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The common finesse

VB#16 The Finesse Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

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

Lead: ♠ 2



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North  
 ♠ 643  
 ♥ K74  
 ♦ AQJT  
 ♣ J97

West  
 ♠ KJ52  
 ♥ J5  
 ♦ K94  
 ♣ T653



East  
 ♠ AT8  
 ♥ QT932  
 ♦ 72  
 ♣ 842

South  
 ♠ Q97  
 ♥ A86  
 ♦ 8653  
 ♣ AKQ

This set of six deals is all about the finesse, a common but very important play in bridge. In the last edition of V-Blue we looked at the *marked finesse* (when you know how the cards lie). Here we are looking at deals where you don't know how the opponents' cards are arranged – you just have to hope that they lie in a certain way. That's in the nature of a finesse.

We'll start with a definition.

**Tenace:** *Two cards of the same suit of which one ranks two degrees lower than the other.*

**Confused? How about this? Two almost-touching cards with a space between them. All of the following suit combinations are tenaces:**

♠A Q, ♥K J, ♦Q 10, ♣J 9

The word comes from the Spanish *tenaza*, meaning "tongs" or "pincers" and tenaces are at the center of nearly all finesse plays. Basic finesse technique says that you do not lead away from tenaces, you lead up towards them.

Hand 1 is a straightforward hand on which to

After a clear-cut auction to 3NT, we get a lead of the ♠2, bottom of a four-card suit. Defenders, pay attention. After a 1NT – 3NT auction, if you can lead a major, it is usually right to do so. Declarer and dummy are unlikely to have an eight-card major-suit fit.

We realize we're likely to lose the first four tricks, which means we have to take the rest. No wiggle room at all. We start out with two Heart winners, one Diamond and three Clubs. In order to take all the rest of the tricks, we have to find the ♦K with West. We will lead from our closed hand up toward the Diamond tenace on table.

We lead a small Diamond at trick 6 (*through* West) and play the ♦10 from dummy, while holding our breath. This is a straight 50-50 shot. If West has the ♦K the ♦10 must hold – if East has it we are dead.

When East plays low, we know we've got the rest of the tricks. Even a 4-1 Diamond split can't hurt us. We re-enter our hand with a Club, play up to the remaining ♦A Q J, and play just high enough to beat West's card. With Diamonds 3-2 we can cash the ♦A to drop the ♦K and cash the last winning Diamond. After that all we have to do is tidy up the room by cashing out our winners.

This was the only way we could make the hand. Had the ♦K been with East we would have gone down... but that's life in the Big City. Meantime, we got lucky.

This hand was an easy one, designed to help you clearly see the concept. Did you get it? Let's try again.

practise your basic finessing technique.  
There is an obvious tenace position in  
Diamonds.

Keep in mind that a hand well planned almost  
plays itself.



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The common finesse

VB#16 The Finesse Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

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

Lead: ♠ 2

Our auction to 3NT is straightforward and the lead of the ♠2 promises to be bottom of a four-card suit topped with an honor or two.

This deal plays out just like Hand 1, except we've got a 4-1 Diamond split to deal with. We have all the top Diamonds, minus of course the ♦K, and we know where they are, so it ain't that tough, binky.

We have our Clubs as **entries** to the closed hand so, after losing our four Spade tricks (leaving us booked to the max) and winning the Heart return in our hand, we start the Diamonds. As ever with finesse positions, we lead up to a tenace holding and **through** our victim (here, that's West).

We are delighted when East produces a little Diamond on the first Diamond trick (which is dummy's ♦10), as that locates the ♦K for us. We return to hand, repeat the maneuver of leading a Diamond through West to the ♦J and see that win as well. On the second Diamond trick we see East show out. The 4-1 break means that we cannot afford to cash the ♦A at this point – we need a third finesse.

So, back to hand (you will discover the more you play that **entries** are a vital part of the finesse machinery) and lead a third round of Diamonds, once again *through* West's ♦K. When West plays low (what else can he do?) we take the ♦Q and we have four Diamond tricks.

On this deal everything depends on the position of the ♦K and we have no control over that. If the Great Dealer in the Sky had given East the ♦K we would have gone down. Live with it. As the cards lie, though, the GDitS has placed the ♦K **onside**, where we want it and where it can be finessed.

Good things happen to people who do things good (and have Vu-Bridge to help), so we prevail.

North  
♠ 643  
♥ K74  
♦ AQJT  
♣ J97

West  
♠ KJ52  
♥ J5  
♦ K942  
♣ T53



East  
♠ AT8  
♥ QT932  
♦ 7  
♣ 8642

South  
♠ Q97  
♥ A86  
♦ 8653  
♣ AKQ

You may think this hand is exactly the same as Hand 1.

Up to a point you'd be right. However, the way you need to play the critical suit will be a little different.

Remember to count them as they are played.



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The common finesse

VB#16 The Finesse Part 1 SA

Date: 07/07/2014

Dealer: South

[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 4H

By: South

Board #: 3

Vulnerable: None

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♥
P	2♥	2♣	4♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ 5

You reach 4♥ after East has entered the auction with Spades. West dutifully leads his partner's suit and, as declarer, you have to take stock of the dummy.

Don't take the car out of the garage till you know where you're going. In other words, make that **Plan**.

From a preliminary **Count** we can see four possible losers (three certain Spades and an uncertain Diamond) so we know we need one loser to disappear, and the only way to make that happen is to try the Diamond finesse.

There is no reason **not** to pull trumps first. Why? We don't need to ruff anything in dummy, so it is the best play to take the trumps from the opponents now rather than later.

It is more convenient to end up in dummy after pulling trumps to take our finesse, so we play the ♥A Q first, and then up to dummy's ♥K. If trumps are 2-2 then we'll have wasted a round of trumps but we can afford that luxury.

The Diamond finesse is necessary for the contract; we need East to hold the ♦K underneath our ♦A Q tenace. There are strong grounds for expecting that East has the offending King. Firstly, East's overcall suggests that he has all the missing high cards (and West has nothing – if that).

Secondly, as the play proceeds, something else happens to reinforce the belief that the ♦K is onside. West discards the ♦2. Usually that shows this is *not* a suit West wants led. More about that another day.

For now, be proud and get ready for the next hand.

North  
♠ 9872  
♥ K965  
♦ 97  
♣ AT4

West  
♠ 5  
♥ 743  
♦ T832  
♣ J8765



East  
♠ AKQT6  
♥ 8  
♦ KJ654  
♣ 92

South  
♠ J43  
♥ AQJT2  
♦ AQ  
♣ KQ3

When the opponents rip off the first three tricks against a major-suit game, we have a problem. We are "tight" and need the rest.

How might we manage that here?





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The common finesse

VB#16 The Finesse Part 1 SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 07/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1♠
P	3♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ A

Another fine hand, well played! The bidding was an invitational sequence 1♠ – 3♠ – 4♠. We can hardly Pass 3♠ with 15 points but the two doubleton Queens are of dubious value. This one may not have ten tricks off the top... West leads the ♣A and we can see at once that our fears about the ♣Q were justified. It's waste paper.

Anyway, we start with a full count of winners and (importantly) losers, and see one inevitable Diamond loser, two unavoidable Club losers and a possible Spade loser.

To bring the contract into the plus column, we need to find the ♠K with East. We don't have that many entries to the dummy, just our ♥Q and ♥J. We are going to *finesse* against the ♠K. If East has the King we can pick the Spades up without loss. If West has it then we will lose a trick and go down. This is the nature of all finesses – they win or they lose and all you can do is shrug your shoulders. You win some, you lose some.

Make sure, though, that you take all your available tricks when the cards lie favorably. Little is more irritating or embarrassing than to lose a trick to a card you could have crushed by means of a successful finesse.

Here, you may note that the ♠Q J 9 7 are all **equals** as we have the ♠10 8 in the closed hand. We could lead any of these cards from the table but it is best in these circumstances to lead the ♠Q and *run it*. If it wins the trick (which it will if East has the ♠K) then we are in the right hand to repeat the procedure.

In other words, if the ♠Q holds, you don't need to get back to dummy to lead again. You're already there. Got that? Look at it a minute, and make sure it makes sense.

When the ♠Q holds we note the 4-0 split but calculate that it doesn't matter. We will need three finesses in Spades but can manage that easily. We fling down the ♠J as further bait and to unblock the suit. West showing out places every card for us.

We play four rounds of trumps (extracting all of East's) to bring the Spades home with no

North  
 ♠ QJ97  
 ♥ QJ  
 ♦ KJ942  
 ♣ J5

West  
 ♠ T986  
 ♥ T763  
 ♦ AK974



East  
 ♠ K642  
 ♥ 742  
 ♦ A8  
 ♣ T632

South  
 ♠ AT853  
 ♥ AK53  
 ♦ Q5  
 ♣ Q8

Being on the right side of the street (er, table...) can make your job easier.

Conversely, being in the wrong hand at the wrong time can prove fatal. Some suits need careful handling.


losers, smile sweetly, concede the ♦A and claim the rest. Cool beans.



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The common finesse

VB#16 The Finesse Part 1 SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 07/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ J74	
	♥ 8642	
	♦ AK	
	♣ K764	
West		East
♠ AKQ		♠ 9532
♥ 3		♥ K95
♦ 9852		♦ 764
♣ T9852		♣ QJ3
	South	
	♠ T86	
	♥ AQJT7	
	♦ QJT3	
	♣ A	

"When you have sufficient tricks you should draw trumps".

Sound advice, Grandma, but how?

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

Lead: ♠ A

We have another invitational sequence to game, this time 1♥ – 3♥ – 4♥. Dummy is spot on for his bidding – we have an oh-so-reliable partner. We see, though, that the ♣K is not much use and the unfortunate Spade duplication (rubbish opposite trash) means that we'll be "booked" after trick 3.

After the opponents have cashed their three top Spades we cannot afford to lose a trick in trumps, but it's possible we would lose to the ♥K if it is lying in West's hand.

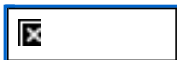
We know what we have to do. We need to get to dummy with one of our Diamond entries (our **ONLY** entries!), and lead a Heart. We are leading **through** our victim (East) and up to a tenace holding. When East follows with a small Heart we finesse the ♥10 and await our fate.

It holds! So, back to dummy for a repeat performance. A low Heart through East to the ♥J neutralizes the threat of the ♥K. We pull the last trump and the rest of the tricks are ours.

Let's pause to reflect what could have gone wrong. What if we got a 4-0 trump split? That might have been difficult to overcome. What if the ♥K magically moved to West? We would have been down for sure.

But all went well. Another day, another dollar.





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The common finesse


VB#16 The Finesse Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

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

Lead: ♣ Q

You reach 3NT and receive the ♣Q lead from West. The bidding is as easy as driving down the freeway. 1NT – 3NT is as simple as it gets.

The play is very straightforward, **once you make your plan**. The first stage of planning is counting and you can see eight *top tricks* in 3NT (two tricks in each of the suits). An extra trick has to come from somewhere, and a Spade finesse against the ♠Q is the only logical choice. Note that we don't actually care if it loses on this deal. If we **run** the ♠10 or ♠J and East turns up with the ♠Q we still have three Spade tricks.

North		East
♠ AK42		♠ 753
♥ K94		♥ QJT7
♦ 964		♦ QJ75
♣ K83		♣ 65
West		South
♠ Q986		♠ JT
♥ 62		♥ A853
♦ T3		♦ AK82
♣ QJT92		♣ A74

This is not a difficult hand. No, really, we mean it.

Just count your tricks and set up the extras. Just make a note of how the defense goes, though. Your turn will come eventually and you may need that weapon.

So you win the Club lead in the closed hand and advance the ♠10, allowing it to run. On this deal you score your ninth trick immediately as the ♠10 wins the trick. You try the ♠J at trick three (if the ♠10 won, why not the ♠J?) but this West has been around the block before. He finds a counterplay by **covering an honor with an honor**, which takes out two of your honors (the ♠J and the ♠K) for one of his (the ♠Q). Now the ♠9 comes into the game.

We will meet this clever and effective defense in later editions of VuBridge. Suffice it to say that this is a way of defending against the finesse.

Anyway, having secured nine tricks you have a free shot for ten by seeing if Diamonds break 3-3. Do they? No (and Hearts don't, either) so you end up with just the nine. That's enough, though.

Now, just for a moment, let's see what would happen if you took your six top winners before establishing the Spades.

This time West wouldn't wait for the second round of Spades to play his ♠Q, he would place Her Majesty on the ♠10. Can you see how that would **block** the suit? You might have nine tricks but you couldn't untangle them. You need the high cards in the outside suits to get back and forth between dummy and the closed hand.

Finesses and entries are important and inextricable bedfellows. It's an important learning point.

