

AN HONORS eBook FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

Mike Dorn Wiss

Shadow in the Bridge World

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For my Zaida, Henry Lehrer, a lucky cardholder who was a century young in 1992 when this book was first published.

Thanks a whole bunch to:

Fred Gitelman for hand analyses,

Ray Spalding for Bridge Composer,

& Caroline Huhn for placing the burr under my saddle.

Author photo by Rupert "Rupe" Cunningham

CLAIMER

Any resemblance to characters living or dead is probably intentional and not likely coincidental. Any litigation should be directed to the author's attorney, bearing in mind the difficulties inherent in getting blood from stones.

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*Previously published in slightly different form in the Ontario KIBITZER, and reprinted with permission of the editor, John Armstrong

**Previously published in slightly different form in BRIDGE CANADA and reprinted with permission of the editor, Neil Kimelman.

Reviews

Eric Kokish/*The Montreal Gazette* - "Take a romp down the Yellow Bridge Road with Mike Dorn Wiss and his multi-talented friend Alan (the Shadow); meet lots of interesting people, experience some unusual slices of Life, and encounter some first-class bridge hands... if you like your bridge in certain settings you will enjoy meeting the Shadow and going on the road with Wiss; it is that sort of book."

Fred Gitelman/Las Vegas - "'Shadow In The Bridge World' is my all-time favorite work of bridge fiction. Mike, my original bridge mentor, has created a highly entertaining book that is packed with fascinating deals, great stories, and wonderful characters. Expect to do a lot of laughing out loud when you read (and reread) this book!"

Mike Passell/Las Vegas - "I recommend 'Shadow' to every bridge player. Both the writing and bridge hands are first rate. This is the only bridge book I have ever read from cover to cover. I thoroughly enjoyed it."

Rhoda Walsh/Palm Desert - "Shadow is superb! The characters are enchanting and the hands to die for...I truly couldn't put it down."

Zia/Man About World - "Boy, you can really write!"

Edgar Kaplan/*The Bridge World* - "Intriguing characters... Most of the deals that matter are on an advanced level. This is a book for sophisticated bridge players who long to step temporarily out of their everyday existences."

Alan Truscott/*The New York Times* - "The writing and the deals are lively, giving an entertaining picture of the tournament world."

Phillip Alder/*Newspaper Enterprise Assn.* - "If you like reading bridge books containing entertaining but difficult hands that really happened, you'll want to buy Shadow In The Bridge World, (this is) a shadow with substance."

Paul Soloway/Mill Creek, Washington - "Mike, you have my endorsement; it brought back memories starting out as a pro; I enjoyed it."

George Mittelman/Toronto - "Excellent writing and fun characters; belongs next to Reese in the bathroom book bin where re-reading is guaranteed."

Allan Falk/Okemos, Michigan - "I read *Shadow In The Bridge World* in one day, while on the airplane returning from the Seattle NABC and had to finish it before I turned out the light to go to sleep."

John Armstrong/Ontario Kibitzer - "Marvelous fun! Mike's inimitable, personal, breezy style makes this a wonderful read. Lots of hands, enjoyable play, psychologically instructive bidding. I hooted with glee at the way the 'Shadow' turned the opponents inside out, especially a pair of cheaters in a rubber game (in Hawaii)."

Ted Horning/Toronto Star Syndicate - "I enjoyed the *Shadow*. *Wiss* is himself in the book, and unlike some writers, he self-portrays perfectly. I recommend it to advanced players who will enjoy the hands and readers who appreciate a 'cool' hero and entertaining stories."

Bruce McIntyre/Vancouver Matchpointer - "A new hero works his table magic."

Linda Lee/Canadian Masterpoint - "I was prepared to hate the 'Shadow' after he was described as both wealthy and accomplished at all he does, but it was impossible to do so. *Wiss* and the *Shadow* just have too much fun together; their bridge is just too good and too interesting. *Shadow* in the *Bridge World* is a great read. The writing is entertaining, the many characters true to life (and rumoured to all be real) and the bridge stories amusing and the hands instructive."

Gabriel Chagas/Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - "Congratulations for a light and agreeable book bearing some interesting hands."

Geoff Hampson/Las Vegas - "Mike is a wonderful writer and the *Shadow* a compelling and interesting character. The book is a fun romp through the world of bridge."

Bill Gates/Redmond, Washington - "*Shadow* is a very clever book, full of amazing bridge hands. If you like to read and you like bridge you will enjoy this."

Rhonda Foster/Vancouver - "I've never read a bridge book in my life, and I'm not about to start now."

* * *

Introduction



IF YOU WERE TO ASK, I WOULDN'T GIVE you a straight answer. If I gave you a straight answer, it would probably be a lie. Perhaps that sounds as if I were running for office. In reality, I'm simply protecting the privacy of a friend.

I've known Alan (which is the name I'm going to give him; if I were you, I wouldn't bet the farm it's his real one) since we were frosh at the University of Saskatchewan. We had actually met two years previous while playing golf in a high school tournament, where I'd beaten him for the first (and last) time in my life, but it wasn't until we shared classes in university that we became close friends. He had had the good fortune to have been born with a platinum spoon for every orifice, and parents who, as he grew, never let the recognition that he was more advantaged than his peers go to his head. Even had he been born broke, he was blessed with brains the least humble Mensian would have envied (only a slight exaggeration), and, as he matured, physical attributes that let him excel at the many sports he enjoyed.

We remained in touch the following year when I moved to the Twin Cities in naive pursuit of a young model whose legs began somewhere in the vicinity of her ears. While I was off stupidly eloping in Escanaba, he was suffering the

tragedy of losing both his parents to an accident, one of simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was forced to drop out of school to raise his sister, and to take over the responsibility of a business that was growing faster than a culture of bacteria.

It wasn't too many years before his sister was out of high school and into college, college boys, and the illusion of independence. Alan sold the business, and simply retired. Rich, healthy, young, and possessing all the time in the world, he devoted himself to sport, and the sports that he loved. Golf and tennis and badminton; sailing, surfing, and soaring; curling and bowling; chess and bridge and go. Individual and intellectual sports were his choices, those where he could fail or succeed, and sometimes excel, alone. Those where he could be responsible only for his own performance.

The unique, the amazing thing about Alan is that he is known and recognized as an expert in each sport and by every peer. He's won two pro golf tournaments (okay, not on the PGA), a PBA bowling title, a bronze medal in the '68 Winter Olympics, a state chess tourney, a dozen regionals (and a national) at bridge, beaten Laver in a tennis match in Australia, Trevino in a ten dollar Nassau in Albuquerque... the list goes on. Characteristically he humbly insists he loses a lot more than he wins.

Now if you've been paying attention you'll be wondering why you haven't heard of this man, why this incredible real-life Plimpton (*with* talent) hasn't been heralded on network television or the covers of national magazines. Simple, really. Alan abhors publicity, and actively shuns it with the use of one of the many skills he has mastered... the art of disguise.

Three weeks under the tutelage of one of Hollywood's top makeup artists, months of practice, a gift for mimicry, and a knack for picking great names out of telephone books have kept Alan invisible as he plays his personal game of hopscotch between sports. You know him, but you don't know him.

Like a Shadow he slips silently from sport to sport, seen but unrecognized, recognized but unknown, altering his name and appearance, his dress and demeanor, to succeed and survive in the social strata that layer each sport. Anonymity, after all, is the key to the survival of his lifestyle. To remove its cloak and bare not only his many accomplishments, but also his wealth and the looks to turn the head of any lady under eighty, or perhaps just any one under the stars, and what you have is not anonymity. What you have is the cover of People magazine.

“So,” the Shadow asked me, “what do you see as the *essence* of the sport? Surely not winning...”

“No?” I teased.

“No. Nor its resultant end products, be they money, prestige, or, perish the thought, monkey points. If you were that interested in winning, you’d be playing on teams where you were the worst player, not doing just the opposite.” He lifted the shot of Glenfiddich to his lips, sipped at it while he studied me from under his brow. I remained obstinately silent; such questions were usually rhetorical. “Perhaps,” he went on, “it’s the competitive or the social aspects. Bridge isn’t unique in its ability to combine the two, although it certainly does it in a unique manner. Maybe, Mikey,” he poked, “you play it only for fun, as a game, a pastime, and not as a sport.”

“Perish the thought,” I said. The Shadow smiled.

“I didn’t mean it to appear as if I were chiding you.” He chuckled and placed his glass carefully on the centre of his napkin.

I always liked his use of the subjunctive. I rarely give serious thought to such comments, from anybody. In the Shadow’s case they are merely indicative of his sensitivity and honest concern for the feelings of others. Empathy is not a word foreign to his vocabulary. But when it comes to his friends, and also to the odd friendly acquaintance, he is forever deriving entertainment from verbal pokes that skirt the edges of fair play, or occasionally even good taste; conscious and constant comments designed to test, to define one’s everchanging states of being through his personal interpretations of reactions to his proddings. I cunningly counter this foible by simply refusing to react. I therefore stared at him blankly, and waited.

Tiring of my patience, he picked up his scotch and tossed it back in a single motion. “Let me put it another way,” he said. “What is the essence of bridge that makes it such a poignant microcosm of life?” He looked directly into my eyes. It was like staring through Paul Newman’s baby blues into the soul of Rasputin.

“This isn’t one of your typical philosophical discourses in barroom drivel, is it? You really *do* want an answer.”

“I run my life by the answer,” he said, “and you are my friend. What you think *is* important to me.”

Well, ‘Alan’, it has taken me fifteen years to give you my answer. And since bridge, like life, is a composition of infinite variety, any answer can be only partial, and forever incomplete. I hope you dig it, good buddy...



Shadow Cruising



I LOST THREE DAYS OF THE HAWAII Regional at a Thanksgiving luau in Lahaina. It was the New Year, of course, and not Thanksgiving, but then we were luauing a turkey, not a porker, and we were giving thanks to the camaraderie that brought us together, not toasting a time of year that in Hawaii is very much like any other time of year.

The turkey was decorated with slabs of yam and chunks of pineapple the size of a preschooler's fist, and was served with papaya punch and a salad decorated with thin strips of avocado and smothered with special Hana mushrooms. Shared with good company the combination was too strong for even the pull of bridge to budge.

A courtesy call to the Shadow's hotel room in Honolulu changed all that.

"Wiss, you jerk! I've been looking for you for days. Where the hell are you?"

"Lahaina. Still enjoying the leftovers of a luau with some friends."

"Well, grab the first flight out of Kapalua and get your ass over here. You're working."

"Working?"

In those halcyon days of owning fewer than four digits of ACBL attendance/participation/reward points I was sometimes in demand as a minor pro, being somewhat of a minor expert. Now that I must admit to possessing at least one fractional over the magic minimum of the day I am less in demand, being a minor expert still.

“I got you a client for the Bee Open.”

“No kidding?”

“Fifty a session; not great.”

“Less your personal agent’s fee?”

“A mere seventy-five percent, but if you do well there’s a helluva bonus.”

“Client is a tall and foxy redhead?”

“More like Methuselah’s granduncle.”

“*That’s* graphic. Must be some bonus.”

“How about an island cruise? He and his cronies have chartered a yacht, Honolulu to Kailua-Kona, nickel rubber and good food and drink all the way. All you have to do to get in is not offend him, which in your case, I’ll admit, is not a trivial request. Do well and you may get to wear the Cap’n’s cap.”

“Sounds great. What’s he like?”

“One of the nicest old gents you’ll ever meet. Reminds me of Otto Leesment.”

“Otto? I’ve played with Otto, numerous times, back when I was a thirty-year-old rookie.”

“Yes,” the Shadow drawled, “he *was* a patient fellow. So’s Francis here, but other than that and a physical resemblance the similarities end there. His doc banished him to a wheelchair fifteen years ago, so he changed docs. Still walks with two canes. (Great, a thought flashed insanely, North-South both sessions!) Says he’ll climb in his grave before he climbs in a wheelchair.”

“Sounds like he might get notrumps in before me a bit too often.”

“Maybe. He can be stubborn all right, but he’s not a bad player. He didn’t take the game up until he was seventy and he’s determined to get his gold card before he croaks.”

“No kidding? That’s great. Think he’ll make it?”

There was a slight pause on the line. “Maybe,” Alan said again.

* * *

Francis was a kindly old gent, just as the Shadow had said. Some people that age get cranky, mostly because of aches and pains, and some get downright bitter, mostly because they haven’t dealt with mortality or are pissed off at themselves that they didn’t do it sooner, but my bridge partner of the day was not of either ilk. Rather he reveled in life, not seeming to care if he had a minute left or a decade. The card gods seem to favour such people. He kept raising me on wings and prayers and his angels kept coming home on both. Twice the opponents misdefended double-dummy to hand us unmakeable contracts, both played from the wrong side – mine. Three times he bid non-suits in an effort to get me to play the hand, each time for an average or better result. The odds began to catch up with us midway through the session, but that was just about the time I began to smarten up and underbid my hands by a queen or so. We finally meandered in with a 209 and Francis had four goldies for his section top and ten years more youth in each leg as we headed for a light dinner.

“Know something?” he said over a salad, “I was kinda testing you this afternoon. I coulda bid notrumps a few times but I wanted to see how you handled some tough ones. Didn’t expect us to do so well, actually. We had luck, didn’t we?”

“Yessir. Quite a bit.” I smiled and shrugged.

“You call me Francis. Tell me... what do you think of my game?”

“Well... Francis, you don’t do anything great, but more importantly, you don’t do anything really bad. One of the marks of a good player is consistency, and those making the fewest mistakes do best. Your tempo’s pretty good, but it’d be better if you thought in advance what card an opponent might play to give you a problem. Your concentration is real good. I could learn from you in that department.”

“Thanks. You expect we’ll do well tonight?”

FICTION

The Shadow is a mysterious expert (at bridge, as well as many other sports) whose passion for anonymity means that you have never heard of him. The author is his friend, and under strict rules of concealment of the Shadow's identity, has been allowed to share these fascinating and instructive anecdotes with the world. Originally published more than 30 years ago, this edition is revised and expanded.

Reviews of the first edition:

"Shadow In the Bridge World" is my all-time favorite work of bridge fiction... a highly entertaining book packed with fascinating deals, great stories, and wonderful characters.

Fred Gitelman

"I enjoyed the Shadow. Wiss is himself in the book, and unlike some writers, he self-portrays perfectly."

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John Armstrong, *Ontario Kibitzer*

"This is the only bridge book I have ever read from cover to cover. I thoroughly enjoyed it."

Mike Passell

"Boy, you can really write!"

Zia Mahmood



MIKE DORN WISS is a professional bridge player, writer and teacher who splits his time between Canada and Thailand.



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