

A GREAT DEAL OF BRIDGE PROBLEMS

Julian Pottage



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This is the greatest bridge problem collection, ever! Any questions?

Julian Pottage has developed a well-earned reputation as a great problem constructor. His problems don't require spectacular plays. They simply require the same attention to detail that produces winning bridge at the table.

In addition, his answers are sharp, to the point, and usually make you say, "of course."

Problem collections usually contain 50-100 deals. This one has almost 200, each fresher than the last. They are divided into categories, which involve slams, no trump contracts, trump contracts, defensive continuations by the opening leader, and quite a few others.

Try one problem each night before you go to bed. No sleeping until you get it right.

You may notice a tendency toward alliteration. Bridge can be fun, you know.

Ron Garber

Introduction to the First Edition

Please may I begin by thanking Ron Garber and the team at Vivisphere for the pivotal part they have played in bringing this project to fruition. May I also thank Maureen Dennison and Peter Burrows for their sterling efforts in eradicating any errors or eccentricities in the initial manuscript. To conclude the credits I must mention the most important person of all. Without you, the reader, the book would be a court with no judge, a lock with no key, a yacht with no breeze: vanity and chasing of the wind.

This book differs from a number of other problem books not just in its size but also in its presentation. On many deals, I ask you not to predict the entire course of the play but just your action on the current trick and those immediately following. My purpose is twofold. Firstly, it simplifies the discussion and more readily replicates conditions you may meet at the table. Secondly, it makes it easier for you to satisfy yourself whether you have successfully solved the problem as posed.

In keeping with the theme of simplification, wherever I can I have given you an auction that would be as familiar in a home game as at a bridge club or tournament. On those rare occasions when I have needed to use conventions from the world of duplicate to make the problem fair or feasible, I have explained any bids about which you need to know. The one bid I do not explain is a 1NT opening. Unless stated otherwise, the range is 15-17 points.

Within each chapter, I have arranged the problems broadly in order of increasingly difficulty. In most chapters, a couple of the problems at the very end have a page and half of explanation rather than the normal page. This speaks for itself. Except in chapter 11 and, to some extent chapter 8, I suggest that you dwell on each problem for about as long as you would if you met it at the table. Naturally, you, the customer are always right. If you chose to linger on a problem you find particularly interesting, I would not wish to debate the point.

If you have been doing your homework, you will know that this is by no means the first book I have done that has required a sizeable source of raw material. If so, it seems only fair that I should share with you a couple of secrets of how I have managed to keep finding fresh copy. At the end of each bridge session I play, I look back over the hand records (or my scorecard if there are none) to identify and note down the most interesting deal or two. I am fortunate also to see much of the world's best bridge literature and do likewise with this. While I would not directly use this in work that I claim as originally mine, it gives me ideas to blend with my own. For instance, what I read as a problem for declarer I often transform to a defensive problem or vice versa.

For a variety of reasons, I usually tweak the cards or the bidding slightly. For one thing, I regard a problem where the best answer works 51% of the time and the second best 49% as unsatisfactory. The tiniest factor I have overlooked or exaggerated might tip the balance the other way. I like there to be no doubt about the best answer. For another, I wish to avoid any accusation that bids or plays made by the unseen players are so unsound as to make the problem void. Thus, I change any debatable actions. Another point is that I like the decisive play to be for the contract rather than for overtricks. This means you can assume rubber or IMP scoring for the problems. Finally, I often like to arrange things so that the auction is the same in Acol and Standard American.

My desire to have clear-cut answers explains why I have not given you any opening lead problems. For any given hand, except perhaps when partner has made a lead-directing double, one can construct the deal in such ways as to support more than one possible lead.

I finish with a request. If, despite spite the thorough checking to which I referred at the start, you spot a mistake then do please let us know. The innovative technology the publisher uses makes it easy to correct such things for the benefit of future readers. Happy solving!

Julian Pottage
Porthcawl, Wales, 2008

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Dedication

To Michael York Pottage (1923-2006),
a kind gentle man,
a loyal friend,
a willing servant,
a humble competitor,
a trustworthy employee,
a devoted husband and,
to me, a loving father.

Sensational Slams

Slams can arouse high emotions: *satisfaction* if a lengthy sequence leads to a good contract, *excitement* at the prospect of making a lot of tricks and a big score, *fear* of going minus with a good hand and *joy* if the contract succeeds. As bridge players, we are not as good as poker players at controlling our emotions. All the same, it pays to do so.

With the stakes higher than usual, a failure to give the play your full attention may make the best of auctions count for nothing. In a grand slam, the tension reaches its height. One slip can spell instant defeat. Usually one wants to avoid taking finesses or leading winners that may be ruffed. You want to keep your chances alive until the end. Small slams, which occur more often, do not generate quite the same stress level. The ability to lose one trick allows you more leeway. Moreover, the fact that you can afford to lose the lead opens up types of play not available in a grand slam, such as a throw-in or elimination play.

One thing that can make slams easier to play than games is that you usually have the entries to cross back and forth between the hands. One thing that makes them harder is that you less often have clues from the opposition bidding. While intervention can cause you problems in the auction, making it hard to reach the correct contract, it frequently helps you when it comes to the play.

1.1

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
pass	2♦	pass	3♣
pass	5NT	pass	7♣
all pass			

♠ A K Q
♥ —
♦ A J 9 7 3 2
♣ Q J 8 7

♠ 9
♥ A J 8 7 6 4 3
♦ —
♣ A K 10 9 3

West leads the six of clubs. With a long suit in each hand, you might try to set up the hearts or the diamonds. Does one suit offer a better bet than the other? Is there an even better plan?

1.2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	3♥	pass	4♣
pass	4♠	pass	5♦
pass	6♠	all pass	

♠ K 8
♥ K 8 6 4 3
♦ J 6 3 2
♣ 8 5

♠ A Q J 7 4 2
♥ A 9
♦ A
♣ A K J 3

West leads the ten of diamonds (consistent with a suit headed by the 10-9, K-10-9 or Q-10-9). How do you play to avoid the possible loss of two club tricks?

1.3

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♥
pass	2NT *	pass	3♥
pass	4NT	pass	5♥
pass	5NT	pass	6♥ **
all pass			

* game-forcing heart raise

** no kings

♠ A J
♥ K Q 5 2
♦ K 6 4
♣ A K J 7

♠ Q 3
♥ A 7 6 4 3
♦ A J 5 3
♣ Q 3

West leads the jack of hearts, which you will discover is from a holding of J-10-9-8. With finesse positions in two suits and the possibility of dropping the queen of diamonds, you want to combine your chances in some way. How should you best go about this?

1.4

W	N	E	S
—	1♥	pass	2♣
pass	2♥	pass	3♦
pass	3♠	pass	6NT
all pass			

♠ 10 8 5 2
♥ A Q 8 7 5 2
♦ J
♣ A 5

♠ A K
♥ K
♦ A K 7 3
♣ K J 8 7 6 2

West leads the nine of diamonds to the jack and queen. How do you play to the next two tricks?

1.1

Contract: 7♥

Lead: ♣6

♠ A K Q

♥ —

♦ A J 9 7 3 2

♣ Q J 8 7

♠ J 8 5 3

♥ K 10 9 5 2

♦ Q

♣ 6 5 2

♠ 10 7 6 4 2

♥ Q

♦ K 10 8 6 5 4

♣ 4

♠ 9

♥ A J 8 7 6 4 3

♦ —

♣ A K 10 9 3

One line is to win the opening lead in dummy and try to set up the diamonds. You will succeed on a normal 4-3 break. You will need four entries to dummy. You have them with two trumps, one spade and one ruff. If the diamonds do not break 4-3 but you have cashed the ace of diamonds early, you will be able to fall back on a crossruff.

Another line is to win the club in hand and play on hearts. On a 3-3 break, you need only two more entries to hand and can survive a 3-1 trump split. On a more normal 4-2 break, you need a 2-2 trump split because you need dummy's three remaining trumps for ruffing and so all your other three entries to hand need to be by ruffing. This line is inferior to playing on diamonds because you need more friendly breaks and because you cannot so readily combine your chances with a crossruff.

As you may have guessed, your best plan is to go for a crossruff from the start. So long as three rounds of spades and the red aces stand up, you can survive quite a hostile distribution. Win the first trick in dummy, cash dummy's side winners, ruff a diamond and cash the ace of hearts. If all has gone to plan, you can claim the remainder on a high crossruff. There is even a vague chance of success if the spades lie highly unevenly. If East ruffs, you can overruff and to try to set up the hearts, for which you will need a 3-3 heart break.

1.2

Contract: 6♠

Lead: ♦10

♠ K 8

♥ K 8 6 4 3

♦ J 6 3 2

♣ 8 5

♠ 5

♥ J 7

♦ Q 10 9 7 4

♣ Q 9 7 4 2

♠ 10 9 6 3

♥ Q 10 5 2

♦ K 8 5

♣ 10 6

♠ A Q J 7 4 2

♥ A 9

♦ A

♣ A K J 3

A lack of entries to dummy means you can rule out trying to set up the hearts. What is the best play in clubs?

Suppose you cross to the king of hearts and take a losing finesse. You will then face a nasty guess on the third round of clubs if West continues to follow. If you ruff low, East may overruff and set you at once. If you ruff high, trumps may be 4-1. With the layout as above, you have no winning option if you lose a trick to the queen of clubs.

If you were in a grand slam, it would be clear what to do. You would cash the top clubs and ruff the third round low. You would want to save the king to ruff the fourth round of clubs when you know that one of the defenders will have run out. Is this the best play in six?

If you ruff the third club low, you risk seeing East overruff and putting back a trump. You do better to ruff the third round of clubs with the king. You can then return to hand and ruff the fourth round low. Unless trumps break 5-0 or someone ruffs with a singleton trump – which would be very unlucky – you essentially just need the two clubs to stand up.

Take a bonus point if you considered but rejected trying to cater for a 6-1 club break by crossing over with a heart to lead the second round of clubs from dummy. A 5-1 heart break, which is more likely than a 6-1 club break, would spell defeat if the defender short in clubs has five hearts: you would lose an overruff on the fourth club and a heart ruff.

1.3

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♥J

♠ A J
♥ K Q 5 2
♦ K 6 4
♣ A K J 7

♠ 10 8 7 2
♥ J 10 9 8
♦ 10 8
♣ 10 8 5

♠ K 9 6 5 4
♥ —
♦ Q 9 7 2
♣ 9 6 4 2

♠ Q 3
♥ A 7 6 4 3
♦ A J 5 3
♣ Q 3

One option is to cash two diamonds and, if the queen does not drop, fall back on the spade finesse. To try for a singleton spade king with the diamond finesse in reserve is better given the trump split and works as the cards lie. Best of all is to combine the finessing chances. You can do it if West holds three or four clubs. After the third top trump, play clubs throwing spades. If West has not ruffed, exit with a trump in this position:

♠ A J
♥ 8
♦ K 6 4
♣ —

♠ 10 8 7
♥ 10
♦ 10 8
♣ —

♠ K 9 6
♥ —
♦ Q 9 2
♣ —

♠ —
♥ 7 6
♦ A J 5 3
♣ —

West's spade exit gives you a free shot at the spade finesse. When East produces the king, you can ruff and try your luck in diamonds.

1.4

Contract: 6NT

Lead: \diamond 9

\spadesuit 10 8 5 2

\heartsuit A Q 8 7 5 2

\diamond J

\clubsuit A 5

\spadesuit J 9 4

\heartsuit J 9 6 4

\diamond 9 8 6

\clubsuit Q 10 4

\spadesuit Q 7 6 3

\heartsuit 10 3

\diamond Q 10 5 4 2

\clubsuit 9 3

\spadesuit A K

\heartsuit K

\diamond A K 7 3

\clubsuit K J 8 7 6 2

Suppose the play to the first three tricks goes ace of diamonds, king of hearts and a club to ace. You intend to cash the ace and queen hearts next to test the suit and to discard a diamond on each of these.

You will certainly succeed if hearts break 3-3. If hearts do not break 3-3, you can try your luck in clubs. If West has the heart length, you will play a club to the king and give up a club. This is a safety play against Q-x with West. You do not mind giving up an overtrick if East has Q-x-x. If East has the heart length, you will finesse the jack of clubs. In this case, you are quite happy to lose the lead to West.

Today your luck is out if you play as above. West has a sure entry in clubs and a heart to cash upon gaining the lead. Nor does it help to leave a heart winner in dummy (a strange play in any event if all follow to two hearts). You would have to lose a diamond at the end.

After taking the ace of diamonds and unblocking the king of hearts, you should continue not with a club to the ace but by ducking a club. Once you regain the lead you can cross to the ace of clubs and test the hearts. When these bring no joy you can return to hand with a spade and play clubs from the top.

1.5

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	4♠
pass	4NT	pass	5♦
pass	7♠	all pass	

♠ K J 4
♥ A K
♦ A 7
♣ A K J 9 5 3

♠ A Q 9 7 5 3 2
♥ 3
♦ Q 8 4 2
♣ 7

West leads the jack of hearts. With twelve top tricks, trying to set up a long club must represent your best bet. Can you spot the play for the first three tricks that gives you the maximum chance of success?

1.6

W	N	E	S
—	1♠	pass	2♥
pass	3♦	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	pass	6♥
all pass			

♠ A Q J 8 3
♥ 8 5
♦ A K 10 6
♣ J 5

♠ K 7
♥ A K J 10 6 3
♦ 9
♣ A 9 6 3

West leads the king of clubs. You decide to win, proceeding to cash the ace and the king of hearts. All follow but the queen of hearts remains out. Do you agree with the play to date? How do you continue?

1.7

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	3♠ *
pass	4NT	pass	5♦
pass	6♠	all pass	

* pushy if you are vulnerable

♠ K
♥ A Q 7 6 3 2
♦ A Q 4
♣ A K Q

♠ A 10 9 8 7 6 4
♥ J 5
♦ J 10 8
♣ 9

West leads the nine of hearts. Assuming nothing peculiar happens in the majors, how do you play to the first seven tricks?

1.8

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	6NT	all pass	

♠ J 9 7
♥ A K 2
♦ A K 5
♣ K 6 5 4

♠ K 3
♥ Q J 10 8
♦ Q J 10 7
♣ A Q 8

West leads the seven of hearts. Is it better to try for a 3-3 club break or for the ace of spades onside? Is there anything else to consider?

1.5

Contract: 7♠

Lead: ♥J

♠ K J 4

♥ A K

♦ A 7

♣ A K J 9 5 3

♠ 10 8 6

♥ J 10 9 7 2

♦ K J 9 6

♣ 4

♠ —

♥ Q 8 6 5 4

♦ 10 5 3

♣ Q 10 8 6 2

♠ A Q 9 7 5 3 2

♥ 3

♦ Q 8 4 2

♣ 7

With normal breaks in the black suits (2-1 in spades and 4-2 in clubs), you can afford to draw trumps ending in dummy at tricks two and three. You can then cash the ace of clubs, ruff a club, return to dummy with a trump or the ace of diamonds and ruff a second club. After this, you use dummy's last entry to enjoy the clubs. Indeed, so long as clubs break 4-2, you can succeed even if trumps break 3-0.

Now suppose that clubs split 5-1. In this case, you need an extra entry to dummy and cannot afford to cash two rounds of trumps. Say you cash the ace only before playing a club to the ace. Then you ruff a spade high (when East follows), cross to dummy with a trump (drawing the last missing trump you hope) and ruff a club low. Since dummy still has two entries left, you expect to set up and enjoy the long club.

The problem comes when West has three trumps and a singleton club. You cannot afford to ruff high twice. Nor can you afford to draw trumps before taking the second ruff. The solution is really rather neat. At trick two, discard your club on a heart. Then you can ruff the first club low, cash the ace of trumps, finding the news, cross to dummy in trumps and ruff a club high. After this you cross to dummy again, drawing West's last trump as you do so, to finish setting up the clubs. The ace of diamonds serves as the entry to the established winner.

1.6

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♣K

♠ A Q J 8 3

♥ 8 5

♦ A K 10 6

♣ J 5

♠ 10 6 5 2

♥ Q 7 2

♦ 7

♣ K Q 10 7 2

♠ 9 4

♥ 9 4

♦ Q J 8 5 4 3 2

♣ 8 4

♠ K 7

♥ A K J 10 6 3

♦ 9

♣ A 9 6 3

Although cashing the two top hearts is not the best way to play for no trump loser, it is the best play when you look at the full picture. If you took a losing finesse, you would be down at once. By playing for the drop in trumps you can combine the chance of a doubleton queen with the chance of discarding all your losing clubs before someone can ruff.

With so few diamonds between the two hands (and the suit unbid), many would fall into the trap of playing on diamonds before spades. An untimely ruff on the second round then puts the contract two down.

Can you see why it is better to play on spades first? You need three discards in all, only one of which can come from diamonds. In other words, you need three rounds of spades to stand up regardless of how the diamonds break. The gain comes when someone has the missing trump and four (or more) spades. In this case, the other defender will show out on a spade and you will know it is safe to play a fourth spade. Indeed, when the spades break exactly 4-2 you can continue with a fifth round and make the contract even if diamonds are 8-0!

1.7

Contract: 6♠

Lead: ♥9

♠ Q 2
♥ 9 8
♦ 9 6 5 3
♣ 10 6 4 3 2

♠ K
♥ A Q 7 6 3 2
♦ A Q 4
♣ A K Q

♠ J 5 3
♥ K 10 4
♦ K 7 2
♣ J 8 7 5

♠ A 10 9 8 7 6 4
♥ J 5
♦ J 10 8
♣ 9

Unless West is known as a tricky customer, you should put up the ace of hearts, placing East with the king. Then unblock the king of spades, cash two rounds of clubs to discard a heart and ruff a heart. You then cash the ace of spades to reach this position:

♠ —
♥ —
♦ 9 6 5 3
♣ 10 6 3

♠ —
♥ Q 7 6
♦ A Q 4
♣ Q

♠ J
♥ K
♦ K 7 2
♣ J 7

♠ 10 9 8 7
♥ —
♦ J 10 8
♣ —

Lead a trump and cross your fingers. If the last trump is on your right, it does not matter that the ♥K is still out. Your luck is in. East wins and can do no better than return a club. This gives you the extra entry to set up the hearts and spares you from taking the diamond finesse.

1.8

Contract: 6NT

Lead: ♥7

♠ J 9 7
♥ A K 2
♦ A K 5
♣ K 6 5 4

♠ A Q 6 4
♥ 7 6 5
♦ 4 2
♣ J 7 3 2

♠ 10 8 5 2
♥ 9 4 3
♦ 9 8 6 3
♣ 10 9

♠ K 3
♥ Q J 10 8
♦ Q J 10 7
♣ A Q 8

Should you test for a 3-3 club break before playing spades? Unless East holds exactly four clubs (less likely than exactly three), this allows you to combine your chances. Assuming there are no wild breaks, can you see something even better? Cash eight red winners before touching the black suits. This is the position as you cash the last red winner:

♠ J 9
♥ —
♦ —
♣ K 6 5 4

♠ A Q
♥ —
♦ —
♣ J 7 3 2

♠ 10 8 5 2
♥ —
♦ —
♣ 10 9

♠ K 3
♥ —
♦ J
♣ A Q 8

To keep four clubs West has to discard the queen of spades on your last red winner. This means you can drive out the ace of spades and make the slam even with clubs 4-2 and the ace of spades offside.

1.9

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	2NT	pass	3♣
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4♥	dbl	pass
pass	rdbl	pass	5NT
pass	7♣	all pass	

♠ J 7 4
♥ A Q
♦ K Q J 7 3
♣ K Q 2

♠ A K 10 3
♥ J 5
♦ A
♣ A 10 8 7 6 3

West leads the ten of hearts. I hope that the bidding has not left you feeling exhausted because the contract is not quite as laydown as first appears. Can you spot the best way to play the first three tricks?

1.10

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♥
pass	3♥	pass	5♥
pass	6♥	all pass	

♠ 9 7 6
♥ K J 2
♦ 9 3
♣ K 8 5 3 2

♠ A K Q 3
♥ A Q 7 5 3
♦ A K 7
♣ Q

West leads the jack of clubs. East wins with the ace and switches to the jack of diamonds. What is the safest plan to avoid a diamond loser?

1.11

♠ K 9
♥ A K 8
♦ A K J
♣ Q J 7 6 5

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1NT
pass	7NT	all pass	

♠ A Q 10
♥ J 6 5 4 2
♦ Q 8 7
♣ A K

West leads a diamond, which dummy wins with the ace as East follows. You decide to cash the ace-king of clubs, preparing to claim, but West discards a diamond on the second round. How do you continue?

1.12

♠ K Q
♥ K Q 3
♦ K Q J 10
♣ A 9 3 2

W	N	E	S
—	—	3♣	dbl
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4NT	pass	5♠ *
pass	7♦	all pass	

* three aces

♠ A 10 9 4
♥ A 9 7
♦ A 8 7 5 3
♣ J

West leads the five of clubs to dummy's ace. You cash the king of diamonds but East discards a club. This makes life awkward. Unless the jack of spades is short, you need six trump tricks rather than five. What is the safest way to take the necessary ruff(s)?

1.9

Contract: 7♣

Lead: ♥10

♠ J 7 4
♥ A Q
♦ K Q J 7 3
♣ K Q 2

♠ Q 9 6 2
♥ 10 9 8 6 3
♦ 9 5 4 2
♣ —

♠ 8 5
♥ K 7 4 2
♦ 10 8 6
♣ J 9 5 4

♠ A K 10 3
♥ J 5
♦ A
♣ A 10 8 7 6 3

You would put up the ♥A even without the double of 4♥ and do so here. If trumps are 2-2 or 3-1, you can afford to proceed with a club to the king and one back to hand. However, this fails if East holds all the missing trumps because you can never draw trumps ending in dummy. Correct is to unblock the ace of diamonds at trick two. Only then do you play a trump. Once West shows out, you start running the diamonds.

♠ J 7 4
♥ Q
♦ J 7
♣ Q 2

♠ Q 9 6 2
♥ 9 8 6
♦ 9
♣ —

♠ 8 5
♥ K 4 2
♦ —
♣ J 9 5

♠ A K 10
♥ —
♦ —
♣ A 10 8 7 6

East has the chance now to ruff and does so. You overruff, cash the ace of clubs and cross to the queen of clubs for the last diamond.

1.10

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♣J

♠ 9 7 6

♥ K J 2

♦ 9 3

♣ K 8 5 3 2

♠ 8 4

♥ 10 8 6 4

♦ Q 5

♣ J 10 9 7 4

♠ J 10 5 2

♥ 9

♦ J 10 8 6 4 2

♣ A 6

♠ A K Q 3

♥ A Q 7 5 3

♦ A K 7

♣ Q

Since ruffing a spade (if the suit does not break 3-3) requires some luck, it makes sense to try to ruff a diamond in dummy. You can use the king of clubs to discard any spade loser.

Ruffing a diamond should prove straightforward if diamonds break no worse than 5-3 and hearts 3-2. How can you cater for a bad break in one red suit or the other?

You could ruff the diamond high to ensure East cannot overruff. Of course, if you do that, you will go down any time trumps break 4-1. It would be nice to test the trumps to find out whether they are 4-1. The snag is that you cannot do so without committing yourself on how high you are going to ruff. If you cash the king and jack to leave a low trump in dummy, you are powerless to stop an overruff. The consolation is that you protect yourself if someone has a doubleton diamond and fewer than three trumps. Take 8 marks out of 10 if you decided to do this.

The best plan of all is to draw only one round of trumps with the king. If West has a doubleton diamond, you can take the ruff in safety, overruffing if need be but otherwise ruffing low. If West follows to three rounds of diamonds, the percentage play is to ruff low. It is much more likely that someone has four trumps than that West has six diamonds.

1.11

Contract: 6NT

Lead: \diamond 10

\spadesuit K 9
 \heartsuit A K 8
 \diamond A K J
 \clubsuit Q J 7 6 5

\spadesuit 3 2
 \heartsuit Q 9 7 3
 \diamond 10 9 6 5 4 3
 \clubsuit 9

\spadesuit J 8 7 6 5 4
 \heartsuit 10
 \diamond 2
 \clubsuit 10 8 4 3 2

\spadesuit A Q 10
 \heartsuit J 6 5 4 2
 \diamond Q 8 7
 \clubsuit A K

With the clubs 5-1, you are still looking at the same 12 top tricks you could see to start with. Moreover, since East discards after dummy and you have no heart winner in your hand, a squeeze in hearts and clubs cannot succeed whatever the heart layout. This means you will need to score a third heart trick by straightforward play.

At the table, I bet that many a declarer would feel so despondent upon finding the foul club split that they would cash the ace-king of hearts next. At least the play would be over quickly this way. Perhaps you also feel like playing for the drop in hearts. Still, it costs nothing to try to find out about the distribution of the unseen hands first.

You should cash the king of diamonds followed by the queen-jack of clubs (discarding hearts) and three rounds of spades. As the cards lie, interesting things happen. East shows out on the diamond, marking the suit as 6-1, and West shows out on the third spade, marking spades as 6-2. This gives you a complete count on the East hand: $6=1=1=5$.

Since it is twice as likely that East's singleton heart is the nine or ten rather than the queen, you lead the jack of hearts. West covers and dummy wins as East drops the hoped-for ten. Finally, you cross back to the carefully preserved queen of diamonds to finesse the eight of hearts.

1.12

Contract: 7♦

Lead: ♣5

♠ K Q
♥ K Q 3
♦ K Q J 10
♣ A 9 3 2

♠ J 6 5 3
♥ 10 8 6 5
♦ 9 6 4 2
♣ 5

♠ 8 7 2
♥ J 4 2
♦ —
♣ K Q 10 8 7 6 4

♠ A 10 9 4
♥ A 9 7
♦ A 8 7 5 3
♣ J

How might ruffing in the short trump hand go? Suppose you unblock the king-queen of spades, cross to hand with the ace of hearts, cash the ace of spades and continue with the ten. If the jack of spades has not dropped, you ruff in dummy and take two more rounds of trumps. Now the snag hits you. To come back to hand to draw the last trump you will eventually have to lead a club and ruff low, hoping to find West with a second club. This is unlikely given the bidding and lead.

At least the above line represents an improvement on going for two club ruffs in hand. You do not want to incur an overruff and find out later that the jack of spades is short. So take 8 out of 10 for that.

Ruffing in dummy is the right idea. It is just question of the best way to go about it. Instead of cashing the king-queen of spades, overtake the second round! You can then lead the ten for a ruffing finesse on the third round. After ruffing the jack of spades and unblocking dummy's trumps, you have the ace of hearts as an entry to draw the remaining trumps.

On this line, you are certain to succeed if West is 5=3=4=1; you also have the odds on your side if West is 4=4=4=1 and are no worse off than with the other lines if West is 3=5=4=1. Indeed, if you know how your opponent plays and a smooth low spade greets your ten, you might elect to ruff in dummy, succeeding also when East has J-x-x.

1.13

♠ K 3
♥ Q 7 3 2
♦ K Q 6 5
♣ J 9 7

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♥
pass	3♥	pass	6♥ *
all pass			

* science is not always best

♠ A
♥ A K J 10 6 4
♦ J 4
♣ A Q 8 4

West leads the queen of spades, which you win performe with the ace. You then cash the ace of hearts, on which East discards a spade. How do you continue?

1.14

♠ —
♥ A 5 4 3
♦ 6 4 3
♣ A J 10 8 7 6

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♣
pass	1♥	3♠	3NT
pass	6♣	all pass	

♠ K 8 5 3
♥ K J 8
♦ A Q
♣ K Q 4 2

West leads a low trump, to which East follows. You could draw a second round and attack hearts, with the diamond finesse in reserve if nothing good happens in hearts. Given the bidding, do you think you can improve on this line?

1.15

♠ 7 6 5
♥ 10 9 5 4
♦ K 2
♣ K 10 6 5

W	N	E	S
3♠	pass	pass	6♥
all pass			

♠ A K 2
♥ A K Q J 6 2
♦ —
♣ A 9 7 3

West leads the queen of spades and you are pleased to see East follow. Even so, the mirror image distribution in the black suits leaves you with a problem. How do you play, or not play, the club suit?

1.16

♠ Q 6 4
♥ A J 9 5 3
♦ K Q 4
♣ K 8

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♣
pass	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	2♦	pass	3♣
pass	3NT	pass	4♣
pass	6♣	all pass	

♠ A K 7 5
♥ —
♦ 6 5 2
♣ A Q J 10 7 3

West leads the jack of diamonds to the queen and ace. East returns a diamond to the king. If suits break well, you might ruff out the hearts but are an entry short to reach the long card. Given that the deal would not be here if spades are 3-3, how do you plan to avoid a spade loser?

1.13

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♠Q

♠ K 3

♥ Q 7 3 2

♦ K Q 6 5

♣ J 9 7

♠ Q J 10 9 5

♥ 9 8 5

♦ 10 8 3

♣ K 5

♠ 8 7 6 4 2

♥ —

♦ A 9 7 2

♣ 10 6 3 2

♠ A

♥ A K J 10 6 4

♦ J 4

♣ A Q 8 4

The 3-0 trump break presents no problem. The real issue is to avoid the loss of a trick in each minor.

If the club finesse succeeds, you have nothing to fear. You can discard one low club on the king of spades and another on the third round of diamonds. How might you succeed with the finesse wrong?

If you can sneak a diamond past the ace, you can discard your other diamond on the king of spades and just lose a club. Indeed, if you lead a low diamond and the ace goes up, you will still succeed. You will have two discards coming on the diamonds and one on the king of spades. This means you will be able to get rid of three clubs.

Which defender should you select as the intended victim of this Morton's Fork? The lack of opposing bidding provides a clue. West, who you place with the king of clubs, may well have a five-card spade suit headed by the queen-jack. With the ace of diamonds as well, West would surely have overcalled one spade. Therefore, you draw trumps ending in dummy and lead a low diamond towards the jack. If East plays low, you win with the jack, cross via the seven of hearts and throw a diamond on the king of spades. What do you do if East prefers to grab the ace and switch to a club? Put up the ace, cash the jack of diamonds and cross via the seven of hearts to take your three discards.

1.14

Contract: 6♣

Lead: ♣3

♠ 9 7
♥ Q 9 7 6
♦ K 10 9 8 5
♣ 9 3

♠ —
♥ A 5 4 3
♦ 6 4 3
♣ A J 10 8 7 6

♠ A Q J 10 6 4 2
♥ 10 2
♦ J 7 2
♣ 5

♠ K 8 5 3
♥ K J 8
♦ A Q
♣ K Q 4 2

As long as East has seven spades, you can guarantee the contract. Win the trump lead in hand and ruff a spade. Come to hand with another trump and ruff a second spade. You have reached this position:

♠ —
♥ Q 9 7 6
♦ K 10 9 8 5
♣ —

♠ —
♥ A 5 4 3
♦ 6 4 3
♣ A 8

♠ A J 10 6
♥ 10 2
♦ J 7 2
♣ —

♠ K 8
♥ K J 8
♦ A Q
♣ 4 2

You lead a heart, finessing the eight if East play low or covering the ten with the jack. West wins but can only lead into a red tenace. You win cheaply and make the remainder in top tricks and by crossruffing.

If West can find a third spade, you ruff in dummy, cash hearts from the top and, if nothing good happens, fall back on the diamond finesse.

1.15

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♠Q

♠ 7 6 5
♥ 10 9 5 4
♦ K 2
♣ K 10 6 5

♠ Q J 10 8 4 3
♥ —
♦ A 10 9 6 5
♣ Q 4

♠ 9
♥ 8 7 3
♦ Q J 8 7 4 3
♣ J 8 2

♠ A K 2
♥ A K Q J 6 2
♦ —
♣ A 9 7 3

Before you think about the clubs, you should use the ten and nine of hearts as entries to ruff diamonds. On a lucky day, East holds the ace of diamonds and flies in with it on the first round. In practice, East cannot go wrong. If you have not already cashed the ace of hearts, you do so now. You should also cash your second top spade. This is the position:

♠ 7
♥ 5
♦ —
♣ K 10 6 5

♠ J 10
♥ —
♦ A 10 9
♣ Q 4

♠ —
♥ —
♦ J 8 7
♣ J 8 2

♠ 2
♥ K
♦ —
♣ A 9 7 3

If you lead a spade, all should be well if West exits with a club. By playing for the queen and jack to lie in opposite hands, you can pick up the suit whether West leads the queen or the jack.

The snag is that a careful West will have been counting your shape and have worked out that a ruff and discard is of no use to you. Either a spade or a diamond exit is safe. You will then have to broach the club suit and need a miracle to succeed, failing dismally on the actual layout.

Throwing East in with a club is a better plan. With a third club winner to come, a forced diamond exit to give you a ruff and discard will give you the slam-going trick. You must just decide whether to play East for three clubs (playing ace, king and another) or for a doubleton (when you cash the ace and finesse the ten). For two reasons you should play East for three clubs rather than two. For one, West has more cards in the majors than East and hence less room for three clubs. For another, it is no good finding East with a doubleton if West holds the queen and jack.

1.16

Contract: 6♣

Lead: ♦J

♠ Q 6 4

♥ A J 9 5 3

♦ K Q 4

♣ K 8

♠ J 9 3 2

♥ Q 10 8 6 4

♦ J 10 8

♣ 6

♠ 10 8

♥ K 7 2

♦ A 9 7 3

♣ 9 5 4 2

♠ A K 7 5

♥ —

♦ 6 5 2

♣ A Q J 10 7 3

If hearts break 4-4 and clubs 3-2, you might ruff three hearts to set up a long card. Unfortunately, you would need four entries to dummy, one more than you have. Finessing the eight of clubs in attempt to gain an extra entry is a poor idea. For one thing, you may go down even with spades 3-3. For another, even if the eight of clubs wins, the extra entry does you no good without some help in hearts. For a final point, unless trumps break 3-2, you can ill afford to ruff three times.

A better idea is to cash only one round of trumps followed by four rounds of spades. Maybe the defender with four spades has four clubs as well. In this case, you can ruff the fourth round of spades. What is more, you do not lose the chance of a 3-3 spade break. Take half marks for this plan.

Best of all is to use dummy's diamond winner and the king of clubs for ruffing hearts. On a normal 5-3 break, this will leave only one defender able to protect hearts. Then, whether or not trumps break 4-1, you play four rounds of trumps. You find you reach this position:

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

West is squeezed as you lead the fourth round of clubs and discard a heart from dummy. After you cross to the queen of spades and cash the ace of hearts, discarding a diamond, you will know what to do.

I can give you the normal maximum 10 marks for getting this far. Take a bonus of 2 if you have spotted that this line works just as well if someone started with five diamonds and four spades. After you cash the ace of hearts, nobody can have four spades and a diamond left. I am afraid the bonus halves if you discarded dummy's diamond at any point. In that case, a spade/diamond squeeze could work against East but not against West.

Crafty Continuations

When you decide your opening lead, you often form a picture of the unseen hands and hence how the play might proceed. The accuracy with which you can do so depends partly on your hand and partly on how much the auction reveals. If you have a strong holding in declarer's side suit, you might lead a trump to cut down on dummy's ruffing power. If dummy has bid a suit and you fear its establishment, you might attack in an unbid suit. In a notrump contract, or if you hold four trumps, you might lead your longest and strongest suit, trying to set it up.

The appearance of dummy may either confirm or contradict your initial ideas. Frequently you can tell whether you have hit a weak spot or not from which side wins the first trick and the manner in which it does so. On the occasions when you cannot, you would expect your partner to give you an attitude signal, playing a high card to encourage the suit or a low card to discourage. Remember, however, that a signal is just that – a signal, not a command. Bear in mind as well that your partner will signal count rather than attitude if the attractiveness or otherwise of continuing the suit is clear.

In this chapter, all the problems revolve around what to do after you hold or regain the lead. In the latter case, you can take into account the way what declarer and your partner have approached the play so far. The more tricks that have gone, the more the correct next lead becomes one of certainty rather than percentages. As in defensive problems in general, counting points, tricks and distribution can help to resolve the more difficult decisions. Good luck!

2.1

♠ Q 9 8
 ♥ A 10 9 7
 ♦ Q 3
 ♣ Q J 3 2

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

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

On your lead of a top diamond partner discards the eight of hearts (or whatever card on your methods would encourage a heart switch). How exactly do you continue?

2.2

♠ Q J 7
 ♥ A J 7 2
 ♦ K 9 4
 ♣ J 8 7

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

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
pass	pass	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

You cash four rounds of clubs. All follow to the first three rounds. On the fourth, North and South throw low hearts, East the two of spades. What do you try next?

2.3

♠ J 4
 ♥ 6 5 4 3
 ♦ K J 5
 ♣ A K J 7

♠ 7 3
 ♥ K Q J 7
 ♦ 8 6
 ♣ 8 6 5 4 2

W	N	E	S
—	1♣	1NT	2♠
all pass			

You lead the king of hearts and, when this holds, decide to continue with the jack. Again, all follow low. What do you lead next?

2.4

♠ Q 9 7 5 3
 ♥ Q 7
 ♦ J 10 3
 ♣ K Q 7

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♦
1♥	1♠	2♥	3♣
pass	4♦	pass	5♦
all pass			

You lead the king of hearts (king from ace-king against high-level contracts). East plays the two and South the four. What do you make of partner's play? How do you continue?

2.1

Contract: 3NT

Lead: \diamond K

\spadesuit Q 9 8
 \heartsuit A 10 9 7
 \diamond Q 3
 \clubsuit Q J 3 2

\spadesuit 6 4
 \heartsuit 6 5
 \diamond A K J 10 6 4
 \clubsuit 10 7 6

\spadesuit J 7 5 3 2
 \heartsuit K Q 8 3 2
 \diamond —
 \clubsuit 9 5 4

\spadesuit A K 10
 \heartsuit J 4
 \diamond 9 8 7 5 2
 \clubsuit A K 8

Suppose you cash your three remaining diamond winners before switching to a heart. You will find that declarer has nine tricks: three spades, four clubs, a heart and a diamond. With a little counting, you could predict this result. If partner has good hearts and declarer has at least 15 points, where do you expect to find the ace-king of clubs and the ace-king of spades? Unless South's opening is a bare minimum and East has neither the queen nor the jack of hearts to support the king, they must all be on your right.

Suppose instead that you switch immediately to a heart. Again, this does you no good. Declarer loses two hearts to East and eventually makes a second heart trick for the contract. It is the same story if you cash one more diamond before switching.

To defeat the contract you must cash exactly two more diamond tricks before switching. Now, so long as partner has the queen of hearts to back up the king, you expect to make either three diamonds and two hearts or four diamonds and one heart.

2.2

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣Q

♠ Q J 7
♥ A J 7 2
♦ K 9 4
♣ J 8 7

♠ 9 5
♥ 10 6 3
♦ J 7 5 2
♣ A K Q 10

♠ 10 8 4 3 2
♥ Q 8 4
♦ 10 6
♣ 6 4 3

♠ A K 6
♥ K 9 5
♦ A Q 8 3
♣ 9 5 2

Although the two of spades does not encourage you to lead the suit, you should do so just the same. For all you know, partner had no other safe discard available – indeed this is the case. Whatever the spade situation, it cannot cost to break the suit.

Declarer has two possible lines after your spade switch – both unsuccessful. The first is to play off some top diamonds, with the heart finesse in reserve if the diamond suit does not yield four tricks. The second is to cash three rounds of spades. This combines the chance of a doubleton queen of hearts with a helpful diamond break and with a squeeze if the same defender guards both red suits.

Do you see what might happen if you switch to a low diamond? East puts up the ten, after which declarer can finesse dummy's nine. Yes, you might avoid that if you lead a tricky jack of diamonds. However, even this blows a trick if declarer reads the position.

A heart switch also costs your side dear. Dummy plays low and partner, holding the queen but not the nine, has no effective play.

2.3

Contract: 2♠

Lead: ♥K

♠ 7 3
♥ K Q J 7
♦ 8 6
♣ 8 6 5 4 2

♠ J 4
♥ 6 5 4 3
♦ K J 5
♣ A K J 7

♠ K 9 5
♥ A 10 2
♦ A Q 3
♣ Q 10 9 3

♠ A Q 10 8 6 2
♥ 9 8
♦ 10 9 7 4 2
♣ —

The bidding tells you that partner has most of the missing values. You might reasonably expect that the few South has are mainly, if not exclusively, in spades. This makes a diamond switch highly attractive. If, as is the case, partner holds the ace and queen, your side can make two winners and a ruff. After this, you simply need to play a third round of hearts to force declarer to lead from hand. The king of spades is the setting trick.

If partner has the ace-queen of spades and the ace of diamonds but not the queen, the diamond switch produces a similar effect. Dummy wins the first or second round of diamonds and leads a trump. Partner grabs the ace and, after you have ruffed the third round of diamonds, you exit with a heart. The queen of spades then takes the setting trick.

Perhaps you thought it obvious to switch to the eight of diamonds and feared a catch. I hope not. I did say that the problems are easier at the start of a chapter than at the end. Since I only asked you what you should lead at trick three, you can give yourself a bonus point if you specified what you would do after ruffing the diamond.

2.4

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♥K

♠ Q 9 7 5 3

♥ Q 7

♦ J 10 3

♣ K Q 7

♠ A 10

♥ A K 10 6 3

♦ 8 5

♣ 9 5 4 2

♠ K J 8 6 4 2

♥ J 9 2

♦ 9 7 2

♣ 8

♠ —

♥ 8 5 4

♦ A K Q 6 4

♣ A J 10 6 3

With the queen of hearts in dummy, partner's attitude towards the suit is clear. The two must be a count signal, presumably showing three hearts – nobody makes a single raise with five-card support these days. This means declarer may have three losing hearts.

Of course, you can see a chance even without a third heart trick. If the ace of spades stands up, you can put the contract down at once. Why should you not try this? In the first place, a losing spade can never run away. In the second, declarer needs some shape – quite possibly a spade void – to justify a free rebid with what cannot be much more than about 14 points.

Did you think to switch to a trump? A moment's reflection should tell you this serves little purpose. You can only lead trumps twice, which means you can never prevent a heart ruff.

Actually, a ruff is the key – one you can give your partner. You can see seven clubs between your hand and dummy. With clubs bid on your right at three level, partner could easily have a singleton club. In this case, a club shift may well defeat the contract. If declarer tries to ruff a heart, you can give partner a club ruff. If your opponent draws trumps, you hope partner has the jack of hearts to give you three heart tricks.

2.5

♠ J 9 4
 ♥ Q J
 ♦ A K 9 8 7 2
 ♣ 10 6

♠ K Q 7
 ♥ K 9 3
 ♦ Q 5 3
 ♣ Q J 8 2

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

You lead the king of spades, on which go the four, two and eight. What card do you lead next?

2.6

♠ K Q J 10 2
 ♥ J 8 4
 ♦ A 8 6
 ♣ 9 8

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2♦
pass	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

You lead the four of clubs to the queen and ace. Declarer cashes two top trumps, to which all follow, before leading the five of spades. Do you take your ace of spades on the first round or the second? After you have taken it, what do you do next?

2.7

♠ K J 5
 ♥ A 9 8 7 4 2
 ♦ J 3
 ♣ K J

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

W	N	E	S
—	1♥	pass	2♣
pass	2♥	pass	2♠
pass	3♣	pass	3NT
all pass			

You lead the king of diamonds, on which go the three, two and six. How exactly do you continue?

2.8

♠ Q 10 7
 ♥ 8 7 4
 ♦ 8 7 5
 ♣ K Q 7 2

♠ A K J 9 3
 ♥ K 10 5 3
 ♦ 9 3
 ♣ 10 9

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

You lead a top spade, collecting the seven, two and five. Again, what is your strategy for so long as you hold the lead?

2.5

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠K

♠ J 9 4

♥ Q J

♦ A K 9 8 7 2

♣ 10 6

♠ K Q 7

♥ K 9 3

♦ Q 5 3

♣ Q J 8 2

♠ A 10 6 3 2

♥ 4 2

♦ J 10 6

♣ 7 5 4

♠ 8 5

♥ A 10 8 7 6 5

♦ 4

♣ A K 9 3

To decide on your next lead it may help to place the missing cards, at any rate those of most relevance. There are three aces and the king of clubs in the unseen hands. The fact that your king of spades has held the first trick indicates that East holds the ace of spades. This plus the bidding means you can put South with the other three cards.

With the position of the high spades obvious, partner's two on the first trick must be a count signal, showing a five-card suit. You might have guessed the spade count anyway from the bidding. To have made a free bid of 1♠ on such a weak hand, partner really needs a five-card suit. This being so, you see three defensive tricks: two spades and a heart. The setting trick will surely need to come from clubs. Why is this? Although your combined diamond holding may be enough to stop the suit from running, declarer is unlikely to have an actual diamond loser.

If partner holds the ten of hearts, you have little to fear from a club ruff in dummy. So long as you do not lead away from your king, a club ruff will simply promote your trump holding. The key situation is the one in the diagram. To put partner in to switch to a trump, you continue with the seven of spades. Declarer then faces an unenviable choice. Ducking the heart allows you to win and play a second round, preventing the club ruff. Going up with the ace and proceeding to ruff a club will, with K-9-x of hearts in your hand, mean the loss of two trump tricks.

2.6

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣4

♠ K Q J 10 2

♥ J 8 4

♦ A 8 6

♣ 9 8

♠ A 7 3

♥ Q 10 3

♦ K 10 7

♣ 10 7 6 4

♠ 9 8 4

♥ 9 5

♦ J 3 2

♣ K Q 5 3 2

♠ 6 5

♥ A K 7 6 2

♦ Q 9 5 4

♣ A J

Since the ace of diamonds is a sure entry to the spades, holding up one round serves little purpose. You might as well take your ace on the first round. The real issue is how to continue.

Very often when you have the master trump and gain the lead, it pays you to play your master to draw two trumps for one. Can you see why the current situation represents an exception? Count everyone's tricks. If you cash the queen of hearts, how can your side possibly make more than a spade, a heart and a club? Since East would play the jack on the first trick from a holding of K-Q-J-x, you know declarer holds the jack of clubs. The tricks against you will be four spades, four hearts, a diamond and a club or the equivalent.

You need to play a club to partner's presumed king before cashing the heart. A diamond return will take out dummy's side entry. So long as the jack of clubs has fallen under the king and declarer does not have the queen and jack of diamonds, you will defeat the contract. You will be able to ruff the fourth round of spades and have a diamond to cash.

Give yourself 5 marks out of 10 if, immediately after taking the ace of spades, you led a diamond. This defeats the contract if the club layout is the same as on the actual deal and East has the queen of diamonds as well as or instead of the jack.

2.7

Contract: 3NT

Lead: \diamond K

\spadesuit K J 5

\heartsuit A 9 8 7 4 2

\diamond J 3

\clubsuit K J

\spadesuit 7

\heartsuit K 10 6

\diamond K Q 10 7 4

\clubsuit 9 7 6 5

\spadesuit A 8 4 3 2

\heartsuit J 5 3

\diamond 9 5 2

\clubsuit 10 2

\spadesuit Q 10 9 6

\heartsuit Q

\diamond A 8 6

\clubsuit A Q 8 4 3

With the jack of diamonds on view in dummy, you should read the two as a count signal. Clearly, partner's odd number of diamonds must be three. This being the case, you continue with the queen of diamonds, which you know is almost certainly going to win.

The real issue is what to lead after declarer holds up for a second time. Do you carry on with diamonds, hoping to gain the lead in hearts? If not, what do you do?

Counting tells you the answer. South has bid clubs before reversing into spades, which indicates a holding of at least five clubs and four spades. When you add three diamonds, you can account for at least twelve of declarer's cards. This leaves at most one heart. This tells you two things. Not only does your opponent have little intention of going after hearts but also it must be perfectly safe for you to switch to the king of hearts. You must lead precisely the king of hearts in case the queen is singleton. If, as it surely will, your king holds, naturally you continue the suit. You hope that partner produces one of the black aces for the setting trick. If not, the situation seems all but hopeless.

2.8

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠A

♠ Q 10 7
♥ 8 7 4
♦ 8 7 5
♣ K Q 7 2

♠ A K J 9 3
♥ K 10 5 3
♦ 9 3
♣ 10 9

♠ 6 4 2
♥ 6 2
♦ J 10 6 4
♣ J 6 5 3

♠ 8 5
♥ A Q J 9
♦ A K Q 2
♣ A 8 4

For differing reasons, two of S.J. Simon's characters, the Unlucky Expert and Mrs. Guggenheim, would beat the contract. They would play a high and then a low spade to make four spades and a heart. Futile Willie would see things differently. He would fancy the idea of leading a low spade at trick two to maintain communications. After this declarer would test both minors to reach this position with the lead in dummy:

♠ 10
♥ 8 7 4
♦ —
♣ 7

♠ K J 3
♥ K 10
♦ —
♣ —

♠ 6
♥ 6 2
♦ 10
♣ J

♠ —
♥ A Q J 9
♦ 2
♣ —

Declarer, recalling East's two of spades at trick one, would now see a better bet than the heart finesse. Exit with a spade to endplay Willie.

By the way, if you are wondering why the other two would defend the right way, I can now explain. Mrs. Guggenheim would not spot the endplay or East's count signal. The Unlucky Expert would spot both and he would judge correctly that his partner could hardly have an entry.

2.9

♠ 10 9 3
♥ A 3
♦ A J 6
♣ A K Q J 7

♠ A Q 6
♥ Q 9 8 6 5 4
♦ K Q 10 2
♣ —

W	N	E	S
1♥	dbl	3♥	3♠
4♥	dbl	pass	4♠
all pass			

You lead the king of diamonds, the ace winning as East plays the three. Dummy leads the ten of spades to the five, two and queen. What card do you lead next?

2.10

♠ A Q 10 4
♥ J 9 5 4
♦ Q 4
♣ A 9 3

♠ J
♥ A K 10 7 2
♦ K J 8 7
♣ J 7 6

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♠
2♥	3♥ *	pass	4♠
all pass			

* limit raise or better

You lead a top heart, collecting the four, three and queen. What card do you lead next?

2.11

♠ K Q 10 9 5 4
 ♥ Q 8 3
 ♦ A J 9
 ♣ Q

♠ 7 3
 ♥ J 10 6
 ♦ 7 5 4
 ♣ A K 8 7 5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♦
pass	1♠	pass	3♦
pass	3♠	pass	4♦
pass	5♣	pass	6♦
all pass			

You lead the king of clubs, on which go the queen, six and three. What do you make of partner's six? What card do you lead next?

2.12

♠ A
 ♥ K 4 3
 ♦ A Q 4
 ♣ J 9 5 4 3 2

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

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	3♥
dbl	4♥	4♠	pass
pass	5♥	all pass	

You lead king of clubs to the two, six and eight. What do you make of the club position? What card do you lead next?

2.9

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♦K

♠ 10 9 3

♥ A 3

♦ A J 6

♣ A K Q J 7

♠ A Q 6

♥ Q 9 8 6 5 4

♦ K Q 10 2

♣ —

♠ 5

♥ K J 10 2

♦ 9 5 3

♣ 10 8 5 4 2

♠ K J 8 7 4 2

♥ 7

♦ 8 7 4

♣ 9 6 3

Your need for four tricks and assessment of the diamond situation should point you to the winning continuation. With the jack of diamonds on display, you read partner's three as a count signal. You cannot be sure this time whether this indicates three cards or five. However, to have any hope, you surely need a second diamond trick. This means you place the unseen hands with an original holding of three apiece.

If partner holds the king of spades, you need do nothing special. You can cash your queen of diamonds and sit back. Of course, it is highly probable that the king of spades is on your right. Apart from the fact that the king is likely to be with the length, South's bidding makes little or no sense with five rubbish spades. This being so, you can see only three tricks. You will need a club ruff to beat the contract. This means creating an entry for partner in diamonds.

Although you would like to lead the two as a suit-preference signal, you can ill afford such a luxury. You must lead the ten to leave yourself with a card lower than the nine, which is the highest diamond partner can have.

Yes, declarer could have made the contract by ducking the first trick. Give yourself a bonus point for spotting this.

2.10

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥A

♠ A Q 10 4

♥ J 9 5 4

♦ Q 4

♣ A 9 3

♠ J

♥ A K 10 7 2

♦ K J 8 7

♣ J 7 6

♠ 8 2

♥ 3

♦ 10 9 6 5 2

♣ Q 10 8 4 2

♠ K 9 7 6 5 3

♥ Q 8 6

♦ A 3

♣ K 5

The odds are that the queen of hearts is a true card. Unfortunately, if it is, you surely cannot defeat the contract. South has both opened the bidding and bid game at a point when North had promised only enough to invite game. This leaves your side with far too few high cards if you can make only one heart trick.

Since the three cannot be top of a doubleton, you must hope it is a singleton. Now prospects brighten considerably. You can count a heart ruff as well as a second heart trick to give you three tricks in all. So long as you safeguard your king of diamonds, all should be well. How can you avoid the risk that declarer will dispose of any losing diamond on the fourth round of hearts? I hope you have seen the answer. You need to give partner a ruff while you still have a heart stopper.

This time you can and should give a suit-preference signal. Since you want a diamond back, you lead specifically the ten of hearts. The two will certainly not work because declarer will duck in dummy and East, after ruffing the heart, will obediently lead a club, playing you for the king of clubs. The seven will not work either if dummy ducks again and South plays the six. Such a scenario leaves open the possibility that your seven is your lowest card from A-K-10-8-7.

2.11

Contract: 6♦

Lead: ♣K

♠ K Q 10 9 5 4

♥ Q 8 3

♦ A J 9

♣ Q

♠ 7 3

♥ J 10 6

♦ 7 5 4

♣ A K 8 7 5

♠ J 8 6 2

♥ K 7 4 2

♦ —

♣ 10 9 6 4 2

♠ A

♥ A 9 5

♦ K Q 10 8 6 3 2

♣ J 3

Mention of suit-preference signals has I hope put you on the track for interpreting the six of clubs. With the singleton in dummy, it should be neither an attitude nor a count signal but suit-preference.

A moment or two's reflection should tell you that the six is surely neither partner's highest nor lowest club. This indicates no clear wish for a lead of one major rather than the other. This can only mean that South holds the ace of spades and the ace of hearts. This being so, you must hope the ace of spades is a singleton and that partner holds the king of hearts. How can you take advantage of the situation?

You must continue with the ace of clubs, which forces dummy to ruff. Needing to discard two losing hearts but unable to draw trumps ending in dummy with the 3-0 break, declarer will have to unblock the ace of spades early and hope you follow to three rounds of spades. Your ruff defeats the contract.

What would you lead at trick two playing with someone unlikely to have given you a suit-preference signal? In this case, a heart is much better than a spade. Partner's hypothetical ace of hearts might run away any time you switched to a spade. The ace of spades could only run away after a heart switch if declarer held ace-king doubleton of hearts.

2.12

Contract: 5♥

Lead: ♣K

♠ A
♥ K 4 3
♦ A Q 4
♣ J 9 5 4 3 2

♠ K Q 3 2
♥ 2
♦ J 10 9 2
♣ A K Q 10

♠ 10 9 8 6 5 4
♥ J 8
♦ K 8 7 5
♣ 6

♠ J 7
♥ A Q 10 9 7 6 5
♦ 6 3
♣ 8 7

The six of clubs was the lowest club missing. This tells you it is a singleton. Do you feel tempted to cash a second top club? Watch what happens if you do. Seeing partner signal with the eight of diamonds, you switch to the suit at trick three. After putting up the ace, declarer ruffs a club, draw trumps ending in dummy and ruffs another club. The ace of spades is still on the table as an entry to the long clubs.

You need to switch to the jack of diamonds a trick earlier. Declarer must try the finesse this time. Although partner cannot return a club after scoring the king, your second club winner does not run away and the contract fails.

‘Wouldn’t the switch be silly if declarer had K-x of diamonds or maybe a void?’ I hear you ask. In this case, declarer would indeed be able to discard a club on the third round of diamonds. This will prove expensive if partner has the ace of hearts, when you could beat the contract by cashing your second top clubs.

There are two answers to this. Firstly, the ace of hearts is likely to be with the length, which you know is on your right; similarly, the king of diamonds figures to be with the length, which is probably opposite you. Secondly, partner, if holding the ace of trumps and a singleton on the side, might well have doubled the final contract.

2.13

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

♠ 8 5
 ♥ J 9 3
 ♦ 10 7 6 3
 ♣ K J 8 4

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1NT
pass	2♦ ¹	pass	2♥ ²
pass	3NT ³	all pass	

¹ transfer; at least five hearts² neutral³ suggests 5332 type

You lead the four of clubs and rattle off four club tricks when partner turns up with A-x-x. On the long club go the five of hearts, the two of diamonds and the two of hearts respectively. What do you lead next?

2.14

♠ 7 6 3
 ♥ A Q 6 4
 ♦ K 8 6
 ♣ K Q 3

♠ K 10 9 8
 ♥ J 9 7 3
 ♦ Q 9 3
 ♣ J 8

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♣
pass	1♥	pass	1NT ¹
pass	3NT	all pass	

¹ 12-14

You lead the ten of spades, finding partner with A-J-x. The ace wins the first trick, the jack the second and your king the third. What card do you lead next? You might want to start by thinking how many points partner can have in addition to those you have already seen and what shape you need declarer to be.

2.15

♠ K Q 8
 ♥ J 3
 ♦ A K Q J
 ♣ Q 9 6 4

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

W	N	E	S
—	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	2NT	pass	4♥
all pass			

You lead the jack of spades to the king and ace. Back comes the six to dummy's queen. Then declarer leads the jack of hearts to the seven, four and king. What card should you lead next?

2.16

♠ A J
 ♥ Q 10 9 2
 ♦ 10 9 5 2
 ♣ A J 7

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♦
pass	1♥	pass	2♠
pass	2NT	pass	3NT
pass	4♦	pass	4♥
pass	6♦	all pass	

You lead the ten of clubs, which dummy's ace wins. Declarer cashes the ace-king of hearts, crosses to the ace of spades and discards the queen of clubs on the queen of hearts. Now comes the ten of diamonds off dummy, which runs to your singleton queen. What do you lead next?

2.13

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣4

♠ A Q 9
♥ Q 10 8 7 5
♦ Q J
♣ 10 9 2

♠ J 5
♥ J 9 3
♦ 10 7 6 3
♣ K J 8 4

♠ 10 8 7 2
♥ K 6 4
♦ 9 8 2
♣ A 7 5

♠ K 6 4 3
♥ A 2
♦ A K 5 4
♣ Q 6 3

Suppose you exit passively with a diamond. Now, with the sight of all the hands, can you see what happens? After unblocking the diamonds, declarer comes to hand with the heart ace and finishes the diamonds. As hearts go from dummy, what can East spare on the fourth round?

♠ A Q 9
♥ Q 10
♦ —
♣ —

♠ J 5
♥ J 9
♦ 10
♣ —

♠ 10 8 7 2
♥ K
♦ —
♣ —

♠ K 6 4 3
♥ —
♦ K
♣ —

Might you have foreseen this turn of events? I think you might.

If you have been counting points, you will know partner still has an ace or a king. The neutral heart four discard makes the king possibility by far the most likely. Can you work out which king it must be?

Yes, counting tricks tells you that partner's king needs to be in hearts. If not, declarer surely has at least nine tricks on top. These will be five hearts, three spades and a diamond (if the king is in diamonds) or five hearts, a spade and three diamonds (if the king is in spades).

Perhaps you worked this out and that a heart switch would disrupt the timing for the squeeze but feared declarer still has ♥A-x (when dummy's ten could win the first heart). Suppose South is 3=3=4=3. East would then be 5=3=2=3 and would surely have thrown a spade from five. If South is 4=3=3=3, East started with four diamonds and would probably have discarded the four or five of diamonds rather than the two. You need not consider other distributions mainly because South would hardly pass 3NT with three hearts and a ruffing value. In any event, if holding five diamonds, declarer would have nine top tricks.

2.14

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠10

♠ 7 6 3

♥ A Q 6 4

♦ K 8 6

♣ K Q 3

♠ K 10 9 8

♥ J 9 7 3

♦ Q 9 3

♣ J 8

♠ A J 2

♥ 8 2

♦ J 7 5 2

♣ 10 9 6 5

♠ Q 5 4

♥ K 10 5

♦ A 10 4

♣ A 7 4 2

As on the previous deal, counting points is a good way to start. As well as the ace-jack of spades, partner can have at most two more points if South has the advertised 12-14. Indeed, since you can account for all the queens and all but one jack, partner cannot have two more points. The jack of diamonds is the best for which you can hope.

You can work out the shape as well, at least if you are to have a chance. South must be 3=3=3=4 or maybe 3=2=4=4. A 3=2=3=5 shape would give your opponent more than enough in top tricks.

Even with a four-card club suit declarer can run the suit unless East has 10-9-x-x; 10-x-x-x is not good enough. Why do I say this? Restricted choice principles indicate that you are almost twice as likely to have started with J-x as with J-10-x when your jack drops in two rounds.

Having formed such a clear picture of the unseen hands, can you see what is going to happen if you cash the last spade before exiting with the jack of clubs? Assuming partner correctly discards a diamond on the long spade, the position will be much like this after dummy wins:

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

Declarer cashes three rounds of hearts, on which partner will have to throw a second diamond to keep three clubs. Then it will be your turn to feel the pinch. After unblocking the queen of clubs, declarer comes to hand with the ace of diamonds to cash the ace. To keep the jack of hearts you, too, will have to throw a diamond. With both of you down to a doubleton diamond, dummy's eight takes the last trick. Your opponent does not need to be an expert on squeeze play to manage this. There are a few variations in the timing that work just as well as the cards lie.

You need to refrain from cashing the long spade. What is more, if South holds the red tens, you can ill afford to lead one of those suits either. The correct card to lead at trick four is the jack of clubs.

2.15

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠J

♠ K Q 8

♥ J 3

♦ A K Q J

♣ Q 9 6 4

♠ J 10 9 7 3

♥ K 6

♦ 7 5

♣ K J 10 5

♠ A 6

♥ 7 5 2

♦ 10 8 6 2

♣ A 8 7 3

♠ 5 4 2

♥ A Q 10 9 8 4

♦ 9 4 3

♣ 2

Your side has made two tricks already: the ace of spades and the king of clubs. If, as is likely, partner has failed to cover the jack of hearts through obligation rather than choice, your side cannot make a second trump trick. In this case, your need for declarer not to have the ace of clubs is especially strong. Placing partner, therefore, with this card, it looks like your best chance is to cash the ace and king of clubs. Indeed it is. Still, you must take care not to overlook the second string to your bow. If the return of the six of spades was from A-6, you can make a second spade trick. How can you combine your chances?

Leading the ten of spades is clearly out. If declarer ruffs, you have lost the lead and any hope of scoring two club tricks. You could lead the five of clubs in an effort to give partner a count on the suit. This is better but not by very much. If a second spade rather than a second club is standing up, it is no good having partner on lead. You need to switch to the king of clubs.

A switch to the king asks for a count signal, especially so with the queen on view in dummy. When partner contributes the eight, you know to go back to spades.

2.16

Contract: 6♦

Lead: ♣10

♠ A J
♥ Q 10 9 2
♦ 10 9 5 2
♣ A J 7

♠ 10 8 5 3 2
♥ J 8 5 4
♦ Q
♣ 10 9 5

♠ 7 4
♥ 7 6 3
♦ K 6 3
♣ K 8 6 4 2

♠ K Q 9 6
♥ A K
♦ A J 8 7 4
♣ Q 3

South, who has shown at least four spades and five diamonds in the bidding, has already produced two hearts and two clubs. This gives you a complete count on the distribution. What do you know of the high cards? It seems East holds the king of diamonds, in which case South surely holds the king-queen of spades. The ending must be like this:

♠ J
♥ 10
♦ 9 5 2
♣ J 7

♠ 10 8 5 3
♥ J
♦ —
♣ 9 5

♠ 4
♥ —
♦ K 3
♣ K 8 6 4

♠ K Q 9
♥ —
♦ A J 8 7
♣ —

The king of clubs will not stand up. Nor can partner ruff a spade. Can you see it now? Lead your heart to let partner discard a spade. This leaves declarer locked in hand, unable to repeat the trump finesse.

Notrump Niceties

The scoring table makes it attractive to play in a notrump contract. You need only nine tricks for game compared to ten or eleven in a suit. At matchpoint pairs, the extra points available in a notrump contract are significant whatever the level. Other reasons for playing without any trumps include a lack of an eight-card fit, a very weak potential trump suit or the desire to protect a tenace from the opening lead. At the slam level, you want to play with no trumps if a ruff on the opening lead is the only thing that could beat you or if you have two long suits and do not know which one will break kindly.

In recent years, it has become widely known that a 5332 type facing a 4333 usually produces as many tricks in a notrump contract as it does in a 5-3 trump fit. This has increased the number of notrump contracts played, as has the greater propensity for players to open 1NT when holding a five-card major.

The absence of a trump suit means that both sides possess fewer weapons. Usually this works to the defenders' advantage, especially as they have the opening lead and can start working to set up their long suit. In addition, certain plays, such as elimination play, are much trickier to bring about without the comfort of a trump suit. Declarer's principle advantage is that the defenders normally hold the minority of high cards and so have difficulty maintaining communication with each other.

3.1

♠ 9 6 2
♥ A J 3
♦ Q J 10 8 2
♣ Q 6

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A Q 5 4
♥ K 9 2
♦ 9 3
♣ A K 7 2

West leads the seven of spades and East plays the jack. How do you play to the first two tricks?

3.2

♠ Q J 6 3
♥ A 8 7
♦ J 10
♣ K J 4 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♦
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A K 5
♥ Q J 3
♦ K Q 9 8 2
♣ 7 3

West leads the six of clubs. What are your initial thoughts on how you can come to nine tricks before losing five?

3.3

♠ K 6 3
♥ Q 8
♦ 8 6 5 3 2
♣ 10 8 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A Q 8 5
♥ A J 4
♦ A J
♣ K J 9 3

West leads the six of hearts. What plans do you make for the first couple of tricks?

3.4

♠ K 9 4
♥ A 7 6 2
♦ K
♣ A 9 7 6 3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♦
pass	2♣	pass	2♦
pass	2♥	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A 6 5 2
♥ J 10 3
♦ A J 9 8 7 3
♣ —

West leads the three of spades. I hope that boredom has not set in with all these presumably fourth-highest leads! What do you play to the first three tricks?

3.1

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠7

♠ 9 6 2
♥ A J 3
♦ Q J 10 8 2
♣ Q 6

♠ K 10 8 7 3
♥ 6 5 4
♦ A K 4
♣ 8 5

♠ J
♥ Q 10 8 7
♦ 7 6 5
♣ J 10 9 4 3

♠ A Q 5 4
♥ K 9 2
♦ 9 3
♣ A K 7 2

You should start by ducking the first trick! If the jack of spades is a singleton, as it is in the diagram, East will be unable to continue the suit. This gives you plenty of time to knock out the ace-king of diamonds.

How should you play to the second trick? A club switch you win in hand to conserve dummy's club entry. You then play on diamonds.

Now suppose East has a spade to return. No problem: you go up with the ace. If East can win the first diamond and produce another spade, you can play the queen in confidence. Either the queen holds or the suit has divided 3-3.

Can anything defeat you? If the lead is a singleton and East holds both top diamonds then yes, you go down. This is an unlikely situation in any event, especially given East's pass as dealer. Besides, you can never make the contract on that layout.

3.2

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣6

♠ Q J 6 3

♥ A 8 7

♦ J 10

♣ K J 4 2

♠ 7 2

♥ 9 6 5 2

♦ A 4

♣ Q 10 8 6 5

♠ 10 9 8 4

♥ K 10 4

♦ 7 6 5 3

♣ A 9

♠ A K 5

♥ Q J 3

♦ K Q 9 8 2

♣ 7 3

Taking nine tricks presents no problem. After driving out the ace of diamonds, you can score four diamonds, four spades and one heart at the very least. The danger you need to consider is losing four club tricks and a spade.

Suppose you put up the king of clubs. You go down on the layout shown. East can win with the ace and return the suit. West will overtake and clear the suit and will have enough winners to cash upon coming in with the ace of diamonds to beat you. Playing the king also works poorly if the lead is unexpectedly from a doubleton.

Putting in the jack of clubs involves even more risk. Now you go down when East has either Q-x or A-x and West the ace of diamonds.

The solution is to play low from dummy! East can win cheaply but has no effective return. Indeed, no matter how the clubs lie you will have the suit well enough stopped to prevent the defenders from taking four tricks in the suit. I leave you to work out the details. Obviously, you are not worried about a heart switch either. This gives you a free finesse.

3.3

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥6

♠ K 6 3
♥ Q 8
♦ 8 6 5 3 2
♣ 10 8 2

♠ 10 9 4 2
♥ K 10 7 6 2
♦ K Q
♣ 7 5

♠ J 7
♥ 9 5 3
♦ 10 9 7 4
♣ A Q 6 4

♠ A Q 8 5
♥ A J 4
♦ A J
♣ K J 9 3

If West has led from 10-9-7-6-x, you can make three heart tricks by playing dummy's eight. However, most players would lead the ten from such a holding. In any event, the case for playing the queen is much stronger. For one thing, if the queen of hearts holds and the first club you lose is to the queen, West will be unable to continue hearts safely. This may give you time to knock out the ace of clubs for eight tricks and try for a ninth via a 3-3 spade break or perhaps an endplay.

The actual layout illustrates another reason for going up with the queen. You want entries to dummy to take and repeat the club finesse.

Once the queen holds, lead the eight of clubs from dummy. Whether this holds or loses to the ace, your next club lead off dummy will be the ten. This allows you to make three clubs and your contract whenever East holds the queen of clubs.

What should you do if the king of hearts covers the queen? It looks right to take your ace. You can then ensure the contract if East holds the doubleton queen of clubs. You also have some chances if the spades break 3-3, especially if there is some sort of diamond blockage. Since having East turn up with the king of hearts is not part of your plan, you only need to specify the plays of the queen of hearts and eight of clubs for full marks.

3.4

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠3

♠ K 9 4

♥ A 7 6 2

♦ K

♣ A 9 7 6 3

♠ Q J 8 3

♥ K Q 8 5

♦ 10 2

♣ Q 8 5

♠ 10 7

♥ 9 4

♦ Q 6 5 4

♣ K J 10 4 2

♠ A 6 5 2

♥ J 10 3

♦ A J 9 8 7 3

♣ —

Without bringing in the diamond suit, you are very short of tricks. You have only six on top and little stuffing anywhere else. Unfortunately, entries, or rather a lack of them, are a problem again.

Suppose you win the first trick in dummy, cash the king of diamonds and come to hand with a spade. If diamonds break 3-3 or one of the ten or the queen is in short holding, you can set up the suit by playing ace and another. Of course, unless your J-10-x of hearts miraculously turns out to provide you with an entry, doing so is pointless. In practical terms, you are unlikely to succeed unless someone has ♦Q-10 doubleton.

After putting up the king of spades, you should lead dummy's king of diamonds and overtake it with the ace. What do you do after that? It will do you no good to lead low and drive out a possible doubleton queen. The other defender will have 10-x left for a second stopper. Correct is to lead the jack, hoping for a doubleton ten. Today your luck is in.

3.5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
pass	pass	pass	1♦
pass	1♥	pass	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ J 8 3
♥ A 7 6 5 2
♦ 8 5 3
♣ K 3

♠ A 4 2
♥ J
♦ A J 10 9 4
♣ A Q 9 8

West leads the six of spades. How do you play to the first two tricks?

3.6

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♦
pass	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	3♣	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ A 10 5 3 2
♥ K 10 2
♦ —
♣ 9 7 4 3 2

♠ J
♥ A Q 5
♦ A Q 8 6 4 2
♣ K Q 8

West leads the three of hearts. What is your plan for the first three tricks?

3.7

♠ A K Q
♥ K 5 3
♦ A K 10 3
♣ 10 7 2

W	N	E	S
1♣	dbl	pass	1♥
pass	2♣	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ J 10 6
♥ J 10 7 4
♦ J 6
♣ A 8 6 4

West leads the five of clubs. East wins with the queen and returns the three. Barring a miracle in one of the red suits, you are a trick short: three spades, one heart, three diamonds and a club. Is a defensive slip (such as a failure by West to cover correctly) your best hope?

3.8

♠ A K 7 5 4
♥ A K 10 7 3
♦ 8 6
♣ J

W	N	E	S
—	1♠	pass	2♣
2♦	2♥	pass	2NT
pass	3♥	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ 9 3
♥ 9 2
♦ K Q 5
♣ K Q 10 9 8 3

West leads the seven of diamonds to East's ten. One problem here is how to shut out the diamonds. A bigger one may be the shortage of entries to your hand. Plan the play to the first five tricks.

3.5

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠6

♠ J 8 3

♥ A 7 6 5 2

♦ 8 5 3

♣ K 3

♠ K 9 7 6 5

♥ K 9

♦ Q 7 6

♣ 10 7 4

♠ Q 10

♥ Q 10 8 4 3

♦ K 2

♣ J 6 5 2

♠ A 4 2

♥ J

♦ A J 10 9 4

♣ A Q 9 8

Your first big decision comes on the first trick. Indeed two decisions come on the first trick: your play from dummy and your play from hand.

One option is to put up the jack of spades, hoping it will win and being ready to hold up the ace of spades if East can beat the jack.

A second option is to put up the jack but play the ace if necessary.

One problem with the first option is that, since the diamond finesses go into West's hand, holding up may do you no good. Another snag is that East might shift to a heart. On balance, even allowing for a lead from 6-5 doubleton, the second option is better. Is it best of all?

There is a third option. Play low from dummy and win with the ace. This will block the suit whenever East has ♠Q-x or K-x. You can then cross to the king of clubs and play a diamond to the jack. Later you can use the ace of hearts entry for running the eight of diamonds. Naturally, you use the club entry first to avoid setting up several heart losers.

If we assume West leads the king from K-Q-10-x-x and the ten from Q-10-9-x-x or K-10-9-x-x, we must mainly consider six holdings. The jack is better against K-Q-9-6-5 and K-Q-7-6-5, while the blocking play better handles K-9-7-6-5, Q-9-7-6-5, K-10-7-6-5 and Q-10-7-6-5 (twice as many holdings). When you add in that West might have overcalled or opened with ♠K-Q-x-x-x and something in the red suits or ♠K-Q-x-x, ♦K-Q-x and a little in hearts, the blocking play stands out as best.

3.6

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥3

♠ A 10 5 3 2

♥ K 10 2

♦ —

♣ 9 7 4 3 2

♠ K 7 6

♥ J 9 7 3

♦ K 9 5 3

♣ 10 6

♠ Q 9 8 4

♥ 8 6 4

♦ J 10 7

♣ A J 5

♠ J

♥ A Q 5

♦ A Q 8 6 4 2

♣ K Q 8

To determine your play to the early tricks you should consider your overall plan. Playing on diamonds appears unattractive. Even if the suit breaks 4-3 with the king in the shorter holding, you will need to play on clubs as well. You will need a ninth trick and an entry to the established winners. Playing on clubs must be better.

You should insert dummy's ten of hearts on the first trick. If it holds, continue with a club to the king. You hope this wins, too. Now you want to go back to dummy to lead clubs once more.

Suppose you cross to the king of hearts. East may smartly step in with the ace on the next round of clubs and switch to a spade. This takes out dummy's last entry before you have unblocked the clubs.

Instead, cross to the ace of spades. You do not mind losing three spades and a club. The ten of spades protects you from losing four spade tricks. Now East cannot hop up with the ace of clubs and attack dummy's entry. You can win a heart continuation in hand with the ace, cash the queen of clubs and cross to the king of hearts to run the clubs.

What would you do if East unsportingly covers the ten of hearts with the jack? In this case, you will have to rely on a doubleton ace of clubs onside, playing up to the king and ducking the second round. As before, you use the ace of spades not the king of hearts as the entry to play the first round of clubs from dummy.

3.7

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣3

♠ 9 8 5
♥ A Q 9
♦ Q 9 4
♣ K J 9 5

♠ A K Q
♥ K 5 3
♦ A K 10 3
♣ 10 7 2

♠ 7 4 3 2
♥ 8 6 2
♦ 8 7 5 2
♣ Q 3

♠ J 10 6
♥ J 10 7 4
♦ J 6
♣ A 8 6 4

Clearly, you should put up the ace of clubs to preserve an exit card. You must use this entry to take the diamond finesse and might as well lead the jack (a singleton queen being very unlikely). After West covers you cash dummy's spade and diamond tops to reach this position:

♠ —
♥ A Q 9
♦ —
♣ K J

♠ —
♥ K 5 3
♦ 3
♣ 10

♠ 7
♥ 8 6 2
♦ 8
♣ —

♠ —
♥ J 10 7
♦ —
♣ 8 6

Cross your fingers and lead a club. As you might expect, West does not have the last diamond and, after cashing two clubs, must lead a heart. The defender's best shot is to lead the queen, playing East for the ten. In practice, you have the jack-ten and come to two heart tricks.

3.8

Contract: 3NT

Lead: $\diamond 7$

\spadesuit 10 2
 \heartsuit Q J 4
 \diamond A J 9 7 4 3
 \clubsuit A 6

\spadesuit A K 7 5 4
 \heartsuit A K 10 7 3
 \diamond 8 6
 \clubsuit J

\spadesuit Q J 8 6
 \heartsuit 8 6 5
 \diamond 10 2
 \clubsuit 7 5 4 2

\spadesuit 9 3
 \heartsuit 9 2
 \diamond K Q 5
 \clubsuit K Q 10 9 8 3

Since you expect West to hold the ace of clubs, this is no moment for a hold-up play. You win the diamond, cash dummy's top cards in the majors and lead the jack of clubs, overtaking. If West does not win at once, you continue with high clubs.

\spadesuit —
 \heartsuit Q
 \diamond A J 9 4 3
 \clubsuit A 6

\spadesuit 7 5 4
 \heartsuit 10 7 3
 \diamond 8
 \clubsuit J

\spadesuit Q J
 \heartsuit 8
 \diamond 2
 \clubsuit 7 5 4 2

\spadesuit —
 \heartsuit —
 \diamond K 5
 \clubsuit K Q 10 9 8 3

You hope that any heart or spade West has left is a winner. When this wish comes true the best West can do is to win the first club, cash a heart and put you on play with a club. You have to throw one club and play away from your diamonds at the end but still make nine tricks.

3.9

♠ 7 5 4 2
♥ J 10 9
♦ Q J 6 2
♣ K 5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ Q 3
♥ A K Q
♦ A 8 5 3
♣ A Q 10 8

West leads the ten of spades. East wins with the king, cashes the ace and continues with the jack. You discard a diamond on this and must find another discard when East then produces the eight of spades. What do you throw and what finesses, if any, should you plan to take?

3.10

♠ A K 7 3
♥ J 4
♦ A 10 7 3
♣ A K 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	1♦	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ J 6 2
♥ K 10
♦ K J 4
♣ 9 7 5 4 3

West leads the three of hearts. East wins with the ace and returns the five, West playing the seven under your king. What do you lead to the next trick? What makes a particular card better than any other?

3.11

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1♥	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

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

♠ A 6 3 2
 ♥ K Q 3
 ♦ K 5
 ♣ A 8 6 5

West leads the jack of spades. Many act in haste and repent at leisure. How do you play to the first trick so as not to be one of them?

3.12

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	1♦	pass	1♠
pass	2♣	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A K
 ♥ J
 ♦ A 9 5 3 2
 ♣ K 6 4 3 2

♠ 9 8 7 4 3
 ♥ K Q 6
 ♦ J 7
 ♣ A Q 8

West leads the four of hearts and dummy's singleton jack wins. Can you spot your best play to the next trick?

3.9

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠10

♠ 7 5 4 2

♥ J 10 9

♦ Q J 6 2

♣ K 5

♠ 10 9 6

♥ 7 5 4 2

♦ 9 7

♣ J 7 6 2

♠ A K J 8

♥ 8 6 3

♦ K 10 4

♣ 9 4 3

♠ Q 3

♥ A K Q

♦ A 8 5 3

♣ A Q 10 8

Although you must make the discard before you tackle the minors, it makes sense to consider your plans there before playing to the current trick. Since your best chance of coming to nine tricks involves making four club tricks, you do not want to discard a club. If you want to keep open the chance of ♦10-9 doubleton with West as well, you will need to save your three remaining diamonds and discard a heart. You can afford to block the hearts so long as either East does not find the club switch or you manage to win the first club in your hand. Before you go down this route, you should think how you intend to play the clubs.

Can you see why West figures to hold the jack of clubs? East, who passed as dealer and who has turned up with ♠A-K-J-8, will surely need to have the king of diamonds. These 11 points are almost enough to open. The jack of clubs in addition would surely tip the balance.

Since it is more likely that East has the nine of clubs than that the jack is short, your correct play is a backward finesse: lead the ten to force West to cover and later finesse the eight. This means you can ill afford to block the hearts and must discard a diamond, giving up on the 10-9 doubleton possibility.

You win the heart switch and lead the ten of clubs as planned. When West covers and dummy wins, you lead the queen of diamonds. East covers but the jack is the entry for you to finesse the eight of clubs.

3.10

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥3

♠ A K 7 3

♥ J 4

♦ A 10 7 3

♣ A K 2

♠ 10 4

♥ Q 8 7 3

♦ Q 9 6 5

♣ J 8 6

♠ Q 9 8 5

♥ A 9 6 5 2

♦ 8 2

♣ Q 10

♠ J 6 2

♥ K 10

♦ K J 4

♣ 9 7 5 4 3

You should lead the jack of diamonds to the next trick. Why should you play on diamonds? To set up the long clubs involves losing the lead, which you can ill afford to do with the heart suit ready to run against you. Why lead specifically the jack? Study the diagram and project the play forward a couple of tricks. This might tell you the answer.

After West covers the jack with the queen, you win in dummy with the ace and return the three. Up pops the eight, enabling you to win with the king and finesse the seven on the third round. Finessing the seven is clearly right because East is twice as likely to hold 8-x or 9-x as 9-8-x. Are you still wondering why I suggest playing West for the queen?

The play to the first two tricks makes it more likely that East is the one with five hearts. When you also consider that West might have led a spade with length in both majors, or led a club if holding Q-J-10-x, you can infer that West has more room for the queen of diamonds than East.

Take half marks for the alternative line of cashing two top clubs with a view to playing anyone with four clubs for the queen of diamonds. Yes, you read that right: play the long club hand to hold the missing queen. If diamonds are 3-3, it is a toss up who has the queen. If, however, they break 4-2, it may well do you no good to find someone with Q-x-x-x. Unless the queen of spades comes down in two rounds, you need four diamond tricks. For this, you to find need a Q-x or Q-x-x somewhere.

3.11

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠J

♠ Q 7

♥ A 10

♦ 10 7 4 2

♣ Q J 10 9 3

♠ J 10 9 8 4

♥ 5 4

♦ 9 8 6

♣ K 7 2

♠ K 5

♥ J 9 8 7 6 2

♦ A Q J 3

♣ 4

♠ A 6 3 2

♥ K Q 3

♦ K 5

♣ A 8 6 5

If East holds the king of clubs, you almost certainly have nine tricks. For the time being, you mentally place this card with West. In this case, East must hold the king of spades and the ace of diamonds. With the high cards placed like this, you can guarantee to stop the defenders from scoring four spades and a club. How do you go about it?

You play low from dummy and win in hand with the ace. If spades are 5-2, East's presumed king will block the suit. If they are 4-3, you can only ever lose three spade tricks. Alternatively, if West holds the king of spades, when you will not get to block the suit, you can be sure that the club finesse will succeed. This is more than adequate recompense.

With the cards as in the diagram, you go down if you put dummy's queen whether or not you allow the king of spades to hold. If you duck the king, East can beat you either by returning a spade or by switching to the three of diamonds.

You also go down if you duck the first trick in both hands. You will have to duck the second spade as well, after which East can beat you by leading any diamond.

3.12

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥4

♠ A K

♥ J

♦ A 9 5 3 2

♣ K 6 4 3 2

♠ J 10 5 2

♥ A 10 8 4 3 2

♦ 8 4

♣ 10

♠ Q 6

♥ 9 7 5

♦ K Q 10 6

♣ J 9 7 5

♠ 9 8 7 4 3

♥ K Q 6

♦ J 7

♣ A Q 8

On a normal 3-2 club break, you can count nine easy tricks: two spades, a diamond, five clubs and the heart already made. Indeed, with two entries to hand and all suits stopped, you will have time to set up a second heart winner for an overtrick.

Now suppose clubs break 4-1. If you play four rounds of the suit, West will have plenty of time to signal that the hearts are not running. This means that the defenders will not helpfully continue hearts but will instead play on dummy's suits. Unable to make a second heart trick you will finish one down.

Can you see how to guarantee the contract unless clubs are 5-0? At the second trick, play a club to the eight (or duck if East plays a card higher than the eight). At worst West wins and switches to a diamond. You play low from dummy and can win the next round of diamonds. You do not mind if you lose two diamonds, one heart and a club. With the ace and queen of clubs still in your hand, you can be sure of setting up and cashing a second heart winner for your ninth trick.

3.13

♠ A K 9 2
♥ J 8
♦ K 9 3
♣ A 9 6 3

W	N	E	S
1NT ¹	dbl	2♥ ²	pass ³
pass	dbl ⁴	pass	3NT ⁵
all pass			

¹ 12-14

² transfer showing five spades

³ expecting to have another bid

⁴ takeout this time

⁵ your side alone is vulnerable

♠ Q 5
♥ A 10 5 3
♦ Q 7 6 5 2
♣ Q 7

West leads the four of hearts after an unusual auction. You decide to play low from dummy and are pleased to see East produce the queen. Do you win this trick? When you get in, how do you play the diamonds?

3.14

♠ A J 6 5 2
♥ 7 4 2
♦ Q 10 4
♣ 10 3

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♣
1♥	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ 9 4 3
♥ A Q 10
♦ A K 3
♣ K Q 5 4

West lead of the six of hearts runs round to your ten. Your bidding has protected your heart tenace. Can you do the same with your play?

3.15

♠ A J 10 8
♥ J 5
♦ Q J 2
♣ A 5 4 2

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ K Q
♥ A K 8
♦ 9 8 7 5
♣ Q 8 6 3

West cashes the ace-king of diamonds and continues with the six on the third round. East follows low once before discarding one low card from each major. If East has precisely J-10 or J-10-9 of clubs, you can set up a club without letting West in. Can you think of anything better?

3.16

♠ J 3
♥ 7 2
♦ A K Q 8 7 2
♣ 10 8 7

W	N	E	S
—	—	pass	1♣
pass	1♦	dbl	rdbl
pass	pass	1♠	pass
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ A 9 7 6
♥ A K Q 6
♦ —
♣ Q J 9 6 3

West leads the eight of spades. This, together with East's initial pass and subsequent actions give you a blueprint of the layout. If East's top club is a singleton, life will be easy. If not, is it just a matter of holding up in spades so that West cannot win the first club and continue spades?

3.13

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥4

♠ A K 9 2

♥ J 8

♦ K 9 3

♣ A 9 6 3

♠ 10 8

♥ K 9 7 4 2

♦ A J 8

♣ K J 5

♠ J 7 6 4 3

♥ Q 6

♦ 10 4

♣ 10 8 4 2

♠ Q 5

♥ A 10 5 3

♦ Q 7 6 5 2

♣ Q 7

Both the bidding and the lead tell you that East has a second heart. This makes ducking the first trick pointless. In any case, you scarcely relish a club switch through your doubleton queen.

Having taken the ace of hearts you must decide how to play the diamond suit. Suppose you lead low to the king and duck on the way back. This seems the natural thing to do as you are in hand and place West with the ace of diamonds on the bidding. If the ace appears on the second round, you will surely come to ten tricks: two hearts, a club, four diamonds and three spades. Unfortunately, on the actual layout, West wins with the jack and clears the hearts. Eventually you will lose three heart tricks and two diamonds.

Since you do not mind losing two diamond tricks if it is East who wins the second one, can you see a better way to play the suit? You should advance the queen of diamonds at trick two. West must win and can clear the hearts. However, now you can play a diamond to the nine to duck the trick into the safe East hand.

Give yourself a bonus point if you have seen what to do if West switches to a spade at trick three. You should win in dummy, cash the king of diamonds and clear the suit. West may play a second spade when in again but you can run the diamonds and eventually score either the ten of hearts or the queen of clubs.

3.14

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥6

♠ A J 6 5 2

♥ 7 4 2

♦ Q 10 4

♣ 10 3

♠ K 10 7

♥ K J 8 6 3

♦ J 6 2

♣ A 7

♠ Q 8

♥ 9 5

♦ 9 8 7 5

♣ J 9 8 6 2

♠ 9 4 3

♥ A Q 10

♦ A K 3

♣ K Q 5 4

The theme of avoidance recurs on this deal. You need to set up the spades, trying if possible to avoid a heart lead from East through your ace-queen. If this fails, you might try to lose any second spade loser to East, hoping that West does not have the ace of clubs as an entry.

Did you think of trying to cater for K-x or Q-x with West? If you lead towards the ace and the king or queen pops up, you duck. If not, you oblige West to win the second round. The snag with this is that you will need a club trick as well as three spades to make the contract. You will not have time for the club if West exits passively with a diamond when first in and East returns a heart while West still has the ace of clubs.

Instead, you should aim to lose both spade tricks to West. Lead the nine, planning to run it if not covered. If the nine does run to the queen, a subsequent finesse of the jack means you make four spade tricks and have no need of a club trick. If West plays the ten on the nine, you duck. You can win a diamond exit in your hand, play a spade to the ace and clear the spades. Again, it is West who wins.

Yes, the recommended line fails if East holds ♠10-x or, if West knows to play high from a doubleton K-10 or Q-10, to those holdings as well. You simply cannot cater for everything!

3.15

Contract: 3NT

Lead: \diamond A

\spadesuit A J 10 8

\heartsuit J 5

\diamond Q J 2

\clubsuit A 5 4 2

\spadesuit 7 5

\heartsuit Q 10 6 4

\diamond A K 10 6 3

\clubsuit K 9

\spadesuit 9 6 4 3 2

\heartsuit 9 7 3 2

\diamond 4

\clubsuit J 10 7

\spadesuit K Q

\heartsuit A K 8

\diamond 9 8 7 5

\clubsuit Q 8 6 3

The 5-1 diamond break coupled with the knowledge that West holds the king of clubs means that you cannot easily establish a ninth trick. Best is to go for a throw-in. Start by cashing four rounds of spades.

\spadesuit J

\heartsuit J 5

\diamond —

\clubsuit A 5 4 2

\spadesuit —

\heartsuit Q 10 6

\diamond 10 3

\clubsuit K 9

\spadesuit 9

\heartsuit 9 7 2

\diamond —

\clubsuit J 10 7

\spadesuit —

\heartsuit A K 8

\diamond 9

\clubsuit Q 8 6

When you throw a heart, West faces an uncomfortable discard. A club allows you to cash the ace and drop the king. A diamond allows you to give up a club to set up the queen. A heart does not cost directly but is still no good. You cash the ace-king of hearts and exit with your last diamond. West must lead from the king of clubs at trick twelve.

3.16

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠8

♠ J 3

♥ 7 2

♦ A K Q 8 7 2

♣ 10 8 7

♠ 8 2

♥ 9 8 5

♦ J 9 6 4 3

♣ K 5 4

♠ K Q 10 5 4

♥ J 10 4 3

♦ 10 5

♣ A 2

♠ A 9 7 6

♥ A K Q 6

♦ —

♣ Q J 9 6 3

Suppose you allow East to win the first trick with the ten. You can then win the next spade cheaply and play on clubs. Whichever defender wins the first round of clubs, the contract is safe: West has no more spades and you still have a spade stopper. Even if they both duck the first club, you can succeed in a number of ways. Simplest perhaps is to cash one top diamond (discarding your low heart) before reverting to clubs. You will lose two clubs and two spades but nothing else.

Have you seen the snag yet? Since when has ducking been the exclusive province of declarer? Instead of playing the ten, East should duck the first trick. This forces you to use a stopper at once. When you play on clubs West will fly in with king to clear the spades while East still has the ace of clubs as an entry. Admittedly, they would not be able to do this if clubs were 4-1 and, if West's big club were the ace rather than the king, it would not be so easy to play it on the first round.

If East is going to force you to win the first round of spades anyway, can you see a better way to play? You should put up dummy's jack to give you an entry to dummy. Can you see the benefit of this? You can cash some diamonds to exert pressure on East before you embark on the clubs. Trying to protect three suits – something you know is the case because of the takeout double – it will prove very hard to defend the position. This is the situation as you cash the third round of diamonds:

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

Suppose East discards a spade and you a club. In this case, you play a club, which West must win to give you a problem. If West carries on with spades, you simply knock out the ace of clubs, losing two spades and two clubs. Alternatively, if West cashes a diamond or two first, East must throw spades to avoid giving you a trick directly. The upshot is that the defenders make only two tricks between the pointed suits (spades and diamonds) whatever West does. Note that you wait to discard your low heart on the last defensive winner in the pointed suits.

Now suppose East discards a club on the third round of diamonds. This gives you an easier time. This time you can throw a heart and set up the clubs.

Finally, if East discards a heart on the third round of diamonds, again you make the contract with ease. You discard a club, of course, and do best to continue with a club. East might just have started with 5-5 in the majors and so have reduced to a singleton club. In this case, you can set up the clubs. In practice, when East produces a small club, you know your small heart is a winner. Two spades, four hearts and three diamonds give you the nine tricks you need for the contract.

Take a normal 10 marks for playing the jack of spades followed by three rounds of diamonds. Give yourself a bonus of 2 if you worked out how to handle a spade discard from East.

Riveting Returns

After dummy comes down the single most important defensive play must be the first lead by the defender not originally on lead. When you are in this position, you have many issues to consider. Unless perhaps the play to the first trick has left you with a tenace in the suit, you must think whether to return it. You know that notrump contracts often involve a race between the two sides to set up their long suits. This may well make it right to continue the suit. The knowledge that breaking a new suit frequently blows a trick provides another reason to stick with the original suit.

At times, you can tell that the opening lead has not hit declarer's weak spot. In this case, one of the first things to do is decide whether you need to defend actively or passively.

A threatening suit in dummy or the belief that the cards sit well for declarer may suggest a bold move, hoping to catch partner with just the right cards. Maybe you need to set up a winner quickly or cash out. Perhaps you need to knock out an entry or attack the opposing trump holding – for instance making declarer ruff or drawing dummy's trumps.

Alternatively, if it looks like declarer's finesses are wrong and suits are breaking badly, you may just want to sit back and avoid giving anything away. A flat dummy or a dummy with a long weak suit and few entries generally indicate that you should defend passively.

If you are paying close attention to what is going on, you may be able to place many of the unseen cards from the bidding, the dummy and the play to the first few tricks. This might enable you to bring off a spectacular switch or return.

There is so much to think about – far more than I can do justice to in a single page. The key message is that your chance to direct or redirect the course of the play is one to relish not rush.

4.1

♠ J 9 6 3
♥ Q
♦ Q 4
♣ A K Q J 7 3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>	♠ A Q 10 8
—	1♣	pass	1♥	♥ 8 5 4
pass	1♠	pass	2NT	♦ A 6 3
pass	3NT	all pass		♣ 8 6 2

Partner leads the ten of diamonds. Playing standard leads this might be from a ten-high suit or an interior sequence.

What do you play on the first trick after dummy plays low? If you put up the ace, what do you return?

4.2

♠ A 9
♥ Q 10 8
♦ Q 10 7 6 5 3
♣ A Q

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>	♠ K J 7 4
—	—	—	pass	♥ 5 3 2
pass	1♦	pass	2NT	♦ K J 8
pass	3NT	all pass		♣ K J 4

Partner leads the four of hearts to the eight, two and six. A diamond goes to the eight, ace and nine. On the next diamond partner discards the two of spades and you win. Which card do you return?

4.3

♠ K J 8
♥ J 6
♦ K J 10 5 3
♣ A K 10

W	N	E	S
2♥ *	dbl	4♥	4♠
all pass			

♠ 6 5 2
♥ Q 10 9 2
♦ A Q
♣ Q 8 5 4

* weak

Partner leads the ace of hearts and you play the ten, judging this as a situation when count is more important than attitude. Partner seems to be in tune with you and switches to the nine of clubs. After taking the ace, declarer draws three rounds of trumps ending in hand; partner follows low twice before discarding the three of hearts. Then comes a diamond; this goes to the two, jack and queen. What do you do now?

4.4

♠ A Q 10 7 2
♥ J 5
♦ 4 2
♣ J 10 7 5

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♦
pass	1♠	pass	3♣
pass	4♣	pass	4♦ *
pass	4♠ *	pass	5♣
all pass			

♠ 8 4
♥ A K 7 6 3
♦ 9 3
♣ Q 8 4 3

* controls – probably first-round

Partner leads the two of hearts, which is good news as it means two heart tricks are available. What is your plan for the first four tricks?

4.1

Contract: 3NT

Lead: \diamond 10

\spadesuit J 9 6 3

\heartsuit Q

\diamond Q 4

\clubsuit A K Q J 7 3

\spadesuit K 2

\heartsuit J 7 6 3 2

\diamond 10 9 8 2

\clubsuit 9 4

\spadesuit A Q 10 8

\heartsuit 8 5 4

\diamond A 6 3

\clubsuit 8 6 2

\spadesuit 7 5 4

\heartsuit A K 10 9

\diamond K J 7 5

\clubsuit 10 5

You must first decide whether the lead is from the king. If it is then, since South would not have jumped to 2NT with J-x of diamonds for a stopper or with only nine points, the position is hopeless. Your side can make two diamonds and a spade but little else. It is a similar story if partner has a high heart instead of the king of diamonds. This gives declarer six club tricks together with the potential for two diamonds, at least one heart and a spade.

The most useful value partner might have is the king of spades. In this case, your side can take the first five tricks. You should put up the ace of diamonds and return the eight of spades to cater for a layout like the one shown above. Partner wins with the king and returns a spade, allowing you to make the ace, queen and ten.

You may wish to note that if you placed South with K-x of spades and partner with an entry, you would play the ace of spades followed by a low one. There is often no single right way to handle a combination.

4.2

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥4

♠ 8 5 3 2

♥ K 9 7 4

♦ 9

♣ 9 7 3 2

♠ A 9

♥ Q 10 8

♦ Q 10 7 6 5 3

♣ A Q

♠ K J 7 4

♥ 5 3 2

♦ K J 8

♣ K J 4

♠ Q 10 6

♥ A J 6

♦ A 4 2

♣ 10 8 6 5

Without the discard, you might have felt tempted to switch to a spade. If you find partner with queen, your side might score three spades and two diamonds. As it is, only a heart return makes sense. Normal is to return the higher of your remaining cards. What is the point of this here? Your two at trick one already gave partner the count, which you should show count when your attitude is clear. Even if partner might not work this out, it is obvious you do not play the two first time from A-5-3-2. The correct return is the three of hearts, which you hope that your partner reads as suit-preference for clubs.

Declarer has to hold up the ace of hearts to shut out the long card. After partner wins and leads a club, your side makes two tricks in each minor as well as the heart.

Naturally, if you held K-Q-x-x of spades and weaker clubs, you would return your higher heart and hope partner reads it as showing values in the high-ranking spade suit.

4.3

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥A

♠ K J 8

♥ J 6

♦ K J 10 5 3

♣ A K 10

♠ 9 3

♥ A K 8 7 5 3

♦ 8 4 2

♣ J 9

♠ 6 5 2

♥ Q 10 9 2

♦ A Q

♣ Q 8 5 4

♠ A Q 10 7 4

♥ 4

♦ 9 7 6

♣ 7 6 3 2

If you want to be sure of getting off play safely, you can cash your ace of diamonds before leading a heart. Can this beat the contract?

You know declarer has five trump tricks (partner showed out on the third round). These, the two top clubs and three diamond tricks will bring the total to ten. So defending in the above manner succeeds only if South holds a second heart. You know this is unlikely both from the bidding and from partner's reluctance to continue hearts. You must return a low club while you still have the ace of diamonds. So long as partner holds the jack, this will set up your queen.

If you found this, now is the time for some mutual congratulations. Partner has two made good plays. Can you tell me what they are? The first was switching to the nine of clubs. It would have been no good leading the jack – then you would have been unable to continue the suit. The second was discarding the three of hearts. Since, as explained above, the heart position was clear, a count or attitude discard would make little sense. The three of hearts, being partner's lowest heart, should only mean one thing: a suit-preference signal for clubs.

4.4

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♥2

♠ A Q 10 7 2

♥ J 5

♦ 4 2

♣ J 10 7 5

♠ K J 9 6 3

♥ 10 8 4 2

♦ 10 7 6 5

♣ —

♠ 8 4

♥ A K 7 6 3

♦ 9 3

♣ Q 8 4 3

♠ 5

♥ Q 9

♦ A K Q J 8

♣ A K 9 6 2

Without undertaking a great deal of analysis, you should manage to work out how to play to the first two tricks: cash your top hearts. At the very worst South holds ♥Q-x-x and lacks the king of diamonds. Even then, after dummy has discarded a diamond on the third round of hearts, declarer cannot pick up partner's king of diamonds on a ruffing finesse. This is because you can overruff on the third round of diamonds. Much more likely, declarer has a doubleton heart in each hand and would love to discard one if given half the chance.

One glance at your trump holding should pinpoint the best chance of a third defensive trick: in trumps. However, unless partner has a trump and it is the nine, declarer can pick up the suit by finessing. Moreover, the position will become marked if declarer lays down a top trump and West shows out. Can you see how you might prevent this?

Switch to a spade at the third trick. After dummy wins and the jack of clubs comes next, you know what to do: duck smoothly. For one thing, you want to leave declarer a guess: fans of 'eight ever, nine never' will overtake with a top club and go down. For another, you want to retain the queen in case declarer has any plans to ruff a diamond in dummy.

4.5

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

W	N	E	S
3♥	pass	pass	5♦
all pass			

♠ K J 8 4 2
 ♥ Q 2
 ♦ A 9
 ♣ 10 9 6 5

Partner leads the nine of spades, which runs to the queen. Declarer leads a low diamond to the jack, partner discarding the other red jack. Do you agree with winning this trick? What do you return?

4.6

♠ 10 9 6 5
 ♥ A 8 5 3
 ♦ A Q 9
 ♣ 8 3

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♣
pass	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

♠ 8 2
 ♥ K J 7
 ♦ K 7 6 5 2
 ♣ 9 7 2

Partner leads the jack of diamonds, which the ace wins. Declarer then plays three top trumps. All follow low to two rounds; on the third, you throw a diamond and partner drops the jack. Now comes a diamond to the queen, on which partner throws the heart two. Do you win this trick? When you get in, what do you lead?

4.7

♠ Q 7 2
♥ 7 6 2
♦ 7 4 3
♣ A Q 9 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ J 10 5
♥ Q J 9 5
♦ A 8 2
♣ 7 5 3

Partner leads the jack of diamonds. You put up the ace and collect the queen on your left. What do you return?

4.8

♠ K Q J 5
♥ K Q 7 5 3
♦ 8 4
♣ K 3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♦
pass	1♥	pass	2♦
pass	2♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A 9 6 3
♥ A 9
♦ 9 6 3 2
♣ A Q 9

Partner leads the two of clubs, dummy plays low and your queen wins.

If partner has the jack of clubs, you can cash the first five or maybe six tricks. If not, how can you stop declarer from scoring six diamond tricks, a heart, a couple of spades and maybe a club as well?

4.5

Contract: 5♦

Lead: ♠9

♠ 10 6 5 3

♥ 8 5

♦ J 10

♣ A K Q 8 3

♠ 9 7

♥ A J 10 9 7 6 3

♦ —

♣ J 7 4 2

♠ K J 8 4 2

♥ Q 2

♦ A 9

♣ 10 9 6 5

♠ A Q

♥ K 4

♦ K Q 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

♣ —

You should take the ace of diamonds on the first round. In general, it is a bad idea to hang on to a master trump, which declarer has no need to draw, rather than a low one. Here you have an even better reason to take the ace. It very much looks like declarer is void in clubs. You sense the danger of heart discards on dummy's top clubs.

At the table, East hastened to switch to the queen of hearts. Is this what you did? You may get away with it playing with an unimaginative partner. Your queen of hearts will hold and you can continue the suit to partner's ace. Unfortunately, if partner defends correctly, leading the queen lets through the contract. Why is this?

Knowing you would have no choice but to lead the queen of hearts if you had a singleton, partner should overtake with the ace and try to give you a ruff. If you trade the two of hearts and the two of diamonds in the diagram, you should see the necessity of this. If the singleton queen of hearts wins, you would be powerless to stop declarer from reaching dummy with the ten of diamonds and throwing two hearts on the clubs.

Leading the two of hearts may fool partner into thinking you have a singleton heart. Luckily, you do not care. If declarer plays the king, West will win and try to give you a ruff, in which case your queen will win. If declarer ducks, it will be obvious that a second round will stand up. Either way, so long as partner holds the ace, you beat the contract.

4.6

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♦J

♠ 10 9 6 5

♥ A 8 5 3

♦ A Q 9

♣ 8 3

♠ J 4 3

♥ 10 9 6 4 2

♦ J

♣ A Q 6 4

♠ 8 2

♥ K J 7

♦ K 7 6 5 2

♣ 9 7 2

♠ A K Q 7

♥ Q

♦ 10 8 4 3

♣ K J 10 5

On the previous deal, the freak distribution gave you a complete count at trick two. This time you have had to wait a bit longer.

Declarer has shown up with four spades and four diamonds (West showed out on the second round) and, having bid clubs, must hold four cards there as well. You can judge that the unseen hands have four clubs each. Putting a fifth club with South would give West a sixth heart and surely reason enough to have made some sort of overcall.

While it may look tempting to lead a club up to the weakness in dummy, you should appreciate that two club tricks and a diamond are not going to be enough to beat the contract. Instead, you should attack the heart weakness you have identified in declarer's hand. To cater for a bare queen – there really is one this time – you should switch to the king. After this runs to the ace, your jack on the second round of hearts will force out declarer's last trump. This will leave partner with a winner to cash upon getting in for the second time in clubs.

Do I hear you say that we are still on the previous trick? You are quite right. Since you know what to do and definitely do not want West to throw a second heart, take your king of diamonds at once.

4.7

Contract: 3NT

Lead: \diamond J

\spadesuit Q 7 2
 \heartsuit 7 6 2
 \diamond 7 4 3
 \clubsuit A Q 9 2

\spadesuit K 9 6 4
 \heartsuit 10 3
 \diamond J 10 9 6 5
 \clubsuit 8 4

\spadesuit J 10 5
 \heartsuit Q J 9 5
 \diamond A 8 2
 \clubsuit 7 5 3

\spadesuit A 8 3
 \heartsuit A K 8 4
 \diamond K Q
 \clubsuit K J 10 6

Since the fall of the queen places South with \diamond K-Q doubleton, you do not need to return the eight to clarify the position. Can you see what might happen if you do? Seeing that playing up to the queen of spades is hopeless and that the chance of safely setting up a heart is remote, declarer goes for a throw in. The line is to take the top hearts followed by four rounds of clubs to end in dummy; then exit with a diamond:

\spadesuit Q 7 2
 \heartsuit 7
 \diamond 7
 \clubsuit —

\spadesuit K 9
 \heartsuit —
 \diamond 10 9 5
 \clubsuit —

\spadesuit J 10
 \heartsuit J 9
 \diamond 2
 \clubsuit —

\spadesuit A 8 3
 \heartsuit 8 4
 \diamond —
 \clubsuit —

Partner makes three diamonds but must then lead into the split spade tenace. To avoid this debacle you return the two of diamonds.

4.8

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣2

♠ K Q J 5

♥ K Q 7 5 3

♦ 8 4

♣ K 3

♠ 10 8 7 2

♥ J 8 4 2

♦ 7

♣ 10 7 6 2

♠ A 9 6 3

♥ A 9

♦ 9 6 3 2

♣ A Q 9

♠ 4

♥ 10 6

♦ A K Q J 10 5

♣ J 8 5 4

Declarer is likely to hold the jack of clubs or the king might have gone up. In any event, there is no rush to play on clubs. You have all suits stopped apart from diamonds and will have another chance to play clubs. Can you identify a more pressing need?

If partner lacks the jack of clubs, there are only four obvious tricks for your side. In this case, you need to focus on stopping declarer from making nine by disrupting the opposing communications. To work out how best to do this you should think about declarer's shape.

South surely has six diamonds (not to rebid 2♣) so will have only three cards in the majors. If these are all spades, which seems unlikely anyway, you can do nothing about it. They cannot all be hearts or you would be defending a heart contract. So assume they are 2-1 one way or the other. Since you can see more spades than hearts, South figures to hold a singleton spade and a doubleton heart.

The winning return is the nine of hearts. Dummy wins this trick but is then dead. When you get back in, you can cash all your aces before exiting with a club to leave declarer locked in hand. The ten of clubs takes the setting trick.

Take 7 out of 10 for a low spade switch; this works if South is 2=1=6=4. Take 3 out of 10 for cashing your three aces before exiting with a club; this beats the contract if South is 1=1=7=4.

4.9

♠ K Q 7 2
♥ Q 10 6 4
♦ A J 8 6
♣ J

W	N	E	S
—	1♦	1♥	1♠ *
pass	2♠	dbl	pass
3♣	3♠	all pass	

♠ 6
♥ A K 9 7 5 3
♦ Q 10 3
♣ A Q 2

* at least five spades

Partner leads the two of hearts and your king wins as South drops the jack. What do you return? What will you continue with if you stay on lead or, if you lose the lead, next time you get in?

4.10

♠ 8 2
♥ 8 3
♦ J 8 5 3 2
♣ J 7 3 2

W	N	E	S
1♣	pass	2♣	dbl
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
all pass			

♠ K 6
♥ J 10 5
♦ Q 7 4
♣ Q 10 8 6 4

Partner leads the five of clubs. You toy with playing the four but fear this might look like a suit-preference signal for diamonds and settle for the ten. As expected the presumably singleton ace wins. Declarer leads the two of hearts from hand, which goes to the seven and three. Do you overtake? If you do, what card do you lead next?

4.11

♠ 10 3 2
♥ 10 9 4
♦ J
♣ A Q J 8 6 3

W	N	E	S
—	—	1♠	dbl
pass	3♣	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

♠ A K Q J 5
♥ 6 3
♦ 9 6 5
♣ K 10 4

Partner leads the six of spades to your jack. You cash the queen and see partner complete a high-low with the four. You continue with the king and partner discards the three of diamonds. How do you continue?

4.12

♠ A Q 7 2
♥ 4
♦ 9 6 3
♣ A Q 10 9 5

W	N	E	S
2♥ *	dbl	4♥	4♠
all pass			

♠ 10 4
♥ A 10 6 3
♦ K Q 10 8 2
♣ K 2

* weak

Partner leads the king of hearts. Which heart do you play on this? If you say the ace, what do you lead at trick two?

4.9

Contract: 3♠

Lead: ♥2

♠ K Q 7 2

♥ Q 10 6 4

♦ A J 8 6

♣ J

♠ 10 9 4

♥ 2

♦ K 9 4

♣ 9 8 7 6 5 4

♠ 6

♥ A K 9 7 5 3

♦ Q 10 3

♣ A Q 2

♠ A J 8 5 3

♥ J 8

♦ 7 5 2

♣ K 10 3

You should return the three of hearts, a suit-preference signal for a club return. Then, when you come in with your ace of clubs, you play back another low heart. How should you arrive at this answer?

Since the lead is clearly a singleton, you can count three defensive tricks: two hearts and a club. On the bidding you can hope partner holds the ace of spades or the king of diamonds. This will give you a fourth trick. If you can stop declarer from taking discards on dummy's hearts, a slow diamond winner may well be the fifth.

If partner holds the ace of spades, it will probably work to cash the ace of hearts at trick two and continue the suit. Declarer will have to ruff high at trick three. Then partner, after discarding on this, can later take the ace of spades and put you in with a club to play a fourth round. I say probably because declarer might hold a doubleton diamond and be able to ruff down your queen or hold K-10-x of clubs and bring off a squeeze.

Cashing the ace of hearts before leading the two proves somewhat less effective if partner has the king of diamonds. Declarer may well be able to ruff high and draw trumps to score five trump tricks, a ruff, a heart, a diamond and the king of clubs.

4.10

Contract: 2♠

Lead: ♣5

♠ 8 2

♥ 8 3

♦ J 8 5 3 2

♣ J 7 3 2

♠ J 9 3

♥ A Q 7 6

♦ K 10 6

♣ K 9 5

♠ K 6

♥ J 10 5

♦ Q 7 4

♣ Q 10 8 6 4

♠ A Q 10 7 5 4

♥ K 9 4 2

♦ A 9

♣ A

The bidding combined with this play on dummy's doubleton leaves little doubt about declarer's intentions. My partner, Simon Richards from Cowbridge, who sat East, knew what to do. He overtook the heart with the ten and switched to the six of spades. Declarer finessed the queen and ducked a second heart. We could now play a second round of trumps and eventually declarer lost four hearts, a trump and a diamond.

Do you see why it would not work for Simon to let me win the first round of hearts and play a trump? To avoid butchering our trump trick I must lead low and East must put up the king. Unfortunately, this allows declarer to escape by winning with the ace and laying down the king of hearts. I win with the ace but cannot continue trumps without leading into the ace-ten and so losing my jack. For the same reason it would be no good for East to win the first heart and switch to the king of spades.

As an aside, you may wish to note that the low spade switch has an added attraction at matchpoint pairs because it may save an overtrick. Declarer may hold the ace of hearts and ♠A-Q-J-x-x-x and be reluctant to finesse for fear that West can win with the king and play a second round of trumps.

4.11

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠6

♠ 10 3 2

♥ 10 9 4

♦ J

♣ A Q J 8 6 3

♠ 6 4

♥ J 8 5

♦ 10 8 7 4 3

♣ 9 7 5

♠ A K Q J 5

♥ 6 3

♦ 9 6 5

♣ K 10 4

♠ 9 8 7

♥ A K Q 7 2

♦ A K Q 2

♣ 2

Again, I held the West cards and this time my partner was Madeleine Lawson from Basingstoke. She studied the position for a few moments before emerging with a card I wanted to see: a fourth spade. Declarer deliberated whether to ruff high or low but, as you can see from the diagram, had no winning play.

How did she find this play? Superficially it involved the risk that declarer would throw a club from two low from hand and ruff high in dummy. In this case, the ruff and discard would kill her club trick.

The clue here was in the way she played her spades. By winning with the jack and continuing with the queen, she had told me about her king of clubs. Unless I could ruff higher than dummy's ten, it was my duty to ruff the third round of spades and switch to a club. She could also rule out finding me with the ace of diamonds for several reasons. One was the bidding, the second was my discard and the third was my failure to ruff the third spade and cash the ace of diamonds.

Note that from East's point of view the trump promotion would also work if South held A-K-J-x-x-x and I Q-x. Yes, against quality opposition East might not be so keen to signal her club strength. Even so, East's failure to cash the diamond ace at trick three would be a clue. West could work out that beating the contract was likely to necessitate either a trump promotion or a defensive club trick and defend accordingly.

4.12

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥K

♠ A Q 7 2

♥ 4

♦ 9 6 3

♣ A Q 10 9 5

♠ 5 3

♥ K Q J 9 8 5

♦ 5 4

♣ 8 7 4

♠ 10 4

♥ A 10 6 3

♦ K Q 10 8 2

♣ K 2

♠ K J 9 8 6

♥ 7 2

♦ A J 7

♣ J 6 3

Since a trump trick seems unlikely, it looks like your side needs two diamonds, a heart and a club to beat the contract. If partner has J-x of diamonds and your side switches to the suit at trick two, you will have two diamond tricks to cash when you come in with the king of clubs. If declarer has a 6=2=3=2 shape and throws you in with a diamond to lead a club from your king (or concede a ruff and discard), that is too bad.

There are two ways to secure a diamond switch. You could play the ten of hearts under the king as a suit-preference signal for diamonds. Alternatively, you could overtake the heart and lead the suit yourself.

If West does hold a short jack of diamonds, it makes no difference which of you leads the suit. Can you think of deceptive play if South holds A-J-x? Suppose your diamond suit were K-10-8-x-x or Q-10-8-x-x. In this case, you would overtake the heart and switch to the ten of diamonds – a surrounding play. To counter declarer would need to play the ace of diamonds on your ten to block the suit. This means you do the same with your actual hand: play the ace of hearts followed by the ten of diamonds. Declarer may well go wrong and rise with the ace.

You risk little with the deceptive play. If partner has J-x, your ten will hold and you are in the same position as if you had led the king. Only if partner's jack is singleton and declarer holds up does your stratagem backfire. The risk seems worth taking.

4.13

♠ Q J 10 9
♥ 6
♦ A 9 6
♣ A Q 10 4 3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	3♣
pass	5♣	all pass	

♠ K 8 4 3
♥ A Q 7 4 3
♦ K 10 8 2
♣ —

Partner leads the ten of hearts. You win with the ace, South playing low. Which card do you return?

4.14

♠ K 10 5
♥ 10 8 4
♦ K Q 7
♣ K 10 5 4

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1♠	2♣
pass	2♠	3♠	4♥
pass	5♣	all pass	

♠ A Q 9 8 7 4 3
♥ Q J 9 5
♦ 3
♣ A

Partner leads the jack of spades, dummy covers and you win with the ace as South follows low.

What do you lead now? If your choice means that you lose the lead, what do you plan to do when you regain it?

Although other shapes are possible, the bidding and play to trick one make it very likely that South is 1=4=2=6. Concentrate on this.

4.15

♠ 10 8 7 5 3 2
♥ Q 9 2
♦ 5
♣ 9 6 5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	4NT
pass	5♣ *	pass	6♦
all pass			

♠ A 6
♥ A K 8 6 5
♦ 10 2
♣ Q J 10 3

* denies an ace anywhere

Partner leads the four of spades. You play the ace and South drops the queen. What do you return?

4.16

♠ 8 7 6 3
♥ A J 4
♦ J 8
♣ A K J 4

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1♦	dbl
2♦	dbl *	pass	2♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

♠ Q J 2
♥ K 9 3
♦ K Q 7 4
♣ Q 6 5

* you pick a suit

Partner leads the three of diamonds to the queen and ace. Declarer cashes two top trumps, to which all follow. After this comes a diamond to the two, jack and king. Do you agree you should next cash the queen of spades? What are your other plans for when you are on lead?

4.13

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♥10

♠ Q J 10 9

♥ 6

♦ A 9 6

♣ A Q 10 4 3

♠ A 7 5 2

♥ 10 9 8 2

♦ J 7 4 3

♣ J

♠ K 8 4 3

♥ A Q 7 4 3

♦ K 10 8 2

♣ —

♠ 6

♥ K J 5

♦ Q 5

♣ K 9 8 7 6 5 2

To arrive at the best return it may help to start by identifying the key layout(s). If declarer has the ace of spades, there seems little or no hope. Even if partner has K-x of clubs and scores a trick with the king, straight or ruffing finesses in spades should enable declarer to avoid any losers in the pointed suits. Conversely, if partner has the ace but fewer than four spades, you are almost certain to beat the contract. Just about the only way it could make is if you lead a diamond away from the king and allow South's singleton queen to score. From this you conclude that the key position arises when South has a small singleton spade.

You hope to score one trick in each of the side suits but must take care not to lose a trick on your return. If you play back a heart and West does not have the king, declarer can finesse the jack and discard two of dummy's diamonds. If you play back a diamond and South holds the doubleton queen, you can wave goodbye to your king. Finally, if you play back a low spade, you expose your king to a ruffing finesse, which will allow declarer to avoid a diamond loser. By a process of elimination, you arrive at the correct answer: the king of spades.

Award yourself a consolation of 5 marks out of 10 if you led the king of diamonds. If South is void in spades, you need to attack diamonds to stop declarer from taking two ruffing finesses in spades. Take 4 marks for a heart or the ten of diamonds and 3 marks for a lower diamond.

4.14

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♠J

♠ K 10 5
♥ 10 8 4
♦ K Q 7
♣ K 10 5 4

♠ J 6
♥ 7 3
♦ J 9 8 6 5 4 2
♣ 8 2

♠ A Q 9 8 7 4 3
♥ Q J 9 5
♦ 3
♣ A

♠ 2
♥ A K 6 2
♦ A 10
♣ Q J 9 7 6 3

Suppose you 'play safe', cashing your ♣A before exiting with the ♥Q. Declarer wins and runs the trumps to reach a position like this:

♠ —
♥ 7
♦ J 9 8 6
♣ —

♠ 10
♥ 10
♦ K Q 7
♣ —

♠ Q
♥ J 9 5
♦ 3
♣ —

♠ —
♥ K 6 2
♦ A 10
♣ —

Now come three rounds of diamonds. You can find one further safe discard but not two. It is a simple squeeze. How can you avoid this?

Best is to lead the ♠Q at trick two and continue the suit when back in with the ♣A; your partner still has a trump to deal with the ♠10. Riskier is to shift to a low heart. If declarer lacks the nerve to duck, you can continue with the ♥Q later and kill the entry to the heart threat.

4.15

Contract: 6♦

Lead: ♠4

♠ 10 8 7 5 3 2

♥ Q 9 2

♦ 5

♣ 9 6 5

♠ 4

♥ J 10 7 4 3

♦ J 3

♣ K 8 7 4 2

♠ A 6

♥ A K 8 6 5

♦ 10 2

♣ Q J 10 3

♠ K Q J 9

♥ —

♦ A K Q 9 8 7 6 4

♣ A

Be honest. If many players met this problem at the table, they would cash, or should I say attempt to cash, a top heart. Would you fall into the same trap?

If the opposing bidding is sane, your side does not have two aces to cash against the slam. To bid it knowing that North has no ace, South must be void in hearts. Of course, until you appreciate that dummy's spade suit may be running, a heart or indeed a club or diamond return appears safe.

Declarer has done well to choose the queen as the card to play to unblock the spades: you know the lead of the four is not from K-Q-9-4 or from Q-J-9-4 but it might be from K-J-9-4. All the same, it should not deflect you from a spade return. If the lead is a singleton, partner scores a ruff. If not, you have nothing to fear from the spades.

Suppose it turns out the lead is from J-9-4. In this case, declarer wins the second trick and runs an avalanche of diamonds. At the end, you may have to judge whether to keep a top heart or three clubs. For the reasoning explained above, you can bet that South is very much more likely to be 2=0=8=3 than 2=1=8=2. Partner's discards should help you as well. With three losing clubs, it would surely be right to discard them all, starting with the lowest.

4.16

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♦3

♠ 8 7 6 3

♥ A J 4

♦ J 8

♣ A K J 4

♠ 10 5

♥ 8 7 6 5

♦ 10 6 5 3 2

♣ 8 3

♠ Q J 2

♥ K 9 3

♦ K Q 7 4

♣ Q 6 5

♠ A K 9 4

♥ Q 10 2

♦ A 9

♣ 10 9 7 2

Since you want to make as few losing leads as possible, it makes sense to cash your trump winner. Having done so, you are still on lead with the end position something like this:

♠ 8

♥ A J 4

♦ —

♣ A K J 4

♠ —

♥ 8 7 5

♦ 10 6 5

♣ 8 3

♠ —

♥ K 9 3

♦ 7 4

♣ Q 6 5

♠ 9

♥ Q 10 2

♦ —

♣ 10 9 7 2

The bidding as well as partner's high-low in diamonds tell you that continuing diamonds will concede a ruff and discard. A club switch from queen also appears unattractive. Since you can lead a heart while keeping your king guarded and the bidding leaves a vague chance that West holds the queen, perhaps you switch to the three of hearts.

All will be well if declarer wins, cashes the ace of hearts and exits with the third round of hearts. After scoring your king, you can afford to play a diamond: with four clubs in each hand, a ruff and discard is no good to your opponent. You will make a club trick at the end.

Unfortunately, the more natural play after winning a cheap heart trick is to play three rounds of clubs: declarer can guess that the finesse is unlikely to work from your opening bid. Whether you play into the heart tenace again or lead a diamond, your potential heart winner vanishes.

To beat the contract you need to lead a diamond after taking your trump winner. With the mirror image 4=3=2=4 in each of the opposing hands (a situation you might guess from South's failure to bid 2♥ when asked to suggest a suit), this does not cost a trick. Say declarer ruffs in dummy, discarding a heart from hand, and plays three rounds of clubs.

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

When you come in with the queen of clubs in this position, you have an easy exit with the fourth round of diamonds.

Note that the recommended strategy can only backfire if South is 4=2=2=5 without the heart queen. This is most unlikely not just from the opposing bidding but from partner's actions.

Trump Teasers

Trumps give you power. Trumps give you power to stop the opponent's suit. They give you extra tricks through ruffing in the short hand. They help you to set up a long suit either with simple ruffing or via a ruffing finesse. Trumps also help you to eliminate suits and to take advantage if a defender leads a suit of which both you and dummy are void.

Less common uses of trumps include crossruffing, reversing the dummy and setting up or executing a squeeze. At times, their special power enables you to escape seemingly sure losers with a trump coup, a trump endplay, an elopement or a smother play. While I do not claim to have given you a fully comprehensive list, I hope I have done enough to convince you of their great worth. Perhaps 70% of all contracts have a trump suit, suggesting that you can regularly make more tricks with the benefit of a trump suit than you will without one.

As they say, sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Although the defenders usually possess fewer trumps than the declaring side, they can threaten your side winners with a ruff and your trump winners with a promotion. To guard against such threats you might draw some or all of their trumps. Indeed, you frequently face no bigger decision than whether you should draw trumps. The play when one defender holds four or more trumps can prove particularly troublesome; if you ruff too many times, you may find you run out. You may be pleased to hear that you will not meet any 4-3 fits in this chapter. In truth, I have included only one deal on which your side can lay claim to fewer than eight trumps; even then, all your side's trumps are in one hand. Happy ruffing!

5.1

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	pass	1♠
pass	1NT	pass	4♠
all pass			

♠ 5 2
 ♥ K 9 8 6 3
 ♦ K 9 5 4
 ♣ J 6

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

West leads the six of diamonds (presumably fourth best). How do you begin your plan of campaign?

5.2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♠
pass	2♥	pass	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

♠ K 9 2
 ♥ Q 8 4 3 2
 ♦ 5 4 3
 ♣ A Q

♠ A Q J 10 6 5
 ♥ J 6
 ♦ A K 7
 ♣ 9 6

West leads the jack of diamonds. How do you play to the first two tricks?

5.3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
pass	2♦	pass	2♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

♠ Q J
♥ 10 4 2
♦ A K 8 4 2
♣ K 5 3

♠ K 10 4
♥ Q J 9 8 6
♦ —
♣ A Q J 7 4

West leads the nine of clubs. What is your basic strategy to restrict your losers to the three obvious ones?

5.4

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
3♦	pass	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

♠ 8 5 4 3
♥ A Q 8
♦ A J 4 3
♣ 9 5

♠ A J
♥ K J 10 9 6 3
♦ 9 6
♣ K Q 2

West leads the king of diamonds. What is your plan for the first few tricks?

5.1

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♦6

♠ A 8 7 3

♥ A Q

♦ J 8 7 6 3

♣ 10 2

♠ 5 2

♥ K 9 8 6 3

♦ K 9 5 4

♣ J 6

♠ 6

♥ J 10 4

♦ A Q 10 2

♣ 9 7 5 4 3

♠ K Q J 10 9 4

♥ 7 5 2

♦ —

♣ A K Q 8

Suppose you begin your plan of campaign by ruffing the diamond in hand and laying down a top trump. West takes the ace on the first or second round and continues with the jack of diamonds, which you ruff. At the point East shows out the second round of trumps, you find that you started with six trumps to West's four. Now that you have ruffed twice, you have the same number. After you draw the missing trumps, you will have none left. When you can play a heart towards the king, West hops up with the ace and can continue diamonds with impunity.

'Plan of campaign' was a misnomer. Playing as above meant you did not anticipate the 4-1 trump break. Before you play to the first trick, you should think what you might do about it. Assuming that West has not made a tricky lead away from the ace, can you see a way to avoid having to ruff twice? Cover with dummy's nine and discard a heart from hand. East wins with the ten but cannot continue diamonds without setting up dummy's king.

Note that you need to cover in dummy or East, using the 'rule of 11', may work out that you cannot beat the six of diamonds and let it ride.

Yes, if hearts break 4-1, you might not score dummy's king even with the ace well placed. Still, this could almost as easily happen if you ruff the first trick – the defenders have a sure entry with the trump ace.

5.2

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♦J

♠ K 9 2
♥ Q 8 4 3 2
♦ 5 4 3
♣ A Q

♠ 8 4
♥ A 10
♦ J 10 9 2
♣ 10 7 5 4 2

♠ 7 3
♥ K 9 7 5
♦ Q 8 6
♣ K J 8 3

♠ A Q J 10 6 5
♥ J 6
♦ A K 7
♣ 9 6

Again, if you play too hastily you go down. Suppose you win the first trick, draw trumps and play on hearts. Even if the hearts break kindly, you are unlikely to enjoy them because dummy has just one entry left with the ace of clubs. True, if West holds the king of clubs, the queen will provide a second entry. In that case, you have nothing to worry about anyway. On the actual layout, you emerge with only nine tricks.

If you stop to form a plan, you should think along the following lines. 'I want to set up the hearts in case the club finesse is wrong. I can't afford to draw trumps because I might need dummy's trumps as entries. Also, I want East to win the first round of hearts because I can't stand a club switch through the ace-queen.'

Can you see how to bring the plan to fruition?

After taking the diamond, lead the six of hearts. West has to withhold the ace or you will have an easy second heart trick. After the ten and queen cover the six, East wins and continues diamonds. You win, cash the ace of spades and knock out the ace of hearts. Now you can handle West's club switch. You put up the ace and ruff a heart. You still have the king and nine of spades as entries for ruffing the next heart and reaching the long card. You lose two hearts and a diamond but no clubs.

5.3

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣9

♠ Q J
♥ 10 4 2
♦ A K 8 4 2
♣ K 5 3

♠ 9 7 6 3 2
♥ K 7 5 3
♦ J 9
♣ 9 6

♠ A 8 5
♥ A
♦ Q 10 7 6 5 3
♣ 10 8 2

♠ K 10 4
♥ Q J 9 8 6
♦ —
♣ A Q J 7 4

With eight clubs on view between the two hands, one defender (West most likely) will be short in the suit. Since drawing trumps involves losing the lead twice, you face a grave danger of running into a ruff.

As the cards lie, the defenders have no choice about who wins the first round of trumps. Even so, East's ace of spades entry means that the straightforward line of leading trumps at every opportunity results in defeat. A second club lead after East takes the ace of hearts leaves West with no more clubs. When West later comes in with the king of hearts, a spade to the ace will put East on lead to give West a club ruff.

The way round this is to knock out the ace of spades early. This does not cut the defensive communications but does allow you to throw one of dummy's clubs on the third round. The sequence of plays goes as follows: four of spades to the queen and ace, win the second club, king of spades, ten of spades for the discard, queen of hearts.

Note that it does not help East to duck the first round of spades. You have a variety of paths home if this happens. For instance, you could simply play a second round. You just need to avoid the trap of throwing your two remaining spades and starting on trumps. If you try that, a third round of diamonds from East would allow West to discard a club.

5.4

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦K

♠ 8 5 4 3

♥ A Q 8

♦ A J 4 3

♣ 9 5

♠ Q 10 2

♥ 2

♦ K Q 10 8 7 5 2

♣ 10 7

♠ K 9 7 6

♥ 7 5 4

♦ —

♣ A J 8 6 4 3

♠ A J

♥ K J 10 9 6 3

♦ 9 6

♣ K Q 2

This time the bidding warns of the impending ruff. East you know holds at most one diamond and quite possibly none at all.

If you play dummy's ace and East ruffs, a spade switch will put you in deep trouble. After you have taken the ace, the defenders will have the top cards in all of the side suits. Having already scored a ruff, all they have to do to beat you is to take these winners. You would be down to hoping that West has the ace of clubs and no more spades.

Can you see how much better placed you are if you duck the first trick? When West continues diamonds, you finesse the jack (or cover the queen with the ace) and East ruffs. Now, when East switches to a spade, you can hop up with the ace and draw trumps in two rounds ending in dummy. You then discard your losing spade on dummy's diamond winner. After this, you knock out the ace of clubs, eventually ruffing a club in dummy.

Of course, it does not help West to switch to a spade at trick two. In this case, the defensive ruff disappears.

Could your ducking the first trick ever cost the contract? Yes, in the unlikely event that East has a singleton diamond and all four missing trumps, you would be better off taking the ace of diamonds at once. Take a bonus point if you spotted this.

5.5

♠ Q 9 5 4 3
♥ —
♦ J 7 6 5
♣ K 7 6 3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1NT *	dbl
2♠	dbl	pass	4♥
all pass			

* 12-14

♠ —
♥ K J 8 7 6 4 2
♦ A K Q 3
♣ A 5

West leads the jack of clubs. How do you play the trump suit?

5.6

♠ 8 4 2
♥ 6 3 2
♦ A 2
♣ A Q J 10 9

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
2♦	3♣	3♦	pass
pass	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

♠ K 6 5 3
♥ A K J 7 4
♦ 7
♣ K 8 6

West leads the jack of diamonds. How do you play the trump suit this time?

5.7

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	3♣
pass	3♥	pass	3NT
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4♠	pass	6♣
all pass			

♠ Q
♥ J 9 8 5 2
♦ 7 6 5 3
♣ A 7 3

♠ A K 6
♥ A
♦ A K 9 2
♣ K Q J 10 4

West leads the ten of spades. A grand slam offers fair play. Forget about that. If you must reflect on the bidding, congratulate yourself for choosing the right trump suit: a 4-1 diamond split might well scupper even 6♦. What is your plan?

5.8

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1♥	dbl
4♥	5♣	pass	5♠
all pass			

♠ 4 3
♥ K
♦ Q 10 3
♣ K 9 7 5 4 3 2

♠ K 10 9 8 7 6 5 2
♥ A
♦ A
♣ A J 8

West leads the queen of hearts to commence a pretty first trick. What do you play to the next couple of tricks?

5.5

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣J

♠ Q 9 5 4 3

♥ —

♦ J 7 6 5

♣ K 7 6 3

♠ K 10 8 6 2

♥ 9 5

♦ 9 2

♣ J 10 9 4

♠ A J 7

♥ A Q 10 3

♦ 10 8 4

♣ Q 8 2

♠ —

♥ K J 8 7 6 4 2

♦ A K Q 3

♣ A 5

All depends upon not losing four trump tricks (or three trump tricks and a ruff). Since you presumably need to draw trumps to make your diamond winners, you can dismiss any thoughts of a throw-in or coup. You will need to tackle the trump suit head on.

Barring a ruff, you can be sure of restricting your trump losers to three if the suit splits 3-3. You should turn your thoughts to the possible 4-2 splits. If someone holds a doubleton ace, you can flush out the ace by leading low twice. If someone holds a doubleton queen, leading low twice is also good enough. Your king-jack will become equals for the third and fourth rounds. Leading the king on one of the first two rounds and ducking the other also succeeds in this case because again the queen will not capture the jack.

As you can see from the diagram, neither the queen nor the ace is short. The strategies we have covered thus far will all fail if West wins the first round to leave East with the ace, queen and ten to make later. What you need to do is to lead the king and then the jack or vice versa. This way you cater for 9-x or 10-x, which together are more likely than Q-x or A-x. Given the bidding, there is a slight advantage to starting with the king. West might hold a singleton diamond and East is more likely to hold A-x-x than Q-x-x of trumps. In this event, you want West to waste the heart queen in ruffing a diamond rather than swallowing your jack.

5.6

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦J

♠ 8 4 2

♥ 6 3 2

♦ A 2

♣ A Q J 10 9

♠ A Q 9

♥ 9

♦ K J 10 9 6 3

♣ 5 4 2

♠ J 10 7

♥ Q 10 8 5

♦ Q 8 5 4

♣ 7 3

♠ K 6 5 3

♥ A K J 7 4

♦ 7

♣ K 8 6

If everything sits nicely, you can picture twelve tricks: five hearts, five clubs, one diamond and the king of spades. This indicates that you can afford to have a few things wrong and still make game.

Suppose you put up the ace of diamonds, cash the ace of hearts, go to dummy with a club and finesse the jack of hearts. There is good news and bad news. Good, the jack holds; bad, West shows out. You draw one more round of trumps before turning to clubs in earnest. Sadly for you, East ruffs the third round and switches to the jack of spades. With the ace offside and well guarded, you lose three spades and a trump.

What you should be saying is something like this: 'I don't mind losing a trump trick so long as it to West, who can't lead a spade through my king.' Have you seen the key play now? At trick two, you should lead a low heart off dummy finesse the seven. West wins an unexpected trick with the nine but can do you now harm. You ruff the next diamond and cash a top heart to expose the position. You then cross cheaply to dummy in clubs and take the marked trump finesse.

You have no doubt spotted that it does not profit East to play some other heart than the five on the first round of the suit. You can win any higher card with the ace, cross to dummy in clubs and take a deep finesse on the second round of trumps.

5.7

Contract: 6♣

Lead: ♠10

♠ Q
♥ J 9 8 5 2
♦ 7 6 5 3
♣ A 7 3

♠ 10 9 8 4 3
♥ Q 7 4
♦ Q 10 8 4
♣ 8

♠ J 7 5 2
♥ K 10 6 3
♦ J
♣ 9 6 5 2

♠ A K 6
♥ A
♦ A K 9 2
♣ K Q J 10 4

Since I mentioned the possibility of a 4-1 diamond division in setting the problem, I hope that you have been exercising your little grey cells trying to work out what to do about it.

You could try the same line as you might take in 7♣. Void dummy's diamonds by making the three top spades and the two top diamonds on the first five tricks. Unfortunately, this is going to fail as the cards lie. East ruffs the second round of diamonds and is poised to overruff on the third and fourth rounds if you ruff low. You can avoid being overruffed by ruffing with the ace but can do this only once. Nor does it help to cross to dummy with the ace of clubs to lead the second round of diamonds towards your hand. East scores one trick by ruffing the second round and later overruffs the seven of clubs with the nine to beat you.

Have you seen the solution now? After cashing one top diamond and discarding two diamonds on the spades, duck the second round of diamonds! This leaves you with just one losing diamond to ruff. You can ensure that East does not overruff by trumping with the ace.

5.8

Contract: 5♠

Lead: ♥Q

♠ J
♥ Q J 9 5 2
♦ 9 7 6 5
♣ Q 10 6

♠ 4 3
♥ K
♦ Q 10 3
♣ K 9 7 5 4 3 2

♠ A Q
♥ 10 8 7 6 4 3
♦ K J 8 4 2
♣ —

♠ K 10 9 8 7 6 5 2
♥ A
♦ A
♣ A J 8

Naturally, you want to play trumps from dummy. East, who opened the bidding, surely holds the ace of spades. The trap is to play a club to the king at trick two. East ruffs, cashes the ace of spades and exits with a diamond to your singleton ace. You need to cash the ace of diamonds first. Now, having ruffed, East has to find a lead from this position:

♠ —
♥ J 9 5 2
♦ 9 6 5
♣ Q 6

♠ 4
♥ —
♦ Q 10
♣ 9 7 5 4 3 2

♠ —
♥ 10 7 6 4 3
♦ K J 8 4
♣ —

♠ K 10 9 8 7 6 2
♥ —
♦ —
♣ A J

Having kept your ♠2, of course, you can ruff the king of diamonds high and later score dummy's queen. If East prefers a low diamond exit, you score the queen at once. A ruff and discard suits you equally well.

5.9

♠ 9 6 2
♥ J 8 6 3 2
♦ A 5
♣ J 4 3

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

♠ A K 7 5 4 3
♥ A
♦ K 6
♣ A 7 6 5

West leads the ten of hearts to your ace. What do you lead now?
What will do you when next or still on lead?

5.10

♠ 10 8 7 6 3
♥ Q 8 5
♦ —
♣ Q 10 9 8 7

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

♠ A K 2
♥ 10 2
♦ K Q 7
♣ A K J 6 3

¹ transfer; at least five spades

² neutral

West leads the five of clubs and East follows with the four. How do you play to avoid losing three hearts and a trump or two hearts, a trump and a club ruff?

5.11

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	2♣	2♠	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

♠ K 8 2
♥ K 10 7 5
♦ J 6
♣ K J 5 3

♠ J 3
♥ J 8 6 4 3
♦ A K 5
♣ A Q 6

West leads the nine of spades to the two, queen and three. East cashes the ace, on which West drops the four, and plays a third round. How high (if at all) do you ruff? How will you play the trump suit?

5.12

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1♦	1♠
pass	2♥	3♦	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

♠ 6 4
♥ A K Q 7 6 4
♦ K 9 5 3
♣ Q

♠ A 10 8 5 3 2
♥ 10 5
♦ 6
♣ A K J 8

West leads the four of diamonds to the three, ten and six. Back comes the ace of diamonds. Again, how high do you ruff and how do you approach the trump suit?

5.9

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥10

♠ 9 6 2

♥ J 8 6 3 2

♦ A 5

♣ J 4 3

♠ J

♥ Q 10 9 5

♦ J 9 8 7 3 2

♣ 9 2

♠ Q 10 8

♥ K 7 4

♦ Q 10 4

♣ K Q 10 8

♠ A K 7 5 4 3

♥ A

♦ K 6

♣ A 7 6 5

Do you bash out your two top spades? If all follow, you will make an overtrick as you will have no trump loser and can ruff the fourth round of clubs if necessary. If someone shows out on the second round, you still have chances. You can lead twice towards the jack of clubs. If you find West with the king and queen, the jack will become good. If East has the king and queen but no more trumps, you will be able to ruff the fourth round of clubs. There is always the chance of a 3-3 break as well. On the layout shown, all of these chances fail. East draws dummy's last trump and makes three clubs as well as a trump.

Do you think it is right to play the ace followed by another club? This is a better strategy – worth 7 out of 10. It works if the singleton trump and club length lie in the same hand. Today, unfortunately, East wins two club tricks and plays a fourth round. This allows West's singleton spade to score and defeat the contract. Of course, it would not help to cash a top trump before playing on clubs. Then East could lead two further rounds of trumps to kill the ruff.

The answer that I am looking for is this: 'Lead a low club now. When I get back in, take a round of trumps if there has not been one; then play ace and another club.' This eliminates the danger that anyone can draw dummy's trumps while making it most unlikely that a defender with a singleton trump can give you trouble.

5.10

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♣5

♠ 10 8 7 6 3

♥ Q 8 5

♦ —

♣ Q 10 9 8 7

♠ J 5 4

♥ A J 9 7 3

♦ J 9 6

♣ 5 2

♠ Q 9

♥ K 6 4

♦ A 10 8 5 4 3 2

♣ 4

♠ A K 2

♥ 10 2

♦ K Q 7

♣ A K J 6 3

Since West has not led a top heart, you stand little chance of making a trick with dummy's queen. There are two obvious ways to avoid three heart losers. The first is to take a ruffing diamond finesse against West. The other is to set up a heart ruff, playing a heart to the eight. You hope that if a defender ruffs a club it is from a holding of three trumps.

Given that the short clubs and long trumps will be together a shade over half the time but the position of the diamond ace is a 50-50 shot, going for the heart ruff sounds preferable. You have the added chance of keeping West off play, say if East holds A-K-9-x or A-K-J-x of hearts. In this case, you do not mind who has three trumps so long as East holds the singleton club. You might also try to combine your chances. You could lead the king of diamonds, planning to run it if West fumbles, otherwise going for the heart ruff. I can give you 7 out of 10 for that.

What do you need to do for full marks? Take the line that almost guarantees the contract whenever trumps break 3-2. Use this first club and the ace-king of spades as entries for ruffing diamonds in dummy. Then leave the master trump out and play on clubs. This line gives you an extra trump winner without the risk of a costly club ruff or a losing finesse. If you missed it, you are in good company. The deal comes from trials to select the England open team for a series of International matches. Several of the competitors missed the winning line.

5.11

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠9

♠ K 8 2

♥ K 10 7 5

♦ J 6

♣ K J 5 3

♠ 9 4

♥ A 9 2

♦ 10 8 7 2

♣ 9 8 7 4

♠ A Q 10 7 6 5

♥ Q

♦ Q 9 4 3

♣ 10 2

♠ J 3

♥ J 8 6 4 3

♦ A K 5

♣ A Q 6

The bidding and play to the first two tricks make it highly probable that West has no more spades. This being the case, how can you hold your trump losers to one? You need to contend not only with an overruff now but also with the fact that you must later lose the lead to the ace of trumps. Think about it logically.

You clearly need East to hold the queen of hearts or West can score the queen on the current trick. This tells you that West must hold the ace of hearts or East would have the ace-queen over dummy's king and two certain tricks. If West has the ace of hearts and East the queen, the only way the queen will not be a winner after West ruffs with the ace is if the queen is a singleton.

Now that you can 'see' all the hands, you know what to do. Ruff the third spade with the jack of hearts. Whether or not West overruffs, your first move in trumps will be low to the king. If need be – because West discards on the third spade and ducks the first trump – you can come back to hand to take a marked finesse against the nine.

If West unexpectedly follows to the third round of spades, I think you still lead a trump to the king. This picks up the suit whenever East holds the doubleton or singleton queen. This seems more likely than that West has A-Q-x.

5.12

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♦4

♠ 6 4

♥ A K Q 7 6 4

♦ K 9 5 3

♣ Q

♠ Q 7

♥ J 9 8 2

♦ 4

♣ 10 7 6 5 4 3

♠ K J 9

♥ 3

♦ A Q J 10 8 7 2

♣ 9 2

♠ A 10 8 5 3 2

♥ 10 5

♦ 6

♣ A K J 8

Again, the bidding and start of the play cause you to think that West has run out of East's long suit. Fortunately, the situation appears a bit more promising than on the previous deal. If West has three spades, you can ruff with anything other than the ace to restrict your trump losers to two. Since the contract appears doomed if trumps break 4-1, you turn your thoughts to the possibility that East has three trumps to West's two.

If West has 9-7 doubleton, you need to ruff with the ten. East has two sure tricks but West cannot overruff. If West has K-9, Q-9 and J-9 doubleton, you are going to go down whatever you do. So forget that.

If West has K-J, K-Q or Q-J doubleton, you can ruff low or with the eight. Later you lay down the ace, cross to dummy and lead up to the ten. You can more or less dismiss this idea. If West holds the king-jack or king-queen of spades, surely East would have opened 3♦, not 1♦.

The final possibility is the one shown in the diagram. If West has J-7, Q-7 or K-7, you need to ruff with the eight. Subsequently you lead twice towards your ten to keep East down to one trick. Since it is three times as likely that West's spade other than the nine is a picture card rather than the seven, you ruff with the eight.

Take half marks for ruffing low. At least this caters for the possibility that East's three trumps include the nine and seven. I must be feeling in a generous mood as I am even giving one mark for ruffing with the ten.

5.13

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1♥	pass
pass	dbl	pass	3♣
pass	3♦	pass	3♥
pass	4♣	pass	5♣
all pass			

♠ A Q J
♥ Q 6
♦ A Q 9 7 4
♣ K 6 4

♠ K
♥ 8 5 4 2
♦ J 10 3
♣ A J 10 9 7

West leads the jack of hearts. East takes the king, cashes the ace and plays a third round. West ruffs with the eight and dummy overruffs. With the diamond finesse surely wrong, you are a trick short. Do you go for another heart ruff, hoping East's presumed queen of clubs is short?

5.14

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♠
pass	2♣	pass	2♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
dbl	all pass		

♠ 6 4 3
♥ A 9
♦ A 6 4
♣ K 9 7 4 3

♠ J 10 9 7 5 2
♥ K Q 6
♦ K 10
♣ A 6

West leads the three of hearts, which runs to your king. When you try the nine of spades, West wins with the queen and East shows out as expected. A heart comes back to the ace. To avoid losing four trump tricks you clearly need to endplay West. How do you continue?

5.15

W	N	E	S
—	—	1♣	1♥
1♠*	2♥	2♠	4♥

all pass

* five-card suit

♠ A
♥ 7 6 4 2
♦ Q 9 2
♣ 8 7 5 3 2

♠ J 10 5 3
♥ K Q J 10 9 3
♦ A 8
♣ K

West leads the queen of clubs to East's ace. Back comes the five of hearts. West wins with the ace and continues with the eight. You cannot now ruff three spades in dummy. Nor, in view of the bidding and play to date, is West likely to hold the king of diamonds. What is your plan?

5.16

W	N	E	S
—	—	1♥	1♠
pass	3♥*	pass	4♠

all pass

* sound raise with four trumps

♠ 10 9 4 3
♥ 7 4
♦ A K 8 5 2
♣ K 8

♠ A K 8 6 5
♥ A K 9
♦ 6 4 3
♣ 9 5

West leads the queen of diamonds and East ruffs dummy's ace. Back comes the queen of hearts. The bidding indicates that East has the ace of clubs, which is bad news. The good news I can tell you is that the missing trumps are not all in one hand. How do you play from here?

5.13

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♥J

♠ A Q J
♥ Q 6
♦ A Q 9 7 4
♣ K 6 4

♠ 9 6 5 4 3 2
♥ J 7
♦ 6 5 2
♣ 8 3

♠ 10 8 7
♥ A K 10 9 3
♦ K 8
♣ Q 5 2

♠ K
♥ 8 5 4 2
♦ J 10 3
♣ A J 10 9 7

So long as three rounds of spades stand up, you can make game whether East holds three trumps or two. Finesse the club, overtake the spade, discard two diamonds on the spades and finesse the club again.

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A Q 9 7 4
♣ —

♠ 9 5
♥ —
♦ 6 5 2
♣ —

♠ —
♥ 10 3
♦ K 8
♣ Q

♠ —
♥ 8
♦ J
♣ A J 7

From here you finish the trumps to squeeze East in the red suits.

Score 3 out of 10 if you went for the heart ruff. This is the only winning line if East is 2=5=4=2. Score 1 if you played East to be very light and took the diamond finesse. There are no marks I am afraid if you took a ruffing diamond finesse: you could never get back to dummy.

5.14

Contract: 4♠ doubled

Lead: ♥3

♠ A K Q 8
♥ 10 5 3
♦ 7 3
♣ Q 10 5 2

♠ 6 4 3
♥ A 9
♦ A 6 4
♣ K 9 7 4 3

♠ —
♥ J 8 7 4 2
♦ Q J 9 8 5 2
♣ J 8

♠ J 10 9 7 5 2
♥ K Q 6
♦ K 10
♣ A 6

To force a trump return you will need to remove all of West's plain cards. You need three rounds of hearts to stand up and can succeed if West's shape is 4=3=3=3 or 4=3=2=4. To avoid having to guess which of these it is, play three rounds of clubs to reach this position:

♠ A K 8
♥ 10
♦ 7 3
♣ Q

♠ 6 4
♥ —
♦ A 6 4
♣ 9 7

♠ —
♥ 8 7 4
♦ Q J 8 5
♣ —

♠ J 10 7 5
♥ Q
♦ K 10
♣ —

As East has shown out, cash the heart queen and the king and ace of diamonds before ruffing a second club. Then exit with a high spade. If East has a third club, the same timing works but your second ruff is of a diamond. Take only half marks if you tried ruffing a diamond early.

5.15

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣Q

♠ A
♥ 7 6 4 2
♦ Q 9 2
♣ 8 7 5 3 2

♠ Q 9 8 4 2
♥ A 8
♦ 10 7 6 3
♣ Q 10

♠ K 7 6
♥ 5
♦ K J 5 4
♣ A J 9 6 4

♠ J 10 5 3
♥ K Q J 10 9 3
♦ A 8
♣ K

West could just about have the king of diamonds, in which case East will have ♠K-Q-x. In this situation, you have several ways to succeed. More likely, East has the king of diamonds and ♠K-x-x or Q-x-x. In this case, you cannot readily score a trick with dummy's queen of diamonds or set up a spade trick. Nor you will not be able to set up a long club. A lack of entries presents one problem. Another is that East, with just four cards in the majors, must have at least five clubs.

An endplay is the only solution. Since you cannot ruff three spades in dummy, you could delay one ruff until the fourth round and lose the third round to East. Do you see why you can be sure of exiting to the right defender? If anyone unblocks the king or queen of spades on the second round, it will give you a ruffing finesse position.

The snag is that East appears to have safe exit cards in clubs. It takes a little imagination and ingenuity to create a tenace in clubs. If the suit splits 6-1, you have no chance. Fortunately, a 5-2 split occurs more often. If West's lower club is the jack, ten or nine, you can succeed.

After winning the second heart, cross to the ace of spades and ruff a club. When West's ten falls, you are in business. You ruff a spade and call for the eight of clubs. East must cover and you ruff. You have reached the following position with the lead in your hand:

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

You continue with a spade, discarding a diamond from dummy. East, upon winning, faces a choice of evils: lead a diamond and set up the queen or lead a club and set up the seven.

5.16	♠ 10 9 4 3	
Contract: 4♠	♥ 9 4	
Lead: ♦Q	♦ A K 8 5 2	
	♣ K 8	
♠ J 2		♠ Q 7
♥ 10 3		♥ Q J 8 6 5 2
♦ Q J 10 9 7		♦ —
♣ 10 6 4 2		♣ A Q J 7 3
	♠ A K 8 6 5	
	♥ A K 7	
	♦ 6 4 3	
	♣ 9 5	

Assuming the remaining trumps break 2-1, you face four losers: two clubs, a diamond and the ruff already lost. The ace of clubs must lie over the king or East's opening and West's failure to make a negative double of your overcall are highly suspect. What can you do about it?

Although you cannot bring off a squeeze, perhaps you can arrange a throw-in. If you can strip East's exit cards in the majors before losing your club losers, a ruff and discard might furnish your tenth trick.

After winning the heart switch, you draw the remaining trumps in two rounds. Then you cash your other top heart and ruff a heart. This brings you to the following position with the lead in dummy:

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

You could have kept a lower trump in dummy but, in any event, you do not want to come to hand at this point. You need to make sure that East wins the second round of clubs. You do this by leading a low club off dummy, saving the king for the second round. At worst, West wins and plays a diamond to dummy's king. Now you exit with the king of clubs to put poor East on play. The forced heart or a club lead allows you to discard a diamond from hand and ruff in dummy.

Take half marks if you decided to strip the hearts before pulling the second round of trumps. This would work if West had only one trump.

Note that it does you no good to exit with the king of clubs in the diagrammed position. Seeing West signal an even number with the six, East knows it is no good to cash the queen or jack of clubs after taking the ace and so exits with a low club. This allows West to win with ten and exit safely in diamonds.

Watch and Wait

You will find the problems in this chapter have a different format. In the first half you watch a contract go down and can then decide where you think declarer went wrong. The failing line generally gives a major clue about the layout or layouts against which declarer needs to guard. If you prefer, you can take a break from solving problems because the solution takes the form of the players' post mortem and they invariably work it out for themselves. It is so much easier being wise after the event – all the more so when you can see all four hands.

In the second half, you can indeed see all four hands. Your task is to work out how many tricks a sound declarer should take. I have included the defenders' hands not for you to assess the winning double-dummy line. Rather it is to allow you to evaluate the success or otherwise of the correct play. Without giving away too many trade secrets, I can reveal that on at least one deal the correct single-dummy line results in a two-trick defeat. At the other end of the scale, seemingly inescapable losers can vanish like magic. Beware of placing your bets too quickly...

6.1

♠ K Q 9 6
♥ K 8 7
♦ K Q J 6 3
♣ 9

W	N	E	S
pass	1♦	pass	1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

♠ J 10 7 5 3
♥ A 5 4
♦ 10 2
♣ K 10 7

West led the queen of hearts. Declarer won with the ace, knocked out the ace of diamonds and won the heart return in dummy. All followed to the next diamond but, when South threw a heart on the third, West ruffed. The defenders scored both black aces later. Can you do better?

6.2

♠ 9 7 6 5 2
♥ A K 2
♦ 7 6
♣ K Q 6

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	2♠	3♣
pass	5♣	all pass	

♠ —
♥ Q J 6 5
♦ K 5 3
♣ A J 10 9 5 2

West led the king of spades. Declarer ruffed, crossed to dummy with a heart and led a diamond to the king. West won with the ace and played a heart, dummy winning. East went in with the jack on the next diamond and gave West a heart ruff. Which play was wrong this time?

6.3

♠ A 9 4
♥ K J 4
♦ 7 4
♣ J 10 9 8 4

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ K 8 6 3
♥ 10 9 7
♦ A Q
♣ A Q 6 2

West led the five of hearts. When dummy played low, East won and switched to a diamond. The finesse lost and West continued the suit. When the club finesse also lost, the defenders ran the diamonds to beat the contract easily. How would you have played differently?

6.4

♠ J 8 7 3
♥ K 7 6
♦ 9 7 6 3 2
♣ K

W	N	E	S
3♣	pass	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ A K 2
♥ A Q J 5
♦ 10 5 4
♣ A 8 5

West led the queen of clubs. Winning with the king, declarer cashed the two top spades. All followed but the queen did not fall. West showed out on the third spade and declarer ended with just the eight tricks that were there at the outset. Can you improve on this line?

6.1

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥Q

♠ K Q 9 6

♥ K 8 7

♦ K Q J 6 3

♣ 9

♠ A 4 2

♥ Q J 10 2

♦ 7 5

♣ Q 8 6 3

♠ 8

♥ 9 6 3

♦ A 9 8 4

♣ A J 5 4 2

♠ J 10 7 5 3

♥ A 5 4

♦ 10 2

♣ K 10 7

‘It’s not my day,’ South groaned. ‘On any other lead I can draw trumps before setting up the diamonds. Even as it was, diamonds could have been 3-3 and I had other chances. I had to play on diamonds early or the defenders would have a heart to cash.’

‘Had to’, North repeatedly quizzically, ‘or chose to?’

‘What do you mean?’ South replied. ‘With three aces between them, the defenders surely had the communications to make a heart trick if I didn’t go for the discard.’

North smiled. ‘The quick discard was the right idea but the execution flawed. Let me ask you a simple question. What’s more likely: a 3-3 break or a simple finesse?’

‘The finesse, I suppose. What’s the relevance?’

‘Why not win the first trick in my hand and lead a club up to your king? If, as was the case, East has the ace, your king will be good for a heart discard from my hand. Nobody’s going to ruff the king of clubs.’

6.2

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♠K

♠ 9 7 6 5 2

♥ A K 2

♦ 7 6

♣ K Q 6

♠ K Q J 8 4

♥ 7 4

♦ A Q 9

♣ 8 7 4

♠ A 10 3

♥ 10 9 8 3

♦ J 10 8 4 2

♣ 3

♠ —

♥ Q J 6 5

♦ K 5 3

♣ A J 10 9 5 2

‘Playing with fire if ever I saw it,’ North remarked. ‘What’s wrong with drawing some trumps? The way you played it you would have gone down even with trumps 2-2.’

‘I had three trumps,’ West announced. ‘If your partner draws two rounds of trumps after the heart switch, I still get the ruff.’

North changed tack. ‘In that case why not come to my hand with a trump rather than a heart?’

West smiled. ‘Still no good, I’m afraid. I play a second round of trumps when in with my ace and win the next diamond to play a third round. Your partner is left with three losing diamonds.’

‘Might I make a suggestion?’ East inquired. ‘Since you can afford to lose two diamond tricks but not three, why not play the first round of diamonds from your hand? Since my partner opened the bidding, I’m not likely to hold the ace of diamonds anyway.’

‘Yes,’ conceded South. ‘I must have been playing too much pairs.’

North managed a wry smile. ‘If it had been pairs, at least we would have beaten those going two or more down in 3NT!’

6.3

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥3

♠ A 9 4

♥ K J 4

♦ 7 4

♣ J 10 9 8 4

♠ Q 5

♥ Q 6 5 3 2

♦ K 9 8 6

♣ K 3

♠ J 10 7 2

♥ A 8

♦ J 10 5 3 2

♣ 7 5

♠ K 8 6 3

♥ 10 9 7

♦ A Q

♣ A Q 6 2

‘I thought I was worth a raise to game,’ North began. ‘The five-card suit is well worth an extra point.’

South nodded. ‘The bidding was fine. It was just unlucky to find two finesses wrong.’

‘One finesse was right,’ West observed. ‘I had the queen of hearts.’

South smiled. ‘So I did the right thing then at trick one. If I put up dummy’s king, a heart continuation or a diamond switch beats me. I didn’t fancy the king anyway. I knew I might need two heart tricks if the minors were wrong and West might have had both the ace and queen.’

‘I’m not so sure about that,’ said a kibitzer who had been sitting with East. ‘If you play the jack of hearts from dummy, it’s much harder to find the diamond switch. It is going to look like the lead is from Q-10-x-x-x, making a heart return attractive.’

East nodded. ‘You’re right. Since my only entry had gone, I knew the diamond was a bit of a long shot. Even as it was, I almost returned a heart, playing my partner for two club entries. However, I couldn’t be sure the lead was from a five-card suit. You might have been concealing the two of hearts. That’s why I tried the diamond.’

Apologies if you thought this was a trick question. It would have been too much of a give away if I had specified that East won the first trick with the ace of hearts.

6.4

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣Q

♠ J 8 7 3

♥ K 7 6

♦ 9 7 6 3 2

♣ K

♠ 9 6

♥ 3

♦ A J 8

♣ Q J 10 9 6 3 2

♠ Q 10 5 4

♥ 10 9 8 4 2

♦ K Q

♣ 7 4

♠ A K 2

♥ A Q J 5

♦ 10 5 4

♣ A 8 5

North began sympathetically. 'Sorry I didn't have the eight points I'm supposed to have when you overcall their pre-empt. The queen of spades instead of the jack would have made all the difference. Do you think you could have done any better?'

A shake of the head from South greeted this inquiry. 'I don't think so. I thought about trying to set up the diamonds but saw too many ways it could go wrong. West's diamonds only need to be as good as Q-8 for East to be able to win the first diamond and knock out my second club stopper while West still has a diamond entry. I suppose there would be a chance if clubs were 8-1 but they weren't.

'We can't go wrong,' the defenders agreed, 'if you play on diamonds. We don't need our three stoppers. Two will do to get the clubs going.'

'Do you want me to tell how you could have made it?' the kibitzer asked. 'Start the spades with the jack of dummy. East covers and you win. On the second round West's nine falls to leave the eight and seven as equals against the ten.'

'That's hardly the normal play in the suit,' South replied.

'You're right,' the kibitzer agreed, 'but the unbalanced club position makes it likely that if anyone is short in spades it will be West. Since 9-x or 10-x is more likely than Q-x, my line must be best.'

6.5

♠ 9 6 3
♥ A 10 6
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ Q 6 5

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♠
2♥	2♠	pass	3♣ *
pass	3♠	all pass	

* game try, asking for help in clubs

♠ A K Q 7 5 4
♥ J 3
♦ A Q
♣ J 4 2

West led the king of hearts. North played the six and South the jack. The ten won the next heart but East ruffed the third round. Declarer overruffed and could later return to dummy to take the diamond finesse; alas, it lost. The clubs brought no joy either. What was the mistake?

6.6

♠ 9 8 6 4
♥ 7 6 3
♦ Q
♣ A K Q 4 3

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♥
2♦	3♣	3♦	4♥
5♦	5♥	all pass	

♠ K 7 2
♥ A K Q J 9 8
♦ —
♣ 9 8 7 5

West led a top diamond. Declarer ruffed and drew trumps in two rounds. All followed to the first club but West showed out on the second. With the suit blocked, declarer tried a spade. East played the jack and West the ace on the king. What is the correct play to land the contract?

6.7

♠ A 10
♥ 7 5 3
♦ A 7 3 2
♣ A Q 8 7

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♥
pass	2♣	pass	2♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

♠ K 5
♥ A K Q 8 6 2
♦ 9 8 6 4
♣ 4

West led the king of diamonds. Dummy played the ace and East ruffed! Later declarer drew trumps in two rounds and played a club to the queen. East won with the king and still there were only nine tricks. How can you improve on the line declarer took?

6.8

♠ A K Q
♥ J 8 5 4 3
♦ A K
♣ Q 8 3

W	N	E	S
4♥	dbl	pass	4♠
all pass			

♠ J 10 9 8 4
♥ —
♦ Q J 10 9 3
♣ 10 6 5

West led a top heart. Declarer ruffed and began drawing trumps. When West showed out on the second round, declarer cashed the top diamonds before ruffing a heart. This was not good enough because East could ruff the third round of diamonds. Where did declarer slip up?

6.5

Contract: 3♠

Lead: ♥K

♠ 9 6 3
♥ A 10 6
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ Q 6 5

♠ 2
♥ K Q 9 8 5 2
♦ K 10 5
♣ K 8 3

♠ J 10 8
♥ 7 4
♦ J 6 4 2
♣ A 10 9 7

♠ A K Q 7 5 4
♥ J 3
♦ A Q
♣ J 4 2

‘Did you have to put me up?’ South asked. ‘You had a lot of losers. I can still bid again.’

‘I believe in straining to show support in a competitive auction,’ North replied. ‘I wasn’t going to pass if West had passed, was I?’

North changed tack. ‘Why don’t you win the first heart and draw the trumps? Then you can exit with the jack of hearts to the queen:

♠ —
♥ 10 6
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ Q 6 5

♠ —
♥ Q 9 8
♦ K 10 5
♣ K 8 3

♠ —
♥ 4
♦ J 6 4 2
♣ A 10 9 7

♠ 7 5 4
♥ J
♦ A Q
♣ J 4 2

West must yield access to my heart winner, lead into your diamond tenace or break the clubs. Anything gives you a ninth trick.

6.6

Contract: 5♥

Lead: ♦K

♠ 9 8 6 4

♥ 7 6 3

♦ Q

♣ A K Q 4 3

♠ A 10 5

♥ 10 4

♦ A K 9 8 7 6 3

♣ 2

♠ Q J 3

♥ 5 2

♦ J 10 5 4 2

♣ J 10 6

♠ K 7 2

♥ A K Q J 9 8

♦ —

♣ 9 8 7 5

A familiar groan emanated from South. 'That was unlucky. The clubs were 3-1, the ace of spades was wrong and the spades were 3-3.'

'What's the significance of the 3-3 spade break?' North asked.

'Well, if spades are 4-2, there's a chance that whoever wins the second round has to give me a ruff and discard. If East has Q-J, Q-10 or J-10 doubleton, there's nothing the defenders can do. Also East might hold some other doubleton including the queen but fail to play the queen on the first round.'

North nodded. 'I think I see. Your play was better than ducking the first spade in the hope of catching a doubleton ace because West was more likely to be 4=2=6=1 than 2=2=8-1. East did well to play the jack. You would have ducked the three, wouldn't you?'

East grinned. 'Thanks for the compliment. Would you like me to tell you how you could have made the contract – with a different sort of ducking play?'

A shrug of the shoulders all round greeted this suggestion.

'If you discard a club on the first trick, you avoid the blockage. You can draw trumps and run the clubs in peace. I can never get in to play a spade though your king.'

6.7

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦K

♠ A 10
♥ 7 5 3
♦ A 7 3 2
♣ A Q 8 7

♠ J 8 6
♥ 4
♦ K Q J 10 5
♣ 10 9 6 2

♠ Q 9 7 4 3 2
♥ J 10 9
♦ —
♣ K J 5 3

♠ K 5
♥ A K Q 8 6 2
♦ 9 8 6 4
♣ 4

‘What have I done to deserve this?’ South asked. ‘The diamonds were 5-0 and the king of clubs was in the wrong place.’

‘You didn’t take advantage of the silver lining after the ruff,’ North replied. ‘Once the missing trumps came down in two rounds, you should have cashed the ace-king of spades and led your club in this position:

♠ —
♥ 7
♦ 7 3 2
♣ A Q 8 7

♠ J
♥ —
♦ Q J 10
♣ 10 9 6 2

♠ Q 9 7 3
♥ —
♦ —
♣ K J 5 3

♠ —
♥ Q 8 6 2
♦ 9 8 6
♣ 4

‘You intend to finesse the eight to endplay East. If West thwarts this by playing high, you cover with the queen and, if need be, duck the jack return. Unless West has J-10-9 and East the king, success is assured.

6.8

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥A

♠ A K Q

♥ J 8 5 4 3

♦ A K

♣ Q 8 3

♠ 3

♥ A K Q 10 9 6 2

♦ 8 7 6 2

♣ K

♠ 7 6 5 2

♥ 7

♦ 5 4

♣ A J 9 7 4 2

♠ J 10 9 8 4

♥ —

♦ Q J 10 9 3

♣ 10 6 5

North went on the offensive. 'Did you have to take out my double? We have them two down easily, three down I think if we get it right.

South was unimpressed. 'Come off it. I had five spades, a suit for which I placed you with tolerance, and none of their hearts. Everyone would do the same with my hand, including you.'

'Show me your hand again.'

South duly obliged.

'OK. I concede your bid was reasonable. I can't say the same about your play. Sorry, that's a little unfair. I didn't mean to be sarcastic.'

'I don't know what you mean anyway. If I discard a club on the first heart, West simply continues hearts. How does it help?'

'It doesn't. There's another way round the 4-1 trump break. Rather than draw trumps, play on diamonds. When two rounds stand up you can claim ten tricks on a high crossruff.'

'That's all very well as the cards lie. I might go down with trumps 3-2 on your line.'

North nodded. 'Yes, no line is free or risk. Still, since a 5-1 diamond split is less likely than a 4-1 spade split, my line is better.'

6.9

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

An uncontested auction (1♥-2♦-2♥-3♣-3NT) puts South in 3NT. West leads the jack of clubs. At the table, how many tricks would you expect a competent declarer to muster?

6.10

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

A simple auction (2NT-3NT) sees South in 3NT. West leads the queen of hearts. How many tricks should declarer make this time?

6.11

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

South plays in 6♥ after East has opened 3♣ and West has raised the suit. West leads the three of clubs. How many tricks do you expect our customary competent declarer to make?

6.12

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

South plays in 5♦ after East has opened 1♥ and West has raised the suit. West leads the five of hearts. Will this contract fare any better than the previous one with our hero at the helm?

6.9

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣J

♠ 7 5 2

♥ 9

♦ K Q J 8 5 4

♣ A K 6

♠ Q 4

♥ K Q 5

♦ 6 3 2

♣ J 10 9 8 3

♠ J 10 8 6 3

♥ J 7 6

♦ A 10 7

♣ 4 2

♠ A K 9

♥ A 10 8 4 3 2

♦ 9

♣ Q 7 5

With the benefit of seeing all four hands you can see eleven tricks: six on top and five in diamonds after knocking out the ace. Why would you expect a good declarer to make a different, clearly lower, number?

Look at the diamond suit. Remember the target is three tricks and you have all the other suits well covered. Are you any the wiser?

If the suit splits no worse than 4-2, you can afford to play the nine to the king. You can drive out the ace and still have two club entries in case you need to knock out the ten as well. Now suppose that the layout is actually like this:

♦ K Q J 8 5 4

♦ 3

♦ A 10 7 6 2

♦ 9

If you overtake the nine, you risk making only two tricks. East will have three stoppers, which you lack the entries and time to dislodge. You need to let the nine run. If East wins with the ten, the K-Q-J-8 are equals against the ace and will you give three tricks. If East ducks, you have a trick in the bag and the K-Q-J must give you two more.

On the actual layout, declarer makes nine or ten tricks depending on whether East finds the heart switch after scoring the ten of diamonds.

6.10

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥Q

♠ A 10 5

♥ 9 4

♦ J 5

♣ 9 8 7 6 5 2

♠ 8 4 2

♥ Q J 10 7 3

♦ Q 9 3 2

♣ 10

♠ 9 7 6 3

♥ 6 5

♦ K 8 6 4

♣ A K 3

♠ K Q J

♥ A K 8 2

♦ A 10 7

♣ Q J 4

Did you say ten tricks? In theory, declarer can make this many. Lead the queen of clubs to knock out one of East's top clubs, grab the next heart and clear the clubs. I hope you did not fall into this trap. In case West has a club entry, declarer should duck the second heart to be sure of a third heart stopper. This gives West time to switch to diamonds and set up a fourth defensive trick. So is 'nine' the right answer?

Take a closer look at the club position, looking only at North-South:

♣ 9 8 7 6 5 2

♣ Q J 4

Playing for two losers is easy on a 2-2 split. What can you do about a 3-1 split? If dummy had two entries, it would be right to lead the queen. This picks up A-K-10, A-K-3, A-10-3, K-10-3 or the bare 10 with East. It costs if East has a lone ace or king but that is only two holdings.

The solitary entry to dummy changes the situation. You can ill afford to lead the queen and have West win with a singleton ace or king. Nor can you succeed if East has A-K-10. Accordingly you should lead low, ensuring two tricks whenever someone has a lone ace or king. This means you score seven tricks as the cards lie, eight on a good day.

6.11

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♣3

♠ A Q 9
♥ 9 7 6 4
♦ K Q 9 2
♣ K 8

♠ 8 7 5 4
♥ 10 8 5 2
♦ A 5
♣ Q 9 3

♠ J 2
♥ —
♦ 8 6 4
♣ A J 10 7 6 5 4 2

♠ K 10 6 3
♥ A K Q J 3
♦ J 10 7 3
♣ —

Our competent declarer emerges with only ten tricks. How do you arrive at this conclusion?

After ruffing the first club and laying down a top heart, it is clear that drawing trumps will result in defeat. Equally, it will not help to knock out the ace of diamonds at this point. A club will come back and ruffing a second time in the South hand will set up West's ten. There is only one hope. Run four rounds of spades, discarding dummy's remaining club. Then, when West comes in with the ace of diamonds and continues clubs, dummy ruffs. After this, you can finish drawing trumps and make the rest of the tricks.

How should you play for four spade tricks? Remember, a 3-3 split is no good – West would ruff in with the ten of hearts on the fourth round. You need West to follow all the way. You do not need to be a rocket scientist to work out the next piece of the puzzle. If West holds four spades to East's two, who is more likely to hold the jack? The answer, of course, is West.

The correct play, having ruffed the club and found about the bad trump break is to finesse the nine of spades. This would land the slam if West had J-x-x-x of spades. On the actual layout, East scores the jack of spades and West the ten of hearts to put the slam two down.

6.12

Contract: 5♦

Lead: ♥5

♠ K Q
♥ 10 9 4 2
♦ A K
♣ 9 7 4 3 2

♠ 10 9 7 2
♥ Q 8 5
♦ Q J 6 3
♣ 10 6

♠ J 8 6 3
♥ A K J 7 6 3
♦ —
♣ Q J 8

♠ A 5 4
♥ —
♦ 10 9 8 7 5 4 2
♣ A K 5

West's seemingly certain two trump tricks shrink to one if you play correctly, meaning that the contract makes. You ruff the heart and play a trump, discovering the news. You ruff a second heart and return to dummy with a spade. You have an entry to spare and can afford to cash dummy's other spade next. Then ruff a third heart and cash your top cards in the black suits, discarding dummy's last heart. You finish here:

♠ —
♥ —
♦ K
♣ 9 7 4

♠ 10
♥ —
♦ Q J 6
♣ —

♠ J
♥ A 7
♦ —
♣ Q

♠ —
♥ —
♦ 10 9 8
♣ 5

You exit with a club. East wins and must return a major. You ruff in hand to leave dummy poised to overruff if and only if West overruffs.

6.13

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

South plays in 6NT after the sequence 1♣-1♥-3NT-6NT. West leads the jack of spades. What is your verdict about declarer's expected number of tricks?

6.14

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

South arrives in 4♥ via the slightly aggressive auction, 1♥-3♥-4♥. West leads the jack of diamonds. Can you predict the outcome?

6.15

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

An uncontested auction (2NT-3♣-3♠-6♠ or similar) sees South arrive in another slam. West leads the ten of clubs. How many tricks do you think declarer should come to this time?

6.16

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

After West has opened 1♦ and North has left in South's reopening double for penalties, East retreats to 1♥. Thereafter North-South have the bidding to themselves and finish in 4♠ by South. How do you rate our declarer's chance of success on a club lead?

6.13

Contract: 6NT

Lead: ♠J

♠ A 5 4
♥ A K Q 4 2
♦ J 9 5
♣ 9 6

♠ J 10 8 7 2
♥ 10 7
♦ 8 7 4 3
♣ 7 2

♠ K 9 6
♥ J 9 6 3
♦ A 10 6 2
♣ 8 4

♠ Q 3
♥ 8 5
♦ K Q
♣ A K Q J 10 5 3

Despite having only eleven top tricks, you can easily make thirteen so long as you judge correctly that the lead is not from the king. Put up the ace of spades and run all the clubs to squeeze East in three suits:

♠ —
♥ A K Q 4 2
♦ J
♣ —

♠ 10 8
♥ 10 7
♦ 8 7
♣ —

♠ Q
♥ 8 5
♦ K Q
♣ 3

♠ K
♥ J 9 6 3
♦ A
♣ —

East has no safe discard when you play your last club and throw a diamond from dummy. Releasing a heart or the ace of diamonds would give you your twelfth and thirteenth tricks at once. Throwing the spade king provides only temporary respite. You cash the queen of spades to produce a simple squeeze in the red suits.

6.14

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦J

♠ K 8 7 4

♥ 8 7 5 3

♦ K 5 2

♣ A 2

♠ Q 3

♥ K 6 4

♦ J 10 9 4

♣ K Q 6 3

♠ 10 9 6 5 2

♥ A

♦ Q 7 3

♣ 8 7 5 4

♠ A J

♥ Q J 10 9 2

♦ A 8 6

♣ J 10 9

Did you predict a two-trick defeat? I can explain this result. Declarer wins the diamond in dummy and finesses the jack of spades. This loses to the queen and a diamond comes back. You cross to the ace of clubs to park a diamond on the king of spades. Unfortunately, West ruffs this. You lose a spade, a ruff, the ace-king of hearts and a club. This is a thoughtful if inferior line. Take half marks if you predicted it.

A novice would probably escape for one down, not bothering to do anything about the third-round diamond loser.

The correct outcome, with a sound declarer, is that the contract makes. Trying to get rid of a diamond before drawing trumps is the right idea. However, rather than stake everything on the spade position, you should combine your chances in the black suits. After all, the J-10-9 of clubs contributed to South's decision to advance to 4♥. You should put them to good use in the play.

Win the opening lead in hand and lead the jack of clubs, intending to let it run. As the cards lie, West covers. This allows you to set up a club trick and so discard a diamond from dummy once you regain the lead. If nothing interesting happens in clubs, you have time to try your luck in spades. Two chances are better than one.

6.15

Contract: 6♠

Lead: ♣10

♠ A K 8 3
♥ A 5
♦ 9 7 6 5 2
♣ Q 8

♠ Q 10 6
♥ Q 8 6
♦ Q 10
♣ 10 9 6 5 4

♠ 7 5
♥ 10 9 7 4 3
♦ J 8 3
♣ 7 3 2

♠ J 9 4 2
♥ K J 2
♦ A K 4
♣ A K J

Again, the correct answer is ten tricks! For a start, the best play in trumps is to cash the ace-king rather than take the double finesse. The queen will drop about 32% of the time but West will have the queen and ten only 24% of the time – even then, a 4-1 break creates problems. Playing for the drop is especially wise when there are throw-in chances. If the queen does not fall, you aim for an end position like this:

	♠ 8 3	
	♥ —	
	♦ 9	
	♣ —	
♠ —		♠ Q
♥ —		♥ Q 9
♦ Q		♦ —
♣ 9 6		♣ —
	♠ J 9	
	♥ —	
	♦ 4	
	♣ —	

You intend to exit with a spade and obtain a ruff and discard on the next trick. This will take care of your diamond loser.

How could you reach a position like this? You must cash all your remaining winners in the minors. This is clear. You also need to find the queen of spades and the diamond length in opposite hands. This factor lies beyond your control. Can you see another essential ingredient? Since you have two trumps left in dummy and no hearts in hand, you must have made three heart tricks, finessing successfully. It is vital that you do have two trumps in each hand or a ruff and discard is no use.

On the actual layout, the heart finesse loses. West, upon getting in with the queen of hearts, can cash the queen of spades and exit safely in hearts. This leaves you with a diamond to lose at the end: two down.

6.16

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♣A

♠ A 9 7 4

♥ J

♦ A K J 7 6

♣ 9 4 2

♠ Q 5

♥ 9 8 6

♦ Q 10 4 3 2

♣ A K Q

♠ J 3 2

♥ 10 5 4 3 2

♦ 9 5

♣ 8 6 5

♠ K 10 8 6

♥ A K Q 7

♦ 8

♣ J 10 7 3

West begins by cashing three top clubs, at which point the contract seems doomed due to the trump loser. Believe it or not, with the aid of a winning view as to the distribution, ten tricks are cold. You cannot get home by drawing trumps, of course. Fortunately, since you know West has length in diamonds and East length in hearts, you have no need to do so. You can play on a crossruff. Moreover, if you time the crossruff to best advantage, eventually one of the defenders will have to ruff, allowing you to overruff. You need to hope the queen and jack of spades lie in opposite hands and judge who is likely to hold three trumps.

With 6-1, 6-2 or 5-2 in the red suits, East's 1♥ bid seems clear. With a lesser disparity, many people would sit 1♦ doubled. This being the case, East is unlikely to be 2=5=3=3 and so probably has three spades.

Win West's probable heart switch in hand, cash a second top heart and ruff a heart, noting that West follows. Then cash a top diamond. You can reach the same position if West switched to a diamond. Then play a second top diamond, discarding your last club as East follows. All is plain sailing from the position you have reached:

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

East cannot gain by ruffing as you ruff a diamond. Likewise West cannot gain by ruffing as you ruff your last heart in dummy. Now you lead dummy's last diamond and poor East has to ruff. Ruffing with the jack is clearly best but you overruff and finesse to pick up the queen.

This general plan also succeeds if East is 3=6=1=3. You will have seen West show out on the third round of hearts and East cannot gain by ruffing your second top diamond. You can also make the contract if East is 4=5=1=3. In this case you will have seen West follow to three hearts but East show out on the second diamond. If this happens, you change to drawing trumps, cashing the ace first, of course. Do not worry if you missed these finer details. For 10 marks, all you needed to do was to see the possibility of success on the actual distribution!

Worries for West

Just as the problems in chapter 2 involved leading, those in this chapter revolve around following suit, discards and ruffs. As a defender, you follow suit more than you do anything else. Much of the time, you do so in a mundane fashion, using your limited resources in an economic manner to avoid giving cheap tricks to your opponent. You normally play low cards when you cannot win the trick and save your high cards for when they pull full weight. You might play a slightly higher card than necessary as a signal, typically showing count or suit-preference on a suit led by declarer or attitude on a suit led by your partner.

Routine actions of following suit do not make for good problems. In this chapter, you often need to consider alternative actions. There is an inextricable link between your play on the current trick and your plan for the next trick. You need to think ahead. The keener you are to gain the lead the more willing you should be to follow with a high card or to ruff. If you want partner to have the lead, or at any rate avoid getting it yourself, you might duck a trick you could win or unblock a high card. Thinking ahead can also prove vital to avoid giving away your holding. If dummy on your left comes down with a king-jack combination and you hold the ace, you do best to decide whether to play the ace before declarer leads the suit. This way, if you decide to duck, you can do so smoothly.

7.1

♠ Q 9 8 4
 ♥ Q J 4
 ♦ J 6
 ♣ A K 8 5

♠ K J 7 5
 ♥ A 8 2
 ♦ A Q 8 2
 ♣ Q 10

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♥
1NT	dbl	2♣	2♦
pass	4♥	all pass	

You lead the two of hearts, which runs to the four, five and seven. At trick two, declarer leads the three of diamonds. What card do you play on this trick? When do you intend to play your ace of trumps?

7.2

♠ A K 10 9 8
 ♥ 9 8 4 2
 ♦ K 5
 ♣ 8 6

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	1♣	1♥
1♠	4♥	all pass	

You lead the four of clubs to the queen and ace. The top spades win the next two tricks; East turns up with Q-x and South throws the jack of clubs on the second round. Declarer now comes back to the ace of hearts and leads a diamond. What do you play on this trick? Why?

7.3

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

♠ K 6 4
 ♥ J 7 6 4 3
 ♦ Q 7 4
 ♣ K 6

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

You lead the four of hearts. Partner wins with the ace and returns the eight. South covers with the nine and you win with the jack. How do you continue? What key play do you hope to make later?

7.4

♠ K 8 7 5 3
 ♥ K 10
 ♦ A K 8 5
 ♣ 10 8

♠ Q 9 2
 ♥ 8 6 2
 ♦ 10 2
 ♣ K 9 7 6 5

W	N	E	S
—	1♠	pass	2♦
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

You lead the six of clubs to the eight, ace and four. Partner returns the three, on which South plays the two. What card do you play on this trick? If you say the king, what do you lead next?

7.1

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♥2

♠ Q 9 8 4

♥ Q J 4

♦ J 6

♣ A K 8 5

♠ K J 7 5

♥ A 8 2

♦ A Q 8 2

♣ Q 10

♠ 10 6 3 2

♥ 5 3

♦ 9 4

♣ 9 7 6 4 3

♠ A

♥ K 10 9 7 6

♦ K 10 7 5 3

♣ J 2

Intuitively you may want to play the queen of diamonds. Players do not generally want to lose a trick unnecessarily. A glance at the diagram should tell you that another rule applies even more strongly: ‘Don’t waste your high cards in collecting small ones.’ You end up with two tricks in diamonds and your ace of hearts but nothing else.

Since you know you can draw dummy’s remaining trumps when you get in, you can afford to duck the first diamond. After the jack wins, you capture the ten with the queen (or the king with the ace) on the second round. At this point, which answers the second question I posed, you take your ace of trumps. You continue with the third round. You are now bound to defeat the contract with three diamonds and a trump.

Note that in ducking the first diamond you must play the two, not the eight. The eight is too valuable a card to waste. In any case, partner has too little involvement in the play to find a signal at all of interest.

7.2

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣4

♠ A K 10 9 8

♥ 9 8 4 2

♦ K 5

♣ 8 6

♠ J 7 5 3 2

♥ J

♦ A Q 10 6

♣ 10 5 4

♠ Q 6

♥ K Q 5

♦ 8 4

♣ K Q 9 7 3 2

♠ 4

♥ A 10 7 6 3

♦ J 9 7 3 2

♣ A J

On the previous deal you had to duck the first diamond because doing so made the difference between making two diamond tricks and three. This time, when you hold the ten, different considerations apply.

Did you think to duck or even play the queen in the hope that your partner has J-x and can gain the lead on the second round to draw some of dummy's trumps? At least I can give you credit for thinking.

Unfortunately, ducking the diamond requires partner to produce three key cards: the king and queen of hearts and the jack of diamonds. As the cards lie, you get to win the second diamond. Declarer ruffs your club continuation and crossruffs. If your partner ever overruffs to draw a second round of trumps, the long diamond will score.

You can reasonably place East with the king-queen of hearts. The position seems hopeless if South has the ace-queen, let alone ace-king. However, there is no reason to put East with the jack of diamonds when South appears to have greater length in diamonds.

A better bet is to rise with the ace of diamonds, blocking the suit. You continue with a club, forcing declarer to ruff. After a diamond to the king comes a spade ruff, on which partner discards a club. Declarer can then ruff a diamond in dummy but to no avail. Partner can overruff the third or the fourth round of diamonds and draw two trumps for one to leave declarer a trick short. The long diamond never comes into play.

7.3

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥4

♠ 10 9 7
♥ K
♦ J 10 9 8
♣ A J 10 9 2

♠ K 6 4
♥ J 7 6 4 3
♦ Q 7 4
♣ K 6

♠ J 5 3 2
♥ A 8 2
♦ 5 3 2
♣ Q 7 5

♠ A Q 8
♥ Q 10 9 5
♦ A K 6
♣ 8 4 3

Holding A-Q-10-8 of hearts partner would hardly return the eight and so block the suit. This means you can read the eight as from A-8-x and put declarer with two heart stoppers. Even so, you should persevere with hearts. You can hardly feel confident that any switch is safe. You really need partner to hold the queen of clubs, in which case declarer must have just about everything else.

If partner lacks the queen of clubs, the contract seems set to make. With five club tricks, two heart tricks and holding at least 11 points in the pointed suits, declarer can surely find two more tricks. Assuming that partner does hold the queen of clubs, can you see how to shut out dummy's suit? You must hop up with the king on the first round. If the ace wins, partner holds up the queen until the third round to restrict declarer to two tricks in the suit. If your king wins, your side should end up with two hearts, two clubs and a spade.

Take a bonus point for spotting that, if declarer loses two club tricks, you may need to take care to avoid falling victim to a squeeze. For this reason, you should lead probably the seven of hearts at trick three as a suit-preference signal for spades. This should enable partner to make the correct lead after getting in with the queen of clubs.

7.4

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣6

♠ K 8 7 5 3

♥ K 10

♦ A K 8 5

♣ 10 8

♠ Q 9 2

♥ 8 6 2

♦ 10 2

♣ K 9 7 6 5

♠ A 10 6 4

♥ J 7 5 4 3

♦ 7 4

♣ A 3

♠ J

♥ A Q 9

♦ Q J 9 6 3

♣ Q J 4 2

As on the previous deal, you should easily read the return. You have seen the two, three and four of clubs. This means the three is either East's only remaining club or an original fourth best. Since the bidding and the return make no sense if East began with A-Q-J-3 and South 4-2, the three must be from A-3 doubleton.

Having grasped the club position, you can see that it can hardly help either to duck the club or to take the king and continue the suit. The club suit is never going to run. You should take your king.

Has something else struck you? Most people respond 2♣ to 1♠ with 4-4 in the minors. This marks South with 5-4 in the minors. When you add in partner's failure to switch to a heart or overcall 2♥ – possible actions if holding six hearts – you feel strongly inclined to place South with three hearts, in other words a 1=3=5=4 shape.

The presumption of a singleton spade on your right tells you to lead a spade. Which card should you choose? If you needed four spade tricks, you would need partner to hold ♠A-J-10-x. You would lead the nine, planning to continue with the queen if it holds. Since, with two club tricks in the bag, three spade tricks will suffice, you need not gamble on the position of the ten and jack of spades. Switch to the queen. This gives your side three tricks whenever South's spade is not the ace.

7.5

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

♠ K 6
 ♥ 9 4
 ♦ K 7
 ♣ A J 9 8 7 6 2

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

You lead the nine of hearts. Partner wins with the ace and switches to the king of clubs. What card you do play on this trick? If your side can score four tricks, what will they be?

7.6

♠ Q 6 3 2
 ♥ 9 8 2
 ♦ A Q 9 7
 ♣ A J

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♥
pass	1♠	2♠ *	pass
pass	4♥	all pass	

* natural

You lead the five of spades. Partner wins with the king, cashes the ace and continues with the seven. South, who started with J-4, discards a club on the third round. Do you ruff? If not, what do you discard?

7.7

♠ A K J 5
 ♥ 9
 ♦ 10 7 6 4 2
 ♣ A K 7

♠ 10 3
 ♥ Q 6 5 4 2
 ♦ A 9
 ♣ Q 9 5 2

W	N	E	S
—	1♦	pass	3♦ *
pass	3♠	pass	3NT
all pass			

* limit raise

You lead the four of hearts, on which go the nine, ace and three. Back comes the seven and you capture South's jack with your queen. What are your plans to establish and run the heart suit?

7.8

♠ J 10 7 4
 ♥ 9 4
 ♦ A K Q J 9
 ♣ K J

♠ A 8 5
 ♥ A 7
 ♦ 3 2
 ♣ 10 8 6 5 3 2

W	N	E	S
—	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

You lead the five of clubs, which goes to the king, ace and four. East switches to the two of spades, on which South plays low. What do you play on this trick? When do you intend to use the ace of hearts?

7.5

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥9

♠ Q J 9 5

♥ 7

♦ A Q J 10 4

♣ Q 10 3

♠ K 6

♥ 9 4

♦ K 7

♣ A J 9 8 7 6 2

♠ 7 2

♥ A 10 8 5 2

♦ 8 6 5 3 2

♣ K

♠ A 10 8 4 3

♥ K Q J 6 3

♦ 9

♣ 5 4

On the bidding, the ace of hearts and the king of clubs that you have already seen are quite probably partner's only high cards. This makes the position hopeless if you place declarer with a singleton club. How could you hope to score more than a heart, a spade and a club? You can see that the diamond position is hopeless. So do you think you can make two clubs, a heart and a spade if the singleton club is where you want it?

Suppose you allow the king of clubs to hold and a trump comes next. Declarer will also have been listening to the bidding and know that you hold the kings of spades and diamonds. It will therefore be clear to go up with the ace of spades and finesse the queen of diamonds. The ace of diamonds or, if East has four diamonds rather than five, the jack will take care of South's second club.

You should overtake the king of clubs with the ace. This allows you to play a second round of clubs before declarer has had time to arrange a discard. When, as you hoped, the king is singleton, your side scores two aces, the king of spades and a club ruff. These tricks should be the four that you look to score.

7.6

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠5

♠ Q 6 3 2

♥ 9 8 2

♦ A Q 9 7

♣ A J

♠ 5

♥ J 10 3

♦ 10 8 3 2

♣ 10 9 6 3 2

♠ A K 10 9 8 7

♥ Q 7

♦ J 6 4

♣ K 8

♠ J 4

♥ A K 6 5 4

♦ K 5

♣ Q 7 5 4

Again, your instincts may tell you to ruff. After all, you cannot say for sure that you can make a trump trick any other way. Shall we see what happens if you do?

Reading the seven as a suit-preference signal for clubs, you lead a club next. Up goes the ace, after which the ace-king of hearts draw the missing trumps. Declarer then claims ten tricks: one spade, five hearts, three diamonds and a club. It would not help if partner had K-x rather than Q-x of hearts. Declarer would finesse and still pick up the suit.

By ruffing the third round of spades, you are effectively ruffing a loser. You must discard. Moreover, in view of dummy's diamonds, you need to discard a club rather than a diamond. This way your side ends up with four tricks: two spades, a heart and a club. Assuming that you can trust your partner not to signal so emphatically for a club if holding the king of both minors, it cannot gain to ruff.

Award yourself a bonus point if you worked out why partner had to play a third spade. If South had opened a little light, you might have held 10-x-x of trumps and K-x-x-x of diamonds.

7.7

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥4

♠ A K J 5

♥ 9

♦ 10 7 6 4 2

♣ A K 7

♠ 10 3

♥ Q 6 5 4 2

♦ A 9

♣ Q 9 5 2

♠ Q 9 7 4 2

♥ A 10 8 7

♦ J

♣ 10 8 4

♠ 8 6

♥ K J 3

♦ K Q 8 5 3

♣ J 6 3

In contrast to 7.3 and 7.4, it looks like the return does come from a four-card suit. Indeed, if you assume South would show a four-card heart suit in preference to raising diamonds, you could work out this out irrespective of the exact cards played.

Partner's play is consistent with a holding of A-K-8-7 and an attempt to give declarer, if holding Q-10-x, a guess. However, the odds are that the king of hearts is on your right. In any case, you can easily defeat the contract if declarer lacks a heart stopper simply by continuing the suit.

In the more likely scenario that the seven comes from A-10-8-7 you need to take care. Since you have had to use your queen to capture the jack, you cannot win the fourth of hearts. After driving out the king on the third round, can you see how to overcome the blockage?

Hold up the ace of diamonds until the second round. With any luck South has five-card diamond support for the jump to 3♦. In this case East will have a singleton and be able to discard a heart on the second round of the suit. This leaves you with two winning hearts to cash.

7.8

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣5

♠ J 10 7 4

♥ 9 4

♦ A K Q J 9

♣ K J

♠ A 8 5

♥ A 7

♦ 3 2

♣ 10 8 6 5 3 2

♠ Q 9 6 2

♥ 10 8 5 3 2

♦ 8 6 5

♣ A

♠ K 3

♥ K Q J 6

♦ 10 7 4

♣ Q 9 7 4

South's bidding indicates around 11 points. This makes it logical to start by working out how many partner can have. The answer, when you add those you can see to the presumed 11 on your right, is about six. This leaves room for two or, if South is an aggressive bidder, three to come. Assuming you read the switch to the two as promising something in spades, they must be the queen or maybe the king of spades.

Given time, you can see how declarer can easily come to nine tricks: five diamonds, two clubs, at least one heart and at least one spade. This means that you need to focus on scoring five first. These surely need to consist of three spades and two aces, which dictates placing South with a doubleton spade. Effectively now defending double dummy, you ought to see what to do on this trick. Play the eight of spades. I guess you could call this an intra-finesse. This answers the first question I posed.

When should you play the ace of hearts? The answer is on the first round. If declarer holds the ten of diamonds as an entry for untangling the clubs, you can ill afford to duck any hearts. After taking your ace of hearts, you continue with the ace and another spade. The way I set the second question, I guess you might try to claim a correct solution if you said, 'Before playing ace and another spade.' I leave this between you and your conscience.

7.9

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

♠ Q 2

♥ A 5

♦ K Q 10 7 5 4 3

♣ K 5

W	N	E	S
1♦	pass	1♠	2♥
3♦	4♥	all pass	

You lead the king of diamonds. Partner overtakes with the ace and shifts to the six of spades. Declarer hops up with the ace and leads a low trump. What do you play to this trick? When do you intend to play your king of clubs?

7.10

♠ A 9 7 2
 ♥ J 9
 ♦ K J 5 4 2
 ♣ A 5

♠ 10 6 5

♥ Q 7 4

♦ A Q 8 6

♣ 10 9 7

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♦ *
pass	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	6♦	all pass	

* four diamonds or 4=4=3=2

You lead the ten of clubs. Declarer wins in hand with the king and leads the nine of diamonds. Which card do you play?

7.11

♠ 10 9 6 2
 ♥ J 6 2
 ♦ 7 4 3
 ♣ A 9 3

♠ Q 8 5
 ♥ 10 8 5
 ♦ K 9 8 6
 ♣ Q J 5

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

With some misgivings, you lead the six of diamonds. All turns out well: partner holds A-J-10. The ace wins the first trick, the king the second (South covers) and the ten the third. When East shifts to a heart from 9-7-3, declarer plays four rounds of hearts. What do you discard?

7.12

♠ 8 2
 ♥ K J 5 4
 ♦ 6
 ♣ K J 9 8 5 2

♠ A 5 4
 ♥ 8
 ♦ K J 8 7 5 2
 ♣ A 6 3

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♠
2♦	dbl	5♦	5♥
all pass			

You lead the seven of diamonds and must recover from seeing partner's ace ruffed. Declarer draws trumps in three rounds (partner has 10-x-x) before leading the ten of clubs. When this holds, the four comes next. What do you do this time? If you win, what do you lead next?

7.9

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦K

♠ K 10 8 5 4

♥ J 10 8 4

♦ J 6

♣ A 10

♠ Q 2

♥ A 5

♦ K Q 10 7 5 4 3

♣ K 5

♠ J 9 7 6 3

♥ 6

♦ A

♣ J 8 7 6 4 2

♠ A

♥ K Q 9 7 3 2

♦ 9 8 2

♣ Q 9 3

Given the bidding partner cannot have much apart from ♦A. Luckily, the ♣J and any trump should be enough. All you have to do is go up with your ♥A, cash the ♦Q and exit with a non-club. You intend to use the king of clubs for covering the queen – not for leading!

If you duck the heart, dummy wins and cashes the king of spades, on which South throws a diamond. A spade ruff (not essential as the cards lie) followed by a lead of either red suit puts you on play:

♠ 10 8

♥ 10 8 4

♦ J

♣ A 10

♠ —

♥ A

♦ Q 10 7 5 4

♣ K 5

♠ J 9

♥ —

♦ —

♣ J 8 7 6 4 2

♠ —

♥ K Q 9 7 3

♦ 9

♣ Q 9 3

After taking the ♦Q and ♥A, you have no safe exit.

7.10

Contract: 6♦

Lead: ♣10

♠ A 9 7 2
♥ J 9
♦ K J 5 4 2
♣ A 5

♠ 10 6 5
♥ Q 7 4
♦ A Q 8 6
♣ 10 9 7

♠ 8 4 3
♥ 10 8 6 3 2
♦ —
♣ J 8 4 3 2

♠ K Q J
♥ A K 5
♦ 10 9 7 3
♣ K Q 6

I hope you did not think, 'I'll duck smoothly in the hope the king goes up or South is an idiot.' If you study the suit carefully, you will see that playing the ace ensures you a second trick even though East is void.

Did you think it is as good to play the queen? Watch what happens. After the king wins, declarer plays three rounds of spades followed by the ace of clubs and two top hearts. Cashing the queen of clubs (dummy throws a spade) and ruffing a heart then brings us here:

♠ —
♥ —
♦ J 5 4
♣ —

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A 8 6
♣ —

♠ —
♥ 10 8
♦ —
♣ J

♠ —
♥ —
♦ 10 7 3
♣ —

A trump to the ten, which you have to win, leaves you endplayed.

7.11

Contract: 3NT

Lead: \diamond 6

\spadesuit 10 9 6 2

\heartsuit J 6 2

\diamond 7 4 3

\clubsuit A 9 3

\spadesuit Q 8 5

\heartsuit 10 8 5

\diamond K 9 8 6

\clubsuit Q J 5

\spadesuit J 7 3

\heartsuit 9 7 3

\diamond A J 10

\clubsuit 10 8 4 2

\spadesuit A K 4

\heartsuit A K Q 4

\diamond Q 5 2

\clubsuit K 7 6

Before making your discard, how do you place the high cards and the distribution? To hold at least 20 points South must hold the ace-king of spades and the king of clubs in addition to those you have already seen. You can be less certain of the distribution. What you know for sure is that the South started with six black cards and East with seven. This tells you that partner cannot hold four spades as well as four clubs. Declarer must have either at least three spades or at least four clubs. Can you see the significance of this? Your opponent will be in a position to set up a long card in one of the black suits whatever you do.

Since you need to have a winner to cash upon gaining the lead, you can rule out discarding the thirteenth diamond. Which black suit can you more readily afford to weaken? The only way declarer can hold four clubs is with ace-king doubleton of spades. On any other layout, the club suit poses no threat. By contrast, if your opponent holds either A-K-x of spades and K-x-x of clubs or A-K-x-x of spades and K-x of clubs, you need to keep your spades. Remember, you rather than your partner need to gain the lead. Therefore, you discard a club.

7.12

Contract: 5♥

Lead: ♦7

♠ 8 2

♥ K J 5 4

♦ 6

♣ K J 9 8 5 2

♠ A 5 4

♥ 8

♦ K J 8 7 5 2

♣ A 6 3

♠ Q J 9

♥ 10 7 6

♦ A Q 10 9 4 3

♣ 7

♠ K 10 7 6 3

♥ A Q 9 3 2

♦ —

♣ Q 10 4

You should win the second club. Since dummy presumably has a trump entry, a hold-up serves little purpose. More importantly, you want to retain an exit card. After taking the ace of clubs, the position is this:

♠ 8 2

♥ J

♦ —

♣ K J 9 8

♠ A 5 4

♥ —

♦ K J 5

♣ 6

♠ Q J 9

♥ —

♦ Q 10 9 4

♣ —

♠ K 10 7 6 3

♥ 9

♦ —

♣ Q

Although you cannot definitely place the king and queen of spades, you can count declarer's tricks elsewhere. These are five hearts and five clubs. This means that if your side has two spade tricks that they cannot run away. Laying down the ace of spades would be a mistake. Instead, exit with your third club and wait for declarer to play spades.

7.13

♠ K 9 5
 ♥ J 5 3
 ♦ K 6 5 4 3 2
 ♣ J

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	pass	1♥
pass	2♥	dbl	4♥
all pass			

You lead the ten of diamonds. Partner wins with the queen, on which South drops the jack, and switches to a trump. Declarer wins with the ace and leads a low club. What do you play on this trick? If you go in with the king, what card do you lead next?

7.14

♠ Q 5 4 2
 ♥ —
 ♦ A K J 7 5
 ♣ A K Q 3

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

You lead a top spade, on which partner plays the three and declarer the eight. What do you lead next? If this is not the key play on the deal, what do you think is?

7.15

♠ Q 9
 ♥ A Q 4
 ♦ Q J 7 5
 ♣ K 10 8 4

♠ J 10 6 5 3 2

♥ 2

♦ K 9 2

♣ Q J 5

—	—	—	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

You lead the five of spades and strike gold. Partner wins with the ace and returns the eight as the king and queen crash together on the second round. Declarer plays a heart to the ace followed by the queen and two more hearts. What is your discard strategy?

7.16

♠ K Q
 ♥ K Q 3
 ♦ K Q J 10
 ♣ A 9 3 2

♠ J 6 5 3

♥ 10 8 6 5

♦ 9 6 4 2

♣ 8

W	N	E	S
—	—	3♣	dbl
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4NT	pass	5♠ *
pass	7♦	all pass	

* three aces

You lead the eight of clubs, which dummy's ace wins as declarer drops the jack. Next, the king and queen of diamonds come from dummy. Partner follows once before discarding a club. Now declarer ruffs a club with the ace of diamonds. What do you play?

7.13

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦10

♠ K 9 5

♥ J 5 3

♦ K 6 5 4 3 2

♣ J

♠ J 8 2

♥ Q 10 6

♦ 10 9 8

♣ K 10 5 3

♠ 10 7 6 4

♥ 7

♦ A Q 7

♣ A 8 7 4 2

♠ A Q 3

♥ A K 9 8 4 2

♦ J

♣ Q 9 6

Before deciding any of your plays, you should piece together all the information you have. There is a lot of it. To pass as dealer and then double 2♥ for takeout partner surely has about 10 or 11 points, four spades and a singleton heart. The play to the first trick enables you to place all the high diamonds. Declarer's lead of a low club at trick three marks the position of the ace of clubs. You can more or less write down the full deal.

Suppose that you duck the club, retaining your king-ten as a tenace. What good does this do you? Partner can do no better than take the ace and return the suit. In any event, declarer has plenty of entries – in the spade suit and by ruffing diamonds – to take two club ruffs in dummy.

Now suppose that you win the club and lead the ten of hearts. This is no good either. The jack wins your ten, after which declarer comes to hand and ruffs a club. Although your side scores a club trick at the end, you have lost your trump trick. Once more, the contract succeeds.

You have no doubt spotted the answer now. You go in with the king of clubs and continue with the queen of hearts to force out the king. This way declarer can still take only one club ruff. Moreover, since the ruff will be with the jack of hearts, your trump trick comes back. It does not help your opponent to refuse the club ruff. In this case, your side ends up with three club tricks as well as the diamond already made.

7.14

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠A

♠ Q 5 4 2

♥ —

♦ A K J 7 5

♣ A K Q 3

♠ A K J 10 6

♥ J 10 9 5

♦ 9 2

♣ 7 4

♠ 9 7 3

♥ K 3

♦ Q 10 8 4

♣ J 10 8 2

♠ 8

♥ A Q 8 7 6 4 2

♦ 6 3

♣ 9 6 5

If the three of spades is a singleton, you want to continue spades to be sure of making your second top spade and to give partner a ruff. If, as is more likely, the eight of spades is the singleton, it surely cannot cost to continue spades. With presumably 1-7 in the majors, you expect South to hold only five cards in the minors. The winners you can see in dummy will cover these.

When, as expected, declarer ruffs the second spade, it is clear that the key point has not yet arrived. It does do so on the next trick when your opponent lays down the ace of hearts. Are you ready for this? If not, you have lost the chance to beat the contract. Cool as a cucumber you need to drop one of your high hearts, ideally the ten.

Look at this from declarer's point of view. If the ten comes from J-10 or 10-9, it would be a mistake to continue with a low trump. The way to avoid three trump losers in that case is to bash out the queen. This results in three trump losers on the actual layout.

For two reasons your ten will look like it comes from J-10 or 10-9 rather than K-10. Apart from restricted choice arguments (with J-10 or 10-9 you might equally have played the other card), your silence in the bidding provides a clue. With the spades you hold and K-10 of hearts and maybe something in the minors you might have overcalled.

7.15

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠5

♠ Q 9
♥ A Q 4
♦ Q J 7 5
♣ K 10 8 4

♠ J 10 6 5 3 2
♥ 2
♦ K 9 2
♣ Q J 5

♠ A 8 7
♥ 10 9 7 6 3
♦ 4 3
♣ 9 7 2

♠ K 4
♥ K J 8 5
♦ A 10 8 6
♣ A 6 3

You need to find three discards in all. You should guess this as soon as dummy plays the queen of hearts. You know that partner would need both the jack and the ten to stop the suit from running and would not expect declarer to be playing on a short suit.

You can easily spare a diamond and a spade. You need only four spade tricks plus whatever trick you get in with to set the contract. The third discard is more problematical. With the position of the unseen aces and kings marked by the bidding, you anticipate this ending:

♠ —
♥ —
♦ Q J 7 5
♣ K 10 8 4

♠ J 10 6
♥ —
♦ K 9
♣ Q J 5

♠ 7
♥ 10 7
♦ 4 3
♣ 9 7 2

♠ —
♥ J
♦ A 10 8 6
♣ A 6 3

It seems that you have no escape. If you discard another spade, you will not have enough tricks to cash when you come in with the king of diamonds. You can lead high to cash two spades or let partner make a spade and a heart. Either way your side scores four tricks. Nor should a club discard save you. A careful declarer will cash the ace of clubs before crossing to the king. When your queen and jack tumble down, dummy's ten and long card are good. The contract now makes with an overtrick. Finally, if you discard a diamond, declarer can fell your king.

In truth, with all four hands on display, you cannot succeed. Luckily, declarer cannot see your hand and has few clues from the bidding about the location of your side's high cards. If you bare your king of diamonds smoothly, you should prevail. Think about the position from the opposing viewpoint. Taking the diamond finesse simply needs East to hold the king of diamonds. Playing for the drop requires you to hold the king of diamonds and Q-J-x, Q-x-x-x or J-x-x-x of clubs (the latter eliminated if declarer cashes the ace and king and sees East play low twice). You need to have sole control in clubs for the king of diamonds to drop. You would have no reason to unguard the king otherwise. Rather than take a view on both minors, declarer will surely take the diamond finesse.

7.16

Contract: 7♦

Lead: ♣8

♠ K Q

♥ K Q 3

♦ K Q J 10

♣ A 9 3 2

♠ J 6 5 3

♥ 10 8 6 5

♦ 9 6 4 2

♣ 8

♠ 8 7 2

♥ J 4

♦ 3

♣ K Q 10 7 6 5 4

♠ A 10 9 4

♥ A 9 7 2

♦ A 8 7 5

♣ J

At first glance, you appear to be in a similar pickle to the previous deal. If you discard a spade and there are four spades on your right, you will set up a long spade. If you discard a heart and there are four hearts on your right, you may well set up a long heart.

A quick recap of the bidding should tell you that South has four spades and four hearts, in other words a 4=4=4=1 shape. Who would bid 4♦ on a four-card suit rather than show a five-card major?

I have been kind to you with the question wording. I did not ask 'What do you discard' but rather 'What do you play?' You surely have the answer now. You undertruff. You are not worried about another club ruff because your nine will enable you to overtruff. Nor does a squeeze bite. You have the stoppers in the majors well placed over the threats.

Most likely declarer draws two rounds of trumps before cashing the king-queen of hearts. Dummy's last trump comes in this position:

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

Judging from the fall of the jack on the second round of hearts that the suit is 4-2, declarer will probably throw a heart in the hope that the jack of spades falls in three rounds. In this case, you discard a heart as well. If instead your opponent throws a spade, you play copycat again.

Yes, it might have been a stronger line to ruff a club before touching the trumps. Then you would have had to consider a 4=3=5=1 shape.

Contracts & Claims

The problems in this chapter consist of two types. In the first half, you need to find a line of play that ensures the contract. You need not worry that this will mean a lot of 'i' dotting and 't' crossing for you to give the right answer. If you simply go for the best line, you should automatically find that it guarantees success. On a couple of deals, I invite you to consider only layouts consistent with the bidding. For instance, if East has bid spades and West has not supported them, you may charitably assume that East holds more spades than West. By contrast, if I ask you to make the contract 'against any distribution whatsoever', you may make no assumptions based on the bidding or lack thereof.

In the second half, I give you declarer's line of play and you need to deduce the contract from this. There are probably two ways to approach this type of problem, either of which is valid. The first is to think of the three most likely contracts and figure out how you would plan the play in these. You can then compare your plans with the stated lines. If you have missed out one of the intended contracts, this should be clear and you can try again. The second approach is to study the lines, as you might as a defender, trying to work out what declarer is trying to do. I can tell you that are no silly contracts to unearth (3-3 fits for instance). Happy sleuthing!

8.1

♠ K 9 5
♥ K
♦ K 9 5 4 3 2
♣ J 7 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A 6 4
♥ A 9 3
♦ A J 6
♣ Q 8 4 3

West leads the jack of hearts to dummy's king. How do you play to ensure nine tricks?

8.2

♠ 8 7 3
♥ A 9 8 5 3
♦ 10 7 2
♣ K 4

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♣
pass	1♥	1♠	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A Q
♥ J 10
♦ A 9 6
♣ A Q 9 8 7 3

West leads the ten of spades, which runs to your queen. Given the bidding, you can guarantee nine tricks if you follow the right sequence of plays. How do you proceed?

8.3

♠ 9 5
♥ K 9 6 4 2
♦ 7 5 4
♣ K 8 7

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
dbl	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

♠ K 8 6
♥ A Q J 10 8
♦ Q
♣ A J 6 3

West cashes a top diamond and switches to a trump, to which East follows. How can you guarantee the contract against any distribution?

8.4

♠ 8 7 4 2
♥ A Q 10 6 5 2
♦ 10 5
♣ Q

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
dbl	4♥	all pass	

♠ K J
♥ K J 9 8 3
♦ K J
♣ A 8 4 3

West leads the ten of clubs to the queen, king and ace. Prospects are clearly very good. Indeed, assuming the bidding and opening lead are reasonable, you can guarantee the contract. How do you proceed?

8.1

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥J

♠ K 9 5

♥ K

♦ K 9 5 4 3 2

♣ J 7 2

♠ Q 10 8 3 2

♥ J 10 8 5 2

♦ —

♣ K 10 5

♠ J 7

♥ Q 7 6 4

♦ Q 10 8 7

♣ A 9 6

♠ A 6 4

♥ A 9 3

♦ A J 6

♣ Q 8 4 3

Since you have all suits well stopped and four top tricks available in the majors, five diamond tricks will suffice. Only a 4-0 diamond division thus presents a problem. What can you do about this?

If West holds four diamonds, you can afford to start by cashing the ace but not the king. In the more troublesome situation that East holds four diamonds, you cannot afford to cash either the ace or the king. Doing so would block the suit.

You can ensure the contract by leading a low diamond off dummy and, unless East hops up with the queen, playing the jack. On the actual layout, the jack holds. You can then clear the diamonds while the king of spades remains as an entry to run the suit. If West held four diamonds and allowed your jack to win, you would continue in exactly the same way. If, instead, the jack lost to the queen, you would not even need a side entry to dummy.

8.2

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠ 10

♠ 8 7 3

♥ A 9 8 5 3

♦ 10 7 2

♣ K 4

♠ 10 4

♥ 7

♦ K J 8 5 3

♣ J 10 6 5 2

♠ K J 9 6 5 2

♥ K Q 6 4 2

♦ Q 4

♣ —

♠ A Q

♥ J 10

♦ A 9 6

♣ A Q 9 8 7 3

As before, you have four certain winners outside your long suit. This means you need five club tricks. Since again you have the other suits adequately stopped, you do not mind losing the lead. This time you must consider a 5-0 break.

You should lead a middle club – the nine for the sake of argument – intending to run it. If West follows low and East wins, the split is at worst 4-1. If West covers, dummy's king wins and you can easily hold your loss in the suit to one trick. If West shows out, dummy's king also wins. On the second round, East must play high to prevent you from taking a deep finesse. You win and, once more, have just the one high club left to dislodge.

The trickiest situation arises when the nine of clubs holds and East shows out. You continue with a club to the king and must find a safe route back to hand. You cannot afford to play a diamond to the ace. One of the defenders might hold five diamonds. The safe way back to hand is by playing a spade to the ace. If spades are 6-2, West will have no more spades to play after coming in with the club. If spades are 5-3, you are happy to lose three spade tricks and a club.

8.3

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦A

♠ A Q 10 3

♥ 5

♦ A K 10 9

♣ Q 10 9 2

♠ 9 5

♥ K 9 6 4 2

♦ 7 5 4

♣ K 8 7

♠ J 7 4 2

♥ 7 3

♦ J 8 6 3 2

♣ 5 4

♠ K 8 6

♥ A Q J 10 8

♦ Q

♣ A J 6 3

You should use the nine and king of hearts as entries to ruff two diamonds in hand. This will eliminate the diamonds and draw trumps. Then cross to the king of clubs and lead the eight, planning to run it:

♠ A Q 10

♥ —

♦ 10

♣ Q 10 9

♠ 9 5

♥ 6 4 2

♦ —

♣ 8 7

♠ J 7 4 2

♥ —

♦ J 6

♣ 4

♠ K 8 6

♥ A

♦ —

♣ A J 6

West, upon winning, must either lead a black suit into one of your tenaces or concede a ruff and discard.

If East could play the ten or nine of clubs on the eight (imagine the ten and four of clubs traded), you would cover with the jack and still achieve an endplay against West.

8.4

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣10

♠ A Q 10 5

♥ —

♦ A Q 9 4

♣ 10 9 7 6 2

♠ 8 7 4 2

♥ A Q 10 6 5 2

♦ 10 5

♣ Q

♠ 9 6 3

♥ 7 4

♦ 8 7 6 3 2

♣ K J 5

♠ K J

♥ K J 9 8 3

♦ K J

♣ A 8 4 3

For the next five tricks, you should alternate between ruffing clubs high in dummy and playing trumps to hand. This leaves:

♠ A Q 10

♥ —

♦ A Q 9

♣ 7

♠ 8 7 4 2

♥ 6

♦ 10 5

♣ —

♠ 9 6 3

♥ —

♦ 8 7 6 3

♣ —

♠ K J

♥ 9 8 3

♦ K J

♣ —

You now lead a diamond to the jack. West can make two diamond tricks but must then open up the spades or give a ruff and discard. Since the bidding (the double of 1♥ and East's failure to double 4♥) makes it impossible for East to hold the king-jack of clubs and an ace, you are sure to succeed. Note, however, that playing up to your other jack would not work. West would have a safe exit on the third round of spades.

8.5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	3♥
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	5♥	pass	6♥
all pass			

♠ A K 6 4
♥ 4 3
♦ J 7 6 2
♣ A Q J

♠ J 2
♥ A K Q J 10 7
♦ A
♣ 10 9 5 4

West lead the ten of diamonds and East follows. Claim twelve tricks.

8.6

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	pass	1♣
1♥	dbl *	pass	1♠
all pass			

* negative

♠ K J 10
♥ 9 5 2
♦ 9 7 4 3
♣ A J 4

♠ A Q 9 2
♥ A 6 4 3
♦ K 5
♣ 9 6 2

West leads the queen of hearts, which East overtakes. How do you play to the first two tricks? Can any distribution consistent with the bidding prevent you from making seven tricks?

8.7

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2♣
pass	2♦	2♠	3♣
4♠	5♣ *	all pass	

* weaker than passing

♠ K 9
♥ 8 7 2
♦ 8 4 2
♣ 10 9 8 5 2

♠ —
♥ A K Q 10
♦ K 6 5
♣ A K Q J 7 3

West leads the five of spades. Claim eleven tricks.

8.8

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♦
pass	1♥	2♣	2♦
4♣	5♦	all pass	

♠ 10 8 3 2
♥ A Q 6 4 3
♦ A 6 4 2
♣ —

♠ A J 9
♥ 5 2
♦ K Q J 10 9 8 7
♣ K

West leads the jack of clubs. Claim eleven tricks against any distribution whatsoever (in other words forget the bidding!).

8.9

♠ K J 4
♥ A K Q
♦ K Q J
♣ K 10 4 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	7NT	all pass	

♠ A Q
♥ 10 9 4 2
♦ A 9 8 6 4
♣ A J

West leads the ten of spades. You win in hand with the ace and lead a low diamond. Even though West shows out, I can tell you that thirteen tricks are still a certainty if you play correctly. You will need to cater for a guarded jack of hearts in either hand and, of course, you do not know which defender holds the queen of clubs. For this unusually tough and interesting problem – one I might have saved until chapter 11 – you can take as much time as you like in deciding the correct line.

8.5

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♦10

♠ A K 6 4

♥ 4 3

♦ J 7 6 2

♣ A Q J

♠ Q 9 7 3

♥ 9 8 6 5 2

♦ Q 10 9 4

♣ —

♠ 10 8 5

♥ —

♦ K 8 5 3

♣ K 8 7 6 3 2

♠ J 2

♥ A K Q J 10 7

♦ A

♣ 10 9 5 4

Unless trumps break 5-0, routine play will succeed. Draw trumps and finesse in clubs. If the finesse wins, continue with the ace and another club. At worst, East wins the first club and plays a diamond. You then ruff, unblock the clubs and have a trump left to enjoy the last club.

When trumps break 5-0, you need to take care. You must throw three diamonds from dummy as you draw trumps. This brings you here:

♠ A K 6 4

♥ —

♦ —

♣ A Q J

♠ Q 9 7 3

♥ —

♦ Q 9 4

♣ —

♠ 10 8 5

♥ —

♦ K

♣ K 8 7

♠ J 2

♥ 7

♦ —

♣ 10 9 5 4

You play a club to the ace and concede a club. When East wins and plays a diamond, you ruff in hand and away goes dummy's last club.

8.6

Contract: 1 ♠

Lead: ♥Q

♠ K J 10

♥ 9 5 2

♦ 9 7 4 3

♣ A J 4

♠ 4

♥ Q J 10 8 7

♦ A J 6

♣ K 8 7 3

♠ 8 7 6 5 3

♥ K

♦ Q 10 8 2

♣ Q 10 5

♠ A Q 9 2

♥ A 6 4 3

♦ K 5

♣ 9 6 2

Clearly, you should win the first trick. The king of hearts is surely a singleton. As for your play to the second trick, you should first consider your overall strategy for the deal.

You have four trump winners and two aces on the side. To make your humble contract you need just one more trick. East might hold the ace of diamonds, in which case your king could be the seventh trick. Of course, this is not a sure thing. Indeed, as West has bid but East has not, you expect the ace to lie over the king.

A safer and surer solution to your quest for an extra trick is by ruffing a heart in dummy. You have three trumps in dummy and need to lose the lead only twice. Moreover, you can afford to win the second round of trumps (if there is one) in hand. This means that, so long as you do not play your trumps yourself, nothing can prevent the ruff

Can you see the danger in conceding a heart immediately? West can make two heart tricks and play a fourth round of the suit. This allows East to discard three clubs and later ruff your ace. Despite scoring the heart ruff, you end up a trick short. At trick two, you must play a club to the ace. Only after that do you go for the heart ruff.

In theory, a highly improbable 7-0 club break could beat you. Of course, the bidding makes this impossible. Both opponents could have bid a natural 2♣ over your 1♠ and East had the chance to open 3♣.

8.7

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♠5

♠ 10 7 6 5 4
♥ 5 3
♦ A Q 9 7
♣ 6 4

♠ K 9
♥ 8 7 2
♦ 8 4 2
♣ 10 9 8 5 2

♠ A Q J 8 3 2
♥ J 9 6 4
♦ J 10 3
♣ —

♠ —
♥ A K Q 10
♦ K 6 5
♣ A K Q J 7 3

You ruff high, cross to the ten of clubs, ruff another spade high and draw any missing trump. Then you cash the ace-king of hearts and return to dummy with a trump to lead a third round of hearts:

♠ 10 7
♥ —
♦ A Q 9 7
♣ —

♠ —
♥ 8
♦ 8 4 2
♣ 8 5

♠ Q
♥ J 9
♦ J 10 3
♣ —

♠ —
♥ Q 10
♦ K 6 5
♣ J

If East shows out, you take the queen and put West in with the fourth heart. In practice, East follows. You now play the ten. Whatever happens, you will get to discard one diamond from dummy. You do not mind if it loses. West can only break the diamonds or play a spade. On a spade exit, you ruff in hand to discard an extra diamond from dummy.

8.8

Contract: 5♦

Lead: ♣J

♠ K Q 7
♥ 9 8
♦ 5 3
♣ J 10 9 7 5 4

♠ 10 8 3 2
♥ A Q 6 4 3
♦ A 6 4 2
♣ —

♠ 6 5 4
♥ K J 10 7
♦ —
♣ A Q 8 6 3 2

♠ A J 9
♥ 5 2
♦ K Q J 10 9 8 7
♣ K

For full marks you should ruff with the six (I did say 'any distribution') and draw trumps conserving the ace. Then play ace and another heart:

♠ K Q 7
♥ 8
♦ —
♣ 10 9 7 5 4

♠ 10 8 3 2
♥ Q 6 4 3
♦ A
♣ —

♠ 6 5 4
♥ K 10 7
♦ —
♣ A Q 8

♠ A J 9
♥ 5
♦ J 10 9 8 7
♣ —

At worst East wins and plays a spade. You finesse and West wins. Then a spade return into your tenace or a ruff and discard spares you a second spade loser. If West has a third heart and leads it, cover it if you can. Either the lead is from the king or hearts are 3-3. This gives you a second heart trick either way. If East returns a heart when first in, you ruff the king or discard on a low heart to ensure a trick with the queen.

8.9

Contract: 7NT

Lead: ♠ 10

♠ K J 4
♥ A K Q
♦ K Q J
♣ K 10 4 2

♠ 10 9 8 6 3 2
♥ 7 3
♦ —
♣ Q 9 8 7 5

♠ 7 5
♥ J 8 6 5
♦ 10 7 5 3 2
♣ 6 3

♠ A Q
♥ 10 9 4 2
♦ A 9 8 6 4
♣ A J

Suppose that West shows out when you correctly test the hearts. Then you overtake the queen of spades to play another spade here:

♠ J
♥ —
♦ Q J
♣ K 10 4 2

♠ 9 8
♥ —
♦ —
♣ Q 9 8 7 5

♠ —
♥ J
♦ 10 7 5 3
♣ 6 3

♠ —
♥ 10
♦ A 9 8 6
♣ A J

On the jack of spades, East must throw a club to keep the five red cards and South throws a diamond. A club to the ace then collects what must be East's last club, enabling you to run the jack in confidence. Although you now have three club tricks, the diamond blockage means you are still a trick short. To overcome this you cross to the queen of diamonds and cash the king of clubs to squeeze East in the red suits.

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

Life is easier if West has the heart length. Cash two more diamonds followed by two more spades (or vice versa). East is in trouble here:

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

To keep the diamonds guarded East must discard a club. You then discard the nine of diamonds while West follows suit. Next, you cross to the ace of clubs and cash the ace of diamonds. To keep the jack of hearts West, too, must discard a club. Now you know the queen of clubs will fall under the king: West still has a heart and East a diamond, which means neither defender can hold the guarded queen of clubs.

8.10

♠ K 9
♥ K 6
♦ 8 7 6 4 3
♣ A J 7 2

♠ A 6 5 3 2
♥ A 7 5 4 2
♦ K Q
♣ 10

West leads the five of clubs against South's game contract.

- (a) Declarer puts up dummy's ace before playing the king, the ace and a third heart.
- (b) Declarer puts up dummy's ace before playing the king, the ace and a third spade.
- (c) Declarer plays low from dummy.

In each case, what is the contract? (You need not concern yourself about how South rather than North came to be declarer on this deal or indeed on any of the succeeding problems.)

8.11

♠ Q 10
♥ 10 8
♦ J 9 7 5 4
♣ A K 4 3

♠ A K 8 6 3
♥ A 6
♦ Q 10 8 3
♣ Q 9

West leads the five of hearts against South's game contract, the ace winning the first trick. What happens next is as follows:

- (a) Declarer plays a spade to the ten.
- (b) Declarer plays the queen of clubs followed by a club to dummy and a third top card in the suit.
- (c) Declarer plays a spade to the queen.

In each case, what is the contract?

8.12

♠ K 9
♥ K 8
♦ Q 8 4 3 2
♣ A 6 3 2

♠ A Q 5 2
♥ A Q
♦ A 10 9 6 5
♣ 8 7

West leads the king of clubs against South's game or slam contract.

- (a) Declarer puts up the ace and plays a diamond, putting up the ace when East follows.
- (b) Declarer puts up the ace and plays a diamond, finessing the ten when East follows.
- (c) Declarer ducks the first trick.

In each case, what is the contract?

8.13

♠ 9 6 5 3
♥ A 7 4 2
♦ K J 10 2
♣ Q

♠ A K 4
♥ K 5
♦ A 9 7 6 5 3
♣ K 4

West leads the three of clubs against South's game or slam contract. East, who opened the bidding with 3♣, wins with the ace and returns a club to the king. What happens next is as follows:

- (a) Declarer leads the ace followed by the king of spades.
- (b) Declarer leads the three of diamonds.
- (c) Declarer lays down the ace of diamonds.

In each case, what is the contract? As an extra clue, I can tell you that the three contracts are same as those on the previous problem (though not necessarily in the same order).

8.10

Contract: 3NT/4♥/4♠

Lead: ♣5

♠ K 9

♥ K 6

♦ 8 7 6 4 3

♣ A J 7 2

♠ 8 7 4

♥ Q 8

♦ A J 5

♣ Q 8 6 5 3

♠ Q J 10

♥ J 10 9 3

♦ 10 9 2

♣ K 9 4

♠ A 6 5 3 2

♥ A 7 5 4 2

♦ K Q

♣ 10

(a) Four spades. Declarer wants to start setting up the hearts before drawing trumps. Dummy can profitably ruff a heart if hearts are 3-3 or, as is the case here, the defender with a doubleton heart cannot beat the nine of spades.

(b) Four hearts. It is a similar story – set up the side suit early. By ruffing a spade in dummy, you hold your losses to two trumps and a diamond on the layout shown.

(c) 3NT. Although prospects seem poor, perhaps West has underled the king-queen of clubs or East will finesse the nine. If you score two club tricks and guess correctly which major suit to tackle, you might make four tricks in one major and two in the other. These eight tricks plus a diamond will give you nine in all.

8.11

Contract: 3NT/4♠/5♦

Lead: ♥5

♠ Q 10

♥ 10 8

♦ J 9 7 5 4

♣ A K 4 3

♠ J 7 5 4

♥ J 9 7 5 4

♦ K

♣ 7 6 5

♠ 9 2

♥ K Q 3 2

♦ A 6 2

♣ J 10 8 2

♠ A K 8 6 3

♥ A 6

♦ Q 10 8 3

♣ Q 9

(a) 3NT. Barring a miracle in the heart suit, you lack the time to set up the diamonds and must play all out for five spade tricks. If you compare the play with bashing out three top spades, finessing the ten gains if West holds J-x or J-x-x-x (eight holdings) and loses if East holds J-x-x (six holdings).

(b) Five Diamonds. With a heart loser exposed by the lead, declarer needs to discard a heart from one hand or the other in a hurry. Since the defenders have more clubs than they do spades, it makes more sense to try three rounds of clubs than three rounds of spades. On the actual layout, this lands the contract without further ado. If East could ruff the third round of clubs low, you would overruff and try your luck in spades. If West could ruff the third round of spades as well, you might overruff again and see the ace-king of trumps crash together.

(c) Four Spades. To avoid losing control you surely need a 3-3 spade split. Therefore, you play trumps from the top and cross your fingers. If all goes well, you will have time to set up the diamonds later.

8.12

Contract: 3NT/5♦/6♦

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

(a) Six diamonds. In the slam, your best chance lies in avoiding a trump loser. You hope the king falls under the ace. If it does not drop but all follow, there remains the slim chance of a 6-1 club break. In this case, you cash two hearts and play four rounds of spades before a second round of diamonds. If East wins and has only major-suit cards left, the ensuing ruff and discard will take care of your club loser.

(b) Five diamonds. Having sensibly stopped in the diamond game, you can afford to take a safety play against a 3-0 trump break. By finessing the ten, you avoid losing two tricks if West is void. Of course, if East had shown out, you would go up with the ace.

(c) 3NT. Ducking the first trick is a routine play to cut the link between the defenders and improve your knowledge of the layout. Even if clubs are 5-2, you can afford to lose the lead once so long as whoever wins has no more clubs. As the cards lie, having seen East show out on the third round of clubs, you may need to take a view on the diamonds. You must decide whether to cash the ace (best if West has a singleton king) or finesse the ten (best if West is void). Perhaps best of all is to lead the queen from dummy, overtaking if East follows low smoothly.

8.13

Contract 3NT/5♦/6♦

Lead: ♣3

♠ 9 6 5 3

♥ A 7 4 2

♦ K J 10 2

♣ Q

♠ Q J 7 2

♥ Q 10 9 8 6 3

♦ —

♣ 10 8 3

♠ 10 8

♥ J

♦ Q 8 4

♣ A J 9 7 6 5 2

♠ A K 4

♥ K 5

♦ A 9 7 6 5 3

♣ K 4

(a) 3NT. If diamonds divide 3-0, you have a two-way finesse for the queen. You aim to find out whether East is very short in one of the majors before deciding which way to play it. If East follows to two spades and two hearts, you will lay down the ace and unblock the jack from dummy. In practice, East will follow twice in spades but show out on the second heart. In this case, you start diamonds with the king.

(b) Six diamonds. In the slam, the main problem is avoiding a spade loser. Your best hope for this lies in a simple squeeze in the majors. For this to work you need West to hold four spades (or Q-J-10 precisely) and five hearts. With the three clubs you already know about, there is no room for three diamonds as well as all those cards in the majors. You thus cater for a possible Q-x-x with East. Having successfully negotiated this, you run the rest of the trumps, perhaps cashing a high spade or two along the way. West will be unable to retain guards in both majors.

(c) Five diamonds. Given East's known length in clubs, West is more likely to hold three diamonds than East. In any case, if West is void in diamonds, you can probably recover. The squeeze referred to in (b) is probably best. Alternatively, you might try to strip East's major-suit cards before exiting with the third round of diamonds. If this works, the club exit will allow you to ruff in dummy and park your losing spade.

Culbertson Curiosities

In *Contract Bridge Complete*, Culbertson explained his Modern Theory of Distribution and associated Law of Symmetry. His theory is that you can gauge the distribution of individual suits from the shape of your own hand. He admits that his theory lacks a strict mathematical basis but claims imperfect shuffling makes it a practical aid in close decisions.

“With a hand pattern 7411, I am not happy about my seven-card suit, for it is astonishing how often will break 7411. It is one thing to hold \diamond A-K-Q-x-x with a 5431 hand pattern and quite another if the hand pattern is 5332.”

He cites a deal on which South is 4=4=3=2, West is 3=5=2=3, North is 1=3=5=4 and East 5=1=3=4. The result is that the clubs are 4432, the same as South, the diamonds are 5332, the same as West and the other two suits are 5431, the same as North and East. This is a perfect example of conformity to his theory.

Although Culbertson himself urges caution when you hold a 4333 type, the truth is that the theory is most likely to work when players hold balanced hands. If at least three players hold a 4333 shape, the theory is bound to work. Depending upon the extent to which the four-card suits overlap, the fourth player will be 4333, 4432 or 4441. Three of the four suits will be 4333 round the table and the fourth suit is certain to match the shape of the fourth player's hand.

All the deals in this chapter conform perfectly to the theory. Do not worry that this knowledge will deflect you from the theoretically correct course of action. On each example, it does not change the winning line but merely makes it easier for you to appreciate the distribution against which you need to guard.

9.1

♠ 3
♥ A 10 3
♦ A 9 6 5
♣ Q J 10 5 4

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A K 5 2
♥ K Q 7
♦ K J 4
♣ 9 6 3

West leads the queen of spades. What is your strategy for the first three tricks?

9.2

♠ J
♥ A K
♦ Q 8 6 5
♣ K J 6 5 4 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1♠	pass
pass	2♣	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A K 6 3
♥ 8 6 4
♦ 9 7 4 2
♣ A 7

West leads the ten of spades, which the jack, queen and king all cover. What do you do on the second trick?

9.3

♠ 10 8 3
♥ Q 4
♦ A 8 6 4
♣ 9 4 3 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
3♠	pass	pass	4♥
all pass			

♠ Q
♥ A K 10 9 5 3
♦ K Q 5 3
♣ Q 7

West leads the ace followed by a low spade. East plays the five and then the king. How do you read West's shape? Once you gain the lead, quite possibly on this trick, how do you continue?

9.4

♠ K 8 5
♥ J 10 5
♦ 10 6
♣ Q 6 4 3 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
1♠	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

♠ Q 4
♥ A K 7 6 4
♦ K Q J 3
♣ K J

West leads the nine of clubs. Can you spot the right way to play to the first two tricks?

9.1

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠Q

♠ 3
♥ A 10 3
♦ A 9 6 5
♣ Q J 10 5 4

♠ Q J 10 9 7
♥ 9 5 2
♦ Q 8 3
♣ A 7

♠ 8 6 4
♥ J 8 6 4
♦ 10 7 2
♣ K 8 2

♠ A K 5 2
♥ K Q 7
♦ K J 4
♣ 9 6 3

You have six tricks on top and can clearly set up the three more you need by playing on clubs. As you do so, you need to guard against the risk of losing three spade tricks as well as two clubs. You can do nothing about it if one defender – presumably West – holds five or more spades and the ace-king of clubs.

If someone has three spades and both top clubs, a simple hold up on the first trick or after you lose the first club should suffice. What can you do about the more common situation that the ace and king lie in opposite hands? Holding up until the second round works against a 6-2 break but not against a 5-3. Whoever began with three spades will win the first club and clear the spades.

You need to hold up until the third round. This ensures that the defender short in spades cannot continue the suit. You will have to take the slight chance that the defenders set up a diamond trick to go with their two tricks in each black suit. This can only happen if West has the queen-ten of diamonds and East leads the suit twice.

What does Culbertson's theory tell you? The shape of the North hand indicates that one suit divides 5431 around the table. Since a 5-3 spade split is more likely than a 4-1 club split and more likely still than a 5-1 diamond division, you should prepare for a 5-3 spade split.

9.2

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠ 10

♠ J
♥ A K
♦ Q 8 6 5
♣ K J 6 5 4 2

♠ 10 9 5
♥ 10 7 5 3
♦ K 3
♣ 10 9 8 3

♠ Q 8 7 4 2
♥ Q J 9 2
♦ A J 10
♣ Q

♠ A K 6 3
♥ 8 6 4
♦ 9 7 4 2
♣ A 7

If you can play the clubs without loss, you will make ten tricks in all, which gives you an overtrick. This indicates you might make the contract even if you lose a club. Unfortunately, communications present a small problem. If you cash your second top spade, the defenders will have the spade suit to run as well as at least two diamonds to cash when they get in. If you do not cash it and they switch to hearts, you might never score your second spade winner.

You can solve this apparent dilemma by ducking the first round of clubs. Any time clubs break 3-2 or the queen is singleton, this will set up the suit. You will win the heart switch, cross to the ace of clubs and cash your remaining spade winner. Finally, you cross back to dummy with a heart to finish the clubs. Admittedly, you will end up two down if West holds four clubs to the queen. Still, on that layout, you can never make the contract if the opponents defend correctly.

The theory is of limited value this time. It tells you that one of the black suits must divide 6421 round the table to match dummy's shape. Given the bidding and lead, a 6-2 spade split and a 4-1 club split seem almost equally likely. Curiously, the theory tells you far more about the diamond distribution. Indeed, if you assume that East would not pass over 2♣ if holding seven spades, you know that nobody can hold a singleton or void in diamonds. I leave you to work out the logic.

9.3

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠A

♠ 10 8 3

♥ Q 4

♦ A 8 6 4

♣ 9 4 3 2

♠ A J 9 7 6 4 2

♥ 6

♦ J 2

♣ J 8 5

♠ K 5

♥ J 8 7 2

♦ 10 9 7

♣ A K 10 6

♠ Q

♥ A K 10 9 5 3

♦ K Q 5 3

♣ Q 7

Andrew Robson once gave a tip: ‘pre-emptors who lead their own suit often have a singleton trump.’ Can you see the reasoning behind this? Someone holding a seven-card suit must hold a singleton (or void) somewhere unless the shape is 7222. If the singleton were in a side suit, it would be an attractive suit to lead. This is especially so when, as you know from East’s play, the long suit includes an unsupported ace.

Placing West with a singleton trump, you ruff the second trick, cross to the queen of hearts and finesse the ten on the way back.

The theory points you in the same direction as Robson’s tip. It very much looks like the spades are 7321 round the table, making it highly likely that West has a 7321 type. You also know from your own shape that a suit is 6421 round the table. This must be hearts or clubs. Since a 4-1 heart break is far more likely than a 6-1 club break, again you place West with a singleton trump and play accordingly.

9.4

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣9

♠ K 8 5

♥ J 10 5

♦ 10 6

♣ Q 6 4 3 2

♠ A J 9 7 3 2

♥ 8 2

♦ A 9 7

♣ 9 5

♠ 10 6

♥ Q 9 3

♦ 8 5 4 2

♣ A 10 8 7

♠ Q 4

♥ A K 7 6 4

♦ K Q J 3

♣ K J

At the table dummy played low on the first trick, East encouraged with the eight and the king won. Declarer next cashed a top trump before leading a low diamond. West, recalling East's signal, stepped in smartly with the ace to continue clubs. The third round of clubs then promoted a trump trick for the defenders to put the contract one down.

Can you see the play to the first two tricks to counter this? Put up the queen of clubs. If it holds, you have the lead in dummy to run the jack of hearts at trick two. If the queen of clubs loses to the ace, East cannot give West a ruff on the third round of the suit because East has no further entry.

The theory tells you that, with a 5422 hand type yourself, one of the minors must be 5422 round the table. With fewer clubs missing than diamonds, you expect this suit to be clubs. A 4-2 break clearly occurs more commonly than a 5-2 break. The size of the spot card led also points to a 4-2 club break.

9.5

♠ 7 6 4 3 2
♥ A
♦ 7 6 3
♣ A 6 4 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♣
pass	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	3♣	pass	3NT
pass			

♠ J
♥ K Q 6 2
♦ A K J 2
♣ K J 10 5

West lead the five of hearts to dummy's ace. What do you do on the second trick?

9.6

♠ 8 2
♥ 9 8 4 3
♦ K J 4
♣ K Q J 5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♦
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A 9 4
♥ A J
♦ Q 7 6 5
♣ A 6 4 3

West leads the three of spades. Do you win the first trick? If, when you get in, you lead a diamond to the king, the opponents will follow with the four and two. How will you continue after that?

9.7

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
pass	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

♠ A J 9 5
♥ Q 6 4 2
♦ K
♣ A K 10 8

♠ 8
♥ 9 7 5 3
♦ A Q J
♣ Q 9 6 4 2

West leads the king of spades. Winning with the ace seems clear. How should you play the trump suit?

9.8

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
1♥	pass	pass	dbl
2♦	pass	2♥	2♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

♠ 6 5 4
♥ K 7 5 3 2
♦ 8 4 3
♣ A 6

♠ A Q J 9 3
♥ A
♦ J 10 6
♣ K Q J 4

West cashes three top diamonds. All follow to two rounds but East discards a club on the third. West then switches to the queen of hearts, which you win impeccably with your ace. Again, how should you play the trump suit?

9.5

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥5

♠ 7 6 4 3 2

♥ A

♦ 7 6 3

♣ A 6 4 2

♠ K Q 9 5

♥ J 9 7 5 4

♦ Q 10 5

♣ 7

♠ A 10 8

♥ 10 8 3

♦ 9 8 4

♣ Q 9 8 3

♠ J

♥ K Q 6 2

♦ A K J 2

♣ K J 10 5

You could play a club to the king at trick two, looking to combine your chances in the minors. You intend to play a club back to the ace. If the queen of clubs does not fall in two rounds, you will be in dummy to take the diamond finesse. This line gives you about a 44% chance of success (32% for the queen drop and 18% of 68% for when East holds Q-x-x of diamonds but the queen of clubs does not drop).

You can improve on this if you can find a way to make the contract whenever East holds the queen of clubs – a 50% shot. You achieve this by giving up on the possibility of a singleton queen with West, which is four times less likely than Q-x-x-x with East. Lead a club to the jack at trick two. When it holds you can return to the ace of clubs to repeat the finesse. Cashing the ace first would be a big mistake. Naturally, you play East for the queen of clubs because you lack the intermediates to pick up Q-x-x-x with West.

The theory forewarns you of the 4-1 club break. You know from your shape that one suit is 4441 round the table. Before you saw the lead, the chance of a 4-4 heart break (33%) exceeded that of a 4-1 club break (28%). However, as there are two hearts missing lower than the five, the chance of a 4-4 heart break has fallen to about 25%: East would need both the three and four of hearts for the suit to break 4-4.

9.6

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠3

♠ 8 2

♥ 9 8 4 3

♦ K J 4

♣ K Q J 5

♠ K 10 7 3

♥ K 10 6 2

♦ A 3

♣ 10 8 2

♠ Q J 6 5

♥ Q 7 5

♦ 10 9 8 2

♣ 9 7

♠ A 9 4

♥ A J

♦ Q 7 6 5

♣ A 6 4 3

If the three of spades is a fourth-highest lead, spades must be 4-4 and holding up until the third round will not help. Since a heart switch through your doubleton ace might enable the defenders to set up three heart tricks, you should take your ace of spades at once.

You might try running the clubs in the hope that someone with four diamonds discards one. However, against most opposition, this plan stands little chance of a success. You do better to conserve your clubs as entries for playing the diamonds to best advantage.

You lead a diamond to the king. This wins but none of the eight, nine and ten appear. This means that you can only come to three diamond tricks on a 4-2 break if West holds a doubleton ace. Naturally, you do not duck a diamond. The suit might split 3-3. Your best shot is to cash the king and queen of clubs. When all follow, you can afford to overtake the jack of clubs with the ace on the third round.

On the second round of diamonds, West goes in with the ace. The defenders then cash three spade tricks. You discard two hearts from dummy and one from your hand. Finally, you take the ace of hearts, unblock the jack of diamonds and lead the five of clubs to the six. This leaves you with the lead in hand to cash your queen of diamonds.

The theory increases the likelihood of spades 4-4, clubs 3-2 and diamonds 4-2. You know at least two suits are 4432 round the table.

9.7

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠K

♠ A J 9 5

♥ Q 6 4 2

♦ K

♣ A K 10 8

♠ K Q 10 3

♥ K J 10 8

♦ 10 5 4 3

♣ 7

♠ 7 6 4 2

♥ A

♦ 9 8 7 6 2

♣ J 5 3

♠ 8

♥ 9 7 5 3

♦ A Q J

♣ Q 9 6 4 2

Other things being equal, with this holding you would lead to the queen of hearts, twice if necessary. This strategy succeeds in restricting your trump losers to three if West has a singleton ten or jack or four cards including the ace-king. Of course, it also works if hearts break 3-2. Can you see a good reason to play differently this time?

The clue lies in the bidding, or rather lack of it. Did you remember that West passed as dealer? Who would do that if holding the ace-king of hearts as well as the king-queen of spades? Another thing to think about is that finding West with a singleton ten or jack does you no good. You may well have to ruff a spade because you cannot get rid of all of dummy's spades on the diamonds. You cannot then gainfully lead twice towards your nine because East simply plays high each time to drop it.

You should concentrate on catering for a singleton ace or king with East. Since you intend to duck the first round in any event, you might as well lead a low heart off dummy at trick two. When East goes in with the ace, you start to relax. If a spade comes back, you ruff. Next, in case East has cleverly played the ace from ace-king-jack, you play three rounds of diamonds. Finally, you lead up to the queen of hearts.

Does Culbertson's theory help? In a way it does. It forewarns you of a 4-1 trump split. You know from the dummy that at least one suit is 4441 round the table. You cannot be sure that any are 4432.

9.8

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♦A

♠ 6 5 4

♥ K 7 5 3 2

♦ 8 4 3

♣ A 6

♠ K

♥ Q J 9 6 4

♦ A K Q 9 5

♣ 9 7

♠ 10 8 7 2

♥ 10 8

♦ 7 2

♣ 10 8 5 3 2

♠ A Q J 9 3

♥ A

♦ J 10 6

♣ K Q J 4

Normally you would finesse East for the king of spades. Can you see why not to this time? West has easily enough for an opening bid with the high cards you have already seen. Likewise East would not have the strength to respond to 1♥ even with the king of spades. You need to think about the possible distributions to uncover the reason.

The bidding and play to date has marked West with at least 5-5 in the red suits. Suppose you try putting East with K-x of spades. In this case, a single lead from dummy will suffice. All you need is for the ace of clubs to stand up. Unfortunately, if East has only two spades, West has three and thus a 3=5=5=0 shape. You will be unable to cross to dummy even once in clubs. Now imagine East has K-x-x of spades. In this case, West's shape will presumably be 2=5=5=1. This means you can cross to dummy once. Of course, once is not enough. You would need to get to dummy twice to take two finesses. You conclude that you can never make the contract by finessing East for the king of spades. Accordingly, you lay down the ace. When the king falls, you can cross to the ace of clubs to take the marked finesse against East's ten of spades.

The theory again points you in the right direction. West cannot be 2=5=5=1 because that would leave the clubs as 6421. No player would have that shape: East would be 3=2=2=6. Nor can West be 3=5=5=0. That would leave the clubs as 7420 but East as 2=2=2=7.

9.9

♠ 8 6 5 2
♥ K 9 3
♦ Q
♣ 8 6 5 4 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT

all pass

♠ J 9 3
♥ A J 8 2
♦ A K 9 5
♣ Q 10

West leads the six of diamonds to the queen, two and five. Which cards should you play to the next trick?

9.10

♠ A J 10 6 5 4
♥ J 8 2
♦ 10
♣ K 9 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♣

dbl	1♠	2♦	3♣
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pass	5♣	all pass	
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♠ 9
♥ Q 4
♦ A 8 7 3
♣ A Q J 10 8 5

West leads the six of clubs. Where should you win the first trick? How should you play the spade suit?

9.11

♠ 9 5 2
♥ K 9
♦ J 7 6 4 2
♣ J 10 4

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A Q 8
♥ Q J 7 2
♦ A K 5 3
♣ A 9

West leads the six of spades. You win East's ten with the queen. What do you do next? What will you do after that?

9.12

♠ K 7 2
♥ 8 7 5 4
♦ Q 9
♣ 8 7 4 3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♥
pass	3♥	pass	3♠
pass	4♥	all pass	

♠ A 9
♥ A K Q J 9
♦ A 7
♣ K Q 6 5

West leads the two of clubs. East wins with the ace and returns the jack. You cover this but West ruffs and exits with the three of spades. Suppose you win in hand and draw the remaining trumps in two rounds, finding East with a singleton. How do you continue?

9.9

Contract: 1NT

Lead: \diamond 6

\spadesuit 8 6 5 2

\heartsuit K 9 3

\diamond Q

\clubsuit 8 6 5 4 2

\spadesuit A Q 7 4

\heartsuit 10 5

\diamond 10 8 7 6 4

\clubsuit K J

\spadesuit K 10

\heartsuit Q 7 6 4

\diamond J 3 2

\clubsuit A 9 7 3

\spadesuit J 9 3

\heartsuit A J 8 2

\diamond A K 9 5

\clubsuit Q 10

Unless someone holds J-10-x of diamonds, you surely need four heart tricks for your contract. If the suit breaks 3-3 and East holds the queen, any normal play will work. The same probably applies if East holds Q-10 doubleton. What other chances can you give yourself?

If you start with the king, you can cater for a singleton ten or queen with West by running the nine on the second round. Trying to cater for these holdings on your right by leading low is not a good idea. If East plays the ten or queen, you have no assurance whatsoever that it is a singleton. Can you improve on cashing the king?

Suppose West has the doubleton ten, as in the diagram. If you win the first round with the jack and the second with the king, you will see the ten pop up and be able to finesse against the queen on the third round. Do you see why you must start with the nine rather than the three? If the nine wins the third round, you will be unable to reach your ace of hearts and remaining diamond winners. Correct play at trick two is to lead the nine and, if East follows low, finesse the jack.

The theory helps you slightly again. Since neither of the hands that you can see has a 4333 shape, a 3-3 heart break is relatively unlikely. While admittedly you know that one suit is 5431, this suit is rather more likely to be diamonds than one of the majors – especially as the six is by no means the lowest diamond out.

9.10

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♣6

♠ A J 10 6 5 4

♥ J 8 2

♦ 10

♣ K 9 2

♠ K Q 8 2

♥ A 10 9 7 3

♦ K 9 2

♣ 6

♠ 7 3

♥ K 6 5

♦ Q J 6 5 4

♣ 7 4 3

♠ 9

♥ Q 4

♦ A 8 7 3

♣ A Q J 10 8 5

You could have done without this trump lead. On any other lead, you could have ruffed three diamonds in dummy. As it is, you surely need to do something with the spade suit.

If you think spades are 3-3, you just need to cash the ace and ruff twice. You know you can draw trumps ending in dummy. Unfortunately, the bidding tells you a 3-3 split is unlikely. West cannot be 3=4=4=2 because East would be 4-4 in the reds and would have bid 2♥ rather than 2♦. You can also rule out 3=5=3=2 for West. The take-out double would be strange with that. Indeed all the clues point to 4=5=3=1.

You should win the club in hand and lead the nine of spades. If West covers, you win with the ace and return the jack, discarding a heart. With dummy's two trump entries, you can then ruff out the suit and get to the long card. If West ducks the nine of spades, you must hold your nerve and withhold dummy's ace. You cannot succeed on the assumed distribution if West holds K-x-x-x or Q-x-x-x of spades. If you put up the ace and ruff the second round, East can ruff the jack or ten on the third round to stop you from conceding the trick to West. In any case, if East holds a top heart – likely as West did not lead the suit – and a couple of picture cards in diamonds, West needs strong spades for the double.

The theory provides a strong clue to the 4-2 spade split. Your shape tells you one suit is 6421. If the double is sound, spades is that suit.

9.11

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠6

♠ 9 5 2

♥ K 9

♦ J 7 6 4 2

♣ J 10 4

♠ K J 7 6 3

♥ 6

♦ Q 10 8

♣ K 7 6 2

♠ 10 4

♥ A 10 8 5 4 3

♦ 9

♣ Q 8 5 3

♠ A Q 8

♥ Q J 7 2

♦ A K 5 3

♣ A 9

At the table, declarer followed the principle of losing certain losers first and played on hearts. East captured the king with the ace and returned a spade. Declarer won and tested the diamonds. When West turned up with a sure stopper and a five-card spade suit, the game went one down. The defenders made three spades, a heart and a diamond.

Declarer should have followed a different principle: lose the lead to the danger hand first. You can identify which hand this is. For one thing, the opening lead suggests West has length in spades. For another, the club position is tenuous if East leads the suit early. The correct plan is thus to lose the lead to West before East. Although you cannot tell who holds the ace of hearts, you can find out who has the diamond stopper.

You should begin by cashing the ace and king of diamonds. If West shows out, you switch to hearts in the hope that West holds the ace or that the club situation is benign. In practice, East shows out on the second diamond. This means that you continue with a third round of the suit. After winning this, West can do no better than clear the spade suit. You win, run the diamonds and play on hearts. If East holds the ace or West started with only four spades, all will be well.

The theory was of very limited use this time. West might equally have been 5=3=1=4 or 5=4=1=3 and it would have held true. Luckily, you were in a position to test the diamonds rather than having to guess.

9.12

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣2

♠ K 7 2
♥ 8 7 5 4
♦ Q 9
♣ 8 7 4 3

♠ 10 6 4 3
♥ 10 6 2
♦ K J 6 5 4
♣ 2

♠ Q J 8 5
♥ 3
♦ 10 8 3 2
♣ A J 10 9

♠ A 9
♥ A K Q J 9
♦ A 7
♣ K Q 6 5

You need to avoid losing a club and a diamond. With a similar shape in the two hands and trumps left in both, you naturally think of a throw in. You cash the king of spades and ruff a spade to arrive here:

♠ 10
♥ —
♦ K J 6 5 4
♣ —

♠ —
♥ 8 7
♦ Q 9
♣ 8 7

♠ —
♥ —
♦ 10 8 3 2
♣ 10 9

♠ —
♥ Q J
♦ A 7
♣ Q 6

If East has the king of diamonds, you want to cash your club winner and exit with the fourth round of clubs. Conversely, if West has it, you want to exit with ace and another diamond. Two clues suggest the king is on your left: (a) West has fewer cards in the rounded suits than East and (b) East's jack of clubs looked a suit-preference signal for spades.

9.13

W	N	E	S
1♠	dbl	2♠	3♦
all pass			

♠ Q
♥ A 9 7
♦ K 8 4 3
♣ Q J 10 9 4

♠ J 8 7 6
♥ Q 5
♦ A 10 9 6 2
♣ 8 3

West leads the king of clubs and continues with the six. East wins the second round with the ace and perseveres with the seven. Which card do you play to this trick? What do you lead once you get in?

9.14

W	N	E	S
2♠ *	dbl	pass	4♥
pass	4♠	pass	5♣
pass	5♦	pass	5♥
pass	6♣	pass	6♦
pass	7♥	all pass	

* weak

♠ —
♥ A K Q J
♦ A 7 6 5 4 2
♣ A Q 9

♠ A J 9 5
♥ 9 8 7 4 2
♦ K 10 9 8
♣ —

West leads the king of spades. What do you play from dummy? What is your general plan?

9.15

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♠
pass	2♦	pass	3♣
pass	3♠	pass	4♣
pass	4♦	pass	4♠
pass	4NT	pass	5♥
pass	6♠	all pass	

♠ K Q J
♥ 8
♦ A Q 9 7 6 4
♣ Q 6 3

♠ A 9 8 5 3
♥ Q 7 2
♦ K
♣ A K J 10

West leads the king of hearts and ominously continues with the ace, which dummy ruffs. What plan do you have for the next six tricks?

9.16

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	pass	1♦	4♥
all pass			

♠ Q 5
♥ A 10
♦ J 7 5 4
♣ Q 8 6 4 2

♠ 10 3
♥ K Q J 9 8 7 6
♦ A 3
♣ A 5

West leads the king of diamonds. Can you see anything better than playing West for king-queen doubleton of diamonds?

9.13

Contract: 3♦

Lead: ♣K

♠ Q
♥ A 9 7
♦ K 8 4 3
♣ Q J 10 9 4

♠ A 9 5 3 2
♥ K J 3 2
♦ Q 5
♣ K 6

♠ K 10 4
♥ 10 8 6 4
♦ J 7
♣ A 7 5 2

♠ J 8 7 6
♥ Q 5
♦ A 10 9 6 2
♣ 8 3

To lead an unsupported king West surely holds a doubleton club. What can you do about the threat of an overruff?

Suppose you discard a heart. What happens next? West ruffs and, reading the seven of clubs as a suit-preference signal, underleads the ace of spades. East then wins and perseveres with a fourth club. You have to ruff this time and hope that West cannot overruff either because the first ruff was with a singleton jack or queen or because East holds queen-jack doubleton. Neither possibility sounds likely.

Now suppose you ruff low and West overruffs. Again, a spade goes to the king and a club comes back. Perhaps you can ruff this without sustaining an overruff. You can then draw the remaining trumps and discard a heart on the last club. Unfortunately, you have only one trump left in hand and cannot ruff both of dummy's losing hearts. You end up losing a trick in each major as well as two top clubs and an overruff.

To make the contract on a normal layout such as the one shown you must ruff with the ace of diamonds. You can then continue with a trump to the king and a second round of trumps. With any luck, the opposing trumps fall in two rounds. This allows you to make your last four trumps separately in addition to dummy's ace of hearts and two club winners.

The theory also allows West to be 5=3=3=2 (hearts would then be 5332). The fact that the opponents have sold out to 3♦ is a better clue to the 2-2 trump split. If 3=5=1=4, East might have found one more bid.

9.14

Contract: 7♥

Lead: ♠K

♠ —
♥ A K Q J
♦ A 7 6 5 4 2
♣ A Q 9

♠ K Q 10 6 4 3
♥ 10 6 5 3
♦ J
♣ 10 5

♠ 8 7 2
♥ —
♦ Q 3
♣ K J 8 7 6 4 3 2

♠ A J 9 5
♥ 9 8 7 4 2
♦ K 10 9 8
♣ —

Unless someone holds a red void, any sensible line succeeds. Since you cannot avoid a diamond loser on a 3-0 break, you focus on a 4-0 trump split. (The theory tells you a suit is 5440, which on the bidding must be hearts.) In this case, the diamond blockage creates a problem. You discard a diamond from dummy at trick one and win in hand. Then you draw trumps, ruffing the queen and nine of clubs along the way:

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A 7 6 5 4
♣ A

♠ Q 10 6 4 3
♥ —
♦ J
♣ —

♠ 8 7
♥ —
♦ Q 3
♣ 8 7

♠ J 9 5
♥ —
♦ K 10 9
♣ —

You have thrown one diamond on the fourth round of trumps. Now you can throw a second on the ace of clubs to unblock the suit.

9.15

Contract: 6♠

Lead: ♥K

♠ K Q J

♥ 8

♦ A Q 9 7 6 4

♣ Q 6 3

♠ 7

♥ A K 9

♦ J 8 5 3

♣ 8 7 5 4 2

♠ 10 6 4 2

♥ J 10 6 5 4 3

♦ 10 2

♣ 9

♠ A 9 8 5 3

♥ Q 7 2

♦ K

♣ A K J 10

If trumps break 3-2 or the ten is singleton, you have little to fear. If, instead, West holds 10-x-x-x, you stand no chance. What can you do about it if East has such a holding? Since you cannot pick up the suit on a simple finesse, you will need a trump coup. This entails reaching an ending in which the lead is in dummy and all you have left is the A-9 of trumps over East's 10-x. Starting with one more trump than East, you will need to ruff one diamond to make your length's equal. You will also want to do all you can to avoid running into a ruff along the way.

Fortunately, the action of ruffing a diamond should set up the suit. Clearly, you prefer to make tricks in diamonds – where you can overruff if East runs out – than in clubs, where you are reliant on the defender's ability to follow suit. Remember, Culbertson warned that a bad break in one suit often heralded a bad break in another.

You should start by cashing one round of trumps. When both follow but the ten does not fall, you continue with a diamond to the king. You then return to dummy with a trump. When West shows out, the wisdom of having unblocked the diamonds first becomes apparent. You can now ruff a diamond and, having done so, return to dummy with the queen of clubs. These cards remain:

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

You plan to play the diamonds from the top, discarding your three clubs and queen of hearts. If East ruffs on any of these four tricks, you overruff and draw the last trump. You cannot return to dummy but have no need to do so because your hand is high. If the defender refuses to ruff four times, you achieve the desired ending of A-9 over 10-6.

Nick Smith of Oxford, England, made the slam by playing in the manner described and rightly earned the accolades of his teammates.

9.16

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦K

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

The bidding makes it highly likely that the ace-king of spades, the queen of diamonds and the king of clubs are all your right. If so, you can exert some pressure by running trumps.

So long as you keep two spades in dummy, East will need to keep two spades to stop you from ducking a spade and setting up the queen. You also intend to keep the jack of diamonds and Q-x of clubs in the dummy. This will force the defender to keep the queen of diamonds and K-x of clubs. The position as you lead your last trump will be something like this:

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

If East discards a low spade, as most opponents will, you can exit with either a spade or a diamond. You lose three tricks but then obtain a lead round to dummy's queen of clubs at trick eleven. If East prefers to throw a high spade, you can exit either with a diamond or with ace and another club. Finally, if the defender bares the king of clubs, you can cash the ace to drop it.

Probably the strongest defensive strategy is to unguard the king of club before this point. In this case, you will need to read the distribution. Unfortunately, the theory provides little help in this regard. East might be any of 3=2=6=2, 3=2=5=3, 2=2=5=4, 4=2=6=1 or the actual 4=2=5=2. I suppose the fact that two of these distributions give East a doubleton club should enable you to guess right more often than not.

Examination for East

Much of what I said at the start of chapter 7 applies here. I do not intend to repeat it. With dummy on your right, you have a relatively easy time of it when making a switch because you can see the strength or otherwise into which you are leading. The hazard now is when you follow suit, ruff or discard. The unseen and often stronger opposing hand is due to play after you. This can result in a nasty surprise.

People say that the three most important features to consider when buying a property are location, location and location. One can say much the same about defensive technique: counting, counting and counting. You should count high cards, distribution and winners, both for your side and for the opponents. Admittedly, on many deals you can get along by sheer intuition. In problems, though, at any rate the harder ones you will meet towards the end of the chapter, you cannot succeed by playing on autopilot. You need to think and you need to count.

An added pressure on you while defending is that you must take care not to think at the wrong time. Doing so could give declarer crucial information about your holding. Ideally, when dummy comes down you should study its high cards in relation to yours. Some of these cards you will be in a position to cover or capture. Think for each one whether you intend to exercise that option. Similarly, if it has a singleton and you hold the ace of the suit, you want to decide before dummy leads the suit whether to grab your ace. At times, you can shift from the passive action of concealing your holding to the active one of painting a deliberately false picture. The trump suit tends to offer particular opportunities for deception. This is because declarer frequently needs to broach the suit before discovering much about the deal and because the defenders have surely not bid it.

10.1

♠ Q 10 6 5
♥ K J 5
♦ A Q
♣ A Q 10 7

W	N	E	S
—	1♣	1♥	1♠ *
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

♠ A 7
♥ A 10 9 8 4
♦ J 10 9 2
♣ 8 6

* five-card or longer suit

Partner leads the seven of hearts and dummy plays the king. Do you play the ace of hearts now or not? Do you play the ace of trumps on the first round or not?

10.2

♠ K 9 7 5
♥ Q
♦ K J 9 5
♣ K Q 10 7

W	N	E	S
—	1♦	pass	1♠
2♥	3♠	4♥	4♠
all pass			

♠ A
♥ 8 7 6 5
♦ Q 10 6 3
♣ A 6 4 2

After cashing a top heart partner switches to the eight of diamonds, which the nine, ten and ace cover. Declarer leads the jack of spades at trick three, which runs to your ace. What card do you return?

10.3

♠ 9 2
 ♥ J 9
 ♦ K J 10 8 5 3
 ♣ A 9 5

W	N	E	S
—	—	1♠	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

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

Partner leads the queen of spades. What spade do you play at trick one? What card will you return when you are first on lead?

10.4

♠ A 7
 ♥ K Q 8 6 5 2
 ♦ Q 10 2
 ♣ J 4

W	N	E	S
—	1♥	pass	2♦
pass	2♥	pass	3♣
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ K 4 2
 ♥ J 10 7 3
 ♦ K 9 6 4
 ♣ Q 9

Partner leads the ten of spades. When dummy plays low, you win with the king and return the four. Do you agree with this? What are your plans for the king of diamonds?

10.1

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥7

♠ Q 10 6 5

♥ K J 5

♦ A Q

♣ A Q 10 7

♠ K 3

♥ 7 3

♦ 8 6 5 4 3

♣ J 5 4 2

♠ A 7

♥ A 10 9 8 4

♦ J 10 9 2

♣ 8 6

♠ J 9 8 4 2

♥ Q 6 2

♦ K 7

♣ K 9 3

One glance at dummy should tell you that your side is not going to score any tricks in the minors. Since the seven of hearts is the highest spot card missing in the suit, you can also tell that partner does not have Q-x-x. This means that to beat the contract your side needs three trump tricks. Even placing partner with the king of spades, you need a heart ruff. This may require careful timing because the bidding indicates that South has five spades, which means you put partner with K-x.

If you put up the ace and return the suit, all will be well if the lead is a singleton. However, in the more likely situation that the lead is from a doubleton, this does not work. If you win the first round of trumps with the ace, partner can only ruff with the king. If you duck, you cannot get back in again before declarer can play a second round of trumps.

To defeat the contract you should save your ace of hearts until the second of hearts, playing an encourage ten on the first trick. Then you duck your ace of spades on the first round as well. You want partner to win with the king and continue hearts so that you can deliver the ruff.

10.2

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥A

♠ Q 6 2
♥ A K 9 4 3 2
♦ 8 4
♣ 8 5

♠ K 9 7 5
♥ Q
♦ K J 9 5
♣ K Q 10 7

♠ A
♥ 8 7 6 5
♦ Q 10 6 3
♣ A 6 4 2

♠ J 10 8 4 3
♥ J 10
♦ A 7 2
♣ J 9 3

Three tricks your way are obvious: the heart already made and your black aces. The setting trick surely needs to come from trumps. It looks like partner has the queen of spades but declarer can finesse against it. You must look for a ruff. If partner has J-x of clubs, a switch to a low club will be good enough. Likewise if the eight of diamonds was from 8-7 doubleton, a low diamond will do. Fortunately, you need not risk this.

♠ Q 2
♥ K 9 4 3 2
♦ 4
♣ 8 5

♠ K 9 7
♥ —
♦ K J 5
♣ K Q 10 7

♠ —
♥ 8 6 5
♦ Q 6 3
♣ A 6 4 2

♠ 10 8 4 3
♥ J
♦ 7 2
♣ J 9 3

There is one card to lock declarer in dummy: the queen of diamonds. If need be, you will rise with the ace of clubs to play a third diamond.

10.3

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠Q

♠ 9 2

♥ J 9

♦ K J 10 8 5 3

♣ A 9 5

♠ Q

♥ 10 8 6 5 4 2

♦ 7 4

♣ J 8 7 3

♠ A 10 8 7 5 3

♥ Q 3

♦ A Q

♣ 10 4 2

♠ K J 6 4

♥ A K 7

♦ 9 6 2

♣ K Q 6

At the table, East lazily played the eight of spades as a request for a spade continuation. After the queen of spades held the first trick, West wanted to oblige but lacked the second spade with which to do so. This gave declarer time to knock out the ace-queen of diamonds and make the contract in comfort.

Holding such good spade intermediates and two likely entries, you need not take the risk that the queen of spades is a singleton. You should overtake the queen of spades with the ace. Then, with the aim of obliterating dummy's nine, you should return the ten. This enables you to dislodge one of declarer's spade stoppers while you still have two stoppers of your own. This leaves you with a very good chance of being able to set up and run the spades. So long as partner has the ten of hearts and at least three clubs, declarer will not have the wherewithal to make nine tricks without the diamonds.

An interesting aside is whether you should deceptively win the first diamond with the ace. If declarer has A-K-10-x of hearts, it may then seem more tempting to repeat the apparently successful finesse for the queen of diamonds than to play you for the queen of hearts. The snag is that placing West with three queens would leave you with very little for an opening bid. This means that such a deception may well not work.

10.4

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠ 10

♠ A 7
♥ K Q 8 6 5 2
♦ Q 10 2
♣ J 4

♠ 10 9 8 6 5
♥ A 9 4
♦ 5
♣ 10 7 6 3

♠ K 4 2
♥ J 10 7 3
♦ K 9 6 4
♣ Q 9

♠ Q J 3
♥ —
♦ A J 8 7 3
♣ A K 8 5 2

The bidding and lead make it likely that West has five spades to the ten and South Q-J-x. Winning with the king and returning the suit makes sense on several counts. For one thing, you avoid blocking the suit. For another, no switch appears attractive.

The real key to the fate of the contract lies in the diamond suit. When do you use your king? Suppose firstly that you cover the lead of the queen with the king. Declarer wins with the ace and crosses back to the ten. When West shows out, it will be clear to finesse the eight on the third round. You end up with no diamond tricks.

Now imagine that you duck the queen and ten of diamonds. In this case, declarer continues with a diamond to the jack and again plays the suit for five winners. To succeed you need to duck the queen but cover the ten (or the other way round if the ten comes first). With a bit of luck partner has the three missing hearts, which means that declarer cannot get back to dummy to finesse against your nine of diamonds.

If dummy had come down with Q-J-x of diamonds, it would have been quite easy to duck the first round and win the second: that is the usual defensive technique. Somehow, when you have to imagine that the queen and ten are effectively touching because declarer holds the jack, the winning strategy seems harder to spot.

10.5

♠ 8
 ♥ K J 8 5 4
 ♦ A Q J 6 3
 ♣ K 9

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♣
pass	1♥	1♠	2♣
2♠	3♦	pass	3♠ *
pass	5♣	all pass	

♠ K J 10 5 4
 ♥ Q 9 6 3
 ♦ 7
 ♣ A 6 2

* asking for help in spades

Partner leads the five of clubs and dummy plays the king. To what use do you put your ace of trumps?

10.6

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

W	N	E	S
3♣	pass	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

♠ K 8 7 3 2
 ♥ A
 ♦ J 9 8 5 2
 ♣ 7 2

Partner cashes the ace-king of clubs, on which South plays the six and queen, and continues with the jack. What card do you play on this trick? What purpose does this serve? I suggest you start by working out what partner will need to contribute in spades and diamonds to give you a chance and take it from there.

10.7

♠ K
♥ 10 8 5 3
♦ K J 8 7 6 2
♣ K J

W	N	E	S
—	1♦	1♥	1♠
pass	2♦	pass	2NT
all pass *			

♠ J 9 5
♥ K Q 9 6 4
♦ A Q 4
♣ 9 2

* yes, they have stopped out of game!

Partner leads the seven of hearts. How do you play to the first trick?
What will you do when in for the first time in diamonds?

10.8

♠ Q 8 6 2
♥ Q 8 5 4
♦ Q 7 4
♣ Q 4

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1NT
all pass *			

♠ K J 10 4
♥ 9 3
♦ 10 6 3
♣ A K J 2

* North shows sound judgment

Partner leads the three of clubs and dummy plays the queen. How do you play to the first three tricks? For a bonus point, you might like to tell me how would play if your K-J-10-x was in one of the red suits.

10.5

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♣5

♠ 8

♥ K J 8 5 4

♦ A Q J 6 3

♣ K 9

♠ A 7 6 2

♥ 10 7 2

♦ 9 5 4 2

♣ 8 5

♠ K J 10 5 4

♥ Q 9 6 3

♦ 7

♣ A 6 2

♠ Q 9 3

♥ A

♦ K 10 8

♣ Q J 10 7 4 3

‘To win a trick’ is not the answer I seek for the use of the ace of clubs, though I suppose a literal interpretation of the question would permit such an answer. ‘To hurl at partner for failing to lead a diamond,’ earns you no marks either.

‘As an entry after dummy has run out of trumps,’ or something to this effect is what I am looking for. If partner has the ace of spades and you hold up the ace of clubs until the second round, you can cash a spade trick or more likely two when you gain the lead.

Indeed, on the layout illustrated, the contract does go two down. If dummy plays a spade next, either of you can win the trick to play a second trump. If declarer prefers a trump, you win and lead the king or jack of spades. The only way declarer can avoid losing three spade tricks is to come to hand with the ace of hearts, return to dummy with a diamond and discard a spade on the king of hearts. In this case, your side makes only two spade tricks but the diamond ruff makes up for it.

The ace of trumps is a precious card. Use it at a time convenient for your side rather than that of the opposition.

10.6

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣A

♠ J 6 4
♥ —
♦ 10 7 4 3
♣ A K J 9 8 3

♠ Q 10
♥ Q 9 8 7 5 3
♦ K Q
♣ 10 5 4

♠ K 8 7 3 2
♥ A
♦ J 9 8 5 2
♣ 7 2

♠ A 9 5
♥ K J 10 6 4 2
♦ A 6
♣ Q 6

Do you throw a low diamond to give nothing away and discourage the suit? Even though partner has the hoped for ♠J and four diamonds, this may not be good enough. Having ruffed the club, declarer strips the diamonds, by cashing the king and ace, and leads a trump to you:

♠ J 6 4
♥ —
♦ 10 3
♣ 9 8 3

♠ Q 10
♥ Q 9 8 7 5 3
♦ —
♣ —

♠ K 8 7 3 2
♥ A
♦ J 9 5
♣ —

♠ A 9 5
♥ K J 10 6 4
♦ —
♣ —

You have two options, both losing. You can lead from your king of spades, and set up the queen, or give a ruff and discard, which amounts to the same thing. To avoid this you ruff the third round of clubs with your ace and exit in diamonds. Later your side scores a spade trick.

10.7

Contract: 2NT

Lead: ♥7

♠ K
♥ 10 8 5 3
♦ K J 8 7 6 2
♣ K J

♠ Q 7 4 3
♥ 7 2
♦ 10 3
♣ A 10 7 5 4

♠ J 9 5
♥ K Q 9 6 4
♦ A Q 4
♣ 9 2

♠ A 10 8 6 2
♥ A J
♦ 9 5
♣ Q 8 6 3

The key to both the questions I posed lies in your assessment of the heart suit. If the lead is a singleton, prospects seem bleak. In this case finding partner with the ace and queen of spades sounds like your only chance. Then you might make three spades, a heart and two diamonds.

You surely stand a better chance if partner has a doubleton heart. To take advantage of this you must duck the first heart, conceding a trick to the jack. When you come in with a diamond, you can continue with a low heart to drive out South's presumably now bare ace. This way you make five tricks: three hearts and two diamonds. Partner must have a black ace (or South would have rebid 3NT) for the setting trick.

It does no good, you see, to contribute the queen on the first trick. No matter how you play later, declarer has three heart stoppers and so easily time to set up enough tricks to make the contract.

The heart position is a first cousin to this layout:

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

East, if holding no entry, must duck the first trick.

10.8

Contract: 1NT

Lead: ♣3

♠ Q 8 6 2

♥ Q 8 5 4

♦ Q 7 4

♣ Q 4

♠ 9 5 3

♥ 10 7 2

♦ A 8 2

♣ 10 8 7 3

♠ K J 10 4

♥ 9 3

♦ 10 6 3

♣ A K J 2

♠ A 7

♥ A K J 6

♦ K J 9 5

♣ 9 6 5

The lead is surely from four to the ten. This gives your side four club tricks. Partner should have an entry somewhere (South cannot hold two ace-kings and the ace of spades without exceeding 17 points), which gives you a chance of making a couple of spade tricks as well.

How do you communicate to partner that you want a spade switch? No matter in which order you play the ace, king and jack of clubs, you can make three club tricks and leave partner in a position to win the fourth. Since spades outrank all the other suits, you should play your highest club on each occasion. In other words, you play the ace first, return the king and continue with the jack.

How would you play if you held K-J-10-x of diamonds? In this case, you would play your lowest winners each time: king first to capture the queen, cash the jack and continue with the ace.

Finally, if you wanted a heart switch, you would play a mixture of high and low winners. The king followed by the ace and jack might do the trick.

Rob Charlesworth from my adopted home town of Porthcawl was West on this deal. He got the right message when his partner played the spades in the recommended manner.

10.9

♠ A Q 9
 ♥ 7 3 2
 ♦ K Q J 10 5
 ♣ J 3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♠
2♣	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

♠ 8 5 2
 ♥ Q 10 8 5 4
 ♦ 7 6 2
 ♣ 9 2

Partner leads the six of hearts. What high cards do you need partner to hold and what can you do to help your side make all its tricks?

10.10

♠ 10 7 6
 ♥ K 3
 ♦ Q J 7
 ♣ A Q J 10 6

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♠
pass	2♣	pass	2♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

♠ K J 9
 ♥ A 8 5 4
 ♦ 9 6 4
 ♣ 8 3 2

Partner leads the jack of hearts and dummy plays low. What do you play on the first trick? Do you see this as your key play on the deal?

10.11

♠ 8
♥ A K J 8 7 6
♦ J 10 8
♣ K Q 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	1♥	1♠	2♦
2♠	3♥	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ A Q 10 6 5
♥ Q 10 9 2
♦ 9
♣ J 8 3

Partner leads the two of spades. Which card do you play on the first trick?

10.12

♠ K 4
♥ K Q J 10 5
♦ 9 8 4
♣ Q 5 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	1♣	1♠
pass	2♥	pass	3♦
pass	3♠	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ A 6
♥ 8 7 3 2
♦ K 10 2
♣ A J 6 4

Partner leads the ten of clubs, which runs to the king. Declarer plays the ace and another heart, running the entire suit. Partner follows twice before discarding the ten of spades and three of clubs on the third and fourth rounds. What do you discard on the fifth?

10.9

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥6

♠ A Q 9

♥ 7 3 2

♦ K Q J 10 5

♣ J 3

♠ 10

♥ K J 6

♦ A 8 3

♣ A Q 8 7 6 4

♠ 8 5 2

♥ Q 10 8 5 4

♦ 7 6 2

♣ 9 2

♠ K J 7 6 4 3

♥ A 9

♦ 9 4

♣ K 10 5

A glance at dummy and a count of the possible tricks for your side point to the solution. Surely, you can make no more than one trick in each red suit and two in clubs. Moreover, you need to gain the lead at some stage to play a club because partner would surely have led a club at trick one if holding the ace-king. The best you can hope for is a suit headed by the ace-queen.

If declarer has ♥A-J doubleton or, less likely, ♥K-J doubleton, you have no winning play. In the more helpful position that your partner has K-J-x of hearts can you see what to do?

If you put up the queen, declarer wins with the ace. Then partner, with just the king-jack left, has no way to put you on lead. Now try playing the ten. Declarer must win or you are on lead straight away. The difference is that partner, after coming in with the ace of diamonds, can lead the jack of hearts for you to overtake with the queen. This will allow you to make the killing club switch.

No ethical difficulty arises if you play the ten of hearts after having thought for while. Declarer's play of the ace marks you with the queen.

10.10

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥J

♠ 10 7 6

♥ K 3

♦ Q J 7

♣ A Q J 10 6

♠ A

♥ J 10 9 7 6

♦ 10 5 3 2

♣ 9 7 4

♠ K J 9

♥ A 8 5 4

♦ 9 6 4

♣ 8 3 2

♠ Q 8 5 4 3 2

♥ Q 2

♦ A K 8

♣ K 5

This time the tempo of your play matters and I set you the problem before you have reached the key trick. Do you think I am too kind?

Actually, you do face a decision on the first trick as well. This is not so hard to solve. If South has a singleton or doubleton queen of hearts, you want to grab your ace at once. In the latter case, you fear a discard on dummy's clubs. If the queen of hearts is trebleton, it can hardly cost to take your ace. In this case, declarer could easily ruff the third round of hearts in dummy and dummy can have no useful discard on the queen.

After taking the ace, you should switch to a diamond. Partner might have the king, in which case you need to attack the suit before declarer can discard a diamond or two on dummy's clubs. The more interesting situation arises when partner holds the ace of spades rather than a top diamond. In this scenario, your side needs three trump tricks.

Assuming that South would not rebid a poor five-card suit, West's presumed ace of spades will be a singleton. You should expect the first lead to come from dummy. If you play low, it will be natural for declarer to duck because this caters to K-J-9 or A-J-9 with you and only loses if you have A-K-9. You can probably prevent this from happening if you nonchalantly follow with the jack. If this were a singleton, ducking would backfire. Most likely declarer will cover and go down.

10.11

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠2

♠ 8
♥ A K J 8 7 6
♦ J 10 8
♣ K Q 2

♠ K 7 2
♥ 5 3
♦ K 6 5 4
♣ 10 7 6 4

♠ A Q 10 6 5
♥ Q 10 9 2
♦ 9
♣ J 8 3

♠ J 9 4 3
♥ 4
♦ A Q 7 3 2
♣ A 9 5

To bid 3NT South surely holds a spade stopper of some description: J-x-x-x, K-x-x or K-x-x-x. You want to cater yourself a chance against all of these holdings.

In the first scenario, you want to knock out the stopper on the very first trick by ducking. Since you expect declarer to play on diamonds rather than on hearts, partner will be the one to gain the lead and your entry will need to be in the spade suit itself.

The second scenario gives you the most flexibility. You can play the queen or ten to dislodge the king immediately. Alternatively, you can win the first round with the ace.

In the third scenario, you want to play the queen or ten on the first trick and return a low spade. Declarer will have to hold up for a second time to shut out the long spades. This will still give your side three tricks in the suit. If partner comes with two diamond stoppers, three spade tricks will suffice.

There is only one card to cater for all three scenarios: the ten. Again, no ethical difficulty should arise if you had to think before playing this. Since you have overcalled on a weak hand, partner knows you must have spades higher than the ten. In any event, you may well get the chance to make a revealing discard on the second round of diamonds.

Take half marks if you played the queen of spades or a low one.

10.12

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♣10

♠ Q 10 9 5

♥ 9 6

♦ J 7 3

♣ 10 9 7 3

♠ K 4

♥ K Q J 10 5

♦ 9 8 4

♣ Q 5 2

♠ A 6

♥ 8 7 3 2

♦ K 10 2

♣ A J 6 4

♠ J 8 7 3 2

♥ A 4

♦ A Q 6 5

♣ K 8

The discard of the spade ten denies the jack and, since you stand little hope if South has the queen-jack, you can read the spade position. If West has the queen of diamonds, you are very well placed. Therefore, you put South with this card and consider an ending like this:

♠ Q 9 5

♥ —

♦ J 7 3

♣ 9 7

♠ K 4

♥ 10

♦ 9 8 4

♣ Q 5

♠ A 6

♥ —

♦ K 10 2

♣ A J 4

♠ J 8 7

♥ —

♦ A Q 6 5

♣ 8

If you throw a spade, declarer can duck a spade. If you discard a club, your opponent can set up a long diamond. The long diamond also comes into play if you discard a low diamond. The answer is to discard the king, creating an entry for partner. This kills the contract stone dead.

10.13

♠ K 10
 ♥ Q 7 6 2
 ♦ 10 3 2
 ♣ K 7 5 4

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♠
pass	1NT	pass	2♦
pass	2♠	all pass	

♠ J 7 4 2
 ♥ A 8 5 3
 ♦ K 5
 ♣ J 9 3

Partner leads the jack of hearts. You put up the ace and South drops the king. You switch to the king of diamonds, which holds, and continue with the five. Partner wins the queen, cashes the ace and plays a fourth round. Dummy ruffs this with the ten of spades. What do you play on the third and fourth rounds of diamonds?

10.14

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

W	N	E	S
3♥	dbl	pass	3♠
all pass			

♠ K J 8
 ♥ J 8
 ♦ 10 9 4
 ♣ A 8 6 4 3

Partner leads the ten of clubs. You capture the king with the ace and switch to the jack of hearts. Partner captures the king with the ace, cashes the queen and continues with the two, which dummy ruffs. What do you play on this trick? What benefit do you see in this play?

10.15

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

W	N	E	S
pass	pass	pass	1♥
dbl	4♥	all pass	

♠ K J 7 5
 ♥ 10 4
 ♦ J 8 5 2
 ♣ Q 9 2

Partner leads the four of diamonds, which runs to the king. Declarer plays a heart to the jack (West follows low) and ruffs a diamond. A high heart then goes to the ace as West throws a diamond, after which South throws a spade on the ace of diamonds. Now comes a spade. When do you play your key cards: the king of spades and the queen of clubs?

10.16

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♦
pass	1♥	pass	2NT
pass	6NT	all pass	

♠ J 7 6 4
 ♥ J 9 8 5
 ♦ 10 7
 ♣ Q 6 4

Partner leads the ten of clubs, the ace winning. A diamond goes to the queen and king, after which partner tries a second club. The king wins and South plays low again. After a diamond to the ace comes the jack of diamonds, on which dummy throws a club. What do you discard?

10.13

Contract: 2♠

Lead: ♥J

♠ K 10
♥ Q 7 6 2
♦ 10 3 2
♣ K 7 5 4

♠ Q 8
♥ J 10 9 4
♦ A Q 8 4
♣ 10 8 2

♠ J 7 4 2
♥ A 8 5 3
♦ K 5
♣ J 9 3

♠ A 9 6 5 3
♥ K
♦ J 9 7 6
♣ A Q 6

Unless partner has the ace of clubs, you need two trump tricks to beat the contract – declarer can throw any slow club loser on the heart queen. The usual rule not to overruff with a natural trump winner applies here. If you overruff, you make the jack but not the seven. What is more, you must discard clubs on each occasion. If you do not, declarer can cash the king of spades and queen of hearts before ruffing a heart. After the black aces comes a second round of clubs to dummy:

♠ —
♥ 7
♦ —
♣ K 7

♠ —
♥ 10
♦ —
♣ 10 8

♠ J 7
♥ —
♦ —
♣ J

♠ 9 6
♥ —
♦ —
♣ Q

Any lead at trick twelve then holds you to one trump trick.

10.14

Contract: 3♠

Lead: ♣10

♠ Q 10 5

♥ 10 5

♦ A K J 7

♣ K Q J 5

♠ 6 4

♥ A Q 9 7 4 3 2

♦ Q 8 2

♣ 10

♠ K J 8

♥ J 8

♦ 10 9 4

♣ A 8 6 4 3

♠ A 9 7 3 2

♥ K 6

♦ 6 5 3

♣ 9 7 2

If partner has the nine of spades, you can ensure two trump tricks by overruffing with the eight or by discarding. A glance at the diagram tells you that your luck is out if you rely either on this or on finding a third heart on your left. If you overruff with the eight, declarer overruffs with the nine. Playing ace and another trump after that holds your side to one trump trick. Alternatively, if you discard on the third heart, dummy leads the queen of spades, forcing you to cover. A spade back to the ten then draws West's remaining trump and drives out jack, after which the nine deals with your eight.

What do you make of the two of hearts? It must be a suit-preference for clubs, meaning that the ten was a singleton. In this case, so long as South holds fewer than six spades, you can beat the contract whoever holds the nine of spades.

Overruff with the jack. If this holds the trick, you can switch back to clubs and defeat the contract at once. More likely declarer overruffs and plays a trump. If this happens, you take your king on the first round and play a club. Again, a club ruff provides the setting trick.

Note that on this deal overruffing with a natural trump winner gained you a trick because it enabled you to give partner a ruff. All the best rules have their exceptions!

10.15

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♦4

♠ 10 6
♥ A J 9 3 2
♦ A 9 6
♣ J 10 8

♠ A 9 4 3
♥ 6
♦ Q 10 7 4 3
♣ A 7 3

♠ K J 7 5
♥ 10 4
♦ J 8 5 2
♣ Q 9 2

♠ Q 8 2
♥ K Q 8 7 5
♦ K
♣ K 6 5 4

Before deciding when to play your king of spades or anything else you should piece together what you know. South ruffed the second round of diamonds and West followed to one round of hearts. This gives you a count on both red suits. Can you see why South is likely to be 3=5=1=4 rather than 4=5=1=3? The take-out double provides a slender clue. A better one is that South would surely have thrown a club on the diamond if holding only three clubs. As for the black aces, it looks like partner needs both for you to have a chance. This makes the ending:

♠ 10 6
♥ 9 3 2
♦ —
♣ J 10 8

♠ A 9 4 3
♥ —
♦ Q
♣ A 7 3

♠ K J 7 5
♥ —
♦ J
♣ Q 9 2

♠ Q 8
♥ Q 8
♦ —
♣ K 6 5 4

Suppose first that you duck the spade, South plays the queen and the ace wins. Partner can do no better than to return a spade to your king. What can you lead after this? A club is certainly no good. It runs round to dummy. Even if partner ducks, declarer can hardly go wrong. Nor does it help to lead a spade or diamond to give a ruff and discard. Declarer ruffs high in hand, crosses to dummy with the trump and just needs to take the right view in clubs. Since you would have had safe exit if you had ♣A-x-x and West's double is looking thin with only eight points, your opponent seems certain to get this right.

You should go in with the king of spades right away and return a spade to the ace. Partner can safely exit with a low club. If dummy plays the eight, you cover with the nine to set up your queen. More likely, the jack or ten goes up. In this case, it does you no good to cover. If you do, declarer wins with the king and leads back to the ten. Partner's takeout double makes it clear to do this rather than finesse the eight. The answer is to duck the first round of clubs. You wait to use your queen of clubs to deal with whichever of the jack or ten of clubs comes second.

10.16

Contract: 6NT

Lead: ♣10

♠ A Q 10 3

♥ Q 10 7 2

♦ 8 4

♣ A K 2

♠ 9 5 2

♥ 6 3

♦ K 9 6 2

♣ 10 9 8 3

♠ J 7 6 4

♥ J 9 8 5

♦ 10 7

♣ Q 6 4

♠ K 8

♥ A K 4

♦ A Q J 5 3

♣ J 7 5

This time, while you cannot quite read the shape, you can place all the high cards. South must have all the unseen cards to have anything in the region of 18 points.

Next, you count tricks. The ace-king-queen of spades is three, as is the ace-king-queen of hearts. The ace-king of clubs is another two, as is the ace-jack of diamonds. This brings the total to ten. Given that you cannot avoid conceding one trick with your discard on this third round of diamonds, you must place West with the nine of diamonds. Even so, you need to take care. The position must be something like this:

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

If you discard a spade, declarer can cash four rounds of spades. What can you throw on the fourth round of spades? You cannot part with a club because you know South has the jack of clubs and a heart entry. You would have to hope that the ace-king of hearts are doubleton. At least this gives you some chance, albeit a small one.

It is a similar story if you discard a heart on the jack of diamonds. Unless South's king of spades is a singleton – highly improbable on the bidding – the fourth round of hearts will subject you to second squeeze.

If South is 2=3=4=4, there is nothing you can do. However, you can survive against 2=3=5=3 and 3=3=4=3 by discarding the queen of clubs. This obeys the usual rule that when partner cannot help guard anything that you should weaken your holding in a suit guarded on your left. The discard costs only one trick and leaves you no problem in finding a discard on the jack of clubs. You just throw the same suit as dummy.

Fantasy Fun-time

For one chapter I hope you will welcome or at least excuse a departure from real life. The problems here take one of two forms. The first type of problem is the inferential problem. While there are various forms of these, I have kept things simple by asking you each time to come up with a distribution that makes the contract makeable. These problems are the opposite of those requiring a claim. Instead of trying to cater for the worst possible distribution, you have to find a layout, no matter how far fetched, that enables you to succeed. These problems are as much an exercise in logic as in bridge skill. You should feel free to take as much time as you wish.

The second type is the double-dummy problem. In this, you see all four hands and assume that all four players are in the same position. The contract, if your objective is to make it, usually appears optimistic. If you are to defeat the contract, your main task is normally identifying declarer's strongest line and then finding a way to thwart it. The solution tends to involve at least one key, counter-intuitive, play. Composers of double-dummy problems generally take great care to avoid alternative solutions. This makes it quite hard to find a solution by chance. Time permitting, you could tackle the problems by laborious trial and error – there is software around these days to check the analysis, which means you will rarely encounter an unsolvable problem. More likely, you will hit upon a few general ideas of how to generate the elusive extra trick and will concentrate on checking these. You can take as long as you like in solving a double-dummy problem. Your frustration threshold is the main constraint. If you really like this type of challenge, you can find many more examples at www.doubledummy.net

11.1

♠ A K 6 4
 ♥ A Q 10 8 2
 ♦ A 10 7 4
 ♣ —

♠ 10 9 2
 ♥ K J 7
 ♦ Q 9 8 6
 ♣ K Q J

South can make 7NT. What distribution makes this possible? For a bonus point, you can consider how the play might go.

11.2

♠ A Q 6
 ♥ 7 6 5 4 3 2
 ♦ A 7 2
 ♣ Q

♠ 2
 ♥ 8
 ♦ 4 3
 ♣ A J 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

South can again make 7NT with best play on both sides. What are the East-West hands this time?

11.3

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

♠ A K Q 3
 ♥ —
 ♦ A 5 4 3 2
 ♣ 5 4 3 2

South is in 7♠, a contract that I can tell you is undefeatable. What are the unseen hands?

11.4

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

♠ J 10 9 8 3 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ A Q 5
 ♣ A Q 8

South is in 6NT, which again is unbeatable. What are the unseen hands this time?

11.1

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

Clearly West must be void in clubs or you will lose the first trick.

For the diamond suit to run either East has the singleton jack or West has the singleton king. Since holding ten clubs and four diamonds in one hand is impossible, it must be the former.

How do the spades need to lie? If someone has queen-jack alone, this gives you three easy tricks. Unfortunately, three is not enough and no squeeze is possible for an extra trick. Instead, you need East to hold eight-seven doubleton. In this case, you can pin the seven and eight by leading the ten and nine before finessing the six on the third round.

Four spades and four diamonds account for eight of West's cards. The remainder must all be hearts.

How does the play go? Any lead helps declarer overcome the slight shortage of entries. Suppose that West leads the four of hearts. You win with the seven and can play on either spades or diamonds. The main point is that when you do play diamonds (or if West leads a diamond initially), you play dummy's ten under your queen. If West continues not to cover, you then unblock the seven under the eight or nine.

11.2

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

For a start, East must hold all the missing hearts for the same reason as in the previous example.

In clubs, you must assume that the king is singleton. Running the queen successfully does no good because it leaves the suit blocked.

Even assuming that the spade finesse succeeds, two spades, an ace and nine clubs still leaves you a trick short. Only a squeeze can provide the thirteenth trick. In view of East's heart length and that both threats lie in dummy, this must be against West.

The threats will need to be the seven of diamonds and the six of spades. Given that East must hold at least five cards between diamonds and spades, there is only one way to arrange this. West must hold all the six spades higher than the six and all the six diamonds higher than the seven. This accounts for twelve of West's cards, the thirteenth being the king of clubs.

The most testing lead is the king of diamonds. You win with the ace and rattle off nine rounds of clubs. Discarding before dummy, West has to come down to only two spades or no diamonds, allowing dummy to retain the seven of diamonds or six of spades as appropriate. A similar position arises after an initial club or spade lead. In the latter case, you can choose whether to cash your second spade winner early.

11.3

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

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

♠ 2
 ♥ —
 ♦ K J 10 9 8 7 6
 ♣ Q J 10 9 8

♠ A K Q 3
 ♥ —
 ♦ A 5 4 3 2
 ♣ 5 4 3 2

If diamonds break 4-3, you might set up a long card. Unfortunately, this leaves you with an inescapable club loser. Of course, if you cannot make a long diamond, you are two tricks short. Since a squeeze in the minors can generate only one trick, the other must come from a throw in. In a grand slam, this has to occur on the opening lead. This dictates that West has only hearts to lead. You ruff in hand, discarding a club from dummy. You then run the trumps, optionally cashing a club or two:

♠ 6
 ♥ —
 ♦ Q
 ♣ A K 7

♠ —
 ♥ K Q J 10 9
 ♦ —
 ♣ —

♠ —
 ♥ —
 ♦ K 10
 ♣ Q J 10

♠ —
 ♥ —
 ♦ A 5 4
 ♣ 5 4

East has no safe discard on the last trump.

11.4

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

Not to have two fast spade losers you need either someone with a singleton ace or West void. For you to have four tricks in the minors the kings will need to be either with East or singleton. Even with all that (and you are short of entries to dummy for finessing in the minors), you still have only eleven tricks. The twelfth needs to come from a squeeze.

The requirement for a squeeze dictates the position in the majors. No squeeze will work unless you give up a spade first – try it yourself and see. This tells you two things. Firstly, East must have all the missing hearts or an initial heart lead beats you. Secondly, West must have a singleton ace of spades or you will be unable to give up only one trick.

Since the minor suits are, for practical purposes, symmetric, let us say that West leads a club. You win and give up a spade, discarding a diamond from dummy. West does best to switch to a diamond. You win and unblock the queen of clubs. Then you run the hearts to reach a three-card ending. Dummy has the last heart, a club and a diamond; you have a spade and Q-x of clubs; West has a diamond and two clubs. You can discard your spade on the last heart but West has no safe discard.

If West starts with a diamond, you discard a club from dummy when you give up a spade. In the three-card ending, you have the same cards in dummy as before but now Q-x of diamonds and a loser in hand. West, who has left a club and two diamonds, will again have no safe discard.

11.5

♠ 9 8 7 6 5 2

♥ 2

♦ 5 4 3 2

♣ 3 2

♠ 4

♥ A K Q J 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

♦ —

♣ —

♠ —

♥ —

♦ A K Q J 10 9

♣ A K Q J 10 9 8

♠ A K Q J 10 3

♥ —

♦ 8 7 6

♣ 7 6 5 4

South is to make 4♠. West leads a heart. For a bonus point, you might also consider how to make the contract on a trump lead.

11.6

♠ K J 10 4

♥ A K 10 6

♦ K J

♣ Q J 10

♠ A Q 8

♥ Q J 9

♦ A Q

♣ A K 9 8 7

♠ 7 6 5

♥ 8

♦ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

♣ 6 5

♠ 9 3 2

♥ 7 5 4 3 2

♦ 3 2

♣ 4 3 2

South is to make 1♥. West leads a top club.

11.7

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

South is to make 4♠. West starts with three rounds of trumps, thus preventing declarer from taking ten easy tricks via two heart ruffs. How should the play continue?

11.8

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

West is to lead and, with a bit of help from East, defeat South's contract of 4♠.

11.5

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

You ruff the heart lead high. After this comes the first key play. You lead the three of spades and let West win the trick with the four!

With nothing else left, West must lead a heart. You discard a club from dummy and a diamond from hand. You do the same on the next heart, discarding a club from dummy and a diamond from hand. On the fourth round of hearts, you ruff in dummy and discard your last diamond.

With dummy now void in clubs and you now void in diamonds, you crossruff the remainder.

What would you do after an initial trump lead? In this case, you play a slightly different gambit and have a little more flexibility. You can win in dummy and lead the two of hearts, discarding a club or a diamond. You will let West win three heart tricks and again void your hand of diamonds and dummy of clubs to finish with a crossruff.

11.6

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

The defenders do best to start with three rounds of clubs. Having ruffed the third round East does best to exit with a diamond. West wins and exits with a diamond. This leaves:

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

You continue with the ace, king and ten of hearts. If West leads a spade, you can easily play the spades for one loser. What do you do on a club exit? You want to keep the spade position fluid and get the lead in hand. You ruff in dummy with the six and overruff with the seven! Then you lead the nine of spades to leave West without recourse.

11.7

♠ 8 7 6 5 4
♥ K Q 10 2
♦ —
♣ A 7 5 4

♠ A K 3
♥ 9 3
♦ K J 9 7 6
♣ Q 10 9

♠ 2
♥ A J 8 7 6 5 4
♦ 10 2
♣ J 8 6

♠ Q J 10 9
♥ —
♦ A Q 8 5 4 3
♣ K 3 2

Nine tricks are easy: three spades, three clubs, a heart, a diamond and a ruff. The tenth needs to be the queen of diamonds or the ten of hearts. You must arrange for whoever wins the third round of clubs to lead into a tenace. The timing hinges on East's discards on the spades.

1. If East discards two diamonds, you lead the king of clubs and a club to the ace. If West has unblocked but East has not, you exit with a heart and East's forced heart return allows you to make two heart tricks. If it is West with the master club, you lead the king of hearts for a ruffing finesse, which East does best to cover. You ruff this, ruff a diamond, cash a heart and exit with a club. West's forced diamond return allows you to score your queen.
2. If East discards a heart and a diamond, you lead a club to the ace and take the ruffing heart finesse. You then cash the king of clubs. If West alone unblocks, you cash the ace of diamonds and exit with a club. East has only hearts left and is endplayed. If West has the master club, you ruff a diamond, cash the queen of hearts and exit with a club. West, with only diamonds left, is endplayed.
3. If East discards two hearts, you lead a club to the ace and ruff out the ace of hearts. You then cash the king of clubs. If West alone unblocks, you play two rounds of diamonds and exit with a club to endplay East. If West has the master club, you ruff a diamond, cash the queen of hearts and exit with a club.

The key thing is to strip the red suits while all follow suit. If you fail to do so, the defenders can change who controls the third round of clubs. For example, if East discards two diamonds (line 1) and you mistakenly cash the ace of clubs before the king, you arrive at this position:

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

You cash the ace of diamonds next, planning to exit with a club. Alas, East discards the jack of clubs. After you then ruff a diamond, cash the queen of hearts and play a club, West simply exits with the king of diamonds. You can never reach the winning queen of diamonds.

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

Declarer's strongest line is to overtake the king of clubs with the ace, ruff a club (West must cover) and play two rounds of spades (on which East must throw two hearts):

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

West wins perforce and must exit with a club. Declarer does best to ruff in dummy and discard a diamond from hand. Finally, West, upon coming in with the ace of diamonds, must lead the queen of diamonds. Declarer ruffs and is now in the wrong hand for putting East in with the jack of diamonds. Using a trump entry leaves East with a club exit (hence the need for East not to discard any clubs on the second and third spades) while crossing to the ace of hearts would set up the king.

It is no good for West to lead low when in with the ace of diamonds because East would have to part with the jack. After this, declarer can put West in with the third round of diamonds and avoid losing any hearts at all by taking the ruff part of the ensuing ruff and discard in dummy.

Why can West not exit with ace and another diamond when in with a trump? After taking the king of diamonds, declarer crosses to dummy with a trump to lead a third round of diamonds. There is a choice of plays now. Simplest is to discard a heart to endplay whoever wins. The alternative is to ruff before ducking a heart to endplay East.

Connoisseur's Collection

Deciding which problems to place in this chapter has proved no easy task. I like all the problems in the book. Why else would I include them? My starting point was the question, 'If the book was only a fraction of its actual size, which deals would still have made the cut?'

As you may well expect, you will find some unusual end positions in this chapter. That said, simplicity can be just as beautiful as rarity. This certainly applies to the first example. I can think of one other example that I could easily have put in with the inferential problems. You do need a very friendly layout to give you any sort of chance.

I am familiar with the saying 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder.' Nevertheless, it would surprise me if your sentiments do not in some way echo those of the bewildered steward at the wedding in Cana in Galilee. 'Most people serve the best first, saving the inferior quality until people have had their fill. You have saved the best until last.'

12.1

♠ Q 2
♥ K J 8 5
♦ K 10 6
♣ K J 8 7

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	pass	pass
pass	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	2♥	all pass	

♠ J 10 6 4
♥ A 10 9 7
♦ J 7 3
♣ Q 5

West cashes a top spade, on which East plays the three. A diamond switch goes to the queen when dummy plays low. East then plays the ace and another diamond, all still following. Which defender holds the queen of hearts?

12.2

♠ K 5 3
♥ A K 7 6 3
♦ A K
♣ Q 7 5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	1♥	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A 10 7
♥ J
♦ 10 9 5 4
♣ J 8 4 3 2

West leads the queen of spades. Which cards should you play to the first two tricks?

12.3

♠ 6 5
♥ A Q J 2
♦ K J 3
♣ A 9 4 2

W	N	E	S
3♠	dbl	pass	3NT
all pass			

♠ K 7 2
♥ K 8 5
♦ 8 7 4
♣ K Q 10 6

West leads the ten of hearts. What is your planned sequence of plays to the first nine tricks?

12.4

♠ 8 6
♥ 10 8 7 5 4 3
♦ K 8
♣ A Q J

W	N	E	S
—	—	1♥	1♠
pass	1NT	pass	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

♠ A K Q J 9 2
♥ —
♦ 10 6 4 3
♣ K 10 4

When West leads the king of hearts, you see that you have done well to avoid 3NT. However, with the ace of diamonds surely offside, you can count only nine tricks. Exactly how many diamond tricks do you expect to lose?

12.1

Contract: 2♥

Lead: ♠A

♠ Q 2

♥ K J 8 5

♦ K 10 6

♣ K J 8 7

♠ A K 8 5

♥ Q 6 3

♦ 9 8 4

♣ 10 3 2

♠ 9 7 3

♥ 4 2

♦ A Q 5 2

♣ A 9 6 4

♠ J 10 6 4

♥ A 10 9 7

♦ J 7 3

♣ Q 5

I asked you who holds the queen of hearts. I am sorry that there are no marks if you said 'East' because West has it. Take half marks if you said 'West'. You are right this time but might equally have been wrong. For full marks, I am looking for the answer, 'the defender who does not hold the ace of clubs,' or something to that effect.

How does one arrive at this conclusion? The answer lies in the bidding or, in this case, the lack of it. Since most people open with 12 points or more, neither defender can really hold the ace of clubs and the queen of hearts. West, who has already turned up with the ace-king of spades, certainly cannot hold six more points. East, who has shown up with the ace-queen of diamonds, can hardly hold six more points either.

It follows from the above that you knock out the ace of clubs before tackling the trump suit.

12.2

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♠Q

♠ K 5 3

♥ A K 7 6 3

♦ A K

♣ Q 7 5

♠ Q J 9 6

♥ Q 10 8 5 2

♦ 6 3

♣ K 10

♠ 8 4 2

♥ 9 4

♦ Q J 8 7 2

♣ A 9 6

♠ A 10 7

♥ J

♦ 10 9 5 4

♣ J 8 4 3 2

With only six top tricks, you clearly need to develop the club suit. The main problem to address is the shortage of entries to your hand.

Suppose East has A-K-x of clubs. Can you succeed? I am afraid not. East wins the first or second round and returns a spade, taking out your entry. In either case, the defender lets you win an early round of clubs and waits to win the third round.

Now suppose West has K-x-x or A-x-x of clubs. Can you succeed in this case? Again, I must answer negatively. East can win either the first or the second round and remove your spade entry prematurely.

Barring a kindly A-K doubleton position (or perhaps a 6-1 spade split), you need East to hold three clubs and West two with the ace and king in opposite hands. How do you take advantage of this? You win the first trick with the king of spades and lead the queen of clubs.

East can win and remove your spade entry but to no avail. You duck the second round of clubs to dislodge the king and leave your three remaining clubs good. If East does not capture the queen, West will gain the lead first and will be unable to attack your spade entry. This makes East's ability to hold up until the third round irrelevant.

12.3

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥J

♠ 6 5
♥ A Q J 2
♦ K J 3
♣ A 9 4 2

♠ A Q 10 9 8 4 3
♥ 10 9
♦ 9 6 2
♣ 5

♠ J
♥ 7 6 4 3
♦ A Q 10 5
♣ J 8 7 3

♠ K 7 2
♥ K 8 5
♦ 8 7 4
♣ K Q 10 6

Given West's spade length, you intend to cater for J-x-x-x of clubs with East by cashing the king and ace. This gives you eight tricks. How do you score a diamond trick for a ninth? So long as East does not hold five clubs, five hearts or a doubleton spade, it is a sure thing. Cash four rounds of clubs and four rounds of hearts to arrive here:

♠ 6 5
♥ —
♦ K J 3
♣ —

♠ A Q 9
♥ —
♦ 9 6
♣ —

♠ J
♥ —
♦ A Q 10 5
♣ —

♠ K 7 2
♥ —
♦ 8 7
♣ —

Now you simply duck a spade. West can make two spade tricks and lead a diamond. You play the jack from dummy to endplay East. The defenders can do nothing to beat you whatever the diamond layout.

12.4

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥K

♠ 10 7 3

♥ K 6

♦ J 9 7 2

♣ 9 7 3 2

♠ 8 6

♥ 10 8 7 5 4 3

♦ K 8

♣ A Q J

♠ 5 4

♥ A Q J 9 2

♦ A Q 5

♣ 8 6 5

♠ A K Q J 9 2

♥ —

♦ 10 6 4 3

♣ K 10 4

Since trying for a diamond ruff is fairly futile (either East has two trumps and draws dummy's or West has ♠10-x-x-x and can score the ten on a promotion if they keep playing hearts), you go for a throw in.

You ruff the heart, draw trumps, cross to the ♣J and ruff a heart. Then you cross back to the ♣Q, ruff a heart and play another club.

♠ —

♥ —

♦ J 9 7

♣ 9

♠ —

♥ 10 8

♦ K 8

♣ —

♠ —

♥ A Q

♦ A Q

♣ —

♠ —

♥ —

♦ 10 6 4 3

♣ —

The stage is now set. You lead a heart and discard a diamond. East wins the next heart as well while you await a lead round to the king of diamonds. You lose two heart tricks but only one diamond!

12.5

♠ 9 8 6
♥ A 5
♦ A Q 7 6 4 3
♣ 10 5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
1♣	1♦	1♥	4♠

all pass

♠ K Q J 10 5 4 3 2
♥ J 4
♦ J
♣ K 8

West leads the three of hearts. How do you play to the first two tricks?

12.6

♠ K Q 10 6
♥ A 7 5
♦ 8 5 3
♣ 4 3 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♣
pass	1♠	dbl	3♣
3♥	5♣	all pass	

♠ A
♥ 3
♦ A 6 4 2
♣ A J 10 9 8 6 5

West leads the jack of hearts. Despite the presence of all four aces between the two hands, you have a definite communications problem. Which of your side's aces will you play last?

12.7

♠ A 9 6 2
♥ J 9 6
♦ J 8 5 3
♣ J 7

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♥
1♠	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

♠ K 5
♥ K 10 8 7 5 3
♦ A K
♣ A 5 3

West leads the queen of spades. You want to ruff a club in dummy but must lose the lead to do so. If West has ♥A-Q-x, the defenders can make two trump tricks and stop the ruff. How should you play to give yourself a second or even a third string to your bow?

12.8

♠ K 6 3
♥ A J 8 3
♦ A 9 8
♣ 8 5 4

W	N	E	S
1♠	pass	pass	2♥
dbl	2♠	3♦	4♥
all pass			

♠ Q 9 5 2
♥ K 9 7 6 4 2
♦ Q
♣ A J

West leads the king of clubs to your ace. You lay down the king of hearts at trick two, finding West void. You will have to play carefully and hope for a spot of luck to avoid losing two spades, a heart and a club. What do you lead to the third, fifth and, most importantly, ninth tricks?

12.5

Contract: 4♠

Lead: ♥3

♠ 9 8 6

♥ A 5

♦ A Q 7 6 4 3

♣ 10 5

♠ A 7

♥ 10 8 3

♦ K 9 8

♣ A Q 9 7 2

♠ —

♥ K Q 9 7 6 2

♦ 10 5 2

♣ J 6 4 3

♠ K Q J 10 5 4 3 2

♥ J 4

♦ J

♣ K 8

The opening bid on the left makes it highly likely that the ace of clubs lies over your king. This puts you in grave danger of losing two clubs, a heart and a spade.

You need to do something with the diamond suit to discard a loser or two. If you could get to hand, you could finesse the queen, which should give you two fast winners. Unfortunately, if you play a trump to set up an entry to hand, West can win and put East in with a heart. A club switch then defeats you. How about playing the ace of diamonds and ruffing a diamond? This is no good. Even if the king falls, you cannot get back to dummy without losing the lead. Have you seen the solution yet?

Put up the ace of hearts, cash the ace of diamonds and continue with the queen, throwing your second heart. West wins and can do no better than play a heart. You ruff and play a trump. If West wins and exits with a trump, you win in dummy and ruff another diamond. On the 3-3 break, this sets up the suit. You can get back to the diamonds with the third round of trumps. This way you end up with an overtrick!

If West has the singleton ace of spades but neglects to cash it when in with the king of diamonds, you can even succeed on a 4-2 diamond break. That defender, when back with the ace of spades, will have to play a diamond for you or do something equally helpful.

12.6

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♥J

♠ K Q 10 6

♥ A 7 5

♦ 8 5 3

♣ 4 3 2

♠ 9 8 7 3 2

♥ J 10 8 6 4

♦ J

♣ K 7

♠ J 5 4

♥ K Q 9 2

♦ K Q 10 9 7

♣ Q

♠ A

♥ 3

♦ A 6 4 2

♣ A J 10 9 8 6 5

You should play the ace of hearts last! If you win the first trick, you are bound to lose two diamonds and a club. You must duck in the hope that West has a doubleton club and a singleton diamond (a fair chance on the bidding). You ruff the second heart, cash your ace of clubs, your ace of spades and your ace of diamonds. This brings you here:

♠ K Q 10

♥ A

♦ 8 5

♣ 4 3

♠ 9 8 7 3

♥ 10 8 4

♦ —

♣ K

♠ J 5

♥ K 2

♦ Q 10 9 7

♣ —

♠ —

♥ —

♦ 6 4 2

♣ J 10 9 8 6

You exit with a club. West, who has only major-suit cards left, must put you in dummy. Your three losing diamonds go on the king-queen of spades and the ace of hearts.

12.7

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♠Q

♠ A 9 6 2

♥ J 9 6

♦ J 8 5 3

♣ J 7

♠ Q J 10 7 3

♥ A Q 2

♦ 7 4

♣ K 8 6

♠ 8 4

♥ 4

♦ Q 10 9 6 2

♣ Q 10 9 4 2

♠ K 5

♥ K 10 8 7 5 3

♦ A K

♣ A 5 3

You win the spade in hand, cash the ace-king of diamonds and duck a club. As you feared, East wins and leads a heart, allowing West to draw dummy's trumps. You win the third round in dummy and ruff a diamond. Perhaps the queen will come down. In fact West shows out, which is almost as good. West is guarding spades and East diamonds. Who can guard clubs? This is the position as you lead your last trump:

♠ A 9

♥ —

♦ J

♣ 7

♠ J 10

♥ —

♦ —

♣ K 8

♠ 4

♥ —

♦ Q

♣ 10 9

♠ 5

♥ 10

♦ —

♣ A 5

West must keep two spades, so bares the king of clubs. Away then goes dummy's spade, after which a spade to the ace squeezes East.

12.8

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♣K

♠ K 6 3

♥ A J 8 3

♦ A 9 8

♣ 8 5 4

♠ A J 8 7 4

♥ —

♦ K J 5 4

♣ K Q 10 2

♠ 10

♥ Q 10 5

♦ 10 7 6 3 2

♣ 9 7 6 3

♠ Q 9 5 2

♥ K 9 7 6 4 2

♦ Q

♣ A J

You will need a throw in against West. At trick three, you play a diamond to the ace. Then you ruff a diamond. At trick five, you exit with the jack of clubs. West wins and must return a club or a diamond for you to ruff. Next (trick seven), you cross to the ace of hearts and ruff dummy's last minor-suit card. This brings you to this position:

♠ K 6 3

♥ J 8

♦ —

♣ —

♠ A J 8 7

♥ —

♦ 4

♣ —

♠ 10

♥ Q

♦ 10 7

♣ 9

♠ Q 9 5 2

♥ 9

♦ —

♣ —

At trick nine, you lead the queen of spades. West must win but can only lead into your split tenace in spades or give a ruff and discard. If West holds the ace, jack and ten of spades, it is just too bad.

12.9

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♠
2♥	3♥ *	pass	4♠
pass	4NT	pass	5♥ **
pass	6♠	all pass	

♠ K 8 7 6 3 2
 ♥ 5
 ♦ A 5
 ♣ Q J 10 5

* raise to at least 3♠

** two aces or one ace and the ♠K

West leads the king of hearts to dummy's ace. With a good fit and a pair of six-loser hands facing each other you might expect to have play for a slam. Unfortunately, the severe duplication in clubs means it is not a very good play. By the way, how are you going to play the clubs?

12.10

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

W	N	E	S
—	—	—	1♠
2NT *	dbl	pass **	pass
3♦	4♠	pass	5♦
pass	6♠	all pass	

♠ Q J 9 8 3
 ♥ A K Q 6
 ♦ A J
 ♣ J 3

* minors, at least 5-5

** you choose

When West leads the king of clubs, you see that again your partner has not underbid. The two issues here are ruffing the fourth heart safely and forcing West to lead a diamond from the king. With these twin objectives in mind, how do you play the trumps?

12.11

♠ 8 6 3 2
♥ 10 6
♦ A K 2
♣ A Q 10 9

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
1♥	dbl	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

♠ A 9 4
♥ A 8 5 4
♦ 7 5 4 3
♣ K J

West leads the seven of hearts and East plays the queen. What should you do on the first trick? If you duck, East will return the two of hearts. How should you proceed upon gaining the lead?

12.12

♠ A 5 3 2
♥ J 7 3 2
♦ Q 9 6
♣ A 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	pass	3♦	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

♠ J 8
♥ K Q 10 9 8 4
♦ A
♣ J 6 4 3

West leads the five of hearts, on which East discards a diamond. You will want to know that East is a disciplined bidder, unlikely to have four spades. In addition, West is not going to play the five of clubs if or when you lead up to the ace. How do you play to the first six tricks?

12.13

♠ 10 6
 ♥ J 7 6 4
 ♦ A Q 9 3
 ♣ 8 4 3

W	N	E	S
—	—	1♥	2♣
pass	3♣	3♥	5♣
dbl	all pass		

♠ A J
 ♥ 2
 ♦ K J 7 2
 ♣ K Q J 10 9 5

West leads the five of hearts and you play low from dummy. East wins with the ten and returns the ace. When you wisely ruff high, West discards a discouraging spade.

Perhaps you should have bid 4♦ to suggest an alternative contract. In 5♦, you would need little more than to avoid a club ruff. Prospects in 5♣ seem rather less rosy. At least the bidding and early play have given you a virtual blueprint of the distribution. I think they do anyway.

Given East's return of the ace of hearts and West discard's, who do you think has the king and queen of spades? Then, adding in West's final double and East's willingness to play in a part-score, who do you think has the ace of clubs?

Assuming this layout, you may well be able to work out a way home if the defender holding the ace of clubs leads the wrong suit (from the defensive viewpoint) after getting in. Can you also find another chance? If you would like a clue, I can tell you that this deal would have been on about page 157 if it had featured in my previous book, *Back through the Pack*.

12.9

Contract: 6♠

Lead: ♥K

♠ Q J 10 4

♥ A J

♦ J 10 9 8 3

♣ A K

♠ A

♥ K Q 10 7 6 4

♦ Q

♣ 8 7 6 4 2

♠ 9 5

♥ 9 8 3 2

♦ K 7 6 4 2

♣ 9 3

♠ K 8 7 6 3 2

♥ 5

♦ A 5

♣ Q J 10 5

The correct play in clubs is to cash the ace-king and, using the ace of diamonds and a heart ruff as entries, ruff the third and fourth rounds high. Why do you play them this way? To avoid losing a diamond you need to find West with a singleton or void diamond and a singleton ace of spades. In this case, East may be short in clubs. Here is the ending:

♠ Q 4

♥ —

♦ 10 9 8 3

♣ —

♠ A

♥ Q 10 7 6

♦ —

♣ 8

♠ 9 5

♥ 9

♦ K 7 6

♣ —

♠ K 8 7 3 2

♥ —

♦ 5

♣ —

Now you make an unusual play in trumps as well. You duck the first round completely. West wins and cannot avoid giving a ruff and discard. Whatever this is with, you should ruff high in dummy for a third time.

12.10

Contract: 6♠

Lead: ♣K

♠ A K 10

♥ 7 4 3

♦ Q 10 5

♣ A 7 6 4

♠ 5

♥ 9

♦ K 9 8 6 4 2

♣ K Q 10 9 5

♠ 7 6 4 2

♥ J 10 8 5 2

♦ 7 3

♣ 8 2

♠ Q J 9 8 3

♥ A K Q 6

♦ A J

♣ J 3

If you draw two rounds of trumps before playing hearts, you will be stuck in dummy after ruffing the fourth round. You must hope West has a singleton spade and draw only one round. Indeed a 1=1=6=5 shape is likely as East has expressed no preference between the minors. After successfully negotiating a heart ruff, you overtake the second round of trumps and finish the trumps. This is the position on the fifth round:

♠ —

♥ —

♦ Q 10

♣ 7 6

♠ —

♥ —

♦ K 9

♣ Q 10

♠ —

♥ 10

♦ 7 3

♣ 8

♠ 9

♥ —

♦ A J

♣ J

If West comes down to a singleton diamond (and you should know it if this happens), you cash the ace to fell the king. If not, you exit in clubs.

12.11

Contract: 3NT

Lead: ♥7

♠ K Q 7

♥ K J 9 7 3

♦ Q J 9

♣ 8 3

♠ 8 6 3 2

♥ 10 6

♦ A K 2

♣ A Q 10 9

♠ J 10 5

♥ Q 2

♦ 10 8 6

♣ 7 6 5 4 2

♠ A 9 4

♥ A 8 5 4

♦ 7 5 4 3

♣ K J

You should certainly duck the first trick. On your lucky day East has a singleton. Having won the second round you play four rounds of clubs – this is much better than trying to duck a diamond to East. West can spare a spade on the third round but is in trouble on the fourth:

♠ K Q

♥ K J 9

♦ Q J 9

♣ —

♠ 8 6 3 2

♥ —

♦ A K 2

♣ 10

♠ J 10 5

♥ —

♦ 10 8 6

♣ 7 6

♠ A 9 4

♥ 8

♦ 7 5 4 3

♣ —

If West discards a second spade, you play the ace of spades and concede two spades to East, eventually making a long spade. If West discards a diamond or a heart, you play three rounds of diamonds. In all cases, the defenders cannot score more than four tricks.

12.12

Contract: 4♥

Lead: ♥5

♠ A 5 3 2

♥ J 7 3 2

♦ Q 9 6

♣ A 2

♠ Q 10 9 4

♥ A 6 5

♦ J 8

♣ K 10 8 7

♠ K 7 6

♥ —

♦ K 10 7 5 4 3 2

♣ Q 9 5

♠ J 8

♥ K Q 10 9 8 4

♦ A

♣ J 6 4 3

If East has Q-10-9, K-10-9, Q-10 or K-10 of clubs, you can set up two ruffs while keeping West out. However, there is a better play, which works whenever West is 4=3=2=4. Play the ace of diamonds and a low club. When West plays the eight, go up with the ace and ruff a diamond high. Then cross to the ace of spades and ruff a second diamond high:

♠ 5 3 2

♥ J 7 3

♦ Q

♣ 2

♠ Q 9 4

♥ A 6

♦ —

♣ K 10 7

♠ K 7

♥ —

♦ K 10 5 4

♣ Q 9

♠ J

♥ Q 10 9 4

♦ —

♣ J 6 4

If West discards a spade, you give up a spade. You will then be able to set up and enjoy a long spade. If West ruffs (high or low), you can ruff two clubs. Finally, if West discards a club, you only need one club ruff.

12.13

Contract: 5♣

Lead: ♥5

♠ 10 6
♥ J 7 6 4
♦ A Q 9 3
♣ 8 4 3

♠ 9 8 5 4 3 2
♥ 5
♦ 10 6 4
♣ A 7 2

♠ K Q 7
♥ A K Q 10 9 8 3
♦ 8 5
♣ 6

♠ A J
♥ 2
♦ K J 7 2
♣ K Q J 10 9 5

All the signs are that West has the ♣A and East the king-queen of spades. If West fails to switch to a spade when in with the ♣A, you will have a simple squeeze. Now suppose West finds the spade switch. You draw the last trump, lead the seven of diamonds to the queen and return the nine to your king. Then run the rest of the trumps to arrive here:

♠ —
♥ J
♦ A 3
♣ —

♠ 8 5
♥ —
♦ 10
♣ —

♠ J
♥ —
♦ J 2
♣ —

♠ K
♥ K Q
♦ —
♣ —

Now lead jack of diamonds to the ace and return the three. Only a very attentive East will know whether you still have the two of diamonds and hence which major-suit jack you will be leading to the last trick.

Winner of the IBPA Book of the Year award, this collection of nearly 200 problems is divided into categories such as Sensational Slams, Trump Teasers, Notrump Niceties and Crafty Continuations, among others.

This is the greatest bridge problem collection, ever! Any questions?

— Ron Garber

I enjoyed this book immensely. Julian Pottage writes well and the problems are well chosen, practical problems rather than being highly technical. It is a book to be dipped into, trying a few problems at a time. It certainly widens one's awareness of possibilities at the table. I recommend it unreservedly

— L Roy Griffin

An excellent collection of problems.

— David Bird



JULIAN POTTAGE (Wales) is acknowledged to be one of the top bridge problemists in the world. He is a regular contributor to magazines and has written a number of books. His most recent book for Master Point Press is *Why You Still Lose at Bridge*.