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High card short side,

VB#2 Y1 General hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 12/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 7
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ KJ53	
	♥ J83	
	♦ KQ97	
	♣ 97	
West		East
♠ T862		♠ 974
♥ Q974		♥ KT6
♦ 8		♦ 6432
♣ KJ53		♣ AQ4
	South	
	♠ AQ	
	♥ A52	
	♦ AJT5	
	♣ T862	

The emphasis in this set of hands is on **not** tangling suits up so that you end up in the wrong hand at the wrong time. Some suits, however, are just dealt that way and the whole deal may need careful planning. Hands 7 and 8 fall into this category.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♣ 3

You reach 3NT in the now customary fashion and West makes a nuisance of himself by leading a Club. (Now that you see his hand you can see he had a choice of three four-card suits to lead. His selection was the strongest of his three suits).

Even though the opponents are in charge of the field you should still not play a card from the table until you are good and ready. You can make your *plans* (do your *counting*) even though you may not be on lead for a while.

Here you can see that you have nine tricks (four Spades, one Heart, four Diamonds) as and when you get on lead. The Spades are awkward, though, in that you cannot run them off (you cash the ♠A Q and then the lead is in the South hand, the ♠K J are in the North hand. Oops!) With such combinations it is essential that you play such "tangled" suits first; in other words – do not play the "easy" suit (Diamonds) before the tangled suit (Spades).

East-West proceed to cash the first four Club tricks Before they run out of steam. You have to make two discards from the table and the most useless cards to pitch are the two low Hearts. West now switches to a Heart, forcing your ♥A. Your first play is to cash the ♠A Q and – having to abandon Spades for a trick – cross to the table with a Diamond to cash the ♠K J. Now you can take the remaining Diamonds and you have made the contract. Bravo!



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High card short side,

VB#2 Y1 General hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 12/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 8
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

North  
 ♠ Q52  
 ♥ A4  
 ♦ QJT65  
 ♣ 642

West  
 ♠ KT8  
 ♥ QT752  
 ♦ 8  
 ♣ QT87



East  
 ♠ AJ6  
 ♥ J96  
 ♦ 97432  
 ♣ J9

South  
 ♠ 9743  
 ♥ K83  
 ♦ AK  
 ♣ AK53

Here we have been dealt another suit where nature has decreed that we cannot immediately take what is rightfully ours. This layout means that we have to think carefully about the play to trick one as it is vital to keep links between the closed hand and dummy.

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ 5

You reach 3NT after an invitational sequence and West leads the time-honored fourth-highest-of-his-longest-and-strongest, to wit: the ♥5.

Your **Count** and **Plan** begins and you should see enough tricks for the contract (two Hearts, five Diamonds and two Clubs). Good enough for a hit and run.

Before we get ahead of ourselves though, let's take a closer look at those Diamonds. They are tangled up good and proper. There might be five tricks there but the suit cannot be run off at one go. You take the ♦A K and then the lead is with South (the closed hand) and leering at you in the dummy are the winning ♦Q J 10. Is this a problem? Well, maybe... You need a way of getting over there, to the table, to make the Diamonds – you don't want them stranded like Robinson Crusoe on a desert island.

The **only** way of placing the lead in the North hand is with Hearts – the ♥A. Now ask yourself the following question: "Where should I win trick one?" You have a choice of the ♥A or the ♥K. Can you see that taking the ♥A at trick one is disaster. Goodbye Mr Crusoe (also known as the ♦Q J 10).

You simply **must** win trick one with the ♥K in hand, preserving the ♥A as later access to the Diamonds. Having taken this necessary precaution you must cash the ♦A K next (untangling the suit – or, if you prefer the technical jargon – **unblocking** the suit) then the path is clear. You can cross to the ♥A, cash the Diamonds and finally take your eighth and ninth tricks with the ♣A K.


This topic will be revisited later when we talk about *entries*. Being in the right hand at the right time is a crucial part of success at this game.



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This series continues from the previous V-Blue series on timing and setting up discards.

Timing (harder examples) SA version	Contract: 4H
Date: 12/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 9
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ KQ64	
	♥ AJ	
	♦ AQ84	
	♣ 863	
West		East
♠ AT73		♠ J98
♥ 43		♥ 652
♦ T63		♦ KJ92
♣ KQJ7		♣ T94
	South	
	♠ 52	
	♥ KQT987	
	♦ 75	
	♣ A52	

Having played two similar deals we are now branching out into more difficult territory.

Good luck with these last four deals...

Just remember to **Count** and **Plan**. Oh - did we mention *Counting*?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	2♥
P	4♥	P	P
P			

Lead: ♣ K

As South you reach 4♥ and West leads the ♣K. It looks obvious to draw trumps (just look at those lovely Hearts!) but such temptations should be resisted until you have performed the ritual of thanking partner and **Counting** your tricks. What is your **Plan**?

Here, you can see six Hearts and two Aces "on top" – so eight tricks are assured. There is also a slow but certain Spade trick to go with the others, so you are guaranteed to make nine tricks.

What about losers? Well, there is a Spade loser, no Heart loser, a possible Diamond loser (just where is that ♦K??) and two Club losers. So the deal appears to hang on the layout in Diamonds and on the Diamond finesse.

However... appearances (as someone wrote) can be deceptive. Why could you not make *two* Spade tricks? True, this entails West having been dealt the ♠A but why shouldn't he have it? If you can lead up to dummy twice in Spades you will make both of the ♠K Q, provided West has the ♠A.

If this is the case you don't need the Diamond finesse – the Diamond loser can be **dumped** on the ♠K. So you draw trumps and play a Spade? Oh no! That way spells defeat. With a capital D. *Why?* Play the hand through in your mind and see. You draw trumps and lead a Spade and West cannily ducks. You win the ♠Q and – oops! – find yourself stuck on table. You play something – a Club? – and West meanly wins and shoots a Diamond through the ♦A Q, forcing you to take the finesse before you are ready. When East has the ♦K you are dead as you have four losers (two Clubs, a Diamond and a Spade).

This hand is all about *good timing*. Win the ♣A and play a Spade at trick 2. What does West do? If he takes the ♠A you have ten tricks so he must duck. You win the ♠Q and NOW you draw trumps before leading a second Spade, neatly cooking West's goose. When he takes the ♠A you have your tenth trick. (If he ducks his Ace you still have your tenth trick).

If East had turned up with the ♠A you would have had to resort to the Diamond finesse. Still,


this way you have two chances instead of one.



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This series continues from the previous V-Blue series on timing and setting up discards.

Timing (harder examples) SA version	Contract: 4H
Date: 12/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 10
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

North		
♠ JT8		
♥ 943		
♦ AK2		
♣ 9864		
West		East
♠ Q64		♠ AK7532
♥ T8		♥ QJ6
♦ J9643		♦ QT7
♣ A52		♣ 3
South		
♠ 9		
♥ AK752		
♦ 85		
♣ KQJT7		

In this deal you are caught up in a "momentum auction" and find yourself in a precarious spot. How should you play the hand?

West	North	East	South
P	P	1♠	2♥
2♠	3♥	3♣	4♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ 4

These competitive deals are tricky. East opens 1♠ and you overcall 2♥ (a better bid than 2♣). West supports his partner with 2♠ (what else?) and North has the choice of Passing (feeble) or supporting your known five-card (or longer) suit. Reasonably enough he supports your suit. East competes to 3♣ (a contract he might make unless you are sharp in the defense) and you decide to take the plunge and bid game in Hearts. No one really knows who can make what on this type of deal when you spin the roulette wheel.

When dummy goes down you can see immediately that you have a Spade loser and the ♠A to lose. If you were to lose two trump tricks you'd be going off so you must hope for a 3-2 trump break so that you only have one Heart loser. What about winners? Well, you have four Hearts (assuming trumps behave nicely and split 3-2) two Diamond winners and four Club winners once the ♠A has gone. So there are ten tricks there.

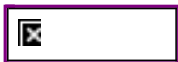
East-West start by playing two rounds of Spades, forcing you to ruff. You must make some effort to draw trumps (you have enough winners, remember) so you cash the ♥A K. Now, it is important not to drive out the boss Heart as that would leave you short of trumps. You should leave the ♥Q outstanding and turn your attention to your side-suit by driving out the ♠A.

West takes the ♣K with the ♠A and plays yet another Spade, leaving you worryingly short of trumps. However, you can now simply lead off your winning Clubs, happy enough to let either defender ruff in with the ♥Q whenever he wishes. When he does, you have the rest of the tricks with winning Clubs, the ♦A K and two boss trumps (one in each hand).

It is normal play to ignore an outstanding boss trump - especially if you have a side-suit to run off. In these cases you can play winners, allowing an opponent to take his trump trick as and when he wants it. There are exceptions to this "rule" but that is a common strategy.

Note also that East could have played a Club at trick two to his partner's ♠A and received a ruff at trick three. That would, however, have

helped his cause not one jot as he would have been ruffing with his *natural trump trick*. There is no defense to 4♥ after a Spade lead.



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This series continues from the previous V-Blue series on timing and setting up discards.

Timing (harder examples) SA version	Contract: 2S
Date: 12/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 11
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♠
P	1NT	P	2♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ J

On this deal you play in a modest part-score after you open 1♠ and partner replies with 1NT.

West leads a Club and you take stock. This sort of deal is difficult to play in that you can't quite count winners and losers. Also, with a moth-eaten trump suit, you don't know how many trump losers you have. On a normal 3-2 break you will lose just two trump tricks (you play off the ♠A and another Spade, leaving East-West with the master trump). However, what if trumps aren't 3-2?

Let's have a stab at counting winners and losers, though. Winners first... There are at least three Spade winners (unless Spades are 5-0 – forget that unlikely possibility). There are three Heart winners, and may be more if that suit breaks 3-2. There are two Diamond winners once the ♦A has gone (and maybe a third Diamond if the suit splits 3-3). No Club winners are possible.

Losers? Two Spades at least, maybe three. No Heart losers. One Diamond loser, maybe two, no Club loser. So, at worst, there appears to be three trump losers (on a 4-1 break) and two Diamond losers (on a 4-2 or 5-1 break). So only five losers – good news.

Now, what is wrong with playing off the ♠A and another Spade? Well, that will work fine if trumps are 3-2. It will be disastrous, though, if trumps are 4-1. Why? Because West will play off the rest of his trumps (leaving you with just one) and will play another Club, removing your last trump. Now when the opponents come in with the ♦A they will have Clubs to cash – lots of them.

To prevent this you should cash the ♠A and turn your attention to your side suit by knocking out the ♦A. This way, the opponents don't get in the position of being able to draw your trumps (humiliating when the defense draws trumps!) and cashing Clubs.

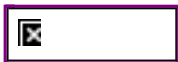
As the cards lie, you must make eight tricks, even with the evil breaks (Hearts 5-0, Spades 4-1, Diamonds 4-2).

<p>North</p> <p>♠ J6</p> <p>♥ K8754</p> <p>♦ QJ3</p> <p>♣ Q73</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ 9</p> <p>♥ JT963</p> <p>♦ 65</p> <p>♣ AK642</p>
<p>West</p> <p>♠ KQT3</p> <p>♥</p> <p>♦ AT94</p> <p>♣ JT985</p>		<p>South</p> <p>♠ A87542</p> <p>♥ AQ2</p> <p>♦ K872</p> <p>♣</p>

Some simple-looking deals, played in modest part-scores, are not always as easy as they look. This one needs care and attention







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Timing (harder examples) SA version	Contract: 4H
Date: 12/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 12
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
P	1♦	P	1♥
P	3♥	P	4♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ K

Here you end up in 4♥ and dummy is something of a shock. You realise that 3NT is actually idiot-proof (with seven Diamonds and three Aces) but 4♥ is anything but. Still, as the bard said, "*Twas ever thus*".

Now, how do we play 4♥ after the ♠K opening lead? Start to ruff black losers in the dummy? Draw trumps? Well, lost with a bewilderingly difficult hand you may lose sight of the necessity of **Counting** and **Planning**. Let's take a deep breath and do that.

**Winners?** Well, there is one Spade, at least one Heart, seven Diamonds and one Club. So we have enough winners. **Losers?** No Spades, at least two Hearts, no Diamonds and no Clubs.

So we can see that all we have in terms of losers are in trumps and that we have sufficient winners. This argues for drawing trumps – but how? We could play off the ♥A and another, hoping for a 3-2 split. That way all we would lose is two trump tricks. A good idea if the contract were 5♥ but it isn't – it's 4♥. You can afford to lose three trump tricks and you cannot afford to play off the ♥A and another hoping for a heart break. If you tried that you'd get the "heartbreak" all right – East would draw trumps (how humiliating!) and West would have Spades to cash. Aaarrggghhh! Three down.

The way to play the hand is similar (identical?) to Hand 4. Cash the ♥A and play on Diamonds, not caring if any of them gets ruffed. After the ♥A the opponents have three Hearts between them – let them make those tricks by trumping your winning Diamonds. You don't need to **trump** any losers in hand – they can all get **dumped** on those magnificent Diamonds. True, you will have to ruff something on table to gain access to the Diamonds but that doesn't ruin the point of the argument.

North  
 ♠ A  
 ♥ 7532  
 ♦ AKQJT53  
 ♣ T

West  
 ♠ KQJ9  
 ♥ 9  
 ♦ 97642  
 ♣ K43



East  
 ♠ T642  
 ♥ KQJT  
 ♦  
 ♣ Q9862

South  
 ♠ 8753  
 ♥ A864  
 ♦ 8  
 ♣ AJ75

This - be warned! - is not an easy hand. However, if you have absorbed the lessons of the previous deal or two you may well be able to unlock its secrets.

