There are two kinds of people in this world: those who play bridge and those who do not. There is a big difference between the senses of humour of the two groups. Bridge players can be old or young, married or single, handsome or homely, frail or hearty — it does not matter. But bridge players must have a highly developed sense of humour: they need it to survive the slings and arrows flying about the table, not to mention the bolts of lightning from above.

*Tales out of School* is a hilarious collection of stories featuring the author’s *alter ego*, Professor Silver, who teaches at Mohican College. The students who take his Bridge 101 course achieve some remarkable successes despite his unorthodox theories and instructional methods. But his status as a bridge “expert” leads him into continuing misadventures involving the administration and other faculty members, and it seems to be only a matter of time before one of his colleagues or ex-partners takes drastic action. Finally one of them does so, and the bizarre outcome in which we encounter a version of Hell that only a bridge player could imagine, is the funniest of all.

There is no attempt in this book to give the reader a bridge lesson, which is one reason that players at any level will be able to enjoy it. However, readers should perhaps be warned away from such ideas as Silver’s Certainty Principle. And warned, too, about other potentially harmful effects of this book: I laughed so hard I cried.
CONTENTS

1. Broom at the Top ............... 1

2. What's a Life Master? ........ 12

3. Bridge 101 ..................... 15

4. Developmental Bridge ........ 20

5. A Board for the Board ....... 25

6. PC Bridge ....................... 40

7. The Turing Test ................. 65

8. The Certainty Principle ...... 80

9. Paradise Lost ................... 95

10. A Reasonable Man ............. 105

11. Managing Change .............. 115
“Pardon me, could you direct me to Human Resources?

“Yes.”

Clearly I had taken a wrong turn; this could only be the Philosophy department. I had a problem. The memo had been quite explicit — I had an appointment with Dr. Duerf at eleven, and I had better be on time.

“Would you direct me to the Human Resources Department?”

“Down those stairs, turn right, can’t miss it. Well, maybe you could.”

I scurried down the stairs and found my destination. Dr. Duerf was waiting and I was ushered immediately into his office. Duerf’s thick glasses magnified the accusing stare in his eyes. He was, as usual, manipulating a pair of steel ball bearings in his left hand. Their metallic clicking added a contrapuntal emphasis to his words as our conversation began.

“Silver, you are probably aware that President Oldham has ordered the faculty to participate in a Professional Development Day. Do you hear someone outside the door? No? Well, I had arranged group activities for everyone, but certain of your colleagues....... you’re certain there’s no-one there?
“My problem is that there are four recalcitrants who refuse to take part. They maintain that the scheduled workshops are backed by the CIA and the World Bank and are simply attempts to brainwash them into accepting a capitalistic paradigm.”

“Let me guess — they would be the group who picketed President Oldham’s office when he wouldn’t close the college on Lenin’s birthday?”

“The same,” said Dr. Duerf, inspecting the underside of his telephone. “I have been charged with finding an activity which will not offend their sensibilities and yet is commensurate with the day’s theme of cooperative collegiality. Now, on going through their files, I noticed that they had all listed contract bridge as a hobby on their application forms. What could better imbue a sense of harmony, partnership, and collaborative participation than a nice game of bridge? Can you arrange something that will keep them quiet for a few hours and get President Oldham off my back?”

“I’d like to help you out, but I’ve signed up for a seminar on ‘Self Defence in the Classroom’....”

“May I remind you of the time that you were going to be reassigned to the janitorial department? I was the one who found a doctor to certify that you were allergic to garbage and saved your job. Now it’s payback time.”

Oliver Cromwell once observed that ‘force and fraud, are in war, the two cardinal virtues’. I had to use both in the course of arranging an IMP match between the Mohican Four and some students from my introductory bridge class. First, I persuaded my colleagues of the need for student participation in faculty professional development; this democratic gesture, coupled with a firm commitment to finish by noon, assured their participation. Finding four students willing to come to the college on a Saturday was more challenging — it’s hard enough to get most of my students to show up even during the week. But there are, as Napoleon remarked, two levers for moving men: interest and fear. I phoned four students who were failing miserably, and offered to give them passing marks if they could win the match. This proved irresistible.
On the appointed day, the students arrived punctually and one by one, the Mohican Four sauntered in. The first to arrive was Mary Wallenstonecraft, who teaches a popular course called ‘Vindicating Women’s Rights in the Post-capitalist Society’. Mary is Mohican College’s most distinguished economist. She took me aside:

“David, can you lend me $400 until payday?”

I agreed, on the condition that her team won the match.

“This is getting interesting,” I thought as I greeted Rosa Ivorytown, affectionately known to the administration as ‘Red Rosa’. Rosa beguiled her students with lectures on Marxist mathematics on those rare occasions when she left the barricades and visited her classroom. Right behind her was Sacco Vanzetti, the holder of the North American record for most grievances by a civil servant. Sacco teaches a course in revisionist history which is frequently audited by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The last to arrive was Kirk Eggaard, a fellow English teacher. Kirk despised the “establishment” canon so vehemently that he refused ever to read anything written in Britain or North America. He obtained his Ph. D. in Literature from the University of PyongYang in 1979 and has been teaching courses on Tibetan poetry at Mohican College ever since.

Partnership arrangements consumed the better part of an hour as Mary was ideologically opposed to partnering either of the males while Rosa considered Mary to be a Trotskyite traitor to the working class. Rosa finally succumbed to a combination of appeals for gender solidarity from Mary, my threats to continue the activities into the afternoon, and a potential workload complaint from Sacco. They sat down and picked up their cards, and our Long March commenced.

People have often wondered why students and college administrators get along so well. I think that it is because they have a common enemy, the teachers. Clearly there was no love lost between the opponents at either table. Cards were slammed down on the table, doubles were announced in tones that would shatter glass,
sarcasm flowed like beer in the faculty dining room. When they compared scores at the half, the faculty were leading by 48 IMP’s.

“Let’s quit now while we ain’t losing,” said Kirk.

“The students are harassing me. They keep doubling me every time I bid. I want to consult the shop steward,” Sacco complained.

“You are the shop steward, idiot!” hissed Rosa. “And I’m sick to death of playing Alice to her Red Queen. She claims her bids mean what she says they mean, not what Goren says they should.”

“That dead white male?” shouted Mary. “I’m not going to be bound by his rules. I have the right to express myself, in my own voice!”

The faculty team was falling apart, at least until I interjected the sobering observation that a default would award the match to the students. I also pointed out that failure to participate in a scheduled professional activity constituted legal cause for dismissal. Consequently, their departure would provide both retribution for the students and delight to the administration. They resumed play.

Weary from carrying today’s particular cross down my endless Via Dolarosa, I sat down and kibitzed. For a while the hands were flat and while the students made some gains, they were small, and their prospects of winning appeared to be bleak. Then came this deal (see top of next page):

Both sides were vulnerable and the bidding proceeded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rosa</th>
<th>Student B</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Student C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pass</td>
<td>1NT</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pass</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pass</td>
<td>all pass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. There are no A students in any of my classes
2. 15-17 (most of the time)
3. Transfer to hearts
4. Super acceptance
The play was mildly interesting. Mary led a small spade, won by Rosa with the ace. She switched to her singleton diamond and was visibly gratified when Mary won the ace and gave her a ruff. Rosa reverted to spades, but declarer ruffed, drew trumps and claimed ten tricks.

I wondered what the result would be at the other table. Kirk and Sacco don’t play transfers and the hand with the singleton would be on lead. If RHO returned his nine of diamonds for his partner to ruff, the contract could be beaten by LHO’s underleading the ♠A and obtaining a second ruff.

However, events when this hand and the two that followed it were replayed were so astounding that I am deviating from my customary narrative structure.

This is what happened later at the other table:

---

_The Developmental Bridge_ 37
Sacco, showing the bravery and daring that made his name a legend in many a teachers’ strike, underled his ♠ A.. When Kirk’s ♣ K held, he continued the suit and was rewarded with a ruff after Sacco won the ace. But their joy turned to chagrin when declarer ruffed the heart return and drew trumps. Four spades bid and made. A double game swing, and 16 IMP’s for the students!

The next swing hand occurred four deals later, and the play at the first table demonstrated the efficacy of my teaching. Obviously having attended my lecture on The Dominant Role of the Heart Suit in First Strike Bidding, North took advantage of having the first bid at favourable colours:
Mary led the ♦J, which was won by partner’s ace. Rosa played the ♠A continuing despite the ominous appearance of the king. Declarer ruffed and claimed the balance of the tricks.

When the hand came up at the second table, I recalled this bidding and play vividly. But the events that unfolded before me bore no resemblance to those I had witnessed earlier:
Kirk confidently cashed his singleton ♠A, and switched to a low heart. Unluckily, declarer ruffed Sacco’s king, and then drew two rounds of trumps. Now the spades provided three discards for his diamond losers — making six clubs doubled, vulnerable!

“A diamond lead would have beaten the hand. Surely that was obvious from the bidding? I wouldn’t have passed if I’d thought you might possibly lead anything else,” said Sacco, pre-empting the post mortem.

“Nothin’ to worry about,” replied Kirk, unperturbed, “A push board. They’ll defend the same.”

I knew better; this “push board” represented a swing of 18 IMP’s. The students must be close to even in the match by now.
The third swing hand sealed the doom of my happily oblivious colleagues. At the first table, the auction proceeded innocuously enough:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♠ A 9 8 3 2</td>
<td>♠ 5 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♥ A K</td>
<td>♥ Q J 9 6 4 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ 3</td>
<td>♦ 9 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♣ Q J 7 6 2</td>
<td>♣ A K 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rosa  | Student B | Mary  | Student C |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ♠</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td>pass 1</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ♥</td>
<td>all pass</td>
<td>2 ♥</td>
<td>pass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Obviously not having attended my lecture on ‘The Dominant Role of the Heart Suit in First Strike Bidding’!

Mary’s response showed a maximum pass, and she congratulated Rosa for finding the four hearts call on her ace, king tight. There were no serious adverse breaks, and even with a diamond lead and continuation, eleven tricks were an easy make.

The bidding was still fresh in my mind when the hand came up at table two. This time the bidding took a less expected course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sacco</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>Student E</td>
<td>Kirk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ♠</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ♠</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td>2 ♠</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ♦</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td>5 ♠</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 ♠</td>
<td>all pass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What a difference in hand evaluation! Aware of the preeminent importance of owning the heart suit, my student not only opened the bidding, but felt he was too good for a mere two hearts
rebid, and chose a temporizing two clubs. This excited his partner, who splintered into diamonds, and only with reluctance gave up dreams of a grand slam to settle for the small. Declarer’s chances are better than 50% in six clubs, but with clubs and hearts both 3-2, the play in fact was routine.

There was some disagreement about the margin of victory. The students maintained that they had blitzed the professors while the latter held that they had lost by a small margin. The matter was resolved when it was discovered that Rosa had subtracted a number she should have added.

“Can’t work without a proper spreadsheet,” she explained as she stomped out. Sacco, announcing to no-one in particular that he was on time-and-a-half since it was two minutes after twelve, lingered to congratulate the students. For my part, I expressed my admiration of their play and repeated my promise to give them all passing grades at the end of term.

The following Monday, though, I was pensive as I wended my way down the familiar paths on campus.

“How is it possible,” I thought, “for students who never attend my classes to play so much better than those who attend regularly?”

I did not care to examine the implications of this too closely. But then, perhaps I was jumping to conclusions too hastily. Maybe the most talented could get by without much coursework. After all, Zia probably never needed to take lessons. Come to think of it, I never had any formal bridge instruction either.

Greatly cheered, I picked up my pace and strode towards the classroom where the students of Bridge 101 awaited me.