**Somehow we landed in Six No trump – David Bird**

I am sure that readers will be familiar with many of David Bird’s books, and my personal favourites have always been those involving the Abbot and the monks of St. Titus Monastery. I was therefore delighted to read in the author’s introduction that the second half of the book contained, amongst others, hands played by those bridge-crazy monks. We are assured that although some of the stories have been published in bridge magazines around the world, none of them have previously appeared in book form. More on this point later!

The feature of this book is that all of the hands end up in a contract of six no trump. Part one of the book comprises a selection of thirty two hands played in this contract by some of the great players of world bridge – including Billy Eisenberg, Leon Yallouze, Jeff Meckstroth, Zia Mahmood plus our own Tony Forrester and Andrew Robson. Not all of these are great contracts – in fact, one of them led to down twelve, doubled and vulnerable! Perhaps the title of the book was quite appropriate in that case. Another fascinating hand was a six no trump contract where the opening leader holds the ace king of a suit. Did he double? Read the book to find out.

We also see some fine examples of defence against this contract, which helps to add variety, as although six no trump is perhaps the most interesting of contracts, you can have too much of a good thing. The opening lead (always the most difficult part of the game, unless you hold that ace king against six no trump) was also a decisive factor in more than one of the hands, with both declarer and the defence suffering because of it.

One of the features of the book which is to be applauded is the lack of blank white space in between the stories. The author is to be congratulated for taking the trouble to fill these blank spaces with a collection of thirty two problems, all of them in a contract of six no trump, some relatively easy and others rather more difficult. The solutions are always on the next page or shortly after that, thus filling in even more of what would otherwise have been wasted space in the book. Well done!

In the second part of the book the contract is the same, but now the hands are placed into the context of stories involving the Abbot, the Nuns of St. Hilda’s Convent, the missionaries to the Bozwambi tribe (good to see them again), Robin Hood and others. These are, as always, great fun – however, I do have a quibble. The first three stories from St. Titus seemed familiar, and checking my collection revealed that they had indeed appeared previously in books. Nevertheless, the stories are all of a high standard, and I found the familiar contract to be more interesting when placed in the context of the stories. It is good to see a slam made via a piece of trickery (unless you are the defender) but how much more fun when it is the witchdoctor or Brother Cameron, the Abbot’s nemesis, who produces the little bit of magic.

Fans of David Bird’s stories will not be disappointed with this collection, and I can guarantee that the next time you find yourself in a slightly dubious six no trump you will look at the hand in a slightly different way. An excellent book.