

Read All About

Is your favorite book on
one of these lists?

By Brent Ma

At her home in New England, Karen McCallum keeps two bridge books at her bedside. Both are by Terence Reese: "These Hands With Me" and "Master Play."

Says McCallum, a many-time world and North American champion, "I usually read a bit of one or the other before going to sleep at night in hopes that some of Terence's brilliance might reach me by osmosis. Reading Reese before a major tournament helps get me in gear for the higher level. I need to be playing at when the competition is tough, and I rediscover how much I love the game itself when I read his words."

Although Reese died more than a decade ago, his works and reputation live on. He remains one of the most highly regarded bridge writers of all time. In a survey of expert players and Bridge Bulletin contributors, Reese had two books in the top 10 — "Master Play/The Expert Game" and "Reese on Play" — and two others were close.

The book with the double title — the No. 1 choice of the experts — was first published in England in 1958 as "The Expert Game." Two years later, it appeared in the U.S. as "Master Play."

Says bridge book expert Tim Bourke, "It is just one of many examples of titles changing when the Atlantic was crossed in the days when books were, by law, published separately in Great Britain and her Commonwealth (excluding Canada) and North America."

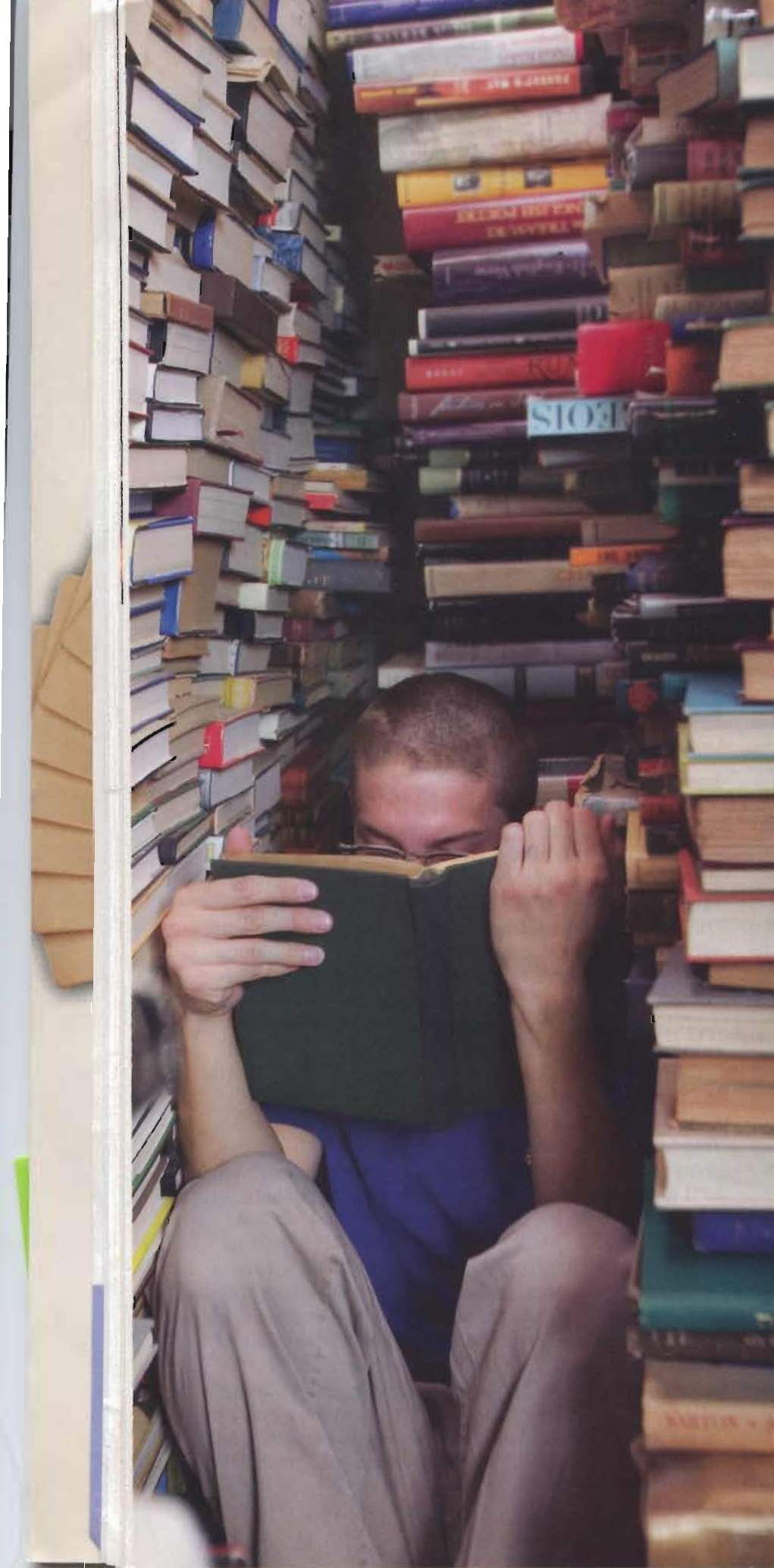
Indeed, in the survey, the votes from the other side of the Atlantic were for "The Expert Game." The votes for the two titles were combined to give the book top billing.

Bourke said he was told once that the American publisher changed the title because he feared the original connoted poker more than bridge.

Second to the Reese classic was a book by another author from Great Britain — S.J. Simons — whose "Why You Lose at Bridge" was far and away the leader in the previous Bridge Bulletin poll, 12 years ago.

In 1994, the poll was sent to well-known players and writers only. This time, readers were invited

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join in, and their picks make up the second list of favorites. The top pick for readers is another classic — Louis H. Watson's "The Play of the Hand at Bridge."

Experts and readers were asked to list their top five "favorite" books — the survey was not intended to render judgment regarding which works are "best." Scoring was on a 5-4-3-2-1 basis. Tables for both sets of results are included with this report.

Of note is the fact that few of the books that made the two lists were published in recent times.

On the experts' list, the most recently published book, "Bridge With The Blue Team," rolled off the presses in 1983. Simon's enduring classic goes back to 1945.

There are three more recent books on the readers' list: "How The Experts Win at Bridge" (1996), "25 Conventions You Should Know" (1999) and "Standard Bidding for the 21st Century" (2000). The rest are old, familiar ... and very good.

At one time Reese was considered by many to be the best player and the best bridge writer in the world. His image as a competitor was tainted by a scandal during a world championship, but his expertise as a writer has never been questioned.

Says McCallum, "Terence had a wonderful way of communicating his own pleasure in the beauty of bridge — a way with words that I think no other bridge writer — other than Victor Mollo — has ever attained."

Kerri Sanborn, one of the world's top players, chose "Master Play" as

Experts' favorites

1. The Expert Game/Master Play, <i>Terence Reese</i>	92
2. Why You Lose at Bridge, <i>S.J. Simon</i>	81
3. Adventures in Card Play, <i>Geza Ottlik & Hugh Kelsey</i>	59
4. Killing Defense, <i>Hugh Kelsey</i>	55
5. Bridge in the Menagerie, <i>Victor Mollo</i>	53
6. Right Through the Pack, <i>Robert Darvas & Norman de V. Hart</i>	47
7. The Play of the Hand at Bridge, <i>Louis H. Watson</i>	28
8. Card Play Technique, <i>Victor Mollo & Nico Gardener</i>	25
9. Bridge With the Blue Team, <i>Pietro Forquet</i>	23
10. Reese on Play, <i>Terence Reese</i>	22

her favorite: "For years, I would learn something new every time I read this classic."

Author, syndicated columnist and Bridge Bulletin contributor Frank Stewart is another Reese admirer: "What a wonderful writer Reese was, especially in the over-the-shoulder genre!"

There was enthusiastic support for other authors, mostly among the expert voters (readers appeared somewhat reluctant to comment on their choices).

Michael Rosenberg is a big fan of "Bridge in the Menagerie" by Mollo. "This was the book that hooked me on bridge forever."

Ron Garber, himself a bridge book publisher, is partial to "Adventures in Card Play" by Geza Ottlik and Hugh Kelsey, whose 1979 book on esoteric squeezes, "non-material finesses" and other such exotica has no equal in the genre. "My hair literally stood on end when I started to realize what was going on here."

Stewart had high praise for "Right

Through the Pack" by Robert Darvas and Norman de V. Hart: "Count me among those who consider this the all-time best bridge book."

John Carruthers considers Hugh Kelsey, with two books on the top 10 list, as a major force in bridge writing: "One knew a major talent had arrived with the publication of ("Killing Defense at Bridge"), his first. Really, one could take any of Kelsey's books and put it in one's top five and not receive an argument from any bridge player. That was his genius. Kelsey is nonpareil in my book."

Mike Lawrence did not have a book in the experts' top 10, but the author, world champion and Bridge Bulletin contributor did make the list among readers, one of whom wrote that "any book" by Lawrence would rate as his favorite. That comment was duplicated by Barry Harper among the experts who were polled.

Player, author and teacher Jerry Helms, who writes for the Play Bridge section of the Bridge Bulletin, echoes Harper's sentiment in endorsing Lawrence's "How To Read Your Opponents' Cards," which was just out of the top 10 among experts and No. 3 among readers. "This book," says Helms, "is quite an eye-opener for many advancing players. Lawrence does an excellent job of pointing out the inferences based on the lead received or the suit not led."

Readers' comments were sparse, but there was a strong endorsement from one reader for the book that took the top spot. Wrote Chris Kaufman of Harpers Ferry WV on Watson's classic, "It was my bible when I was first starting to learn the game." □

Readers' favorites

1. The Play of the Hand at Bridge, <i>Louis H. Watson</i>	79
2. Points, Schmoints!, <i>Marty Bergen</i>	44
3. How to Read Your Opponents' Cards, <i>Mike Lawrence</i>	43
4. Why You Lose at Bridge, <i>S.J. Simon</i>	41
5-6. Killing Defense at Bridge, <i>Hugh Kelsey</i>	33
5-6. 25 Conventions You Should Know, <i>Barbara Seagram & Marc Smith</i>	33
7. Card Play Technique, <i>Victor Mollo & Nico Gardener</i>	27
8-9. How the Experts Win at Bridge, <i>Burt and Rose Hall</i>	24
8-9. Adventures in Card Play, <i>Geza Ottlik & Hugh Kelsey</i>	24
10-11. Standard Bidding for the 21st Century, <i>Max Hardy</i>	22
10-11. Secrets to Winning Bridge, <i>Jeff Rubens</i>	22