

Rick's Tricks

RRed Again

By Rick Roeder

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Given that my initials are RR, I have always been drawn to Victor Mollo's fictional creation of the Rueful Rabbit. The Rueful Rabbit's legend stems from his uncanny ability to turn lemons into lemonade. Rueful Rabbit can make forgetful or ludicrous plays that result in stunning success. Just ask the Hideous Hog: Nobody has an equal in tilting out an opponent than the mythical Rabbit!

I am playing in a virtual game when this hand occurs. A matchpoint bidding question for you, holding:

♠ AJ84 ♥ 8763 ♦ K932 ♣ A

At all white, you are in fourth chair after (pass)- 4♣- (pass)-?. What would you bid, given that you are not a Namyats pair?

Personally, I do not see this as a close decision and would pass. Sure, 5♣ could make but you have excellent defense if the opponents do not go quietly. An underrated mantra: "Matchpoints is a game of plus scores." My LHO does not concur and bids 5 fateful clubs.

On opening lead, I am staring at:

♠ Q10752 ♥ AQ4 ♦ J75 ♣ 52

Decide what you would lead before reading on. On the surface, a spade lead looks best. However the ♥A could easily be the winner as the preemptor is not a strong candidate to hold the ♥K. I choose a safer spade. When Declarer pitches a heart on the ♠A, I realize that I have likely erred.

Declarer plays his other black ace and ruffs a spade, with me playing a suit preference 10. A second round of trumps is followed by a diamond to dummy's king and Pard's ace. Pard flips another spade on the table, as declarer ruffs. Declarer produces the ♦10. What do you play?

If declarer is 0247 or 0148, ducking my jack is clearly the right play. Did I have the audacity to say the "clearly" right play? OOPS! Declarer's ♦10 is a winner. When the ♦Q is declarer's next play, I go into shock as Pard again follows. Declarer is more than happy to concede a heart trick. -400!!

Declarer has 2 legitimate ways to make 5♣. He can play for an opponent to hold stiff ace or ♦Ax. A higher percentage play of a first-round finesse of the ♦10 is available. While Declarer could finesse my Partner for the ♦10, it is safer to pull trumps before taking a position in diamonds. An

expert declarer would make this hand by finessing me for the 10. Why does this not help me feeling less agitated?

How would one classify the play of the $\heartsuit 10$: genius, stupidity or just a blessed mislick? Initially, I shook my head at declarer's play but, upon reflection, I started to admire the uniqueness of the play.

My ex-post-facto irritation at not covering the 10 was palpable. If one had the objective of getting under an opponent's skin, mission accomplished! In that sense, declarer's imaginative play achieved the same objective as a "Grosvenor Gambit." The Gambit offers a chance for the opposition to gain a trick in an illogical manner. To wit:

You are defending a 3NT contract:

DUMMY

\spadesuit K752

\heartsuit 543

\diamondsuit 872

\clubsuit 6432

YOU

\spadesuit A109

\heartsuit Qxx

\diamondsuit Axxx

\clubsuit Jxx

DECLARER

\spadesuit 864

\heartsuit AKJ10

\diamondsuit KQJ

\clubsuit AKQ

The opponents conduct a simple $2\clubsuit$ - $2\diamondsuit$ - $2NT$ - $3NT$ auction. Pard leads the $\spadesuit Q$, all ducked. The spade jack prompts the king from dummy. You proceed to win the $\spadesuit A$ and then the $\spadesuit 10$. Alas, since virtually all the HCP are accounted for, your chances of getting to Pard so that the 13th spade can be cashed are roughly the same as needing suntan lotion on a November day in Anchorage.

You fiendishly (or foolishly) decide to play a heart at trick 4. Declarer assumes you are a sane human being and would not offer him a free finesse when dummy is as barren as the Sahara. Declarer rises and knocks out your $\diamondsuit A$. OK, you have had your fun and could safely exit. But, no! Satan has ordered you to play another heart. Your possessed soul obediently follows his command. Declarer rises with his other high heart honor. After the hand, declarer glares at you with a twisted blend of contempt and amazement. Your inner soul is Dancing in the Street. Anybody can accidentally stumble into a Grosvenor Gambit. However, you have managed to perform the feat

TWICE in the same hand, which accords you automatic entrance into the Grosvenor Gambit Hall of Fame – a prime tourist trap in Dry Hole, Texas.

One suggestion: When pulling off a Rueful Rabbit gem, do not do so in matchpoints. Your victimized opponent becomes your ally for the balance of the session. You do not want your victim to remain traumatized in later rounds, playing less than their best. Better to pull off a strategic gem during the early portion of a knockout match. If you any degree of compassion, have a list of readily available therapists: the least a humanitarian would offer their victims. Of course, you know that bridge is a predatory game. There will be no such list. ♣