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Pirate Bridge

THE LATEST IMPROVEMENT UPON AUCTION.

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"Complete Bridge," "Royal Auction Bridge," etc.



An English Writer, Aleister Crowley, at present residing in New York, was spending the summer at a camp in the woods of New Hampshire, where they whiled away the evenings playing auction. One day, after innumerable bids had gone wrong, owing to the trumps being all in one hand against the declarer, it occurred to him that the game would be vastly improved by borrowing an idea from solo whist, in which the partners are selective.

On his return to town he laid the matter before Frank Crowninshield, the editor of the American magazine *Vanity Fair*, who saw its possibilities at once, and then I was called in to give my opinion of it.

I found that there were many details which required rounding out and adjusting, and spent some weeks in discussing the matter with expert auction players, playing it with all sorts and

conditions of men, not forgetting the ladies, who were delighted with it, the final result being that we evolved a game that bids fair to supplant auction as completely as that game did bridge, or bridge killed whist. The reasons for this belief are as follows.

There have always been three or four great objections to auction bridge, but they have been submitted to because no one seemed able to suggest anything better. The first and most important is the forced partnership of mismatched hands and the impossibility of getting rid of an uncongenial partner if the cards decide that he shall sit opposite you.

The original declaration may be perfectly sound, but dummy's cards do not fit, and the result is a disappointment. The cards you hoped to find in the dummy are with the opponents. Then, again, the original or other bid may not be sound, but you cannot prevent your optimistic partner from making it, and you will have to sit there and see him go down several hundred points, with no consolation but the privilege of starting a row after the hand.

Another objection is the repeated failure of perfectly legitimate bids and the consequent predominance of scores above the line, which leads naturally to another serious objection, the frequency of long drawn-out rubbers, in which one pile of losses simply offsets another pile, so that the rubber does not amount to much after all, although it may have taken an hour or more to play. This is such a common occurrence that a law has been introduced for the benefit of those who cannot keep awake long enough to see the end.

Statistics that have been compiled from a very large number of recorded rubbers played in the leading clubs show that the contract fails in about four times out of every nine deals. This naturally leads to considerable friction between partners, each of whom blames the other for his want of judgment, or something of that sort, whereas the bid may have been perfectly legitimate upon general principles, and the failure due to the unfortunate distribution of the cards. It sometimes happens that one player at the table will have a shocking run of bad luck, and another will manage to cut him for a partner every time.

A still further objection to auction is the absolute impotence of weak hands. It is not at all uncommon for a player to have worthless hands, without a bid or a support in them, for a whole evening, or even for a week or two in succession, and to find himself completely at the mercy of the strong hands against him, which pile up games, honour scores, slams, and

rubbers at an alarming rate. Pirate bridge removes all these objections at one stroke, although the fundamental principle of the game is simplicity itself.

Seats and cards are cut as usual, and the dealer has the privilege of making the first bid or passing, the rank of the suits and the value of the bids being the same as at auction.

As soon as a bid is made each player in turn to the left may either "accept" or pass, but no one can make any higher bid or double until the first bidder has been accepted by someone as a partner. It does not matter which of the three accepts, the partnership is formed without any change of their positions at the table.

If no one accepts a bid it is void, and the player to the left of the rejected bidder can bid just as if no such bid had been made. If it is a higher bid that is not accepted, the bidding returns automatically to the previous bid and acceptance.

The moment a bid is accepted the bidding is reopened, and each in turn to the left of the acceptor may bid higher, double, or pass. Even the bidder who has just been accepted may bid something else, a useful privilege if he has a two-suiter and wants to get the partner with the stronger help. The only player who cannot bid again until he is overcalled is the acceptor.

Let us suppose the points of the compass to indicate the positions of the four players, and that N deals and bids a spade. E and S both pass, but W accepts. N passes, but now E bids two hearts, which he could not do on the first round, as N's bid had not been accepted yet. S passes and W accepts. N has nothing more to say and E passes, but S now bids three clubs, which is accepted by N and doubled by E. When S passes, W bids three spades, accepted by N, and that ends it.

The player who makes the final bid that is accepted becomes the declarer and plays the combined hands, no matter who first bid that suit. This greatly simplifies the matter of determining the declarer. The player who accepts becomes the dummy, but does not change his seat. The leader for the first trick is always the player to the left of the declarer, unless that person is the dummy, in which case the player to his left leads. The moment the first card is led dummy's hand is laid down face up, wherever it happens to be, to the right or left of the declarer, or opposite him. Here is the distribution of the cards in the bidding just described: —

	Hearts - 8, 7, 5. Clubs - Ace, king, 7. Diamonds - 5, 3. Spades - Ace, king, 10, 6, 5.											
Hearts - King, 9, 2. Clubs - 8. Diamonds - Queen, knave, 10, 8. Spades - Queen, knave, 9, 4, 3.	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50px; height: 50px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">N</td> <td style="width: 50px; height: 50px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">W</td> <td style="width: 50px; height: 50px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">E</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 50px; height: 50px;"></td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">S</td> <td style="width: 50px; height: 50px;"></td> </tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		Hearts - Ace, queen, knave, 6, 3. Clubs - 10, 9, 4, 3. Diamonds - Ace, 7, 6. Spades - 8.	Hearts - 10, 4. Clubs - Queen, knave, 6, 5, 2. Diamonds - King, 9, 4, 2. Spades - 7, 2.
	N											
W		E										
	S											

Although N first bid the spades, it was W's bid that was finally accepted by N, so that W plays the hand. E leads, and N's cards are laid down before S plays. The declarer then plays from his own hand and afterward from dummy. As will be readily seen, W must lose one heart and two diamonds, but wins a game, with five honours.

If the position is examined it will be seen that E cannot go game in hearts unless he can induce W to accept him, but W prefers to play the hand instead of being an acceptor, because the actual declarer is the only one that can score below the line toward game, his partner's points all going into the honour column.

The result of the play on this hand would be scored as thirty-six below the line for W with a line drawn under it to show a game won. Then he takes forty-five in honours and a bonus of a hundred for winning a game. W's acceptor, N, scores the whole one hundred and eighty-one points in honours. When one player wins two games that ends the rubber and he gets a hundred points for it, in addition to the regular hundred for winning a game, but his acceptor does not share in this hundred rubber points.

The scores are kept in four separate columns, the initials of the players at the top. At the end of the rubber the scores are all added up and the fractions thrown off, reducing the amounts to even hundreds or fifties, as may be the club custom. Suppose this is the final addition:—

Jones.	Smith.	Brown.	Green.
190	426	58	286
2	4	1	3

There are then two ways to find the amounts each wins or loses. The simplest, once it is understood, is to call the lowest score nothing and deduct it from the others. Then add the winnings and place the total to the right. After multiplying each player's score by four, deduct the total of the winnings, thus:—

	Jones.	Smith.	Brown.	Green.
	1	3	0	2 = total 6
4 times:	+4	+12	0	+8
less 6:	-6	-6	-6	-6
	-2	+6	-6	+2

Another way is to settle each man's account with each of the others, one at a time, without throwing out the lowest score, thus:—

	2	4	1	3
	-2	+2	-1	+1
	+1	+3	-3	-1
	-1	+1	-2	+2
	-2	+6	-6	+2

Jones lost two to Smith, so we call Jones two minus and give Smith two plus. We do the same with Jones as compared to Brown, and then with Green; then we go to Smith and Brown, and so on.

On account of the accuracy of the information upon which all bids after the first are made, very few contracts are really risky in pirate bridge, unless a player deliberately takes a chance in order to save a game or rubber. The play is very fast. Six rubbers in two hours is not at all uncommon, and very few rubbers go more than five deals, the average among good players being three and a half.

Among the novelties and attractions of the game are the varying position of the dummy and the ease with which an undesirable partner or unsafe bidder can be got rid of. Another

point is the fact that no matter how often one passes a bid, there will always be a chance to bid again when it has been accepted or if it is void.

The first mistake the novice is likely to make is grabbing for the partner with the strong hand, so as to ride to victory on his coat-tails. This is impossible against good players, because the intended benefactor will shake you off. There are many opportunities to pick out the strong hand for a partner when the bidding has gone far enough, but the beginner is apt to be in too great a hurry.

Take this distribution:—

Hearts - King, knave, 10, 6, 4.											
Clubs - 9, 4.											
Diamonds - 7.											
Spades - King, knave, 7, 6, 2.											
Hearts - Queen, 7, 5.	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">W</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">E</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;"></td> <td style="border: none; text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		Hearts - 8, 2.
	N										
W		E									
	S										
Clubs - Ace, 8.			Clubs - Knave, 10, 6,								
Diamonds - Queen,			3, 2								
10, 8, 3, 2.			Diamonds - Knave,								
Spades - Ace, queen,			6, 5.								
5.			Spades - 10, 8, 3.								
			Hearts - Ace, 9, 3.								
			Clubs - King, queen, 7, 5.								
			Diamonds - Ace, king, 9, 4.								
			Spades - 9, 4.								

N dealt and passed, not having the two sure tricks to justify an original bid. When passes, S bid no trump and W accepted. Now N bids the higher-valued of his two equal suits, spades, hoping that whichever of the two no-trumpers held by S and W is the better suited to a spade make will accept him, but E jumps in and accepts, shutting them both out. Both S and W pass. They can kill that spade contract.

In order to get rid of E, who he knows is not a desirable partner with two no-trumpers against them, N bids three hearts, and again E accepts. S now sees the situation and overcalls with four hearts, which N accepts, shutting out E, but when it gets round to W he bids four spades, knowing that N will accept him, and so the declaration originally planned by N is reached, in spite of the interference from E. It is a certain game hand in spades, but when it gets round to S he bids five hearts against W, and is accepted by N. They make five odd and four honours.

This is a good example of what happens all the time in playing pirate bridge. A player with a hand like N's is fishing for the

partner that can make the best use of N's cards, and the best spade combination bids against the best heart combination.

A very interesting feature of the new game is maneuvering for the right to play the hand and score toward game and rubber, instead of accepting another player and helping him on his way to the rubber. The bidding on the following hand is illuminating, and the manner in which E managed it shows the possibilities of a hand that would be worthless at auction:—

Harts - King, queen, knave, 9, 5, 2.											
Clubs - 9,											
Diamonds - Ace, queen, kanve, 8.											
Spades - 10, 5.											
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			Harts - 8.								
			Clubs - 7, 3, 2.								
			Diamonds - King, 9, 6, 4.								
			Spades - Ace, king, knave, 7, 2.								

N dealt and bid two hearts. He is fishing for a partner with strong cards in plain suits. E and S both pass, and W accepts. When N and E pass, S bids two spades, again accepted by W, who seemed anxious to accept everything that came along. Contrast his bidding to E's, who bides his time. N hid three hearts, E and S passing, accepted by W, and S went to three spades, when E passed for the fourth time, correctly guessing that W would again accept, and shut out N.

But when N passed E saw his opportunity had come, and he bid four hearts, and was of course accepted by N. It is an easy game hand at hearts, but if S ventures any further with the spades he will go down, as N would lead his singleton club, ruff the next one, and lead a heart, getting another club ruff amid making his ace of diamonds.

There are many other pretty points about the game, but these should be enough to give one a general idea of its possibilities, although one has to play several rubbers to get into the spirit of it. A complete code of laws has been drawn up for the game, providing for the usual penalties, and the fifty for failing on a contract, etc., pretty much as in auction.