

Arctic Club

The bridge player, who devised the following method, remains unknown and hopefully s/he steps forward to claim credit. These pages are in the First Person Singular. This .pdf file has only been preserved and archived here. We presume that the origins began at the Farthest North Bridge Club, which is on the Internet at: <http://www.mosquitonet.com/~siegmond/bridge/farnorth.htm>.

System of Bridge Bidding

General Philosophy

For the most part, I like Standard American just fine. (Especially if I can tack a few dozen extra conventions onto it.) So why did I invent a new bidding system? I wanted more aggressive openings than Standard allows. I didn't want to have to open 1 on a 3-card suit. I did not want to throw away a whole level of bidding by opening 2 on all my big hands.

On the other hand, Precision's 1 opening falls to pieces if the opponents interfere vigorously (and I *love* to interfere vigorously when my opponents play Precision!), and Precision's 13-15 1 No Trump makes it awkward to bid balanced 12-point hands. Also, my own experience is that the Precision 2 (5+ Clubs, 11-15) misfires as often as not, though others have disagreed with this claim.

In addition to avoiding these pitfalls, I wanted my system to be as natural as possible. (And, of course, it has to be legal under the ACBL's General Convention Chart.) A rather tall order -- I have not found a perfect solution yet, but the Arctic Club as described below has given me good results. I spent many hours analyzing hand records from regionals and found that in a typical session, Arctic yields better results than Standard American on 2-5 hands and worse results on 0-3 hands.

The system is named "Arctic" because I developed it in Alaska (though Fairbanks actually has only a sub-arctic climate) and first played it here in Fairbanks. Its first use in a large game was at the Great Salt Lake Regional, Salt Lake City, Utah, 17. May 1996.

I love theoretical discussions of bidding, as well as practical bidding problems.

Opening Bids

1 : Forcing. Any one of the following:

Balanced hand, 11-13, 17-20, 24+ points.

5+ Clubs, 13-18 points, no other 5-card suit (or 4-4-1-4 distribution).

Unbalanced hand, 19+ points, any distribution.

Opening with a balanced 11 points, or with 11-12 points and a 5-card Club suit, is optional.

1 : 11-18 points and:

5+ Diamonds, no 5-card Major suit.

4-4-4-1, with singleton in Spades, Hearts, or Clubs.

4 Diamonds, 5 Clubs, and no rebid if 1 were opened.

1 : 11-18 points and 5+ Hearts

1 : 11-18 points and 5+ Spades

10 HCP and a good 5-card suit is a reasonable 1 / / opening.

1 NT : Balanced hand, 14-16 points.

With a 5-card Major and a balanced hand, open 1 NT with 14-16 points, but 1M, not 1 \heartsuit , with 11-13 or 17-18 points. Hands with 5-4-2-2 or 6(Minor)-3-2-2 shape may be considered balanced to ease rebid problems.

- 2 \heartsuit : 6 Clubs (QTxxxx or better), no void, 7-13 HCP. May have a 4-card Major.
- 2 \spadesuit : 6 Diamonds (QTxxxx or better), no void, 7-13 HCP. May have a 4-card Major.
- 2 \clubsuit or 2 \diamonds : 6-card suit (QTxxxx), no void, 4-10 HCP, no side 4-card Major.
- 2 NT: Balanced 21-23 points. May include a 5-card Major.
- 3 of a suit: 5 to 7 tricks, usually a 7-card suit and no side 4-card Major.
- 3 NT: Solid suit in either Major (AKQxxxx, AKJxxxx, or better); at most one King and one Queen (no Aces) on the side.
- 4 \heartsuit or 4 \spadesuit : 6 to 8 playing tricks.
- 4 \clubsuit or 4 \diamonds : 6 to 8 playing tricks; denies a solid suit.
- 4NT: Asking for Aces (ACOL, not Blackwood).
- 5 \heartsuit or 5 \spadesuit : ~8 playing tricks.
- 5 \clubsuit or 5 \diamonds : 11 winners, missing two high trump honors.

Responses to Opening Bids

Responses to 1 \heartsuit

- 1 \heartsuit : Usually a negative response (up to 7 points). Rarely, a hand containing 11+ points and no long suit except Diamonds.
- 1 \spadesuit : 8+ points, 4+ Hearts.
- 1 \clubsuit : 8+ points, 4+ Spades.
- 1 NT: 8-10 (or bad 11) points; usually a balanced hand.
- 2 \heartsuit : Any of the following:
 - Balanced 11-13 points (may be as few as 3 Clubs if 3-3-4-3)
 - 11+ points, 4+ Clubs, no 4-card Major
 - 14+ points, 5+ Clubs, with a 4-card Major
- 2 \spadesuit , 2 \clubsuit , or 2 \diamonds : 6-card suit, 3-7 points, no side 4-card Major.
- 2 NT: Balanced hand, 14-15 or 18+ points.
- 3 \heartsuit : 6-card suit, 3-7 points, no 4-card Major.
- 3 \spadesuit , 3 \clubsuit , or 3 \diamonds : 14+ points, singleton or void in bid suit, willingness to play in any other denomination. Usually 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0.
- 3 NT: Balanced 16-17 points.
- 4 \heartsuit , 4 \spadesuit , or 4 \clubsuit : Weak hand, long suit; to play.
- 4 \diamonds : Asking for Aces.

Responses to 1 Diamond

- 1 \heartsuit or 1 \spadesuit : 8+ points, 4+ cards.
- 1 NT: Balanced hand, 8-10 points.
- 2 \heartsuit : One of the following:
 - Balanced hand, 11-13 points, unsuitable for inverted raise
 - 5+ Clubs, 11+ points, no 4-card Major
 - 5+ Clubs, 14+ points, side 4-card Major
- 2 \spadesuit : 11+ points, no 4-card Major, Diamond support
- 2 \clubsuit or 2 \diamonds : 3-7 points, 6-card suit, no side 4-card Major, no Diamond support.
- 2 NT: Balanced 14-15 or 18+ points.

- 3 ♠: 3-7 points, 6-card suit, no side 4-card Major, no Diamond support.
- 3 ♥: <10 points, 4+ Diamonds, no good 4-card Major.
- 3 ♣ or 3 ♦: 14+ points, Diamond support, singleton in bid suit.
- 3 NT: Balanced 16-17 points.
- 4 ♠: Asking for Aces.
- 4 ♥: 5+ Diamonds, very weak hand.
- 4 ♣ and 4 ♦: weak hand, long suit; to play.

Responses to 1 Heart or 1 Spade

- 1 ♠ (over 1 ♥): 8+ points, 4+ Spades.
- 1 NT: 8-10 points, usually balanced.
- 2 ♠ or 2 ♥: 11+ points, 4+ cards.

2-over-1 bids show 8-12 points, 5+ cards, and no fit if responder is a passed hand.

- 2 ♠ (over 1 ♥): 11+ points, 5+ Hearts.
- Raise to 2: 6-9 points, 3 trump

After Major-suit openings, all bids from 2M to 4M are raises. The overall approach is Bergen-esque. In keeping with the tradition of naming conventional raises after towns on Norway's west coast, I call these "*Hell Raises*."

- 2 ♠ (over 1 ♥): 4+ trumps; 15+ HCP; singleton or void in any side suit.
- 2 NT: Balanced 14+ points; may have 3 trump.

If responder is a passed hand, this bid shows a limit raise with exactly 3 trump.

- 3 ♠: Limit raise (~10-13 points, including distribution), 4+ trump.
- 3 ♥: Intermediate raise (~7-9 points), 4+ trump.
- 3 ♣ (over 1 ♥): 4+ trumps; 15+ HCP; singleton or void in any side suit.
- Raise to 3: 4 trump, 0-6 points.
- 3 ♦ (over 1 ♥): ~9-14 HCP, 4+ trump, singleton or void in Spades.
- 3 NT: 14+ points, 4 trump, balanced hand.
- 4 ♠, 4 ♥, or 4 ♣ (over 1 ♥): ~9-14 HCP, 4+ trump, singleton or void in bid suit.
- Raise to 4: 5+ trumps, very weak hand; usually distributional feature in a side suit.
- 4 NT: Asking for Aces.
- Other jumps: control asking bids.

Responses to 1 No Trump

- 2 ♠: Non-forcing Stayman.
- 2 ♣ and 2 ♦: Jacoby Transfers.
- 2 ♥: Any one of the following:
 - 6+ card Club suit, <6 points;
 - 6+ card Diamond suit, <6 points;
 - Both Minors (5-4 or better) and slam interest.
- 2 NT: Natural raise (balanced 9-10 points).
- 3 ♠ and 3 ♥: Invitational; 6-card suit, 5-7 points.
- 3 ♣: Suggests 5 ♠ is a playable game, but 3 NT may not be.
- 3 ♦: Suggests 5 ♥ is a playable game, but 3 NT may not be.
- 3 NT: Natural. Balanced 11-16.
- 4 ♠: Asking for Aces.

4 and 4 : Texas Transfers.
4 , 5 of a suit: control asking bids
4 NT: Balanced 17-18.
5 NT: Balanced 21-22.
All higher bids to play.

See: Second-round continuations after 1 NT openings.

Responses to 2 Clubs

2 : Stayman-like distributional asking bid.
2 and 2 : Natural and forcing; 5+ card suit (usually 6).
2 NT: Ogust.
3 \square : 3 trumps, no other promises. Usually preemptive.
3 , 3 , and 3 : Long suit, weak hand.
All game bids and 4 \square : To play.
4 : Asking for Aces.

Second-round continuations after 2 Clubs – See below.

Responses to 2 Diamonds

2 and 2 : Natural and forcing; 5+ card suit (usually 6).
2 NT: Ogust.
3 \square : Stayman-like distributional asking bid.
3 : 3 trumps, no other promises. Usually preemptive.
3 and 3 : Long suit, weak hand.
All game bids and 4 : To play.
4 \square : Asking for Aces.

Two weaknesses of the current system are 1) responder has great difficulty showing a Club suit and 2) it is difficult to determine whether opener had a preemptive or constructive opening if the response is anything besides 2 NT.

Second-round continuations after 2 - See below.

Responses to 2 Hearts and 2 Spades

2 (over 2): Natural and forcing.
2 NT: Ogust.
3 \square and 3 : Forcing, ostensibly natural, but sometimes just looking for a stopper ("support") in the bid suit.
3 (over 2): Natural and forcing.
Raise to 3: 3 trumps, weak hand.
3 (over 3), 4 \square , and 4 : long suit, weak hand.
Any game bid: to play.
4 NT : Asking for Aces.

Second-round continuations after 2 or 2 - See below.

Responses to 2 No Trump

Standard continuations apply. The one exception is 3 : this bid shows slam interest and one or both Minors.

Responses to Three of a Suit

Standard continuations apply. As always in Arctic, to ask for Aces, bid 4 of the other Minor over 3 ♣ and 3 ♠, 4 NT over 3 ♣ and 3 ♠.

Responses to 3 No Trump

Pass: *Rarely*, responder may judge that the hand should play in No Trump.
4 ♣: asks opener to show an outside King.
4 ♠: asks opener to bid his suit.
4 ♣ and 4 ♠: To play.
4 NT: Asks opener to show an outside Queen.
Higher suit bids: control asking bids.

Second-round continuations after the Kantar 3NT – See below.

Responses to 4 Clubs or 4 Diamonds

Standard continuations apply. 4 NT is *natural and non-forcing*.

Responses to 4 Hearts or 4 Spades

Standard continuations apply.

Responses to 4 No Trump

5 ♣: no Ace
5 ♠: DA only
5 ♣: HA only
5 ♠: SA only
5 NT: any two Aces
6 ♣: CA only

Opener then places the final contract.

Rebids

Sequences After 1 Club is Opened

Note that, in contrast to Precision, almost all of the second-round bids are natural.

Responder Bids 1 Diamond:

With less than 19 points, opener makes a minimum rebid:

- 1 ♣: 4+ Clubs, 4 Hearts, usually 14-18 points (occasionally less).
- 1 ♠: same thing, with 4 Spades.
- 1 NT: To play: a balanced hand and 11-13, 17, or a bad 18 points.
- 2 ♣: Club one-suiter (rarely with four Diamonds), usually 14-18 points (occasionally less).

None of these minimum rebids is forcing. Responder tries to get out as cheaply as he can, by passing, taking a preference, or bidding his own suit (with 5-7 points). Responder can raise 1 ♣ or 1 ♠ with 4-card support and 5-7 points. If responder has a strong hand with Diamonds, he can take any strong-sounding action.

After 1♣-1 -1NT, 2♣ is Delayed Stayman (promising 5-7 points and a 4-card Major), 2 and 2 are weak transfers, and any higher rebid by responder shows the rare strong Diamond hand. In replying to the Stayman inquiry, a minimum opener bids 2, 2, 2 as usual; a 17-18 point opener bids 2 NT, 3, or 3.

Opener's Rebids from 2 to 3 Show Strong Hands:

- 2 : Artificial and forcing to game.
- 2 : 19-23 points, 5+ Hearts unless 4-4-4-1 with a singleton Club, Diamond, or Spade.
- 2 : 19-23 points, 5+ Spades unless 4-4-4-1 with a singleton Heart
- 2 NT: Balanced hand, 19-20 points (possibly a good 18).
- 3♣: 19-23 points, 5+ Clubs.
- 3 : 19-23 points, 5+ Diamonds.

Responder may pass 2, 2, 3♣, or 3 with a very bad hand and a tolerance for opener's suit. The cheaper Minor (or 3 over 3) is a second negative; new suits and No Trump are natural, 5-7; jump shifts are Splinters. Raise to game is weak; single raise is more encouraging.

After 1♣-1 -2, responder may not pass. 3♣ is a second negative; other bids are natural.

After 1♣-1 -2NT, 3♣ is Delayed Stayman, 3 is a good hand with Diamonds, 3 and 3 are natural, 5-7 points, 3 NT is to play. 4 asks for Aces.

Opener's suit rebids from 3 to 4 show nine playing tricks and less than 19 points; suit rebids from 4 to 5 show ten playing tricks and less than 19 points. A rebid of 3 NT shows a balanced 24-26.

Responder makes a Positive Response:

If responder bids 1 or 1, opener's rebids are as follows:

- 1 (over 1): 14-18 points, 4 Spades, less than 4 Hearts. Standard continuations apply after rebids of 1, 1 NT, and 2♣; see the responses to 1 section for details.
- 1 NT: Balanced 11-13 points.
- 2♣: Natural, same as over a 1 response.
- 2 : Artificial game-forcing raise of responder's suit (19+ points, or possibly 17 or 18 and a singleton). From here on, new suits are cue bids, jumps are Splinters, double jumps are asking bids.
- Raises: to 2M = 11-13; to 3M = 14-16; to 4M = 17-18. Standard continuations apply.
- 2 of the other Major, 3♣, 3 : 19+ points, 5+ cards in the bid suit, denying support for responder's Major. Continuations are natural.
- 2 NT = Balanced 17-18; 3 NT = Balanced 19-20.
- Suit bids of 3 and above show 9-10 playing tricks and no fit for responder's Major.

If responder bids 1 NT, then 2♣ is natural and non-forcing; 2 to 3♣ show 19+ hands; 3 to 4♣ are 9-trick preempts; 4 asks for Aces; 4 to 5♣ are 10-trick preempts; No Trump bids are to play.

If responder bids 2♣, opener rebids as if it were an Inverted Minor raise, though no Club fit has been promised:

- 2 : 11-18 points, no Major-suit stopper; usually 5 Clubs and 4 Diamonds.
- 2 : 11-18 points, Hearts stopped. No Spade stopper unless 14-18.
- 2 : 11-18 points, Spades stopped. No Heart stopper.
- 2 NT: 11-13 points, both Majors stopped. Non-forcing.
- 3♣: 14-16 points, no Major-suit stopper, strong 6+ card Club suit. Non-forcing.

3 ♠, 3 ♥, 3 ♦ : 19+ points.
3 NT = balanced 17-18; 4 NT = balanced 19-20.
4 ♣ : 17+ points, no other biddable suit.
4 ♣ : Asking for Aces.
Higher suit bids: to play.

Responder's rebid of 2 NT or 3 ♣ is non-forcing; 3 ♣ asks for a Diamond stopper; an unbid Major shows 4 cards in the Major, 5 Clubs, and 14+ points; 3 NT is to play; 4 ♣ asks for Aces; other bids are slam tries.

Responder Makes a Strong Jump Response:

A response of 2 NT invites opener to raise No Trump naturally; show a long Club suit or a side 4-card suit by bidding at the 3-level; ask for Aces with 4 ♣; bid any game or slam, to play. (If responder has 18+ instead of 14-15, he may raise opener's signoff.)

Responses of 3 ♠, 3 ♥, and 3 ♦ to 1 ♣ are Splinter bids, suggesting the ability to play game in any suit except the one bid. Opener may bid 3 NT, any suit game, or any slam to play; 4 ♣ to ask for Aces; 4 NT to invite 6 NT with a maximum.

A response of 3 NT describes responder's hand so well that opener either bids 4 ♣ to ask for Aces or places the final contract.

Responder Makes a Weak Jump Response

Opener usually passes. A 2 NT rebid, if available, is "Ogust"; simple suit bids show 19+ hands; all jump bids (and a single raise of responder's suit) are to play.

Sequences After 1 ♠, 1 ♥, or 1 ♦ is Opened

Most second-round and later bids are essentially standard. Opener's hand is categorized as **weak** (11-13 points), **medium** (14-16 points), or **strong** (17-18 points.)

Responder makes a 1-over-1 bid:

1 NT: 11-13 points, balanced or semi-balanced. 2 ♣ by responder is New Minor Forcing (1 round). Responder's reverses are forcing one round, jump shifts to game.

2 of a new suit (non-reverse): 11-16 points, 4+ cards. Responder's jumps are forcing to game; the fourth suit forces one round.

Reverse: 14-19 points, 4+ cards. Responder must bid. 2 of responder's suit and 2 NT are responder's weak bids. Other bids by responder force to game. We play Lebensohl after a reverse.

Opener raises responder: to the 2-level with 11-13; the 3-level with 14-16; to the 4-level with 17-19. The same game and slam tries are available after 1 ♠-1 ♠-2 ♠ as after 1 ♠-2 ♠.

Opener rebids his suit (non-forcing): at the 2-level with 11-13 (usually 6 trump and no side suit); at the 3-level with 14-16 and a good 6-card suit; at the 4-level with an "8-trick preempt" too good to open at the 4-level. Responder rebids as in Standard.

Opener jumps (forcing to game): In a new suit -- 17+ points, 4+ cards; responder rebids naturally. To 2 NT -- 17+ points, *artificial* (often a strong 6-3-3-1 or 6-3-3-2 hand); responder rebids naturally; To 3 NT -- balanced 17-18 points; to play. Double jump in a new suit -- 17+ points, Splinter in support of responder's suit.

Responder bids 1 No Trump

Opener's rebids are standard; new suits are natural and non-forcing. Reverses force one round. Jump shifts force to game. 2 NT invites 3NT. 4 ♣ is Gerber.

Responder Makes a 2-over-1 Bid

2 of a new suit (non-reverse): 11-16, 4+ cards, forcing one round. (Non-forcing in third seat.)

Responder bids naturally.

Reverse: 14+ points, 4+ cards. Forcing to game (1 round in third seat.) Responder bids naturally.

Opener raises responder: to the 3-level: 11-13, *non-forcing*. To game -- 14-16. To 4 of a Minor -- 17-18.

Opener rebids his suit: at the 2-level: 11-13, usually 6 cards, *non-forcing*. At the 3-level: 14+ points, good 6-card suit, forcing to game (14-16 and non-forcing in third seat.) At the 4-level: "preempt," too good to open at the 4-level (to play, strong or weak, in third seat.)

2 NT = 11-13. 3 NT = 17-19. Jump shift = 17+ points, 4+ cards, forcing to game. Jump reverse or double jump shift = Splinter in support of responder's suit.

Responder bids 2 NT or Raises Opener's Suit

After a jump to 2 NT, opener rebids naturally: a 1st opener bids 3rd or 3 NT with a minimum, a natural 3rd, 3rd, or 4th with a maximum; 4th or 4th as Splinters; 4th as Gerber. A 1M opener bids 3 NT or 4M with a minimum; 3M with a balanced maximum; 3 of a new suit to show 14+ points and 4+ cards; jumps in new suits show extreme distribution.

After responder raises opener's Major, opener has a variety of game and slam tries available:

After 1M-2M: Help-suit game tries; 2 NT asks responder if he has a doubleton; Mathe Asking Bid; Splinters (1st-2nd-3rd NT = Spades). 3M and 4M are to play.

After 1M-3rd: 3rd = all-purpose game try; 3M and 4M to play; 3 of the other Major asks for a singleton; 4 of a new suit (or 1st-3rd-3 NT = Spades) is a cue-bid.

After 1M-3rd or 3M: Same as after 1M-3rd, but no game try.

After 1st-2nd: 2 NT asks for responder's singleton. 3rd, 3rd, 3rd, and 3 NT are natural, describing the shape of opener's hand. 3rd, 4th, and 4th are Splinters. 4th confirms a semi-balanced minimum.

After 1st-3rd: 3rd asks for responder's singleton. 3 NT shows a good hand with no singleton and starts a cue-bidding sequence. 4th, 4th, and 4th are Splinters. 4th confirms a semi-balanced minimum.

After a weak Splinter: 3 NT invites further slam exploration; new suit is a cue-bid; 4M is to play.

1st-2nd is an Inverted Minor raise. Opener responds by showing stoppers: 2nd = Hearts, not Spades; 2nd = Spades, not Hearts; 2 NT = both Majors; 3rd = Clubs, but neither Major; 3rd = no stoppers. 3rd, 3rd, 3 NT = as above, showing 17+ points. 4th = Gerber. Responder's bid of 2 NT or 3rd may be passed. Responder's bid of 3rd after 2nd, 2nd, or 2 NT asks for a Club stopper; responder's bid of 3rd or 3rd asks for a half-stopper.

1st-3rd is a weak raise. New suit by opener is natural, inviting 3 NT; 4th is Gerber.

Responder Makes a Weak Bid

Opener normally passes a weak bid (2nd, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 4th over 1st, or 4th over 1st). After a 2-level weak bid, 2 NT is Ogust. None of opener's bids is forcing (except 2 NT).

Sequences after 1 No Trump is Opened

Almost all of our Stayman and Jacoby sequences have the usual meaning. Bill Root's *Modern Bridge Conventions* gives a good summary. 1NT-2nd-2nd-4th is a Splinter, not Gerber. We rarely, if ever, "super-accept" after a transfer. The Total Tricks-based jump is nice with weak hands, but too often, it wastes bidding room needed for constructive auctions.

The 2 response is a transfer to 3 , but responder may have a weak hand with either Minor or a strong hand with both Minors. My conventions page describes responder's rebids.

If responder bids 2 NT and opener has a maximum, he may bid 3 or 3 (with a 5-card Major) or 3 NT.

If responder bids 3 or 3 , opener usually either bids 3 NT or passes. A Major-suit rebid asks responder to bid 3 NT with the other Major stopped, 4 of the Minor without.

The 3 and 3 responses have not come up enough for me to know what the most effective set of rebids is.

Sequences after a Weak Two-Bid

Ogust: A 2 NT response asks the opener to describe his strength, as follows:

- 3 : Minimum hand, weak suit (only 1 top honor)
- 3 : Maximum hand, weak suit.
- 3 : Minimum hand, good suit (2 of the top 3 honors)
- 3 : Maximum hand, good suit.
- 3 NT: All three top honors.

Distributional inquiry: 2 and 2 openings may contain a 4-card Major, but no void. A bid of the other Minor is Stayman-like. After 2-2 , 2 or 2 shows a 4-card suit; 2 NT shows 6-3-3-2 shape; 3 shows 6-3-3-1; 3 shows a maximum and 4-card Diamond suit. After 2-3 , 3 shows 6-3-3-1 or a 4-card Club suit; 3 and 3 are natural; 3 NT shows 6-3-3-2. After 2-2 -2M, 2 NT by responder is still Ogust.

The cheapest bid of a new suit is forcing and natural (except 2-2 and 2-3). Responder: raises with xxx, Kx, or better; rebids his own suit with a minimum; bids a new suit to show a side feature; bids notrump to show a solid suit.

Second-round bidding after 2 NT, 3 , 3 , 3 , and 3 proceeds as in Standard American.

Sequences after 3 No Trump is Opened

A 4 response asks opener to show a side King, if any. Opener bids 4 of any suit in which he holds a King (4 of the trump suit with no side King.)

A 4 response tells opener to sign off in either 4 or 4 .

A 4 NT response asks opener to show a side Queen. This bid may be used on the second round, following a 4 inquiry.

After any of these bids, responder sets the final contract.

Second-round bidding after 4-level and higher openings proceeds as in Standard American.

Roman Blackwood and Gerber

I have seen too many disasters resulting from misunderstandings concerning Key-Card Blackwood, so as of now, I do not play RKC or any of its variants. Here are the original Roman responses:

First step: 0 or 3 Aces.

Second step: 1 or 4 Aces.

Third step: 2 Aces -- ♠ and ♥, ♠ and ♣, ♠ and ♦, or ♠ and ♣.

Fourth step: 2 Aces -- ♠ and ♥ or ♠ and ♣.

Higher jumps show voids.

Gerber applies in the following situations: 4♣ in any auction where Clubs are the only suit named or Clubs have been agreed as trump; 4♦ in any auctions where Diamonds are the only suit named or have been agreed as trump; 4♠ in any auction involving Stayman; 4 of the lower unbid Minor (4♣ if both Minors have been bid) over any natural No Trump bid. Otherwise, Blackwood applies (except after Jacoby Transfers, when one cannot ask for Aces unless someone makes another natural No Trump bid.)

After *Gerber*, 4 NT is to play. 5 of the "asking suit" asks for Kings. 4 of a new suit after the first or second step asks for clarification. For example, after 1 NT-4♣-4♣-4♣, 4 NT by opener shows no Aces, a suit bid shows the other three Aces. After 1 NT-4♣-4♣-4♣, 4 NT shows all four Aces, a suit bid shows the Ace of the bid suit only. (The same asking bid can be used at the 5-level after Kings are shown.)

After *Blackwood*, 5 NT asks for Kings; 5 of the cheapest unbid suit orders partner to bid 5 NT; the next unbid suit above this is the Grand Slam Force.

I have been experimenting with some refinements (e.g., 6♣ over 5 NT showing any two Kings and a previously undisclosed singleton, instead of two non-touching Kings) but I am unconvinced that they are worth the extra trouble to memorize them.

Overcalling

Arctic uses standard (conservative?) overcalls after suit bids: 8-16 points and 5+ card suits, weak jump overcalls except over preemptive openings, 1 NT = 15-17 (systems on, including Lebensohl), Michaels, Unusual NT. Invisible cue-bids are used, e.g., (1 NT) Pass (2♣-Jacoby) 2♣ is Michaels because opponent has shown Hearts.

Over opposing 1 NT and strong Club openings, Arctic uses the Sierra convention, another invention/adaptation of mine.

Coping with Interference

Most standard methods carry over into Arctic, including Lebensohl (after 1 NT is overcalled 2♣, 2♦, or 2♥), Support, Negative (through 3♣), and Maximal Overcall Doubles.

Interference directly over the 1♣ opening is not much of a problem. Our agreement is simple: responder bids as if opener made a *Standard American* 1♣ opening, since 90% of the time, opener will be in the 11-18 HCP range. Opener makes a strong-sounding bid at his next turn if he really had a 19+ hand.

Interference in fourth seat – 1♣ (Pass) 1♦, ♠, ♥ (Overcall) -- requires a few special agreements. If opener can bid at or below the level of 2♣, his bid retains its original meaning. A second-round double by the 1♣ opener is negative if there is an unbid Major suit. Bids of 2♣ and above are natural and strong.

Arctic also uses the Western Cue Bid, asking for a full stopper, on the second and subsequent rounds of bidding. It is still unclear to me whether cue-bids by the 1♣ opener should be Western or show monster hands.

Defending Against the Arctic Club

Opponents can treat all opening bids except 1 ♣, 1 NT, 2 ♣, and 3 NT just as if they were standard. The following are the principal areas where I recommend different defenses:

Since 1 ♣ openings often contain only two or three Clubs (even zero or one on rare occasions), either 2 ♣ or 3 ♣, and possibly both, should be natural overcalls. I suggest using the double, rather than Michaels, to show the Majors.

A 2 NT overcall should show the Minors, not Diamonds and Hearts. Remember that Precision's 1 ♣ is purely artificial, while Arctic's 1 ♣ is not: opponents who use highly aggressive strategies such as those in Baron et al's *Clobber Their Artificial Club* tend to cause themselves more trouble than they cause us.

Since 1 NT is 14-16, opponents should overcall *slightly* more aggressively than they would opposite a 15-17 No Trump.

Over 2 ♣, whatever methods you normally use over a weak 2 ♣ bid can be used. Remember that Arctic's 2 ♣ and 2 ♣ bids are stronger than 2 ♣ and 2 ♣.

The Kantar 3 NT shows a solid Major. Defenses to the NAMYATS 4 ♣ opening can be adapted to be used over our 3 NT opening.

Oh, one more thing -- when you sit down at *my* table in a tournament next year, please remember to pass throughout and always make opening leads that give me an extra trick. Thanks!