



THE
Encyclopedia

OF

CARD PLAY
TECHNIQUES
at BRIDGE

GUY LEVÉ

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Preface

Guy Levé, an experienced player from Montpellier in southern France, has a passion for bridge, particularly for the play of the cards. For many years he has been planning to assemble an in-depth study of all known card play techniques and their classification. The only thing he lacked was time for the project; now, having recently retired, he has accomplished his ambitious task. It has been my privilege to follow its progress and watch the book take shape.

A book such as this should not to be put into a beginner's hands, but it should become a well-thumbed reference source for all players who want to improve their game. It will be an important text for experts as well, because all types of coups, even the strangest or rarest, are described. Can you execute a boomerang stepping-stone squeeze? Are you familiar with waiting moves? If not, you can find out what they are in these pages. What's more — and in my view, an indispensable feature — much space has been dedicated to defensive techniques, one of the most exciting aspects of card play.

Many of these deals have been published previously in books or magazines, but Guy identifies his various sources and has added personal analysis and commentaries. What's more, all the examples are classified by topic, rendering them easy to retrieve as well as remember.

Savor and use this book; its 800+ deals and diagrams will provide long and thought-provoking reading. It should become *the* reference book for everyone.

May the seven of clubs bring you fun and fascination for many years to come!

Philippe Poizat,
European Senior Champion

Foreword

When did you last perform a dummy reversal, a Morton's Fork, an avoidance play, an intra-finesse, or delight of delights, a squeeze? Have you ever thought about applying one of these techniques at the table? Do you know them well enough to do that?

Okay, so you need to brush up a little — but where can you find the details? Here! This book lists all the techniques of card play at bridge from both declarer's and defender's point of view. There are many techniques that good players think they know, but I'll wager that everyone, including the experts, will be surprised by the diversity of card play techniques that are known today. This book should be a useful resource for improving players, as well as those experienced players who are looking to enhance their skills. In fact, this book is for anyone who wants to explore in depth (or even just browse) those techniques that do not come up every day, but which come up often enough to make them matter in the long run.

A small number of the chapters are designed to be educational. However, my goal is not to present a bridge course with inherent pedagogy and specific explanations. Rather my vision is of a collection of topics, a sort of dictionary or reference guide. Although most of the situations that I cover have already been described in books and magazines, they have never been brought together in one place... until now.

In addition to card play techniques, the book addresses thinking methods, strategies, and the context in which each card play technique can be applied. However, many other aspects of card play are not described here: signaling and discarding, opening leads, safety plays, probabilities, etc. Our game is so rich and varied that it would have taken a mammoth tome to cover them all! Bidding is included only when needed for overall comprehension. Opponents' bids, when given, are an indication of adverse distribution and strength; otherwise bidding is not discussed here.

Thinking techniques and strategies are the foundation of the game of bridge. Their execution requires knowledge of the card play techniques that are described extensively in the following pages. Even finesses, which are usually thought of as simple or trivial, can produce surprising results. Maneuvers and coups often produce excitement and admiration for their complexity and elegance. Are squeezes a technique of last resort? In many cases, they represent an additional chance for declarer. The relevant thinking techniques are described, followed by all known positions.

I do not claim to have invented anything in this book, except perhaps for the one-suited trump squeeze, but that has a low frequency indeed! Rather, during my reading and from my own experiences at the table, I have noted many wonderful card play techniques. Most of them have been described by well-known bridge authors, to whom I am very grateful indeed for the many deals that appear in this book. Where I have used a previously published deal, I give credit where credit is due. Where a play or maneuver has no name in English, I have sometimes invented one. It is interesting to note that everything that exists in the world has a name — even the famous ‘Coup without a name’ is now more aptly described as the ‘Scissors Coup’. A name is a common reference that facilitates communication and also serves to explain what it represents. It helps us to imagine and categorize the ‘thing’ better, to conceive and memorize it better, and thus to use it better. In the original edition of this book, I used the French names and classifications of Dr. Bertrand Romanet, at least for the positions he described. Where applicable, these have been translated or modified to suit English bridge terminology.

What could be more beautiful than an elegant avoidance play? Or a new deceptive play? The human factor prevails: the technician becomes an artist! As I have said, this book illustrates the enormous diversity of techniques in bridge, a diversity that adds to the social and human aspects of our game, providing challenge as well as attraction. Without such a vast array of possibilities, this intellectual, passionate, captivating and unique mind sport would not have charmed so many people. I hope this book, once you have used some of the techniques described within it, will have served to enhance that charm for you.

Bon bridge!

Guy Levé
Castries, France
Winter 2005

Table of Contents

SECTION 1: THINKING TECHNIQUES

Planning the play	13
What's the problem?	16
Counting	18
Discovery play	21
Card reading	25
Assumptions	26
Inferences	28
Getting into an opponent's head	30
Combining your chances	34
Timing	36
Strategies at notrump	42
Defensive strategies at notrump	44
Strategies in trump contracts	46
Defensive strategies in trump contracts	51

SECTION 2: SPECIAL PLAYS, COUPS AND GAMBITS

Communication	55
Blocking and unblocking plays	60
Playing to create or cut off an entry	66
Deschappelles Coup	72
The Merrimac Coup	73
Elimination play	76
Throw-in play	81
Suit establishment	94
Ducking play	100
Hold up play	104
The Bath Coup	111
Defensive duck	112
Avoidance play	115
Morton's Fork	122
Isolation play	128
Changing tack	130

Keeping the right card	131
Sacrifice	136
Grosvenor Gambit	138
Deceptive plays	142
Shell game	156

SECTION 3: TECHNIQUES SPECIFIC TO TRUMP CONTRACTS

Ruffs and underruffs	161
Transferring a ruff	170
Dummy reversal	172
Ruff and sluff (ruff and discard)	175
Defending against ruffs	180
Waiting move	182
Loser-on-loser play	184
Maneuvers with winners	189
Scissors Coup (Coup without a name)	191
Keeping trump control; forcing leads	193
Trump pick-up	197
<i>En passant</i> play	199
Elopement	201
Guillemard's Maneuver	205
Uppercut	207
Lob	209
Trump promotion	210
Smother play	214
Trump coups	217
Forcing defense	229
Trump reduction	230
Grand Coup	232

SECTION 4: FINESSES

Finesses and playing towards an honor	237
Intra-finesse	249
Backwards finesse	253
False or Chinese finesse	255
Entry-creating finesse	257
Obligatory finesse	260
Ruffing finesse	261
Finesse percentage play	264
Restricted choice	266

SECTION 5: TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF SQUEEZES

About squeeze play	271
Counting your tricks	274
Falling back on a squeeze	276
Recognizing the elements of a squeeze	278
Identifying the squeeze suit	279
Identifying the squeeze card	280
Rectifying the count	281
Keeping an idle card	282
Vienna Coup	283
Isolating the menace	286
Transferring / shifting the guard	287
Communication	289
Choosing the type of squeeze	290
Defending against squeezes	291
Let's look at all types of squeezes	297

SECTION 6: NOTRUMP SQUEEZES

Simple squeeze	301
The simultaneous double squeeze	305
Non-simultaneous double squeeze	307
Reciprocal squeeze	309
Compound squeeze	313
Octagonal squeeze	323
Guard squeeze	324
Finesse squeeze	331
Vice squeeze	334
Stepping-stone squeeze	336
Winkle	339
Delayed duck squeeze (squeeze without the count)	342
Strip squeeze	345
Strip squeeze and endplay	348
Mole squeezes	353
Triple squeeze (three-suit squeeze)	356
Progressive (repeating) squeeze	362
Entry squeeze	365
Overtaking (entry-shifting) squeeze	369
Count squeeze (discovery squeeze)	372
One-threat squeeze	374
One-suit squeeze	376
One-card squeeze	377

Clash squeeze	378
Guard reduction squeeze	384
Non-material squeeze	386
Pseudo squeeze	390
Suicide squeeze	391

SECTION 7: TRUMP SQUEEZES

Simple trump squeeze	395
Double trump squeeze	397
Compound trump squeeze	399
Trump guard squeeze	401
Trump finesse squeeze	404
Schroeder squeeze (trump stepping-stone squeeze)	406
Trump triple squeeze	407
Trump entry squeeze	409
Trump entry-shifting (overtaking) squeeze	410
One-suit trump squeeze	411
One-card trump squeeze (MacGuffin)	413
One-threat trump squeeze	414
Backwash squeeze	415
Knockout squeeze	417
Trump clash squeeze	419
Trump suicide squeeze	420

BIBLIOGRAPHY	421
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SECTION 1

THINKING TECHNIQUES

Before learning to walk, one must learn how to think



Planning the play

A word, an important one, before we start. "Wait."

All the techniques you are going to see later in this book will be useless if you do not stop and think before trying to use them. As soon as the opening lead has been made, it is time to stop and think, to count winners and losers, to review the opposition bidding (or lack of it) and to draw conclusions, to search for where the missing trick(s) might come from and, of course, to decide what technique to apply. In short, it is time to plan a line of play.

Do not touch a single card in dummy, even if it is a singleton, before planning the play. You do not set off in a car to go somewhere (the contract) without knowing which route to take (the line of play); otherwise you risk trouble ahead (going down). Sometimes, even, because of an unexpected incident, you must take a different route (modify the line of play). Just as a driver decides on his route before starting his engine, so must we look ahead from behind the wheel of our contract. Bad traffic, construction, and other road hazards might appear, so let's be prepared. We'll look at one example just in case you're not convinced:

♠	A J 4									
♥	J 5 2									
♦	K Q 5 3									
♣	Q 9 4									
<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>			N		W		E		S	
	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠	K 9 5									
♥	A K 4 3									
♦	A 7 6 4									
♣	A 2									

South plays 3NT; West leads the ♦ 2.

Initial thinking and diagnostic

What's the lead convention? Fourth best.

Even with 31 combined points, South has only eight tricks. One more must be found. There are several possible ways we might do this:

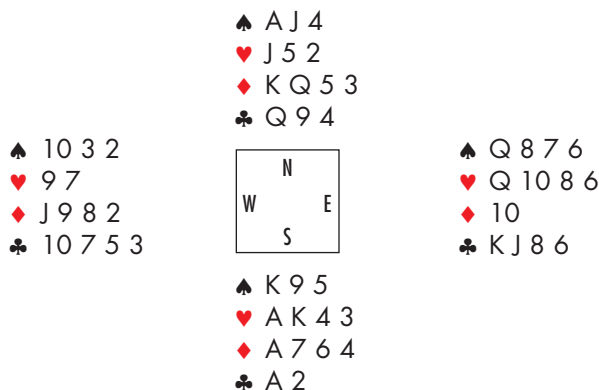
- establish the fourth diamond
- establish the fourth heart
- lead up to dummy's honors in hearts and clubs
- spade finesse
- endplay an opponent
- a squeeze

Let's keep thinking:

- 1) Establish the fourth diamond. From the lead, West probably has four diamonds and they are all higher than ours, so this line is very unlikely to work!
- 2) Establish the fourth heart. This is possible if hearts are 3-3 or if the queen is doubleton — keep this line in mind.
- 3) Playing towards dummy's honors. Yes, we only need West to have one of the ♠Q, the ♥Q and the ♣K. We could win the ♦A and play once towards the ♥J, once towards the ♠J and once towards the ♣Q. Three chances! Not bad. Surely one of them will succeed.
- 4) Endplay an opponent to give us a free finesse. That works after eliminating his exit cards. Keep it in mind.
- 5) A squeeze? For the time being, that's not an obvious choice.

Let's try Line 3. We want the lead in the South hand, so we put in the ♦3 at Trick 1 and East plays the ♦10. That should start an alarm bell ringing. 'Stop, look, listen,' was what the traffic signs used to say at the beginning of the automobile era. Before grabbing that ♦A, let's think some more. What if East has all the honors after all? In addition, what if the hearts are not 3-3 and the queen is not doubleton? In that case, we are going to go down, although we will be able to complain about our bad luck.

Any other ideas? Is there something we forgot to take into account? Stop and think now; do not mechanically take the trick! Maybe there's a better line. Thinking further brings us to the endplay, Line 4: if a play is due to fail when South tries it, perhaps it will succeed if East has to make it (the reverse of 'Anything you can do, I can do better!'). If West has four diamonds, East has only one, and if we let him hold this trick, he is endplayed right now! His return will, perforce, be in one of the three other suits, the ones that we are interested in. Wherever the missing honors are, he will be obliged to give us a trick.



We can call it a (very) early throw-in. Assuming that the ♦2 really is a fourth-best card, the contract is 100% safe from the very first trick — nice, isn't it? All we had to do was count 4+4+4+1= 13 diamonds — not too difficult at all. No difficult technique whatsoever was required here, just a ducking play at the first trick. Yes, East could have been thrown in later, but it's much neater and more effective this way. Above all, the important thing was not to play mechanically.

Of course, 'Stop, Look, Listen' is not a maxim for declarer only; it is just as important for the defenders.



What's the problem?

Even when applying the principle 'Stop, Look, Listen', many players, even relatively good ones, have difficulty deciding what needs to be done. As in a police enquiry, or a medical diagnosis, the collection of facts (here, that West has four diamonds) does not suffice to solve the problem; one must know how to make deductions and draw conclusions. The first deduction (East has only one diamond) will not suffice. It is the consequence (if left on play, East must now lead another suit) that ultimately indicates the right line of play. How many times do we think, 'I can't believe it was so simple. How did I never think of it?' Intellectual laziness, lack of concentration, distractions, too many things to think about... everything plays a role. However, a player can develop the necessary analytical discipline by following a checklist. After 'Stop, Look, Listen', we can add 'Analyze, Imagine, Draw conclusions, Verify that nothing has been overlooked'. All good players, without exception, force themselves to do just that, and it is an even more valuable process for aspiring players, whether they are declarer or defender.

As declarer

♠	KJ72									
♥	AJ5									
♦	983									
♣	1073									
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	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠	A653									
♥	K9872									
♦	Q2									
♣	A2									

Victor Mollo, *The Finer Arts of Bridge*

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♦	1♥
2♣	2♥	3♦	3♥
pass	pass	4♦	4♥
all pass			

A competitive auction and a difficult contract. West leads the ♦6 and East takes the king, then the ace and jack. Declarer discards the ♣2 on the third diamond, escaping an overruff. West throws the ♣9 on this trick. East now plays the ♣8, taken with the ace.

East had six diamonds and it's reasonable to assume he has two clubs, since West should have six clubs rather than five, with the three missing honors. East surely has the two major queens for his opening bid. If the ♥Q is doubleton, the ♠Q will be third and impossible to pick up, because the ten, nine and eight are also missing. You therefore have to assume the opposite situation: that the ♠Q is doubleton. We have to play the ♥A and ♥J, a backwards finesse, hoping to pin West's doubleton ♥10. If that works, we can play off the top spades to drop the queen.

As defender

♠ AQ842													
♥ 64													
♦ 842													
♣ AK7													
♠ J9765													
♥ 532													
♦ AK5													
♣ J8													
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	N												
W		E											
	S												

Victor Mollo, *The Finer Arts of Bridge*.

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	1♠	pass	4♥
all pass			

West leads the ♦ Q.

East may be surprised by North's pessimism in passing 4♥ with such a good hand, but it is still his job to try to defeat the contract. North's bid obviously enhanced South's hand, but South nevertheless made no slam tries, so he probably has two losing diamonds. What's more, South certainly has some spades. So why can't West be void? Overtake the ♦ Q with the king, a revealing card, and give West a spade ruff. You can then regain the lead with the ♦ A and give partner another spade ruff for the setting trick.

Counting

Counting is often the alpha and omega, the start and very often the end of the thinking techniques that one must apply to any bridge deal. Counting, never to more than 13 in regard to distribution and rarely to more than 20 as far as points go, often leads to precise knowledge of the concealed hands, the distribution as well as the placement of missing honors. Any self-respecting player pays careful attention to the cards that are played, so as to be able to make useful and necessary inferences. Using our driving analogy, we look at the road and other cars; we drive carefully and pay attention to everything that happens around us. If we don't, we're going to have an accident!

Declarer counts the distribution

♠	K53									
♥	A42									
♦	Q842									
♣	K103									
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	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠	AQ7									
♥	KQ6									
♦	AKJ3									
♣	AJ5									

The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge.

South plays 7NT; West leads the ♠J.

It's easy to count twelve tricks; all that remains is to locate the ♣Q. The only effective way to find her is to cash all the winners in the other three suits and watch what happens. The opponents will follow or discard; their distribution will then be known. On the diamonds, at least one opponent will show out, possibly also in another suit. Suppose East follows only twice in each major suit and follows three times in diamonds. Now twelve of West's cards are known and it is clear that he has a singleton club. Cash the ♣K and take a proven finesse against East's queen.

A defender counts the distribution

♠	KJ											
♥	1053											
♦	A863											
♣	A872											
<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td> <td>N</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>W</td> <td></td> <td>E</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>S</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			N		W		E		S		♠	AQ6
	N											
W		E										
	S											
		♥	J976									
		♦	QJ10									
		♣	J95									

The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge.

South plays 5♦; West leads the ♠5.

East takes the ♠J with the queen and returns the ace, ruffed by declarer. Declarer cashes the ♦A and ♦K, West following only once. Then he plays the ♥A, ♥K and ♥Q, West following three times. Declarer then plays a diamond to East's queen.

The count of the South hand is simple: 1-3-5, leaving four clubs. A club play now could well be disastrous, but a heart return, even though it is a ruff and sluff, cannot allow the contract to make.

Declarer counts points

♠ 432										
♥ AQ65										
♦ 6543										
♣ J2										
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	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠ QJ10965										
♥ 432										
♦ AJ										
♣ KQ										

East opened a strong notrump and South plays in 2♠.

East has 15-17 points; North-South have 20 and West has the rest (3-5 points).

West leads a diamond to East's king, taken with declarer's ace. Now declarer plays the ♠Q: West takes the king, and cashes his ♦Q.

West has already shown up with 5 points. He can't have anything else! West plays another diamond, ruffed in the closed hand. A second round of spades goes to East's ace (West discards a club) and East cashes his ♣A and continues clubs. Declarer wins and draws the last adverse trump.

Where are the heart honors? Obviously, East has them, so the heart finesse will lose. Declarer has to hope that the ♥KJ are doubleton, giving East a 3-2-4-4 hand with 15 points. He can then play a small heart from both hands, followed by the ace (or vice versa). When the heart honors fall doubleton, the ♥Q is high.

A defender counts points

	♠ 76										
	♥ 52										
	♦ A954										
	♣ KQ932										
♠ KJ102											
♥ AJ964											
♦ 76											
♣ J8											
	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										

South plays 3NT after he has opened with a strong 1NT; West leads the ♥6.

East plays the ♥8 and declarer wins with the ♥10. He then cashes the ♣A, plays the ♣4 to the king and cashes the ♣Q, discarding the ♥3. Then he plays the ♦5 to his jack, followed by the ♦K and ♦A. Presumably disappointed that neither minor suit is breaking, he now plays the ♥5 to his king, West taking his ace.

At this stage, West still has ♠KJ10 and ♥J9. Counting declarer's points, he has seen 4 in clubs, 4 in diamonds and 5 in hearts, for 13 points in all. Therefore, South cannot have both the ♠A and ♠Q for his 15-17 point 1NT opener. If he has the ace, he already has nine tricks; if he has the queen, however, he will go down two when West now leads the ♠10 to East's ace and a second spade is led through.

Bertrand Romanet, *Bridge Gagnant*.

A defender counts declarer's tricks

<p>♠ K752 ♥ 103 ♦ AK2 ♣ AK109</p>	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 103 ♥ A852 ♦ QJ109 ♣ 843</p> <p>♠ J984 ♥ 97 ♦ 863 ♣ 7652</p> <p>♠ AQ6 ♥ KQJ64 ♦ 754 ♣ QJ</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

South plays 3♥; West leads the ♣K.

East gives count. West can see four tricks for his side and asks himself if he should look for one more in spades where East has a high honor, before North's diamonds are established.

However, counting declarer's potential tricks, only eight can be found. West must not give him a ninth trick.

West simply takes his four honor tricks in the minors and belatedly gives the lead back to declarer, in any suit but spades.

A defender helps his partner to count declarer's hand

<p>♠ A9 ♥ 9 ♦ AK1072 ♣ AQJ102</p>	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ K765 ♥ 102 ♦ Q963 ♣ K54</p> <p>♠ J108432 ♥ K ♦ 854 ♣ 763</p> <p>♠ Q ♥ AQJ876543 ♦ J ♣ 98</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

South has bid to 5♥ after East-West competed to 4♠; West leads the ♠A.

On the ♠A lead, East plays the jack, denying the queen, which falls from declarer. West cashes the ♦K (East plays the ♦4, signaling count) and switches to a trump, fearing that declarer is void in clubs.

Declarer wins with the ♥A, crosses to dummy with the ♥10, discards the ♣9 on the ♠K, and returns to hand by ruffing a spade to cash all his trumps. At this point, East has to help his partner, who may not know what to discard on the last trump in a two-card ending. Was declarer 2-1 or 1-2 in the minors? Spade discards are meaningless — East must start by discarding all his diamonds and clubs. West can then count declarer's hand and throw all his diamonds, keeping the ♣A rather than the ♦A as his last card. If he does not do this, he could be in trouble, even more so if declarer throws the ♣K from dummy to keep the ♦Q, a nice decoy if West has forgotten the count signal in diamonds given by East. This is a 'memory squeeze', permitting the ♣8 to become Trick 12. Giving count is essential, but a little more help can be useful.