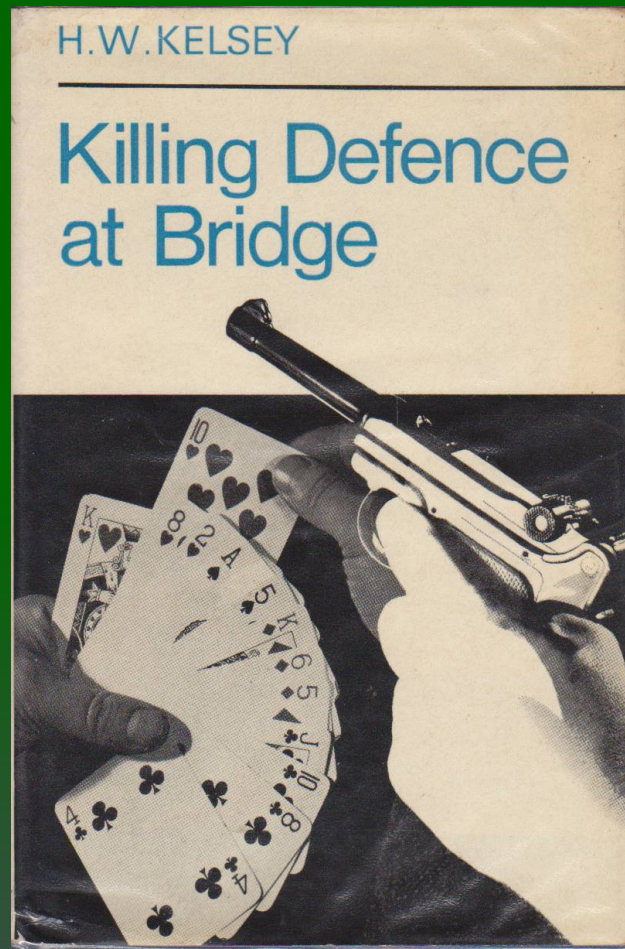


The Count

Ipswich & Kesgrave
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My first Kelsey, his first book



Chapter 1. Counting

- ▶ The first paragraph of the book is:

“If you think this is a dull subject to start with, you had better trot straight back to the bookseller and see if he will refund your money. For the same theme runs through every page of this book. Counting is a subject that the serious student cannot afford to neglect. It is impossible to produce consistently tight defence unless both defenders make a conscious effort to count the hand.”

Mr Kelsey was serious

Contents

<i>Foreword by Albert Benjamin</i>	<i>page</i> 11
<i>Introduction</i>	13
1. Counting	15
2. Beating the Drum	28
3. More Counting	44
4. Breaking Ground	55
5. To Love and to Cherish	70
6. A Further Count	85
7. The Tangled Web	97
8. Don't be Fooled	113
9. Counting Again	128
10. End-Game Defence	140
11. In the Squeeze Zone	152
12. The Final Count	180

Love it or loathe it...

- ▶ You can't ignore it.
- ▶ There is so much to count:
 1. Tricks – winners and losers
 2. Trumps
 3. Perhaps all the suits
 4. High card points – to place unseen cards
 5. Entries – to execute our plan
 6. Chances – holdings where our play wins (or loses)
- ▶ And probably more...
- ▶ I'm going to concentrate of 1-3; in the main, the others can wait for another session.
- ▶ None of this is 'rocket science' – it's almost guaranteed you won't meet numbers greater than 13.

First things first

- ▶ The most important things to count are **winners** and **losers**.
- ▶ Before the EBU course ('SWOT') I evolved...

Winners and losers

Assets

Risks

Plan

The image is a composite of two scenes from the Star Trek: Voyager series. The top half shows the ship's interior during a WARP speed of light sequence, with the word "WARP" in yellow text. The bottom half shows the ship's exterior as it enters a warp tunnel, with a green arrow pointing to the text "Why did it never catch on?".

WARP

► Why did it never catch on?

SWOT

- ▶ **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, **T**hreats
- ▶ But no counting – and that was its selling-point: a bit vague and demanding no real effort.
- ▶ Unfortunately you can't hope to play a hand well unless you count winners and losers.

County bridge

► ♠ J84

♥ AK653

♦ A762

♣ 5

♠ K106

♥ Q10987

♦ 8

♣ QJ104

► West

North

East

South

1♥

Pass

2♣*

1♣

X*

2♦

Pass

4♥

All Pass

► Trump lead, South follows: how many tricks?

How not to count suits

- ▶ Recapping – or ‘backwards’

- ▶ ♥ KQ76

- ♥ J1052

You play ♥J and that is taken by the ace. They win a trick and after that you regain the lead to play ♥K and when one opponent shows out, ♥Q.

- ▶ Is that enough? Is the ♥10 good anyway?

How not to count suits (2)

▶ ♥ 7

♥ 10

Let's see... 4 hearts went on the first round, then 3 and another 3... That's 10 plus the 2 in view – there's one left.

- ▶ But that doesn't answer the question, "is the ♥10 good?".
- ▶ The situation is harder if, say, we were forced to ruff high with one dummy's honours. Or they ruffed before we regained the lead.
- ▶ Count back only as a last resort. **Count forward** instead.
- ▶ Replaying everything is much harder than looking for what you need.

The asset survey

▶ ♥ KQ76

♥ J1052

▶ List your assets:

1. 8 hearts – missing 5

2. K, Q, J, 10 – critical, ♥A and ♥9

▶ Work out the possible splits: 3-2, 4-1, 5-0

▶ Watch for those splits: only 5-0 can hurt you if you play your top cards; if both opponents follow to two rounds 3-2 is confirmed.

Method

1. Do all this **before you play from dummy**
2. Calculate how many of the critical suit are missing.
3. Assess the possible breaks, which are good for you, which are bad.
4. Identify the critical cards in the critical suit.
5. Your best – and most memorable – thoughts are in words: put the answers to 2-4 into words.
6. Only then play from dummy

Practice

► ♠ J75

♠ AK42

- a) What are the critical breaks?
- b) What are the critical cards?

- Answers: 3-3 and ♠Q
- What is the correct play? How do we count?
- A/K then low to J. The more extreme breaks are confirmed in an opponent shows out on first round (6-0) or second (5-1). Watch for ♠Q, if East wins it over ♠J, hope for 3-3.

Practice (2)

► ♦ QJ852

♦ K9

- a) What are the critical breaks?
- b) What are the critical cards?

- Answers: 5-1 (!), ♦ A and ♦ 10.
- What is the correct play? How do we count?
- Low to K then ♦ 9 towards Q/J. Watch for ♦ 10 while you drive out the ace. Unless we're really unlucky, we make at least three tricks, four if the ten falls under K, Q or J.


Method – long term

- ▶ If all this seems a bit much take it in easy stages:
 1. Count just one suit (look for cards in the rest). In a suit contract, trumps, but also your 'main suit' in no-trumps.
 2. When that comes more easily, add their suit. Set yourself a puzzle; look at the lead and estimate how their suit is breaking then count.
 3. Once you are sensitive to all the counts, put them together and express them in the original patterns. Using the 13-card deal helps you reflect on the auction and it's always 13 (not how many are outstanding at the time) so the shapes become familiar.
- ▶ You have joined the ranks of those who 'count the hand'
- ▶ Now do it on every deal.

Practice (3)

- ▶ “I suggest you practise counting suit distributions whenever you have a spare moment. If you have difficulty in sleeping at night, instead of counting sheep or creditors or master points, try counting suit distributions. Start with any number from four to ten and repeat to yourself all the complementary combinations of numbers that add up to thirteen. It is best to do this out loud but, if you think your dear ones may sit on your head and send for a strait-jacket, you can do it mentally. You should aim to reach a point where, under the stimulus of the number six, your brain will fire back with with computer-like precision the series, 7-0-0, 6-1-0, 5-2-0, 5-1-1, 4-3-0, 4-2-1, 3-3-1, 3-2-2.”
- ▶ Hugh Kelsey, KDAB, introduction to chapter three, ‘More Counting’

Practice (4)

BBO  **Counting Game**

5	0	5	?				
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

New Problem

10 Problems

Clear Score

Problems attempted: 0

Correct answers: 0

Incorrect answers: 0

Correct percentage:

Total points: 0

Average points:

<http://bbi.bridgebase.com/game/game.html>

Putting it all together

- ▶ Let's look at some full deals
- ▶ Counting and watching
- ▶ Suit establishment: two suits to count
- ▶ Cross-ruffing: counting entries

Key Points

1. Counting really isn't difficult – but you actually have to do it.
2. 'Lookout' not 'backtrack': watch for the things you identify on your **asset survey**.
3. Always count trumps, gradually move to counting all the suits. Say to yourself the patterns.
4. In a ruffing hand, watch for their highest trump, count entries before you start.

Credits

- ▶ 'Asset Survey' first used to my knowledge by Eric Rodwell in *The Rodwell Files: secrets of a bridge champion*, (Masterpoint Press, 2011). Rodwell is one of the world's best players and this is a very good book but the learning curve is intimidatingly steep.
- ▶ *Killing Defence at Bridge* by Hugh Keley (Faber and Faber, 1966) is a classic – as is his *Advanced Play at Bridge* (1968).
- ▶ I investigated two books by Ron Klinger, *Improve Your Bridge Memory* and *Better Bridge with a Better Memory* (Master Bridge, 1984 & 1998 resp.). This is an important but tough subject and I'm not sure the definitive work has been written. But he and I agree on the evils of 'backtracking' and I did steal from the former. However both of these are mainly about the auction rather than the play.
- ▶ Bridge Base Online sells *Counting at Bridge*, a program with bridge material by Mike Lawrence and technical wizardry by Fred Gitelman. I haven't tried this but I'm a big fan of the similar *Bridge Master 2000*.