

Chapter 7

THE BLITZ

I don't know what made me do it, but I agreed to play one night of bridge at the club with a very dear, old friend; old being the operative word. Not that I have anything against old age, it's just that I have the feeling sometimes that I myself am ALREADY there, judging by symptomatic manifestations of Alzheimers, especially at the bridge table. Dear old Wally Blitzem can still pack a punch, though, as bridge players go, but at 88 it's not surprising that he nods off every now and then. However the decision to accept his offer was certainly well worth while when a fascinating hand came along. It was fascinating because of the amazing number of different contracts arrived at, as well as the results. Let me tell you what happened at OUR table first:

BOARD 28 DLR W NS VUL

♠ K 5 3	
♥ A Q	
♦ A 9 4 3	
♣ A 8 6 2	
♠ A Q 10 8 7	♠
♥ 9 6	♥ K 8 5 2
♦ Q 2	♦ K J 8 7 6 5
♣ K 10 7 5	♣ Q 9 4
♠ J 9 6 4 3	
♥ J 10 7 4 3	
♦ 10	
♣ J 3	

Wally opened 1S. Another dear old friend of mine, Mary Eager (since departed, may the Lord rest her soul), was sitting North. I know that NORMALLY she would have bid 1NT on her hand, but her partner was the fearsome and quite opinionated Dora Dingleby, who INSISTS: "Partner, if you have an opening bid, you DOUBLE". So, Mary DOUBLED. I considered my options but with a void in Wally's suit, decided to pass. Now, the Countess Lynley and I play 2D as NON FORCING over a double, but who knows what Wally may have done. I was still wondering whether PASS was the right thing to do when Dora quickly passed. "BID, you Wally," I thought to myself, but Wally was oblivious to my frantic telepathetic efforts and also passed.

Mary didn't have an easy choice of lead and opted for the three of diamonds. Wally won the queen and returned another to the six when Mary played low, Dora ruffing. The defence continued to deteriorate when Dora shifted to the jack of clubs and Mary won her ace and persisted with yet another LOW diamond, Dora ruffing and Wally overruffing. In the end Wally managed to scramble EIGHT tricks! Dora insisted that "I had nowhere to go" and was too full of her own excuses to listen to poor Mary's apologies for HER awful defence. No wonder SOME people like partnering Dora, I thought. She doesn't even listen when you insult YOURSELF!

I was busy re'COUNT'ing the story at the post session drinks. My dear wife the Countess was very interested.

"Sorry, precious, but I'm afraid that score wasn't a top for you. I played 2NT doubled from YOUR hand and made."

"WHAT!?" I exclaimed, "how on earth did you bid to 2NT AND make. That must have been some more of your loony bidding and someone's loony defence."

(hands repeated for convenience)

Board 28 DLR W NS VUL

♠ K 5 3	
♥ A Q	
♦ A 9 4 3	
♣ A 8 6 2	
♠ A Q 10 8 7	♠
♥ 9 6	♥ K 8 5 2
♦ Q 2	♦ K J 8 7 6 5
♣ K 10 7 5	♣ Q 9 4
♠ J 9 6 4 3	
♥ J 10 7 4 3	
♦ 10	
♣ J 3	

"Not at all. The problem really arose when Rosie didn't pass my 2D bid which you and I play as not forcing and SHE clearly plays as forcing! North doubled Rosie's 1S, I can't understand WHY people double instead of bidding 1NT, but she did. I of course bid 2D but Rosie thought this was forcing and rebid 2S. North doubled again. I still don't understand North's bidding but I thought I'd try 2NT. It's quite amazing how often I've seen hands which make 2NT in these situations. It really is quite a PARADOX, because normally it's quite dumb to bid No Trumps with a void in partner's suit." I certainly wasn't going to disagree with THAT.

"So, I suppose North kept liking her hand despite partner's apparent near Yarborough."

"Yes, she doubled again and I decided to sit it out. South led a heart and North won her ace and then continued the queen. I ducked, and North was endplayed at trick three. She tried a club, to South's jack and dummy's king. The queen of diamonds lost to North's ace and she led yet another club, which I overtook in dummy. The clubs were now wide open but I'd noticed South's ten of diamonds drop on the first round and had decided to finesse against the NINE. Doesn't the theory of restricted choice tell me to do that? I had no more entries to my hand had that finesse lost and I would probably have gone for a telephone number but it worked didn't it? I suppose you'll say I could have made THREE?" First time I've heard the Countess being sarcastic.

At this stage Ben Bacon broke into the conversation.

"It would have helped if you had, Lynley," he chortled somewhat pompously, "my quick calculation tells me that YOU scored 490. Correct? Well, WE actually scored 500 when we doubled them in 2H! Once North doubled and I REDOUBLED, all South could do was to bid 2H and I doubled THAT for two down!"

"Maybe South should not have bid 2H," the voice this time was Joe Lenny's. "WALLY may have been able to make a doubled overtrick, but how about three REDOUBLED UNDERTRICKS? You may have noticed that ONE West was in 1S DOUBLED, THREE down? That would tend to indicate that your redouble wasn't so clever unless it panicked poor South into bidding 2H. Of course all this nonsense wouldn't happen if people bid properly. WHY didn't the Norths overcall 1NT?"

"I did," piped up Dolly Barton. "But you won't guess what WE ended up playing in!"

All those present made somewhat futile guesses and eventually gave in.

(hands repeated for convenience)

Board 28 DLR W NS VUL

♠ K 5 3	
♥ A Q	
♦ A 9 4 3	
♣ A 8 6 2	
♠ A Q 10 8 7	♠
♥ 9 6	♥ K 8 5 2
♦ Q 2	♦ K J 8 7 6 5
♣ K 10 7 5	♣ Q 9 4
♠ J 9 6 4 3	
♥ J 10 7 4 3	
♦ 10	
♣ J 3	

Dolly continued. "I overcalled 1NT and East DOUBLED. My partner Alec, the smart little ass, wanted to play games, so he bid 2C on the South hand. West of course doubled that, and Alec now bid 2D, passed to East who now doubled. REDOUBLE from Alec. Now we all know about the SOS redouble and this was clearly a case of that, convoluted as the bidding may have been. I did as I was told and bid my better major though I admit that I DID contemplate bidding 2NT. But Alec may be a smart little ass but there's no need to punish him by not doing as he asks you to. So I did as I was asked and bid 2S, which was passed round to West; he doubled, of course. It wasn't up to ME to go anywhere else and neither did Alec!"

"So, how many down did you go?" Joe wanted to know. He didn't like Alec and this was going to give him great pleasure to hear. "Fancy doing THAT to you AND making you play the hand as well!"

"Down? Not at all. I MADE it, though admittedly the lead did help a bit. East, with NO trumps to lead, had to choose something and chose a heart. This ran round to my queen and I tried the effect of a low club. East won the queen and came back with another one. I won, ruffed a club, ace of diamonds and a diamond ruff, heart to the ace for another club ruff. How many tricks is that? Two hearts, two aces, three ruffs in dummy, and I still had to make my king of spades. Maybe I could have done better, after all if 1S doubled can go THREE down then WE should be able to make nine tricks!"

Yes, a weird assortment of cards and results, indeed. Apart from three 3D contracts making 3, the others were ALL different. I haven't mentioned the 3D DOUBLED making, or the THREE No Trumps by East down two, or the 2C by West, down two, or the 2H UNDOUBLED, by South, down two. Seems like a great time was had by all, on the ONE hand. I certainly don't remember anything of any interest in any of the OTHER hands that I held. As for poor Wally, with a total of 28 boards played in the session, is it any wonder that he'd nodded off well before the end.

Chapter 8

NATIONAL DISASTER

Over the weekend I had the distinct (dubious?) pleasure of taking part in a practice match involving the national Open team, against our own Gumboot Barbarians (Neanderthals?), as the NPC of the national team had entitled us. The national team showed that they will be a force to be reckoned with, and the following hand is a perfect example of their brilliance:

DEALER WEST NIL VUL

♠ 10 9 4
♥ 9
♦ Q J 10 8 6 3
♣ 8 5 3

♠ Q J 8 5 ♠ A K
♥ ♥ K Q J 10 4 3 2
♦ K 7 2 ♦ A 5
♣ A K 10 9 7 4 ♣ J 6

♠ 7 6 3 2
♥ A 8 7 6 5
♦ 9 4
♣ Q 2

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
2C	4D!	4NT	NB
5H	NB	6H	NB
6NT	NB	NB	NB

The auction was a thing of beauty. West opened a Precision 2C and my loony partner did his usual thing and preempted about three levels too high (FOUR diamonds!). East had a reasonable hand and all he wanted to know was more about the West hand, so bid 4NT, Key Card Blackwood. West responded 5H to show two key cards (either two aces or the AK of clubs). What else was East to do other than bid 6H? I wasn't going to ask any questions, this suited me fine, so quickly and nonchalantly passed. But our hero, West, inspired no doubt by his favourite chess opponent, Deep Thought, went into just that. Yes, he had it ALL figured, and ten minutes later came out with the master bid: 6NT! THIS time I considered doubling but partner had been bidding on FAR less all day, so I just led the nine of diamonds. Our hero opened his mouth and said: "Lead out of woops!" as his face dropped a foot or two (no doubt one of them was now in his mouth). By now he was out of his trance and no doubt expecting the defence to run the first seven diamond tricks, but his partner was absolutely delighted with dummy, and very much more so when he found out that the hearts weren't working (yes, NORTH'S preempt WAS much better than he thought, it contained the ONE card that could do the damage against a 6H contract, the singleton NINE!).

WEST (who shall remain nameless) had cleverly tried to protect his king of diamonds from a lead through it. The only problem was, WEST would have been playing the SIX HEART contract, since HE had bid 5H in response to East's Roman Key Card 4NT! Despite this wonderful transfer system, all that remained for declarer to do when the hearts behaved so badly, was to take the club finesse and chalk up the required twelve tricks.

AFTERTHOUGHT:

There's more to the story. The national representative holding my hand (no, not like THAT, my CARDS!!!) found a double of a quite FREELY bid 6H irresistible, and.....our teammates, despite this, had no desire to be rescued! Yet another huge swing against the Gumboot Barbarians. With such fine touch, I'm sure the National Team will be unbeatable! And the Gumboot team will continue to wallow in the Interprovincials

Chapter 9

WITHOUT THE COUNT

WE were in the semis of the major teams event at the club. Don't ask me how we got there, but we did, despite the other three members of our illustrious team. I, the Count Raimondo Von Impski, you will of course have met, but you may not have met the other members of this particular team: Billy Nelson, my partner, and the Simple twins, who were newcomers to the hurly burly of A grade bridge. Our opponents for this half of the match were Mike Murray and Murray Michael. If you find that confusing, don't worry, I'll just refer to them as Mike and Murray.

I was South, as usual, and this lovely little gem came up when Board 7 came along.

DEALER SOUTH ALL VUL

My hand:

♠ K 7
♥ A 7
♦ A K Q 10 9 8
♣ K 8 3

I considered this to be good enough to open 2D, and Billy bid 2H. This was a positive response and guaranteed at least three controls and a five or longer card suit. I rebid 3D and Billy bid his hearts again. It was now clear that we should be in slam, but WHICH slam? Anyway, I asked for aces with 4NT and Billy showed one only, so the decision had to be made. Playing the slam in hearts would mean that not only would Billy be at the helm, the lead may go whizzing through one of my unprotected kings. There may also POSSIBLY be a heart loser, though Billy seldom rebid a poor suit and I DID have the ace myself. In DIAMONDS, if the jack failed to drop, I would be down no matter HOW brilliant my declarer play. Playing in a suit, as long as I chose the right one, had the advantage that the OTHER suit could be set up with a ruff if it wasn't running. Against that, guessing the correct suit plus the lead coming through me if hearts were trumps, was not too attractive. If Billy had SIX hearts, then even if ONE of the red suits did not break, the chances were that there would STILL be twelve tricks available in NO TRUMPS. Having so cleverly worked that out, and confirming to myself that, since I DID ask for aces with 4NT, I would DEFINITELY be playing the hand, I bid a confident 6NT. Mike led the queen of clubs, and this is what I saw in dummy:

♠ Q 8 5
♥ K Q 10 8 4 3
♦ 6
♣ A 9 2

"Absolutely brilliant, Billy," I ecstatically thanked him. Despite the fact that my king of spades in fact WAS protected from a lead from EAST, the rest of my analysis was spot on. I didn't really know where to win the first trick, but had a feeling I'd better win the ace on table. I then played on diamonds but Murray showed out on the third round. Oh well, I guess the hearts will have to break, I said to myself and started on that suit. I breathed a sigh of relief when both Mike and Murray followed to two rounds, but then to my horror I realised that I could count only ELEVEN tricks. The twelfth would need to come from a SPADE but what if Mike, who had the jack of diamonds, also had the ace of spades? Not much I could do in that case, so I proceeded to run off the balance of the hearts. With the last four cards to be played, these were the cards in my hand and dummy:

Me:

♠ K
♥
♦ 10
♣ K 8

Dummy:

♠ Q 8
♥ 4
♦
♣ 9

I led the four of hearts from dummy and in desperation threw the king of spades. Mike started to squirm quite visibly and discarded a club. When the nine of clubs was led and I overtook with my king, Mike's jack dropped and the twelfth trick was provided by courtesy of the eight of clubs.

"Goodness", exclaimed Billy. "THAT was some play. I think that is what's known as a squeeze without a count."

Mike was somewhat less amused. "No, Billy. THAT was a squeeze that would not have been necessary BUT for the Count", he was positively fuming now. "ONLY the Count von Impski could have concocted such a butchery as declarer, only to find that ONE hand had all the cards to allow the contract to eventually make." Billy however was on my side, possibly for the first time in his life. "Anyway, he DID make, even THOUGH he got lucky. Better than giving up a spade and hoping Murray had the ace and not you."

Let me show you all the hands before I proceed any further:

North (Billy Nelson)	
♠ Q 8 5	
♥ K Q 10 8 4 3	
♦ 6	
♣ A 9 2	
West (Mike Murray)	East (Murray Michael)
♠ A 10 6 3	♠ J 9 4 2
♥ J 2	♥ 9 6 5
♦ J 7 4 3	♦ 5 2
♣ Q J 10	♣ 7 6 5 4
South (Count Raimondo Von Impski)	
♠ K 7	
♥ A 7	
♦ A K Q 10 9 8	
♣ K 8 3	

Murray now came to life. "It hardly mattered WHO had what, the fact of the matter is that your worthy partner DID, shall we say, fail to find the recommended line? By running the diamonds, he did not find out until the third round that the jack wasn't dropping, and THAT should have been too late. Had he played on HEARTS FIRST, he would have known after TWO rounds whether they were running or not. If they were, he could run all the hearts to see if we were prepared to part with any diamonds. If we were, then he could test the diamonds safely enough with at least TWO rounds before setting up the required spade trick. And if the hearts WEREN'T running then he'd just have to set up the spade trick and hope that the diamonds WERE running. And if he isn't so greedy as to want to make an overtrick in a small slam, he could have just given up a spade trick and THEN tried the red suits in any order he wanted! It's such a shame that the Count ALWAYS has to perpetrate an atrocity first in order to create a situation that he thinks shows off his genius. But no, on reflection, giving up a trick needlessly is not a good idea even at teams, the Count merely chose the wrong suit to run; yet since the hearts DID run, I dare say you'll find that you actually lose an i.m.p. on the board. Our less expert and far less sophisticated team mates will land up in the technically inferior contract of 6H and make an overtrick, no doubt! Let's hope it doesn't cost you the match."

Sarcastic brute, I thought to myself. But it turned out he was quite right. Simon came back to our table and explained that THEIR opponents had indeed ended up in 6H, VERA had led a club from the EAST hand and declarer had wrapped up thirteen tricks in comfort, winning the club in hand, drawing trumps and running the diamonds, ruffing out Simon's jack and then entering dummy with the king of clubs. Whether or not that was the best line, it was difficult to argue against it, or against our 1 i.m.p. ultimate loss in the semi final. Oh well...

Chapter 10

GRANDS ARE EASIER

The tournament was progressing quite nicely, with lots of interesting and fun hands. That is, until this hand came up, with me as South.

	North	
	♠ K Q 9	
	♥ A Q 10 8 5	
	♦	
	♣ Q 10 9 6 4	
West		East
♠ A J 5 3		♠ 7 6 4 2
♥		♥ K 7
♦ A K Q 8 7 6 4 2		♦ J 10 9 5
♣ J		♣ A K 8
	South	
	♠ 10 8	
	♥ J 9 6 4 3 2	
	♦ 3	
	♣ 7 5 3 2	

With neither side vulnerable, partner opened 1H and East passed. I jumped at the opportunity - all the way to 4H, but maybe 6H would have been better since the 4H bid didn't stop West, who bid 5D. East pondered on this for a while and raised to six. I figured, rightly or wrongly, that our defence to 6D would be minimal and pressed on with 6H. Well, I was right to a degree since a small slam in diamonds CAN be made. It wouldn't have been, at least not by THIS particular declarer. But the said declarer did even better than that, because my bid of 6H so enraged him that he bid 7D!!! Partner couldn't write his cross on the bidding pad fast enough, but unfortunately gave declarer a sporting chance by leading the ace of hearts!

What happened after that was a bit of a blur. Declarer ruffed, crossed with a diamond and cashed the heart king discarding a spade and then ran all the diamonds, more in hope than anything else. He then cashed the ace of spades and saw that the king had not appeared, so what was he to do but give up and lead the jack of clubs to the ace, king and finally the eight, which just so happened to be one spot bigger than my seven. Would you believe that this particular declarer was quite shocked at this unforeseen success and wanted to know why my partner had discarded the clubs down to two to the queen!

Yes there's no way he would have made SIX, since partner would no doubt have led the king of spades. Against such a madly bid GRAND slam, he was unfortunately cajoled into trying to cash his ace.

Yes, 6D CAN be made but no one had! SEVEN is much easier!

Actually, I'm not quite right am I? 6D CAN be made on the standout lead of the KING OF SPADES, but partner was in such a sporting mood that against the small slam in diamonds, he would surely have made the only lead that would have DEFEATED it. Can you see what that lead would have been and could there possibly have been a WORSE one against the small slam?

For those of you who DON'T believe that I am correct in saying 6D can be made on the standout lead of the king of spades, and to see what the abominable lead to defeat 6D is, turn to our final chapter.

Chapter 11

THE SLAM DUNK

BOARD 6 DLR E EW VUL

North (Dolly)	
♠ K Q 6	
♥ K J 9 5 4 2	
♦ K Q	
♣ K 6	
West (Von Impski)	East (Charlie Chan)
♠	♠ A J 10 9 8 7 5 3 2
♥ 8 6 3	♥
♦ J 9 8 7 5 4 3	♦ 10 6
♣ A Q 2	♣ J 5
South (Polly)	
♠ 4	
♥ A Q 10 7	
♦ A 2	
♣ 10 9 8 7 4 3	

Now and again, there is an important Central Committee meeting that takes place at our club. Very conveniently, these meetings begin at 6 p.m. and end just in time for the members to be able to play a session of bridge in the club's A Grade. All the Committee members are most welcome and such is their standing that they are all treated like Gods. Now, Dolly and Polly have only just recently been promoted to the A Grade, and consequently haven't any idea who these Gods are and to be quite frank, don't seem to give a tinker's cuss either. This one night I was kindly offered the eminent Chinese International, Charlie Chan, as a partner, and couldn't jump at the chance quickly enough.

Things were going pretty swimmingly until we reached Polly and Dolly's table. This was Board 6. Vulnerable against not, Charlie opened with a bid of 4S. Polly passed. I wasn't too happy with my void, but did have two good cards in the club suit. I passed. Dolly DOUBLED. Charlie passed and I feared the worst. This time Charlie had no doubt overstepped the mark, but....after all, he's well known for his declarer skills. You girls will see an expert at work, I thought to myself, but Polly must have taken pity on Charlie, and of course she had no idea who he was either. After some thought, Polly bid SIX HEARTS! I doubled. Who cared if it was a Lightner double and I myself was on lead. In fact I didn't even think about it. Surely it was the girls who were now overboard.

Once everyone had passed, I did ask about the meaning of the girls' bidding and clearly they had no real idea themselves. It turned out that DOLLY thought she could defeat 4S, as indeed she could have, but POLLY had been talking to Dolly's friend Wally who had told her that all the EXPERTS these days played takeout doubles all the way up to FOUR SPADES. Her hand, since Polly could make a takeout double of Four Spades, the highest possible level for such a double, surely had to be worth a takeout to SIX. And since takeout doubles always promised the other major, she bid 6H. All quite logical really. The only trouble was that they had two aces missing. I didn't know that at the time of course, just suspected it, but Polly's declarer play as a novice A grader was bound to be somewhat lacking, so the double of 6H was going to produce another great result.

(Hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 6 DLR E EW VUL

North (Dolly)

♠ K Q 6
♥ K J 9 5 4 2
♦ K Q
♣ K 6

West (Von Impski)

♠
♥ 8 6 3
♦ J 9 8 7 5 4 3
♣ A Q 2

East (Charlie Chan)

♠ A J 10 9 8 7 5 3 2
♥
♦ 10 6
♣ J 5

South (Polly)

♠ 4
♥ A Q 10 7
♦ A 2
♣ 10 9 8 7 4 3

I led a diamond. I even had some hopes that we might be able to get into a real nasty cross ruff if the girls' bidding had gone awry. Dummy went down, Polly thanked Dolly most profusely, and immediately overtook the queen of diamonds, Charlie having played the ten. Polly then led the eight of clubs, of all things. Good grief, I thought, she doesn't even know to draw trumps in a slam. Unbelievable. The eight was a funny card, but I had no choice and won the ace. Hoping that Charlie could ruff the second diamond I continued that suit, but Charlie followed. A heart to Polly's hand revealed the bad trump break, but she resolutely carried on. A club to the king and a trump back to hand, followed by another club ruff, bringing down my queen.

Polly was now able to re enter her hand with the third trump, discard all of dummy's spades on her established clubs and still had one trump left in dummy to ruff her losing spade. What amazing luck. And what a blunderous way to play a hand. She didn't even take ONE round of trumps before playing on the off suits. Oh well, on with the next hand.

Charlie was looking pensive, so I apologised for not having led his suit. He roared with laughter but continued to look pensive.

The next hand was, speak of the devil, against Wally and Willy. Two more of the recent newcomers to A Grade. I really thought the club shouldn't be admitting such green and 'wet-behind-the-ears' players to the A Grade, but since I wasn't on the Club's Committee, who was I to argue. Anyway, it improved the results of us more knowledgeable players, despite such atrocities as the previous board.

THE SUPER GROSVENOR

This was the next hand, against Wally and Willy.

BOARD 4 DLR W

North (Willy)

♠ Q J 9 4

♥ J 7 2

♦ Q 8 6 4

♣ A 4

West (Von Impski)

♠ A K 8

♥ A Q 9 3

♦ A 3

♣ Q 10 6 5

East (Charlie Chan)

♠ 10 5 3

♥ 8 5

♦ K J 10 9 5 2

♣ K 3

South (Wally)

♠ 7 6 2

♥ K 10 6 4

♦ 7

♣ J 9 8 7 3

I opened 1C, Charlie responded 1D and I jumped all the way to 3NT. An easy hand to bid. Willy led the queen of spades. I could see that dummy had lots of potential diamond tricks, but if they didn't break I may have trouble gaining entry to dummy. The ace of clubs would then have to be right (or LEFT, to be precise), nothing else for it.

Winning the ace of spades, Wally having played the two, I embarked on the diamond suit. Ace, and all followed. King, and Willy started to fumble. THAT'S unfortunate, I thought, but when Willy finally played a card, it was the queen of diamonds! Wow, I thought. I can see why you didn't want to let go of it, young man. I called for dummy's king and Wally showed out! I simply could not believe my eyes. With the queen being a certain trick, Willy had played it, right into the jaws of the KJ10! I'd seen it often enough with learners, when they become confused and think they must beat dummy's next highest card to somehow stop it making, but this guy's actually in A Grade now. I stared unbelievably at Wally's nine of clubs. Still, why stare a gift horse in the mouth, as they say.

"Signals?" I asked Willy.

"Yes", he replied.

"Yes, what SORT." I was becoming somewhat testy despite the more than helpful play on Willy's part.

"Oh, sorry. Just the standard ones. You know, high encouraging, low discouraging." It was perfectly clear to me that Wally was telling Willy that the king of clubs would not have been an entry to the diamonds.

I happily ran all the diamonds, discarding, well, discarding was a bit of a problem. I decided to pitch a spade, two hearts and a club. I could then either take the safe heart finesse for an extra trick, or play the king of clubs and hope to work and end play and either drop the jack or get a heart led round to my ace and queen. Lots of options in fact. As it was I decided to lay down the king of clubs, but Willy won the ace and exited a spade. I was in hand and could not really afford to give up a trick since I might unnecessarily lose one or more spade tricks. So I cashed up the ace of hearts and queen of clubs, but when neither dropped either of the outstanding honour cards, settled quite happily for making Four, having been gifted the queen of diamonds.

Poor Willy. He's still got a lot to learn.

At our post session 'conference', I just had to tell the Central Committee members about the blunderous younger brigade. As I was recounting the story to Charlie Chan's current international partner, Hung Lo,

who had been playing with Ben Bacon, about dear young Polly and her fluky 6H contract despite the girls' atrocious bidding and Polly's even more atrocious dummy play, Hung Lo was looking more and more puzzled.

(Hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 6 DLR E EW VUL

North (Dolly)		
♠ K Q 6		
♥ K J 9 5 4 2		
♦ K Q		
♣ K 6		
West (Von Impski)		East (Charlie Chan)
♠		♠ A J 10 9 8 7 5 3 2
♥ 8 6 3		♥
♦ J 9 8 7 5 4 3		♦ 10 6
♣ A Q 2		♣ J 5
	South (Polly)	
	♠ 4	
	♥ A Q 10 7	
	♦ A 2	
	♣ 10 9 8 7 4 3	

"Why you play ACE on club lead?" he queried.

"I couldn't very well play LOW, could I, LO? What's the point of THAT? Surely you wouldn't either?"

"No, not at all," replied Hung Lo. "I don't play low OR high. I play the QUEEN. That way, declarer must lose trick to EAST if East has jack. YOUR hand, Count, is worth NO tricks, so why do you DOUBLE? But if you play correctly, CHARLIE'S hand is worth two tricks if you let him in to cash the ace of spades. You were not thinking too well, honourable Count."

Ben Bacon gave a guffaw and broke in. "Can't say the same thing for young Polly though. Correct me if I'm wrong, but she not only needed to find a misdefence on your part, Ray, she DID need to play a club immediately and risk a possible diamond ruff. The trumps were odds on to be three zero, and she knew the only way to make was to get the clubs established, and you needed precisely AQx AND not the sense to slot the queen when she led towards dummy. She also needed to establish the clubs, which meant entering her hand often enough to do so, AND entering her hand once clubs were established, AND still having a trump left in dummy to take care of her losing spade after discarding spades from dummy on the established clubs. She wouldn't have been able to do all that had she drawn ANY trumps at trick two."

Charlie, oddly enough, came to my rescue. "I think Polly perhaps was just lucky. EVERYONE draws trumps, and NOBODY can be blamed for not playing the QUEEN from AQx when declarer leads towards Kx in dummy. But that next hand, against, what were their names? Willy and Wally, were they? Those young men will be world beaters some day."

"What? After what Willy did? He doesn't even know that when declarer leads towards KJ10x and he has three to the queen, he shouldn't slot in the queen. What sort of kamikaze play was that? He let me make FOUR without even trying."

Ben Bacon burst in. "Not that hand with six to the KJ10 of diamonds and king of clubs in dummy? Hung Lo made FIVE easily enough, as indeed did almost everyone else. I did notice one poor soul making Four only. THAT wasn't you by any chance, Ray, was it?"

It was now Charlie's turn to continue with his laudations of the younger bridgade.

"That Willy found the Grosvenor coup of all time, I would say. You know what a Grosvenor coup is of course, but for those of the audience who don't know..." he motioned to what had accumulated as quite a crowd of onlookers and listeners by this time, "the Grosvenor coup is an atrocious play by a defender which is so bad that declarer cannot believe it, and ends up not taking the obvious trick thrown at him, and ends up still making the same number of tricks that were there in the first place. That leaves declarer frantically searching for a paper bag, to put it politely. Declarer is then a total wreck for the rest of the session. Willy, I would say, found the SUPER GROSVENOR. You all know about a SUPER ACCEPT when you play transfers and choose to bid one level higher than you should?" The audience nodded mutely. "That is fraught with danger. Willy perpetrated the Super Grosvenor, and that too was very much a risky venture. He not only made a seemingly idiotic play, HIS play should have given a thinking declarer THREE overtricks but resulted in the UNTHINKING declarer making just ONE overtrick. Since the result at the other tables was in fact TWO overtricks, Willy's SUPER GROSVENOR resulted in him getting a top and my partner, and myself of course, a BOTTOM."

(Hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 4 DLR W

North (Willy)

♠ Q J 9 4
♥ J 7 2
♦ Q 8 6 4
♣ A 4

West (Von Impski)

♠ A K 8
♥ A Q 9 3
♦ A 3
♣ Q 10 6 5

East (Charlie Chan)

♠ 10 5 3
♥ 8 5
♦ K J 10 9 5 2
♣ K 3

South (Wally)

♠ 7 6 2
♥ K 10 6 4
♦ 7
♣ J 9 8 7 3

I started to defend myself. "Rubbish, I couldn't possibly make six, despite...." But at that stage Hung Lo gently interrupted.

"Yes, is possible to make six if they don't want their queen of diamonds. If you ask yourself why is young man Willy willing to lose queen? Answer: because he's either a silly Willy or he knows you have entry to dummy in clubs. Then, you don't run diamonds at all. You take HEART finesse which works and lead towards the king of clubs. Like all others would have to do. Willy must duck or you have too many tricks. Dummy's king wins and you now run all the diamonds, watching discards carefully and discarding carefully yourself. You are now down to top spade, top heart, and Q10 in clubs. A club to the TEN (not even Wally would have ducked the ace when you play the king) and last three tricks are yours. WOW. That WILLY and WALLY. You better get them for your International trials team, don't you think?"

Totally speechless, that's what I was, and I STILL don't believe that Willy's play of the queen was any more than an unfortunate slip of the brain.

Chapter 12

THE CUBE

It's a local tradition in our fair city of Gumboot that side bets are taken on all sessions, as well as the overall result, of all major tournaments. These (the bets that is), as a rule, don't amount to that much, just the casual \$10 per session and \$20 overall, or something along those lines. However, Bruce Lenny has become rather bored with this, and being a keen Backgammon fan, suggested the introduction of the 'cube' to make more interesting side bets possible. Thus, you could double the stakes for the next session if you felt that you'd played brilliantly and your score of 43% was the result of atrocious luck. While the cube remained with YOU, you could in turn double again whenever you wanted.

Over three sessions, it was possible for a side bet to escalate to, in theory, 64 times the original, given that the cube was put into play twice each session. In practice, the cube was only ever turned once or twice.

The tournament was over, and the cube had been used but once, with Lenny about to be the fortunate recipient of \$60, having no doubt beaten us in the last session as well as overall after turning the cube half way through the first session. Oh well, I guess I knew my partner's limitations!

Bruce was his usual articulate and assertive self after the tournament while waiting for the inevitable announcement that he and 'the lemming' (the other Bruce of the partnership, Bruce Leming) had won.

"That was an awful break in that 6NT slam that EW had but couldn't make against the 5-0 club break, wasn't it? We could hardly stay out of it, and I don't expect many good bidders could. But of course we will get few match points for bidding the slam since half the room probably stayed in 3NT, adventurous bunch that they are."

This was beginning to interest me. "So, not makeable, eh? I guess you got a spade lead?"

Bruce concurred. "Yes, I won in hand and when I laid down the ace of clubs and got the bad news, had to try the heart suit. The ace didn't drop any singleton queen or jack and I continued with a low one but North won and continued spades. Just not makeable."

"Ten bucks says it's cold," I ventured. Bruce Lenny was always good for a side bet.

"Not on a spade lead. You're on."

"Great," I was now in full flight myself. "What about the cube? Would you like to give that a turn also?"

This was like a red rag to a bull and Lenny immediately placed the "2" in front of me.

"The lead is totally irrelevant, except that on a red suit lead the 6NT slam is handed to you on a plate, whereas a black suit lead gives you a bit of work to do, but nevertheless the contract is cold. Grab the hand records and let's have a look".

I watched as Lenny went to the side table and uplifted one copy for each of us.

This was the hand:

BOARD 24 DLR W NIL VUL

♠ 9 8		
♥ Q J 6 2		
♦ Q 9		
♣ J 9 7 6 5		
♠ A 7		♠ K Q J 4
♥ A K 9 4 3		♥ 10 5
♦ A 10 8		♦ J 4
♣ A Q 3		♣ K 10 8 4 2
	♠ 10 6 5 3 2	
	♥ 8 7	
	♦ K 7 6 5 3 2	
	♣	

I wasn't going to let this one get away. "Simple, really, isn't it? All you do is take three rounds of clubs and then run the jack of diamonds. If South covers and you see North's nine drop, give up a trick to the queen. If South does NOT cover, run it to North's queen and later finesse against South's king. With a void in clubs, surely South can be expected to have SOMETHING in diamonds?"

"Maybe," Lenny agreed, "but that's just a lucky layout. Not the most sensible line to take such a risky play in a suit you have only five cards in, is it? And the fact remains that nobody else bid and made 6NT either."

"Surprising, really. Since the line YOU tried is about the only rational line that fails. There are at least TWO other ways of making 6NT WITHOUT running the jack of diamonds, anyway."

Lenny had the cube and wasn't about to give in. "Rubbish. Show me." And he turned the cube to "4" which I immediately turned to "8" and returned to him.

"Firstly, let's say you win the ace of spades and lead a LOW heart. North must win and will exit another spade. You now cash your ace of diamonds, then your queen of clubs followed by the marked club finesse, then play your last two spades from dummy. At that stage there are only three cards left in YOUR hand: Ace, king, nine of hearts. DUMMY has one heart, one diamond, and one 'losing' club. Can North keep BOTH of his hearts AND the jack of clubs? Of course not."

"Again, a lucky layout." Lenny was not convinced. "So, what's your SECOND line. I hope THAT requires a less lucky layout."

"Maybe it does, and maybe it doesn't, "but YOUR line of ace and another heart, while it MAY have succeeded against a singleton heart honour in the South hand, DOES break up any squeeze, since you must run the penultimate tricks from dummy. A LOW DIAMOND towards the jack after testing the clubs also creates a squeeze position. But I don't suppose you'd accept THAT as a second genuine alternative?"

"I suppose I'd have to, but you disappoint me. Can't you come up with an even cleverer line? What if I turn the cube again, could you THEN?"

"Try me." He did, and the cube was now on 16.

(hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 24 DLR W NIL VUL

	♠ 9 8	
	♥ Q J 6 2	
	♦ Q 9	
	♣ J 9 7 6 5	
♠ A 7		♠ K Q J 4
♥ A K 9 4 3		♥ 10 5
♦ A 10 8		♦ J 4
♣ A Q 3		♣ K 10 8 4 2
	♠ 10 6 5 3 2	
	♥ 8 7	
	♦ K 7 6 5 3 2	
	♣	

"This may not be that clever, but it certainly is another line of play. Try running the SPADES first, after testing the clubs of course. What does North discard on the THIRD spade? If a heart, then ducking one heart will surely see the suit break or create an easy squeeze. If the nine of diamonds, the diamond situation becomes clear and there is not much harm in running the jack, then later on, finessing. But let's say North does discard the nine of diamonds. What about on the FOURTH spade? North still can't let go a CLUB, and if he lets go a heart, they can be set up. DECLARER can discard the eight of diamonds on the fourth spade. If North parts with the queen of diamonds, surely declarer has enough clues to now cash the hearts, clubs, and finesse the ten of diamonds?"

Bruce Leming chimed in. "Bruce," he quietly said, "that certainly seems to make sense to me. I wouldn't fiddle with that cube any further."

I decided to tempt fate once more. "Of course, had you been in the CORRECT contract instead of that stupid 6NT, you might have REALLY been able to show off your declarer play. I can't understand WHY 6NT seems to be the only slam ever bid around here. Surely if you're going to bid a slam, SIX CLUBS is where you should play? At least in THAT contract you could have received a diamond lead, won in dummy, laid down the ace of clubs, seen the bad break, and shown your perspicacity and conceded one down immediately." I was being rather facetious, but I HAD been studying the hand while talking. Was there to be one more bite at the cherry from the Bruces?

Sure enough, the lemming was ready to head for the high dive.

"I suppose YOU, being the brilliant Count Von Impski, would have MADE 6C."

"Certainly, if North had doubled, I would have for sure, AND I would have redoubled as well. Pity you don't use the backgammon cube in bridge."

Leming nudged Lenny and looked quizzically at me. "Maybe if Lenny and I took equal shares in the cube, you would consider telling us HOW. Shall we turn it to 32?" Lenny was quick to agree. The lemming had seldom been known to take a losing bet.

I was going to be laughing all the way to the bank. "I believe I have the final right of reply," I smirked as I turned the cube to 64.

(hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 24 DLR W NIL VUL

	♠ 9 8	
	♥ Q J 6 2	
	♦ Q 9	
	♣ J 9 7 6 5	
♠ A 7		♠ K Q J 4
♥ A K 9 4 3		♥ 10 5
♦ A 10 8		♦ J 4
♣ A Q 3		♣ K 10 8 4 2
	♠ 10 6 5 3 2	
	♥ 8 7	
	♦ K 7 6 5 3 2	
	♣	

I then proceeded to show off my great powers of analysis. "South presumably leads a diamond, but a spade or heart have the same effect. I win in dummy with the ace and play the two top hearts, then ruff a heart. South shows out but doesn't overruff, so the situation is now perfectly clear. A diamond to the ace and another heart ruff. The king of spades followed by the queen which I ruff with the ace of trumps! Another heart, ruffed with the eight when North discards the queen of diamonds. Now the last spade ruffed with the queen of trumps and North has to undertruff. Only three cards left and I haven't lost a trick yet. For best effect I then lead a diamond and South is livid when North trumps his trick! A club to dummy's ten and king completes my contract."

Leming, perhaps for the first time in his life, seemed duly impressed. "Wow, what a coup! But surely if I've turned the cube you must allow me to make the BEST lead. Had I been sitting North against the 6C contract, I would have led a CLUB. THAT may not help defeat 6NT, but I do believe it might just spoil your little cross ruff in a 6C contract."

"Why would YOU be on lead as NORTH? East would be declarer."

"Not in OUR case, he wouldn't have been. I opened the West hand 2C! Isn't that reasonable enough? So, NORTH would have been on lead."

Lenny was more than magnanimous. "Bruce," he said, "I'm sure Ray has a good argument in response to that. What's say we let him work one out while he's extracting \$640 from the money machine. We, of course, will be ready with the cash from our tournament winnings should Ray be able to show us how 6C can, indeed, be made on a trump lead!"

I was flummoxed. This I had NOT expected, but I still had a trump card left, so to speak. "I can right now. Pity the cube doesn't go further. The trump lead is irrelevant. I win the eight in dummy, if East indeed IS dummy, and STILL have the ace and queen in hand to ruff the spades with. As long as I don't win the club lead with the ace or queen, which admittedly is the natural thing to do, the end play STILL results the same way."

Got them THIS time!!