

The Origin of the Game of Pirate Bridge

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There are six major drawbacks to Auction Bridge. Here they are: 1. Mismatched partners. You get a friend for a partner and can't shake him off. 2. Mismatched hands. The two good heart hands never seem to come together. The good spade partners are opposed to each other, etc., etc. 3. The frequency with which bids are set. In actual practice only nine bids out of thirteen are successful at auction. 4. The fact that you are liable all through a rubber, for your partner's mistakes. 5. The bickering, fault-finding, nagging, and exhibitions of bad temper. 6. It is not a good game for the gambling type of player, as only two people can win—or lose—and they *must* always win or lose *like amounts*.

Last summer, during odd days, I worked at this sixfold problem—at the attempt to eliminate these six great drawbacks. I was alone, in camp, and had to puzzle it all out with three dummies before me,—but I worked hard at it, and suddenly the great idea dawned upon me: Choose your own partner!

Well, I developed that simple Great Idea and came to New York with the results of it. I went straight to the office of Vanity Fair, and, lo, great was my reward! The editor and I tried out a few hands at double dummy. He liked the game at once, and summoned to our aid that noted authority on every game from Scat to Poker, Mr. R. F. Foster. Mr. Foster also liked the game, and has worked at the theory of it pretty steadily ever since. He has introduced it to certain of the leading card clubs, and has even crystallized my crude idea into a pamphlet of official rules.

Luckily for the readers of Vanity Fair, it will be he who is to explain, month by month, to its card-loving subscribers the best way to combine pleasure with profit at Pirate Bridge. I must not encroach upon his province of scientific explanations, but I should like to point out six major advantages of the game of Pirate:

First: You can—if you are clever—avoid tying yourself up with a tedious or idiotic partner.

Second: The hands which will work best together tend to come together as partners.

Third: Fewer final bids are set back, thus shortening the duration—and bother—of every rubber.

Fourth: Every player is playing for himself. Four individual scores are kept, all independent.

Fifth: It does away with a lot of bickering and quarrelling. You may feel inclined to blame someone for “accepting” you, when the hand goes wrong; but you are not tied to him for a rubber.

Sixth: It is a first-rate game for the man who fancies his own individual play, and has many of the best elements of poker.

Let me draw a picture! In auction, I bid a heart, but only with fear and trembling, because my partner may not have any hearts at all. In the new game of Pirate I can bid two hearts and feet more or less certain that either the man—no matter where he sits—with the hearts or the man with the aces and kings, is going to accept me as a partner and so save me from ignominy and ruin. After a bid has been accepted, and a partnership thus established, the next player can accept *that* bid and so establish a new partnership, and so on indefinitely.

But, more delightful than anything else, is the change in the actual play introduced by the fact that partners are not always playing across the table. One’s dummy may be exposed across the table, or at one’s immediate right or left. Finessing,

and “leading through,” become much more interesting and important when two partners are sitting next to each other. The whole technique of the play of the cards at once becomes a great deal more diversified, unexpected and subtle.