

Richelieu Plays Bridge



Robert F. MacKinnon
*from the author of **Samurai Bridge***

Richelieu Plays
† Bridge †

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Introduction

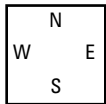


Alexandre Dumas's great novel *The Three Musketeers* has for over 150 years continually renewed interest in the goings-on at the court of Louis XIII. Dumas had uncovered a vein of literary gold, for the court at the time was populated by an unequalled group of colorful characters: the beautiful, devout, and devious queen, Anne of Austria, secretly in love with the dashing handsome Duke of Buckingham; the lascivious Duchesse de Chevreuse who could easily twist a man, even a Cardinal, around her little finger; Richelieu, the consummate schemer willing to sacrifice his soul in the pursuit of power. The key figure of the King is portrayed by Dumas as a shadowy character in need of protection from the wiles of his crafty Prime Minister, a view that has prevailed despite evidence that such was far from being the case. In fact, the King and the Cardinal operated together in a close, smoothly-functioning partnership.

In his editor's view, Dumas' novels were long enough without including bridge hands, so all references to bridge were expurgated, even though the protagonists were known to have engaged almost daily in the game. The omission was rectified in 1978 with the publication of Aksel J. Nielsen's *Bridge with the Three Musketeers* (Kaye and Ward, London) a highly biased account based on notes left by D'Artagnan's manservant. Planchet, like Dumas, wished to show his erratic master in the best light possible, but he stretches our credulity and does the King an injustice on his description of following hand in which the irrepressible Gascon plays in six spades missing two cashable aces:

Neither Vul.
Dealer South

<p>Richelieu ♠ A ♥ 8 6 3 ♦ J 9 7 3 2 ♣ Q J 10 8</p>	<p>Athos ♠ 9 4 2 ♥ K J 9 5 2 ♦ Q 10 ♣ A K 4</p>	<p>Louis XIII ♠ 8 3 ♥ 10 7 ♦ A 8 5 ♣ 9 7 6 5 3 2</p>	<p>D'Artagnan ♠ K Q J 10 7 6 5 ♥ A Q 4 ♦ K 6 4 ♣ —</p>
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Richelieu	Athos	Louis XIII	D'Artagnan
pass	2NT	pass	1♠
all pass			6♠

The Cardinal leads the ♣Q and D'Artagnan takes the top clubs and discards two hearts from his hand before leading a trump to the ace. According to Planchet, the Cardinal woodenly returns a third club, allowing the slam to make as declarer can get rid of his losing diamonds on the heart winners in dummy. Louis angrily

blames the Cardinal for this disaster. This is the kind of misinformation concerning the King and the Cardinal that has been circulating for three centuries.

One should not believe this implausible tale for one moment. One of the crosses that Richelieu had to bear was that Louis XIII was a stickler on partnership cooperation. Although the Cardinal preferred a free-and-easy approach to bidding and defense, frequently he had to suppress the creative side of his game for fear of raising the ire of the King who took a slip from orthodoxy as a personal betrayal. On the first club Louis would have played the ♣9 to show an even number in the suit. On the second club from dummy he would have played the ♣2 as a clear indication of a strong diamond holding. Richelieu would certainly have switched to a diamond in response to that suit-preference signal, the Bridge equivalent of a royal command, and Louis would not have failed to play the ♣2. If, inadvertently, he had played his clubs otherwise, Louis the Just would have been the first to apologize to his 'dear Cousin' for a careless play.

In Paris today there are many reminders of the servitor Richelieu, but few of his master. True, there exists a nondescript equestrian statue in the Place des Vosges and you may view Louis' portrait in the nearby Musée Carnavalet, but his tomb in the Basilica of Saint Denis has never been restored after its destruction during the French Revolution. If Louis XIII is remembered today it is most likely as the father of Louis XIV, the so-called Sun King, yet it was the father who left his country much the better for his having reigned over it.

We must also take exception to Dumas's characterization of Anne of Austria as a damsel in distress who cannot extricate herself from a mess of her own making without four bungling musketeers stumbling to her rescue. In fact, she exercised real political power, as did many women at that time. Female rulers of their countries who were contemporaries of Richelieu's included Catherine de Medici, Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I, Marie de Medici, and Christina of Sweden. In addition, many less exalted women played an active role in political life, especially in France. The Duchesse de Chevreuse was foremost of those. Richelieu's successor, Mazarin, must have had her in mind when he wrote to a Spanish minister in words that might as easily been penned by his predecessor:

'In Spain, as in all other countries, you have two types of women: coquettes, of whom there is an oversupply, and decent women, of whom there are but a few. The former think of not else but how to pleasure their lovers, and the latter of nothing but how to please their husbands. In either case, their sole aim is the gratification of their vanity and the fulfillment of their desire for luxury. But our French women! Whether they be virtuous or loose, old or young, clever or silly, all want to meddle in absolutely everything. A wife will not go to bed with her husband, nor a wanton with her lover, unless he first informs her of the affairs of the day. They must know everything, see everything, be informed about everything, and, now this is even worse, they must interfere in everything and mix it all up.'

As for our main character, Cardinal-Duc de Richelieu, his personality is so complex that it cannot be analyzed in its totality in one book. Each decade sees

another interpretation of his life put in print, but in all the years since Richelieu's death in 1642, no biographer has topped the witty epitaph of Pope Urban VIII, who, on being informed of the Cardinal's passing, remarked extemporaneously, 'If there is a God in Heaven, he presumably has much to answer for, but, if there is no God..., well, he was successful.'

To finish this brief introduction we retell one incident that gives insight into the personality of the great statesman. When Montaigne died in 1592 his literary heir was his adopted daughter, a young lady by the name of Marie de Gournay. She compiled several editions of his works and produced some of her own fiction that was mannered in style and full of far-fetched romantic notions. By 1635 she had become out-of-date and something of a laughingstock amongst the fashionable literary crowd that surrounded the powerful Cardinal. When she dedicated her latest edition of Montaigne's works to Richelieu, he gave her an audience during which he amused his hangers-on by rather making fun at her expense by using some of the fulsome phrases that had appeared in her work, *L'Ombre*. The old lady was no fool; she gently rebuked the Cardinal in such a gracious way that he felt deeply ashamed of himself and humbly asked her pardon. Richelieu had always loved cats and was frequently found stroking a favorite feline sitting in his lap. He discovered Mlle de Gournay also was a cat lover. Later when he granted her a generous lifetime pension, it amused him to include also a pension for her cat, Piaillon, and not only for Piaillon, but also for Piaillon's soon-to-arrive kittens as well.

Our story encompasses the decade 1615-1625 when Richelieu, then in his thirties, was struggling to win the favor of the ruling royal family. How was he able to attain prominence and what role did Bridge play in his rise to power? That is what we shall describe. If before commencing on the Bridge segment the reader would like to learn more of the Cardinal's early days, his noble family, his education, and his surprising decision to become a priest, a historical summary is presented in the Appendices along with some comments on life in Paris at that time. Let us begin our journey back in time to those days when Fate shuffled and dealt the cards of Richelieu's destiny.

Richelieu

Plays

Bridge





Along The
Corridors
of Power



It is a bright, sunny day in mid-June, 1616. The Grand Gallery of the Louvre is packed with serious-faced men and their richly dressed womenfolk competing for an advantageous location from which to view the promenade of the young royal couple recently married and returned from the South. These jostlers normally have but minor connections with the Court, but on this occasion they have been allowed entry to pay their respects en masse to their royal patrons — patrons in name only, however, for it is the Queen Mother, Marie de Medici, who loosely holds the purse strings in her chubby fingers.



Standing apart from the hurly-burly is a tall, pale, red-lipped gentleman with long, blonde hair flowing to his shoulders. From his brown costume of heavy material one might guess correctly he is an Englishman. Beside him is a stocky, old gentleman with sun-tanned features whose clothes are finely made but of a fashion several years out-of-date. As we approach, the old codger, obviously a leftover from the glory days of Henri IV, is doing all the talking.

'It does one's heart good to see such a lively crowd, but the noise, the noise, Monsieur, is enough in time to impair the hearing. I'm sure your English court does not suffer from such a chaotic affliction. Ah well, we French like to talk, even if there is nothing to talk about — that's the way we are — and since the arrival of the new queen from Spain, there has been no lack of topics. Look at these young courtiers taking on new life, setting out new shoots, and now blossoming out in these colorful silks and satins we see displayed before us. What hats! If I were younger I'd purchase one of those with big, white, African plumes, like that one over there. Oh, what a great time to be young, Monsieur, and living in Paris! I envy the days and nights that lie before you, especially the nights. Take full advantage.'

'I intend to,' replies the Englishman, his eyes sifting through the crowd for a pretty face with pouting lips.

'I mean no disrespect, but His Majesty is as yet still a young sprout. Some plants take longer than others to grow to maturity and it is just a matter of time before he has the strength to claim his place in the sun, but, frankly, it can't be too soon for some good Frenchmen. His mother's a good sort, but a bit of a pumpkin, if you ask me, dominated by that countryman of hers, Concini — Zucchini, I call him. Oh, Monsieur, you smile. My similes grow agricultural, I fear. As you may have deduced, I prefer to spend my days in my little garden now, among my fruits and vegetables, returning to my roots as it were, and come to Court only to pay the necessary respects. Frankly, my bladder can't stand the waiting about for someone who may never appear.'

The Englishman silently continues his amatory survey — the complaints of old age do not merit a reply.

‘I can point out some of the courtiers with whose names you may be familiar. That tall, elegant cavalier by the window is Bassompierre, France’s greatest lover, although there are many who compete for that title. Ironically he’s not French at all, but a German from Lorraine. The short, ugly man with the beautiful, blonde wife is Henry, Prince de Condé. She’s the one who drove the old King mad with desire. Strange, is it not, how these ugly mugs get wedded to such beauty and grace. She doesn’t look happy to me and no wonder — she just missed marrying Bassompierre. Ha, at last here comes someone who knows me.’

The old gentleman steps forward and makes a sweeping bow to a tall, heavy-set man with florid features and a stupid face who returns a smile and a bow that does not break his stride on the way by.

‘That big lout was Hercule de Rohan, Duc de Montbazon. I knew him well in the old days. At least he recognized me and noted I’m still alive. His daughter has just come to Court and from all I’ve heard she emulates her old man’s rakish ways. That would be justice well-served. Ah, now there’s an interesting new fellow coming this way — see him, pale of face, pointed of beard, bright of eye, dressed in black and carrying a portfolio? That’s Armand-Jean du Plessis, younger brother of Henri de Richelieu. He’s a Bishop and Grand Almoner to the new Queen. Quite full of himself, isn’t he? Don’t be fooled, as so many are, by his overdone obsequiousness; he’s a groveler, that’s for sure, but grovelers get the gravy. You’ve heard what the Pope said of him? No? How’s your Italian? — *Questo giovane sara un gran furbo* — ha-ha — *un gran furbo*, I like that. If he is to become a great trickster, and it takes one to recognize one, then I am content that this one will be on the side of France, for we could do with some more intelligence in the conduct of our foreign affairs. Frankly, Monsieur, and I trust this goes no further, I feel this marriage alliance with Spain benefits more the Spaniard, who wishes to surround France with corsets of steel and then squeeze us until our eyes pop. The old King wouldn’t have stood for it. But look! Here come their Majesties!’

It hardly seems possible for more people to crowd into the corridor, but there appears along the passageway a contingent of Swiss guards followed by a procession of courtiers in the midst of whom walks a young couple to whom all bow or curtsy as they pass. The boy-king is a lad of medium height and build, with the full face of an immature adolescent. His black hair is long and curly, the look on his smooth face solemn and impassive. His bright eyes give evidence of a quick mind, but he seems ill at ease when the crowd of humanity presses close. At such times he avoids eye contact and turns to address the robust gentleman who walks beside him. The queen is alike to the King in years, but she seems more mature and gracious when acknowledging the tributes of her subjects. She is a pretty little thing, who moves with a dainty step and easy grace. She is dressed in the Spanish style; her father is Philip III, King of mighty Spain, but she is known as Anne of Austria because of her Hapsburg lineage.

‘I venture to say the young King has much to look forward to,’ observes the old gentleman after the procession has passed. As the tall Englishman turns to make his

farewells, the old courtier says, 'You must depart? I must stay. I have enjoyed talking with you, Monsieur. It is always interesting to hear the opinions of an Englishman. Good luck to you, Monsieur. Adieu, adieu, and adieu,' he concludes with a well-executed deep bow and wide sweep of his hat.

ANNE OF AUSTRIA

A few days later Armand-Jean du Plessis de Richelieu again passed through the Grand Gallery, now divested of the clamorous crowd. Everyone present this time was important or could be important to his future. He gave effusive greetings to all and sundry. A smile was ever on his thin lips. Often his gaunt frame bent forward in repeated bows. He tarried not long with any particular group, but moved on purposefully, giving the impression of a man with pressing duties to which to attend, an impression heightened by the red leather portfolio he carried under his arm. His black costume was not clerical, yet it was appropriately austere and set him apart from the others moving along the corridors of power. His dress said, 'Yes, a man of obvious principle, yet one flexible in practice, not someone overly concerned with all the niceties,' exactly the impression he wished to convey — a priest to whom you could talk frankly, a priest with whom you could bargain as freely as with the devil. Bright sunshine poured through the open windows of the Grand Gallery as the Grand Almoner made his way to his appointment with the young queen.

Queen Anne was judged by courtiers to be the most beautiful woman in Christendom, but that was courtly exaggeration — at fourteen years of age she was still not fully matured. The Princesse de Condé at twenty years of age had better claim to that title. Anne was a slim blonde with green-flecked eyes and a snow-white complexion, and when she attired herself, as she did on this day, in her green dress with the long slashed sleeves caught at the elbow and wrist with diamond buttons, a black feather in her hair, and when the sun played upon her unblemished cheek and full red lips, as it did now, then a young man, even a Bishop, could not but help to be impressed. If asked at that moment when her white teeth sparkled in laughter, if she were not the most beautiful, dainty creature he had ever seen, then such a man would have said with all his heart, 'She is'.

'Your Majesty,' began Richelieu, 'I do not wish in any way to change the beliefs with which your father and saintly mother by her good example have inculcated within your heart. You look puzzled — *inculcated?* A new French word for your Majesty — it means to be impressed upon your heart by repeated example.'

He paused to collect his thoughts once more before proceeding. 'I do not wish in any way to change the beliefs with which you have come to us, but the outward shows of piety may take different forms in different countries. Like the fashion of one's clothes, those that may be seen as commonplace in our country, France, may appear quaint in the country of your father, Spain. And vice versa. So please bear with me, and in time you will see there is no spiritual conflict whatsoever engendered by the differences in our customs.'

'Thank you, Bishop,' replied the young queen, meekly lowering her eyes. 'You

give my heart ease. I do not wish to give the King offense, but I do need some time to adjust to the French ways with which I am unacquainted. I must assure you, however, that observances of my religious duties are not in the way of being merely an outward show.'

Richelieu smiled pleasantly enough, but in his heart he felt a foreboding. The older members of the Spanish entourage played too strong a role in the new queen's household, acting to preserve the austere practices of Madrid which were highly inappropriate to the French Court and which certainly would serve to give offense if retained.

'Your Majesty, I am most honored to be allowed to serve a lady whose every thought proves worthy of her royal heritage. Turning now to more pressing matters, the Queen Mother has suggested I might instruct you in the French way of Bridge. It is, of course, imperative that Your Majesty quickly become familiar with the favorite card game of the Court, and, in addition, there is much to be learned from the game, for it is much more than a game, it is a lesson in life.'

'Yes, I am quite taken with Bridge, but, alas, have not had much experience at card play. I would welcome your kind instruction,' replied the queen sweetly as she had been coached to do.

'It is important for the sake of appearances not to play against any but your own attendants until your skills are sufficiently advanced to impress a French courtier. In the meantime I can provide some guidance. The game exercises the three powers of the mind: Memory, Intellect, and Will. By playing Bridge you will develop an ability to retain information, and also the skill of recognizing ahead of time what is important to commit to memory and what is not.' Queen Anne nodded solemnly in agreement, so Richelieu felt he could press on.

'We all have remembrances, Your Majesty. We cherish the pleasant and suppress the unpleasant. Has it not been said, 'Forgive then forget'? But Bridge does not distinguish between a pleasant card and an unpleasant card, a pleasant fact and an unpleasant one. Cards are cards and facts are facts; each must be taken at its face value. There is no forgiving and forgetting, only the utilization of what is known to be.'

'You mean facts as they appear in the Holy Scriptures, Bishop?' asked Anne.

'We speak here not of holy words, but evidence of men's actions as encountered in our daily life,' replied the Bishop, somewhat put off by the Queen's highly orthodox reaction. It was going to be harder than he had bargained for to bring this young woman to his practical way of thinking. He decided to skip to his final point.

'Of Memory, Intellect, and Will, the greatest is Will. One cannot expect to excel at Bridge, or indeed at any endeavor, without the will to do so. Bridge pits your interests against those of the opponent and it is often the strongest will that prevails. By playing bridge you will exercise your will power and learn not to give up hope even when the future appears darkest. Also you will learn not to lose your attentiveness when the future seems rosy...'

His discourse was interrupted by the Queen. 'Ah, don't say rosy, for the scent of

the rose makes me faint.’ She placed a hand to her forehead and closed her eyes, and Richelieu recognized this as a signal to end his lesson. Nonetheless he felt he had made progress, not realizing that his efforts to instill cold rationality in this warm heart would earn him only frigid hatred in the end. But why speak of ‘cold’ rationality and ‘warm’ heart? Is it ‘colder’ to plan one’s actions for the maximum benefit and the least risk than to act impulsively and, through lack of foresight, to endanger the careers and even the lives of those around you, as Anne was to do repeatedly? Is not the selfish perpetrator of foolish acts showing a ‘cold’ disregard for the well-being of others, no matter how many warm tears of regret may later be publicly shed?

ROMANCE, CONSPIRACY, HISTORY... AND BRIDGE!

In his first novel, *Samurai Bridge*, Robert MacKinnon took us to a 19th century Japan peopled with bridge players; in this book, we are transported to 17th century France, a time contemporary with Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*. The court of the young King Louis XIII was populated by an unequalled group of colorful characters: the

beautiful, devout, and devious queen, Anne of Austria, secretly in love with the dashing

handsome Duke of Buckingham, the lascivious

Duchesse de Chevreuse who could easily twist a man, even a Cardinal, around her little finger, and

Richelieu himself, the consummate schemer willing to

sacrifice his soul in the pursuit of power. Once again, the narrative revolves around bridge games, from Richelieu's attempts at tutoring the young queen to the wickedly delicate intrigue which forms the second part of the book.



Praise for *Samurai Bridge*:

You can read this book on many levels; bridge players world-wide will enjoy it, benefit from it, and ponder it. – The Kibitzer.

MacKinnon justifies the publisher's claim that this will be 'the most unusual bridge book you've ever read'. – Bridge Plus.

An unusual setting for a bridge book! Recommended. – The Denver Post.



DR ROBERT MACKINNON is a graduate of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London. After a thirty-year career as a mathematician he began writing humorous stories with a bridge setting, which have appeared in *Bridge Plus*, *International Popular Bridge Magazine* and the *ACBL Bulletin*. He lives in Victoria, BC, Canada.

