

# MORE BRIDGE LITERATURE

Nick Smith



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## Foreword by Sir Walter Raleigh: The Historie of the World and the Art of the Single-Dummy Problem



Although now falsely imprisoned in the Tower of London by the Scottish king and his wicked courtiers, I have used the time wisely to compose a historie of the world, giving full weight to the part I have played in it.

Laughing at danger, I sailed to the southern part of the New World and brought back irrefutable evidence of a city built entirely of gold, El Dorado, as the Spanish covetously called it. Further north, I established the colony of Virginia, named after our late queen, and brought back four things which have transformed the lives of all of us in the First World. Firstly, the potato, now growing in profusion on my estate in Ireland, a delicacy that will transform our diet for years to come. Secondly, tobacco, the health-giving properties of which are now established. I am proud to be the very first Pipe Smoker of the Year. Third, the bicycle, now produced exclusively at my workshop in Nottingham.

And fourth, of course, the game of bridge. Others have claimed that its origins lie in European card games like One-and-Thirty and Primero but I can confirm that the game is the invention of the great Inca civilization and has been played for thousands of years in El Dorado itself. My humble contribution has been to write down the rules during a tempest off the coast of the Azores on my return to Europe. While its universal popularity now owes a little to the enthusiasm with which Good Queen Bess embraced the game and the bridge-based dramas created by my good friend, Mr William Shakespeare, it is still, in Europe at least, *my* game.

Opportunities to play bridge are somewhat limited here in the Tower but I have now been inspired by a quest to compose the ultimate single-dummy problem. Sceptics will scoff but if I find that fabled creature, I will consider it my life's greatest achievement. This self-imposed challenge is explored in the stories which follow, and I hope that readers will take their chance to pit their wits against the protagonists – Hamlet, Lear and the rest – and perhaps solve those problems. Then consider the conundrum – which is the greatest of all these single-dummy layouts?

The single-dummy problems in this book are hard – very hard, indeed – but (I hope) fair. They only work if the reader, having read the analysis, agrees that the recommended winning line is not only the sole winning option on the given lie of the opposing cards but also the best, or often the only, chance of success, given the clues offered by the auction, the opening lead and any subsequent play.

The composer's challenge is akin to that of the creator of a particularly fiendish cryptic crossword puzzle (another pastime that I am proud to have invented). As the omniscient setter, I do not want the solver to fail or give up – on the contrary, each element of the puzzle is designed to nudge the solver in the right direction and, despite a few red herrings, allow him or her to experience the eureka moment when the solution is apparent. It is not a zero sum game – the setter *wants* you to succeed and to feel that it was a hard-won victory which stretched you to the limits of your ability. What do we play bridge for, otherwise?

Single-dummy problems have been set since the early days of the game in the jungles of Peru, and published bridge columns are usually based loosely on this format, drawing on recently played deals from major championships. Where problems have been composed, they usually fall within one of three categories:

- (a) The Heffalump Trap, as David Bakhshi calls it – a seemingly comfortable contract where bad news needs to be anticipated.
- (b) The Technical Challenge – a *reasonable* contract where there is a choice of plays. How can you maximise your chances?

- (c) The Last Chance Saloon – you’ve overbid to an apparently unmakeable contract – can you see a favourable lie that will give you a chance?

Whether we are actually playing the game or facing a challenge in a magazine, part of the difficulty of declaring is to determine which of these three categories apply. Dummy must be evaluated objectively and any clues from the bidding considered. We tend to count tricks and consider the opportunities and risks associated with each possible strategy. Should we try to draw trumps or engineer ruffs in dummy? Should we prioritise knocking out our opponents’ aces and kings?

Examples of each of these categories appear in the pages that follow, but you will find relatively few Technical Challenges here. There are quite a few Heffalump Traps, sometimes sign-posted by a surprising double from an opponent who is looking at all five of the missing trumps. But the biggest category in these stories is, without doubt, the third one. My characters are flamboyant, reckless and prone to overbidding. They reach slams when most of us would be content to stop in game. They have no interest in playing for one off. But can they envisage a layout which will give them a chance of making their contract?

In particularly desperate cases, the solver must infer a single layout of the opposing cards, both in terms of hand-shape and honour-distribution, which would allow for success. In some “inferential” problems, the proposed line of play may not be complex – the real challenge is to ‘place’ the right 13 cards in the West hand and the right 13 with East. But in the very best problems, the layout is far from obvious and the line of play anything but trivial.

♠J109  
♥AQ432  
♦9  
♣AKQ2

N  
W E  
S

♠65432  
♥—  
♦J10765432  
♣—

Here's a famous example, sometimes ascribed to Atahualpa, the last Inca emperor, but actually one of my own many inventions. How must the cards lie if South can make 5♦ against a trump lead and best defence? Which lead *would* have beaten the contract?

It's clear that there are at least two unavoidable trump losers, more if trumps break 3-1 or 4-0. Thus, if the defence can cash even a single spade at trick 2, the diamond game is doomed. We must conclude that West is void in spades. Further, if the East hand is to be denied an immediate entry, West must hold the ♦AK doubleton.

Whether or not he cashes his second top trump, he will be obliged to lead a club or heart. At that point, we have our only entry to table and we need to be able to cash five winners to discard all five of our spade losers. For that to happen, East must hold a singleton ♥K. West must therefore hold a void spade, seven hearts to the jack, ♦AK doubleton and any four clubs.

Let's say West switches to a club after the ♦A. We ruff in hand and lead a trump. West has no choice but to win and lead a further club or heart for the remaining spades to be discarded on the top clubs and the ♥AQ. So there's almost nothing to the play.

And the lead that would have beaten 5♦ on that layout? A heart. West must get in sooner or later with a top trump and East will ruff the next heart with the ♦Q.

If that seems a little too easy, I have another conundrum for you. How must the East-West cards lie for South to be able to make a modest 3♦ against best defence ... and yet East may do likewise?

Impossible, you say. How can *both* sides make nine tricks in the same contract, especially when their opponents have the advantage of choosing the opening lead?

But we can easily see, from the inferred solution to our first problem, the main reason why East could be in with a chance of making 3♦. South

has only spades and diamonds to lead, so there is no easy access to North's winning clubs and hearts. Bizarrely, we only need to look at our solution to the first problem and move a couple of cards, the  $\spadesuit$ AK, from West to East, and send a couple of clubs the other way.

	$\spadesuit$ J109	
	$\heartsuit$ AQ432	
	$\diamondsuit$ 9	
	$\clubsuit$ AKQ2	
$\spadesuit$ —	N	$\spadesuit$ AKQ87
$\heartsuit$ J1098765	W E	$\heartsuit$ K
$\diamondsuit$ —	S	$\diamondsuit$ AKQ8
$\clubsuit$ 876543		$\clubsuit$ J109
	$\spadesuit$ 65432	
	$\heartsuit$ —	
	$\diamondsuit$ J10765432	
	$\clubsuit$ —	

That gives us this layout. On South's spade lead to  $3\diamond$ , say, East needs to win and draw one top trump. He then cashes the entire spade suit, leaving South with  $\diamond$ J1076543 only. South is obliged to ruff the subsequent heart or club lead. He returns the  $\diamond$ J but he is then obliged to ruff again and concede the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> tricks to the  $\diamond$ Q8.

Meanwhile, if South gets to play in  $3\diamond$  himself, he is rewarded with a club or heart lead and cashes  $\clubsuit$ AKQ and  $\heartsuit$ A for spade discards. When he

continues with the  $\heartsuit$ Q, East has to avoid the temptation to ruff high just to avoid conceding the overtrick!

A much harder challenge is to devise a convincing auction which allows either side to declare in  $3\diamond$  (the highest making contract for either side, although 2NT would score 10 points more for E/W). Even in a fictional context, I fear such an auction is beyond me.

In the real world, such extreme examples are few and far between. More often, there is *some* latitude. Perhaps you need four out of five cards in the right place. A solution which requires four out of five well placed is, by definition, to be preferred to one that requires five out of five. The "solution" (or critical) layout should penalise your error, with that fifth card in the wrong place.

This is not an exact science. The location of the opponents'  $\diamond$ Q (say) is rarely a 50/50 guess. Every bid and every card so far played affects that calculation. Known point-counts and the Principle of Vacant Spaces may

well have a bearing. Whether it's now 60/40 or 30/70 is, to some degree, a matter of opinion. At the table, opponents may 'psyche' or call light, they may false-card, and so on. This should not be the case in a composed problem. A big part of the setter's job is to construct an auction which will provide some helpful clues and also, in retrospect, 'justify' the solution. So the opponents' bidding is 100% reliable – you may trust it absolutely. The same is true of the lead and any defensive signalling up to the critical point. Those clues have been put there for a reason – use that information well!

In most textbook single-dummy problems, the 'crunch' is right now. The cards you play to the next trick will make or break your contract and the rest will then be a formality. But in the more difficult problems, including nearly all the puzzles here, the challenge is two-fold. Not only must you find the right cards to play to the next trick or two, you must also, on the assumption of initial success, envisage a relatively complicated end-position and plan how you will build towards and execute that. Of course, the two things go together. Your initial plan must be based on an idea, perhaps hazy at this stage, of the sort of end-position you would like to reach.

Not all my readers will be world champions and some may like to see whether their initial manoeuvres are correct before devoting time to the complexities of the endgame. So I have also provided "half"-solutions for each problem. Readers may take a peek and find out whether they are on the right track before taking on the final challenge.

Every setter tries to make his "solution" as water-tight as possible. None of us wants the reader to say: "Hang on a second! I've found a line which would work if  $x$  and  $y$ . Isn't that just as likely as your 'correct' answer?" I hope that does not apply to any of the problems in this book. All I would ask is that you try to evaluate competing lines as objectively as possible.

In almost all cases, there is only one play to the next trick which will allow you to make the contract against what I think is the critical distribution and best defence. In quite a few cases, there is only one precise sequence of plays between now and trick 13 which will ensure success, although the sequence will naturally vary according to any

counter-measures that the defence may employ. There may be a *little* latitude in the cashing of top tricks, rarely more.

In general, you need to anticipate the most testing defence possible. The lead and defence up to the critical juncture may be unlucky or ill-judged, but you must assume that it will be flawless from this point on. You will usually need to anticipate the most effective defensive ripostes and plan accordingly. It goes without saying that strategies based on deception or maximising the chances of a defensive error are not applicable here, even though you might occasionally prefer them at the table. Imagine that you are playing against an infallible computer\* program, such as Deep Finesse.

I will stop there as I think I hear the executioner's footsteps on the flagstones outside my pitiful cell. Wish me luck in my final storm-tossed journey.

WR, 28<sup>th</sup> October 1618

\* Did I mention that I also invented the computer?

## Single-dummy Problems

In all the problems that follow, you will need to decide not just what you will play to the next trick or two but also, on the assumption of success, deduce the ending you expect to reach and how you will finish the job.

You must assume perfect defence from this point on, although not necessarily up to this point.

All East-West bidding is natural (unless specified otherwise), “honest” and up-to-strength. The auctions are generally designed to offer up important clues to the best/winning line. All defensive leads and signals to date are also standard, honest and logically chosen. Leads are top of honour sequences (or K from AK to ask for count); 2<sup>nd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> from length.

For those who like to check that they are on the right track before addressing the detail of the endgame, “half-solutions” are to be found at the back of the book.

## 1. Rescuing oneself to 4NT

♠A5	N/S Vul, Dealer W			
♥AK53	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦A7532	1♣	Dble	1♠	Pass
♣K8	2♠	Dble	4♠	Pass
	Pass	Dble	Pass	4NT
	All Pass			

♠Q7  
♥J942  
♦J1094  
♣Q64

You've made an odd decision to bid 4NT rather than defend 4♠ doubled. Can you make it on the ♣10 lead?

Full deal on p.33 and half-solution at the back of the book.

## 2. Charlotte Lucas's baby

♠A	N/S Vul, Dealer W			
♥AKQJ	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦QJ3	2♥	Dble	Pass	2♠
♣AJ986	Pass	3NT	Pass	4♠
	All Pass			

♠KQJ104  
♥108  
♦10852  
♣74

West's 2♥ is Lucas-like, showing 5 hearts, a 5-card minor and 4-9 HCP.

West leads the ♣2 (2<sup>nd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>). Your line?

Full deal on p.36.

### 3. The Blue-rinse League

♠52	Neither Vul, Dealer W			
♥76532	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦96432	1♣	Pass	1♦	1NT
♣A	Pass	2♦	Pass	3♥
	Pass	4♥	All Pass	

♠K103            2♦ showed hearts.  
 ♥AKJ8           West leads the ♥4 and East plays the ♥Q.  
 ♦A5              What is the best line to try to make 4♥?  
 ♣J1052          Full deal on p.43.

### 4. When you have eliminated the impossible

♠AKJ5	Both Vul, Dealer E			
♥—	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦J98762			2♥	Pass
♣A54	Pass	3♦	Pass	3♥
	Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣
	Pass	4♥	Pass	4NT
♠42	Pass	6♣	All Pass	

♥AKQ64  
 ♦A5  
 ♣KQJ10

East's 2♥ opening is a standard weak-two, 5-9 HCP. You have missed out on a large penalty and must make a fiddly 6♣ instead.  
 West leads the ♠7. If you rise with the ♠A, East will play the ♠9. Your plan?  
 Clue: when you play a trump, East will contribute the nine.  
 Full deal on p.45.

## 5. A Yorkist plot

♠Q75	N/S Vul, Dealer W			
♥AQ4	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦QJ7542	1♠	2♦	Pass	4♣
♣Q	4♦	Dble	4♠	5♣
	5♠	Dble	Pass	6♣
	Pass	Pass	Dble	All Pass

♠K9

♥K762

♦—

♣AK108642

After a wild, if natural, sequence (including West's 4♦!), you find yourself in 6♣ doubled.

West leads the ♦A, on which East will play the eight. Over to you ...

Full deal on p.52.

## 6. To play the king?

♠A	Neither Vul, Dealer E			
♥532	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♦864			2♠	Pass
♣KQJ1083	Pass	3♣	Pass	3NT
	Pass	4♣	Pass	4♥
	All Pass			

♠Q10763

♥KQJ4

♦AKQ3

♣—

East's 2♠ is a standard weak-two, 5-9 HCP, 6-card suit.

West leads the ♦J (East plays the seven).

If/when you play a top trump, West will win with the ace and lead the ♦10, East playing the five. What strategy will you adopt?

Full deal on p.57.

## FICTION

Nick Smith's first book, *Bridge Literature*, was originally published by Cadogan Books in 1993 and has since been acclaimed as one of the quirky classics of the game. *More Bridge Literature* takes a similar form, as a set of parodies of well-known works of English literature.

King Lear finds himself playing for France, Winnie-the-Pooh makes his first slam and Lady Bracknell proves hard to impress. Sherlock Holmes' deductive skills fail him for once, Robinson Crusoe takes drastic action and there's a lot of fumbling under the table at Cold Comfort Farm. *More Bridge Literature* is an irreverent and humorous take on much-loved literary classics.

Most of the deals are also presented in quiz-form. Readers are encouraged to attempt these declarer-play problems before reading the stories in which the deals are located. But be warned — these may be the toughest single-dummy problems ever published! If you solve even half of these, you are a current or future international player.



**NICK SMITH** is a Grand Master from Oxford, England. He is the author of *Bridge and the Romantics* (Master Point Press, 2019) and *Bridge Behind Bars*, with Julian Pottage (Master Point Press, 2009). He is also the author of numerous novels and plays.