



DealTales

Big Ideas on the Board

A SPARK & ANVIL STRATEGY BOOK

DealTales – Big Ideas at the Table

A Spark & Anvil companion book – free to download and share.

Ages 9-14. Game: trick-taking card games (bridge and friends).

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This volume teaches strategy through the app's cast – 4 big ideas, one per chapter.

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Card games like bridge are played with a partner, and the real skill is not luck – it is **information**: what you tell, what you learn, and what you count. The other DealTales books teach the rules; this one teaches how to **play well**, through the cast you know.

Chapter 1 – Bidding Tells a Story

Auntie Audrey knows that the **bidding** is not just a race to name a contract – it is a conversation. Every bid tells your partner something about your hand: how strong it is, and which suits you like. A pass says one thing; a jump says another.

"Do not bid to win the auction," said Auntie Audrey. "Bid to *tell your partner what you hold* – and to listen to what they tell you."

The first skill is knowing when to **commit** (you have the strength to promise tricks) and when to **pass** (you don't – over-bidding a weak hand is how contracts collapse). Strong players treat every bid as a careful sentence in a shared story.

Say it out loud: *Every bid tells my partner about my hand – bid honestly, listen closely.*

Your turn: The "Bidding" workbook pages show a hand and the bidding so far. Should you commit or pass – and what does your bid tell your partner?

Bidding feels like guesswork until you see it as a language. Then every auction becomes a conversation you can read.

Chapter 2 – Read Your Partner

Bram's whole gift is **inference**: figuring out what cards your partner (and your opponents) hold, from what they bid and what they play. You cannot see their cards – but their choices leak information on every turn.

"When my partner bids hearts," said Bram, "I know something about their hand. When an opponent doesn't follow suit, I know they are out of it. I am always reading."

This is the deepest skill in trick-taking games. If an opponent shows they have no more of a suit, you know who holds the missing high cards. If your partner led a certain card, you know what they want. Playing well means constantly updating a picture of the hidden hands from every clue.

Say it out loud: *Every bid and every card tells me what the hidden hands hold – keep reading.*

Your turn: The "Read the Table" pages show the bidding and a few tricks. What can you deduce about who holds the missing high cards?

Reading the hidden hands is like being a detective. Every clue you notice makes your next play sharper.

Chapter 3 – Play Your Short Suits

The Doubleton Sisters manage the **short suits** – a suit where you hold only two cards (a doubleton), or one, or none. Short suits are not a weakness; played well, they are a weapon. In a suit contract, being short in a side suit lets you **trump** (ruff) – win a trick with a trump when you have run out of that suit.

"A short suit is an opportunity," said the elder sister. "Empty your hand of it early, and then you can trump their winners."

Strong players plan their short suits on purpose: they play out a doubleton so that soon they can ruff, turning a low trump into a winning trick. Managing which suits to keep and which to shorten is a real piece of strategy.

Say it out loud: *Empty a short suit early, then trump their winners.*

Your turn: The "Short Suit" pages show a hand with a doubleton. Find the plan that lets you ruff a loser into a winner.

Using a weakness as a weapon is one of the most satisfying ideas in cards. Short-suit play takes practice – and it wins tricks.

Chapter 4 – Count the Table

The Vanderbilt plays with the calm of a legend: **counting**. There are 13 cards in each suit and 13 tricks in a deal – and a strong player counts them as they go. Count the trumps that have been played, and you know how many are left. Count a suit around the table, and you know who holds the last one.

"I do not remember every card by luck," said The Vanderbilt. "I count. Thirteen of each suit – and I track them down to the last one."

Counting turns the endgame into certainty: when you know exactly which cards remain and who must hold them, you can play the last few tricks perfectly. Add the **conventions** – the agreed bids and signals partners use – and good table manners, and you have the whole picture.

Say it out loud: *Count each suit down to the last card – then the endgame is certain.*

Everything in this book meets here: bid to tell your story (Chapter 1), read the hidden hands (Chapter 2), use your short suits (Chapter 3) – and count the whole table to a perfect finish.

Your turn: The "Count" pages show the last few tricks. Count the suit – who holds the missing card, and what do you play?

Counting a whole hand takes focus most beginners skip. Learning to count the suits is exactly what getting good at cards feels like.

Keep playing at spark-and-anvil.org – the trainer runs these ideas as live hands, with the cast beside you.

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