

No Idiots or Dummies Need Apply

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Bridge isn't a game for dummies. And bridge isn't a game for idiots. Nevertheless, we have the revised and updated editions of *Bridge for Dummies* by Eddie Kantar (Wiley Publishing, Hoboken, N.J.) and *The Idiot's Guide to Bridge* by Anthony Medley with Mike Lawrence (Alpha Books, New York).

Lawrence and Kantar are probably the two most popular and prolific American bridge book writers of the past quarter century. And Medley's lucid writing style meshes well with Lawrence's typical approach.

No. Despite the titles, bridge is not an easy game to learn. With so many of the games we learn growing up, both card games and board games, you get to read a several page rulebook or someone can explain the basics in a few minutes, and you're ready to play.

Even the basics of chess can be boiled down to a couple of pages (although there is certainly a big difference between moving the pieces around semi-randomly and playing a proficient game). Not so with bridge.

You can take lessons, you can read a whole book, or patient friends can still try teaching you the game at the table.

Both of these volumes are comprehensive "from square one" texts and a quick perusal of the several hundred pages apiece makes it clear we are not talking Monopoly here.

Nevertheless, whereas most basic bridge books on bidding or play still assume some knowledge of the game, these tomes assume you know nothing. You will start with the ranking of the suits and the fundamentals of the auction, followed by very elementary play of the hand, and then work your way up to a handful of more advanced topics.

In fact, both volumes are even more basic than that. You don't even have to have previous familiarity with a deck of cards. You will start off learning about the shuffle, the cut and the deal.

On the other hand, even if you are a beginning or intermediate player of some experience who learned the game by taking a few lessons or having friends teach you, but who has never actually read a whole bridge book before, this can still be the way to go.

You can fast forward through the parts you already know, and fill in a lot of gaps in your basic bridge knowledge.

It's quite possible that someone who has never played bridge before would be aghast looking at the amount of material one needs to master to attain even bare basic proficiency.

Still, as current District 17 president John Van Ness once noted, "We don't play bridge because it's easy. We play bridge because it's hard."

As an extra added bonus, both books include information on the duplicate and tournament world, Internet bridge, and the American Contract Bridge League. Plenty of resources for those who really get the bug.

Have a friend interested in bridge? Either of these books will provide an excellent and comprehensive tutorial.