

Major Problems in the Slow Lane

I usually manage to avoid the weekly duplicate here in the ward, preferring to offer post-mortem commentary. But when Andrew's father unexpectedly arrived to take his son out for the afternoon, I was pressed into service as Rick's partner.

We got a pretty good result for this defence, which featured one of my favourite plays, the taunt.

Game All. Dealer East.

♠ 982			
♥ 10643			
♦ J9			
♣ AQ62			
♠ J653	N	♠ —	
♥ 952	W	♥ AJ8	
♦ A108		♦ KQ6532	
♣ 1085	S	♣ 9743	
		♠ AKQ1074	
		♥ KQ7	
		♦ 74	
		♣ KJ	

West	North	East	South
Rick		DJW	
—	Pass	1♦	1♠
Pass	2♠	3♦	4♠
All Pass			

Rick led the diamond ace; I played the six. He continued with the ten. When I won the king, I didn't know who had the missing diamond so I played the queen next. This handling of the diamonds was intended to indicate a preference for hearts.

South was charmed by the ruff-and-dancing in his head, he pitched a dancing in his head, he pitched a heart from hand and ruffed in dummy. He would cash all the trumps, squeezing me if I had the club majority along with my marked heart ace. When I showed out on the spade nine, South cleverly ducked. The same squeeze might bring home the contract. Despite my delicate signal, Rick was 50-50 to return a club since he had three of each rounded suit. But my discard of the heart jack changed the odds, and we nipped down a trick.

Rick's smile remained even after he

saw the result on this routine game I made, but I was hard pressed not to growl.

North/South Game. Dealer East.

♠ 632
♥ KJ82
♦ A963
♣ K6

N	E
W	S

♠ 97
♥ A10765
♦ KJ5
♣ AJ9

West	North	East	South
Marshall	Rick	Marcia	DJW
—	—	Pass	1♥
Pass	4♦*	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

The spade ten was led by Marshall, and since I had the nine I looked at his convention card. The lead showed either the jack or shortness. Marcia won the queen and returned the spade five to Marshall's jack. A third spade went to Marcia's king. I formulated a clever plan. I would ruff, cash the high trumps, strip clubs, and exit with a heart. Perhaps someone would be forced to play a diamond for me. This plan was short-lived, though, because Marcia played the queen when I led the second trump back to my hand. But now I had a sure advantage. Marcia had the three high spades and the heart queen. Having passed originally, she couldn't have the diamond queen in addition. I advanced my diamond jack casually, hoping that Marshall would duck from queen to three if he did not have the magical holding of queen to four.

Marcia casually won her queen, and I claimed disgustedly. Why can't they count their points correctly? I'm so tired of drilling that 4-3-2-1 business. Looking at the travelling slip, I saw that everyone else made at least five. Marcia didn't pass an opening bid; Marshall had done me in with his lead. This was the full hand:

♠ 632			
♥ KJ82			
♦ A963			
♣ K6			
♠ AJ104	N	♠ KQ85	
♥ 43	W	♥ Q9	
♦ 742		♦ Q108	
♣ 5432	S	♣ Q1087	
		♠ 97	
		♥ A10765	
		♦ KJ5	
		♣ AJ9	

I was even more annoyed later, when I realised that my bad result was not simply a matter of having Marshall on lead. I had missed a Holmesian inference. I had placed Marcia with the high spades, but that was not consistent with her play. She would not have dared to return a low spade at Trick 2, for fear her partner had led from a doubleton.

We got a great result on another four heart contract, this time one played by Rick. With double stoppers in all suits, our counterparts all played three no-trumps, but eight tricks proved the limit. Rick made me proud as he followed one of the basic rules I had taught: when you're in a trump contract, ruff things.

Game All. Dealer West.

♠ A95
♥ A74
♦ 86
♣ KJ852

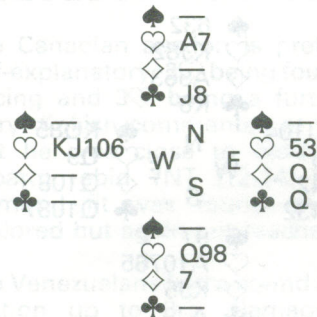
N	E
W	S

♠ QJ106
♥ Q982
♦ AK74
♣ A

West	North	East	South
	DJW		Rick
Pass	1♣	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

A spade was led through to the king,

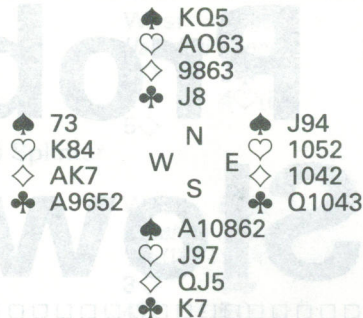
and another spade came back. Rick won in dummy and split the suit when he played a third spade to his queen. My head spun as declarer cashed the club ace and the diamond ace-king followed by a diamond ruff. Then came the club king (I frowned when Rick pitched the thirteenth spade on it, but no-one was looking my way) and a club ruff followed by the fourth diamond. This was the position as the fourth diamond was led, with eight tricks in for declarer:



West trumped with the jack to shut out dummy's seven, but nothing Rick could do would fail.

I thought we would win after that effort, but Ann's terrible bidding and brilliant play on the last round extinguished my hopes.

Love All. Dealer West.

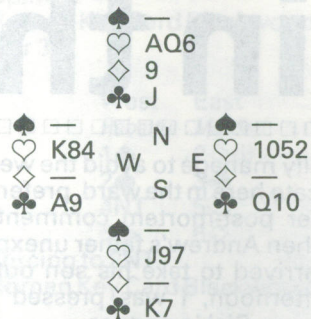


West	North	East	South
<i>DJW</i>		<i>Rick</i>	<i>Ann</i>
1♣	Dble	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

With 12 hcps opposite 11, no-one heard a bid that could be passed. I led the ace of diamonds and switched to a trump. Declarer took three rounds of spades and led a sneaky diamond jack from her hand. Fervently hoping that Rick did not have the doubleton queen, I rose with my king because I did not want the lead. I had a safe exit in the third diamond.

Winning in hand, declarer now cashed her last two trumps. I had

taught the inmates the old rule (when in doubt, play trumps), but why did she have to pick this moment to be in doubt? Of course, I wasn't squeezed, since I had clubs to throw, but might Rick screw things up somehow? Here we were after the last trump:



Ann finessed the heart queen and then cashed the diamond. She pitched a club from her hand and smiled at me. I had never seen a hand like this; a double-jointed strip-squeeze with the trap closing only after declarer was cut off from hand. Did Ann's smile mean she understood the deal? What is she doing here? What am I doing here? Would this have happened if Andrew were in my seat? Why can't I win in this place?