

BRIDGE AND THE ROMANTICS

Nick Smith



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Every attempt has been made to ensure historical accuracy in all non-bridge matters. Any errors that remain are the author's own.

The author welcomes feedback. Contact nick@ool.co.uk.

Bridge, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

P.B. Shelley, *Adonais* (adapted)

For my father, Roy Smith,
who did not live to read this ...

Casa Magni, San Terenzo, 30 June 1822

Dear Hookham,

I thank you for your kind solicitations. Alas *The Triumph of Life* is incomplete. Instead all I can offer for publication is a short subsidiary pamphlet to be entitled simply, 'Declarer Play Problems'. My life has been spent in a search for the most perfect bridge deal and these are amongst the finest I have encountered to date – in Oxford, London, Grasmere, Geneva, Ravenna and a host of other locations. Some were correctly played at the table, others not. In each there is a perfect balance between declarer and defenders – one false move by either side and the other should prevail. In that equilibrium, we glimpse the white radiance of eternity or Blake's fearful symmetry. Although the two sides cannot both win, there is a victory of a different sort in a perfectly executed contest, a triumph of life itself.

Here are those challenges from declarer's perspective; my solutions will follow soonest. But tomorrow I must sail to Livorno to greet Hunt and his family, there to discuss his plans for *The Liberal*.

Yrs, in haste, P.B. Shelley

Editor's Note

Percy Bysshe Shelley did not live to compile his own answers to these problems. The text that follows is not by Shelley himself but the work of an unknown author, possibly Thomas Jefferson Hogg himself, dating from around 1850. The manuscript was recently found in a collection of papers donated anonymously to University College, Oxford.

Introduction to *Declarer Play Problems*

by P.B. Shelley

The child is father of the man, as Mr Wordsworth has said. In our beginnings are our endings and we must plan to make the best of the riches and opportunities that have been bestowed on us. So too with bridge problems – from the outset, we must glimpse the fork in the road that lies a long way ahead, how we will reach and recognise that fork and the untrodden path we will travel thereafter.

Most play problems, even in the worthiest tomes, are single trick affairs. If you select the right card to play to the next trick, you will prevail. But these challenges are more complex. Not only must you envisage the critical layout of the opposing hands and select the right cards to set yourself on the winning line, you must also anticipate the details of the subsequent play on the assumption of initial success. In other words, you are asked to delineate a full plan of action. For top marks, you should identify the critical position you hope to reach and the specific cards that you hope to find on one side or the other.

In every case, you must anticipate perfect defence from this point on. Strategies based on deception or anticipated incompetence will not gain approbation.

Each problem had but a single answer when the deals occurred at the table. Even the smallest deviation from the path of righteousness would have resulted in failure. It is no use arguing that your line would have worked against a friendlier, if less likely, distribution.

In many cases, the auction provides important clues. All opposing bids are reliable and honest, conforming to accepted standards, e.g. for strength of the opening bid, promised distribution, etc.

Good luck!

PBS

June 1822

The Problems

1. Some dangerous sport

♠10642	N/S Vul, Dealer S			
♥AK1097	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦753				1♣ ¹
♣4	Pass	1♠ ²	Pass	1NT
	Pass	2♦ ³	Pass	2♥
N	Pass	3♣ ⁴	Pass	7♥
W E	All Pass			
S				

♠A ¹ 16+ (Precision) ² 5+ ♥s ³ 3 controls
 ♥QJ4 ⁴ 5 ♥s to 2 of top 3 hons. West leads the ♠Q.
 ♦AKQJ2 What is your best chance for 13 tricks?
 ♣AQ83 For the full layout, see p. 28.

2. A shot at redemption

♠965	N/S Vul, Dealer W			
♥82	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦AKJ10	Pass	1NT	3♥ ¹	4♠
♣AK76	5♥	5♠	Pass	6♠
	All Pass			

N
 W E
 S ¹ weak
 West leads the ♥K. You ruff but when you
 lead the ♠A, East shows out, discarding ♥6.
 ♠AKQJ43 How can you ensure 12 tricks?
 ♥— For the full layout, see p. 31.
 ♦98532
 ♣94

3. Greeks, bearing gifts

♠K10	Neither Vul, Dealer E			
♥AQ102	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦QJ4			1NT (10-12)	Pass
♣AKJ9	2♥ ¹	Dble	2♠ ²	3♦
	Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
N	All Pass			
W E				
S				
♠J42	¹ transfer ² confirms 3 to an honour			
♥K4	West leads the ♠5 (4 th highest). East will win			
♦A732	the trick with the ♠A and return the ♠9.			
♣6542	What is your best chance for 9 tricks?			
	For the full layout, see p. 33.			

4. A little foresight, in retrospect

♠862	N/S Vul, Dealer N			
♥—	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦A1065		Pass	Pass	1♥
♣AJ7532	1♠	2♣	3♠	4♥
	All Pass			
N				
W E				
S				
♠9	West leads the ♠Q and then the ♠4 to			
♥AKJ8542	East's ♠K.			
♦874	How do you plan to make 10 tricks?			
♣Q10	When you lead the ♥A, West will play the			
	queen, and, on the ♥K, discard a spade.			
	For the full layout, see p. 42.			

5. A fearful symmetry

♠54	Neither Vul, Dealer E			
♥AQJ109	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦7			1NT(12-14)	Dble
♣A10543	2♣ ¹	Dble	2♦ ²	Dble
	Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠
	Pass	4♣	Pass	4♦
	Pass	4♥	Pass	6♠
	Pass	Pass	Dble	All Pass

♠AKJ83
 ♥84
 ♦AJ42
 ♣K9

¹ transfer to diamonds ² 3 to an honour
 West leads ♣8.
 What is your best chance for 12 tricks?
 Clue: when you play trumps, you will find
 that West has ♠109 doubleton.
 For the full layout, see p. 64.

6. Honeymoon choices

♠3	Both Vul, Dealer E			
♥Q754	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦AQJ82			Pass	1♦
♣863	3♠	Dble	Pass	3NT
	Pass	4♦	Pass	5♦
	All Pass			

♠A10
 ♥AJ6
 ♦K10974
 ♣KQ5

West leads the ♠K.
 What is your best chance for 11 tricks?
 East will show out on the 2nd round of
 trumps.
 For the full layout, see p. 73.

7. The man from Porlock

♠K	N/S Vul, Dealer W			
♥AQJ104	West	North	East	South
♦Q76	1NT(12-14) 2♣ ¹		Pass	2♦
♣Q963	Pass	2♥	Pass	2NT
	Pass	3NT	Dble	All Pass
N				
W E				
S				
♠J742	¹ Asptro, hearts and another West leads the ♠10 to king and ace. East returns the ♠5 to the 7 and 8. West now leads the ♥9. What is your best chance for 9 tricks? For the full layout, see p. 83.			
♥87				
♦A532				
♣A72				

8. The Godwin girls

♠962	Neither Vul, Dealer W			
♥QJ73	West	North	East	South
♦A1063	1♣	Pass	1♦	1♥
♣K6	1♠	2♣	2♦	2♥
	Pass	4♥	All Pass	
N				
W E				
S				
♠AJ4	West leads ♠K (2 from East). When you duck, West switches to ♦7. What is your best chance for 10 tricks? For the full layout, see p. 93.			
♥K109852				
♦8				
♣Q104				

9. Standard weak-two

♠K	N/S Vul, Dealer N			
♥A6	West	North	East	South
♦J106532		Pass	2♠ ¹	Pass
♣K842	Pass	3♦	Pass	3NT
	All Pass			
N				
W E				
S				
♠AQJ42	¹ Standard weak-two, 5-9 HCP			
♥K1072	West leads the ♣Q. When you call for the			
♦A4	king, East follows with the ♣10.			
♣93	How will you make 9 tricks?			
	For the full layout, see p. 96.			

10. Precision bidding and play

♠A954	Neither Vul, Dealer E			
♥K6432	West	North	East	South
♦6432			2♦ ¹	Dble
♣—	3♣	4♣	Pass	5♦
	Pass	6♦	All Pass	
N				
W E				
S				
♠KJ104	¹ Precision-style, 11-15 HCP, 4414, 4405,			
♥Q	4315 and 3415 only shapes possible.			
♦AKQ98	West leads the ♠2.			
♣KJ4	Where will you go for 12 tricks?			
	Clue: East has the singleton ♦J.			
	For the full layout, see p. 101.			

11. A precocious talent

♠AK104		N/S Vul, Dealer S			
♥103		<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦AK4					1♦
♣7432		1♥	Dble	2♥	Pass
		Pass	3♥	Pass	4♦
		Pass	5♦	All Pass	
N					
W	E				
S					

West leads the ♦9. East plays the 3.

How will you find 11 tricks?

For the full layout, see p. 104.

♠J3
♥J62
♦QJ852
♣AKJ

12. Avoiding the avoidance

♠A863		N/S Vul, Dealer E			
♥—		<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦86432				1♥	1NT
♣9743		2♦	Dble	3♥	Dble
		Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
		All Pass			
N					
W	E				
S					

West leads the ♦K. East plays the 5.

Surely you can make 3NT?

Clue: if you run the ♠Q, East wins with the ♠K and returns the ♠9.

For the full layout, see p. 108.

♠QJ7
♥AJ83
♦A7
♣AQ52

13. Prince Prudent rules at last

♠J972	N/S Vul, Dealer S			
♥—	West	North	East	South
♦A108753			2♠ ¹	Dble
♣K107	2NT ²	3♦	Pass	6NT
	All Pass			
N				
W E				
S				
♠K103	¹ 5 spades and 5 of a minor, 5-9 HCP			
♥AKQJ7	² please bid your minor!			
♦KQ	West leads the ♥10. East plays the 3.			
♣AQ8	Where will you find 12 tricks?			
	Clue: East proves to be void in diamonds.			
	For the full layout, see p. 112.			

14. Les enfants terribles

♠AK9	Both Vul, Dealer N			
♥Q642	West	North	East	South
♦743		1NT(14-16)	2♠ ¹	3♦
♣AJ3	Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠
	Pass	4♦	Pass	4♥
N	Pass	4♠	Pass	4NT
W E	Pass	5♣	Dble	6♦
S	All Pass			
♠J6	¹ natural (2♦ would show ♠ + minor)			
♥AJ5	West leads the ♣8 (2 nd /4 th).			
♦AQ1052	What is your best chance for 12 tricks?			
♣972	For the full layout, see p. 119.			

THE GREATEST BRIDGE BOOK EVER WRITTEN?

June 1822. P.B. Shelley is planning a new bridge book. It will feature the most dazzling, difficult deals ever published, the bridge of the gods. It will also be his manifesto — a defense of bridge...

But before Shelley leaves on his ill-fated trip to Livorno, he only has time to send his publisher a short “Declarer Play Problems” pamphlet. Nick Smith, however, has unearthed a series of hitherto unchronicled episodes in the poet’s life, which demonstrate where the deals first arose, and what actually happened at the bridge table in each case. Historically accurate and beautifully illustrated, this is a book for fans of classic literature as well as bridge players.



NICK SMITH is a Grand Master from Oxford, England. He is the author of *Bridge Literature* (Cadogan, 1993) and *Bridge Behind Bars*, with Julian Pottage (Master Point Press, 2009). He is also the author of numerous novels and plays.