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MAH JONG: R. F. Foster Estimates Calling of Value Hands.

By R. F. FOSTER.

One of the most important things in playing Mah Jong is in getting the hand into such shape that it has the greatest possible number of chances to win. We saw in the last article that a hand which might be calling for some special tile might, by a shift in its make-up, be changed into a hand that was calling for three, four, or even five different tiles, any of which would win.

But this is after the hand has been built up to that point by getting rid of all the useless or disconnected tiles that were part of it at the start. We have already seen how this is accomplished by gradually eliminating inferior sequences. In favor of those open at both ends; of taking pungs in preference to chows; and keeping one suit instead of two or three.

Two Points To Watch.

In estimating the possibilities of a hand for a woo, there are two ends to the question. What the hand is worth at the start, and what it is worth when the game is near the finish. The difference is that between how many places you want to fill up in your original thirteen tiles, and how many different tiles you can use to fill up just one place to complete your hand for a woo.

Many players make it a practice to count up their tiles at the start, arranging them in order to see how many partially-formed sets there are, and how many disconnected tiles there are to be got rid of. The proportion between the two will give one a pretty good line on the value of the hand as better or worse than average.

In order to become familiar with this, while not having to pay such close attention to the play of others, it is excellent practice to draw a set of 136 tiles, leaving out the Flowers and Seasons, and to draw several hands of thirteen at a time, with a view to counting up the possibilities.

of discarding and drawing. As an example, suppose you find two pairs of any kind, one complete sequence, one open-end sequence of two only, and four tiles that connect with nothing, odd Winds or Dragons among them. Four draws from the wall or the discards would complete this hand for a woo; three will get it in shape. If you fill your two pairs by pungs, and your open-end sequence, you will have three "free discards," as they are called, from your disconnected four tiles. Then, if you match the one you have left for your pair, you are out. It is quite possible that you may match one of these four tiles while making up your sets. Then you have your eyes all ready.

Too Many Partial Sets.

But when you have too many partial sets, or pairs, you are shy on free discards, and often have to choose between two or more of these possible sets, which to break up when you fill others. For this reason good players do not consider it any advantage to have more sets to fill than they have free discards, because some of the partially formed sets will have to be thrown away, with the annoyance in many cases of finding that you have picked the wrong one.

It is after the hand sets into shape that many players find it difficult to see all its possibilities, and many a game has been lost through the player's inability to see quickly that a certain tile would complete his hand when he was looking for something else that would do so. Every one must have had the experience of not being able to decide whether a certain tile discarded would complete his hand or not, especially when he has quite a number of the same suit.

In order not to overlook any opportunities to woo, when there are several tiles that would do so, it is important for anyone who is ambitious to be a first-rate player to practice by one's self, picking out the

various groupings of tiles that are most commonly undervalued, and which are usually seven or more in number, and in the same suit. This is supposing that there are two sets already complete or grounded.

The player invariably knows that he wants a certain tile or tiles to woo, but he is apt to overlook others that would do equally well. Shuffling the tiles about in the rack before the hand to the opponents, takes time, and is often inconclusive, because it follows no rule.

Simple Rule to Follow.

All groupings that depend on filling pairs may be dismissed as obvious. The difficulties arise with mixed pairs or triplets and sequences. With pairs or triplets that could be transposed into sequences. There is a simple rule for studying these combinations which does not require any rearrangement of the tiles in the rack. This rule is an example of method, and from its application one may deduce rules to fit all the various combinations of pairs, triplets, and sequences that can be held in seven tiles of the same suit.

As an example, take these seven tiles: Look over any assortment like this to see how many open-end or interior sequences you have that are incomplete. In this hand the 4 and 5 form an open end sequence, which either the 3 or the 6 would fill, completing the hand for a woo. This will leave you the triplet of 7s, which is a pair for your eyes. Going further along you will find that the 6 and 7 form another open-end sequence, and the pair of 7s for your eyes. You must, therefore, be calling for four different tiles, any one of which would complete your hand for a woo.

If you will examine a number of similar hands, you will find this rule to hold good. If you have seven tiles in one suit, among them a pair, a triplet, and a sequence, if the triplet is at one end and the sequence at the other, you are calling for four tiles to woo. Take this arrangement:

Either the 4 or the 7 will complete the 5 sequence, leaving two 5s for the eyes; or either the 3 or the 6 will complete the 7 sequence, leaving the triplet of 5s and the pair of 6s for the eyes.

But if the sequence is in the middle instead of at either end, as in the following example, you are calling for two tiles only, in spite of the fact that you still have a pair, the triplet and the sequence, all in the same suit:

If you will examine this holding carefully, you will find that the only sequence you can complete, and leave a pair for the eyes, is the 6-7 sequence, and either a 5 or an 8 will do it, but no other tile will complete the hand for a woo.

There are, as we saw in the last article, a number of cases in which you may not draw the tile or tiles you want, but may get others that are better suited to the combination than the ones you have. In this example, for instance, can you suggest any single exchange that would improve your chances for a woo?

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THE ISLAND OF DEATH

A Weird Tragedy of a Man Who Called Himself "Monsieur the Devil."

By H. BEDFORD JONES.

INSTALLMENT VI. CHAPTER XI.

Landing.

"Quarrel?" he responded. "I remember now—why, there was no quarrel! He drew a knife, and struck: I shot him."

"Ah!" said Lebrun calmly, regarding him. "Well, let it pass. You are thirsty. There is water beside you. No more was said. None the less, Smith was subtly aware that he had not given the right answer. He felt intuitively that he had bungled somehow; yet he was too thirsty to care. He had not the water and drank. Lebrun went to sleep again.

After some time Lebrun awakened and took the tiller while Le Morpion crawled up forward, munching some biscuit and curled up in slumber. Smith stared up at the calm gaze of Monsieur the Devil, and voiced the question that was bothering him.

"Where are we going?"

Lebrun's black eyes glittered on him reflectively.

"To an island. To a place of vengeance. There is a man whom I hate, whom I shall kill; there we take his possessions. His name, Des Gachons."

The eyes of Smith widened a trifle.

"Des Gachons?" he repeated in a low voice.

Lebrun regarded him attentively.

"What? You know him?"

Smith feebly shook his head. "No. But he may know me."

"No. He has been out of official affairs for quite a long time. He will not know that you are wanted; that there is any reward for me, since he never saw me; although he might have seen my picture. We must chance that."

"I'm not worried about you," said Smith. "But when he knew me, I was employed by the government."

"Ah!" said Monsieur the Devil calmly. "This is news. In what capacity?"

Smith allowed his head to droop for an instant. He was lying now, and lying artistically. He was not so weak as he seemed. Still, there was not great strength left in him.

"If I told you, then you would consider a lie," said Lebrun, regarding him. "I would advise you to tell me."

There was something deadly in these words.

"I was an engineer—of construction. With the new railroad. Not long ago, I need money—I made a mess of things, but got away."

Lebrun nodded. "Then you got the money?"

"I have five thousand dollars in my belt."

Lebrun had discovered this money in his search. He nodded his head. "Very well. Now go to sleep—there will be no difficulty about Des Gachons."

However, there was nothing to be done about it now, and he dropped off to sleep.

J. Hudson Smith, lying in the boat or sitting propped against his rolled jacket, spent several uncomfortable, painful and reflective days. His wound was developing badly; he had taken on a touch of fever which made Lebrun frown over the dressings. Lebrun was a good surgeon, deft and cunning in the fingers. This man seemed a good everything.

A good navigator, certainly. He guided the whaleboat over the waste of waters without help from Le Morpion, and with unerring certitude. There were charts and instruments in the boat. During these days, Smith learned for the first time from conversation and scattered hints, how Lebrun had come to find the island owned by Des Gachons.

The American could guess at much of the story that remained untold—much at which even M. de Diable himself seemed now to reluctant in thought and word. It was an odyssey fit for the devil himself. Bad enough was the escape from that infernal paradise, Noumea; the escape, tintured with blood and desperation, imbued with images of savage, naked brown men, old weary-eyed guards of the night swim past the ships and that little island which sits in the jaws of the harbor and vomits the shrieks of tortured humanity. Worse yet was the sequel, the tossing for days and nights upon a crazy raft of brush, the finding of a life-buoy lost from some ship or some corsair, the savage persistency of spirit which held the falling body ever to its work. After this, the island: the last flickering effort of the iron will and safety. Following upon these, the flame of vengeance toward the man who had finally succeeded in sending him to the penal colony.

Smith realized that he was going to be in a bad way unless his wound quickly received antiseptic treatment; but he fought down the fever and held his peace.

Then at last, the unceasing monotony of sky and sea was broken; in that long word-like line of the horizon appeared a slight nick. This came at sunset. With dawn, the nick had grown into a green smudge, and by noon the whaleboat was off the entrance to the island harbor.

Here Lebrun delayed purposely. There was evident commotion ashore; the small cruiser taken to Saigon by Berangere had not yet returned. The whaleboat came slowly in toward the curving crescent of beach, where, in obvious agitation, Jean Marie Auguste des Gachons was marshalling his forces to receive the unexpected visitors. The escalier was working fast; the two secretaries, the gardener, the chef and several native servants appeared on the beach and Des Gachons stood at their head. Lebrun, smiling thinly, directed the boat to the sand at his very feet.

Smith watched and listened sardonically. Was it possible that the hudge would not recognize the criminal? True, Lebrun was changed

now; the reddish moustache altered his entire appearance, nor was there anything of the criminal in his bearing. Quite the contrary.

"Who are you?" boomed out Des Gachons, theatrically. His pose was majestic.

CHAPTER XII.

Welcome.

Lebrun leaped out to the sand, drew in the prow of the boat, turned and rendered an elaborate bow.

"Monsieur," he said gravely, "you see before you three shipwrecked unfortunate. I am a humble devotee of ethnology, mineralogy and the scientific arts; Paul Lebrun by name, an unsuccessful aspirant for the Prix Concord in times past, and for some years a student of the sciences of China."

Before he could proceed further Des Gachons advanced with open arms and tendered him a warm Gallic embrace.

"Colleague, I welcome you!" he exclaimed sonorously. "You have come to a good house of hospitality. I, too, am something of a savant in my unworthy way; Des Gachons by name."

"What!" exclaimed Lebrun, drawing back in astonishment. "Not the author of that admirable and learned treatise upon the ethnological significance of the lamais rosaries?"

"The same," admitted Des Gachons modestly.

Then it is a kindly fate which has drawn us to the shore!" cried Lebrun. "To think that I have touched the hand of this master! I am over-whelmed! But I forget our friends. Allow me to present to you an American gentleman, a fellow-passenger on our hapless coasting steamer—Monsieur Smith. He was hurt during a will scramble for the boots, you comprehend. And this is one called Le Morpion, an excellent seaman, to whose care and skill we all owe our lives."

"Ah!" said Des Gachons briskly. "A wounded man? Monsieur, have no fear. We shall care for you excellently. We have guests; that is admirable! I welcome you!"

It was at this point that Smith gave way suddenly; the overstrained nerves, the overtaxed muscles, the collapse of the body, fever, and fell asleep. The words that had formed upon his lips remained unuttered.

When he awakened, it was to find himself lying in a bed. The room about him was, to his disordered senses, a room of some eastern palace. Real furniture, real paintings on the walls, real flowers at the window! He was in a guest room, of course. What made it more terribly real was Le Morpion sitting beside him, watching.

And Le Morpion stayed there, as though he had had orders to this effect.

A day had passed, thought Smith; it was another morning, and the fever was gone out of him. He did not try to speak. He lay silent and unmoving; as he lay, there came voices from outside the open window, which in fact overlooked the garden. They were the voices of Des Gachons and Lebrun.

Their host, gathered the American, was about to show Lebrun over his island estate. To this M. de Diable objected for a moment.

"One thing, dear colleague," he protested. "I wish your opinion upon a vexed point. For some time I have been studying the question of turquoise in China—a most interesting problem!"

"Most interesting, indeed," agreed the voice of Des Gachons. "Well?"

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"You are aware that the stone is unknown in many provinces of China," pursued Lebrun, proving himself master of some astonishing knowledge. Yet we know that Marco Polo—

"Exactly!" exclaimed Des Gachons eagerly. "He spoke of the monopoly of the stone is turquoise, occurring in the Cho-genk-lu, publishing in 1296. Therefore—"

"The voices drifted off and became indistinct. Smith saw Le Morpion glance at the window, a dark smile hovering about his ugly lips.

Smith saw nothing of his host. As the hours passed, native servants appeared, but Le Morpion never left the room. One would have fancied this man utterly devoted to the wounded American; but in this devotion, Smith read a sinister significance. Very possibly Le Morpion was here to guard against any delicious babbling. The native servants of the establishment numbered three. They were a man and two women, brown creatures who spoke French after a fashion, and who had been fetched from the mainland. They were ignorant and timorous creatures, quite devoid of any traces of civilization; the man and his two wives had been brought here to serve and they served—that was all. As for the polygamist aspect of the case, in these days when one can get servants at all, one does not inquire too closely into their private lives, does one?

Lebrun, on this fine morning, had terminated his argument about turquoise, and was accompanying his host upon a walk about the place—a walk which was destined to terminate very unhappily for Jean Marie Auguste des Gachons.

This simple and honest-hearted fat man was supremely happy. To have his little paradise invaded by three unfortunates to whom he could give shelter and aid, was a pleasure. To find that one of the men was a fellow-savant, a person of discernment and much ethnologic lore, was as a master, deferred to, regarded with awe and honor, was a supreme happiness.

So Des Gachons accounted himself fortunate, and devoted his energies to showing Lebrun about the place. First came the house itself, a house built not for show, but for living in. After the house, the exterior, with the old gardener proud of his work; the establishment was on display, and all recognized it. And at last, ignorant that his visitor knew the man no less than he, Des Gachons took Lebrun down the avenue of palms to the swimming pool.

This was now the same as when he had first looked upon it, except that there was no golden figure adorne in the sunlight. The two men circled that pool of cerulean blue. Des Gachons opened the gate in the wall, and they passed to the fantastic little orchard, with the cliff and the sea beyond.

Here Des Gachons paused, and signed as he surveyed the place. (Copyright, 1924, by the Bell Syndicate, Inc.)

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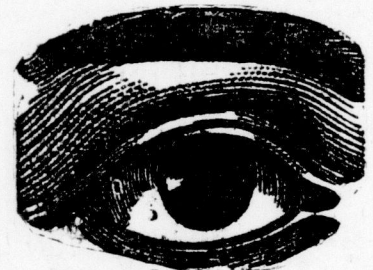
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