Have You Ever Been A Grosvenor Victim?

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There are so many exciting plays in bridge – squeezes, falsecards, coups and endplays, for example - but there may be none as bizarre as the *Grosvenor Gambit*. Philip Grosvenor is a fictional character created by Frederick Turner for the June 1973 edition of *The Bridge World* magazine. His psychological defensive ploy involves *purposely* giving the declarer an opportunity to make his unmakeable contract.

Grosvenor, a competent player, believed that if he deliberately made a totally illogical play, his opponent would assume that he could not possibly have played that way, so he draws the wrong conclusion and still doesn't make his contract. Why do so? According to the article, he hoped that "…without risk, one could bring about a natural result in an unsettling and disruptive manner." Declarer would become so distracted thinking about what had transpired, he would play horrible bridge thereafter.

The first time Grosvenor attempted his gambit it was accidental (he inadvertently played the wrong card), but when declarer still went down – as he undoubtedly should have – Grosvenor observed the following:

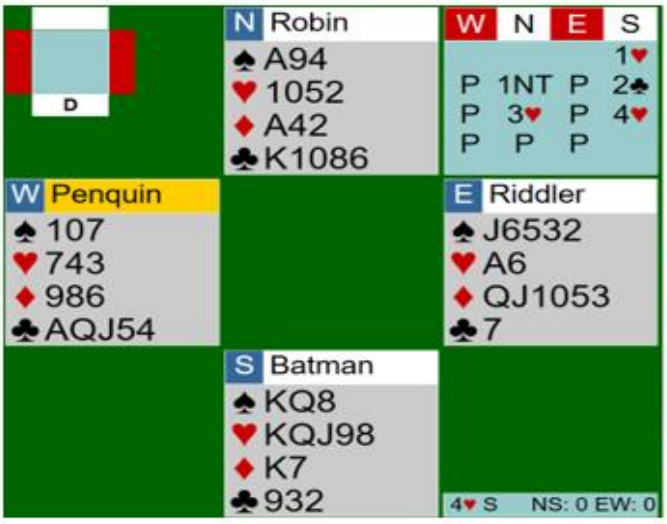
> *…South exploded, and even North got into the act… During the next deal, South - still fuming over the first board - revoked, and Grosvenor fulfilled a hopelessly overbid game contract. The two experts left the table fulminating, and were still talking angrily about the deal when the tournament ended. Grosvenor noted that they managed to score only 41%.*

This inspired Grosvenor to begin to look for intentional opportunities for his new gambit.

Let's fast forward to the Summer of 2023 when the lengthy Screen Actors Guild strike began. Did you see any famous but idle thespians (Bradley Cooper, Charlize Theron, Nicole Kidman, or David Morse, perhaps) playing at your local club? Our club had a surprise visit from four well-known actors: Batman and Robin playing N-S along with Penguin and the Riddler sitting E-W, all fine bridge players in their own right.

When they finally met up in the middle of the afternoon, it was a SAG-AFTRA event like no other. The initial deal of their 4-board round would have made Grosvenor very proud:







Robin used a forcing 1NT followed by a jump to 3♥ to show his 3-card limit raise, and his partner Batman, although ace-less, decided to bid game. The Penguin, not a big Batman fan on screen nor in real life, began his assault with a trump lead to his partner's Ace, and the Riddler wasted no time in firing back the ♣7. Considering the auction and the clubs in dummy, the ♣7 had to be a singleton. Batman chuckled to himself that not only did he and Penguin know it was a stiff, so did the preschoolers in the building next door.

Batman realized that best defense would easily defeat his contract. Penguin would of course win his Ace and return the ♣Q, thereby pickling dummy's King: if Batman covered, it would be ruffed out, and if he didn't, another club would follow to be ruffed by Riddler. There was not a single doubt in The Dark Knight's brain that Penguin, a skilled opponent, would have no trouble finding that defense.

With top hat, cigarette holder and monocle in place, the ever-diabolical Penguin had a far more fiendish plan. Despite knowing full well how to beat the contract, upon winning the ♣A he tabled the ♣4 and not the expected Queen. His goal was to mess with Batman's head rather than defeat the contract straight away!

Batman was completely surprised - what the heck was going on? Was it in fact the Riddler who was up to his usual shenanigans? Did his tricky RHO think leading low from doubleton J7 or Q7 would gain him a trick? If that were the case, no matter how Batman played, he would lose just two clubs and make his contract. While looking to his right, he imagined hearing his opponent's riddle: *If the solitary 7 causes you to frown, what other holding might take Batman down?*

Then it occurred to Batman that perhaps the Riddler had led the ♣7 from QJ75. If Batman's 2♣ bid had been a 5-card suit, Riddler could give his partner a ruff and still make a club trick later on, possibly gaining a trick for the defense. Oh, what a brilliant play, Batman thought. Then Batman had an epiphany: if the Riddler had in fact found his partner with the doubleton ♣A4 and dummy played low, Riddler would win his Jack and give his partner a ruff to crush the contract that way, *just as the imaginary riddle suggested!*

Batman was wise to all of the possibilities running through his brain as he had a surefire safety play: put up the King in dummy, draw trumps and lose just one more club, making four. Riddler's tricky holding didn't matter one bit, now that Penguin's return was proof positive the ♣7 could not be a singleton.

Batman proudly called for dummy's ♣K and the Riddler promptly ruffed. Batman was stunned. He had been given the opportunity to make the 4♥ contract by simply playing low. "I knew the ♣7 had to be stiff," he thought, "why even Alfred my butler knew it… why in the world did I put up the King?"

Since Batman still had to lose another club, the contract failed, just as it would have if Penguin had led the ♣Q after winning his Ace. But Batman was beside himself. His nemeses had thrashed his contract in a way that put his mental state into a tizzy. Batman made several errors in the ensuing boards, helping his two rivals obtain excellent matchpoint

scores and causing Robin to exclaim *"Holy, Batsh*t, Batman!"* The Caped Crusader had indeed been *Grosvenor-ed* by Penguin and the psychological damage was far more than he could bear.

Postmortem/Confession: Truth be told, I was declarer on this board, certain the ♣7 was a singleton, but when the ♣4 was returned for no apparent reason, I thought for a very long time before finally putting up the King and going down. Totally distracted and feeling like an idiot, I began thinking about the *Grosvenor Gambit* and couldn't get this board out of my head for several days. Why did West return the ♣4, you ask? Unfortunately, we'll never know.

But here's the good news: if you would like to read Frederick Turner's interesting and somewhat humorous 1973 *Bridge World* article, just click on this link.

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