

Rick's Tricks

WALKING A TIGHT ROPE: HIGH-LEVEL DECISIONS!



By Rick Roeder

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A classic 1950 Japanese movie, *Roshomon*, looks at an assault and murder from the different perspectives of the four protagonists. Let's do likewise in a hand played in Walt Schafer's IMP game.

You hold:

♠J10xxx ♥9xx ♦— ♣8xxxx

The beauty of bridge is that even one-counts can offer tantalizing options. At all red, you are in 3rd seat. Pard opens 1 club. Righty passes. And you? Your anemic hand argues for pass, but your distribution suggests that either 1♠ or 3♣ (*most expert pairs play inverted*) could work well.

If you choose to bid 3♣, the late, great Grant Baze had a toy to deal with such a hand. He would bid the next step, asking Pard, "am I making 3 No Trump?" If yes, Pard would bid the next step, enabling the strong hand to be declarer in 3 No Trump. If no, a bail out to 4 of the minor was required.

If you do not play Grant's toy, but do play inverted minors, you should pretend that you are the Clash singing "Should I Stay or Should I Go" in asking Pard what to do with 18-19 HCP, balanced hands.

Our expert elects to pass. Lefty makes a reopening double. Your partner, an esteemed 10-time national champion, excites you with a 1 spade bid. WOW! Your side may have so many black cards that Los Bravos' 1966 classic, *Black Is Black*, starts playing in your head. Righty butts in with 2♥. Decide what you would bid before reading on.

In a New York-second, I would bid 4♠ as a two-way action. The law of total tricks can be overridden (you likely have only 9 trumps in a 10-trick contract) because of your two-suited fit. For purists of THE LAW, I can understand 3♠. A 2♠ bid is both sneaky and reasonable if you wish to "walk the dog" with the objective of buying the hand in 4♠.

Did our man make one of those bids? Nope! He made an out-of-this-galaxy cue bid of 3♥! Lefty also makes an unexpected bid: 5♥. Your Righty tanks for about 15 seconds over this unexpected jump and taps the table. Your turn. Are you done?

Who knows who can make what? If the opponents have a 9-card Heart fit, losing a Heart and 1 black card means you are making 5 Spades. But that seems odds against as Pard would need excellent holdings in the blacks. Perhaps a better rationale to bid 5♠ is that the opponents can make 11 tricks in Hearts while your side can take 10 tricks in Spades. If so, you might win 10 IMPs by bidding. However, there are two downsides by bidding on: Pard will not comprehend your joke of a cuebid. If 5♠ happens to be making, might Pard bid on to a doomed slam? The other downside is your possession of negative defense against 7♥.

Undaunted, you push on with the 5th Spade. After a slight tank, Lefty bids 6♥. Back to you in passout seat. The stakes have become higher. Pard did not double. Hmm...Does that suggest bidding on? On the surface, your defensive prospects do not look bright. Ever creative, you come up with a scenario where Pard gets in with a black Ace and gives you a Diamond ruff. What if you could get two Diamond ruffs and beat this 3? Stop fantasizing and get back to reality! Unfortunately, you recall, with dread, the classic horror movie, *The Fog* where your vision gets more and more impaired as time passes. You know that Pard will never dream that your Diamond void may well be key to the defense so you make an imaginative double in hopes that your delayed "Lightner double" will clue in Pard.

Lefty, yours truly, tanks for about 15 seconds and redoubles. Passed back to you. Mystery has been supplanted by horror. Your 1-HCP hand has now resulted in your 5th fascinating bidding decision. Or has "fascinating" been replaced by "terrifying" as you painfully endure flashbacks from 6 different Stephen King movies. Is Lefty trying to bully you into bidding 6♠ with his macho redouble? While 6♠ might provide a degree of safety, you flash back to the reality that the opponents did not freely bid slam. You pushed them to 6 with your 5♠ chirp in passout seat. With this in mind, you decide to stand your ground. Mercifully, this torture chamber has finally ended.

Now, let's look at the perspective of my partner, Alan Watson, holding:

♠x ♥KQ10x ♦QJ9xx ♣J109

What would you bid after:

RHO	YOU	LHO	PARD
1♣	P	P	DBL
1♠	?		

First decision: do you bid your longest suit or the suit most likely to get you to game? I would opt for Hearts since you may not have a chance to introduce that suit if the opponents keep bidding Spades.

Two or three Hearts? Without the ♥10, I would settle for 2♥. With it, I would take the high road opposite Pard's double in DIRECT seat. Since my values for a reopening double can be shaded, Alan very reasonably chose to bid 2♥. Unknown to Alan, the auction was about to take off like a rocket ship: 3♥ by his LHO and 5♥ by Pard. What in earth was going on? Alan was unsure. He initially wondered if Pard was making a preemptive strike against their 4♠ contract. If Pard was

looking for a Club control, he certainly did not have that. He tapped the table and became an interested spectator for the balance of the bidding excitement.

Finally, my hand:

♠AQx ♥A9xx ♦AK10xxx ♣—

My reopening double is clear. I was stunned at the ensuing round of bidding. I have this rock, LHO has an opener worth a 2nd call, Pard is freely bidding and Righty cue bids!! Aha, I thought: a 50-HCP deck!

I need very little to make a slam. After 3♥, I thought about blasting 6♥. I was willing to gamble that we had no Diamond loser but the Heart situation worried me. When dealing with 50-HCP decks, invariably there is lots of distribution. We could have 2 trump losers. I made what I thought was the scientific master bid of 5♥.

My thinking was that I was inferentially showing controls in both black suits and wanted Pard to focus on his trump holding. After all, I had a variety of cue bids available if one black suit was a problem or if I needed to slow down the auction to get more information.

When Righty pushed on to 5♠ in passout seat, I reconsidered. First, I knew my 5♥ bid might be construed as ambiguous. Second, if the distribution was more extreme than I thought, the likelihood that Pard had a 5th Heart increased. Envision Pard with a Yarborough and 6 Hearts. If Hearts broke 2-1, slam would be either reasonable or cold. I took the push to 6♥.

When I was doubled, my first instinct was one of sadness. However, nobody knew I had a Club void and a great side suit. I had no clue as to whether 6♥ was a maker. I heard the voice of deceased San Diego expert, Marc Rothblatt, in my head: “When you have reasonable options, play for the story.” You would be proud of my redouble, Marc! “RIP.”

On a club lead, Alan managed to ruff two Clubs in dummy as he was very relieved that he had no trump loser. +2470! The play of the hand is far from trivial as the specter of a 4-1 break loomed large. Alan thought the best line was to run dummy’s ♥9 at trick 2, thinking that if he lost to the Jack, reasonable chances remained.

In the post-mortem, Alan reflected that I must have been asking for good hearts because my hand could not have been good enough to venture to the 5 level without the two Heart royals in front of his nose in addition to a hole elsewhere.

Our fourth protagonist, the one-club opener, must have felt like an innocent bystander who witnessed a fatal car crash.

When making a high-level decision, do NOT look down at the ground as Jimmy Stewart did in *Vertigo*. The consequences may prove disastrous. ♣