscape (north of Bruce Mines and east of Sault Ste Marie). It is a farming community with one industry, the Hamilton Brickworks, which makes bricks from a large deposit of red clay (hence local names like the Red Palace Cinema and the Red Castle Retirement Home).

The first novel, *Deadly Endplay*, was a mystery novel, but more of a howdunit than a whodunit. Furthermore, for most of the novel, whether *anyone* dunit was an open question. *Shades of Grey* is also a mystery of sorts, but the crime is cheating rather than murder. The cheaters are introduced to the reader while the detectives are still unsure if there are any cheaters, let alone who they are. Inverted whodunits do something similar—R. Austin Freeman wrote the first inverted whodunit in 1912 with his novel *The Singing Bone*. Inverted whodunits, like the Columbo television movie series, show you the crime and the criminal and then concentrate on how the detective finds the criminal and solves the crime.

At major tournaments and international competitions, cheating is often suspected, but seldom proven. At the club level, planned cheating is less common. As of spring 1997, the Pemberton Duplicate Bridge Club has gone fifty-two years without a cheating investigation. They might have gone longer were it not for an experiment by Lance Storey, owner of the Red Palace Cinema.

The Palace was built in 1909 as a vaudeville theater. In 1938, the year Lance was born, the Palace was in decline; it was purchased by Lance's father and converted to a movie theater. In the fifties, when Lance was an usher and movie manager apprentice, the Palace was a thriving business with six full-time employees. In the nineties, television and movie rentals took their toll and attendance decreased to the point where the Palace was losing money. By this time, it was a two-person operation: Betty Gates sold admission while Lance sold popcorn; then Betty took over the snack concession while Lance ran the projector.

When Betty decided to retire, Lance made plans to shut down the Palace. There was a firestorm of protest. The Palace was a Pember-ton institution. People who hadn't been to a movie in years implored Lance to reconsider. Truth be told, Lance didn't want to retire just yet, but he was being realistic—he didn't want to continue until the Palace ate up his retirement nest egg.

He decided to try something which, if successful, would allow him to stay open for a few more years. His plan was to use the honor system for collecting the admission fee and for selling popcorn. This plan was the subject of a front page story in the *Pemberton Chronicle*. Lance announced that the Palace would stay open for as long as the honor system was respected and attendance covered expenses. While people in small towns are no more virtuous than their cousins in the big city, there were grounds for hoping this might work. First and foremost, it is impossible to be anonymous in a small town and, for those who are tempted to sneak into the movies, the embarrassment of discovery is a deterrent. Also, most of the citizens of Pemberton knew Lance personally or had gone to school with his children or grandchildren. If they cheated, they would be cheating a man they knew and liked, not some faceless millionaire from Southern Ontario. Realistically, Lance expected to be retiring within the year.

Three years later, the Palace was still operating. Regular patrons were consulted about what movies to show and they felt like participants in the operation of the theater. The honor system had been embraced.

The Pemberton Chronicle

Thursday, March 20, 1997

THE JAY'S NEST

HESITATION ETHICS

by Jane Seabrook

Dealer West
N-S Vul.

Lisa

♠ K 10 9 3

♥ K 10 9 4

♦ 10 3

♣ A Q 5

Jay

♠ A 5 4 2

♥ Q J

♦ A K J 9 5

♣ 9 8



Sadie

♠ Q 7

♥ 7 2

♦ Q 7 4 2

♣ J 6 4 3 2

James

♠ J 8 6

♥ A 8 6 5 3

♦ 8 6

♣ K 10 7

West	North	East	South
1♦	dbl	pass	2♥
all pass			

Opening lead: ♠2

When I asked Sadie what she would like for her ninetieth birthday, she said, "Why a game with you, Jay, of course." I'm not used to being anybody's special treat, so I said yes before she came to her senses.

We played this deal against James and Lisa. I opened 1♦, Lisa doubled, and Sadie took a full min-

ute to decide on a pass. At least, she seemed to be deciding what to bid. She has become a little absent-minded and may not have noticed it was her turn.

James jumped to 2♥. Then he turned to me and said, "I assume you agree that your partner hesitated before passing."

"Yes, she did. But she is ninety, so I think she is entitled to take whatever time she needs."

"Of course," said James. "Thinking is allowed, even for those of us who are not yet ninety. This game we play would not be much of a game if you didn't have to think once in a while. We never penalize anyone for thinking. The difficulty for you, as Sadie's partner, is that when you consider your bid, you cannot take into account the fact that she had something to think about. In other words, you must be careful not to make a bid that is suggested by your partner's hesitation."

"So I have to pass?"

"Not necessarily. If you have an obvious bid that you would have made without the hesitation, then you should still make it. But if you have two reasonable choices, and the hesitation makes one of them seem better, then you are obliged to choose the other one."

I'm not sure I like the idea that I am required to choose an inferior bid. I make enough such bids with-

out any help from the hesitation police. Still, I wanted to be ethical. It's just I had no idea what I would have done without the hesitation. By the time I was considering my options, Sadie's hesitation was firmly planted in my head. I finally decided that "pass" would have been an option and it certainly seemed like an inferior option, so it must be what I should do this time. Besides, Sadie could always balance if she really had something. At her turn to bid, Sadie, wanting no part of James, passed like a shot.

As I considered my opening lead, I had an unpleasant thought. If Sadie's hesitation suggested a par-

ticular lead, I suppose I should avoid that as well. My best guess was that Sadie had diamonds. So I led my fourth best spade. Oops. I had just underled an ace at a suit contract. The Professor would not be pleased.

James called for a small spade from dummy. Sadie shrugged and played her queen. It won. Sadie is slowing down a bit—it took her the better part of a second to figure out why her queen had won. She returned a little spade. I won and gave her a ruff. We cashed two diamonds.

2♥ just making was a minus for us, but it was the smallest minus on the traveler—in other words—a top. Seldom has virtue felt so good.

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The members of the Pemberton Bridge Club, along with the wickedly funny Jay's Nest bridge columns, were first introduced in Ken Allan's debut novel, *Deadly Endplay*. This sequel addresses something worse, for the bridge players, than a mysterious death—the growing suspicion that someone in their midst is systematically cheating. When retired policeman Dan Cogan begins to investigate, he finds himself confronting such issues as: Is there a clear distinction between dubious ethics and cheating? Can you prove cheating from hand records? And if you can, what should the consequences be? Finally, why do people cheat at duplicate bridge, a game that offers no monetary rewards? There are no easy answers—only shades of grey.

PRAISE FOR 'DEADLY ENDPLAY'

'This book will resonate with you long after you read it.'

Glen Ashton

'Way better than most bridge fiction. [Ken Allan's] character development is excellent, and the way he interweaves the bridge deals to accomplish this is also excellent.'

ACBL Bulletin



KEN ALLAN (Kingston, Ontario, Canada) is an expert bridge player with many Regional wins. This is his second bridge book.



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