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## Not on the cards

Sanjay K Bose

I think I know exactly what Jerome K Jerome felt about work. My feelings towards bridge are roughly similar. I love bridge, it fascinates me and I can sit and watch others playing it for hours. However, my troubles with bridge usually start when I start playing it - especially when I am forced to play in a competitive environment.

Some of it, I guess, is my fault for not taking this sacred game with the same degree of veneration and seriousness as my fellow bridge players do. Or perhaps because, the game somehow manages to bring out the worst in people addicted to it. Friends otherwise incapable of hurting a fly turn into raging maniacs while playing, sowing death and destruction all around without fear or favour.

My friend Dev was one such person. We got along well except when we were playing bridge.

I did not have the heart to refuse him whenever he was desperately looking around for a partner to play with in a tournament. Dev was a born optimist and was never deterred by the fact that these card-playing adventures would invariably end just a little short of murder and mayhem - with me at the receiving end.

Being a kind-hearted soul under his ruthless bridge-playing exterior, he would eventually "forgive" my transgressions.

However, actually forgetting my sins was a lot harder for him to do. No wonder, weeks after the match, he would still be asking me searching questions about my bidding strategy or card play and would make disparaging remarks like me having a tendency to take "being the dummy" too much to heart.

The last time I played competitive bridge was in Singapore when my friend Lalit was appointed the school captain for bridge. He was not making much headway in getting together the bridge team for the school. This was probably because sensible people, even some of his closest friends, would duck into the nearest toilet or stairwell, whenever they saw Lalit coming down the corridor with the team list in his hands. Though a kind and gentle soul otherwise, Lalit was known to be capable of teaching Attila a trick or two in order to win at bridge. Unf-

ortunately, my skill at ducking into toilets was probably worse than my bridge hence, I got nabbed and turned into member of his team.

From that day onwards until the end of the tournament, Lalit would spend the lunch hour and most evenings preparing me for the match which would include everything from psychological pep talks, practice games to a bridge playing software for me to assiduously hone my skills.

He must have done something right for we did finally make it to the second rank by the end of the tournament. Of course, Lalit still unkindly insists that the team got there in spite of my best efforts to the contrary.

B.