

The Fish-Father

By Rikard Greenberg House Cat

The smell was out of this world: thick yellow clouds with a tangy fishy odor so strong that they could knock you down flat were hanging above as we entered the large building.

Welcome to the Yochanan Fish Factory everybody! This was going to be my designated residence for the next two months, courtesy of the Feline City Court and its presiding judge.

As soon as I arrived, I got a 30 minutes crash course on the rules and regulations of the place as well as the critical subjects of fish cleaning and packing, I was issued a uniform, bedding sheets and sent on my way.

The following morning I was shown to my new task: to wash and prepare an endless supply of fish before it is cooked and sold as tinned "gefillte fish". The worst though was not being able to taste any of it! As for food, at the end of the day we had to queue up for a bowl of soup and some dried biscuits... yuk!

After a while I noticed that a few of my fellow inmates never showed up for dinner and yet seemed always in a jolly good mood in the evening. Undeterred by silly proverbs such as "Curiosity killed the cat", I tried to find out more and thanks to my newly found friends, Trill and Troll, a cheerful pair of Siamese who had the annoying habit of completing each other's sentences, I was introduced to Alfio, the Sicilian Chef in charge of the kitchen, a plump street cat with a wicked smile and a mad passion for gambling and card games.

I immediately seized the opportunity and shared with him my dream: to dedicate to him the soon-to-be opened "Fish-Father's Bridge Club", where all the inmates could learn and practice the game under my expert supervision. What was in it for me? Just a regular supply of trout, sea-bass, mackerel and whatever else he could lay his hands on. An enthusiastic meoow and a strong paw-shake settled the deal. Thanks to Alfio's influence I was excused from my job and I dedicated all my efforts

in getting the club up and running.

At the start it was pretty tough: I had a really hard time teaching bridge to a bunch of unruly cats who were attending my classes merely to escape their dreary jobs in the fish factory. The club evening tournaments became soon full of loud arguments which often turned into nasty fights between players. Looking at the awful rows taking place again and again, I could not help wondering how is it possible that a social game like bridge seemed always to attract all sorts of anti-social people!

At the end of the week we would have a "Management meeting" with Alfio to discuss the club's affairs and future plans and this would often lead to a few hours of very competitive bridge with myself and Alfio playing versus my valid assistants, Trill and Troll.

This hand from our last session will show you that my game was still as sharp as ever:



Dealer South, Both Vul

	♠ J53	
	♥ J1096	
	♦ AQ104	
	♣ K9	
♠ K1092		♠ A87
♥ A73		♥ 52
♦ 63		♦ 875
♣ 10632		♣ J8754
	♠ Q64	
	♥ KQ84	
	♦ KJ92	
	♣ AQ	



West	North	East	South
Trill	Alfio	Troll	Myself
			1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

Lead: ♦6

Things did not look too well: apart from the ace of trumps, I had probably three losers in the spade suit, unless I found AK of spades in East (West cannot have ♠AK as he would have led one) or I could somehow convince the opponents to play the suit for me.

I took the lead in dummy with the ♦10 and then played the ♥J from dummy, hoping that whoever had the ♥A would decide to play on spades, for fear that I might discard one on the diamonds. Unfortunately Trill took his ♥A and, after some thought, played back another diamond.

I took out trumps, making sure to remain in dummy and it seemed that all that was left for me to do was to hope that East held both ♠AK in order for me to get a spade trick and make the contract.

Could you think of a better plan?

I quickly realized that I had a much better option: the chance of East holding both spade honors is only 25% (since half the time each opponent will have one honor) but if I played the ♠J from dummy, as if I held K10x in hand and intended to finesse for the ♠Q, East would surely play low with the ♠A in his hand to keep me guessing. West would now win his ♠K and return a club or a diamond. Now I could play another spade towards the ♠Q and make a trick not only when both spade honors were in East but also when East had the ♠A, a much better chance!

As you can see, the layout proved me right and Alfio was so delighted with my play that he treated us to a very tasty salmon steak!