

CHAPTER 20

ROLL OVER LAUGHING

This Internet bridge really is quite fun. I hadn't tried it before but finally succumbed to becoming a guest of one of the many play sites that currently offer the service.

After a couple of abortive attempts, and lots of kibitzing and getting myself at least a little bit familiarised with which buttons to push, like hide this and hide that, chat and reply, the moment of truth arrived. I decided to register under the name of Batman, which I thought was rather appropriate considering my Transylvanian background and ongoing friendship with Count and Countess Drakkula ever since they put me up in their belfry for a couple of nights during a Transylvanian national bridge tournament

So, here I was, ready for a bit of heavy rubber bridge. I found a table with a spare seat and ended up with someone calling him or her self 'Pusikat'. Our opponents were 'Robocop' as West and 'Okker' as East. As play went on I gathered that Robocop was from Chicago and Okker from Melbourne, but the clues on Pusikat were more difficult to unscramble.

"What system please, Pusikat?" I typed into the chat box and got a very quick reply "LOL". Now what the hell was LOL? I'd vaguely heard of SAYC, but LOL? So I queried further, and was told "Lotsa Laughs". Great, but SYSTEM, I queried further?

"OK we play American. Strong No Trump, transfers" was my return message.

"OK Pusikat.. Where you from?" I asked.

"Where you from" was the reply. At that very time the message from Robocop flashed on the screen: "Batman, press ready so we can play, goldarnit!!!!"

Well, when I finally woke up to the fact that I had to click on something, and frantically clicked on a few boxes at random, the hands finally came up and mine was:

♠ A J 9
♥ K 9 4 3 2
♦ 7
♣ K J 9 7

I opened 1H. That was easy. Pusikat bid 1S and I tried 2C. I did think about raising to 2S but maybe Pusikat wouldn't appreciate being raised with only three. Suddenly, there was this 4NT in the bidding box. Yes, Pusikat was no pussycat after all. Anticipating all sorts of awful things, I duly replied 5D but undeterred Pusikat bid 6H. Robocop led the five of trumps and dummy appeared:

♠ K 7 5 3
♥ Q J 6
♦ A K J 9
♣ A 2

I knew by now that I had to type in something like "typ" meaning "thank you, partner". "Glp" appeared in partner's chat box. That's how I felt actually, I was going to say GULP myself, but then remembered that 'glp' was meant to say 'good luck partner'. Oh well, at least the LEAD was helpful, running round to my K9. Maybe one or two finesses, and all would be well.

Let me rearrange the hands so they are easier to follow:

Dummy:

♠ K 7 5 3
♥ Q J 6
♦ A K J 9
♣ A 2

Me:

♠ A J 9
♥ K 9 4 3 2
♦ 7
♣ K J 9 7

I played low from dummy and so too did Okker, producing the seven. That seemed a bit ominous, so I fiddled round a bit by leading a diamond to the ace and returning the nine. Okker covered with the ten and I ruffed. Time for a trump I guess, so a trump to dummy, expecting Robocop to have the ace, but it was won by Okker. After what seemed like an eternity, he now returned the ten of clubs, having successfully endplayed himself by not taking the ace of trumps at trick one. I covered with the jack but Robocop was too smart, or too stubborn, or could see all four hands, and refused to give up his queen. I still needed an extra trick somewhere and was reluctant to rely on the spade finesse, so I crossed to the ace of clubs and ruffed the jack of diamonds, East producing the queen. Now I ruffed my nine of clubs with dummy's last trump, the queen, and came back to hand with the ace of spades. Robocop's last trump was now drawn and I cashed my king of clubs and last trump, leaving dummy with the two kings for the last two tricks. Robocop's two black queens had been well and truly neutralised!

The chatbox lit up with a very polite reference by Robocop as to Okker's ancestry and his defensive frailties, and it was at that stage that I decided that Robocop and Okker were both definitely males.

Meanwhile my own message flashed up from Pusikat: WPP WPP WPP!!!! Pusikat didn't need to carry on quite like that, after all it wasn't that difficult after Okker's unfortunate switch.

The next hand presented me with a problem. I knew "American" was a strong 15-18 or was it 15-17 or 16-18 No Trump, but what is the opening for a STRONGER hand, like this one:

♠ A K 8
♥ A K 7
♦ K 8 6 3
♣ A 10 2

Oh well, presumably it was 2NT in 'American' so I tried that. Pusikat, after a LONG time, but maybe it was the Internet connection, emerged with 3D. I knew this had to be a transfer, surely he doesn't think I'm that stupid? So I bid 3H. Another long pause. 3NT. This was a typical transfer sequence, showing five hearts and a balanced hand. I liked my hearts and controls, so decided to cue bid to tell partner the good news. 4C. Another long pause. Then I saw this message addressed to Robocop, from Pusikat: "Opps, is 4C Gerber, do you think?" and the very quick answer from Robocop: NO. Was I meant to be able to see these messages, I wondered, but flashed my own message : "CUE BID!" hoping that Pusikat would understand, but the computer said I couldn't send a message. Don't know what happened to the connection, oh well, press on regardless, I thought. So, Pusikat now bid 4D. Must have got my message after all, it was clearly a return cue. Great, he's cooperating. In the meantime, I'm telling the opponents that my 4C is a cue bid, but Okker snorts, or as much of a snort as I can discern via a computer screen: "Some 2NT opening then! Is it 26-28?" and I snarl back "We're not past 4H YET are we?" Things were getting a bit testy, I could feel the vibes via all that space travel!!

Things had gone well on the first hand, so I decided to try and end the rubber with a flourish and bid 6H. But poor Pusikat went into another trance and finally emerged with a bid of 6NT, flashing the usual glp message, but there was still more to the message from Pusikat: Sorry, dk what you bidding" and I type back

"Txp, transfers of course?" And the reply came back just as fast "Too sorry. I only learn transfers 2 weeks ago. You play over 2NT also?" I said no more and gasped as dummy came into view when Robocop led a spade.

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

The GOOD news was that Pusikat had bid 6NT and not passed 6H, despite my insistence that I wanted to play in hearts. The BAD news was that I should have listened to him when he bid 3D. 6D had a small percentage chance, 6NT was NOT going to make!

I gulped once more, but said tx pard nevertheless and won the queen in dummy and led a low club from dummy and put in the ten. It HELD! The ace of clubs followed and Okker dropped his jack, then a further club and Robocop produced the NINE. It was fairly clear that Okker had started with KJx of clubs and I could set up clubs by losing to Okker's king, and I was about to casually play low from dummy when it occurred to me that THAT would be an awfully presumptuous and sloppy play. I could afford to play dummy's queen because that would leave me with the eight as the thirteenth anyway. So I played the queen and Okker showed out! I glanced at Robocop and gave him an admiring wink. Did he think I was THAT stupid? I nearly HAD been! As for winking at a computer screen with inanimate cards on it, surely that PROVES my stupidity, I suggested to myself. But my word, this Robocop is a cunning one, tried to suck me into complacency!

I next tried a diamond to my king and Robocop produced the TEN. THAT was promising. Another diamond and the FOUR from Robocop. What's he playing at? More shenanigans? Clearly, this finesse was going to lose, but I could see no future in going up with the ace, so I finessed. Okker followed, LOW. The ace of diamonds won, while I unblocked to ensure there was a diamond entry to table. The miracle had happened! I cashed the spades and led the last diamond to dummy. Robocop discarded the ten of hearts and when I played my hearts from the top, the seven was somehow a trick at the end. I could see Robocop's message on the screen: "Goldarn, your bidding stopped my natural QH lead!" and I replied: "sorry, but if you don't want your KC same thing happens anyway." Meanwhile I had decided that enough was enough, this excitement was too much, and suggested to Pusikat I had to go. But Pusikat's return message was: No cannot go must stay. You play good. No. PLEEEEEEEEESE NO GO!"

"OK I stay a bit more if you tell me where you from", I relented.

Pusikat's answer: "I told three times already"..

"Tell me again, I keep losing things on my screen" I cajoled him

"Scroll back"

"What? Scroll what?"

"The arrows, you dork"

Well, THAT didn't sound like a broken Englished Hungarian or Afghanistani like I had picked Pusikat to be. Wish I hadn't missed the bits where he said where he was from!

"Never mind the arrows, just tell me where you're from, Pusikat."

"We play more. You CLEVER player, I learn lots. ROL."

"What the heck is ROL?" No answer.

I decided to give up on trying to ascertain Pusikat's location, and we played a few more, much less eventful hands with honours about even. I decided that I really must go when the next rubber ended and told the others at the table just that.

We managed to get to both sides vulnerable, then I picked up this exciting collection:

♠ J 10 7 4 ♥ Q 10 8 4 2 ♦ 3 ♣ 8 5 2

Pusikat opened 1D, Okker passed and I passed. 2C from Robocop, 2D from Pusikat. I'd already told him how little I had, so I bid 2H. Surely we had a better fit in one of the majors? Pass, Pass, DOUBLE from Okker. After two passes, Pusikat bid 2NT. I expected the worst, but unbelievably, both Okker and Robocop passed. As Okker led a club, I sent the message for all to see: "Glp No Double, No Trouble", but immediately regretted it when all the hands flashed up on the screen and I could see Pusikat's:

♠ A Q 8 6 2 ♥ VOID ♦ A Q 9 5 4 2 ♣ K 3

I typed in: " Better open 1S and rebid diamonds. Next hand last hand, must go", and couldn't bear to watch any more and went and made a cup of tea. On my return there were two messages waiting, one from Robocop (of course) : "No double no trouble. Five down, no trouble for us. No spade game bid, even less trouble for us". Smart ass, I thought to myself. The second message was from Pusikat:

"I GET BLOODY PISSED OFF WITH THIS STUPID GAME WHEN I DO SOMETHING SO BLOODY DUMB LIKE THAT EEEEEEEEEEE AND I'M FROM VANCOUVER!!!! And please, Batman, don't talk to me in any more Pidgin English, I know you can talk proper!"

We all consoled Pusikat. Never mind, is OK, we all said in unison.

We were still both Vul, but I consoled myself with the fact that the last hand could not be far away. "Last hand for me", I typed in.

"No No you stay, Batman, you good player, you teach me lots. You soooooo good." Here he was again, back to his broken English, all the way from Vancouver! He must be a nutter. I wondered whether this adulation and hero worship could turn into something more sinister. I had heard of Cyberstalkers and all that. Surely not!

"One more Q, Pusikat, I typed, what's ROL?"

This time I got the answer: "Roll over laughing". Ha, ha, ha. He WAS a nutter.

I then picked up, or should I say, had this hand flash up in front of me:

♠ A K Q J 10 8 7
♥ 7 5
♦ 9 6 2
♣ Q

This seemed like an appropriate hand to try and finish the rubber with. The values were almost perfect for it, one more trick might have been a bit better, but what the hell, I opened 4S. That should do, but Pusikat had other ideas. If I could make 4S, HE had three more tricks. He did check for aces and kings first though, but when he worked out that I had one of each, confidently bid 7S. "You such good player, you no need luck for this" was the message in the box. But there was another bid there, a DOUBLE from Robocop. I continued the banter: "Me so good, me redouble".

Robocop led the eight of clubs and this is what I saw between me and dummy:

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

Nice hand, I thought to myself, great help in making game. But I was in a GRAND SLAM! Two finesses needed just to make a small slam. With so many losers staring me in the face, I played low from dummy at trick one. Robocop's eight of clubs gave me hope. If there was a tricky card to be led, he'd do it. Sure enough, Okker produced the two and I won my queen. Suddenly, a flashback to a hand I'd read about many years ago. Robocop had to have the king to FIVE hearts plus the king and queen of diamonds and then he would be squeezed and I would make three heart tricks from dummy. After winning the queen of clubs, I ran off numerous spades, Robocop showing out on the first round. Tricky double, I thought. With two spades left, this is what I was hopping was the seven card ending:

	Dummy:	
	♠	
	♥ A Q 4	
	♦ A J	
	♣ A J	
Robocop		Okker
♠		♠
♥ K x x		♥ J x
♦ K Q		♦ 10 x x x
♣ K x		♣ x
	Me	
	♠ 8 7	
	♥ 7 5	
	♦ 9 7 5	
	♣	

When I led my eight of spades, Robocop had to let go a heart. I let go the jack of diamonds and Okker a diamond also. This was what I now envisaged the situation to be:

	Dummy:	
	♠	
	♥ A Q 4	
	♦ A	
	♣ A J	
Robocop		Okker
♠		♠
♥ K x		♥ J x
♦ K Q		♦ 10 x x
♣ K x		♣ x
	Me	
	♠ 7	
	♥ 7 5	
	♦ 9 7 5	
	♣	

If that was the situation, I'd already accomplished my task and could take the heart finesse, but just in case I'd missed something, I prolonged it a bit. I played a diamond to the ace, ace of clubs, and ruffed a club. I then took the heart finesse and..... lost it, along with two diamonds at the end. OKKER had had a singleton king of hearts. Pusikat's message was somewhat strained and a bit incoherent: "What have you done Batman? Why you take ace of diamonds? Why not ace of HEARTS? Easy to make, you three down redoubled! AAAAAAAUUUUUUGGGGGGHHHHHHH." And, when I looked at the seating arrangements, there was a blank in the North seat. Then, Okker also disappeared and I was left with Robocop. There was a sympathetic 'bad luck' message from him at least. I thought I'd better make SOME pleasant conversation.

"YOU play a mean game, Robocop. What's say we have a game sometime?"

Robocop's reply came through quickly enough: "Sure, buddy. Next time I'm in Batsville I'll give you a call"

Then he, too, was gone from the screen.