

**THE**

# **CONTESTED AUCTION**

**ROY HUGHES**

**FROM THE AUTHOR  
OF BUILDING A  
BIDDING SYSTEM**

**FOREWORD BY  
ERIC KOKISH**

**THE**  
**CONTESTED**  
**AUCTION**  
**ROY HUGHES**

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**ERIC KOKISH**

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# FOREWORD

Many years ago, in a time of greater innocence, I contemplated writing a book on bidding in competition with the working title 'The Offense Strikes Back'. Perhaps I am dating myself with such a blatant homage to the Star Wars saga. The scrupulously detailed proposed Table of Contents ran to a half dozen pages, and it soon became clear to me that a co-author would be needed to get the project off the ground. Hopefully, I lobbied my theory-minded brethren in the scribblers' art only to receive a steady stream of polite rejections, all of them encouraging me to do the book, but indicating that the project would be too time-consuming for them. Life being what it is, my file folder of notes and research grew like rice, but never threatened to segue into a book, eventually finding a home in my office filing cabinet. And there it rested.

When Roy Hughes retired and decided to pursue his writing muse, we discussed many ideas and even contemplated a joint venture or two. When the subject of a book on contested auctions arose, I remembered my file and brought it out of mothballs, a blast from the past that led to some whimsy and knowing smiles. Where my original orphaned project was meant to cover competitive auctions after our side opened the bidding, Roy was suddenly speaking of covering all contested auctions in considerable detail. I raised an eyebrow, offered to help as much as I could, and left Roy to carry the ball.

The product of his efforts is this essential master work, which neither proselytizes nor dismisses, but presents cogent options while covering in depth an increasingly complex and essential area of bidding. Here you will find extensive 'market research' on popular and occasionally arcane treatments designed to solve problems that might not have been at issue when some of the best books on competitive bidding were written. The game has changed, and Roy discusses different philosophies and strategies to cope with the modern vernacular, stressing the importance of clarity of principles, comfort with agreed methods, and a commitment to understanding any treatment and its consequences before adopting it.

If you stick with this book and buy a copy for your partner you will be pleased that you did.

Eric Kokish





## THE NATURE OF CONTESTED AUCTIONS

In the gentler times of some years ago, one might have encountered the following problem discussed in a bridge magazine:

Teams, Dealer West, North-South vul.  
As South, you hold:

♠ K ♥ A J 9 4 ♦ A Q 9 4 2 ♣ Q 10 5

The bidding proceeds pass, pass, pass to you. What is your bidding plan?

The majority of the expert panel would have voted for 1♦, with a divergence of opinion expressed should partner make the somewhat inconvenient response of 1♠. The naturalists could without embarrassment have rebid 2♥, a reverse promising extra values but not forcing. The new scientists would have considered the hand not good enough for a reverse; they would have chosen between the unpleasant alternatives of 2♦ (understating the hand while overstating the suit), 1NT (underbid and misbid) and 2♣ (lying about suit length and risking a ridiculous contract). A few old-timers might have avoided the rebid problem by opening the bidding with 1♥.

### THE NEW LANDSCAPE

As I write this in 2011, I suspect that most experts playing standard methods would not consider this much of a problem. They would do what they seem to do whenever it is remotely possible: that is, open 1NT. Besides, the problem is largely irrelevant. Who gets to open this hand in fourth chair, red against white? The problems of today run more along the lines of:

As South, vulnerable against not, you hold:

♠ K ♥ A J 9 4 ♦ A Q 9 4 2 ♣ Q 10 5

Dealer, West, opens 1NT (10-12). East bids 2♥, a transfer to spades. Your call?

or

Dealer, West, opens 1♣ (11-13 balanced or clubs or any hand with 17+ HCP). East responds 1♥, showing four or more spades. Your call?

or

Dealer, West opens 2♦ (weak two in an unspecified major or 20-21 balanced). East responds 2♥, 'pass-or-correct' (i.e., asking partner to pass if he has hearts and bid 2♠ if he has spades). Your call?

or

Dealer, West, opens 2♦ (6-10, red suits or black suits, at least 5-4). East responds 2♥, pass-or-correct. Your call?

Welcome to today's new game! No longer do opponents have the decency to simply open their longest suit when holding good cards and pass otherwise. No, they are in there with preempts on wretched suits, artificial two-bids, one-bids on balanced 11-counts, responses on nothing, and when they happen to hold good cards, they are bidding two-card diamond suits, strong/weak clubs or opening 1NT on a singleton. Some of these methods, such as transfer responses to 1♣, are played largely for their theoretical advantages. By responding 1♦ with hearts, and 1♥ with spades, one step of bidding space is saved, a step that may be crucial to subsequent detailed investigation. Other methods, like the 'red suits or black suits' 2♦, are played primarily to create problems for the other side. But whether the intent is better constructive bidding through new techniques, or more effective obstructive bidding through new devices, the effect is largely the same: new, unfamiliar situations are created for the opponents. To survive in this new game, partnerships must be prepared. These unfamiliar situations must become familiar ones. It is dangerous, and ultimately losing bridge, to assume that without discussion partners will see these situations the same way. Taking the example of the transfer response of 1♥ showing spades:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	pass	1♥*	?

What should a double by South here mean? Should it show hearts, say the equivalent of a 1♥ overcall? Or should it be a takeout of the suits shown by East-West? Or, if 1♣ could be short, should double be a three-suit takeout of spades? I see no obvious answer; North-South need to have an agreement. Similarly, if South bids 1♠, what should that be? I can see a case for its being:

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COGENT OPTIONS WHILE COVERING IN DEPTH  
AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX AND ESSENTIAL  
AREA OF BIDDING.”

ERIC KOKISH

Roy Hughes' first book, *Building a Bidding System*, has become a must-read for expert pairs looking to develop effective constructive bidding methods. Now Hughes turns his attention to the theory and practice of competitive auctions, a critical component of the modern game.

Beginning again by establishing what the bidding system needs to accomplish, Hughes goes on to discuss every type of contested auction, recommending useful methods and agreements from which the reader can select. This is a state-of-the-art discussion, covering in detail many topics that until now have at best seen cursory treatment in print.



**ROY HUGHES** (Toronto, Canada) is the author of several successful books, including the 2007 IBPA Book of the Year award winner, *Canada's Bridge Warriors*. His background in mathematics and linguistics led to his work on the theory and structure of effective bidding systems. Roy is also an accomplished musician, a talent he shares with his wife, Erika.



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