

Esther Discusses "'Picture Bids' versus 'Fast Arrival' versus '2 Over 1' versus 'Jacoby 2NT': What's It All About, Alphie?"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

Esther: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss "'Picture Bids' versus 'Fast Arrival' versus 'Jacoby 2NT' versus '2 Over 1': What's It All About, Alphie?".²

Bruce: Well, Esther, thank you for talking to us today.

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

Bruce: Errr, well, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, perhaps before we discuss "Picture Bids" perhaps we should first *briefly* review, *in turn*, (1) "Fast Arrival", (2) "2 Over 1", and (3) "Jacoby 2NT".

Esther: Well, my *Boneheaded Bozo*, of course I will try to help you! Let's first discuss the bridge bidding style "Fast Arrival". "Fast Arrival" is a bidding style that is relatively easy to remember and focuses on the **Cardinal Bridge Principle, "He who knows, goes! And goes as soon as**

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by **Bruce Thompson**.

² Many of the ideas presented here are drawn from Vic Quiros' excellent article, "Two-Over-One: Slam Investigation After a Major-Suit Opening: Part 3" (pp. 66, 68), in the September, 2024 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin. Unless otherwise noted, example Hands herein are also based on similar Hands presented in that article.

he or she knows!" The idea is that once a Player knows how the final contracts should be set that bid should *immediately* be made so as to not give Opponents any further information during the auction, and not require Partner to continue to ask questions when you think you have all the information you need to set the final contract. Here are *some* examples of bidding sequences illustrating "**Fast Arrival**" or instead of what might be called "**Slow Arrival**"³. The *first 2* examples illustrate "**Slow Arrival**" while the *last* example illustrates "**Fast Arrival**".

1. NORTH: 1**H**, SOUTH: 2**H**: Responder SOUTH is saying, "Partner, I hold (1) **3+** Hearts and (2) **8-10** HCPs. I do not know if we should continue bidding. Please consider the "**Rule of 5**"⁴ to help make this determination." ["Constructive Raise"]
2. NORTH: 1**S**, SOUTH 3**S**: Responder SOUTH is saying, "Partner, I hold (1) **3** or probably **4** of your bid Spades and (2) a "strong" Hand with "side" features. We may be interested in bidding *past 4S*." ["Limit Raise"]
3. NORTH: 1**S**, SOUTH 4**S**: Responder SOUTH is saying, "Partner, I hold sufficient Spades and HCPs such that with my distribution I believe we will make **4S** and *no more*. Please PASS unless you know important stuff that you have not yet shown and you think we should go further."

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, please now turn your attention to "**2 Over 1**".

Esther: Well, my *Simpering Simpleton*, sure. I consider "**2 Over 1**" one of the *most important* bridge conventions, *especially* for less experienced players, because "**2 Over 1**" makes clear to *both* Partners **early** in the auction whether Partners are likely to make *at least* a Game contract, or instead alternatively should play for a Part Score. When *both* Partners know that a Game contract is likely, Partners will *keep talking* until they finally settle on their optimal contract.

³ "**Slow Arrival**" is based on the **Cardinal Bridge Principle** that Partners should talk *more* when they have *more* to talk about, and *less* when they have *less* to talk about.

⁴ Within the "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" see: "**Rule of 5**":

https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rule_5.pdf

To trigger this convention neither Partner can have previously PASSEd, and the LHO to the Opener must also PASS. For "2 Over 1" to be in play the Opener must have bid 1D, 1H, or 1S. The Responder holding ~13+ HCPs shows this and *specific distributions* by bidding at the 2 level in a lower-ranking unbid Suit. For more details about the "2 Over 1" convention see "Esther Bridge Lesson #1": "2 Over 1" at:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/2 over 1.pdf>

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, please now briefly discuss "Jacoby 2NT".

Esther: Well, my *Beaudacious Bupkus*, again I am happy to try to help you! "Jacoby 2NT" is a convention by which when Opener bids either 1H or 1S Responder can bid an "artificial" 2NT that says, "Partner, I hold (1) 4+ cards in your bid Major and (2) 13+ HCPs." Because this bid is "artificial" this response bid must be **Alerted!** "Jacoby 2NT" is a very important convention because it allows Responder to show Partner a specific Trump card count.

Bridge players place a *heavy* emphasis on knowing **exact, precise card counts** when they are considering finalizing a *Suit* contract in which card counts and distributions are much more *important* than HCPs! This recognition was popularized with the publication of Larry Cohen's 1992 American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) award-winning book, To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks. And Cohen's compatriot Marty Bergen, in Bergen's ABTA 1996 award-winning book, Points Schmoints!, also teaches the all-important philosophy underlying the "Law of Total Tricks".⁵ The "Law of Total Tricks" says:

When you are bidding a Suit contract, assuming both you and Partner are bidding rationally, you will *almost always* (about 85% of the time in Esther's estimation) make a Suit contract if your contract is set at, or lower than, the number of Trump cards you hold minus 6!

⁵ For a summary of *empirical bridge* research (yes, Virginia, there is indeed such a thing as *empirical bridge research*) about how well the "Law of Total Tricks" works, see:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/LOTT bad.pdf>

Bruce: Wow, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, that's a lot to digest! But we now turn our attention to another alternative: "**Picture Bids**"⁶?

Esther: Well, sure, Bruce. But before I get into the details of "**Picture Bids**", I want to say something that is very, **very important!** These **4** systems are not, not mutually exclusive. A Partnership can play *any 1, any 2, any 3, or all 4* of these systems. And you could hold a Hand in which you could respond to Partner by bidding, for example, "**Jacoby 2NT**" but you choose for one reason or another instead to make a "**Picture Bid**"!

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I understand. As usual you have been quite clear! *Crystal!* You are a *magnificent* bridge teacher!

Esther: Well, my *Malodous Misanthrope*, thank you for the compliment. OK. Let's talk about "**Picture Bids**". Let's assume that the auction proceeds as follows:

Opener	Responder
1 S	2 C
2 H	???

Let's assume that Partners are playing "2 Over 1" and Responder's 2**C** bid shows (1) **~13+** HCPs and (2) **3** or **4** "good" Clubs and (3) does not "deny" Spades. In Partnerships playing "**Picture Bids**", holding **4** Spades the Responder's subsequent bids in *this* auction say the following:

1. 4♠: "Partner, I hold (1) **4** "good" Spades, **5** "good" Clubs, but (3) no "control" cards (Ace, or perhaps K,x,x) in either of the red Suits.
2. 3♠: "Partner, I hold (1) **4** "good" Spades, **5** "good" Clubs, and (3) *at least 1* "control" in a red Suit.
3. 2♠: "Partner, I hold *neither* of the above.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, would you now talk us through some examples of "**Picture Bids**"?

⁶ Also see Neil H. Timm's web posting, "**Fast Arrival or Picture Bids?**":

<https://bridge-tips.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Fast-Arrival-or-Picture-bids.pdf>

Esther: Well, of course. Consider the following Hands and the related auction with Opponents PASSing at each turn:

Opener (14)	Responder (13)
S: Q 9 6 4 3	S: A K 5 2
H: K Q 7	H: 8 6
D: A 5	D: 8 4
C: K 8 2	C: A Q T 7 3
1 S	2 C ¹
2 NT ²	4 S ³
6 S ⁴	PASS

¹This is a "2 Over 1" bid showing (1) ~13+ HCPS, (2) 4 (or rarely maybe 3) Clubs, and (3) not denying Spade "support".

²This is a bid showing (1) a relatively "balanced" or "flat" Hand, (2) 1st- or 2nd-Round "protected" "stoppers" across unbid Suits, and (3) denying a 6th Spade.

³This is a "Picture Bid" showing (1) 4 Spades, (2) 5 "good" Clubs, and (3) denying a red Suit "control".

⁴Opener knows that the Partnership holds 9 Spades, 7+ "good" Clubs, and that Opener holds a Diamond "control", and although missing the Heart Ace, holds K,Q,x in Hearts, and thus Opener/Declarer is likely to only lose 1 Trick in a 6S contract. The Opener also knows that Responder holding ~13 HCPs *likely* does not hold (1) a void or singleton in *either* red Suit along with (2) 4 Spades because the Responder did not make a "Splinter Bid"⁷ showing that.⁸

Bruce: WOW, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! The Opener did not need to "ask for key cards"! The "Picture Bid" instead already told Opener everything that he needed to know!!!!

But Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, couldn't Responder have initially bid "Jacoby 2NT" rather the "2 Over 1" 2C bid?

Esther: Well, of course, Bruce. But just because you can bid something does not mean that you *must* bid something!

⁷ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Convention Lesson #16: Splinter Bids":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/splinter.pdf>

⁸ However, the "Splinter Bid" has *numerous* requirements, and it is possible that Responder holds a singleton or void but does not meet some *other* requirement for making a "Splinter Bid".

Responder wanted to "show" his Clubs first. When Responder later shows his Spades Opener, given his Club holdings, will elevate his estimate of what Responder's Clubs look like.

Bruce: WOW, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Well, can you give us another example of a "Picture Bid"?

Esther: Well, of course. Consider the following Hands and the related auction with Opponents PASSing at each turn:

Opener (17)	Responder (11)
S: A J 8 5 4	S: K Q 6 2
H: K Q 5	H: 8 6
D: K J	D: 8 4
C: K 8 2	C: A Q T 7 3
1 S	2 C ¹
2 NT ²	4 S ³
PASS	

¹This is a "2 Over 1" bid showing (1) ~13+ HCPS. (2) 4 (or rarely 3) Clubs, and (3) not denying Spade "support".

²This is a bid showing (1) ~13+ HCPS and (2) denying a 6th Spade.

³This is a "Picture Bid" showing (1) 4 Spades, (2) 5 "good" Clubs, and (3) denying a red Suit "control".

⁴Opener knows that the Partnership holds 9 Spades, 7+ "good" Clubs, and that Opener does not hold either red Suit "control". The Opener also knows that Responder *likely* does not hold a void or singleton in *either* red Suit, because the Responder did not make a "Splinter Bid" showing that.⁹ Thus Opener expects to lose 1 Heart and 1 Diamond, and so does not bid any higher than 4**S**.

Bruce: WOW, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! How about one more example of a "Picture Bid"?

⁹ However, the "Splinter Bid" has *numerous* requirements, and it is possible that Responder holds a singleton or void but does not meet some *other* requirement for making a "Splinter Bid".

Esther: Well, of course. Consider the following Hands and the related auction with Opponents PASSing at each turn:

Opener (16)	Responder (14)
S: A 8 7 5 4	S: K Q 6 2
H: K Q 7 5	H: 8 3
D: A 9	D: K 2
C: K 8	C: A Q T 7 3
1 S	2 C ¹
2 H ²	3 S ³
4 NT ⁴	5 S ⁵
6 S	

¹This is a "2 Over 1" bid showing (1) ~13+ HCPS, (2) 4 (or rarely 3) Clubs, and (3) not denying Spade "support".

²This is a bid (1) denying a 6th Spade and (2) showing 4+ Hearts.

³This "jump" is a "Picture Bid" showing (1) 4 Spades, (2) 5 "good" Clubs, and (3) a red Suit "control". With his holdings Opener now knows that Responder holds the "protected" Diamond King.

⁴This is the "Roman Key Card 1430"¹⁰ convention asking Responder how many "key cards" (Aces and the Trump King) he holds.

⁵This "RKC-1430" response bid shows holding 2 of the 5 (Aces and the Trump King) "key cards" and the Spade Trump Queen.

Bruce: WOW, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, I notice that all 3 of your examples involve Opener bidding Spades and Responder showing Clubs. Am I *correct* that a "Picture Bid" might involve other Suits, for example, Hearts and Diamonds, respectively?

Esther: Well, Bruce, yes, indeed! B_I_N_G_O!!!

¹⁰ Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Convention Lesson #3: Roman Key Card 1430": http://esther-bridge.com/pdf/RKC_1430.pdf

**"Picture Bid', 'Jacoby 2NT', 'Splinter Bid':
How Do I Decide?"**

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, for the purposes of *clarification*, let's assume that I as Responder hold (1) exactly **4** of Partner's bid Major and (2) **~13** or only slightly more HCPs. With these holdings I as Responder meet at least some of the requirements for bidding a "**Picture Bid**", a "**Jacoby 2NT**" bid, or a "**Splinter Bid**". How do I as Responder decide which bid to make?

Esther: Well, Bruce, that is actually a *very helpful* question!

1. I as Responder meet 1 requirement to make a "**Picture Bid**", because (1) I hold **4** cards in Partner's bid Major. *Iff* (if and only if) I also have *already shown* (2) a side-Suit with good "Suit Quality" and (3) **~13** HCPs and (4) I hold a side-Suit **void or singleton** and (5) I deny holding "control" in the **2** other side-Suits I have not bid, then I would make a "**Picture Bid**" rather than a "**Jacoby 2NT**" bid. I would do so for **2** reasons: (1) the "**Picture Bid**" is *more accurate* than a "**Jacoby 2NT**" bid in describing my Hand, and (2) the "**Picture Bid**" eats up more of the Opponents' "bidding space", and you and your Partner do not need that "bidding space" because you and Partner have already shared all the important fundamental information to guide your further actions within the auction.
2. Assuming I do not hold a singleton or void and thus cannot make a "**Splinter Bid**", I would then *immediately* bid "**Jacoby 2NT**". Not making a "**Splinter Bid**" tells Partner "I hold (1) **4+** of your bid Major and (2) **~13** HCPs, but (3) *likely* I do not hold a singleton or void in a side Suit." Now early in the auction you and Partner *both* know that you have found a **9+** card "fit" in a Major, and that you are going to play a contract in that Major at the Game level or higher. Opener can then show a void or singleton by Opener bidding that "short" Suit at the 3 level. Or you or Partner can bid Aces "*up the line*" by bidding side-Suit Aces at the 4 level with your *lowest ranking* Suit holding an Ace being bid first.