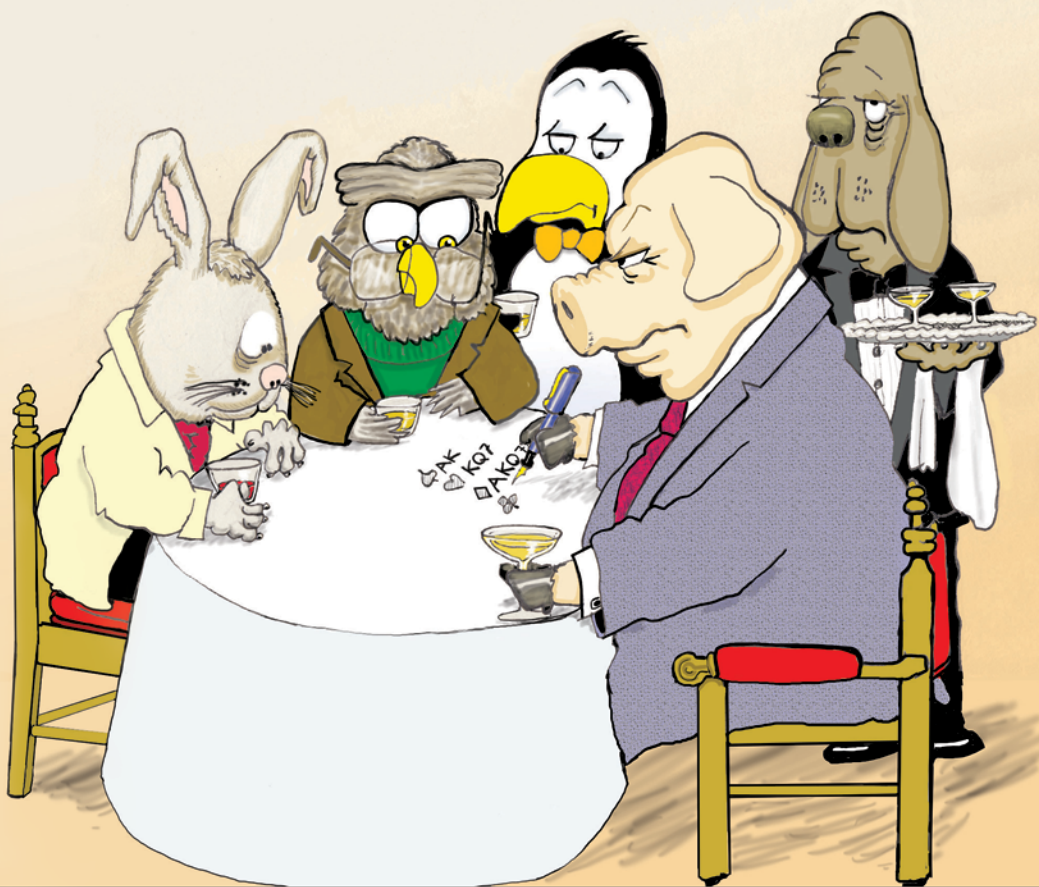


Victor Mollo

# DIA MONDS

Are the Hog's Best Friend



A new collection of original Menagerie stories

Victor Mollo

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Are the Hog's Best Friend



Master Point Press • Toronto, Canada

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# Publisher's Foreword

If by chance this is your first encounter with the Hog, the Rabbit, the Owl and all the rest of Mollo's wonderful characters, we envy you the joy of discovering them. Do not fail to find a copy of *Bridge in the Menagerie*, the book which began it all (now back in print at last!) and read this remarkable series from its very start. It is, correctly, the yardstick against which all other attempts at humorous bridge writing are measured.

This is one of four new collections of original Victor Mollo Menagerie stories, none of which have previously appeared in book form. *The Hog Takes to Precision* was published in 2011, *Swings and Arrows* will be available in 2014 and the final volume, *Last Call in the Menagerie*, will appear the following year.

Ray Lee  
Master Point Press  
July 2013



## SEARCHING FOR VICTOR MOLLO

Mark Horton, the editor of these latest Mollo books, has asked me to write about how these stories made it back into print. I was not part of the research that unearthed the scores of stories, but I did play a large part in taking those articles and getting them into a state whereby they could be included in this collection. Why, I hear you ask, was I selected for this onerous task? There were two reasons: firstly, I have a computer, a scanner and OCR software; secondly, I could not find a reason to say ‘no’ quickly enough.

The articles arrived in many formats: some in magazines, both small and large format, some as pdf files on disk and others as poor photocopies of the original Mollo typed stories. The actual physical process of scanning the documents represented no great problem, though the somewhat cheap OCR software I was using struggled considerably with hand diagrams and obviously the lower quality the photocopy the less accurate the character recognition. Thus the conversion to digital form was carried out as a fairly laborious manual process and took me about a hundred hours.

This, however, is by no means all there was to it. After reading about four or five articles, I got the feeling that I had seen one story somewhere else. The question was how to verify this. The reason I thought I recognized the story was that I am a bit of a ‘Mollo-holic’ — I have read and reread all the Menagerie stories many times (in fact I have actually hosted a dinner party where the dishes all came from the Mollo books) — so I tended to notice a repeat. So now the problem was how to develop a strategy to find any duplicates, and of course the answer was not to flick through all the books every time one had a nagging doubt. The solution I adopted was to create a database of all the deals in the existing Mollo books. Inspection revealed that noting the North spade holding would be a sufficient amount of data to rule out a large percentage of the deals as being a repetition.

So in the space of a morning I created an Access database of 372 hand records along with associated tables about the books so as to keep the database normalized according to Codd. Edgar F. Codd (August 23, 1923 — April 18, 2003) was the person who first codified rules for true relational databases; they are known as ‘Codd’s twelve rules’ which of course means there are thirteen of them, numbered from zero to twelve. This ends the nerd interlude. A query form was set up so one could simply interrogate the database to see whether the North hand was unique; if it was not, then further research was undertaken. This approach removed a lot of the potential problems.

But not all. Just to confuse the issue further, there were cases where in two articles the deals were the same but the text was different and even a case where the texts were virtually the same but the deals different. And of course there were cases where the hands were rotated, e.g. North became South, etc., and also instances where the suits were manipulated, i.e. hearts and spades were interchanged. Only personal inspection and a thorough knowledge of all the articles brought these episodes to light. Am I sure we have a perfect solution? No, there is one deal that still nags me though I have reread everything and cannot find the duplicate; deep down I know I have seen it somewhere before but just do not know where.

So there you have it: that is how the Menagerie stories went from pieces of paper through various computers before reappearing on paper in this book. I hope you enjoy reading them, I know one of the reasons sometimes things took longer than they should is that I stopped to reread some interesting snippet. I can now say with some confidence that there are not many people out there who have read more Menagerie stories than I have, and I still look forward to rereading them all over again. Now excuse me while I go off and get some more chocolate and almond biscuits.

*Ron Tacchi*  
*Vaupillon, February 2012*

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# The Chimp Joins the Griffins



‘What’s he like?’ asked the Emeritus Professor of Bio-Sophistry, generally known at the Griffins as the Secretary Bird.

‘Clueless, quite clueless,’ replied Colin the Corgi.

We were discussing a new member, Charlie the Chimp, who had been playing at Colin’s table during the afternoon session. His name wasn’t really Charlie, but he looked like one and there was something distinctly simian about the way he jabbered and grimaced and waved his long hairy arms. Besides, he had to be addressed somehow and one couldn’t keep on saying: ‘No hearts, Mr. Bolvan-Bolvanovitch?’ or ‘Would you draw your card, Mr. Bolvan-Bolvanovitch?’

‘And not only is he clueless,’ went on C.C., ‘but his eye is never on the ball. He is always prattling about hands that came up yesterday or the day before, or last year for that matter. There can be little doubt,’ concluded Colin, ‘that he will be a big and consistent loser.’

‘Sounds a pleasant, unselfish sort of chap,’ said the Hog approvingly. ‘Clubbable and all that. Did you... er... form the impression, Colin,’ went on H.H., ‘that he is a man of substance?’

‘Wouldn’t like to say,’ replied the Corgi cautiously. ‘He was driving his Rolls himself when he arrived, but that’s nothing to go by, of course. His chauffeur might have been having a day off or something.’

As we made our way to the card-room, the evening session was already in full swing.

‘But I had nineteen, I tell you!’ the Walrus was blaring across the room, ‘and I would have got out of it for two down if the trumps had broken no worse than 3-2. What could I do against all six in one hand?’

Whatever disaster had befallen Walter the Walrus, Charlie the Chimp, his right-hand opponent, seemed to be taking it very well.

‘It’s like a hand my wife had on Tuesday,’ he was saying. ‘She went four down just as you did, but it would have been five down had I switched to a diamond, because...’ The rubber was over the next hand.

The Hog and S.B., who now joined the table, drew each other, while the Chimp faced the Rabbit.

‘What shall we play?’ asked Charlie.

‘Everything,’ replied R.R. enthusiastically, ‘Swiss, Baron, Fishbein, Texas, Flint...’

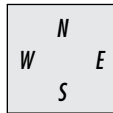
‘Yes, yes,’ broke in the Chimp, ‘my brother met him at a congress in Harrogate last year, no sorry, it was Blackpool. They had a hand on which...’

‘We play the usual,’ announced the Hideous Hog in stentorian tones, to break up the Blackpool hand before it got under way.

‘That means the Forcing H.H.’ explained S.B. with a wry smile. ‘We all play that here, you know. We have to.’ There was a menacing gleam behind the pince-nez and the cold, bloodless lips curved down in a meaningful sneer.

It was not long before the Professor showed us what was in his mind.

♠ 10 3 2  
 ♥ 10 9  
 ♦ A 3 2  
 ♣ A K Q 6 2



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

West	North	East	South
<i>Ch.Ch.</i>	<i>H.H.</i>	<i>R.R.</i>	<i>S.B.</i>
	1♣	pass	1♦
1♠	2♣	pass	3NT
all pass			

S.B. was practicing, or rather usurping, the H.H. system. He had every intention of playing the hand — and of not getting a diamond lead. Hence the typical Hog response of 1♦.

Charlie the Chimp opened the ♦K and the Secretary Bird hissed. When the Hog bid a suit he did not want led, people had the decency to

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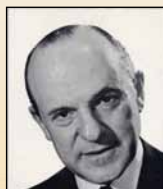
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## GENERAL INTEREST

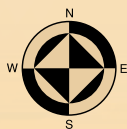
'I am sure I could devise a system that no one would understand. Perhaps I've been playing one all along without knowing it.'

Just about every bridge player over forty has read Victor Mollo's *Bridge in the Menagerie*, a book that is on any list of the all-time top ten on the game. Towards the end of his life, Mollo continued to write stories about the same well-loved characters (the Hideous Hog, the Rueful Rabbit, Oscar the Owl and the rest), but they appeared in various magazines around the world, and if you weren't a subscriber, you didn't get to read them.

This is the second Master Point Press collection of these lost Menagerie gems, appearing here for the first time in book form (following *The Hog Takes To Precision* in 2011).



**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 (including the classic *Card Play Technique*, with Nico Gardener) but it is as a humorist, and the author of *Bridge in the Menagerie* and its sequels, that he is best remembered.



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