

Contents

CHAPTER 1 CAMOUFLAGE	5
CHAPTER 2 OPENING LEAD ANALYSIS.....	47
CHAPTER 3 TABLE PRESENCE	75
CHAPTER 4 STUDYING THE OPPONENTS' REACTION	115
CHAPTER 5 COUNT SIGNALS	187

Chapter 1

CAMOUFLAGE

It was Machiavelli who said: “People judge on the basis of appearance... Everyone can watch, but few can see.” The word *camouflage* is of French origin; it means to mask, to cover, in order to hide the true nature of something.

The principle of camouflage is likely to be one of the most important elements of 21st century declarer play. Until now it has been largely neglected by the majority of players, and quite unwisely so.

Defenders’ observations concerning declarer’s hand are often superficial and susceptible to suggestion and deception from declarer. Sometimes camouflage is accidental or subconscious. But some techniques must simply be learned and used in a disciplined way. Lacking important pieces of information or misperceiving them, defenders will go wrong more often. It is therefore vital for declarer to master the art of concealing his intentions. He should talk defenders into believing that he is implementing some other plan. He should also try to confront them with false, nonexistent dangers.

The fact that camouflage will sometimes be de-camouflaged, i.e. deciphered, should not deter us from trying the same thing in future.

FALSE TRACK

The hunter follows his prey and the prey tries hard to cover up its tracks. Sometimes it can even lead the hunter astray by leaving false traces.

Presenting defenders with false picture of our hand, instilling in their minds fear of dangers that are not real, pretending to proceed in a direction incompatible with our true intentions – these techniques indicate a high level of declarer play. The time has come to look at a few concrete examples. Test yourself on the next two problems.

CAMOUFLAGE IN THE RED SUITS

W	N	E	S
<hr/>			
1NT	pass...		

♠ Q 5 3
♥ A J 3
♦ 9 8 5
♣ A K Q 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 9 8
♥ Q 10 9
♦ Q J 10 7 3
♣ J 2

North leads the ♥5 against your contract of 1NT. What can be done about that, you may ask. Quite a lot, as we'll find out shortly.

1. Camouflage

PLAYING THE RIGHT CARDS

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	3♣*	pass
4♠	pass...		

* – 7–9 HCP, 4+♠

♠ A 10 6 5 3
♥ K J
♦ Q J 10 8
♣ A K

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 9 8 7
♥ Q 10
♦ K 8 7 3
♣ 7 5 2

North leads the ♦4 (second or fourth best). How will you tackle the contract?

8

1. Camouflage

inescapably indicate an even number of hearts and we must attempt to deceive defenders in the other red suit – diamonds.

After getting in with the diamond honor, North will know enough to refrain from a heart continuation. He will still have to guess which black suit to play, in order to reach his partner's hand. South will try to give a suit preference signal in diamonds – the six – to show values in spades. We should counter this by playing the queen and following with the five of diamonds from hand.

Since the position of the two highest diamond spots is still unknown, South's six can be interpreted, for all North knows, as low from ♦K986 or, equally well, high from ♦K642.

All of these deceptions are aimed at making life difficult for the defenders. If you use them on permanent basis, from time to time defenders will make a mistake. This is what practical, winning declarer play is all about.

1. Camouflage

FALSE ALTERNATIVE

W	N	E	S
1♠	2♥	4♠	pass...

♠ K Q J 10 9
 ♥ 10 9 7 3
 ♦ Q 4
 ♣ K Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 8 3 2
 ♥ Q 8 5
 ♦ A J 3
 ♣ J 5 2

North leads the ♥A and South follows with the ♥6. Opponents use natural count signals. How will you play the contract?

HIDING THE TWO

W	N	E	S
2♣*	pass	2♦	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass
4NT	pass	6NT	pass...

* – game forcing.

♠ Q 2
 ♥ A K Q J 10
 ♦ A K Q
 ♣ A K 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 10 9
 ♥ 9 8 5
 ♦ J 10 3
 ♣ 9 5 2

♥6 led. Opponents use natural count signals.

FALSE ALTERNATIVE

W	N	E	S
1♠	2♥	4♠	pass...

North leads the ♥A and South follows with the ♥6. Opponents use natural (low-high=odd) count signals.

	♠ 7	
	♥ A K J 9 2	
	♦ K 10 9	
	♣ A 9 8 3	
♠ K Q J 10 9	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	♠ A 8 3 2
♥ 10 9 7 3		♥ Q 5 4
♦ Q 4		♦ A J 3
♣ K Q		♣ J 5 2
	♠ 6 5 4	
	♥ 6	
	♦ 8 7 6 5 2	
	♣ 10 7 6 4	

This time we drop the ♥3. We want to create the illusion of South holding three hearts (♥1096, ♥1076 or ♥976). If this was the case, it might have been necessary for North to switch to diamonds.

1. Camouflage

HIDING THE TWO

W	N	E	S
2♣*	pass	2♦	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass
4NT	pass	6NT	pass...

* – game forcing.

♥6 led. Opponents use natural count signals.

		♠ 8 7 3
		♥ 6 4
		♦ 9 7 5 4
		♣ Q 10 8 3
♠ Q 2		
♥ A K Q J 10		
♦ A K Q		
♣ A K 4		
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	
		♠ K J 10 9
		♥ 9 8 5
		♦ J 10 3
		♣ 9 5 2
		♠ A 6 5 4
		♥ 7 3 2
		♦ 8 6 2
		♣ J 7 6

At Trick 2 we play the queen of spades, overtake it with the king and return the spade jack. South will face an unpleasant dilemma: was partner's ♠3 on the previous trick low from ♠873 or high from ♠32?

DE-CAMOUFLAGE

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass
4♠	pass...		

♠ A Q J 10 8
♥ 7 2
♦ A K
♣ Q 8 6 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9 3
♥ K Q 10 6
♦ Q 10 3
♣ 9 5 2

♠7 led. Opponents use natural count signals.

MASKING THE QUEEN

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
2♠	pass	3♠	pass
3NT	pass	4♣	pass
4♦	pass	4♥	pass
4NT	pass	5♥	pass
6♠	pass....		

♠ A 10 8 7 5 2
♥ 7 2
♦ A 5
♣ A Q 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9 3
♥ A K 5
♦ 10 8 3
♣ K J 10 5

♦Q led. Having won the ace, we draw trumps. On the second round North discards ♦7.

1. Camouflage

DE-CAMOUFLAGE

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass
4♠	pass...		

♠7 led. Opponents use natural count signals.

		♠ 7 6 2
		♥ J 9 4
		♦ J 7 5 4
		♣ A 10 3
♠ A Q J 10 8		
♥ 7 2		
♦ A K		
♣ Q 8 6 4		
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
		♠ K 9 3
		♥ K Q 10 6
		♦ Q 10 3
		♣ 9 5 2
		♠ 5 4
		♥ A 8 5 3
		♦ 9 8 6 2
		♣ K J 7

We win the trump lead in hand and immediately play the two of hearts. Why the two rather than the seven? North will play the four, signaling an odd number of hearts. This information may persuade South to hold up the ace. We will, of course, take advantage by discarding the other heart from hand on the queen of diamonds.

Playing the heart seven, instead, will make North's four ambiguous (♥J94 or ♥J942). South will then probably take the ace – exactly what we do not want.

1. Camouflage

A MISLEADING SUGGESTION

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	1♥	pass
2♣	pass	3♥	pass
3NT	pass...		

♠ A Q 6
 ♥ 2
 ♦ 10 5 2
 ♣ A K Q J 9 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 4 3
 ♥ K Q 10 5 4 3
 ♦ Q 3
 ♣ 10 5

♦6 led. South covers dummy's queen with the ace and returns the four of diamonds.

A REASSURING MANEUVER

W	N	E	S
4♥	pass	6♥	pass...

♠ 6 2
 ♥ Q J 10 9 8 7 4 2
 ♦ K
 ♣ J 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 9 3
 ♥ A K
 ♦ A 9 5 3
 ♣ A Q 5

♣6 led.

A REASSURING MANEUVER

W	N	E	S
4♥	pass	6♥	pass...

♣6 led.

♠ 6 2		♠ A 8 7 5									
♥ Q J 10 9 8 7 4 2		♥ 5									
♦ K		♦ 10 8 4 2									
♣ J 4		♣ 10 8 7 6									
	<table><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♠ K J 9 3									
		♥ A K									
		♦ A 9 5 3									
		♣ A Q 5									
		♠ Q 10 4									
		♥ 6 3									
		♦ Q J 7 6									
		♣ K 9 3 2									

Any experienced player's instinctive move is to go up with the ace, throw the losing club on diamonds and try to get the spades right. In theory, the successful club finesse is equally probable, but the fear of going down as early as in Trick 2 can be overwhelming.

The way to enhance our chances, on the practical level, is to play the queen of clubs from dummy. Hopefully South will not notice the danger and will avoid the risky, from his perspective, spade switch. True, we sacrifice the potential overtrick (if North holds the king of clubs), but the reassuring maneuver is worth it.

DE-CAMOUFLAGE

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	2♣	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ K Q
 ♥ K 6 5 2
 ♦ K Q J
 ♣ 10 6 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 9 3
 ♥ A Q
 ♦ 6 3
 ♣ K Q J 9 8 5

♠2 led. South takes the ace.

MASKING SIDE SUIT STRENGTH

W	N	E	S
1♥	pass	1NT	pass
3♦	pass	4♦	pass
4NT	pass	5♥	pass
6♦	pass...		

♠ K
 ♥ A Q J 10 9 2
 ♦ Q J 10 8 5
 ♣ A

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 6 5
 ♥ 8 7
 ♦ A K 9 2
 ♣ Q 8 4 3

♣6 led.

MASKING SIDE SUIT STRENGTH

W	N	E	S
1♥	pass	1NT	pass
3♦	pass	4♦	pass
4NT	pass	5♥	pass
6♦	pass...		

♣6 led.

		♠ 10 8 4 3 2
		♥ K 4
		♦ 7 6
		♣ J 9 7 6
♠ K		♠ Q 6 5
♥ A Q J 10 9 2		♥ 8 7
♦ Q J 10 8 5		♦ A K 9 2
♣ A		♣ Q 8 4 3
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
		♠ A J 9 7
		♥ 6 5 3
		♦ 4 3
		♣ K 10 5 2

The aggressive bidding has brought us to a slam that depends on the location of the heart king. The odds can be increased, however, with the use of camouflage.

The tempo of the first trick play is quite important here. Too long a hesitation will give South the opportunity to combine information from the bidding and the opening lead. We should call for the queen in normal time, let's say 10 seconds after dummy hits the table. The Defender's instinct may prevail over analysis, especially since it is not that easy to discover why he should duck.

So the first trick goes: ♣6, ♣Q, ♣K, ♣A. Does this end the camouflage? No – we must not allow defenders to signal suit preference *via* the trump suit.

1. Camouflage

Keep in mind that many partnerships show values in the higher-ranking of the two relevant suits by following high-low in trumps. Therefore we should draw only one round of trumps, leading the eight to conceal the five. Why?

South will attempt to signal the spade ace. If we drew two rounds of trumps, he would have an opportunity to follow with the ♦4 on the first round and with the ♦3 in the second. Since the five remains hidden, the four can be low from ♦54 just as well as it can be high from ♦43. The signal is thus ambiguous.

Time for camouflage in hearts. The routine play is the eight, for a deep finesse. This would, nevertheless, disclose the strength of the heart suit in our hand and might set the alarm bell ringing in North's head. Leading a heart to the queen will, to a certain degree at least, conceal the quality of our suit. When North, on getting in with the heart king, tries to cash the club jack, we will be rewarded for all our efforts.

A MISLEADING SUGGESTION

W	N	E	S
		3♦	pass
3NT	pass ...		

♠ A K 5
♥ A K 4 3
♦ J 6
♣ J 10 9 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 7 2
♥ 5
♦ A Q 10 9 8 4 2
♣ 4 3

♥Q led.

A TRAP

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	1♠	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ A K 2
♥ K Q 2
♦ A 6 5
♣ Q J 10 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 10 5
♥ 8 7
♦ 9 4
♣ A 9 7 5 3

♥3 led (fourth best).

♥Q led.

25

1. Camouflage

FALSE INTENTION

W	N	E	S
		1♦	pass
1♥	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass...		

♠ K Q 10 6
 ♥ J 8 6 5 4 2
 ♦ J
 ♣ 7 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J
 ♥ Q 3
 ♦ A 10 9 6 3
 ♣ A J 8 3 2

♦7 led.

FAKING HONORS POSITION

W	N	E	S
1♥	pass	2NT*	pass
4♥	pass...		

* – with heart support, invitational

♠ 9 4
 ♥ A Q J 5 2
 ♦ A
 ♣ K 7 6 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 7
 ♥ 10 9 8 3
 ♦ Q 7 6 3
 ♣ A Q 3

♦J led.

W	N	E	S
		1♦	pass
1♥	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass...		

♦7 led.

♠ A 8 3 2
 ♥ A 9 7
 ♦ 8 7 4
 ♣ Q 9 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 10 6
 ♥ J 8 6 5 4 2
 ♦ J
 ♣ 7 5

♠ J
 ♥ Q 3
 ♦ A 10 9 6 3
 ♣ A J 8 3 2

♠ 9 7 5 4
 ♥ K 10
 ♦ K Q 5 2
 ♣ K 10 4

28

FAKING THE HONOR POSITION

W	N	E	S
1♥	pass	2NT*	pass
4♥	pass...		

* – with heart support, invitational

♦J led.

♠ A J 3 2
 ♥ K 4
 ♦ J 10 9
 ♣ J 9 8 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 4
 ♥ A Q J 5 2
 ♦ A
 ♣ K 7 6 4 2

♠ Q 7
 ♥ 10 9 8 3
 ♦ Q 7 6 3
 ♣ A Q 3

♠ K 10 8 6 5
 ♥ 7 6
 ♦ K 8 5 4 2
 ♣ 10

We call for dummy's queen (a routine play) and cover South's king with the ace. Next we play the trump queen (the odds for king singleton are small). Entering dummy in clubs puts contract at risk (clubs may divide 4-1).

Where is the camouflage? By inserting the queen of diamonds, we invite the defenders to cash the hypothetical diamond trick. By playing the trump queen, in turn, we may avoid the trump loser, if North ducks. Even if he decides to put up the king, he will not be in a position to read the honor distribution (he will assume his partner holds the ace of trumps).

PRETENDING TO FINESSE

W	N	E	S
2NT	pass	6NT	pass ...

♠ A J
 ♥ K Q J 10
 ♦ A Q 9 8
 ♣ Q 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 10
 ♥ 6 5 2
 ♦ J 10 2
 ♣ A K J 10

After some enthusiastic bidding you found yourselves declaring a small slam. North leads the ♣5.

AN ABSURD FINESSE

Many years ago my partner Tomasz Przybora took a finesse that seemed to make no sense whatsoever. In fact it was a result of a detailed analysis of opponents' bidding.

S	W	N	E
Leśniewski	Przybora	Wilkosz	Martens
1♦	X	1NT	2♦
4♦	4♠	pass	pass
X*	pass...		

* – an optional double; partner is to decide on the optimal contract: 4♠ doubled or 5♦.

♠ K J 4 2
 ♥ Q 7
 ♦ A 8
 ♣ A Q 8 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 8 7 5 3
 ♥ 10 6 4 3
 ♦ 7 5
 ♣ 5 3

♦J led.

PRETENDING TO FINESSE

W	N	E	S
2NT	pass	6NT	pass ...

After some enthusiastic bidding you found yourselves declaring small slam. North leads the $\clubsuit 5$.

♠ A J
♥ K Q J 10
♦ A Q 9 8
♣ Q 3 2

♠ 8 7 5 2
♥ 9 4 3
♦ K 7 6
♣ 8 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 10
♥ 6 5 2
♦ J 10 2
♣ A K J 10

♠ 9 6 4 3
♥ A 8 7
♦ 5 4 3
♣ 9 7 6

The situation seems to be clear-cut, with the fate of the contract depending on who holds the diamond king. But we must never cease looking for extra chances.

Camouflage comes to our rescue once again. We win in dummy, play a heart to the queen, return to dummy with another club and lead another heart to jack (pretending to finesse again). We enter dummy in clubs one more time and lead the jack of diamonds, ducking in hand. If the king is offside, we have two additional chances:

- a) North held only two hearts;
- b) Deceived by our alleged finessing, North will fail to switch to hearts.

AN ABSURD FINESSE

S	W	N	E
Leśniewski	Przybora	Wilkosz	Martens
1♦	X	1NT	2♦
4♦	4♠	pass	pass
X*	pass...		

* – an optional double; partner is to decide on the optimal contract: 4♠ doubled or 5♦.

♦J led.

		♠ Q 9 6									
		♥ K 8 2									
		♦ J 10 2									
		♣ J 10 7 6									
♠ K J 4 2		♠ A 8 7 5 3									
♥ Q 7		♥ 10 6 4 3									
♦ A 8		♦ 7 5									
♣ A Q 8 4 2		♣ 5 3									
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♠ 10									
		♥ A J 9 5									
		♦ K Q 9 6 4 3									
		♣ K 9									

South's distribution is close to 1-4-6-2. The trump queen is most likely with North, who left in partner's double for penalties. Even so, the winning declarer play requires imagination.

Declarer's big chance is South's singleton ten of trumps. So Przybora led the spade jack from hand and Andrzej Wilkosz, an esteemed Polish player sitting North, failed to cover with the queen. And little wonder: Przybora's play suggested some other layout of the trump suit, e.g. ♠J1042 in the West hand.

The rest was easy. A small spade to the ace, club finesse, ace of clubs, club ruff in dummy, returning to hand with the spade king and ruffing the clubs good.

1. Camouflage

HIDING THE DIAMOND TEN

W	N	E	S
3♠	pass	4♠	3♦ pass...

♠ Q 10 7 5 2
 ♥ 9 4
 ♦ A 10
 ♣ A K Q 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 9
 ♥ A Q 5
 ♦ Q 7 4
 ♣ 8 7 3 2

♦J led.

A MISLEADING SUGGESTION

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	1♦*	pass
1NT**	pass	3NT	pass..

* – 0-6 HCP, any shape or 7-11 HCP, no four-card majors

** – 18-21 HCP, balanced

♠ K 8 7 3
 ♥ A J 5
 ♦ J 2
 ♣ A K Q 10

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 2
 ♥ 8 7 2
 ♦ K 10 8 4
 ♣ J 9 8

♦3 led.

HIDING THE DIAMOND TEN

W	N	E	S
3♠	pass	4♠	3♦ pass...

♦J led.

		♠ 8 4 3	
		♥ J 10 8 6 3	
		♦ J	
		♣ J 9 6 4	
♠ Q 10 7 5 2			♠ A J 9
♥ 9 4			♥ A Q 5
♦ A 10			♦ Q 7 4
♣ A K Q 5			♣ 8 7 3 2
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> W E </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>		
		♠ K 6	
		♥ K 7 2	
		♦ K 9 8 6 5 3 2	
		♣ 10	

The majority of players would cover with the diamond queen immediately, take South's king with the ace and finesse in spades. It doesn't take a prophet to foretell how the defense will continue: a diamond ruff and a heart back. One down.

Let me say it again: the key to successful declarer play is to paint a false picture of one's hand. In this case it means ducking the diamond jack in dummy and winning with the ace. We then take the spade finesse. From South's point of view it is his partner who holds the missing ten of diamonds. So he switches to clubs. We win, draw trumps and underlead the queen of diamonds. In all probability we will score the ten, but that doesn't matter any more.

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	1♦*	pass
1NT**	pass	3NT	pass..

* – 0-6 HCP, any shape or 7-11 HCP, no four-card majors

** – 18-21 HCP, balanced

♦3 led.

♠ K 8 7 3		♠ Q J 2
♥ A J 5		♥ 8 7 2
♦ J 2		♦ K 10 8 4
♣ A K Q 10		♣ J 9 8

♠ 6 5	
♥ K 10 3	
♦ A 7 6 3	
♣ 6 5 4 3	

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 9 4	
♥ Q 9 6 4	
♦ Q 9 5	
♣ 7 2	

A misleading suggestion can work miracles.

Suppose we play a low diamond from the dummy. There are now two situations:

a) North underled the queen. It's not hard to predict what will happen next. South wins with the ace of diamonds and returns a heart. We win if four hearts are not with the ace of spades or the king and queen of hearts are onside.

b) North underled the ace. We should insert the eight, suggesting the possession of the ace. South will be tempted to cover with the nine from ♦Q9x. Having won the jack, we play a spade towards dummy twice. The contract is now safe provided spades break 3-3 or North holds ♠Ax. If

Practical Aspects of the Play

neither of these is the case, there is still a chance for an extra heart or diamond trick.

Admittedly, putting up the eight in Trick 1 is a creative play. An average declarer will thoughtlessly call for the low card - ♦4. South is now much more likely to contribute the queen even from ♦Q9x. Why? Because the Rule of 11 tells him there's only one card higher than the three in declarer's hand. Ducking implies that this card is the jack.

Going up with the king is effective only when North underled the ace and provided we find some favorable lie in the spade suit.

A FICTITIOUS FINESSE

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
2NT	pass	4♠	pass...

♠ K 9 8 7 2
 ♥ K Q 6 3
 ♦ A K
 ♣ 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 6
 ♥ J 4
 ♦ 8 7 4 2
 ♣ A K 9 6

♦Q led.

CONCEALING THE LOCATION OF HONORS

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	2♦	pass
3NT	pass...		

♠ 10 6 4
 ♥ Q 7
 ♦ A Q J 10 6
 ♣ A K Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 2
 ♥ A 4 2
 ♦ 8 5 3 2
 ♣ J 9 8 5

♥10 led (indicating an interior sequence of KJ10).

A FICTITIOUS FINESSE

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
2NT	pass	4♠	pass..

♦Q led.

	♠ A Q 4	
	♥ 10 9 5 2	
	♦ Q J 10	
	♣ J 8 7	
♠ K 9 8 7 2		♠ J 10 6
♥ K Q 6 3		♥ J 4
♦ A K		♦ 8 7 4 2
♣ 5 3		♣ A K 9 6
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ 5 3	
	♥ A 8 7	
	♦ 9 6 5 3	
	♣ Q 10 4 2	

A misleading suggestion will be the key to success, once again.

We reach dummy in clubs and lead the heart jack. The killing defense is now to hop up with the ace and play three rounds of trumps. Leading the jack from dummy, however, may deter South from adopting this line, particularly if the ace is not accompanied by the ten. A routine play of a low heart towards the jack in Trick 2 would leave South with little doubt as whether to take the ace and play a spade through, followed by two more spades from North.

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	2♦	pass
3NT	pass...		

♥10 led (indicating an interior sequence of KJ10).

♠ 10 6 4
♥ Q 7
♦ A Q J 10 6
♣ A K Q

♠ 9 7 5
♥ K J 10 9 6
♦ K 4
♣ 6 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K J 8 3
♥ 8 5 3
♦ 9 7
♣ 10 7 2

♠ Q 2
♥ A 4 2
♦ 8 5 3 2
♣ J 9 8 5

A psychological chance is often much better than mathematics.

We win with the queen of hearts. In theory, we need to find South with singleton or doubleton king of diamonds. A little over 26%. But I do encourage you to exit with the queen of diamonds.

Are you afraid that they will cash four or five spades? It won't happen too often. Our play will totally confuse the defenders as to the location of the honors. From time to time we will even catch North's king doubleton of diamonds, as he will probably duck. Why is that?

Well, nobody likes to bump into partner's singleton ace. Besides, he may want to retain an entry to his potential heart tricks.

If you decide to follow my advice, try not to lose your temper when South wins the singleton king and the defenders cash five spade tricks!

A MISLEADING PLAY

W	N	E	S
<hr/>			
			1♥
4♣	pass	5♣	pass...
♠ 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"><div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;">N</div><div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;">W E</div><div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;">S</div></div>		♠ A 9 7 4
♥ Q 9 4			♥ 10 8 3 2
♦ 6			♦ A Q 3
♣ A K J 10 9 8 3 2			♣ Q 7

♥6 led. The opponents lead fourth best; middle from three small.

STEERING THE DEFENSE

W	N	E	S									
	1♦	2♣	pass									
2♦	pass	3♣	pass									
3NT	pass...											
	♠ A 10 5	<table><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 6 4
	N											
W			E									
	S											
	♥ A 7 5 2	♥ Q 6										
	♦ A 10 2	♦ 6 4 3										
	♣ 10 9 8	♣ A Q J 6 5										

♦K led, South follows with the eight, we duck. North continues with the queen, South follows with the five, indicating odd number of cards. What next?

A MISLEADING PLAY

♥6 led. The opponents lead fourth best; middle from three small.

The camouflage here consists of hiding the two heart spots by dropping, as casually as possible, the queen. Based on this, South will construct a false picture of our hand. He will be afraid to try and cash the second heart. Why?

Nine is the key card. From his perspective, the layout of hearts is this:

Declarer would ruff the heart ace and shortly he would be establishing a heart trick by playing the ten from dummy. So South may well switch to spades. We will ruff three spades, using trumps as entries, to discover all about South's hand. This four-card ending will arise:

Practical Aspects of the Play

	♠ K 8	
	♥ —	
	♦ 10 9	
	♣ —	
♠ —		♠ —
♥ 9 4		♥ 10 8
♦ 6		♦ A Q
♣ 10		♣ —
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ —	
	♥ A J	
	♦ K J	
	♣ —	

We discard heart on the last trump, putting South under pressure. If he parts with one of his heart winners, he will soon find himself endplayed.

STEERING THE DEFENSE

W	N	E	S
	1♦	2♣	pass
2♦	pass	3♣	pass
3NT	pass...		

The ♦K is led. South follows with the eight and we duck. North continues with the queen, South follows with the five, indicating odd number of cards.

	♠ Q J 8 7	
	♥ K J 4	
	♦ K Q J 9	
	♣ 7 3	
♠ A 10 5		♠ K 6 4
♥ A 7 5 2		♥ Q 6
♦ A 10 2		♦ 6 4 3
♣ 10 9 8		♣ A Q J 6 5
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ 9 3 2	
	♥ 10 9 8 3	
	♦ 8 7 5	
	♣ K 4 2	

Since we can expect a diamond continuation, we must plan the entire play in Trick 1. Most likely the effort will be wasted, for North is the favorite to hold the king of clubs. Nonetheless, what separates a master from a mere good player is that the former never rests.

It looks obvious to duck the second diamond. But let's treat it as a typical chess problem, where one has to plan a series of moves in advance.

Suppose we hold up twice and take the third diamond. After getting in with the king of clubs South will switch to a heart, destroying any potential squeeze or endplay. We must convince South that his partner holds five diamonds. To do this, we must win the second diamond with the ace smoothly. Deceived by this cunning trick, South, after gaining the lead, will return a diamond. Check it yourselves – North cannot escape a squeeze or an endplay.

JUST ONE LITTLE POINT

W	N	E	S
3♥	pass	4♥	pass...

♠ 7 5
 ♥ A Q J 10 7 5 2
 ♦ J 10 2
 ♣ J

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K 6 4
 ♥ K 6 3
 ♦ A Q 7 3
 ♣ K 5

♠8 led, South follows with the queen.

FALSE PICTURE

W	N	E	S
			1♥
pass	1♠	2♦	pass
3♦	pass	3♥	X
3NT	pass...		

♠ K 10 8
 ♥ K Q 3
 ♦ 10 6 5 3
 ♣ 5 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q
 ♥ 9 7 5 4
 ♦ K Q J 8 7
 ♣ A 6

♥6 led (natural leads) and South plays the ♥A.

FALSE PICTURE

W	N	E	S
			1♥
pass	1♠	2♦	pass
3♦	pass	3♥	X
3NT	pass...		

♥6 led (natural leads) and South plays the ♥A.

		♠ J 7 6 4 2
		♥ 6
		♦ 4 2
		♣ Q 10 9 7 2
♠ K 10 8		
♥ K Q 3		
♦ 10 6 5 3		
♣ 5 4 3		
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
		♠ A Q
		♥ 9 7 5 4
		♦ K Q J 8 7
		♣ A 6
		♠ 9 5 3
		♥ A J 10 8 2
		♦ A 9
		♣ K J 8

Follow woodenly with the ♥3 at Trick 1 and it is easy to see what will happen. With a clear picture of the heart situation, South will switch to clubs. The defenders will then have a total of six tricks to take when they win with the ♦A. Instead you should follow with the ♥Q on the first trick! South is likely to return the ♥2. You can enjoy the moment as you run this to dummy's ♥9, taking ten well-deserved tricks.

Chapter 2

OPENING LEAD ANALYSIS

A defender's choice of opening lead is based on assumptions derived from the bidding as well as from his own hand. Having gathered all the available data, he should try to predict the course of declarer's play, especially whether declarer will:

- a) ruff his long suit in dummy;
- b) draw trumps and throw his losers on a side suit;
- c) be looking for tricks in all the suits.

As a consequence of formulating such a hypothesis, the opening leader should be able to decide whether an active or passive line of defense is required.

The next step is the evaluation of the chances of making the contract. It must include all of the following factors:

- a) level and type of contract (suit or notrump).
- b) overall strength of declarer and dummy (is there extra, insufficient or just the right strength for the contract bid)
- c) the character of their hands (balanced or shapely, possession of good, long suits, location of honors).

Favorable or unfavorable suit distribution and honor location.

Apart from all the above factors, selection of the opening lead is also based on the CHARACTER OF THE LEADER'S OWN HAND.

Any highly qualified declarer should undertake an effort to trace the opening leader's line of reasoning. What may be gained by this? Knowledge of the leader's hand.

If the bidding suggests an attacking lead and the actual lead is passive, declarer should expect bad breaks and unfavorable honor location. Conversely, if a passive lead is indicated and the lead is in fact aggressive, good breaks and favorable location of honors may be hoped for.

When the auction calls for the trump lead, any other attack is evidence of either a lack of stoppers in declarer's side suit or an extremely discouraging trump suit combination to lead from.

A lead designed to force declarer to ruff suggests a poor trump break.

A quick lead indicates lack of an alternative. An automatic, quick lead of a king, to take an example, suggests full sequence. Conversely, the lead of a king preceded by a hesitation may point to combination such as KQx(x) or Kx.

Let us now look at a number of real life examples to see what can be inferred from the tempo of the opening lead.

2. Opening Lead Analysis

OPENING LEAD ANALYSIS IN THE LIGHT OF BIDDING INFORMATION. TEMPO OF THE OPENING LEAD

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♦	pass
2♠	pass	3♠	pass
3NT*	pass	6♠	pass...

* – accepting the slam try, no singleton.

♠ A K 10 6 3 2

♥ 7 5

♦ K 8

♣ Q J 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 9 8

♥ A K

♦ A Q J 10 6 3

♣ A 2

Quick lead of ♣5.

2)

W	N	E	S
1NT*	pass	3NT	pass...

* – 12-14 HCP.

♠ 10 8 7

♥ A K 3

♦ A J

♣ J 10 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 3

♥ J 4

♦ Q 8 6 2

♣ A Q 4 3

North huddles and leads ♥5.

Practical Aspects of the Play

3)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ A K 5
 ♥ Q 5 2
 ♦ A 6 5 2
 ♣ A 7 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 4 3
 ♥ A K
 ♦ Q J 10 9 7
 ♣ J 4 2

A lead of ♣6 – with some hesitation.

4)

W	N	E	S
	1♦	X	pass
2♥	pass	6♥	pass...

♠ 7 2
 ♥ A K 8 5 3
 ♦ Q 6 3
 ♣ 10 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q J 3
 ♥ Q J 10 4 2
 ♦ A 7
 ♣ A 2

Lead – ♣K.

- a) Automatic
- b) After reflection.

2. Opening Lead Analysis

5)

W	N	E	S
4♥	pass	6♥	pass...

♠ 10 8 6

♥ A K Q 10 9 6 4

♦ 2

♣ 7 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 4 3 2

♥ 5 2

♦ A 10 3

♣ A K 10 5

♦K is led:

- Automatically.
- Upon deliberation

6)

W	N	E	S
2♣	pass	2♦	pass
2♠	pass	4♥*	pass
6♠	pass...		

* – Splinter.

♠ A K Q 10 8 4

♥ A K Q

♦ 8

♣ A J 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 7 4 2

♥ 5

♦ Q J 6

♣ K 8 7 5 2

♦A led:

- Hesitantly
- Automatically

2. Opening Lead Analysis

a) We are facing a high level opponent.

As the bidding indicates, declarer's plan will be to draw trumps and play on diamonds, getting rid of any losers in the remaining suits. The conclusion is obvious – 'we have to cash any tricks we# by 'the defenders have to cash any tricks they'

The opening lead must therefore be aggressive, aiming to establish some tricks. This criterion is met by the lead from a suit headed by honor and this strongly enhances the probability of the ♣K being in the North hand. The correct play on the first trick is low. Still, it is difficult even for experienced players to follow this logical conclusion. Fear of losing on a ruff in Trick 2 is as irrational as it is paralyzing. A quick lead is further evidence of North's possession of the ♣K.

Why? Because with a hand such as:

♠ Q 7 4
♥ 9 6 5 2
♦ 7 2
♣ 10 8 5 4

the defender would at least be in some trouble.

b) We are playing against a weak opponent, who didn't even bother to ask for the meaning of the bidding. Poor players don't like underleading honors against slams. It is now wiser to put up the ace and try our luck in diamonds.

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	3NT	pass...

A lead of ♣6 – with some hesitation.

♠ 8 7 2
♥ 9 7 6
♦ K 4
♣ K Q 9 6 5

♠ A K 5
♥ Q 5 2
♦ A 6 5 2
♣ A 7 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 9 5
♥ J 10 8 4 3
♦ 8 3
♣ 10 8

♠ 10 4 3
♥ A K
♦ Q J 10 9 7
♣ J 4 2

If the hesitation was connected with the choice of the suit, clubs are likely to split 4-4 and the contract is safe. But what if North considered which particular card to lead?

a) An automatic, quick lead suggests one of the following suit combinations:

K10865, Q10865, K9865, Q9865

Holding such suits there is virtually no choice. We are bound by a convention, i.e. fourth best. Some partnerships consider H98xx to be an interior sequence combination and lead the nine. We should learn about such agreements.

From a technical point of view the solution is very simple – we must block the suit. We therefore play low from dummy at Trick 1, take the ace, reach dummy with a heart and finesse in diamonds.

Practical Aspects of the Play

b) A lead after some hesitation indicates KQ965 or KQ865, because in such case leading the king is an option.

Let's trust our analysis and boldly put up the jack. If that fails (South finds the queen or the king), we must not give up hope. We hold up twice, and after taking the third club we cash the ♦A as an insurance against king singleton in the North hand.

4)

W	N	E	S
	1♦	X	pass
2♥	pass	6♥	pass...

Lead – ♣K.

a) After reflection.

b) Automatic

	♠ K 10 8 6	
	♥ 9	
	♦ K J 9 5	
	♣ K Q 9 3	
♠ 7 2		♠ A Q J 3
♥ A K 8 5 3		♥ Q J 10 4 2
♦ Q 6 3		♦ A 7
♣ 10 6 5		♣ A 2
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ 9 5 4	
	♥ 7 6	
	♦ 10 8 4 2	
	♣ J 8 7 4	

2. Opening Lead Analysis

a)

A ♣K led after reflection is evidence against North holding KQJ. Since the club jack is surely with South, the throw-in won't work this time. The alternative chance is a squeeze, operating on the assumption that North has four spades. We duck the ♣K, win the club continuation, overtake ♥Q with the king and ruff a club. We then get back with ♥J overtaken by the ace and take the spade finesse. After cashing the diamond ace we continue with hearts, reaching this position:

	♠ K 10 8	
	♥ —	
	♦ K J	
	♣ —	
♠ 7	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="text-align: center;">W E</div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">S</div>	♠ A Q 3
♥ 8 5		♥ 4
♦ Q 6		♦ 7
♣ —		♣ —
	♠ 9 5	
	♥ —	
	♦ 10 8 4	
	♣ —	

Playing off the two remaining hearts squeezes North in spades and diamonds.

A quick lead of the ♣K points towards a KQJ sequence. The contract can be made on the throw-in. We take the ace, play a heart to our hand, finesse the jack of spades, come back with another heart and repeat the spade finesse. Next we discard club on the ace of spades, ruff the fourth spade and....

exit with the $\clubsuit 10$.

5)

W	N	E	S
4♥	pass	6♥	pass...

- Automatically.
- Upon deliberation

a)
If North leads the $\spadesuit K$ without giving too much thought to the matter, he probably holds the $\spadesuit KQJ$ sequence. We therefore underlead the ace of spades. Why so?

Firstly, to rectify the count for a potential squeeze. Secondly, to investigate the distribution and choose the optimal line of play. But why should we give up a spade before drawing trumps? For communication reasons. South hops up with king and continues diamonds. We ruff, cross to the $\heartsuit A$ (North follows with the queen) and play a trump back to our hand. We now cash all remaining hearts, reaching this end position:

Practical Aspects of the Play

	♠ —	
	♥ —	
	♦ Q	
	♣ J 8 4	
♠ 10	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right;">W</div> <div style="text-align: center;">N S</div> <div style="text-align: left;">E</div> </div>	♠ —
♥ 6		♥ —
♦ —		♦ 10
♣ 7 6		♣ A K 10
	♠ J	
	♥ —	
	♦ —	
	♣ Q 9 2	

The last trump executes a double squeeze.

b)

If North leads the ♦K upon reflection, he probably lacks the ♦J and the double squeeze is not likely to operate. We must consider two alternative lines:

- 1) Simple squeeze in spades and clubs against any defender.
- 2) Double finesse in clubs.

This time we may begin with hearts, postponing the crucial decision. Statistically speaking, the finesse is better, but the opponents' discards may prove revealing.

2. Opening Lead Analysis

6)

W	N	E	S
2♣	pass	2♦	pass
2♠	pass	4♥*	pass
6♠	pass ...		

* – Splinter.

♦A led:

- a) Hesitantly
- b) Automatically

	♠ 5	
	♥ J 9 3 2	
	♦ A 10 9 7 4	
	♣ Q 10 6	
♠ A K Q 10 8 4	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WS </div>	♠ J 7 4 2
♥ A K Q		♥ 5
♦ 8		♦ Q J 6
♣ A J 4		♣ K 8 7 5 2
	♠ 9 6	
	♥ 10 8 7 6 4	
	♦ K 5 3 2	
	♣ 9 3	

The author of the problem proposes to play for a minor suit squeeze, stating – quite correctly – that it would be mathematically against the odds to settle for a straightforward club finesse. However, it doesn't make much sense to present such problems with no relation to the actual situation at the table. The play depends in an obvious way on the tempo of the opening lead.

A reluctant lead of ♦A is, as a matter of practice, certain evidence of the king lying in the South hand. Declarer ought to cash the high clubs (to keep his conscience clear) and then take the ruffing finesse against South's diamond king.

Practical Aspects of the Play

After a quick lead of the diamond ace, we must attempt to count the defenders' hands. South will no doubt give his partner an honest count signal in diamonds, while North may be maneuvered into signaling count in hearts by playing the ace at the first opportunity. If, in the end, we are able to determine that North holds three clubs, a squeeze will be the obvious choice. If, however, it turns out that South holds the longer clubs a finesse will be the correct play.

2. Opening Lead Analysis

WHAT DOES A QUICK TRUMP LEAD SUGGEST?

W	N	E	S
	1♠	3♣*	3♠
5♦	pass...		
* —	+5♥ - 5♦		

♠ J 6
 ♥ K 8
 ♦ A 9 7 4
 ♣ 10 9 7 6 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 4
 ♥ A J 6 3 2
 ♦ K Q 10 6 5
 ♣ 2

Quick lead of ♦8.

JUNIOR'S SOLUTION

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ A 10 8 7 3
 ♥ K 7
 ♦ A Q 10
 ♣ Q 6 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 9 2
 ♥ 10 4 2
 ♦ K 4 3
 ♣ A 8 7

North gave some thought before leading ♦2.

JUNIOR'S SOLUTION

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	3NT	pass...

North gave some thought before leading $\spadesuit 2$.

♠ Q 6 5
♥ A J 8
♦ J 8 6 2
♣ 10 5 2

♠ A 10 8 7 3
♥ K 7
♦ A Q 10
♣ Q 6 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 9 2
♥ 10 4 2
♦ K 4 3
♣ A 8 7

♠ 4
♥ Q 9 6 5 3
♦ 9 7 5
♣ K J 9 3

I have come across this problem on many occasions. The statistically correct analysis seems to be the following.

South is the dangerous opponent. Thus, we must finesse in spades safely, the extra chance being ♣K in the North hand. So we play three rounds of diamonds and cross to the king of spades to take the finesse against South's queen. When North produces the queen, we hope he is endplayed. He is not, as it happens, and the technically correct line of play failed this time.

The winning line was found by a gifted junior player. He had no doubt as to the interpretation of underleading jack fourth of diamonds. “3-3-4-4” he cried split second after dummy hit the table, and he courageously put his analysis into practice by finessing the spade jack in dummy.

AN UNUSUAL LEAD

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	1♠	pass
3♣	pass	4♦	pass
4NT	pass	5♦	pass
6♦	pass...		

♠ A
 ♥ K 10 3
 ♦ A J 10 6 2
 ♣ A Q 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 6 5 2
 ♥ J 6 2
 ♦ K Q 9
 ♣ K J 7

Opening lead: ♠4; South contributes the queen.

CHECKING DEFENDER'S MENTAL STAMINA

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	3NT*	pass
6♠	pass...		

* – 12-14 HCP, 4+♠, balanced.

♠ A J 10 8 6
 ♥ K 10
 ♦ A K 2
 ♣ A J 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 4 3 2
 ♥ A J
 ♦ Q 10
 ♣ 10 5 3 2

♥2 led, jack holds the trick.

AN UNUSUAL LEAD

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	1♠	pass
3♣	pass	4♦	pass
4NT	pass	5♦	pass
6♦	pass...		

Opening lead: ♠4; South contributes the queen.

♠ A
♥ K 10 3
♦ A J 10 6 2
♣ A Q 4 2

♠ J 10 7 4 3
♥ A 9 8
♦ 7
♣ 10 8 6 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 8
♥ Q 7 5 4
♦ 8 5 4 3
♣ 9 5

♠ 9 6 5 2
♥ J 6 2
♦ K Q 9
♣ K J 7

The theoretically correct line of play is dummy reversal: crossing to dummy in clubs, ruffing a spade, followed by another club to dummy and another spade ruff. Next we cross with a trump and ruff the last spade with the diamond ace. After drawing trumps (discarding heart from hand) we play a low heart to the ten or king.

The success of this line of play depends on:

- 1) A 3-2 diamond break.
- 2) The clubs breaking not worse than 4-2.
- 3) A favorable lie in hearts. The play of this suit will depend on the spade distribution:
 - a) if the fifth spade remains with North, we play a heart to the king;
 - b) if the fifth spade remains with South, we play a heart to the ten.

Practical Aspects of the Play

An alternative plan is based on taking two heart tricks. This will be possible when either both ace and queen of hearts are in the South hand or South has queen doubleton. If North wins the first heart with the ace, one last remaining chance is one defender possessing four clubs and three diamonds. In that case we will draw two rounds of trumps, cash the heart king (hoping that the queen falls doubleton) and try to discard heart on the fourth club.

As it is, however, the unexpected spade lead should set the alarm bell ringing. For starters, North has the ♥A – otherwise why would he refrain from the natural lead of the unbid suit?

The lack of a trump lead, in turn, betrays some inconvenience on the part of the opening leader concerning this attack. This heightens the possibility of a bad trump split.

We should take advantage of the defenders' relative ignorance about our hand. What is more, the bidding suggests 5-5 in minors in our hand. The full deal may easily be:

<p>♠ A</p> <p>♥ K 10</p> <p>♦ A J 10 6 2</p> <p>♣ A Q 4 3 2</p>	<p>♠ J 10 7 4 3</p> <p>♥ A 9 8 3</p> <p>♦ 7</p> <p>♣ 10 8 6</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; text-align: center; width: 100px; height: 100px;"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 9 6 5 2</p> <p>♥ J 6 2</p> <p>♦ K Q 9</p> <p>♣ K J 7</p>
	N											
W		E										
	S											
	<p>♠ K Q 8</p> <p>♥ Q 7 5 4</p> <p>♦ 8 5 4 3</p> <p>♣ 9 5</p>											

From the defenders' point of view, the whole contract may depend on guessing hearts correctly. How would an experienced declarer tackle it? He would cross to dummy with trump and play the heart jack.

Practical Aspects of the Play

- a) cash the ♣A and continue with a small club, winning whenever either defender has a doubleton Qx, Kx or KQ;
- b) play club to the jack, intending to duck North's club continuation in dummy. This line succeeds with both honors or any doubleton honor in the South hand;
- c) lead ♣10 from dummy. If South covers, we take with the ace, cross to dummy in spades and exit with a club towards the jack, winning when both honors are in the same hand or when North has honor doubleton;

Needless to say, plan c) is optimal. What else can be done?

As the opening lead analysis reveals, it would be a mistake to take into consideration the case of both remaining club honors in the North hand. He chose an aggressive lead (from a suit headed by queen). Had he been in the possession of the king and queen of clubs, too:

- a) club lead would have been more aggressive
- b) there would have been little point in an aggressive lead anyway, since partner might easily have held a bust.

Declarer's task is therefore to combine the chances of South holding both king and queen of clubs and a doubleton honor in either hand. In theory, both honors and a doubleton honor in the South hand are exclusive chances. In practice, we may attempt to combine them. After taking the trick with the ♥J, we lead a small club. We are seeking to exert pressure on South to make him insert an honor from K-Q. He is more likely to do it at an early stage of play, when the distribution of our hand is still unknown to him. From his perspective, declarer might be trying to steal the trick holding:

♠ A J 10 8 6
♥ K 10
♦ A J 9 8
♣ A J

If South plays low without a trace of hesitation, we put up the ace, draw trumps, eliminate the red suits and exit with a low club.

2. Opening Lead Analysis

A SURPRISE

W	N	E	S
1♥	pass	3♦*	pass
4♥	pass...		

* – 7–9 HCP with support and any shortness

♠ K Q
♥ K 10 8 4 2
♦ 8 4
♣ A K 9 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7 4 2
♥ J 7 5
♦ A Q 6 5 3 2
♣ 2

The quick lead of ♠J. South wins the ace and, after a minute of thinking, plays the ace of hearts and another heart.

TEMPO OF THE OPENING LEAD AND DEFENDERS' DISCARDS

W	N	E	S
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ A Q 6
♥ A K 6
♦ A Q 6 5
♣ Q 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 5 3
♥ Q J 5
♦ K 10 4 3
♣ 10 9 7

♣2 led. Defenders cash four club tricks. What should we discard?

2. Opening Lead Analysis

dummy with the diamond ace. Our diagnosis has proved correct – South discards a spade. So we ruff a diamond, cash the ace and king of clubs, ruff a club and ruff a diamond with our last trump. Contract made.

TEMPO OF THE OPENING LEAD AND DEFENDERS' DISCARDS

W	N	E	S
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♣2 led. Defenders cash four club tricks. What should we discard?

	♠ 9 8 7 4	
	♥ 10 8 3 2	
	♦ 8	
	♣ K J 4 2	
♠ A Q 6	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="text-align: center;">W E</div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	♠ J 5 3
♥ A K 6		♥ Q J 5
♦ A Q 6 5		♦ K 10 4 3
♣ Q 6 5		♣ 10 9 7
	♠ K 10 2	
	♥ 9 7 4	
	♦ J 9 7 2	
	♣ A 8 3	

We throw a heart from dummy and a spade from the hand.

a)

South discards heart.

We win the likely heart continuation in dummy, finesse the queen of spades, and cash the spade ace. We continue with the ace of diamonds (perhaps the jack will fall?) and two remaining hearts (North follows).

We have conducted a discovery play, intending to find out more about the opponents' hands. We learned something, yes, but the whole layout is still far from certain. We now face the dilemma of what to throw from dummy on the third heart. Discarding a diamond squeezes South in spades and diamonds, but that would preclude us from finessing against the jack in the case of 4-1 diamond break with jack-fourth in the North hand.

The odds are against North's having four diamonds. If he did, along with two spades, three hearts and four clubs he's already shown, South would hold five spades. Based on my experience, he would then discard a spade rather than heart on the fourth club.

On the other hand, with 4-4-1-4 distribution would North choose a club lead? The long reflection preceding the opening lead suggests that North had a choice of leads, probably from a three-suiter.

A quick lead, on the contrary, suggests 2-3-4-4, with South cunningly deceiving us with his discards.

b)

South discards a spade on the fourth club. Now South probably holds five spades, together with three clubs and at least three hearts. Why? Because otherwise North would have five hearts and he would have led this suit rather than clubs. In this case we should base the further play on diamonds, finessing the jack if necessary.

Chapter 3

TABLE PRESENCE

There are two kinds of cognitive structures:

- 1) Those related to imagination. Sensual stimuli perceived in this way are often distorted by our expectations, needs, feelings and defensive mechanisms spurred by the subconscious.
- 2) Those related to intelligence, where stimuli perceived by the imagination are corrected.

Human perceptive systems enable us to see and hear, but also to be self-conscious (as separate from our environment) and to predict the future on the basis of available data. This, in turn, allows us to avoid some unwelcome developments or, at least, to prepare for them. It is precisely this sense of the word “imagination” which we have in mind talking about the “imaginative play of an expert”.

A world-class player, thanks to his experience and the ability to concentrate and use his imagination, can combine:

- perception (including subliminal)
- cognition
- attention and impression.

The capability of applying all of these mental processes simultaneously is the sign of a genuine master.

Applying the above to practical matters, I would like to draw your attention to one embarrassingly avoided aspect of table presence.

Does anybody pay attention to the opponents' behavior while picking their cards out of the board (or picking them from the table, if the cards were hand-dealt)? Experts can discover a lot from the way the opponents arrange the cards in their hands. Good players perform this act dispassionately, but against amateurs one can, with some experience, estimate the strength of their hands. On what basis?

- interest or lack thereof;
- the time that opponents devote to counting their points;
- hesitation or lack thereof before opening the auction (even if the opener's first call is "pass")

But it's unethical, you may protest. The thing is that any experienced bridge or poker player detects all of these subtle signals subconsciously (subliminal perception). This characteristic is sometimes misleadingly referred to as "card sense".

SUBLIMINAL PERCEPTION

“Subliminal perception” – the theoretical possibility of recording information directly in the subconscious, without any intend by the receiver or awareness of the process.

Subliminal messages are visual or auditory stimuli either concealed by other information or lasting too short to be consciously perceived. Phenomena shorter than 0,04 seconds are recorded only in the subconscious. This part of human mind is extremely efficient, since it can deal with more than one thing at a time. The conscious mind, on the contrary, can process only one issue at a time; as a consequence, its activity is much slower.

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2NT	pass
3NT	pass...		

♠ K 5
 ♥ J 7 4 3
 ♦ Q J 10 7
 ♣ A K Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 3 2
 ♥ 10 8 5
 ♦ A 6 5 3
 ♣ J 5 2

♠Q led.

3. Table Presence

“ATTENTION”

“**Attention**” – general name for multiple cognitive processes responsible for:

- maintaining the body in the state of readiness and anticipation for the perception of some stimuli or other activity;
recognizing significant elements from the perception field (visual, auditory etc.), while rejecting the insignificant ones;
engaging in the analysis of a stimulus and the ability to leave one stimulus and focus on another.

W	N	E	S
		1♦	pass
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	pass...		
♠ K 8 7 6			♠ A 10 9 4
♥ Q 10 3			♥ K
♦ K 2			♦ A Q 5 3
♣ A 6 5 2			♣ 9 8 4 3

North leads the ♥6. South wins the ace and switches to the queen of clubs.

“ATTENTION”

W	N	E	S
		1♦	pass
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	pass...		

♥6 led. South wins the ace and switches to the queen of clubs.

	♠ J 5	
	♥ 8 6 4 2	
	♦ J 9 7 6	
	♣ K J 7	
♠ K 8 7 6	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 2px;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 2px;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 2px;"> S </div>	♠ A 10 9 4
♥ Q 10 3		♥ K
♦ K 2		♦ A Q 5 3
♣ A 6 5 2		♣ 9 8 4 3
	♠ Q 3 2	
	♥ A J 9 7 5	
	♦ 10 8 4	
	♣ Q 10	

There are several, mutually exclusive lines of play. Each of them requires ducking the club queen. We must keep our mind ready for perception.

3. Table Presence

a)

South continues with the ♣10. We win the ace, North dropping the king. Where is the jack?

From a split second moment of hesitation we infer that it is North who holds the missing honor. To squeeze him in the minors we have to find North with four diamonds, too. And, of course, we must not allow him to win a trick.

So we lead a spade towards the ten, win the diamond return with the king, play off the heart queen, ruff the last heart and draw trumps, reaching the following end position:

	♠ —	
	♥ —	
	♦ J 9 7	
	♣ J	
♠ 8 ♥ — ♦ 2 ♣ 6 5	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ — ♥ — ♦ A Q 5 ♣ 9
	♠ —	
	♥ J 9	
	♦ 10 8	
	♣ —	

The last trump squeezes North in clubs and diamonds.

Practical Aspects of the Play

b)

Defenders' behavior suggests that South holds three clubs. We must proceed differently.

	♠ J 5 2	
	♥ 8 6 4 2	
	♦ J 9 7 6	
	♣ K 7	
♠ K 8 7 6	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="text-align: center;">E</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">W</div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	♠ A 10 9 4
♥ Q 10 3		♥ K
♦ K 2		♦ A Q 5 3
♣ A 6 5 2		♣ 9 8 4 3
	♠ Q 3	
	♥ A J 9 7 5	
	♦ 10 8 4	
	♣ Q J 10	

One chance is a minor-suit squeeze against South. In order to prepare it, we must give up a trump trick to North and ruff a heart.

But there is a better line – an endplay. We cash the ace and king of trumps, followed by three top diamonds and a diamond ruff, reaching this ending:

♠ J
♥ 8 4 2
♦ —
♣ —

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ —
♥ J 9 7
♦ —
♣ J

♠ 10 9
♥ —
♦ —
♣ 9 8

We now throw North in with a trump.

c)

It is not possible to determine who holds the missing club. The chances for a squeeze are now reduced. Not only do we have to find one of the defenders with both three clubs and four diamonds, but also guess to whom to give the trump trick (who the dangerous opponent is).

Using our imagination, we can execute a rare endplay. We assume North holds four diamonds. We cash three top diamonds, ruff the fourth one, cash the heart queen and ruff a heart. Here is the ending:

♠ K 8 7	N	♠ A 10 9
♥ —		♥ —
♦ —	W E	♦ —
♣ 6	S	♣ 9

We conclude by giving up a club trick. If only spade honors are split, the contract is made. If it turns out that North held three diamonds, but he did not overruff the fourth round, there is still a chance of South's holding ♠QJ doubleton (otherwise North will ruff the club and save his partner from the endplay).

COGNITION

Cognition is the process of arranging and interpreting sensual impressions, whose purpose is to understand the environment.

W	N	E	S
			pass
1 ♠	2 ♣	3 ♠	pass
4 ♠	pass..		
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-start; padding: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: right;"> <p>♠ A K J 10 9 4</p> <p>♥ A 10 5</p> <p>♦ J 5</p> <p>♣ 7 2</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center; width: 100px;"> <p>N</p> <p>W E</p> <p>S</p> </div> <div style="text-align: left;"> <p>♠ Q 8 7</p> <p>♥ K J 3</p> <p>♦ A 10 8</p> <p>♣ 9 8 5 3</p> </div> </div>			

North leads three rounds of clubs (South discarding a diamond on the third club). We ruff and draw trumps in two rounds.

Practical Aspects of the Play

	♠ —	
	♥ ? ?	
	♦ K	
	♣ Q	
♠ 9		♠ —
♥ A 10 5		♥ K 3
♦ —		♦ 10
♣ —		♣ 9
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center; width: 100px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 5 3	
	♥ ? ? ? ?	
	♦ 9 7 6 4 2	
	♣ 6 3	

We lead the last spade, executing a triple squeeze against North. He is forced to part with a heart, as we discard either minor suit card from dummy. We can now take cross to the heart king and take the safe heart finesse of the ten. One nuance we must remember is to unblock hearts by throwing the jack rather than the three.

b)

South wins with the nine and without much thought returns the suit with the king.

	♠ 6 2	
	♥ ? ? ?	
	♦ 7 6 3	
	♣ A K Q J 10	
♠ A K J 10 9 4		♠ Q 8 7
♥ A 10 5		♥ K J 3
♦ J 5		♦ A 10 8
♣ 7 2		♣ 9 8 5 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center; width: 100px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 5 3	
	♥ ? ? ? ?	
	♦ K Q 9 4 2	
	♣ 6 3	

♠ —
 ♥ ???
 ♦ —
 ♣ Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ —
 ♥ K 3
 ♦ 10
 ♣ 9

South wins with the nine and, upon long reflection, returns a diamond

South wins with the nine and, after some contemplation, returns a small

South wins the trick with an honor. We claim.

Practical Aspects of the Play

Perception is the process of receiving visual, auditory or sensual stimuli, processed and synthesized in the relevant segments of brain. It is the first stage of dealing with the information obtained by the sensory organs. Perception is the first stage of cognition.

W	N	E	S
2♣	pass	2♦*	pass
2NT	pass	3♣**	pass
3♦	pass	4NT***	pass
6NT	pass...		

* – after the game forcing opening – no ace

** – Stayman

*** – invitational

♠ A K 7
♥ A K 6
♦ A K 10 8
♣ A J 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 6
♥ J 7 5 4
♦ Q J 4 2
♣ K 7 5

♦7 led.

3. Table Presence

W	N	E	S
2♣	pass	2♦*	pass
2NT	pass	3♣**	pass
3♦	pass	4NT***	pass
6NT	pass...		

♦7 led.

♠ A K 7
 ♥ A K 6
 ♦ A K 10 8
 ♣ A J 6

♠ Q 6
♥ J 7 5 4
♦ Q J 4 2
♣ K 7 5

We have to combine chances, even at the cost of reducing one of them. Having taken the first trick we play the ace and a small heart. Time to rely on our table presence. If we have the impression that North held up with the queen, we put up the jack. If, on the other hand, he follows low without a trace of hesitation, we call for a low card too.

Practical Aspects of the Play

If the queen does not appear, we will cash the ♥K at the first opportunity.

If happens that it was North who held four hearts to the queen. We are left with the club finesse or a squeeze in hearts and clubs.

If South was discovered to hold queen-fourth, we can execute a show-up squeeze, protecting us from losing to queen doubleton of clubs in the North hand.

We reach the end position:

	♠ J	
	♥ —	
	♦ 9	
	♣ ? ?	
♠ —	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> WS </div>	♠ —
♥ —		♥ J
♦ 8		♦ Q
♣ A J 6		♣ K 7
	♠ —	
	♥ Q	
	♦ —	
	♣ ? ? ?	

in which we play a diamond towards dummy. South is squeezed. He has to release a club and we can now catch North's possible queen doubleton.

MATHEMATICS OR PSYCHOLOGY?

W	N	E	S
---	---	---	---

			2♥*
X	pass	3NT	pass
6♣	pass...		

* – 7–10 HCP, 5+ hearts, 5+ other.

♠ 10
♥ A Q 4
♦ A 5 2
♣ A K Q 5 4 3

	N
W	E
	S

♠ K 9 7
♥ K J 7
♦ Q J 4 3
♣ J 10 9

♣8 led.

MATHEMATICS OR PSYCHOLOGY?

W	N	E	S
			2♥*
X	pass	3NT	pass
6♣	pass...		

* – 7–10 HCP, 5+ hearts, 5+ other.

♣8 led.

		♠ J 6 5 4	
		♥ 9 3	
		♦ 10 8 7 6	
		♣ 8 7 2	
♠ 10		<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> S </div>	♠ K 9 7
♥ A Q 4			♥ K J 7
♦ A 5 2			♦ Q J 4 3
♣ A K Q 5 4 3			♣ J 10 9
		♠ A Q 8 3 2	
		♥ 10 8 6 5 2	
		♦ K 9	
		♣ 6	

Tough decision: mathematics or psychology?

We draw two rounds of clubs (South discards small heart), ending in dummy. We have two options:

a)

Small spade to the ten, hoping South will go up with the queen (perhaps even the ace). What is gained by this? We transfer spade stopper to the North hand, preparing a squeeze in spades and diamonds against North after the successful diamond finesse.

How should we proceed? After jumping up with the queen of spades, South switches to hearts. We win the ace, reach dummy with the third

3. Table Presence

trump and play the spade king, covered by South's ace. We ruff, return to dummy with a heart and lead the queen of diamonds to the king and ace. The stage is now set for a squeeze.

This is the ending:

	♠ J	
	♥ —	
	♦ 10 8	
	♣ —	
♠ —		♠ 9
♥ —		♥ —
♦ 5 2		♦ J 4
♣ Q		♣ —
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ 8 3 2	
	♥ —	
	♦ —	
	♣ —	

Playing the last trump forces North to part with one of his stoppers.

Suppose the spade led from dummy at Trick 3 was ducked smoothly by South. There is still a chance of North holding both queen and jack. In this case we can try the same maneuver: king of spades covered by the ace, transferring the spade stopper to the North hand.

b)

At Trick 2 we lead ♠10. If North ducks, we proceed the same way as in variant a). Should North, upon detailed analysis, decide to insert his honor (queen or jack), we cover with the king, losing to South's ace. We can still transfer the spade stopper to North provided he holds the eight. To this end, we reach dummy and play the spade nine. We ruff South's remaining honor, return to dummy, finesse in diamonds and execute the squeeze.

c)

As before, we lead ♠10 at Trick 2. This time, however, North covers with the jack with little consideration (to king and ace). We may now suspect that he holds the queen, too. Without further maneuvering the spade stopper is where we want it to be.

HESITATION BEFORE THE OPENING BID

W	N	E	S
	4♦*	pass	pass
4♥	pass	5♦	pass
6♣	pass	7♥	pass...

* – preceded by a huddle

Helplessly, you bid 4♥. The alternative, double, leads nowhere. You accept partner's slam invitation with delight, showing club values. He then risks a grand slam.

♠ 5 4
♥ A K Q 10 3
♦ 8 6 2
♣ A K Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 10
♥ J 6 4 2
♦ A
♣ J 8 7 6 4

North leads ♦K to dummy's ace. We start drawing trumps: both defenders follow to the ace, but on the second round of trumps North discards a diamond. What now?

HESITATION BEFORE THE OPENING BID

W	N	E	S
	4♦*	pass	pass
4♥	pass	5♦	pass
6♣	pass	7♥	pass...

* – preceded by a huddle

Helplessly, you bid 4♥. The alternative, double, leads nowhere. You accept partner's slam invitation with delight, showing club values. He then risks a grand slam.

North leads ♦K to dummy's ace. We start drawing trumps: both defenders follow to the ace, but on the second round of trumps North discards a diamond.

	♠ J 7 3 2	
	♥ 9	
	♦ K Q J 10 9 7 5 3	
	♣ —	
♠ 5 4		♠ A Q 10
♥ A K Q 10 3		♥ J 6 4 2
♦ 8 6 2		♦ A
♣ A K Q		♣ J 8 7 6 4
	♠ K 9 8 6	
	♥ 8 7 5	
	♦ 4	
	♣ 10 9 5 3 2	

We are almost ready to table our hand and claim all the tricks, but deep down inside we feel some uneasiness. North's hesitation before his opening bid should keep us alert. Something must have made him feel uncomfortable – perhaps four spades. If so, clubs will break 5-0. We can afford to check it prior to drawing the third trump, since it is impossible for South to be void in clubs (otherwise he would have used Lightner double).

3. Table Presence

On the ace of clubs North discards a diamond. That's bad luck. All we can do is to finesse in spades, planning to ruff one diamond loser and throw the other one on ♣J.

Does this conclude the analysis?

We have assumed that North holds:

♠ K x x x
♥ x
♦ K Q J 10 9 7 5 3
♣ —

For starters, this hand is too strong for a 4♦ opening.

Furthermore, after our 4♥ North would certainly consider reentering the auction (e.g. with 4♠). His smooth pass is thus strong evidence against North's holding such a hand.

What can be done? A squeeze against South won't work, since dummy is the first to discard. We can, however, squeeze North, provided he holds the spade jack. This, to be sure, demands a high degree of declarer play sophistication.

♠ J x x x
♥ x
♦ K Q J 10 9 7 5 3
♣ —

We cash two more clubs and enter dummy with the spade ace. We now discard the second spade from hand on the ♣J and ruff the last club with the trump queen. This leads to:

Practical Aspects of the Play

	♠ J 7	
	♥ —	
	♦ Q J	
	♣ —	
♠ — ♥ 10 3 ♦ 8 6 ♣ —	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ Q 10 ♥ J 6 ♦ — ♣ —
	♠ K 9 8	
	♥ 8	
	♦ —	
	♣ —	

Now we table the ♥10 and North is helpless. If he parts with a diamond, we follow with the six from dummy and establish a diamond trick with a ruff. A spade discard, instead, allows us to overtake with the jack and play the spade queen.

An entry-shifting crisscross squeeze, made possible by table presence. A beautiful hand. The hardest part, I admit, is refraining from drawing the third trump.

3. Table Presence

OPPONENTS' INDECISION

W	N	E	S
2♣	pass	2♦	pass
4♥	pass	6♥	pass
pass	pass*		

* – North passed reluctantly.

♠ A Q 5
♥ A K J 10 9 4 3 2
♦ —
♣ Q 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10
♥ Q 8 7
♦ K Q 10 6 5
♣ J 10 4 3

♥6 led.

THE VOICE FROM ABOVE

W	N	E	S
	1♥	X	3♥
4♠	pass...		

♠ Q J 9 5
♥ 10 4
♦ K Q J 5
♣ K 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 10 4 2
♥ 8 7
♦ A 10 6
♣ A J 4 3

Quick lead of ♥A, ♥K and ♥2.

THE VOICE FROM ABOVE

W	N	E	S
	1♥	X	3♥
4♠	pass...		

Quick lead of ♥A, ♥K and ♥2.

♠ Q J 9 5		♠ A 8 7 6									
♥ 10 4		♥ A K J 5 2									
♦ K Q J 5		♦ 8 2									
♣ K 6 5		♣ Q 9									
	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♠ K 10 4 2									
		♥ 8 7									
		♦ A 10 6									
		♣ A J 4 3									
		♠ 3									
		♥ Q 9 6 3									
		♦ 9 7 4 3									
		♣ 10 8 7 2									

The instinctive reaction is to ruff in dummy and dispose of the losing club in hand. But we should pause to consider why North was so quick to give us a ruff-and-discard. He seems to have a clear defensive plan. In addition to the five hearts he holds, in all probability, four spades. We should play him for 4-5-2-2 with the club queen.

The plan of play begins to emerge. We discard a diamond, ruff in hand and play trumps twice. As expected, South throws a heart on the second round. We then cash two diamonds and two clubs, finishing in hand, and reach the following end position:

Practical Aspects of the Play

	♠ A 8	
	♥ J 5	
	♦ —	
	♣ —	
♠ Q		♠ K 10
♥ —		♥ —
♦ K Q		♦ —
♣ 6	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	♣ J 4
	♠ —	
	♥ —	
	♦ 9 7	
	♣ 10 8	

North is helpless as we lead diamonds.

FAILURE TO OPEN THE BIDDING

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	4♠	pass* pass...

* – after some hesitation

♠ A K 10 9 7
♥ 4 2
♦ A K Q 2
♣ 6 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 8 5 2
♥ K 8 5
♦ 10 9
♣ Q 8 7

North leads the ♥Q. We hold up and South follows with the nine (reverse count signals). We duck the ♥J continuation too, South following with the three after some thought. Finally, we ruff the third round of hearts and cash the ace of spades, North discarding a heart. What next?

NO THINKING

W	N	E	S
X	pass	2♦	1♥ pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ A 7 5
♥ K J 10
♦ Q 2
♣ A K Q J 10

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 6
♥ 6 5 3
♦ K J 7 6 5 3
♣ 8 7

We duck the opening lead of ♠Q and the ♠J continuation, overtaken by South's king. We take the third round of spades. What next?

FAILURE TO OPEN THE BIDDING

W	N	E	S
			pass*
1♠	pass	4♠	pass...

* — after some hesitation

North leads the ♥Q. We hold up and South follows with the nine (reverse count signals). We duck the ♥J continuation, South following with the three after some thought. Finally, we ruff the third heart and cash the ace of spades, North discarding a heart.

	♠ —										
	♥ Q J 10 7 6										
	♦ J 4 3										
	♣ J 10 5 4 3										
♠ A K 10 9 7 ♥ 4 2 ♦ A K Q 2 ♣ 6 2	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q J 8 5 2 ♥ K 8 5 ♦ 10 9 ♣ Q 8 7
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ 6 4 3										
	♥ A 9 3										
	♦ 8 7 6 5										
	♣ A K 9										

The only chance, it seems, is to finesse against the diamond jack.

But what does South's uncertainty suggest? He no doubt considered opening the bidding. The only case in which it would be justified (bearing in mind he is balanced) is his holding both the ace and the king of clubs. What is more, he was thinking of overtaking the second heart with the ace, surely to cash the two clubs. If this analysis is correct, then the diamond jack is with North (otherwise South would have 12 HCP).

3. Table Presence

It is therefore necessary to squeeze South in the minors. We proceed towards this ending:

	♠ —	
	♥ 10	
	♦ J 4 3	
	♣ J 10	
♠ —		♠ 8
♥ —		♥ —
♦ A K Q 2		♦ 10 9
♣ 6 2		♣ Q 8 7
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ —	
	♥ —	
	♦ 8 7 6 5	
	♣ A K	

where the last trump triggers the squeeze.

NO THINKING

W	N	E	S
			1♥
X	pass	2♦	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

We duck the opening lead of ♠Q, as we do with the ♠J, overtaken by South's king. We win the third round of spades. What next?

		♠ Q J 10 9 3
		♥ 4 2
		♦ 4
		♣ 9 6 4 3 2
♠ A 7 5		
♥ K J 10		
♦ Q 2		
♣ A K Q J 10		
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
		♠ 8 6
		♥ 6 5 3
		♦ K J 7 6 5 3
		♣ 8 7
		♠ K 4 2
		♥ A Q 9 8 7
		♦ A 10 9 8
		♣ 5

We cash all five club tricks. South follows only once, discarding three hearts and the ♦9. Here is the end position:

3. Table Presence

	♠ 10 9	
	♥ 4 ?	
	♦ 4 ?	
	♣ —	
♠ —		♠ —
♥ K J 10		♥ 6 5
♦ Q 2		♦ K J 7
♣ —		♣ —
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> S </div> </div>	
	♠ —	
	♥ A Q ?	
	♦ A 10 ?	
	♣ —	

If South's original shape was 3–6–3–1, he now has three hearts and two diamonds left. In this case we must overtake diamond queen with the king (South has no choice but to duck), lead a heart to the jack and, finally, endplay South with the ace of diamonds.

If, on the other hand, South was 3–5–4–1, overtaking the queen is wrong – South would win the ace and return a diamond, establishing another trick in the suit for himself. Where is the key to this problem? In my opinion, it lies in the quick pace of the bidding. With:

♠ K 4 2
 ♥ A Q 9 8 7 4
 ♦ A 10 9
 ♣ 5

South would at least pause before passing on the second round to consider reintroducing hearts at the two level. His failure to do so suggests:

♠ K 4 2
 ♥ A Q 9 8 7
 ♦ A 10 9 8
 ♣ 5

Practical Aspects of the Play

If this indeed was his hand, in the five-card ending South is left with:

♠ —

♥ A Q

♦ A 10 8

♣ —

and we must lead the diamond queen, following low from dummy. There is nothing South can do to prevent us from making the contract.

A DELAYED PASS

None vulnerable.

W	N	E	S
2♣*	pass	3♣**	pass***
7♥	pass...		

* – game forcing

** – natural, promises three controls (ace=2, king=1).

*** – slight hesitation

♠ A K		♠ Q 10
♥ A K Q J 10 9 5		♥ 4 3
♦ Q 5		♦ A 8 7 4
♣ A 6		♣ K 8 7 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♥2 led, South discarding a spade.

3. Table Presence

	♠ —		
	♥ —		
	♦ K 10		
	♣ Q		
♠ —		♠ —	
♥ 10		♥ —	
♦ Q 5		♦ A 8	
♣ —		♣ 8	
	♠ —		
	♥ —		
	♦ J 9 6		
	♣ —		

where we execute a simple minor-suit squeeze against North.

Now let's imagine that South passes smoothly. This time the chance of the squeeze is practically nonexistent. South has a three-suited hand, something like 5440 shape with the heart void.

We must now choose between:

- playing for a 3–3 club break;
- playing for a crisscross minor-suit squeeze against South.

The decision can be postponed for a while. For the moment, we draw four rounds of trumps, throwing a club and a spade from dummy.

3. Table Presence

On the nine of hearts we discard a diamond from dummy, executing the crisscross minor-suit squeeze. To make sure, we cash the ace and king of clubs, confirming the 5–1 club break.

b)

On the four rounds of trumps South discards two spades and two diamonds. Two more trumps attract two more spades from RHO. Time for the ace and king of spades. We now infer South's distribution to be 5–0–4–4 and play for the crisscross squeeze.

c)

To the six trump tricks South releases three diamonds and three spades. When the top spades are cashed, he follows suit. His shape seems to be 5–0–5–3 and we should ruff a club, counting on a 3–3 club break.

Chapter 4

STUDYING THE OPPONENTS' REACTION

INTUITION

Intuition is also known as the sixth sense. Thanks to the discoveries of cognitive psychology, which studies cognitive processes, more and more of the domain of subconscious thinking is being revealed. As mathematician Henri Poincare observed, “We use logic to prove. We use intuition to discover.”

I often have the opportunity to watch the development of bridge players. After playing thousands of hands, they no longer need rules; their decisions are often subconscious, led by intuition.

In this context intuition can be understood as years of experience, analysis which has turned into a habit. It is very close to instinct.

From the neurological point of view, intuition is a kind of a shortcut in the nervous system, leading to hidden warehouses of memories and experiences.

Every moment we play bridge, we subconsciously perceive a variety of information. Our conscious attention is selective but the unconscious one restlessly scans the environment. We can significantly improve our level of play by increasing the number of actions that we can perform without thinking. Great masters sometimes play intuitively, without even analyzing any alternatives.

Skeptics claim intuition is nothing but subjective conviction of being right, irrespective of the actual state of affairs. Intuition is thinking by shortcuts, and one can easily get lost using shortcuts. Another shortcoming of intuition is that it creates *post-factum* illusions, letting the mood influence our thinking too much.

Anyhow, we should not reject the power of intuition. Accompanied by concentration and knowledge, it can work miracles. It's worth knowing that we can do more than we are aware of. On the other hand, one cannot trust intuition unconditionally. Deprived of the brakes of logical analysis, it can be harmful. Ideally, one should combine rational thinking with subconscious intuitions. This will make us different from computers in a positive way.

What is a reflex?

A reflex is an unconscious adaptive reaction to an outer or inner stimulus, taking place in and controlled by the nervous system. There are two main types of reflexes: unconditioned and conditioned.

As a general rule, reflexes are reactions to an unexpected danger, catching us "switched off", before our mind takes control over the body.

Why do cats always land on four legs? What makes our eyes blink? Why do we breathe, even while asleep? All of those things are steered by automatic control reactions, i.e. reflexes.

There are various kinds of reflexive reactions: from the automatic withdrawal of one's hand after touching hot surface to a more complex actions to keeping the body in an upright positions after losing one's balance. We are born with numerous primitive reflexes, which later give place to other, learned reactions.

Unconditioned reflex – an automatic, innate reaction, caused by the stimulation of afferent nerve receptors or the stimulation of various organs and, in particular, muscles by motor and efferent nerves.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

PRESSURE

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
3♦	pass	4♦	pass
4♥	pass	4♠	pass
4NT	pass	5♣	pass
5NT	pass	7NT	pass...

♠ Q J 4
 ♥ K 6
 ♦ A Q 10 9 8 2
 ♣ A 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 8
 ♥ A Q 7 5 3
 ♦ K J
 ♣ K 3 2

♣Q led.

2)

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
3♦	pass	4♦	pass
5♦	pass	6♦	pass...

♠ Q 9
 ♥ 9 5 4
 ♦ A K J 10 6 5
 ♣ A 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 5 2
 ♥ A J 10 3
 ♦ Q 2
 ♣ K Q 3

♣J led.

Practical Aspects of the Play

3)

W	N	E	S
			2♦*
2♥	pass	2♠	pass
3♦	pass	4♣	pass
5♦	pass	6♦	pass...

* – Multi

♠ —
♥ K J 9 8 7 5
♦ K Q J 10 9 8
♣ 10

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 7 5
♥ A 6
♦ A 4 3
♣ Q 6 4 3

♣5 led. South wins with the jack and continues with the ace, North following with the ♣9. Trumps split 2-2.

4)

W	N	E	S
	pass	1♣	pass
1♠	X	3♠	4♥
4♠	pass....		

♠ 8 7 6 5 2
♥ 4 3
♦ A 8 3 2
♣ Q 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K Q 4
♥ 9 5 2
♦ 9
♣ K 8 4 3 2

North leads three top hearts.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

5)

W	N	E	S
		2♦*	pass
2♥**	pass	2NT***	pass
3♦****	pass	3♥	pass
4♥	pass....		

* – Multi

** – waiting

*** – 22-23 HCP, balanced

**** – transfer to hearts

♠ 9 7
♥ K 10 8 3 2
♦ 8 6 4 2
♣ 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 4 3
♥ A Q J
♦ A 7 5 3
♣ A J

♥4 led.

6)

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	2NT*	pass
3♣	pass	4♣	pass
4♥	pass	6♣	pass...

♠ A 6
♥ K Q
♦ Q J 6
♣ K 10 9 7 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 3 2
♥ 9 7 4 3
♦ A 8
♣ A Q J

North leads the ♥J against our club slam. South wins the ace and returns the ♥6.

Practical Aspects of the Play

7)

W	N	E	S
2NT	pass	3NT	pass....

♠ K 5 2
 ♥ A K 9
 ♦ A K 9
 ♣ A 4 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 6 4
 ♥ Q 7 6 2
 ♦ 8 5 3
 ♣ K 8 7

♥J led. From AJ10 and KJ10 opponents lead the ten.

Why do I give this information? It will prove useful for the declarer in due course.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

Answers

1)

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
3♦	pass	4♦	pass
4♥	pass	4♠	pass
4NT	pass	5♣	pass
5NT	pass	7NT	pass...

♣Q led.

		♠ 9 6 3
		♥ 10 8 4 2
		♦ 7 4
		♣ Q J 9 7
♠ Q J 4		♠ A 10 8
♥ K 6		♥ A Q 7 5 3
♦ A Q 10 9 8 2		♦ K J
♣ A 6		♣ K 3 2
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	
		♠ K 7 5 2
		♥ J 9
		♦ 6 5 3
		♣ 10 8 5 4

We win the club lead in hand and test the hearts, discarding a spade from hand.

- a) South holds four hearts. We take the spade finesse (overtaking a diamond honor).
- b) North holds four hearts. We return to hand (overtaking a diamond honor) and lead the queen of spades. Holding the king, North faces a bit of a problem. From his point of view our play may be a desperate attempt to steal a trick, even without the jack.

It's easy to count declarer's tricks: six diamonds, two clubs and three hearts – two spades are needed. It should be obvious for the defender,

Practical Aspects of the Play

you would observe, that squeeze is a better chance than a non-existent finesse. True, but he needs at least some time to realize that. Even the shortest hesitation will disclose the location of the king.

If North follows with a small spade absolutely smoothly, we go up with the ace and reach the following ending:

	♠ —	
	♥ 10	
	♦ —	
	♣ J 9	
♠ J ♥ — ♦ Q ♣ 6	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	♠ — ♥ 7 ♦ — ♣ K 3
	♠ K	
	♥ —	
	♦ —	
	♣ 10 8	

The last diamonds triggers a double squeeze:

- in hearts and clubs against North;
- in spades and clubs against South.

It may turn out, obviously, that North has nerves of steel and we go down in a grand slam that our grandma would make with flying colors. Well, that can't be helped.

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
3♦	pass	4♦	pass
5♦	pass	6♦	pass...

♣ J led.

♠ Q 9	♠ K J 6 4	♠ A 10 5 2
♥ 9 5 4	♥ 8 7 6 2	♥ A J 10 3
♦ A K J 10 6 5	♦ 4 3	♦ Q 2
♣ A 8	♣ J 10 9	♣ K Q 3

N

W

E

S

♠ 8 7 3
♥ K Q
♦ 9 8 7
♣ 7 6 5 4 2

On this deal, you need less mathematics, more active presence at the table.

The author of the problem offers the following analysis. We play on hearts rather than spades. A double heart finesse = 75%. Another 8,5% is gained by cashing two club honors (after drawing trumps), hoping that South holds only two clubs. If that is the case, South, after getting in with the heart honor, will have to switch to spades. Obviously, we would still have to guess the position of spade honors. The 8,5% suggested by the author seems to be an incorrect figure, but I don't want to dispute percentages. Any experienced rubber player, who never bothers to count probabilities, would find a better play. She would begin by testing spades, using the fact that vast majority of players cannot avoid instinctively covering an honor with an honor.

So we win the ace of clubs and lead the spade queen. If North covers – that’s it. If he doesn’t, we go up with the ace, discard the nine of spades on

Practical Aspects of the Play

the third club and come back to the basic plan of a double finesse in hearts. There will be small additional chances available (e.g. South's ♠KJx).

3)

W	N	E	S
			2♦*
2♥	pass	2♠	pass
3♦	pass	4♣	pass
5♦	pass	6♦	pass...

♣5 led. South wins with the jack and continues with the ace, North following with the ♣9. Trumps split 2-2.

		♠ 9 3 2
		♥ Q 10 4 3
		♦ 7 5
		♣ K 9 8 5
♠ —		
♥ K J 9 8 7 5		
♦ K Q J 10 9 8		
♣ 10		
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> S </div> </div>	♠ A Q 7 5 ♥ A 6 ♦ A 4 3 ♣ Q 6 4 3
		♠ K J 10 8 6 4
		♥ 2
		♦ 6 2
		♣ A J 7 2

We draw trumps in two rounds and ruff another club. South follows with the seven and North with the eight.

The club layout is not completely clear. It is conceivable that North originally held ♣ K9852 and he is now concealing the two. Since trumps break 2-2, hearts must be either 3-2 or 4-1, with North holding the longer fragment.

It costs nothing to lead the heart jack from hand, on the first round of the suit. Action often precedes thinking, and bridge players are no exception.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

4)

North leads three top hearts.

♠ 8 7 6 5 2
♥ 4 3
♦ A 8 3 2
♣ Q 6

♠ A K Q 4
♥ 9 5 2
♦ 9
♣ K 8 4 3 2

The auction has been quite revealing as to the location of honors. South holds the ace of clubs, while North's shape is similar to 2-4-5-2. A routine play of crossing to dummy in trumps and leading a club to the queen leads nowhere. If we draw two rounds of trumps, we will find ourselves short of an entry to dummy to use the established club. If, on the other hand, we fail to play a second round of spades, North will overruff the third club. Playing

the queen of clubs from hand is no better – South will have no difficulties holding up.

We must put the defenders under pressure. After ruffing the third heart, let's try leading a small club to the king. Very few defenders would be aware enough to duck. If they win, they will probably play diamond (a heart would kill us).

We simply take the diamond switch, play off the club queen and two rounds of trumps. The rest is easy.

5)

W	N	E	S
		2♦*	pass
2♥**	pass	2NT***	pass
3♦****	pass	3♥	pass
4♥	pass....		

* – Multi

** – waiting

*** – 22-23 HCP, balanced

**** – transfer to hearts

♥4 led.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

	♠ J 10 6 5	
	♥ 7 6 4	
	♦ K 9	
	♣ Q 9 6 2	
♠ 9 7		♠ A Q 4 3
♥ K 10 8 3 2		♥ A Q J
♦ 8 6 4 2		♦ A 7 5 3
♣ 4 3		♣ A J
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	
	♠ K 8 2	
	♥ 9 5	
	♦ Q 10 4	
	♣ K 10 8 7 5	

Few players can see any sort of a problem here. Are hearts 4-1, they ask, or perhaps the diamonds don't behave?

In my opinion they lack certain card-playing shrewdness. I like the way one of Polish juniors played the hand. In Trick 2 he led a small spade from dummy. Caught unprepared, South winced and ducked. North won and continued trumps. Declarer cashed the ace of spades, ruffed a spade, drew the last trump and conceded a diamond. A nice, courageous, rare play.

If South ducks smoothly, it's still not too late to finesse in spades and get rid of the club loser.

The risk involved? Two down.

Practical Aspects of the Play

6)

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	2NT*	pass
3♣	pass	4♣	pass
4♥	pass	6♣	pass...

* – game forcing, may be even both majors

North leads the ♥J against our club slam. South wins the ace and returns the ♥6.

		♠ J 8 7
		♥ J 5
		♦ K 10 7 5 4
		♣ 8 6 2
♠ A 6		
♥ K Q		
♦ Q J 6		
♣ K 10 9 7 5 3		
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	
		♠ K Q 3 2
		♥ 9 7 4 3
		♦ A 8
		♣ A Q J
		♠ 10 9 5 4
		♥ A 10 8 6 2
		♦ 9 3 2
		♣ 4

The theoretically soundest solution is to cash the ace of diamonds, ruff a heart (just in case the ten drops tripleton) and play off all trumps. One of the following squeezes may occur:

- 1) in spades and hearts against North (if he holds 4-4 in majors);
- 2) in spades and diamonds against North (if he holds 4 spades and the ♦K);
- 3) in spades and diamonds against South (if he holds 4 spades and the ♦K).

It all looks fine, but again we've got to be slier than that. At Trick 3 we should play the queen of diamonds. If North ducks without a trace of

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

hesitation, we go up with the ace and only then try to execute one of the squeezes.

In the present case none of them would be effective. But North, caught unprepared, went into a huddle. To cover or not to cover? There is no good answer. Posing the question itself was of fatal consequences.

7)

W	N	E	S
2NT	pass	3NT	pass....

♥J led. From AJ10 and KJ10 opponents lead the ten.

Why do I give this information? It will prove useful for the declarer in due course.

	♠ A 10 8 3	
	♥ J 10 8 3	
	♦ Q 6 4	
	♣ 10 5	
♠ K 5 2	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WS </div>	♠ Q 6 4
♥ A K 9		♥ Q 7 6 2
♦ A K 9		♦ 8 5 3
♣ A 4 3 2		♣ K 8 7
	♠ J 9 7	
	♥ 5 4	
	♦ J 10 7 2	
	♣ Q J 9 6	

The tested players focused their attention on the black suits. A 3-3 club break, perhaps, or possibly endplaying the defender holding the spade ace with the fourth club and similar analyses. There were not too many ideas.

I recommend an apparently absurd play. Try winning with the ace and returning the ♥9. Nonsense, you say? North will always cover with the ten?

Practical Aspects of the Play

A good defender will play low, I believe. Why? He will visualize a totally different layout of the suit. Let's suppose the whole deal looks like this:

	♠ A 10 8 3	
	♥ J 10 8 3	
	♦ Q 6 4	
	♣ 10 5	
♠ K 5 2	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="text-align: center;">W</div> <div style="text-align: center;">E</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div></div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> <div></div> </div>	♠ Q 6 4
♥ A 9 5		♥ Q 7 6 2
♦ A K 9		♦ 8 5 3
♣ A Q 4 3		♣ K 8 7
	♠ J 9 7	
	♥ K 4	
	♦ J 10 7 2	
	♣ J 9 6 2	

Declarer wins the first trick with his ace and returns the ♥9. What would you do as North? Because you would lead the ten from KJ10 or AJ10, the layout of the suit is absolutely clear for the declarer. Would you cover with the ten? No, because declarer would duck and get three heart tricks. Now you know what I am getting at. Imagination constitutes an inexhaustible source of ideas for declarer.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

OPPONENT'S REACTION

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ 10 8 7 2
 ♥ A 6
 ♦ A J 7
 ♣ A K 10 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 9
 ♥ K 2
 ♦ 10 6 5 4 2
 ♣ Q J 4

♥J led.

2)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
3♣	pass	3♠	pass
3NT	pass	4♣	pass
4♦	pass	4♥	pass
4NT	pass	5♥	pass
6♠	pass...		

♠ A K Q 10 8
 ♥ 8 2
 ♦ A 6
 ♣ Q 6 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 9 3
 ♥ A Q J 4
 ♦ K 8 7
 ♣ A 5 3

♦J led.

Practical Aspects of the Play

3)

W	N	E	S
2♣	pass	2♦	pass
3♥	pass	4♣	pass
6♥	pass...		

♠ 5
♥ A K Q J 10 3
♦ A K J
♣ A Q 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 7 6
♥ 9
♦ 9 8 6 5
♣ K 10 8 2

♣6 led.

4)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
2♠	pass	3♦	pass
3♠	pass	4♠	pass...

♠ A Q J 8 7 4
♥ Q J 3
♦ Q 7
♣ 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 10
♥ 5
♦ K 8 4 2
♣ A K 8 6 5 2

♠6 led.

We finesse in hearts and cash the ace of clubs. Ruffing the third diamond, we reach the following end position:

♠ —
 ♥ K 10 7
 ♦ —
 ♣ K

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ —
 ♥ 9 6
 ♦ Q
 ♣ J

♠ —
 ♥ A Q 4
 ♦ —
 ♣ 5

♠ Q
 ♥ 8
 ♦ —
 ♣ Q 6

The last trump now squeezes North in hearts and clubs. The same squeeze would operate against South if he held the king of clubs and four hearts. An extra chance is king of clubs doubleton with either defender.

There is an alternative line of play: small club towards the queen. It wins whenever South holds the king or if either defender hold four clubs and four hearts (he can be squeezed).

The exclusive holdings (that are not covered by both alternative lines) are:

- a) South's $\clubsuit Kxx$ without four hearts – 9%;
b) North's $\clubsuit K$ or $\clubsuit Kx$ – around 9%.

Why do I suggest we should cater for b) rather than a)? Because with king third in clubs South may nervously put it up or at least betray its possession by a moment of hesitation.

W	N	E	S
2♣	pass	2♦	pass
3♥	pass	4♣	pass
6♥	pass...		

♠ A 9 8 4 3
♥ 7 4 2
♦ Q 4 2
♣ 6 4

♠ 5
♥ A K Q J 10 3
♦ A K J
♣ A Q 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 7 6
♥ 9
♦ 9 8 6 5
♣ K 10 8 2

♠ K 10 2
♥ 8 6 5
♦ 10 7 3
♣ J 7 5 2

Both defenders follow three times. Then North discards three spades and South two diamonds and a spade. We dispose of three diamonds and two spades from dummy. The important question is whether the defenders need to share information about their length in spades and diamonds. In my view, the defense cannot be effective without it. Even if they fail to pass explicit count signals, we should be able to make inferences based on the opponents' discards.

South's hand: $3\spadesuit - 3\heartsuit - 3\diamond - 4\clubsuit$.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

What matters is also the location of the spade honors.

- a) If it seems from the defenders' signals that the top spade honors are divided, we should, after cashing the hearts:

	♠ A 9	
	♥ —	
	♦ Q 4 2	
	♣ 4	
♠ 5		♠ Q J
♥ —		♥ —
♦ A K J		♦ 9
♣ A Q		♣ K 8 2
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ K 10	
	♥ —	
	♦ 10	
	♣ J 7 5	

cash two club honors. North can do nothing about it – he must part with a spade. We conclude by playing off the ace of diamonds and exiting with a spade.

Practical Aspects of the Play

- b) South desperately signaled spade values. The conclusion is clear: he holds both missing top honors.

	♠ 10 8	
	♥ —	
	♦ Q 4 2	
	♣ 4	
♠ 5		♠ Q J
♥ —		♥ —
♦ A K J		♦ 9
♣ A Q		♣ K 8 2
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A K	
	♥ —	
	♦ 10	
	♣ J 7 5	

This time we have to cash the ace and king of diamonds first (discarding a spade from dummy). South is squeezed – he is forced to part with one of the spade honors. To finish with, we cash two clubs and throw South in with a spade.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
2♠	pass	3♦	pass
3♠	pass	4♠	pass...

♠ 6 5 3
 ♥ K 10 6 4
 ♦ J 5 3
 ♣ Q 10 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 2
 ♥ A 9 8 7 2
 ♦ A 10 9 6
 ♣ J 9

♠ K 10
 ♥ 5
 ♦ K 8 4 2
 ♣ A K 8 6 5 2

The simplest concept is to draw trumps, establish the clubs with a ruff and lead a diamond towards the king. But let's try some more sophisticated tactics.

- a) North ducks. Desperate for two overtricks, we overtake with the king. If, however, we are not sure about our impressions (about

Practical Aspects of the Play

North holding the ace), we duck. North wins the next diamond and he must return one of the red suits.

- b) South, watching his partner's count signals closely, ducks with some hesitation. We cash all the remaining trump tricks, reaching the following end position:

♠ J	♠ —
♥ Q 3	♥ —
♦ 7	♦ K 8
♣ —	♣ 8 6

♠ —	♠ —
♥ A 9	♥ —
♦ A 10	♦ K 8
♣ —	♣ 8 6

The last spade now squeezes South (he will later be endplayed). Will we know which ace South has bared? Yes, provided we watched North's count signal in diamonds as carefully as South did.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

KNOWING OPPONENTS' HABITS

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ A 2
 ♥ K Q 3
 ♦ A J 2
 ♣ Q 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 3
 ♥ A J 10 4
 ♦ 7 6 4
 ♣ A J 10

♦K led.

2)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♥	pass
2♠	pass	3NT	pass
4♠	pass...		

♠ K 5 2
 ♥ J 10 8 5
 ♦ A K
 ♣ A 6 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 9 8 4
 ♥ 9 3 2
 ♦ Q J 10
 ♣ K 10

♣Q led.

A shrug of the shoulders was most players' reaction to this apparently banal problem. The king of trumps and a small trump to the jack is the best chance. What else can be done about it?

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

b) Opponents use count signals.

We should appreciate the value of the diamond two. Perhaps we had an opportunity to watch the opponents' signaling habits in previous boards. If they always signal with the highest card from three small, it's no use playing the jack. Any intelligent North will count up to 13 and expose the ruse easily. We have no choice but to win the ace and try the club finesse. Many defenders, however, tend to signal with the middle of the three cards. In this case South's ♦5 may show either ♦952 or ♦95. Playing the jack will be effective again.

2)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♥	pass
2♠	pass	3NT	pass
4♠	pass...		

♣Q led.

A shrug of the shoulders was most players' reaction to this apparently banal problem. The king of trumps and a small trump to the jack is the best chance. What else can be done about it?

Practical Aspects of the Play

The whole deal may be:

	♠ 10 7 2	
	♥ K 7 4	
	♦ 9 7 4 2	
	♣ Q J 9	
♠ K 5 2		♠ A J 9 8 4
♥ J 10 8 5		♥ 9 3 2
♦ A K		♦ Q J 10
♣ A 6 4 3		♣ K 10
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q 6	
	♥ A Q 6	
	♦ 8 6 5 3	
	♣ 8 7 5 2	

More ambitious correspondents tried to cash the top diamonds and clubs, ruff two clubs and wait for the defenders to open the key trump suit.

This idea is worth considering provided South signaled even number of clubs on the first trick. It will nevertheless be difficult to implement due to communication problems.

So we ruff a club, cash two top diamonds, ruff the last club and discard a heart on the queen of diamonds. We finally exit with a heart. For this to work, we must find North with four or five diamonds together with three clubs. We will then be able to finesse in spades twice. North will be the first to lead this suit.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

<p>♠ K 5 2</p> <p>♥ J 10 8 5</p> <p>♦ A K</p> <p>♣ A 6 4 3</p>	<p>♠ 10 7 2</p> <p>♥ K 7 4</p> <p>♦ 9 7 2</p> <p>♣ Q J 9 8</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 10px auto; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; top: 5px; left: 45px;">N</div> <div style="position: absolute; top: 50px; left: 10px;">W</div> <div style="position: absolute; top: 50px; right: 10px;">E</div> <div style="position: absolute; bottom: 5px; left: 45px;">S</div> </div> <p>♠ Q 6</p> <p>♥ A Q 6</p> <p>♦ 8 6 5 4 3</p> <p>♣ 7 5 2</p>	<p>♠ A J 9 8 4</p> <p>♥ 9 3 2</p> <p>♦ Q J 10</p> <p>♣ K 10</p>
--	--	---

If, however, South indicates an odd number of clubs, the dangerous line of play presented above makes no sense whatsoever. We must start trumps on our own. The theory is clear about it: the king and a small spade to the jack.

Can we possibly squeeze anything more out of this hand?

When we played the king, North followed with the ♠2 and South with the ♠6. On the second trump trick North plays the ♠10. Where is the queen? Who is this question addressed to? A clairvoyant or a card-peeper? Surprisingly, this is a question for a scrupulous analyst.

As I observed on previous deals, the opponents signal suit preference through trumps: high-low shows values in the higher of the two side suits taken into account. This is a very useful convention. Signaling count in trumps would help declarer rather than defenders, save for those exceptional situations where a ruff is possible. Knowledge of the location of side suits honors, on the contrary, will assist defenders in preparing an efficient defense.

Back to the deal in question. The queen and the seven of spades are missing. It follows evidently from the opening lead that South holds at least one heart honor. He should be interested in telling his partner about it. With ♠76, he would thus play the seven in the first round. Conclusion: North holds the seven and South holds queen doubleton.

Where is the seven of spades, turned out to be the real question.

GIVE CREDIT TO THE MASTER

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
2♣*	pass	2♦	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass
4NT	pass...		

* – game forcing

This aggressive, risky invitation will test your ability at declarer play.

♠ A K 5
♥ A K 3 2
♦ A K 9
♣ K Q 10

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 3 2
♥ Q 7
♦ 8 6 4 3
♣ J 6 3 2

We take North's ♥J lead with the ace and lead the king of clubs, followed by the queen. As North discards a spade, his partner – a distinguished expert – wins with the ace and devotes the next five minutes to analysis. Finally he switches to a heart, won with the queen. Our next move is a small diamond from dummy, with the intention of playing the nine from hand, but unfortunately the jack appears from South. What now?

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

2)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	pass....		

♠ Q 9 7 5 3 2

♥ A K

♦ Q 10

♣ A Q 10

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K 6

♥ 7 5 3

♦ 9 4 2

♣ 6 4 3 2

North leads the ♦A and South follows with the ♦3, indicating an even number of cards. After long meditation, North switches to spades.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

What was the purpose of inserting the diamond jack? Should South follow low and we ducked, the trick would be won by North. No matter what he returns, we will cash the ace and king of diamonds, disclosing North's shape: 4-4-4-1.

In the five-card ending:

	♠ J 10 7										
	♥ 8										
	♦ 10										
	♣ —										
♠ A K 5 ♥ 3 ♦ — ♣ 10	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 8 3 ♥ — ♦ 8 ♣ J 6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ Q 9 6										
	♥ —										
	♦ —										
	♣ 8 7										

North will find himself in the triple squeeze as we play the ♣10; he will be forced to part with a spade. Next we cash two top spades and throw South in with the third round of the suit. The last trick will belong to dummy's jack of clubs.

A difficult hand, though it gets easier as the layout unravels. Untypical squeezes tend to operate automatically, without declarer being aware of them at all. Our duty is to notice that something has happened. The master must have seen it before. The opening leader's hand should cease to be a mystery to us at Trick 3. Why? On the first trick South signaled an odd number of hearts. If hearts split 4-3, then North's hand is, in all probability, 4-4-4-1. We must counter the master's brilliant play and execute the triple squeeze anyway. Obviously we cannot afford to duck the jack of diamonds, since South would break the squeeze by switching to clubs.

Practical Aspects of the Play

This is the position, let me remind you:

	♠ J 10 7										
	♥ 10 9										
	♦ Q 10 8										
	♣ —										
♠ A K 5 ♥ A 3 ♦ A 9 ♣ 10	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 8 3 2 ♥ — ♦ 8 6 4 ♣ J 6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ Q 9 6										
	♥ 5										
	♦ 2										
	♣ 8 7 5										

We must now exit with the ♦9. We can reasonably hope that North will win the trick; remember that inserting the jack was the effect of a long analysis. Accordingly, North wins and switches to hearts. The ending is now identical to the previous, hypothetical one. We force North to discard a spade and later endplay South with spade to get the last trick with dummy's club jack.

“Hold on,” you might disagree, “what if South held queen or ten of diamonds together with the jack? Then we go down in a cold contract”. True, but I believe we should give full credit to masters: if they spend a few minutes thinking, the situation just cannot be trivial.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

2)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	pass....		

North leads the ♦A and South follows with the ♦3, indicating even number of cards. After long meditation, North switches to spades.

	♠ 10 8	
	♥ J 10 6 2	
	♦ A K J 5	
	♣ K J 8	
♠ Q 9 7 5 3 2	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 20px;"> WS </div>	♠ A K 6
♥ A K		♥ 7 5 3
♦ Q 10		♦ 9 4 2
♣ A Q 10		♣ 6 4 3 2
	♠ J 4	
	♥ Q 9 8 4	
	♦ 8 7 6 3	
	♣ 9 7 5	

We must take note when anybody devotes a few minutes to analyzing the hand.

Partner's signal in diamonds should encourage him to continue the suit: either South ruffs the third round or he holds four diamonds. So what stopped North from following up with another diamond honor? It may seem that the contract depends on either of the missing club honors being onside. What was North afraid of? It looks as if by switching to a spade he attempted to destroy communication between our hand and dummy. He didn't want to assist us in eliminating the red suits. He is saving himself from an endplay in clubs.

This thoughtful defense suggests that both club honors will be with North. We take in hand, cash the ace and king of hearts and enter dummy with a spade.

Practical Aspects of the Play

- a) Trumps break 3-1. In this case we should probably finesse in clubs twice, anyway.
- b) Trumps break 2-2. We ruff a heart and exit with the queen of diamonds. North must return another diamond. We ruff and put the queen of clubs on the table. Bingo! This is a double dummy play, you would protest. Nonsense! We still have the same 75% chance, losing only when South holds the king and North the jack of clubs. Let me ask you a question: what would make North go into such a long huddle if his club holding was headed merely by the jack?

ASSESSING THE OPPONENT

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
3♠	pass	4♠	pass....

♠ K 10 9 8 6 5 4
 ♥ K 8 2
 ♦ 10 9 4
 ♣ —

N	
W	E
	S

♠ A Q 2
 ♥ 10 4 3
 ♦ A K J 3
 ♣ K 6 5

♠J led.

2)

W	N	E	S
4♥	pass....		

♠ A J
 ♥ K Q J 10 9 6 3
 ♦ Q 5 3 2
 ♣ —

N	
W	E
	S

♠ 7 5 3 2
 ♥ 4
 ♦ K 8 6 4
 ♣ K Q 7 2

♣J led.

Practical Aspects of the Play

3)

W	N	E	S
			1♠
2♣	pass	2♠	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ K 8 7

♥ J 6

♦ 9 2

♣ A K 10 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 2

♥ A Q 7 2

♦ A K 8 6 5 4

♣ —

♠6 led. South covers our ♠10 with the queen and we win the king.

Practical Aspects of the Play

2)

W	N	E	S
4♥	pass....		

♣J led.

		♠ K 10 4
		♥ A 8 2
		♦ J 10 7
		♣ J 10 9 4
♠ A J		
♥ K Q J 10 9 6 3		
♦ Q 5 3 2		
♣ —		
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	
		♠ 7 5 3 2
		♥ 4
		♦ K 8 6 4
		♣ K Q 7 2
		♠ Q 9 8 6
		♥ 7 5
		♦ A 9
		♣ A 8 6 5 3

We contribute the honor from dummy, South covers with the ace and we ruff. The author of the problem came up with the following solution. To make the contract it is necessary to find North with the ace of diamonds. Therefore, we may as well start playing trumps. The defenders win and switch to spades. We shall win with the ace, draw the outstanding trumps and play a diamond. North will either go up and cash the spade trick, but the rest will belong to us, or hold up to get his two diamond tricks, but allowing us to discard the losing spade on good club.

Let me suggest a daring alternative. At Trick 2 we lead the queen of diamonds. This play undoubtedly increases our chances. With ♦Ax South will be helpless. If, upon consideration, he ducks, we will switch to trumps. With ♦Axx he may go wrong and take the trick. As for North, with ♦Ax he will no doubt jump up. If, however, he ducks with ♦Axx, we play a heart.

W	N	E	S
			1 ♠
2♣	pass	2 ♠	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

North, holding any two of the three remaining honors (Q, J, 10), should insert it on the first round of diamonds. Let's consider all the possible three-card holdings in the North hand:

- 1) Q J 10
- 2) Q J 5
- 3) Q J 3
- 4) Q 10 5
- 5) Q 10 3
- 6) Q 5 3
- 7) J 10 5
- 8) J 10 3
- 9) J 5 3
- 10) 10 5 3

In three cases North cannot stop us from playing dummy's eight on the first or second round (i.e., conceding the trick to South). The probability is 10.2%.

In one case (Q J 10) we are helpless.

In the other six cases (20.4%) North may beat the contract by inserting one of his honors.

The conclusion: against an expert, skilled North we should play from the top, hoping to find South with three diamonds, as a precaution against North's king. If, on the other hand, North is a weaker or less concentrated opponent, we may consider playing the eight.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

HONOR ON HONOR

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2NT*	pass
4♠	pass...		

* – invitational with spade support

♠ A Q J 5 2
♥ Q 7 3
♦ A 10
♣ K 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 8 7 6 4
♥ A K 2
♦ J 3
♣ 10 8 4

♥J led.

2)

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	1♦*	pass
1NT**	pass	2NT	pass
3NT	pass...		

* – 0-6 HCP, any shape, or 7-11 HCP without four-card majors

** – 18-21 HCP, balanced

♠ K Q 5
♥ J 10
♦ A Q 4
♣ A K 10 8 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 7 3
♥ Q 7 4
♦ K J 2
♣ J 6 5 3

♠4 led, South contributes the jack.

Practical Aspects of the Play

Obviously analysts will not be entirely happy with this line of play. It loses to 4-0 club break with South holding four clubs. But this shortcoming is more than compensated by potential profits.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

THE ANALYSIS OF DEFENDERS' ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2NT*	pass
4♠	pass...		

* – invitational with spade support

♠ K Q 7 6 3

♥ K 5

♦ 6

♣ A 7 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 7

♥ Q 10 8 7

♦ K 4

♣ K Q 9 3

♣J led. We win in dummy and lead a trump to the king. It wins, but how to get back to dummy to play another spade?

Let's try a heart to the queen. No way – South produces the ace and without much thought returns a club. North... follows with the ten. With a sigh of relief (no ruff this time!) we win in dummy and play another trump. South follows with the nine. What should we do and why?

OPPONENTS DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT OUR HAND

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	4♥	pass..

♠ K 5 2
 ♥ A J 10 6 2
 ♦ Q 4 2
 ♣ A J

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10
 ♥ Q 9 8 3
 ♦ A 10 8 6 5
 ♣ Q 3 2

♠6 led. South takes his ace and switches to the ♣10.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

THE ANALYSIS OF DEFENDERS' ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2NT*	pass
4♠	pass...		

* – invitational with spade support

♠ K Q 7 6 3
♥ K 5
♦ 6
♣ A 7 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 7
♥ Q 10 8 7
♦ K 4
♣ K Q 9 3

♣J led. We win in dummy and lead a trump to the king. It wins, but how to get back to dummy to play another spade?

Let's try a heart to the queen. No way – South produces the ace and without much thought returns a club. North... follows with the ten. With a sigh of relief (no ruff this time!) we win in dummy and play another trump. South follows with the nine. What should we do and why?

♠ K Q 7 6 3
♥ K 5
♦ 6
♣ A 7 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 7
♥ Q 10 8 7
♦ K 4
♣ K Q 9 3

♠ J 9 4
♥ A J 4
♦ A J 9 8 3
♣ 8 4

This time the principle of camouflage was adopted in the bidding. Our long clubs were never mentioned and South returned the suit hoping for a third-round ruff.

Let's imagine South's hand:

♠ A 9 4
♥ A J 4
♦ J 9 8 3 2
♣ 8 4

A rational play with these cards would be to go up with the ace of trumps and try to reach partner with the diamond ace to get the club ruff. With a different hand:

♠ A 9 4
♥ A 6 4
♦ A 9 8 3 2
♣ 8 4

after getting in with the heart ace South would probably conduct a more thorough analysis. An automatic club return does not make much sense, since there may not be an entry to partner's hand. Anyway, it is far from clear how the defense should proceed.

This hand came up in a final of Transnational Teams World Championships in 1997. Based on the above analysis, I ducked the ♠9. It proved to be the winning play.

OPPONENTS DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT OUR HAND

♠6 led. South takes his ace and switches to the ♣10.

Very rarely do declarers use the fact that their hand is hidden and opponents are to some degree ignorant as to its content.

We have five hearts, but we revealed only four in the bidding. One possible way of playing the following suit:

is to take two consecutive fineses. We start with dummy's queen and, when it gets covered by the king and ace, we return to dummy and finesse against the ten.

It is therefore only natural for South to cover the queen with king second and even third. What am I getting at? At the winning solution.

We go up with the ace of clubs (it's unimaginable for South to underlead the king) and concede a club trick. North will probably continue clubs for lack of a better switch and we discard a diamond. Why manipulate in clubs this way rather than simply duck the ten? Let's see what would happen then.

North wins the king and continues clubs. We win, cash the ace of spades, ruff a spade and cash the queen of clubs, discarding a diamond. Experienced South will correctly interpret all this as the elimination of black suits and he may not cover the queen of hearts if he holds the king. The camouflage is about masking our true intentions.

Back to our plan. The queen of clubs won the trick and it's time for trumps.

Note that spades are not eliminated yet. We call for the trump queen. If South does not cover, he probably hasn't got the king. Even if he has, he will most often betray himself by a short hesitation. If none of these happens, we overtake with the ace and only now do we cash the spade king and ruff a spade. Finally, we concede the trump trick.

This risky line will be successful whenever North holds a singleton king of trumps or a doubleton king of trumps and the king of diamonds. Importantly, we have, as a matter of practice, excluded the possibility of South's holding the king of trumps.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

TESTING OPPONENTS' REFLEXES

W	N	E	S
2NT	pass	6NT	pass...

♠ A 10 9 8
 ♥ K J 3
 ♦ Q J 10
 ♣ A K J

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 4 3 2
 ♥ A Q 10
 ♦ A K 3
 ♣ J 10 8

♥7 led.

DEFENDER'S BEHAVIOR

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	2♣	pass
2♠	pass	6♠	pass...

♠ A 8 7 5
 ♥ 5 2
 ♦ A Q J 10 9 4
 ♣ 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 6 4 2
 ♥ Q J 10
 ♦ —
 ♣ A K 8 6 5 2

♠J led.

TESTING OPPONENTS' REFLEXES

W	N	E	S
2NT	pass	6NT	pass...

♥7 led.

	♠ K 7	
	♥ 8 7 5 2	
	♦ 8 7	
	♣ 9 6 4 3 2	
♠ A 10 9 8	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> N E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> W S </div>	♠ Q 4 3 2
♥ K J 3		♥ A Q 10
♦ Q J 10		♦ A K 3
♣ A K Q		♣ J 10 8
	♠ J 6 5	
	♥ 9 6 5	
	♦ 9 6 5 4 2	
	♣ 7 5	

We win in hand and play the diamond jack. This is the way to find out how North behaves when not possessing the honor. We win the ace, return to hand in clubs and exit with the eight (!) of spades.

We must now focus our attention on North's reaction. Even the slightest hesitation may be of use.

- a) North behaves in exactly the same way as in the diamond trick; we infer he does not hold the spade king. Therefore, we duck the eight and, if need be, finesse against South's king later. In theory, this line loses when North holds the king and South the jack of spades (25%), but in practice opponents would need to have nerves of steel to avoid making a mistake or betraying the location of the missing honors by their reactions.
- b) North behaves in a different way – i.e. he holds the king. We put up the queen.

Are there any possible objections to the line?

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

Of course there are.

- 1) North would hesitate also holding ♠KJ65; we go up with the queen and... lose.
- 2) North actually puts up the king. Even though we should be able to feel if the king was singleton or from KJxx, before continuing spades it cannot hurt to do some discovery play: cashing all the winners in the other suits.

I especially recommend this line of play against weak opposition.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

You should. North held king doubleton. This is the only reason why he, quite correctly, covered with the king.

Where are the three spades? How to combine the chance for a doubleton spade in the North hand (accompanying doubleton king of diamonds) with the chance of a 3-3 club break?

This may be the whole deal:

	♠ J 10										
	♥ K 7 6 4 3										
	♦ K 5										
	♣ Q 10 9 3										
♠ A 8 7 5 ♥ 5 2 ♦ A Q J 10 9 4 ♣ 4	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 6 4 2 ♥ Q J 10 ♦ — ♣ A K 8 6 5 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ Q 9 3										
	♥ A 9 8										
	♦ 8 7 6 3 2										
	♣ J 7										

After ruffing the king of diamonds, we cash the ace and king of clubs (discarding a heart) and continue with a small club.

- a) Suppose South discards a diamond in the third round of clubs (see diagram above). We ruff, reach dummy with the trump king and lead another club. South cannot ruff, so he discards another diamond. We conclude by cashing good diamonds, getting rid of all three hearts from dummy (South will follow twice).

Another possibility is:

♠ A 8 7 5	♠ J 10 9	♠ K 6 4 2
♥ 5 2	♥ K 7 6 4 3	♥ Q J 10
♦ A Q J 10 9 4	♦ K 5	♦ —
♣ 4	♣ Q 10 9	♣ A K 8 6 5 2

♠ Q 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">E</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">W</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">S</td> </tr> </table>	N		E	W		S	♠ K 6 4 2
N		E						
W		S						
♥ A 9 8		♥ Q J 10						
♦ 8 7 6 3 2		♦ —						
♣ J 7 3		♣ A K 8 6 5 2						

- b) Clubs break 3-3. We ruff the third club and discard a heart on the diamond ace. This is very important. Why? Because otherwise North (this time holding three spades) would discard a diamond on the fourth club. Later he would ruff the first diamond honor played from hand and cash the setting heart trick. Check it yourselves.

So, after cashing the diamond ace, we lead a spade to dummy's king and cash all the club winners. Finally, we ruff a heart and dispose of the last losing heart on good diamond.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

HUDDLE IN THE BIDDING

W	N	E	S
1♠	X*	4♠	1♣ pass...

* — after consideration

♠ A K 8 5
♥ 3
♦ K 7 4
♣ Q 10 9 8 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 10 4 3 2
♥ K 10 9 5 4
♦ 8 6 3
♣ —

♦Q led. South wins and returns suit. We win with the king and lead a heart. North smoothly follows with the ♥2 (reverse count). We decide to play the nine and South wins the trick with the jack. He then switches to a diamond to his partner's nine and North exits with a trump. Plan the play.

A NERVOUS DEFENDER

W	N	E	S
X 3♥	2♠ pass	1♦ pass 4♥	1♠ pass pass...

♠ 5
♥ 9 8 7 5 4 3
♦ K 9 3
♣ K Q 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 8 3 2
♥ A J
♦ A J 8 6 4
♣ J 6

♠J led.

HUDDLE IN THE BIDDING

W	N	E	S
1♠	X*	4♠	1♣ pass...

* — after consideration

♦Q led. South wins and returns suit. We win with the king and lead a heart. North smoothly follows with the ♥2 (reversed count). We decide to play the nine and South wins the trick with the jack. He then switches to a diamond to his partner's nine and North exits with a trump.

		♠ 9 7
		♥ Q 8 2
		♦ Q J 9 2
		♣ A 6 4 2
♠ A K 8 5		♠ Q 10 4 3 2
♥ 3		♥ K 10 9 5 4
♦ K 7 4		♦ 8 6 3
♣ Q 10 9 8 3		♣ —
		♠ J 6
		♥ A J 7 6
		♦ A 10 5
		♣ K J 7 5

Our attempt to stay in dummy failed as South covered the ten with his jack. We must now guess the position of the hearts.

We detected two mutually exclusive pieces of information. North's hesitation in the bidding suggests problems with finding the optimal call. With four hearts a double would be routine. This indicates a 4-3 heart split, South holding the longer fragment of the suit (contrary to the standard meaning of the auction). By contrast, North's ♥2 shows even number of cards. Which of these traces is reliable?

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

In my opinion we should draw conclusions from the bidding. North's signal is aimed at leading us astray. Therefore, we ruff a club in dummy and lead the king of hearts.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

In cases (a) and (b) all the North players we consulted said they would put up the honor. In (c) it doesn't matter what we do, while in (d) and (e) the winning play is to go up with the ace.

At the table North reacted nervously to a heart led from hand, but he finally followed low and dummy's jack held the trick. I proceeded to ruff a spade and play a club to the jack. South forced me with another spade. I ruffed and cashed the queen of clubs (importantly, discarding a spade from dummy!). This led to:

♠ —	♠ —	♠ 8
♥ 9 8 7	♥ K Q 6	♥ A
♦ K 9 3	♦ ? 7 2	♦ A J 8 6
♣ —	♣ ?	♣ —

♠ —	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS </div> </div>	♠ 8
♥ 9 8 7	♥ K Q 6	♥ A
♦ K 9 3	♦ ? 7 2	♦ A J 8 6
♣ —	♣ ?	♣ —

♠ —	♠ K 9	♠ 8
♥ 9 8 7	♥ —	♥ A
♦ K 9 3	♦ ? 10 5	♦ A J 8 6
♣ —	♣ ?	♣ —

The diamond position is still unclear. South might originally hold one of the following hands:

A	B
♠ K Q 9 6 4	♠ K Q 9 6 4
♥ 10	♥ 10
♦ Q 7 5	♦ 7 5
♣ A 8 7 5	♣ A 10 8 7 5

The bidding suggests hand A. With the other one South might have bid 3♣ over his partner's 2♠ to prepare a potential sacrifice. On the first club trick North played the ♣2, implying even number of cards. This is another argument in support of the A hypothesis.

Practical Aspects of the Play

Consequently, we cash the ace and king of diamonds and concede a diamond trick to South.

♠ —	♠ —
♥ K Q 6	♥ A
♦ —	♦ J 8
♣ —	♣ —
♠ —	
♥ 9 8 7	
♦ —	
♣ —	
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>
	♠ K 9
	♥ —
	♦ —
	♣ 8

Whatever he returns, his partner will find himself in a sorry situation. Playing this way we will lose only one trump trick.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

A SIGNAL IN HEARTS

W	N	E	S
		1♦	pass
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
4NT	pass	5♦	pass
6♠	pass...		

After some primitive bidding we reach a small slam in spades.

♠ A K 6 5
 ♥ K 7 2
 ♦ A Q 5
 ♣ A 10 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 10 9 3
 ♥ A 8
 ♦ K J 10 7 3
 ♣ Q 5

We take North's ♥Q in dummy and play a spade to the ace. South shows out, discarding ♥3. According to the opponents' signaling methods, this promises a club value.

DEFENDER'S EMOTIONS

W	N	E	S
INT	pass	2♣	pass
2♦	pass	3♣	pass
3♠	pass	6♦	pass...

The opener showed 3-2-4-4 distribution.

♠ K 10 2
 ♥ Q J
 ♦ Q J 7 2
 ♣ K Q J 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J
 ♥ 10 7 2
 ♦ A K 10 6 4
 ♣ A 6 5

♦8 led. We draw two rounds of trumps (they are 2-2) and, taking the bull by the horns, we lead a spade from hand. After some thought we go up with the ace. North sighs with relief.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

A SIGNAL IN HEARTS

W	N	E	S
		1♦	pass
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
4NT	pass	5♦	pass
6♠	pass...		

After some primitive bidding we reach a small slam in spades.

We take North's ♥Q in dummy and play a spade to the ace. South shows out, discarding ♥3. According to the opponents' signaling methods, this promises a club value.

	♠ J 8 7 4 2	
	♥ Q J 9	
	♦ 9 2	
	♣ K 9 4	
♠ A K 6 5		♠ Q 10 9 3
♥ K 7 2		♥ A 8
♦ A Q 5		♦ K J 10 7 3
♣ A 10 2		♣ Q 5
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	
	♠ —	
	♥ 10 6 5 4 3	
	♦ 8 6 4	
	♣ J 8 7 6 3	

Since losing a trump trick is inevitable, we need a heart ruff in dummy. So we finesse in trumps through North and ruff a heart. Our next steps are cashing the trump queen, returning to hand with the diamond ace and discarding a diamond on the king of spades. Why? Only a throw-in can save us.

Here is the end position:

	♠ J	
	♥ —	
	♦ —	
	♣ ? 9 4	
♠ —		♠ —
♥ —		♥ —
♦ 5		♦ K J
♣ A 10 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	♣ Q 5
	♠ —	
	♥ —	
	♦ 8	
	♣ ? 8 7	

As we lead the diamond, North discards a club. We continue with the diamond jack, throwing the ♣2 from hand. North ruffs and, in a two-card ending, exits with the ♣9. We remember South's second trick signal, indicating club value. But something strange is going on here. Why didn't North ruff the third diamond?

The only answer is that if he did, declarer's sole chance for making the contract would be to put up dummy's club queen. The opponents worked hard to create a situation where we may easily misjudge the position of the club honors. One should particularly appreciate efforts of South, who began the deception as early as Trick 2.

4. Studying the Opponents' Reaction

DEFENDER'S EMOTIONS

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♣	pass
2♦	pass	3♣	pass
3♠	pass	6♦	pass...

The opener showed 3-2-4-4 distribution.

♦8 led. We draw trumps twice (they are 2-2) and, taking the bull by the horns, we lead a spade from hand. After some thought we go up with the ace. North sighs with relief.

	♠ Q 9 8 7 3	
	♥ A 8 6 4	
	♦ 8 3	
	♣ 9 7	
♠ K 10 2		♠ A J
♥ Q J		♥ 10 7 2
♦ Q J 7 2		♦ A K 10 6 4
♣ K Q J 2		♣ A 6 5
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> W E </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ 6 5 4	
	♥ K 9 5 3	
	♦ 9 5	
	♣ 10 8 4 3	

So we know we missed. But let's not give up. A slight mistake by South will allow us to make the contract.

We cash all the outstanding diamonds. In the last round South releases a spade. Time for four club tricks.

This is the ending:

	♠ Q 9	
	♥ A 8	
	♦ —	
	♣ —	
♠ K 10	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WS </div>	♠ J
♥ Q		♥ 10 7 2
♦ —		♦ —
♣ J		♣ —
	♠ 6	
	♥ K 9	
	♦ —	
	♣ 10	

We play the jack of clubs, throwing the spade from dummy.

- a) North discards the ♥A. We cash the king of spades and concede a heart. Note that if South keeps one more spade instead of club in the ending, declarer's brilliant technique will not help.
- b) North discards the ♥8. We endplay him with the heart.

Chapter 5

COUNT SIGNALS

There is an ongoing debate among bridge theoreticians as to the proper use of defensive signaling. Many believe that the defenders' primary responsibility is to avoid simple errors and to help each other in this respect. This, however, requires passing precise information concerning the number of cards in each suit, also the location of honors. The proponents of detailed signaling think it safe to give such information, since declarers rarely pay attention. Even if they do, they don't tend to believe the defenders anyway.

Professional partnerships choose the middle way. They signal only when they deem it necessary, which may of course lead to misinterpretation. Top American partnerships use different signals depending on the position. They obviously explain it to declarer when requested, but hardly anybody bothers to ask. Others swear they never use any count signals, but, as I often observe on vugraph, the cards they play possess the miraculous characteristic of showing a number of cards in the suit just when it seems necessary. Playing in a match, you should, in the course of first few deals, watch the opponents' habits very closely. Each responsible captain should keep a database on the opponents' style, with special attention to their defensive signaling.

COUNT IN CLUBS

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
	1♦	X	pass
1♠	pass	2♥	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ J 7 5 2
♥ A 8
♦ Q 4 3 2
♣ 9 7 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 6
♥ K Q J 7 4
♦ J 8
♣ K Q 2

♦7 led.

We call for dummy's jack. That holds and South follows, a little hesitantly, with the ten.

2)

W	N	E	S
	1♦	1♠	2♦
3♥	pass	4♥	pass...

♠ 10 7 4
♥ A K J 9 5 3 2
♦ K 5
♣ J

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 8 6 5 2
♥ Q 10 6
♦ 8 6
♣ A 9 2

♣K led.

5. Count Signals

3)

W	N	E	S
	1♦	pass	pass
1♠	pass	2♦	pass
3♠	pass	4♠	pass...

♠ A Q J 10 7 6
♥ 7 5
♦ J 7 5
♣ K 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9 8 2
♥ 10 8
♦ A Q 4 2
♣ Q 7 4

♥K led, followed by ♥Q and ♠3.

4)

W	N	E	S
	pass	1♣	pass
1♠	pass	1NT	pass
3♦	pass	3♥	pass
3♠	pass	4♦	pass
4♠	pass....		

♠ K Q J 9 3
♥ A 9 2
♦ K 7 5 4
♣ 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 6
♥ K Q J
♦ A Q 8
♣ 6 5 4 3 2

North leads the ace and king of clubs.

- South follows with the eight and seven, the high-low showing an odd number of cards.
- South follows in the opposite order: low-high, indicating an even number.

- 2)

♠ J 9
♥ 7 4
♦ A Q J 7 2
♣ K Q 10 5

♠ K Q 3
♥ 8
♦ 10 9 4 3
♣ 8 7 6 4 3

We start by ducking the club king. Our aim is to establish spades without letting South gain the lead. We will take club continuation with the ace (discarding a spade from hand) and play ♣9, throwing another spade. Finally, we will establish spade tricks getting to dummy with trumps.

191

Practical Aspects of the Play

We have to change the strategy and attempt an endplay. After all but one hearts have been played off, these cards remain:

	♠ J 9										
	♥ —										
	♦ A Q										
	♣ Q 10										
♠ 10 7 4 ♥ 9 ♦ K 5 ♣ —	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A 8 ♥ — ♦ 8 6 ♣ A 9
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ K Q 3										
	♥ —										
	♦ 10 9 4										
	♣ —										

As we cash the last trump, North has no choice but to discard a spade. We do the same, enter dummy with the spade ace and play the ace and the nine of clubs, awaiting tenth trick with the diamond king.

Is this line risk-free? North will obviously try to escape the endplay. To read the actual distribution of his hand correctly, we should take advantage of South's first-trick count signal in clubs.

W	N	E	S
	1♦	pass	pass
1♠	pass	2♦	pass
3♠	pass	4♠	pass...

♠ 3
♥ K Q J 2
♦ K 10 9 6
♣ A 10 6 2

♠ A Q J 10 7 6
♥ 7 5
♦ J 7 5
♣ K 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9 8 2
♥ 10 8
♦ A Q 4 2
♣ Q 7 4

♠ 5 4
♥ A 9 6 4 3
♦ 8 3
♣ J 9 5 3

♥K led, followed by ♥Q and ♠3.

Our purpose is to prepare an endplay on North. In the process, we must watch South's signals carefully, so that we don't have to guess which cards North has kept in the three-card ending.

We win in hand and play small club to the queen, which holds the trick. South will no doubt show true count, as he did earlier in hearts. Next we cash four trump tricks, reaching the following position:

♠ —
♥ —
♦ K 10 9
♣ A 10

W	N	E	S
	pass	1♣	pass
1♠	pass	1NT	pass
3♦	pass	3♥	pass
3♠	pass	4♦	pass
4♠	pass....		

- South follows low- high showing an odd number of cards.
- South follows in the opposite order: high -low, indicating an even number.

♠ K Q J 9 3
 ♥ A 9 2
 ♦ K 7 5 4
 ♣ 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 7
 ♥ 6 5 3
 ♦ 10 9 6 2
 ♣ A K J 10

♠ 10 6
 ♥ K Q J
 ♦ A Q 8
 ♣ 6 5 4 3 2

♠ A 5 4 2
 ♥ 10 8 7 4
 ♦ J 3
 ♣ Q 8 7

195

b)

	♠ 8 7	
	♥ 10 6 5 3	
	♦ 10 9 6 2	
	♣ A K J	
♠ K Q J 9 3		♠ 10 6
♥ A 9 2		♥ K Q J
♦ K 7 5 4		♦ A Q 8
♣ 9		♣ 6 5 4 3 2
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ A 5 4 2	
	♥ 8 7 4	
	♦ J 3	
	♣ Q 10 8 7	

This time we act on the assumption that hearts divide 4–3 and diamonds not worse than 4–2.

We ruff the second club and cash all three heart tricks. Finally, we play the ace, queen and eight of diamonds, following low from hand if South follows suit. This way we will force defenders to play trumps twice themselves or else we will be able to ruff the diamond king with the ten of trumps.

COUNT IN DIAMONDS

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
2♠	pass	4♠	pass...

♠ K 7 6 4 2
♥ K Q 3
♦ J
♣ K 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 3
♥ A J 10 4
♦ A 10 5
♣ J 4 3

♦K lead.

2)

W	N	E	S
	1♣	1♦	pass
1♥	pass	3♦	pass
3♥	pass	4♥	pass....

♠ A 10 6 5
♥ A Q 7 4 2
♦ 5
♣ 10 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 3 2
♥ K 6
♦ A K Q J 10 6 3
♣ 4

North leads the ♣A, followed by ♦7.

Practical Aspects of the Play

3)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	3♦	pass
4♣	pass	4NT	pass
5♦	pass	6♠	pass...

♠ Q 10 8 3 2
♥ K Q 4 3
♦ 8
♣ A Q 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 7 4
♥ A 7 6
♦ A 10 4 2
♣ K J 4

♦6 led. We win the ace and cash the ace of trumps, dropping South's king

4)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
3NT	pass...		

♠ A K 10 9 2
♥ Q 3 2
♦ A Q
♣ A J 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 8 3
♥ A 9
♦ 8 4 3
♣ 10 9 7 4 2

Hesitant lead of ♦J.

An examination of the opponents' convention card reveals that they lead jack from AJ10 and KJ10.

5. Count Signals

5)

W	N	E	S
1♠	X	2♥*	pass
4♠	pass...		

* – with spade support

♠ A K J 6 4 2

♥ Q 6 4

♦ —

♣ A 10 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 5 3

♥ A 7 3

♦ K 9 3

♣ 9 8 4 3

♣K led. Trumps break 2–2.

Answers

1)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
2♠	pass	4♠	pass...

♦K led.

	♠ J 9	
	♥ 8 6 2	
	♦ K Q 9 8 4	
	♣ A 9 7	
♠ K 7 6 4 2		♠ A 10 3
♥ K Q 3		♥ A J 10 4
♦ J		♦ A 10 5
♣ K 6 5 2		♣ J 4 3
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ Q 8 5	
	♥ 9 7 5	
	♦ 7 6 3 2	
	♣ Q 10 8	

It is important to notice the diamond count signal on the first trick. We take the ace and play three rounds of trumps. Whoever gains the lead, must switch to hearts (any other switch lets the contract make).

We cash two remaining trumps and all the hearts, reaching this ending:

5. Count Signals

	♠ —	
	♥ —	
	♦ K ?	
	♣ A ?	
♠ —	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="text-align: center;">W E</div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">S</div>	♠ —
♥ —		♥ —
♦ —		♦ 10 5
♣ K 6 5		♣ J

Success depends on getting the question marks right. The answer lies in the very first trick. As a rule, South will show true count in a situation like this.

2)

W	N	E	S
	1♣	1♦	pass
1♥	pass	3♦	pass
3♥	pass	4♥	pass....

North leads the ♣A, followed by ♦7.

	♠ Q 7 4	
	♥ J 8 3	
	♦ 7 4	
	♣ A K Q 8 6	
♠ A 10 6 5	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="text-align: center;">W E</div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">S</div>	♠ J 3 2
♥ A Q 7 4 2		♥ K 6
♦ 5		♦ A K Q J 10 6 3
♣ 10 3 2		♣ 4
	♠ K 9 8	
	♥ 10 9 5	
	♦ 9 8 2	
	♣ J 9 7 5	

Let's face it – the contract is ugly. Indeed, it would be far easier to make the diamond slam than the heart game. As in a typical chess problem, we must look far ahead: we must predict what will happen at Trick 9.

A routine line of play would be to win the diamond switch and lead a spade to the ten. North switches to, say, hearts. We win with the king, return to hand with the spade ace, ruff a club and discard the last losing club on a diamond honor. Now we concede a spade. No good: South wins and switches to a diamond, promoting his partner's jack of trumps into the setting trick. This line would prove successful if North held three diamonds.

South's count signal in diamonds in Trick 2 should be the key to further play. Suppose he shows odd number of diamonds. We must now modify our initial plan and lead the spade jack in Trick 3. We duck South's king and, irrespective of what the defense does, repeat the sequence of steps from the previous variation. This time, however, it is North who gets in with the third spade. Lacking the crucial diamond, he can no longer beat the contract.

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	3♦	pass
4♣	pass	4NT	pass
5♦	pass	6♠	pass...

♠ J 9 6 5
 ♥ J 9 5 2
 ♦ 6 5
 ♣ 10 8 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 10 8 3 2
 ♥ K Q 4 3
 ♦ 8
 ♣ A Q 6

♠ A 7 4
 ♥ A 7 6
 ♦ A 10 4 2
 ♣ K J 4

♠ K
 ♥ 10 8
 ♦ K Q J 9 7 3
 ♣ 9 5 3 2

- 4-3-3-3
- 4-4-2-3
- 4-4-3-2

- a) They split 3–3. We must play North for the 4–3–3–3 shape: we ruff two diamonds and cash three clubs, ending in hand.

b) They split 4-2, North holding four. Now if North is:

- 1) 4-4-2-3, we ruff the fourth heart, ruff a diamond on the way back and cash three clubs. Finally, we exit with the ♠8.
- 2) 4-4-3-2, we ruff the fourth heart, two diamonds and play three rounds of clubs.

The difficulty is that we have to guess: 1) or 2).

What will come in handy, as usual, is the defender's exchange of information, especially regarding diamonds. South would, in most cases, show true count in Trick 1.

4)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
3NT	pass...		

Hesitant lead of $\spadesuit J$.

An examination of opponents' convention card reveals that they lead jack from AJ10 and KJ10.

♠ Q 7 6
♥ K 10 5 4
♦ K J 10 2
♣ Q 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 8 3
♥ A 9
♦ 8 4 3
♣ 10 9 7 4 2

♠ 5 4
♥ J 8 7 6
♦ 9 7 6 5
♣ K 8 3

5. Count Signals

a)

South follows with the ♦7, indicating an even number of cards.

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned opening lead agreement, South's count signal must be honest. Why?

Let's imagine a slightly different layout of the diamond suit:

	♦ A J 10 2	
♦ K Q		♦ 8 4 3
	♦ 9 7 6 5	

After regaining the lead, North must know whether it is right to cash the ace of diamonds. Hesitation preceding the opening lead strongly suggests a 4–4, rather than a 6–2, diamond break. We should base our plan on this piece of information.

We play the ace of spades and a small spade towards the eight. North will probably fail to go up with the queen anyway, but it's not the point of the play. We are simply establishing another entry to dummy in order to finesse in clubs twice. Defenders will get two diamonds, a spade and a club.

Practical Aspects of the Play

b)

South signals with the ♦2, showing an odd number of cards.

Now we know that the diamonds split 5–3.

♠ A K 10 9 2	♠ Q 7 6	♠ J 8 3
♥ Q 3 2	♥ K 10 5 4	♥ A 9
♦ A Q	♦ K J 10 6 5	♦ 8 4 3
♣ A J 3	♣ Q	♣ 10 9 7 4 2

♠ 5 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 5px 0;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	♠ J 8 3
♥ J 8 7 6		♥ A 9
♦ 9 7 2		♦ 8 4 3
♣ K 8 5 3		♣ 10 9 7 4 2

Back to pure mathematics. We cash the club ace and continue with the jack if one of the honors falls. Otherwise we have to rely on the spade finesse.

5)

W	N	E	S
1♠	X	2♥*	pass
4♠	pass...		

* – with spade support

♣K led. Trumps break 2–2.

5. Count Signals

	♠ 10 8	
	♥ K J 7	
	♦ A Q 10 5	
	♣ K Q J 6	
♠ A K J 6 4 2	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;"> S </div>	♠ Q 5 3
♥ Q 6 4		♥ A 5 3
♦ —		♦ K 9 3
♣ A 10 5 2		♣ 9 8 4 3
	♠ 9 7	
	♥ 10 9 8 2	
	♦ J 8 7 6 4 2	
	♣ 7	

We win the ace of clubs, draw trumps, ruff a diamond and exit with the ♣10. Two tricks later we win the fourth club in dummy and ruff another diamond (North drops the queen), arriving at:

	♠ —	
	♥ K J 7 ?	
	♦ A ?	
	♣ —	
♠ K 2	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;"> S </div>	♠ 5
♥ Q 6 4		♥ A 5 3
♦ —		♦ K
♣ —		♣ —

As we reach dummy with a trump, North discards the seven of hearts. He has already shown two spades and four clubs and for his double he should have four hearts. Therefore, his ace of diamonds should now be bare, we conclude.

So we throw him in with a diamond and...out of nowhere, he produces the ten of diamonds. "How could I possibly guess?" you complain. Are you sure you couldn't? What card did South play to the first diamond trick? You've forgotten? Let me remind you: the 8♦. He indicated an even number of cards.

COUNT IN DIAMONDS

Problems

6)

W	N	E	S
1♣	2♦*	pass	2♥
6♣	pass...		

* – 5-5 majors

♠ A K Q 6

♥ —

♦ K 6

♣ A K Q 9 7 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 2

♥ J 9 7 4 3

♦ Q 8 5 3

♣ J 4

North leads the ♥A. We ruff and cash the trump ace, North discarding a heart.

7)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	3♦*	pass
6♠	pass...		

* – 9-11 HCP, +4♠ .

♠ A K 10 7 4 2

♥ A 10

♦ A J 5

♣ A 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 9 3

♥ Q 9 4

♦ 6 4 2

♣ K Q 5

♦K lead.

5. Count Signals

8)

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	1♠	pass
1NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ K Q
♥ A 9 6 4
♦ J 6 5 3
♣ Q 10 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 7 6
♥ Q 2
♦ A 4
♣ A 6 5 3 2

♦K led.

9)

W	N	E	S
		1♣	pass
1♥	pass	2♥	pass
2NT	pass	4♥	pass...

♠ K 10 4 3
♥ K 7 6 4
♦ J 7
♣ K J 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 7 5
♥ A 8 5 3
♦ 9 5 3 2
♣ A

North leads ♦A, ♦K and ♦Q.

5. Count Signals

	♠ J 8 7 5 3										
	♥ A K 10 5 2										
	♦ A 10 7										
	♣ —										
♠ A K Q	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ —		♥ J 9 7 4 3									
♦ K 6 4		♦ Q 8 5 3									
♣ A K Q 9 7 5 3		♣ J 4									
	♠ 9 6 4										
	♥ Q 8 6										
	♦ J 9 2										
	♣ 10 8 6 2										

If this is the case, North needs information about the distribution to decide whether to hold on to four spades to the jack or two diamonds to the ace. But why does declarer need to know that? We'll find out shortly.

The diamond queen holds the trick. We come back with the heart ruff, reach dummy with the jack of clubs and ruff another heart. Next we start drawing trumps:

♠ A K Q 6		♠ J 8 7 5										
♥ —		♥ —										
♦ K		♦ A 10										
♣ Q		♣ —										
	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S			
	N											
W		E										
	S											
		♠ 10 2										
		♥ J 9										
		♦ 8 5										
		♣ —										
		♠ 9 4										
		♥ —										
		♦ J 9 4										
		♣ 10										

In the above ending we cash the last club. North hand could be either 6–5–2–0 or 5–5–3–0. If he discards two spades, we will have to guess which was

5. Count Signals

♠ —	♠ —	♠ —
♥ K ?		♥ Q 8
♦ Q ?		♦ 6
♣ —		♣ —

♠ —	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	♠ —
♥ A 10		♥ Q 8
♦ J		♦ 6
♣ —		♣ —

We have to guess whether North has kept two diamonds and a bare heart king or two hearts and a diamond. True, South's count signal on the first trick should be helpful, but who bothers to remember? We had to focus on our declarer play problem. North may well leave his king of hearts bare. As for clubs, we will never know their distribution.

Playing for a squeeze, we must duck the king of diamonds. Then we cash six trump tricks, the ace of hearts and two top clubs, getting to:

♠ —	♠ —	♠ —
♥ K		♥ Q
♦ Q 10		♦ 6
♣ —		♣ Q

♠ —	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	♠ —
♥ 10		♥ Q
♦ A J		♦ 6
♣ —		♣ Q

We conclude by cashing the club queen, discarding heart from dummy. We need no guessing whatsoever.

It may be rationally argued, however, that the chance of finding North with both king and queen of diamonds and the heart king is small. If South signaled heart values, there is, of course, a way to transfer heart stopper to the North hand. We simply exit with the heart queen and cover South's king with the ace. If North holds the jack of hearts, we will be able to squeeze him in the red suits.

5. Count Signals

and reach dummy by overtaking the spade honor. We lost an overtrick, but the contract is made.

Alas, our misgivings proved well founded – North shows out in the second club trick. So we cross to the queen of spades and play a heart towards the queen. North puts up the king and even the spectators understood why we retained the club queen in hand.

- b) South follows with the ♦8, showing even number of cards. The next three tricks are identical as above and we land in hand winning North's spade return. Now, however, we should adjust our plans to the actual layout. It is very likely, this time, that the king of hearts is with South.

With:

♠ 9 7 3 ♥ K 10 4 3 ♦ K Q 10 9 2 ♣ 7

North would have probably overcalled 1♦ over our 1♣ opening. Accordingly, we unblock the spades, cash the queen of clubs and cross to the ace of clubs.

Finally, we cash the two remaining spades and throw South in with a club.

♠ 9 5 3 2		
♥ 10 4 3		
♦ K Q 10 9 2		
♣ 7		
♠ K Q	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="text-align: center;">E</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">W</div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	♠ A J 7 6
♥ A 9 6 4		♥ Q 2
♦ J 6 5 3		♦ A 4
♣ Q 10 5		♣ A 6 5 3 2
	♠ 10 8 4	
	♥ K J 8 7	
	♦ 8 7	
	♣ K J 9 8	

We happily score the well-deserved overtrick.

5. Count Signals

- b) South signaled an even number of diamonds (i.e. four). We ruff the third diamond, cash the top trumps and the ace of clubs, ruff the last diamond, cross to the ace of spades and exit with a heart.
 - 1) North held three trumps – we claim.
 - 2) South held three trumps – we have to rely on the spade finesse (or opponent's error, i.e. his underleading the club queen).

COUNT IN HEARTS

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	2♠	pass
3♣	pass	3♦	pass
3♥	pass	3♠	pass
5♦	pass	6♦	pass....

♠ —
♥ 8 5 3
♦ A K 10 6 5
♣ Q J 8 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q J 10 9 4
♥ A J 7
♦ Q 4 3
♣ 9

♥K led.

2)

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♥	2♥	pass
2NT	pass	6♦	pass...

♠ A 2
♥ K 10 4 3
♦ J 9 7 4
♣ K J 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 3
♥ J
♦ A K Q 10 8 6
♣ A Q 3

♣10 led.

5. Count Signals

3)

W	N	E	S
	1NT*	2♣**	pass
	4♠	pass...	

* – 15–17 HCP

** – at least 4–4 in majors (very daring)

♠ A K Q 6 5

♥ Q 5

♦ A Q 6 5

♣ Q 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 4 3

♥ K J 9 6 4

♦ 9 7

♣ 4 2

♣A led, followed by ♣K and ♠9.

4)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	3NT	pass...

♠ Q 6

♥ K 6 4

♦ A K J 6 5

♣ Q 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9 3

♥ J 8 5

♦ 10 4 3

♣ A K 8 7

South takes his partner's ♠J with the ace and returns the queen of hearts. Our king wins the trick.

5. Count Signals

Declarer had to choose between:

- a) returning to hand with the club ruff and playing small heart towards the jack;
- b) exiting with a low heart immediately, playing North for two clubs and the bare queen of hearts.

The answer lies, of course, in the count signal South gave at Trick 1. But who bothers to remember... True, I never told you which card South played, but the whole point is whether you were aware that it was going to be extremely important.

2)

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♥	2♥	pass
2NT	pass	6♦	pass...

♣10 led.

	♠ K 7 4	
	♥ A Q 9 8 6 2	
	♦ 5 3	
	♣ 10 9	
♠ A 2		♠ Q J 3
♥ K 10 4 3		♥ J
♦ J 9 7 4		♦ A K Q 10 8 6
♣ K J 4		♣ A Q 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	
	♠ 10 9 8 6 5	
	♥ 7 5	
	♦ 2	
	♣ 8 7 6 5 2	

We win the ace of clubs, draw trumps in two rounds and cash the club queen, to deprive North of a safe exit card. However, we retain the king of clubs, which will be needed later to execute the squeeze. Having made the

Practical Aspects of the Play

necessary preparations, we duck the jack of hearts to North's queen. The defender wisely returns the ♥9. We win in hand and draw trumps, getting to:

	♠ K ?	
	♥ A 8 ?	
	♦ —	
	♣ —	
♠ A	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right;">W</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> N S </div> <div style="text-align: left;">E</div> </div>	♠ Q J
♥ K 4		♥
♦ —		♦ 8
♣ K		♣ 3
	♠ 10 9 ?	
	♥ ?	
	♦ —	
	♣ 8	

We play a club to the king, North discarding a heart. What now?

It is necessary to determine the distribution of North's hand: 4–5–2–2 or 3–6–2–2. In order to decide correctly, we need to consult the count signal that South faithfully gave in hearts.

5. Count Signals

a)

It turns out that South holds five clubs.

The situation is getting complicated.

	♠ J 10										
	♥ ? 4 3										
	♦ ?										
	♣ —										
♠ — ♥ 6 ♦ J 6 5 ♣ 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ — ♥ J 8 ♦ 10 ♣ A 8
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ —										
	♥ A ?										
	♦ ?										
	♣ J 10 4										

We must decide whether the fifth card in the South hand is:

- queen of diamonds, South's heart ace being bare; in this case we have to establish the heart trick;
- nine of hearts; this time the winning play is to throw South in with clubs.

Where is the answer? Well, North must have signaled accurately in hearts.

b)

Both defenders followed suit when the club queen was played.

We continue with a club to the king.

- South is found to hold four clubs – we endplay him with this suit, awaiting the heart trick.
- North holds four clubs – knowing North to be 6–1–2–4, we throw South in with diamonds.

Problems

COUNT IN SPADES

1)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	4♥	pass....

♠ A 8 6 5
♥ A K 7 4
♦ J 5
♣ K 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9
♥ Q 6 5 2
♦ A 10 6 3
♣ Q 7 4

♣8 led, South contributes the ten.

COUNT IN CLUBS AND SPADES

2)

W	N	E	S
1♦	X	2♣*	pass
3♦	pass	5♦	pass...

* – transfer to diamonds

♠ A K Q
♥ Q 5 3
♦ K J 10 9 6 5
♣ 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 7
♥ A 9 4 2
♦ Q 8 7 3
♣ A 6

♣K led.

Answers

1)

W	N	E	S
1NT	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	4♥	pass....

♣8 led, South contributes the ten.

♠ Q 7 3
 ♥ J 8 3
 ♦ K 9 7
 ♣ 9 8 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 8 6 5
 ♥ A K 7 4
 ♦ J 5
 ♣ K 3 2

♠ K 9
 ♥ Q 6 5 2
 ♦ A 10 6 3
 ♣ Q 7 4

♠ J 10 4 2
 ♥ 10 9
 ♦ Q 8 4 2
 ♣ A J 10

In order to learn declarer’s distribution, defenders have to inform each other about the length of the key suits. Spades is one of them, since its longer fragment is in declarer’s hand.

- a) South suggesting an even number of spades. We cash the queen of trumps, lead a spade to the ace and ruff a spade. Next we play the diamond ace, ruff a diamond and lead the fourth spade, intending to ruff. If North inserts the trump jack, we'll discard the losing club.

b)

	♠ Q 7 3 2										
	♥ J 3										
	♦ K 9 7 2										
	♣ 9 8 6										
♠ A 8 6 5	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 9
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A K 7 4		♥ Q 6 5 2									
♦ J 5		♦ A 10 6 3									
♣ K 3 2		♣ Q 7 4									
	♠ J 10 4										
	♥ 10 9 8										
	♦ Q 8 4										
	♣ A J 10 5										

This time it is North who signals an even number of spades. We aim to ruff two diamonds in hand. We cash the trump king, the diamond ace and ruff a diamond, followed by the ace of spades and a spade ruff. Ruffing the remaining diamond will give us the tenth trick.

5. Count Signals

2)

W	N	E	S
1♦	X 2	♣*	pass
3♦	pass	5♦	pass...

* – transfer to diamonds

♣K led.

		♠ J 9 4 3
		♥ K J 10
		♦ A 2
		♣ K Q J 8
♠ A K Q		♠ 10 8 7
♥ Q 5 3		♥ A 9 4 2
♦ K J 10 9 6 5		♦ Q 8 7 3
♣ 3		♣ A 6
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	
		♠ 6 5 2
		♥ 8 7 6
		♦ 4
		♣ 10 9 7 5 4 2

The problem looks trivial, but there is more to it than meets the eye. “I play the doubler for the singleton ace of trumps”, declared the majority of the tested players with a relaxed smile. Ace of clubs, club ruff, three spades and a diamond.

This is a typical example of a cursory, perfunctory analysis. If North’s ace is indeed singleton, everything will turn out fine. But suppose North wins the trick and returns a diamond. Now the real problem starts. Young experts are still confident. “It is clear from the bidding, that North holds the heart king. So we play South for the jack or ten of hearts doubleton: the heart queen from hand, covered with king and ace, followed by small heart. South is endplayed.”

Nice technique, to be sure, but how do we know hearts are 4–2? We can still win if hearts split 3–3, provided we find one of the following layouts:

Practical Aspects of the Play

N	S
a) K J 10	8 7 6
b) K J 8	10 7 6
c) K 10 8	J 7 6
d) K 8 7	J 10 6

We underlead the ace and:

- a) duck South's ♥8.
- b)
 - duck South's ♥7, or
 - cover his ♥10 – played after some hesitation – with the queen.
- c) cover the ♥J – inserted reluctantly – with the queen;
- d) duck the automatically inserted ♥10.

How do we determine how the hearts lie:

- 3–3 or
- 4–2, with North holding four hearts?

We should take advantage of South's count signals in clubs and spades. In the former, the defender will signal automatically. In the latter, we have to maneuver him into doing so. How? By playing the queen on the first spade trick. From South's point of view his partner may be holding up and may need information about the distribution of the suit.

FALLING OFF A LOG

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	1♥	pass
3♣	pass	3♦*	pass
3♠	pass	4♣	pass
6♣	pass...		

♠ A J 6

♥ A

♦ Q 6 3

♣ A K J 9 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 3 2

♥ J 8 7 4 3

♦ A K

♣ 8 5 4

North leads the ♥K. When the ♣A is played, South drops the queen.

The author of the problem comments brilliantly:

“The solution is as easy as falling off a log. But one can be badly hurt falling off a log. Declarer must discard a spade on a diamond and ruff a spade in dummy. It is, of course, vital to concede a spade first, instead of starting with a discard, for fear of the ♣10 being promoted into the setting trick when the fourth diamond is led.”

This is a primary school level solution. But how would secondary school graduate tackle the problem.

5. Count Signals

If North takes the trick, he will supposedly switch to diamonds. We now cash the trump king (the queen on the first round does not necessarily mean a singleton), the ace of spades (to cater for South's honor doubleton), and only then throw dummy's last spade on the third diamond.

But since we should strive to achieve the university level, let me present a more fascinating solution. The key will be the potential of the heart suit. For an effective defense, the opponents need to use an alphabet of signals. Declarer should take advantage. It would be natural for every good partnership to show count on the king of hearts. Otherwise they would find it difficult to sort out the defense.

Effective, practical declarer play should depend on the actual layout.

The plan of play in 6♠ will change dramatically in accordance with the distribution of hearts.

A)

South followed with the ♥2, showing even number of hearts.

We reach dummy with a diamond and ruff a heart with the nine of trumps. After returning to dummy, we lead another low heart.

1) South follows.

	♠ Q 9	
	♥ K Q 10	
	♦ 10 8 7 5 2	
	♣ 10 7 6	
♠ A J 6		♠ 10 3 2
♥ A		♥ J 8 7 4 3
♦ Q 6 3		♦ A K
♣ A K J 9 3 2		♣ 8 5 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K 8 7 5 4	
	♥ 9 6 5 2	
	♦ J 9 4	
	♣ Q	

Practical Aspects of the Play

We ruff with the jack (the queen falls from North) and play a low club to the eight. We concede a trump trick, but get two spade discards on hearts in return.

2) South discards a spade.

♠ A J 6	♠ Q 9	♠ 10 3 2
♥ A	♥ K Q 10 9 6	♥ J 8 7 4 3
♦ Q 6 3	♦ 10 8 5	♦ A K
♣ A K J 9 3 2	♣ 10 7 6	♣ 8 5 4

♠ K 8 7 5 4	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> N E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> W S </div>	♠ 10 3 2
♥ 5 2		♥ J 8 7 4 3
♦ J 9 7 4 2		♦ A K
♣ Q		♣ 8 5 4

North holds five hearts and three clubs. It's no use trying to ruff a spade in dummy now. We must play North for three diamonds and two spades.

We lead a small spade to the ten. Great concentration is required now to feel if North follows low a) smoothly or b) with a little hesitation.

- a) In this case we ruff diamonds return in dummy and finesse against the other spade honor.
- b) Now we cash the spade ace, hoping for the missing honor to fall doubleton from North.

5. Count Signals

B)

South's first-trick count signal betrays an odd number of hearts.

We get to dummy with a diamond and ruff a heart. If the honor falls – we win. Otherwise we come back to the secondary school plan.

This time it will not be possible to check South's spade honor doubleton variant, because North, after getting in with a spade, will switch to a third diamond, forcing us to a premature discard. The choice between hypothetical North's ♥KQ doubleton and South's ♠Hx doubleton is difficult. We must take into consideration, as well, that opponents will not necessarily defend optimally, i.e. switch to the third diamond.

Falling off a log turns out to be more difficult at the university level, it seems.

OPPONENTS' SIGNALS

W	N	E	S
1♥	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	3♥	pass
3NT*	pass	6♥	pass...

* – good trumps, accepting slam invitation

♠ Q 10
♥ A K J 10 3
♦ K 6
♣ 10 4 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 7
♥ Q 9 7 2
♦ A 10 7 5
♣ A K 7

♣8 led.

OPPONENTS' SIGNALS

W	N	E	S
1♥	pass	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	3♥	pass
3NT*	pass	6♥	pass...

* – good trumps, accepting slam invitation

♣8 led.

	♠ J 9 6 4 2	
	♥ 6 5	
	♦ J 9 8 2	
	♣ 8 6	
♠ Q 10		♠ A 7
♥ A K J 10 3		♥ Q 9 7 2
♦ K 6		♦ A 10 7 5
♣ 10 4 3 2		♣ A K 7
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ K 8 5 3	
	♥ 8 4	
	♦ Q 4 3	
	♣ Q J 9 5	

In a long match, we usually have an opportunity to learn something about the opponents' defensive style from previous boards. It is important to know what kind of information they pass – about the location of honors and stoppers, the length of each suit. Signals in the trump suit may show suit preference. Will they need to use count signals on a particular deal?

5. Count Signals

From the defender's point of view, the present deal may well look like this:

	♠ Q 9 6 4 2	
	♥ 6 5	
	♦ J 9 8 2	
	♣ 8 6	
♠ J 10 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ A 7
♥ A K J 10 3		♥ Q 9 7 2
♦ K		♦ A 10 7 5
♣ 10 4 3 2		♣ A K 7
	♠ K 8 5	
	♥ 8 4	
	♦ Q 6 4 3	
	♣ Q J 9 5	

They are likely to get lost, both holding on to their four diamonds.

Practical Aspects of the Play

Back to the actual problem:

a)

If we conclude from the defenders' signaling that it is South who holds the king of spades, the winning line of play would be a squeeze combined with an endplay against South.

We ruff two diamonds in hand, reaching dummy with clubs. In the process we learn about the layout of clubs. Here is the ending:

	♠ J 9 6 4										
	♥ —										
	♦ —										
	♣ —										
♠ Q 10 ♥ — ♦ — ♣ 10 4	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A 7 ♥ Q ♦ — ♣ 7
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ K 8										
	♥ —										
	♦ —										
	♣ Q J										

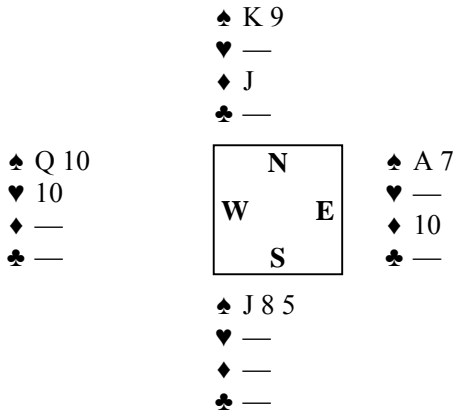
On the last heart South is forced to discard a club.

5. Count Signals

b)

If, on the other hand, the spade king is more likely to be in the North hand, we must play him for at least four diamonds, too. This is the condition for a spade-diamond squeeze to operate.

After drawing trumps we concede a club trick. South continues passively with another club. We ruff a diamond, finally getting to:



Leading the last heart activates the squeeze. Note that in all the variations there is an additional chance of ♦QJ falling doubleton or tripleton. Had North held ♠KJ, South would have been able to break the squeeze by switching to a spade.

DEFENDERS' SIGNALS

Problems

1)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
3♠	pass	4♣	pass
4NT	pass	5♦	pass
5♥*	pass	7♠	pass...

* – trump queen asking

♠ A K J 7 5 4

♥ A J 9

♦ A 6

♣ 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 10 9

♥ K 5 4

♦ Q 2

♣ A K Q 6 5

♣J led.

2)

W	N	E	S
	2♠	pass	pass
4♥	pass	4♠	pass
4NT	pass	5♣	pass
5NT*	pass	6♦	pass
7♥	pass....		

♠ 6

♥ A Q J 10 9 8 5 3

♦ A J

♣ Q 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 7 5 4

♥ K 2

♦ K 6 3

♣ A 9 6 4

♠K led.

Answers

1)

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♣	pass
3♠	pass	4♣	pass
4NT	pass	5♦	pass
5♥*	pass	7♠	pass...

* – trump queen asking

♣J led.

	♠ 8	
	♥ Q 7 6	
	♦ K 9 8 4	
	♣ J 10 8 7 3	
♠ A K J 7 5 4		♠ Q 10 9
♥ A J 9		♥ K 5 4
♦ A 6		♦ Q 2
♣ 4 2		♣ A K Q 6 5
	♠ 6 3 2	
	♥ 10 8 3 2	
	♦ J 10 7 5 3	
	♣ 9	

Once again, the defenders' signals may get us on the right track. Why? Because the opponents, trying to behave rationally, too often let routine prevail over thinking.

We draw trumps in three rounds and check clubs. Back to hand with a club ruff, we cash the penultimate spade, getting rid of a heart.

5. Count Signals

b)

If North discards three diamonds, he is suspected of being 1–2–5–5. We therefore drive to:

♠ —	♠ —	♠ —
♥ ? 7	♥ K 5	♥ K 5
♦ ? ?	♦ Q 2	♦ Q 2
♣ 10 8	♣ Q 6	♣ Q 6

♠ J	N W E S	♠ —
♥ A J 9		♥ K 5
♦ A 6		♦ Q 2
♣ —		♣ Q 6

♠ —	♠ —
♥ ? 8 3	♥ ? 8 3
♦ ? J 10	♦ ? J 10
♣ —	♣ —

Both defenders release a small diamond on the last spade and so do we. Why a diamond rather than a club? If North is 1–1–6–5, only the second heart will see him squeezed in the minors. We next play the ace and king of hearts, squeezing North in clubs and diamonds (provided his shape is 1–1–6–5) and cash the club queen, squeezing South in diamonds and hearts.

We ruffed a spade and North signaled clubs.

♠ 6		♠ K Q 10 9 8 3									
♥ A Q J 10 9 8 5 3		♥ 6									
♦ A J		♦ 9 7 5									
♣ Q 2		♣ K J 5									
	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♠ A 7 5 4									
		♥ K 2									
		♦ K 6 3									
		♣ A 9 6 4									
		♠ J 2									
		♥ 7 4									
		♦ Q 10 8 4 2									
		♣ 10 8 7 3									

♠ Q
♥ —
♦ —
♣ K J

♠ —
♥ 3
♦ —
♣ Q 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ —
♥ —
♦ —
♣ 10 8 7

♠ 7
♥ —
♦ —
♣ A 9

b)

As we ruff a spade, North indicates diamond values.

		♠ K Q 10 9 8 3	
		♥ 6	
		♦ Q 10 9	
		♣ 10 8 5	
♠ 6		<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	♠ A 7 5 4
♥ A Q J 10 9 8 5 3			♥ K 2
♦ A J			♦ K 6 3
♣ Q 2			♣ A 9 6 4
		♠ J 2	
		♥ 7 4	
		♦ 8 7 5 4 2	
		♣ K J 7 3	

This time the ending would be:

		♠ Q	
		♥ —	
		♦ Q 10 9	
		♣ —	
♠ —		<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	♠ 7
♥ 3			♥ —
♦ A J			♦ K 6 3
♣ Q			♣ —
		♠ —	
		♥ —	
		♦ 8 7 5	
		♣ K	

making the contract on the double squeeze.

WATCHING THE DISCARDS

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	3NT	pass
4♣	pass	6♣	pass...

♠ Q 4 2
 ♥ Q 10
 ♦ A 8
 ♣ A K J 10 9 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K J
 ♥ A 6 5
 ♦ 5 3 2
 ♣ Q 8 7

**** East has only 12 cards ****

♦4 led.

A DIAMOND DISCARD

W	N	E	S
1♠	2♥	2♠	pass
4♠	pass...		

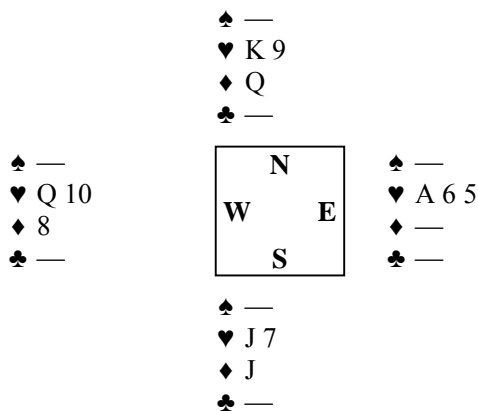
♠ A K 10 6 5 3
 ♥ J 2
 ♦ A 6 5
 ♣ A 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 9 2
 ♥ 8 6 4 3
 ♦ K J 7
 ♣ Q 5

North leads the three top hearts, South discarding the ♣4 on the third round.

5. Count Signals



One of the defenders may, however, bare his honor. To avoid this danger, we must watch the signals carefully!

5. Count Signals

We ruff and draw trumps, noting North's heart discard on the second round. Experienced defenders shouldn't be expected to give true count in such a position. We cash the remaining spades, throwing small diamond from dummy, while both defenders part with two clubs and a diamond. Here is the ending:

♠ —	♠ —	♠ —
♥ —	♥ 10	♥ 8
♦ A 6 5	♦ ? 9 8	♦ K J
♣ A 2	♣ K ?	♣ Q 5

♠ —	N W E S	♠ —
♥ —		♥ 8
♦ A 6 5		♦ K J
♣ A 2		♣ Q 5

♠ —	♠ —
♥ —	♥ —
♦ ? 10 3	♦ ? 10 3
♣ J ? 8	♣ J ? 8

The key to decoding North's hand is his partner's discard of a diamond. Suppose South held:

♠ 8 7
 ♥ 7 5
 ♦ 10 3 2
 ♣ J 10 8 7 6 4

He would never throw a diamond. Therefore, North is 2-2-4-5, and, consequently, in the above ending he has reduced himself to one heart, two diamonds and two clubs. We cash the ace and king of diamonds and endplay North with a heart.