

For Novices Only

by Marti Ronemus

Party (?) Bridge

My BFF and I are currently involved in a trip Down the Rabbit Hole of bridge. We are playing in a Rubber Bridge marathon, sponsored by an organization which shall remain anonymous to protect the guilty. Each month we play a different pair and at the end of the year, winners emerge. We entered this to meet some new fellow bridge players and enjoy some games together.

What were we thinking?

We knew it would be different from our Club games, and accepted there would be very few (if any) conventions played, no bidding boxes, and completely different scoring.

BUT we had no idea the REAL difference wouldn't be the level of bridge played, but (how can I put this politely--) the ethics. We are playing bridge as it would be played in "Lord of the Flies."

Here are some examples of what we've run into.

A player folded her hand, laid it on the table, looked directly into her partner's eyes, and said, "PASS." Her partner got the message and passed.

Another woman, said, "Can we review the bidding?" One Spade (she pulled three cards out of her hand), two Hearts (she pulled four)—and so on through the bidding. She was, according to her, just innocently arranging her hand.

A woman opened the bidding. After my Pard's pass, her partner passed. "What, don't you have anything for me?" the opener asked. Her partner looked at her hand again and then bid.

I was declaring. West took a Club trick, then started to pull out another card for her next lead. Her partner quickly rearranged his hand. She put back the card she was going to lead and led another Club which he trumped. I audaciously mentioned that he had just told his partner he was void in Clubs. "I always rearrange my hand to keep the red and black suits separated."

My Pard and I have learned that when they open, "Oh I think I'll bid a Club," says nothing about Clubs, whereas when they say "ONE CLUB!" they mean they have a Club suit.

Faithful Readers who know me are probably asking themselves why I wasn't standing on the table screaming at these people. Well, here's the problem. We are guests. This group has been playing for decades and this is just the way they play. My partner and I don't have the right to challenge them, as these are THEIR house rules. There is no director and thusly no court of appeals.

The big problem of course is that there is absolutely no understanding of the concepts of "unauthorized information" and "active ethics." We Club players have been raised on these principles. We know that if there are no bidding boxes (sigh), calls must be made neutrally. We don't even LOOK at our partner during the bidding. We know we must always be aware that the "language" of bridge is very narrow, and doesn't include Kabuki acting out.

We also know we are judged by our ethics, and our reputations as ethical players are very precious to us.

One final thought on this: We were asked where we usually played and we mentioned our club games. The person asking said, "Oh we tried that, but you people (you people? Really?) have too many rules."

So pray for us as we continue this voyage into the unknown. It is giving us a renewed appreciation of the environment in which we usually play. Will we make it safely through? Stay tuned.

And if you have any adventures you'd like to share, please reach out to me at mronemus@comcast.net.