

# The Most Beautiful Game

By Bernard Marcoux



## Theseus in the Labyrinth

Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Courtesy of [CGFA](#).

A bidding system is a fascinating construction. The mind cannot help being seduced by those beautiful sequences, logical and clear, that drive infallibly to a grand slam. And bridge, at that moment, appears like a microcosm that we can circumnavigate, that we can understand and codify, that we can explain and control. And this impression of having created something perfect doesn't forgive: you are hooked for life. The beginner will go through a long period where, convinced that everything must have an explanation, and therefore that each situation has an answer in a convention, he will constantly search, in his bridge hands, applications of learned conventions.

Bridge, at the beginning, is exhilarating because of this impression that it works by itself, that you only have to apply known recipes, and that everything will arrive like predicted. The early bad results, inevitable and that last so long, can perhaps attack this myth and, sometimes, diminish your enthusiasm.

And you begin to see, slowly, the immensity and the complexity of the labyrinth where you find yourself, that seemed at first so simple. At that moment, you can decide that you will never make it and run away. You can start Monopoly ... and die from boredom. Or you can decide to untangle this maze.

Theseus, practical, pragmatic, took a thread from Ariadne's dress, went into the labyrinth and came back alive. At bridge, getting out of the labyrinth of bidding takes at least two years, if you study seriously. After this period, if you work hard, the labyrinth becomes a bit more familiar and you can get in and out more easily. And you start then, not to try to make hands fit into a convention system, but to use conventions to describe hands. And the 55% ceiling, at duplicate, which seemed in concrete, starts to inch up. And the more you study, the more you play, the more you realize that you need, in this game that you thought mechanical, to reintroduce judgment, thought, ruse, sometimes even lies. And you start to notice that bridge is a moving thing, a changing thing, a living thing. And a new fascination emerges: to find responses, not in conventions, but by deduction and imagination. And you reinvest at this moment, in your

bridge, everything that you are, all your brain and all your instincts. You begin to notice that the exaltation, which seemed to reside at first in the elimination of judgment, reappears when you reintroduce the same judgment, and that you have to be right only a little more than half of the time. At baseball, a good hitter is the one who is out 7 times out of 10. And if a good hitter is the one who accepts to lose 7 times out of 10, a good bridge player knows that, if everything goes well, he will lose 3 or 4 times out of 10. He knows also that, if things go bad, he will lose 4, 5 and even 6 times out of 10. And we are talking here only about bidding, and you have been playing bridge for more than two years.

Then you encounter another labyrinth: card playing. And you do the same thing all over again. You apply recipes, go down in contracts everyone makes, and watch, fascinated, those good players who do magic, who find all the cards and make 11 tricks in a contract you have failed miserably. And one day, playing 4 spades, and having established 2 diamond tricks in dummy, you suddenly notice that your 3 of spades is too strong for the 2 in dummy, that there are no more entries, that two diamond tricks are lost, and the contract also. The lesson is very harsh, but essential. You become then, and only then, a real bridge player: you start to notice those 5's, 7's or 9's that slide under your nose, apparently unimportant, and that contain often the key to a contract or even a slam. At that moment, if you have endured everything, you discover the real pleasure, the real exaltation: you listen to the bidding, you watch the first two or three tricks, you count and you know, for sure, the location of all the cards. You visualize and play your cards in such an order that opponents are reduced to spectators.

There is no game more difficult; there is no game more gratifying. It is the most beautiful game man ever invented. Sometimes, when you play it perfectly, you feel like a god. Other times, when you are lazy or negligent, you make deplorable mistakes. But, each time you call upon those faculties that define the human being: intelligence, imagination, calculus, thought, will, courage, this game will gratify you with marvelous successes. Many, witnessing your frequent victories, will say you are lucky.

But you will know that you have wandered for a long time in many labyrinths, and that, one day, you have decided, courageously, to explore them, to know them, to master them. Only you will know that, at the table, you count, count and count in order to find an elusive Queen or a stiff King. And this is the more fascinating: this game forces us to tap deep into ourselves and makes us discover unknown resources, which slept there, under laziness and absence of challenge.

The first time you will find, after thought, observation and imagination, the key to a contract, and see the cards fall exactly like you had envisioned, you will then feel a pleasure so profound that you will be hooked for life. Like us.