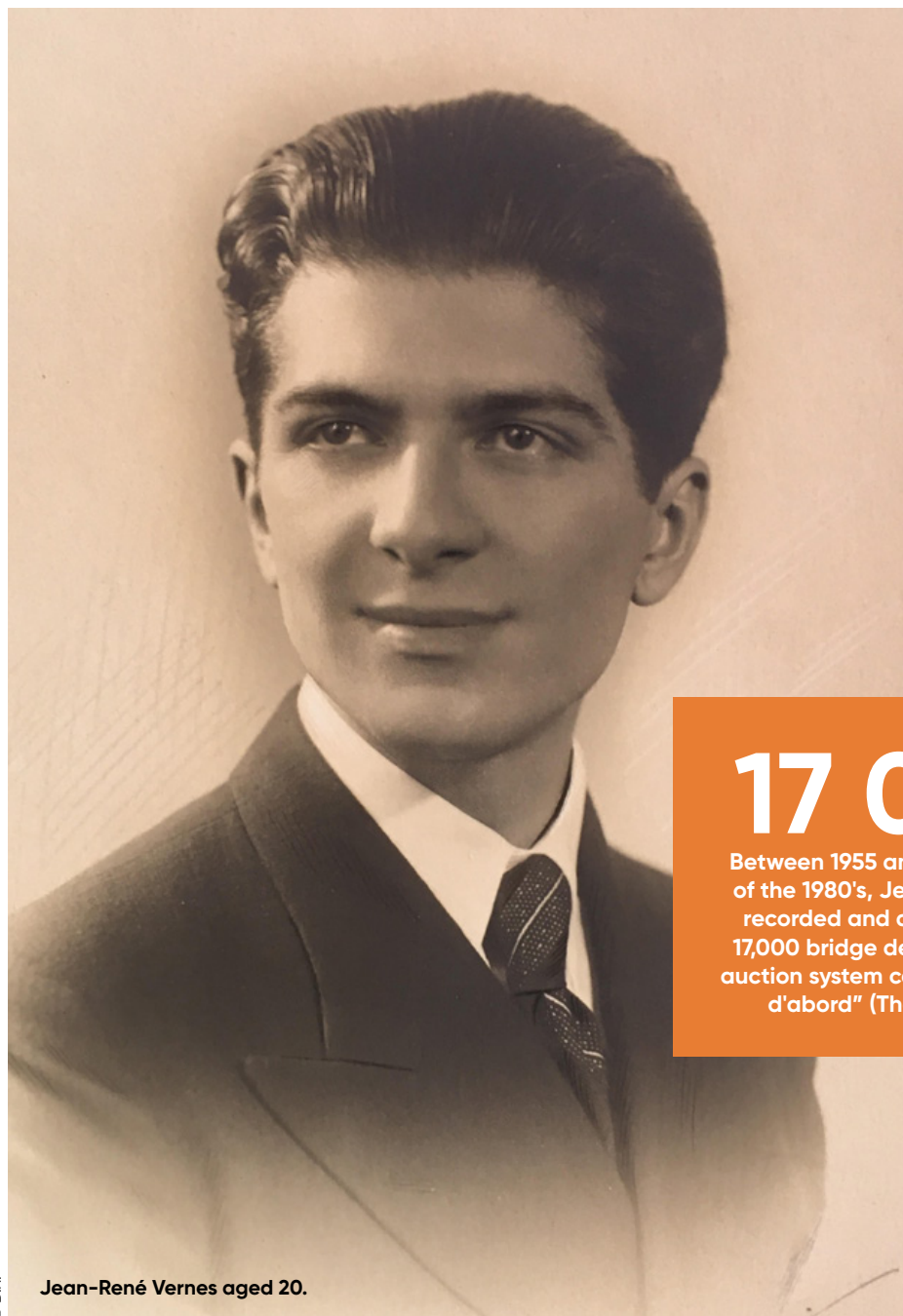


Jean-René Vernes, a very discreet hero

PORTRAIT Man of letters and statistics, this great theorist of bridge and inventor of the famous board game RISK, who died in 2012, marked his time more than the encyclopedias. Be Bridge has gone back over a hundred years to stroll through the thread of his dense and rich existence.



Sometimes, even when you write dozens of books and invent several board games, the Internet still doesn't say much about your life. When you type the name of Jean-René Vernes into a search engine, you will quickly realize that there is very little reliable information on the existence of this great theorist of bridge and philosopher with multiple works. No precise dates of birth or death. Close to no trace either before 1966 and the publication of his book "Modern Bridge Defense", theorizing the law known as "Total Tricks".

Almost nothing on his feats of arms during the Second World War. And even less on a hypothetical descent. Apart from an imposing bibliography, a passion for bridge and

philosophy, what do we really know about Jean-René Vernes? In order to be able to tell his story, we had to mobilize the memories of many people, until we found his first child, Alain Vernes, born in 1940. On the web, only the year of birth

17 000

Between 1955 and the beginning of the 1980's, Jean-René Vernes recorded and analyzed nearly 17,000 bridge deals to set up his auction system called "La Majeure d'abord" (The major first).

Jean-René Vernes aged 20.

of his father is indicated: 1914. More precisely - as we will learn later - on April 13 in the XVIth "arrondissement" (district) of Paris. He was born into a family of Protestant aristocrats, son of Jacques Vernes and Alice Doblere, herself heir to a line of French industrialists. The Vernes family also counts a few personalities amongst them. Charles, the grandfather, was president of the Consistory of Reformed Churches in Paris. His ancestors created the Vernes Bank in 1780 (which is now Palatine Bank), having fled to Switzerland following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. To this very rich family picture, we must also add the existence of Arthur Vernes, uncle of Jean-René: famous doctor and specialist for syphilis, he is at the origin of an institute which bears his name, located in the rue d'Assas in Paris.

Five years in the hands of the Germans

Jean-René Vernes spent his childhood under the control of his mother. A stern woman "who refused to send him to school." He

At the time of Calvinism (first half of the 16th century), the Vernes family rendered eminent services to Switzerland, making its members honorary citizens of the city of Geneva. As such, all descendants - including Jean-René Vernes - obtained Swiss nationality.

therefore received his education from a tutor, before being enrolled at age 13 or 14 at the Lycée Fustel de Coulanges, in Strasbourg," says his son Alain, who has kept numerous archives. At the end of his studies at the "Faculté de Lettres" (part of Sorbonne university dealing with arts and humanities), in Paris, he became professor of philosophy. Then comes military service. A period of three years, from which he

will not be released, while the war against Germany is already looming. In 1939 he marries Madeleine Boulet, first of his four wives, who will give him his first child: Alain. Lieutenant in charge of a battery of "75 mm" guns in an artillery regiment, Jean-René Vernes was caught in the German stranglehold in May 1940, in the heart of the Ardennes. For five years, he remained a prisoner in Germany in



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The introduction of the game 'Rome & Carthage' in the 1960s.



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Jean-René Vernes holds his son Alain in his arms in May 1940 just before departing for the front.

Adaptation

Known to be a very popular board game in North America, RISK was also adapted into a video game in 1997. Since then, several versions have been published.

a “stalag”. *“My father did not speak about this period, because it is a moment of his life when he was very unhappy”*, specifies Alain Vernes.

After the war, he was appointed professor of philosophy in a high-school in Saarbrücken. There he meets his second wife, Annie Guigon, mother of his second child: Anne.

At the end of the 1950's, Jean-René Vernes abandoned his teaching profession to devote himself to his passion for bridge and board games. And also a little bit more to “a very dense social life”, tells his son, who depicts him as *“an affable man, who never spoke to say nothing and who could have held salons. He was very courteous, a gentleman.”* “*He was completely in tune with current events, on all subjects, he was against fascism and for women's equality. A mind of incredible openness. A man who loved the good things in life. He was not allowed to eat fat or to put salt in his dishes... but he didn't care!*”, adds Philippe Cronier, his former editor.

Bridge research funded by RISK

In the 1960's, Jean-René Vernes developed his creative activity and invented two games: “The Conquest of the World” and “Rome and Carthage”, for which Alain and his daughter Anne were the first guinea pigs. He also creates a small card game with five suits called “The Twisted” (*Le Tordu*). But

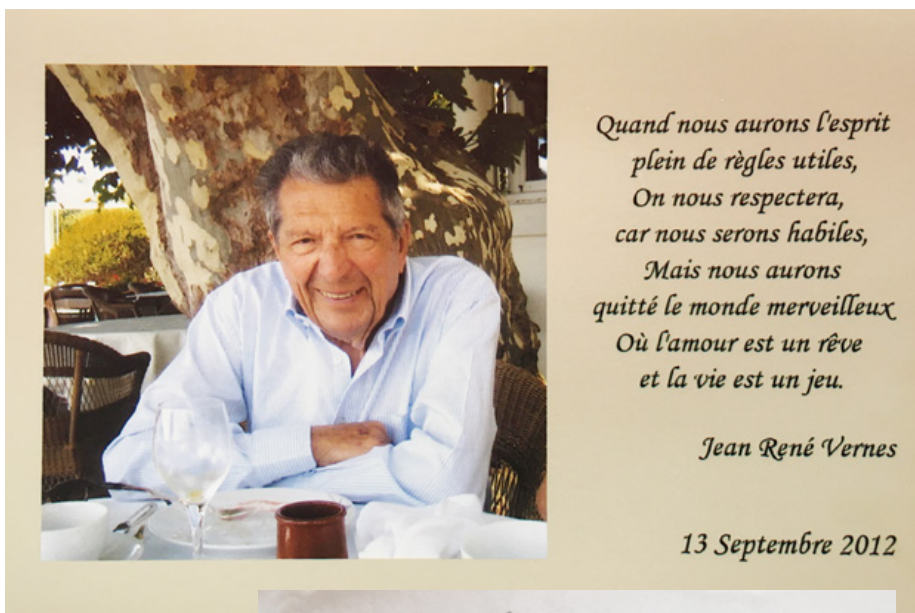


Photo of Jean-René Vernes chosen by his last wife Florence for his funeral.

One of the many poems (here 'Présidentiables', written on 13 April 2012) that were exchanged by Jean-René Vernes and his son sharing their impressions on philosophy and politics.

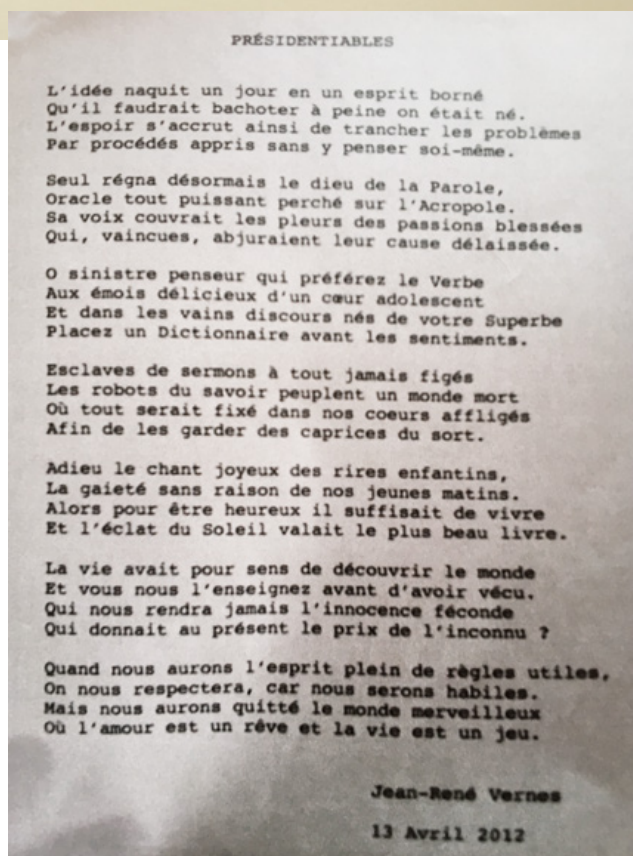
when the Miro Company, which published his first two games, was acquired by the American company Hasbro, they adapted his first game and created RISK. A board game that is widely played in North America, was adapted as a video game and continues to be very successful.

For more than twenty years, it is with this resource that the scholar philosopher will finance his research on bridge. First with the help of the mathematician Bernard Charles, who will rely on his students to enter the 3000 deals collected manually by Jean-René Vernes between 1955 and 1965 into computer systems. Then, by employing a person almost full time to handle this file

*Quand nous aurons l'esprit
plein de règles utiles,
On nous respectera,
car nous serons habiles,
Mais nous aurons
quitté le monde merveilleux
Où l'amour est un rêve
et la vie est un jeu.*

Jean René Vernes

13 Septembre 2012



comprising thousands of deals, before bequeathing it to the Bridge Federation. *“But also by paying professional players, who have helped him fine-tune his auction system called “La Majeure d'abord” (The major first)”*, recalls Philippe Cronier.

Jean-René Vernes devoted the biggest part of the end of his life to philosophy. He concluded his work on Hume and Descartes. Then Kant, in 2011, a year before his death. What the Internet does not say either, is that he died on September 13 2012, at the age of 97.