

THE VON IMPSKI FILES

My name is Count Raimondo Von Impski. Friends call me RAY for short, others call me Ray Von which they think is more meaningful, and others still are more respectful and call me 'THE COUNT'. My history dates back to my home country of Translatvania, and my bridge, well, THAT seems to date back to prehistoric times, according to many of our so called experts. Unfortunately for THEM, I'm the one who's going to have the last laugh, because I'm the one writing these stories, which, if you'll bear with me, you'll find not only edifying but somewhat amusing also from time to time. I HOPE!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	3
THE TEAMS MATCH	3
CHAPTER 2	5
WE'RE MOTORING	5
CHAPTER 3	7
NO TRUMP MAGIC	7
<i>BOARD 7 DLR ALL VUL</i>	<i>8</i>
CHAPTER 4	9
THE RABBIT PUNCH	9
<i>DLR N EW VUL</i>	<i>9</i>
CHAPTER 5	10
HIGH SOCIETY	10
<i>BOARD 15 DLR S NS VUL</i>	<i>10</i>
CHAPTER 6	12
TRANSFER THE CHARGES	12
<i>BOARD 21 DLR N NS VUL</i>	<i>12</i>

CHAPTER 1

THE TEAMS MATCH

We were playing 16 Board teams matches and after the first eight had a slight lead. The next eight needed to be good ones for us to make the final, but then, against THAT team, we should already have been 30 or so up after the first eight! Board 9, Dealer North, and EW VULNERABLE; I was sitting East and this was my hand:

♠ 8 6 5 4 ♥ A 9 ♦ K 9 8 4 ♣ A Q J

Dear old lady North opened 1NT. Tempting to double, but let's not get too hasty I thought, and passed. Lady South bid 2C and North responded 2H. South raised to 3H, but then the bidding took a slightly unexpected turn: North bid 3S and South now bid 3NT! There must have been SOME subtle reason for this bidding, but the only explanation available was that: "we're just simple people playing a simple system". Oh well, seems like a diamond lead is a stand out, so I led one. Dummy went down with:

♠ K 9 3 ♥ J 7 6 2 ♦ A J 10 7 6 ♣ 5

Lady South was certainly a bit pushy, but once North had shown hearts and then bid spades, I could see why South had bid 3NT, opting for the somewhat eccentric 9 trick game. When the diamond ran to the queen and declarer took two more finesses using spade entries to hand and thus wrapping up nine tricks, I almost felt a sneaky admiration for the old birds! Never mind, maybe our team mates will make 4H if they take the right view in the heart suit, I thought, but there wasn't any time for post mortems so on with the next hand. THAT went quite well for us, and after the next six it looked like we had a reasonable win. Had we done enough? A full 15 minutes after WE had finished, our slowcoach teammates arrived to compare scores. The first hand was the only one that really interested me.

"3NT making 3 at our table, I said. How about you?"

"Yep, same here," said Hank, "the diamond lead was rather unfortunate".

"Yes, I DID consider leading something else," I tried to show how clever I might have been.

"What do you mean?" Hank sounded somewhat perplexed, "I'M the one who led the diamond!"

"WHHHAAT," I croaked, " don't tell me we both played the same way. C'mon, we're surely not THAT stupid, when we needed a decent win?" Yes, sure enough, there it was: 3NT making 3 with an "x" (denoting a low card the way things were done in this club) diamond lead. The only difference was that on HANK'S score card the score was 600 to THE OPPONENTS!! And on OURS it was 400 to..... THE OPPONENTS!!

"Wait a minute!" I exclaimed, "How did the bidding go at YOUR table?"

"Joe opened 1NT, the old dear on my right doubled and I bid 2D. Seemed better than waiting for them to run to clubs, I thought. But that didn't stop West from bidding 3C, but East then bid 3NT. A diamond lead seemed fairly clear cut, in fact I expected the contract to go quite a few down but did not double because I figured they might run to 4C which may have been makeable. Then the old dear proceeded to run another eight tricks!!"

I couldn't help but see the funny side.

"Let's go and have a look at the hands," I said, "it looks like Rueful Rabbit and Hideous Hog would be more likely to have been involved in THIS hand! As Victor Mollo would have said: Peculiar hand. BOTH sides make 3NT on the SAME lead!" Yes, the four hands were:

North(Little lady North/Joe)

♠ A Q J 2
♥ K 8 6 3
♦ Q 3 2
♣ 8 6

West (Lady West/Lynley)

♠ 10 7
♥ Q 10 5
♦ 5
♣ K 10 9 7 6 3 2

East (Lady East/Von Impski)

♠ 8 6 5 4
♥ A 9
♦ K 9 8 4
♣ A Q J

South (Lady South/Hank)

♠ K 9 3
♥ J 7 6 2
♦ A J 10 7 6
♣ 5

Yes, 3NT made by East, lead: xD and 3NT made by North, lead: xD. A mere swing of 1000, or just 14 i.m.p.s. Are you surprised when I tell you that we didn't quite make the final, and have resolved NEVER to take these particular dear old ladies lightly again!

CHAPTER 2

WE'RE MOTORING

Talk about ruining a great session. Joe Lenny and I were surely going to crack 70% and there was only one board to go, against Anton Porsche and Bruce Huflundung. Both of good German extraction though Anton also has Italian connections (in the motor car industry). This was my hand and this was the bidding:

BOARD 18 DLR E NS VUL

Me (West)

♠ K 9 2

♥ J 9 7 6 5

♦ J 2

♣ 9 5 2

E	S	W	N
NB	2S*	NB	4S
NB	6S		

* 8+ playing tricks in spades

So, I was on lead. NOT a good hand to lead from. I don't believe in leading trumps against a SMALL slam, and I hate leading from three small, OR from a long suit to the jack. There was only one suit left, DIAMONDS. To muddy the waters in case that suit was crucial, I led the TWO and not the jack. The jack is too dangerous when it might end up clarifying the suit for declarer when dummy has e.g Q 10 x and partner the KING. At least the two gives declarer a guess. And YES, I DID expect to get in with the king of trumps, so setting up a trick on the go may well be crucial. It didn't turn out quite how I expected. Dummy appeared:

♠ A 10

♥ K Q 10 8 2

♦ 9 8 7 4

♣ 6 3

Not quite what I had hoped, but I DID still have a spade trick. Bruce played the seven and Joe covered with the ten. After asking about our leads and being told that we lead 'tops, fourths, doubletons and SINGLETONS', Bruce won with the queen. After some thought, he played ace, king of clubs and ruffed a club, then the ace of spades followed by a low heart which Joe eyed suspiciously before rising with the ace. Bruce ruffed and exited with a spade to my king. "I don't think I played that right, did I?" Bruce was about to concede. "I can't now finesse against your jack of diamonds, Joe, can I?" I knew that, so very helpfully laid it down and glared at Anton.

"I'll do it FOR him, then, shall I?" I COULD have exited with my last spade but this was more to the point, and a darn sight quicker. I had found a brilliant lead, OBVIOUSLY a singleton, and that man Huflundung had botched the play so he couldn't make if I HAD led a singleton!

"Hard to know, really, what the best line is," commented Anton, "I'm sure that YOU would have played it differently, Count. What would YOU have done on that lead, Joe?"

Joe looked at the traveling score card and wasn't impressed. "Apart from the usual loony in six NO TRUMPS making SEVEN, gawd, East must have covered the queen of spades, it is a bottom board for us. No other pair is in slam. And what's the use of making such a brilliant lead, OBVIOUSLY a singleton, I tried to tell you that, Ray ALWAYS leads from either length or singletons against suit slams, if declarer isn't up to going down. I'm finesse happy myself and would probably have played a trump to the TEN, ruffed out my (East's) ace of hearts, returned with the ace of trumps, discarded a CLUB on the heart and run the nine of diamonds, letting Ray ruff with the king if he wanted to. He wouldn't have ruffed but would have scored the jack of diamonds instead! Wouldn't YOU have played it that way, Anton?"

"No, I'm even more finesse happy than YOU. I'd have finessed a spade to the ten, played the king of hearts ruffing out East's ace and then returned to dummy to discard a DIAMOND from hand since West may have led from Jack fourth, and the CLUB finesse would ALSO have been waiting for me. What JOY. All those finesses! Pity none of the other declarers had the same problem, there aren't any TWO of diamonds leads

but they are all against FOUR spades which of course everyone makes six in. But I wonder how Anthony Car (no relation to Porsche - ed.) would have played it? Must ask him sometime."

Oh yes, the four hands were:

North (Anton Porsche)

♠ A 10
♥ K Q 10 8 2
♦ 9 8 7 4
♣ 6 3

West (Von Impski)

♠ K 9 2
♥ J 9 7 6 5
♦ J 2
♣ 9 5 2

East (Joe Lenny)

♠ 5 4
♥ A 4 3
♦ 10 6 3
♣ Q 10 8 7 4

South (Bruce Huflundung)

♠ Q J 8 7 6 3
♥ -
♦ A K Q 5
♣ A K J

CHAPTER 3

NO TRUMP MAGIC

The other night at the club, I picked up this useful looking hand:

♠ Q J 10 9
♥ K J 7
♦ 10 3
♣ K Q J 10

A good 1NT opening if playing ACOL, and fortunately, we were. With both sides vulnerable, I opened 1NT. West, a dear old lady, thought for quite some time, then asked a whole lot of questions, and eventually DOUBLED. Her partner, an equally UNDEAR old bat, screwed up her nose (or was it simply her NATURAL nose, often it's hard to tell the difference!), and eventually passed. I liked playing the hands, especially against THIS type of defender, so I happily passed also. West led her ace of diamonds and dummy appeared:

♠ 7 6 5 2
♥ 4 2
♦ J 7 4
♣ 7 6 4 2

I thanked my partner, Billy Nelson, most profusely and noted that we'd missed our spade (AND club) fit. Cursing Acol, I realised that I needed to get as many tricks as possible to cut down the damage. No doubt others would be in the same difficulties, seeing the whole club seemed to play Acol, and at least I had my declarer skills and the ineptitude of the defence on my side.

The old bat signalled with the nine and the dear lady West continued with the king then the eight, won by East. The nine of hearts I covered with the jack, won by the queen, and the five of diamonds now put the old bat on lead again. A further heart and dear old lady West now ran her hearts. Life was becoming a bit uncomfortable for yours truly, and I discarded down to....well, what WAS I to discard down to? I decided to keep three spades and the bare king of clubs, but dear old lady West now laid down her ace of clubs and, after a lot of thought and murmuring 'oh dear I've lost track', decided to 'exit' with her nine of clubs. It held! The ace of spades took the penultimate trick and the old bat triumphantly laid her king of spades down to take the last trick. Even MY brilliant declarer play had resulted in a somewhat lesser result than I had expected when I first picked up the hand.

"Making NONE?" queried Billy, "You realise of course that we kept you out of a grand slam," he continued, turning to the old bat. "And THAT is worth 2220. Had we had better defence or better declarer play we might even have escaped for -1400 which beats the SMALL slams in hearts or No Trumps".

I wrote down 2000 to East West and noted that there WERE a lot of 1400's there, as well as 1430's and 1440s but NO 2220s or even 1460s or 1470s. Clearly it must have been easier to score a grand slam on defence than as declarer. I convinced myself that I WOULD have made all the tricks as declarer had I had the WEST hand. As it was, I had to settle for making NO tricks at all as SOUTH.

The four hands:

BOARD 7 DLR ALL VUL

North (Billy Nelson)

♠ 7 6 5 2

♥ 4 2

♦ J 7 4

♣ 7 6 4 2

West (Dear old lady)

♠ A 3

♥ A Q 10 8 6

♦ A K 8 5

♣ A 9

East (Old Bat)

♠ K 8 4

♥ 9 5 3

♦ Q 9 6 2

♣ 8 5 3

South (Von Impski)

♠ Q J 10 9

♥ K J 7

♦ 10 3

♣ K Q J 10

CHAPTER 4

THE RABBIT PUNCH

DLR N EW VUL

	♠ A 9 6 5 3	
	♥ A K Q J 10 2	
	♦ 10 2	
	♣	
♠ 8 7		♠ Q J 10 4
♥ 9 3		♥ 4
♦ Q 8 7 6 3		♦ A K 9 5
♣ K 10 3 2		♣ A J 9 5
	♠ K 2	
	♥ 8 7 6 5	
	♦ J 4	
	♣ Q 8 7 6 4	

I still can't believe it. I feel so utterly STUPID and totally conned by those two rabbits, only recently promoted to the A grade. AND it happened while I was having a session with an eminent international, Steve Beefstock, whom I had invited to our Club.

I picked up the North hand and considered opening it a strong 2H but decided to open 1H instead. Rabbit No. 1 DOUBLED. Wouldn't YOU? EVERYBODY'S idea of a perfect takeout double. Steve bid 3H, a perfectly good bid considering we play TRUSCOTT. Rabbit No. 2 passed and I considered bidding 4C as a cue but decided bidding just game and making one more than the others (we WERE, after all, going to get some real Rabbit defence) would be good enough, so I just quietly bid game. Rabbit No. 1 counted up his points and tanked for some time before passing, as did Steve and Rabbit No. 2.

Rabbit No. 1 led the ace of diamonds, and Rabbit No. 2 followed with the EIGHT. Wouldn't YOU, to tell your partner you had the queen? Rabbit No. 1 then continued with the king, Rabbit No. 2 following with the three. Rabbit No.1 then came up with the 'RABBIT PUNCH'. Deciding Rabbit No. 2 wanted a third round, and in fact expecting No. 2 to RUFF (wouldn't YOU?), Rabbit No. 1 led a THIRD diamond! Great, a RUFF AND SLOUGH! Only real rabbits would give you a ruff and disard, especially so early in the play, I thought to myself, so I discarded the only loser I could see, and that was one of my small spades, while ruffing in dummy. WOULDN'T YOU?

After two rounds of trumps, I played two rounds of spades, ruffing a third spade, but when that suit broke 4-2 had to lose a spade at the end.

"Oh well, no overtricks, looks like THAT will be a flat board," I commented as Beefstock opened the score sheet.

"Flat apart from YOUR effort, Count." Steve Beefstock was sneering typically. "YOU are the only one to make FOUR. All others make FIVE. Of course if you're going to play like a bunny, I suppose that is to be expected. You are the ONLY person I have seen who is presented with a ruff and slough and who then proceeds to ruff and shorten dummy's ruffing value and on top of that, slough a WINNING trick way!"

"What are you talking about?" both Rabbits burst out in unison.

"Your brilliant play, of course, you caught the Count in a typical Rabbit coup. Had he discarded ANYTHING from dummy and ruffed in HIS hand, he would then have been able to ruff TWO spades in dummy and the spade that he discarded on your ruff and slough would have been RUFFED and not SLOUGHED, thereby establishing the FIFTH spade as a winner, like it was no doubt for all the OTHER declarers when East followed a less imaginative defence and tried to cash the club ace! Cunning play on YOUR part, but VERY amateurish by the Count."

Steve Beefstock hasn't partnered me since. Would YOU?

CHAPTER 5

HIGH SOCIETY

"What would you lead against 1NT-3NT with THIS hand?" The question came from Lord Nelson, one of our illustrious team mates. The match was the annual Lords vs Ladies (COUNTS were also begrudgingly invited!) teams match for the Primrose Bowl. He scribbled out the following:

♠ A 10 2
♥ 7 3
♦ A Q 10 9 8
♣ 8 7 2

"Yes, I know the hand," my memory was not great but as I had agonised for fully five minutes before leading the TEN, it WAS fresh in my mind. "Presumably you made 3NT just like Lady Muck did. I led the ten but Lady Muck played low and Earl Grey won his king. He pondered for a while and returned a club, RIGHT ROUND to the AKJ! Lady Muck immediately attacked spades, and I won the third round. I returned a club to dummy, but the old bird certainly had THIS hand sussed: winning in dummy she CASHED another club, thereby exposing herself to more losers, and casually led a low heart to the queen. When the ace did not drop the king, she nodded wisely as though she had been expecting that turn of events, cashed the thirteenth spade and discarded the jack of hearts from dummy. Then she casually led her second diamond! Neither I nor dummy had anything other than diamonds, and despite the fact that I tried her on with the NINE, she covered and made dummy's jack for the ninth trick. I doubt that she knew what she'd done. What do YOU think? I suppose YOU didn't make the jack of diamonds?"

Lord Nelson looked oddly at me. "No, I didn't. Well, yes I DID make the jack, but I COULDN'T make the contract. You may recall that I played the hand against Lady Luck and The Duchess of Cork. THOSE two! Lady Luck has this THING about leading off her aces, and SHE led the ACE of diamonds. You should have seen the Duchess, who turned purple first, then green and then bright red before parting with her singleton king. Cork's eyes were fair popping out of their sockets, but somehow Lady Luck managed to restrain herself from cashing her other ace when she realised what she had done. She continued DIAMONDS, the TEN, and I DID cover and make my jack, but the moment I produced a spade, she zapped in with the ace and cashed her diamond tricks. You recall the full deal, don't you?" He quickly scribbled the rest of the hands:

BOARD 15 DLR S NS VUL

North (dummy - anon)

♠ Q 9 6
♥ J 4 3
♦ J 8 5 4
♣ A K J

West (Lady Luck; Von Impski)

♠ A 8 7
♥ 7 5
♦ A Q 10 9 3
♣ 9 5 4

East (The Duchess of Cork; my partner Earl Grey)

♠ 10 5 2
♥ K 10 9 8
♦ K
♣ 10 8 7 3 2

South (Lady Muck; Lord Nelson)

♠ K J 4 3
♥ A Q 6 2
♦ 7 6 2
♣ Q 6

" How come YOU, the Count Von Impski no less, could not find the OBVIOUS LEAD? After all, aren't you the one who is always going on about increasing your chances? Yes, there's no doubt that a diamond lead is correct on the hand, but WHICH one? Whenever you lead the TEN, Murphy's law tells you that declarer will hold Jx and dummy Kxx, and when you lead the queen, declarer will hold the doubleton KING and dummy Jxx. Since you can't expect partner to get in for SURE, and since you have the certain entry yourself, you should expect that it will be necessary for YOU to set up the diamonds with only one loser if the contract is to be defeated. So you WAIT until trick TWO before deciding whether to continue diamonds, and WHICH diamond to continue with. THEREFORE, you DO lead the ace. Lady Luck's judgement is clearly much superior to yours. While the expected did NOT happen, her play had also allowed for EITHER a singleton king OR jack in the Duchess's hand. The Duchess wasn't amused, and even two hands later was still going on about how she could have got an extra trick had Lady Luck not crashed her king, but then we all know that the Duchess is NOT exactly related to Einstein!"

I wanted to tell Lord Nelson that Albert in fact WAS a distant relation of MINE, but felt that in view of MY lead, that snippet of information could wait until I did something a little bit better.

CHAPTER 6

TRANSFER THE CHARGES

BOARD 21 DLR N NS VUL

	♠ J 3	
	♥ 8 7 5 4 2	
	♦ A 8	
	♣ K Q 8 3	
♠ K Q 8		♠ A 10 4
♥ 10 6 3		♥ A K J
♦ Q 7 2		♦ 10 9 6 5
♣ A 7 4 2		♣ J 9 6
	♠ 9 7 6 5 2	
	♥ Q 9	
	♦ K J 4 3	
	♣ 10 3	

If people were going to play transfers, I wish the heck they would learn to play them properly! Sitting North I was looking forward to the next board, since the next pair were Pompous Patsy and Prissy Pru. As dealer, I passed and Pompous Patsy opened a weak 1NT. Pru ummed and aahed and emerged with 2NT. Patsy circled this with great alacrity while I watched Pru squirm. I wasn't going to help them by asking questions. My experience with people who take on transfers is that they invariably mess SOMETHING up along the way. Patsy, sure enough, bid 3C. Now Pru, once more looking rather embarrassed, bid 3NT.

My partner, Hori Gami (of doubtful ancestry but theory has it his father was Maori and mother Japanese, though I suspect it must have been the other way round), being on lead, asked the same question that I would have, and was told by Pompous Patsy: "The 2NT? Of COURSE it is a transfer to clubs! But Pru has a tendency to forget these things, don't you, my DEAH?" Pru reddened even further before blurting out: "Why, um, er yes, I'm affraid I ddid, I just wanted to show you I had 11 points".

"Nobody asked YOU,"snarled Hori and whipped out the very cunning TWO of spades (I thought we had agreed to lead FOURTH highest). Pompous Patsy was even less impressed with Pru's dummy than she had been with her bidding.. "Good grief! You may as well have passed ONE No Trump with THAT absolute load of garbage, Pru," she sighed, "what am I meant to do with THAT?!?" I was about to suggest that she concede two down to save any more hassles, or give her a VERY suitable answer to the question, but why not ENJOY the game, so I said nothing.

Patsy called for the king from dummy and then immediately for the two of clubs. I won the queen and noted the drop of Patsy's NINE. She must have J109 I thought, but if so what a strange play, but what can you expect from her anyway? I returned my jack of spades, won in hand by Patsy who now laid down the ten of diamonds. This did not impress Hori one little bit, and he decided to rise with the king and continue with another spade. Patsy won in dummy and returned to hand with the king of hearts. I had discarded a heart on the spade and now followed casually with another.

Patsy now produced a diamond and, when Hori played low, considered for some time before puffing out her chest in her characteristic way and inserting the seven. Perforce, I won the king. Oh well, that's ONE more trick she's managed to create for herself, I thought as I returned a heart. Patsy now actually started to show some signs of intelligence as she focussed her eyes and stared at the far end of the room. Having reached her momentous conclusion, she played her ace of hearts and down tumbled the queen!

These were the cards that we now had left:

North (Von Impski)	
♠	
♥	8 7
♦	
♣	K 8 3

Dummy (Pru)	Declarer (Patsy)
♠	♠
♥	10
♦	Q
♣	A 7 4
	♠ 9 7
	♥ -
	♦ J 4
	♣ 10

When Patsy led a diamond to the queen, it really did not matter what I discarded: if I discarded a heart, she would lead a heart to the jack and then run the jack of clubs and I would have to win my king and lead from the 8 3 round to dummy's A 7. Since THAT would have been FAR too elegant a line for me to allow the likes of Patsy to execute, I discarded the EIGHT of clubs, hoping she might have miscounted and decide that my king would drop. It didn't fool her and she unerringly called for a low club from dummy. All I could win was my king and dummy's A 7 of clubs STILL scored the eighth and ninth tricks!

"Wow, what a great play, Patsy," I said facetiously, "to take a play of dropping the doubleton queen instead of finessing against the hand with FIVE, that takes BRILLIANCE! How did you manage it?"

"I had to give you SOME credit, Count, though I must say I wasn't sure that my theory would stand up. Even YOU wouldn't have risen with the queen of clubs WITHOUT the king. The KING might have been a more subtle play, don't you think?" She was getting haughtier by the second. "The OTHER thing I had to trust you on of course was whether you could count to TWELVE. I knew I could count to twelve, and had COUNTED you for TEN points: the ace of diamonds, jack of spades, and king-queen of clubs. If YOU'D counted to TWELVE, you'd have the queen of hearts as well, and would have opened the bidding, wouldn't you? OF COURSE, DEAH BOY, I had to think ahead a bit and unblock the nine of clubs at trick two, but that was just an elementary precaution."

No, I WASN'T lost for words. "Patsy, the director called the move TWO MINUTES ago," I croaked.