

2ND EDITION REVISED & EXPANDED

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a playing card. The card is held between the thumb and index finger, showing its face. In the background, several other playing cards are scattered on a green surface, some overlapping each other. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the hand and the edges of the cards.

THE EXTRA EDGE IN PLAY at bridge

TERENCE REESE & JULIAN POTTAGE

2ND EDITION REVISED & EXPANDED

THE EXTRA
EDGE IN PLAY
at bridge

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Introduction

Bobby Fischer, the reclusive chess champion, once said: ‘You have found a good move — fine — now look for a better one.’ The same advice applies in bridge. If you settle for second best, you will not achieve your full potential. Through a series of problems that we believe are both fresh and a genuine test of skill, we want to offer you the chance to become accustomed to looking for that extra edge. Whether or not you find the best answers first time round, you will surely develop new ways of thinking to strengthen your game.

Among the techniques you will encounter are: how to make the most of your chances in a single suit; how to force opponents to lead a key suit for you; how to read the cards in the light of the bidding; how to achieve the right timing; how to deceive your opponents about your actual holding.

As this is a book about card play, we have generally kept the bidding simple — using the type of methods you might meet at the rubber bridge table in London. On those occasions when only someone used to a certain system or style (five-card majors and a strong notrump, for example) might feel at home with the bidding, we have included an explanation.

Problem number one is fairly easy and number seventy-six rather tricky, but the others appear in random order. After all, when you are playing at the table there is nobody to warn you that a particular deal is more difficult than it looks, is there?

Terence Reese 1994
Julian Pottage 2005

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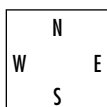
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Slow but Fairly Sure

♠ 2
 ♥ 10 8
 ♦ A 5 3
 ♣ K Q J 9 7 5 2

♦ 9 led



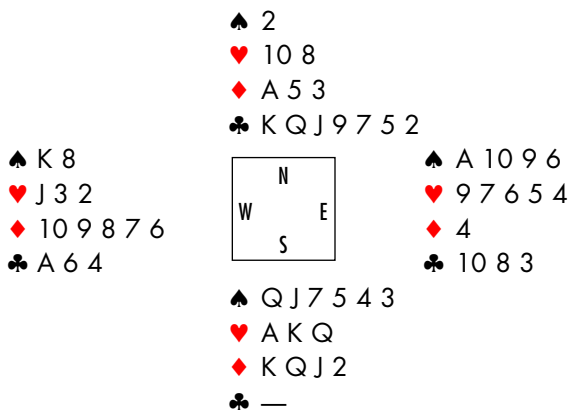
♠ Q J 7 5 4 3
 ♥ A K Q
 ♦ K Q J 2
 ♣ —

Dealer North
Both vul.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♣	pass	1♠
pass	2♣	pass	2♦
pass	3♣	pass	3NT
all pass			

Your 2♦, being a change of suit rebid, created a one-round force, and the final contract seems reasonable.

Since there are insufficient entries to establish and run the club suit, you will need to play on the spades. How will you do this after winning the diamond lead in one hand or the other?



You are in 3NT and West has led the nine of diamonds. (Many players treat the ten as a ‘strong’ lead.)

You can afford to lose three spades, so no problem arises if the suit breaks 3-3. You must concentrate on the 4-2 divisions.

The most critical situation is where West has a doubleton, as in the diagram. It would be a mistake, as you see, to take the first trick in dummy and lead low to the jack and king; that way you would lose four spade tricks. It works better to play low from your hand on both the first and second round.

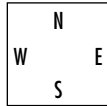
Since you intend to duck in both hands, it should make no difference whether you begin with the two of spades from dummy or the three from your hand. We admit that if East held something like A-K-10-8 you would do better to lead from dummy and win with the queen or jack. However, you intend to play small from hand: if East has four spades, he is more likely to hold A-10-x-x or K-10-x-x than precisely A-K-10-x.

There are some other interesting plays of this kind. With a small singleton opposite your A-J-10-x-x-x, for example, the best play for four tricks is the ace (or ideally up to the ace) followed by a low card. This succeeds against K-x or Q-x on either side, a better chance than finding K-Q-x-x on your right.

No Genius

♠ 9 7 6 4
 ♥ Q
 ♦ A J 10 6
 ♣ A K 8 3

♦ K led



♠ A K J 10 8
 ♥ A J 5
 ♦ 9 2
 ♣ J 6 5

Dealer South
 N-S vul.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♠
pass	4♣	pass	4♥
pass	5♥	pass	6♠
all pass			

North's 4♣ was a conventional bid (from the days before splinters) indicating spade support, an unspecified singleton and two aces. With his moderate spades, it might have been wiser to begin with 2♣ or 2♦. Since he had already shown two aces, the bid of five hearts suggested a singleton heart.

The king of diamonds lead means there will be a discard for the losing club, but how will you tackle the trump suit?

	♠ 9 7 6 4										
	♥ Q										
	♦ A J 10 6										
	♣ A K 8 3										
♠ Q 3 ♥ K 9 6 2 ♦ K Q 8 7 3 ♣ 9 4	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 5 2 ♥ 10 8 7 4 3 ♦ 5 4 ♣ Q 10 7 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ A K J 10 8										
	♥ A J 5										
	♦ 9 2										
	♣ J 6 5										

You play in 6♠ and West leads the diamond king. You will not have to worry about the third club now, but you may well have to take a view in the trump suit.

A 3-1 break occurs more often than a 2-2 break, but if you cash the ace, the singleton queen might fall. This means that if the queen does not drop on the first round then the odds are almost even on whether she will do so on the second.

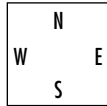
Since West appears more likely than East to hold length in diamonds, you could reasonably play East for three spades to the queen, but on such occasions there is sometimes a way to entrap a non-expert defender. Take the first diamond and play one straight back. Then win a club return in dummy and lead the master jack of diamonds. At this point, many players in the East position would ruff with a confident air, solving all your problems.

Of course, it wouldn't be good play for East to ruff: he should ask himself why declarer has not played on trumps at once. If East nonchalantly discards, declarer will surely feel inclined to place him with an original Q-x-x. So really it comes down to a question of how South estimates his opponent.

Test Case

♠ 9 6 4 3
 ♥ K 8 5 3
 ♦ A Q
 ♣ A 7 5

♠A led



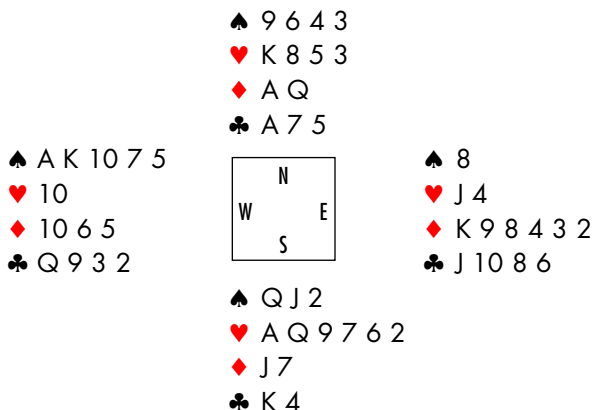
♠ Q J 2
 ♥ A Q 9 7 6 2
 ♦ J 7
 ♣ K 4

Dealer North
 Neither vul.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT ¹	pass	3♥
pass	4♣	pass	4♥
all pass			
1. 12-14			

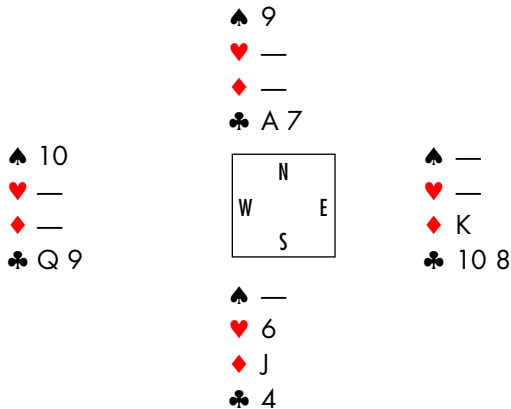
Over 3♥ North has good enough support to show willingness for a slam with an advance cuebid of 4♣, but you are not interested.

West begins with the ace and king of spades, East throwing a small diamond on the second round. East ruffs the third round of spades and then leads the jack of clubs. How should you plan the play?



You play in 4♥. The defenders take two spades and their ruff; East then exits with the jack of clubs.

As West has spade length, East is likely to hold the ♦K. You should win with the king of clubs, cash dummy's ace of diamonds, then run the trumps, arriving at this position:

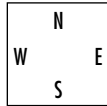


Now the last trump effects a double squeeze.

When you cashed the ace of diamonds to make your jack available as a threat against the king, this was a *Vienna Coup*.

♠ A J 9
 ♥ 8 7 6
 ♦ K 5
 ♣ K 7 5 4 2

♦ 4 led



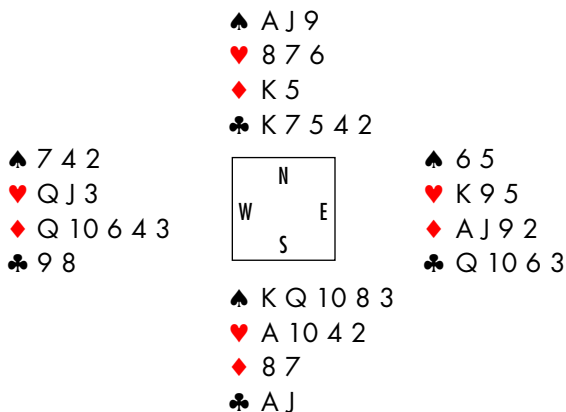
♠ K Q 10 8 3
 ♥ A 10 4 2
 ♦ 8 7
 ♣ A J

Dealer South
Neither vul.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♠
pass	2♣	pass	2♥
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

In traditional Acol, a change of suit response of 2♣ does not promise a great hand and North subsequently needed to give jump preference to show three-card spade support and invite game. In Standard American, North would rebid 2♠ knowing you would bid again.

West leads the four of diamonds and you put up dummy's king. East takes two tricks with the ace and jack, then shifts to the five of hearts. Clearly, you will need to set up some club winners for heart discards. How do you proceed?



You are in 4♠ and West leads a small diamond. East cashes two diamond tricks and shifts to the five of hearts.

This deal is a little deceptive. To begin with, ducking the first heart cannot help you to make the contract, because if you lose another trick after that you will go down anyway. If you put up the ace, you may finish with eleven tricks.

After you have won the first heart, a possible line is to take three rounds of clubs, ruffing the third. This will bring in ten tricks when the spades break 3-2 and the clubs 3-3.

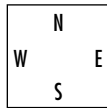
However, this is too optimistic. You do better, after the ace of hearts, to cross to dummy and finesse the jack of clubs. You risk going two down, if West produces the queen, but as the cards lie, this sets you on the right path — you unblock the ace of clubs, cross back to dummy and ruff a club to make five spades, four clubs and a heart. It also works when East has a doubleton ♣Q-x; again, you can set up four club tricks.

Finally — not easy to foresee — you can succeed when East holds ♣Q-x-x and *four* trumps. After the second round of spades, you play good clubs from the table. When East ruffs, you over-ruff and return to dummy to make a fourth club trick.

Tell Tale

♠ Q 6
 ♥ 7 5 3
 ♦ K 8 7 4 2
 ♣ A K J

♥4 led



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

Dealer South
E-W vul.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT ¹
1. 12-14			

Some people decide whether to open the bidding by adding their high card points to the number of cards in their two longest suits. This normally produces the result that they open any hand with 12 HCP upwards unless it has a 4333 shape. Although the idea has merit, striking the first blow, especially when you can do so with some preemptive effect, often works well.

Against your normal 3NT contract, West leads the four of hearts and East plays the queen. You probably cannot afford to lose two diamonds. What is your strategy?

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

You are playing in 3NT and West leads the four of hearts to his partner's queen.

The play to the first trick needs consideration. If you duck, then as the cards lie, a spade switch from East would prove threatening: you would have to duck and the opponents might then revert to hearts. This sequence of plays does not sound very likely, but if you take West's four of hearts as fourth best, holding up the ace serves no purpose.

You win with the ace of hearts, therefore, and now have to consider which defender might hold three diamonds to the ace. You have a clue to this. It would appear that West has led from a four-card suit, so unless he is precisely 4-4-1-4 — and has chosen to lead a heart — he will not hold a singleton diamond.

Having decided that East is more likely than West to be short in diamonds, you cross to the ♣K and lead a small diamond; this runs to the jack, queen and ace. When you regain the lead, you play the next diamond from hand and West plays low. Now you should finesse, for more than one reason. On restricted choice principles, East's jack is more likely to be single than from J-10. Another point is that if West were not 3-4-3-3 he might have led his other four-card suit rather than a heart from K-J-x-x.

LOOK FOR THAT EXTRA CHANCE!

Chess champion Bobby Fischer once said: “You have found a good move — fine — now look for a better one.” The same advice holds true in bridge. If you settle for second best, you will not achieve your full potential. Through a series of problems that are both fresh and a genuine test of skill, this book offers you the chance to become accustomed to looking for that extra edge. Whether or not you find the best answers first time round, you will surely develop new ways of thinking to strengthen your game.

TERENCE REESE, who died in 1996, held center stage in the bridge world as a player for more than forty years. He is also generally regarded as the greatest bridge writer of his generation, and many of his books are landmarks in the development and understanding of the game.



JULIAN POTTAGE is known as one of the world’s best creators of bridge problems, and his *Play or Defend?* was the winner of the 2004 IBPA Book of the Year award. He lives in Wales.

