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A series of eight unrelated deals for V-Blue edition 24, year 2. ACOL version.

VB#24 Year 2 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 2H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ A74		
	♥ 4		
	♦ Q8532		
	♣ Q863		
West		East	
♠ T986		♠ QJ3	
♥ J3		♥ K652	
♦ KJ94		♦ T76	
♣ A95		♣ KJT	
	South		
	♠ K52		
	♥ AQT987		
	♦ A		
	♣ 742		

This set of eight deals makes up our General Series. There is no theme to the hands, just enjoy them as they come.

Some are defences, some are declarer play problems.

Hand 1. You are playing in a delicate part-score. What is the percentage play here?

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

Lead: ♠ T

On this deal you open in third seat with the obvious bid of 1♥ and partner replies with the courtesy response of 1NT. You know that he has 6-9 points without four Spades.

It is clear with a misfit and 19-22 points between you to play this one in a part-score. Nonetheless, with a 6-3-3-1 shape you can hardly Pass 1NT so you sign-off in 2♥, a bid which rapidly ends the auction.

Dummy brings scant cheer after West leads the ♠10. A whole 8 points, yes, but the minor-suit Queens are useless facing the singleton ♦A and the three low Clubs. Counting up losers we can see one Spade and three Clubs (West is hardly going to have the ♣A K after his failure to lead one, is he?) so must confine the trump losers to one.

This is the crux of this deal – can you hold your Heart losers to one (put another way – can you make five Heart tricks?)

You may as well win the Spade lead in dummy and play a Heart immediately. When East (of course) plays low you have to decide what to do. Play the ♥7? Play the ♥Q? (playing the ♥A looks to be fairly pointless).

Well, it may look to be an even shot. Putting in the ♥7 (finessing against the ♥J in other words) will bring in five Heart tricks when East has ♥J × ×. Playing the ♥Q will bring in five Heart tricks if East has ♥K × ×. So far, so even.

However... if West has ♥J × (and East ♥K × ×) then the ♥Q wins the day, The ♥A then drops the ♥J and there are five Heart tricks by force.

The converse distribution is of no help. If West had ♥K × and East ♥J × × × then finessing the ♥7 would force the King, it is true, but East would still be due a second trump trick. So you get two bites of the cherry if you finesse the ♥Q – East having ♥K × × or ♥K × × ×


Two chances are always better than one...



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VB#24 Year 2 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4S
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ T65	
	♥ J63	
	♦ KQ752	
	♣ AK	
West		East
♠ 9732		♠ K
♥ AKQ		♥ T985
♦ JT		♦ 9863
♣ T642		♣ J873
	South	
	♠ AQJ84	
	♥ 742	
	♦ A4	
	♣ Q95	

You reach a routine game contract here and, annoyingly, the defenders cash early tricks, putting you under pressure.

What is the precise way you should proceed now?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♠
P	2♦	P	2♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ A

You reach the obvious contract of 4♠ here and West leads the ♥A. Well, we say “obvious” but 3NT would have proved a little easier to make with the Hearts 4-3, the Spade finesse onside and the blockage in Hearts to boot. *C'est la vie...*

Against 4♠ West cashes three top Hearts and exits with a Diamond. The problem is clear and easy to state – *how can you pick up the Spade suit for no losers?* Take the finesse, you say? Sure, but how **precisely** do you do it?

Many players would win the Diamond switch on table and immediately lead the ♠10. That's sloppy play and would be punished on this layout. East covers with the ♠K (yes, we realise he has little choice!) and West's ♠9 comes into the game as a fourth-round winner.


If there were no entries to dummy then leading the ♠10 would be the best play but here, with the ♣A K providing easy access to the table, you can afford to make the technically correct play of leading a low trump at trick four. When East reluctantly produces the ♠K on the ♠5 it's all too easy... just draw the remaining trumps and claim the game.



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VB#24 Year 2 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4S
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ T65	
	♥ J63	
	♦ KQ752	
	♣ AK	
West		East
♠ 2		♠ K973
♥ AKQT		♥ 985
♦ T986		♦ J3
♣ 7642		♣ JT83
	South	
	♠ AQJ84	
	♥ 742	
	♦ A4	
	♣ Q95	

Here at VuBridge we do like to create hands that look similar to other hands but have subtle differences. This deal does look just a little bit like Hand 2, doesn't it?

However, as the play develops you can see that it isn't. It needs precision play to land your contract.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♠
P	2♦	P	2♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ A

This is another one of VuBridge's *déjà vu* hands... It's Hand 2 all over again, isn't it? Hmmmm – maybe.

You reach 4♠ again and West leads the ♥A, cashing three rounds of the suit. After taking his top Hearts West exits with a Diamond.

The problem is as it was in the previous deal – how can you pick up the Spade suit for no losers? Take the finesse, you say? Sure, but how **precisely** do you do it?

We know that to lead the ♠10 on the first round of the suit would be sloppy play, falling foul of East holding a singleton King. So we carefully lead a low Spade to the ♠J, which holds. Now what? Well, it is obvious to return to dummy with a top Club to play another Spade – but **which Spade?** The ♠10 or the ♠6?

Now, having cleared out two trumps (one from each defender) we know that there are only three left, the ♠K 9 7. If we were to lead another low Spade to the ♠Q we'd fall foul of a 4-1 break with East having four trumps. (*Please don't say you could play a low Spade to the ♠8. Yes you could, but only if you had peeked at East's cards*).

The right play is to lead the ♠10, not caring if it gets covered or not. As it happens, East does cover with the ♠K and West shows out.


Game over... We cross over to dummy again and play the ♠6 to the ♠8 (a classic **marked finesse**) before tidying up the house by drawing trumps and claiming the rest.



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VB#24 Year 2 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ J4	
	♥ 83	
	♦ A9753	
	♣ A754	
West		East
♠ KT52		♠ A83
♥ KT2		♥ AJ54
♦ K2		♦ Q84
♣ KJT2		♣ Q83
	South	
	♠ Q976	
	♥ Q976	
	♦ JT6	
	♣ 96	

The Conversation is a 1974 film written by Francis Ford Coppola and starring Gene Hackman. It features a surveillance expert who listens into people's private conversations.

Can you listen in effectively to your opponents' dialogue here?

West	North	East	South
-	P	1NT	P
2♣	P	2♥	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♦ J

You are on lead to 3NT with a miserable 5 points. What do you lead?

Well, it might look like a toss-up between a Heart and a Spade as your two best suits are identical.

However, were you listening to the bidding? Let's remind you of it. East opened 1NT and West employed Stayman. East showed four Hearts and West then leapt to 3NT. We now know that East has four Hearts and West has four Spades. (If West has no four-card major why not simply raise 1NT to 3NT? If he has four Hearts why not raise Hearts?)

Now, with both of your suits well held by the opponents the rationale for leading one evaporates. We like to lead long suits against No-trumps so that we can get the long cards going – here we know we can't. So with cannons to the left of us and cannons to the right of us it is best not to attack into strength. Realistically we have to choose between Diamonds and Clubs. With Clubs highly unattractive we select the ♦J, hoping partner is well at home there. As an aside, if North were well stacked in Clubs he might have Doubled 2♣...

The Diamond lead scores a goal in quick time! Declarer tries the ♦K from table and ducks the next round of Diamonds to you. When you clear the suit at trick three East is doomed – partner must get in with the ♣A and cash out his Diamonds for a brisk one off.

Note that an initial major-suit lead gives declarer an undeserved trick as well as a tempo.



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VB#24 Year 2 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

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

Lead: \spadesuit A

You are once more on lead to 3NT, this time with a good suit – \spadesuit A Q J 9 5 to be exact. So what is your selection?

The textbook lead from this holding is the \spadesuit Q – the top of an **interior sequence**. You may be hoping that the Diamonds are something like this:

North		East
\spadesuit J953		\spadesuit K82
\heartsuit T872		\heartsuit KJ4
\diamondsuit 62		\diamondsuit K4
\clubsuit 932		\clubsuit KT864
West		East
\spadesuit AQ6		\spadesuit K82
\heartsuit AQ5		\heartsuit KJ4
\diamondsuit T873		\diamondsuit K4
\clubsuit QJ7		\clubsuit KT864
South		East
\spadesuit T74		\spadesuit K82
\heartsuit 963		\heartsuit KJ4
\diamondsuit AQJ95		\diamondsuit K4
\clubsuit A5		\clubsuit KT864

You are on lead against a rapidly bid game contract.

In theory you have a textbook lead. Is that the practice as well?

Partner
 \diamondsuit x x

Dummy Declarer
 \diamondsuit x x x \diamondsuit K 10 x

You
 \diamondsuit A Q J 9 5

Now your \spadesuit Q forces the \spadesuit K and the suit is yours to run when the defence gains the lead. Note that if declarer ducks the \spadesuit Q then, depending on circumstances, you may well abandon the suit and wait for your partner to gain the lead. Now a Diamond *through* the \spadesuit K would kill the King and allow the defenders to pick the suit up for five tricks.

That's the theory – what about the practice? Well, if you have no outside entry then, without doubt, the best lead is the \spadesuit Q. But here you have the \clubsuit A as a way of regaining the lead. That makes a difference. It makes all the difference in the world.

The right lead now is the \spadesuit A, to take a look at dummy. If the Diamonds are distributed as above you can still continue with the Queen, setting the suit up and expecting to regain the lead with the \clubsuit A.

However, in the layout as you see it on this deal you can see that continuing with the \spadesuit Q at trick two would only set up the \spadesuit 10 on the table as an extra stopper. So you must continue with a low Diamond at trick two, hoping partner has two of them and that the King will fall "on air". If declarer started with \spadesuit K x x then no defence works at all – 3NT would have been impregnable.

On this layout it is true that an initial low Diamond lead (the \spadesuit 9?) would have defeated 3NT. However, it would have failed against the

distribution given above – declarer would take the ♠10 and his ♠K would be safe from further attack from you.


The ♠A lead will beat 3NT whenever it is possible to beat it.



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VB#24 Year 2 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ Q9752	
	♥ J63	
	♦ A95	
	♣ A4	
West		East
♠ 843		♠ AK6
♥ T4		♥ AKQ8
♦ K63		♦ QT72
♣ QJ762		♣ K8
	South	
	♠ JT	
	♥ 9752	
	♦ J84	
	♣ T953	

Once more you are on opening lead, this time with a poor collection.

What do you lead here? Or is it just a case of chucking something on the table and inviting declarer to get on with it?

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

Lead: ♠ J

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; ...

Again you have to lead against 3NT, this time with a real rubbish tip after East has opened 2NT on your right. Well, you have to make the first move, even with this tripe. What should it be?

Now, it is easy to depress yourself on this sort of hand and just throw any old card onto the table, expecting to concede a couple of overtricks. Indeed, you may be feeling relief that East-West are not contracting for a slam.

Enough of the negative thoughts...!

Let's try and beat the contract, shall we? You are not going to take anything much with this heap so you must focus on how the defence might garner five tricks. North might have a decent hand (he has to have a decent hand if 3NT is going down) but was unable to bid given that the auction was at the 3NT level before he could open his mouth.

So we have to lead partner's long suit and hope we can set it up. That means abandoning any hope of setting up our pathetic Hearts or Clubs (even if we did get a long Club or long Heart going how on Earth would we reach it?) and hoping North has a long suit and some entries. A Spade lead is now starting to look attractive – if North has five of them and a couple of Aces we may get something set up over there. Why Spades? Well, just where do you think North's length is likely to be? Bear in mind that neither East nor West bid the suit and opponents tend to bid Spades (or employ Stayman) if they have the suit. A mere straw in the wind, it is true...

No chance of beating 3NT, you say? Well, it's not a great chance to be sure – but it's a whole lot better than sitting here and sulking because we've picked up yet another piece of mouldy cheese.

As the cards lie a Spade lead is a killer. East ducks the ♠J (we won a trick! How cool is that?) so we put another Spade on the table. Turn and twist as he might East can't make 3NT as North can keep him out of dummy by ducking a Club and has the ♦A over the ♦K. Not only that


but partner has the *tempo* to make three Spades and two Aces – all thanks to our perspicacious lead...

Even an unfortunate Heart discard in the middle of the play, which gives East an extra trick, doesn't affect the outcome. One off – who'd have thought it?



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VB#24 Year 2 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 7
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ J5	
	♥ 732	
	♦ J42	
	♣ AJ953	
West		East
♠ AKQ92		♠ T7
♥ 954		♥ 86
♦ 875		♦ KQT6
♣ Q4		♣ KT762
	South	
	♠ 8643	
	♥ AKQJT	
	♦ A93	
	♣ 8	

Here a competitive auction gets you to an uncomfortable level. At least you have an idea of which defender has what.

How can you put this knowledge to good use?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♥
1♠	2♥	X	P
2♠	P	P	3♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ A

A typical confused, competitive auction has us winning the pot with 3♥ bid over West's 2♠. Could we have beaten 2♠? Who knows? Can we make 3♥? Ah...! Now that is the £1,000,000 question...

West starts off with two top Spades and sees his partner's encouraging high-low signal. Sure that East can over-ruff dummy's feeble trumps West plays another top Spade. What now?

Well, to start at the beginning we can see seven easy winners (five trump tricks and two Aces). To increase that somewhere we need to ruff some losers in the *short trump hand* (ruffing Clubs in hand, in the long trump hand, is not profitable). The problem is that ruffing Spades on table will lead to defeat as it is crystal clear that East will over-ruff. What can we do?

The theme of this deal recurs surprisingly often. We throw Diamond losers away on the top Spades instead of ruffing them – a classic *loser-on-loser play*. West cashes the first four tricks while we chuck two Diamond losers away.

At trick five West switches to a trump but that is too late for the defenders. A trump lead at trick two would have made this hand too difficult. As it is, we take the late Heart switch in hand and play the ♦A and ruff a Diamond. Back to hand with the ♣A and a Club ruff and then another Diamond ruff. Meanwhile, East has been caught in an unusual dilemma. If he has kept his Diamonds then we can ruff two of them on table. If he chucked them on the Spades then the ♦9 would have been master after one ruff. A strange position...


Anyway, as the play actually goes we can ruff two Diamonds in dummy with no problem and our hand is then only high trumps. 3♥ bid and made.



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VB#24 Year 2 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4H
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 8
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ A963	
	♥ A64	
	♦ 743	
	♣ K95	
West		East
♠ QT854		♠ KJ2
♥ 82		♥ 753
♦ QJT9		♦ 852
♣ 42		♣ AJT8
	South	
	♠ 7	
	♥ KQJT9	
	♦ AK6	
	♣ Q763	

You reach a decent contract here after a sensible auction.

Do you have enough tricks? If so, you should draw trumps. If not, you have to find the source of the "extra".

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

Lead: ♦ Q

Here you reach a decent 4♥ contract after partner gives you *jump preference* in the auction. West leads the ♦Q from his attractive sequence and you contemplate dummy, counting winners and losers.

There are no Spade losers, no Heart losers, one Diamond loser and two Club losers. Just the three losers...

A check on winners shows an anomaly. One Spade winner, five easy Hearts, two top Diamonds and one Club winner. That's only nine winners. Oops – something does not add up.

The anomaly is in Clubs, of course. In fact, were we to draw trumps then we'd have **three** Club losers on a 4-2 break (or if a friendly opponent played the ♠A on thin air). So, the problem is: what do we do about the extra Club loser?

The usual way of eliminating excess losers is to **trump them** or **dump them**. Here there is no side suit in either dummy or the closed hand on which to pitch anything. Can we ruff a loser, then? Yes, but don't make the mistake of ruffing Spades in hand. That would be the foolish play of *ruffing in the long hand* – usually pointless. What you need to do is to manoeuvre a Club ruff on table (with the ♥A, probably).

Drawing trumps is wrong (it usually is when you have insufficient winners). What you should do is to take the ♦K and immediately play a Club to the ♠K. East takes the ♠A and shoots down your other top Diamond.

You now play off the ♣Q and another Club, preparing the ground for a Club ruff on table. The defenders play off a winning Diamond and switch to a Spade. So you take the ♠A, cross to a Heart and play your last Club. In desperation West trumps with the ♥8 to force the ♥A. That doesn't worry you in the slightest – you were going to ruff high in any case!

Your hand is only top trumps now so you can claim the rest. Yes, the defenders could have beaten you. West has to lead a trump at trick

one – a very difficult play considering the highly attractive alternative of a Diamond.