

Chapter 10

Three bridge frolics

10.1 3NT from any side, against any defence

Consider a suit distributed as follows:

Q 10 9	
–	K J
A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2	

This yields seven tricks only if there is a side entry to the long hand, because if the ace is played on the first or second round then the third round will be won in the short hand, and if the ace is held up until the third round the defence will take the first two tricks. However, if a preliminary discard can be made from the short hand, a first-round duck will set up the rest of the suit.

Now consider a deal consisting of four such suits :

S Q 10 9	
H –	
D A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2	
C K J	
S –	S K J
H A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2	H Q 10 9
D K J	D –
C Q 10 9	C A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
S A 8 7 6 5 4 3 2	
H K J	
D Q 10 9	
C –	

Suppose the defence starts by leading a

low heart. Declarer discards a spade from dummy and ducks a spade, setting up seven spade tricks to go with the ace of diamonds and the heart already in the bag, and the defence can take at most three more tricks before letting him in to make them.

Similar play occurs if the defenders take either or both of their aces before playing a low heart or club, though declarer must be careful to answer the lead of a low heart by ducking a spade and a low club by ducking a diamond; and if the defenders broach spades or diamonds before taking their four tricks, declarer will make an overtrick.

This appeared in *The Games and Puzzles Journal* in 1988. Fourteen years later, I opened my morning copy of *The Guardian*, and there in the bridge column was this very deal with the name “Thomas Andrews” attached to it. Apparently he had performed a systematic analysis by computer of all rotationally symmetric deals, had spotted this one as being of particular interest, and had published it on his web site as the new discovery he genuinely believed it to be. I might add that both he and *The Guardian* behaved impeccably, and unhesitatingly and indeed handsomely acknowledged the prior discovery as soon as they became aware of it.

10.2 The Ultimate Disaster

“The trouble with these artificial bidding systems,” said the Oldest Member, “is that it takes only a single mistake to throw the entire machine out of gear. My former partner and I used to play nothing more exotic than a Two Club system with Blackwood and some elementary cue bids, but even with these simple tools a single error once landed us with the worst result that can possibly occur at a Bridge table.

“We were a game up, when West dealt this hand :

S	Q J 10 9	S	3 2
H	K	H	Q 10 9 8 7 6
D	K	D	5 4 3 2
C	K J 10 9 8 7 6	C	2
S	A	S	3 2
H	A 5 4 3 2	H	Q 10 9 8 7 6
D	A Q 9 8 7 6	D	5 4 3 2
C	A	C	2
S	K 8 7 6 5 4		
H	J		
D	J 10		
C	Q 5 4 3		

“West opened One Diamond, partner overcalled with Two Clubs, and East passed. Unfortunately I had been paying more attention to my coffee cup than to the bidding, and I had missed the opening bid and thought I was responding to a Two Club opening by partner. I therefore bid a negative Two Diamonds. West showed his second suit by bidding Two Hearts, partner,

reading my Two Diamonds as a cue bid showing a strong hand, showed his own second suit by bidding Two Spades, and East, having a splendid fit for West’s second suit, raised him to Four Hearts.

“I still thought I was responding to a Two Club opener, and if partner’s bid was based on a spade suit then my hand was worth far more than my initial Two Diamonds had indicated. However, East’s jump to Four Hearts had left no room to investigate, so I bid a Blackwood 4NT to ask for aces. Partner, having none, replied Five Clubs, and of course I interpreted this as meaning all four. So I bid 5NT to ask for kings, and partner duly replied Six Spades to show three. This seemed to guarantee us all thirteen tricks, six spades (surely any partner opening Two Clubs and following with Two Spades had at least a five-card suit), AK in hearts, AK in diamonds, and AKQ in clubs, so I bid 7NT. Double, said West. Perhaps I should have asked for a review of the bidding, but I merely went through my calculations again, found them still good, and redoubled.

“West led an ace – I forget which, and it didn’t matter – and with fourteen tricks on top the defenders had no trouble in making thirteen of them. That was thirteen down, redoubled, vulnerable, and 150 honours to the defence; and you cannot get a worse result than that however hard you may try.”

10.3 Did the Rabbit play too well?

One of the Rueful Rabbit's rare failures occurred in the celebrated match between the Leprechauns and the Gremlins (*Bridge in the Menagerie*, 1979 Faber paperback edition, pages 67-84).

S 9 8 6
 H 9 8 7 6
 D 8 3
 C 9 8 7 4

S Q J 10 7	S A 4 3 2
H A 4 3	H K Q 5 2
D A 9 4	D Q
C A Q 5	C K 6 3 2

S K 5
 H J 10
 D K J 10 7 6 5 2
 C J 10

The Gremlin, North, opened with a psychic One Spade, the Hog, South, responded Two Diamonds, and the Rabbit, West, ended up in 3NT. "The Gremlin led a diamond and the Rabbit, relying on the spade finesse for his ninth trick, went three down." Three down seems excessive – even the Rabbit would surely have tested both the hearts and the clubs before risking the finesse – but in fact the Rabbit would seem to have incurred a well-deserved penalty for having tried to play properly. Had he performed with his usual incompetence, he would have made two overtricks.

Consider the following line of play.

The Rabbit passes the first diamond, and takes the second. He has a vague feeling that there is a long diamond suit out somewhere, and his idea, if neither the hearts nor the clubs break, is to throw someone in on the third round and obtain a ruff and discard. He then tests the hearts and the clubs, ending in hand. In fact this makes no difference, because if the second suit breaks he can reach the long card by crossing in spades, but it is a matter of elementary Rabbit technique to block the run of his suits if it is possible to do so. At trick eight, he leads the ace of clubs from hand, and this is what the Hog can see :

	S A 4 3
	H 5
C A led	D –
	C 6 3
S K 5	
H –	
D 10 7 6 5	
C –	

The Hog has already had to discard one diamond on the third heart, and he can see that if he discards another he will be thrown in on the third round and forced to lead away from his K5 in spades. He therefore bares his king of spades, a routine brilliancy seen a thousand times in the annals of the Griffins, and waits for the finesse.

But the Rabbit, flustered by the failure of the clubs to break, leads the ace of spades from the wrong hand, and that is that.