

The expert game

By Rikard Greenberg House cat



It was a dark and stormy night, thunders and lightning striking repeatedly in a crescendo which barely allowed me to hear what was going on around me. The old, decrepit floor boards creaked under my paws with a noise all the more sinister because of the ghostly surroundings. I finally found Prissy. She was tied up to a chair next to my eternal foe, the evil Felix, surrounded by his minions. He glanced with disdain at my hateful eyes and asked: "Took you long enough to find me. So shall we make a game of it? Winner takes all, Prissy, your life or mine." I did not even bother to reply, I gave him my "Siberian chilling stare" and I sat down. Prissy was to be my partner, while one of Felix's stooges sat opposite him.

In this deadly critical time luck did not desert me as I slowly picked up an amazing collection:

♠ AKQJ10
♥ AK
♦ AKQ
♣ AKQ

I turned around to face Felix, sporting my best "devil may care" look and asked him: "So just this hand, right? Whoever gets a plus wins everything". When he confirmed the deal, I murmured softly my opening bid: "7NT." Prissy looked at me as if I were crazy. "Did you.. ahem...say 7NT??" I calmly nodded. To my surprise Felix doubled, I redoubled with relish and asked him to lead.

He quickly did so, dummy went down with the expected Yarborough and only then I noticed that the lead was a strange green card with the features of an ugly looking cat.

Puzzled, I looked at it for some time and only barely heard Prissy's asking: "Having no Felixes partner?"

That's when I usually wake up screaming.

Cold sweat running all over me, shaking with fear at the thought of my impending loss, this nightmare has been haunting me for the whole fortnight leading to the National Pairs Final. Well at least it should soon be over. In three hours time I will be sitting with my sweet Prissy amongst this country best bridge playing felines ready to make a fool of myself. My sweet darling will probably be so embarrassed by our poor results that she will never lay an eye on me again.

I have been trying to cushion the blow, to explain to her that, yes, we did very well up to now, but that we are really bungling amateurs and that there are cats who are playing bridge professionally, who breathe bridge day and night, against whom all we can hope for is to play our best and learn from our mistakes. Such cogent points would merely spark her gorgeous laughter and be dismissed with: "Come, come, Rik Rik, don't play modest with me, I know that you are the best player in the country by far, we will show these pro...professionals that they are the ones who need to take lessons!"

Hopeless, right?

I tried to convince myself that there might a little bit of truth in what she said, after all I am not a bad player and maybe with a bit of luck and some help from the opponents there might be a chance to scrape a face-saving average score. But I had to get to know better my competition so I started to frequent regularly the bridge evenings at the "Aristocats", trying to finally catch a glimpse of these famous experts I kept reading about in most of Hana's well stocked bridge library.

Finally one day I heard that Sly Sylvester would be visiting the club to autograph copies of his new book and to play in the evening duplicate.

I managed to convince Tipshon to play (I know, I know but one cannot be too

choosy in selecting last minute partners) and, after a few tins of tuna changed hands, we got a place at Sly's table.

The first hand was a 3NT contract in which Sly's partner, a grossly overweight angora, managed to take minimum tricks. I held back expecting a stream of reproaches but what I heard instead was: "Beautifully played, darling, it was only their excellent defense that stopped getting us a top. Keep it up."

I looked at him in amazement. Why did he not tell the silly angora how atrociously she had played? Isn't that what an expert player is supposed to do? Show people what they do wrong?

I shook my head in disbelief and picked up my hand:

♠ K976
♥ 653
♦ 1097
♣ 864

Truly exciting stuff, I thought to myself.

The bidding was very quick:

Dlr S – All Vul

West	North	East	South
Me	Angora	Tipshon	Sly
			2♣
Pass	2♦	Pass	3NT
Pass	4NT	Pass	6NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

What to do, what to do... I led the ♦10 and this is what I could see:

♠ QJ84
♥ 84
♦ KJ5
♣ 9752

♠ K976
♥ 653
♦ 1097
♣ 864

N
W S E

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