

"The 'Stepping-Stone Squeeze' Endplay"

Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen¹

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Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss **"The 'Stepping-Stone Squeeze' Endplay"**. Well, Esther, thank you for talking to us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

Bruce: Errr, well, Est... err, I mean Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, sorry about that. Well, at the start would you tell us a little bit about who popularized the **"Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay"**?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. The **"Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay"** was named and analyzed by Terence Resse (1913 - 1996) in his 1958 book, The Expert Game, subsequently re-published as Master Play in Contract Bridge.² The Wikipedia article describes Reese as a "British bridge player and writer, regarded as one of the finest of all time in both fields."

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¹ As noted in an article in the Winter/Spring, 2024 article in The American Bridge Teachers' Association (ABTA) Journal, https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/ABTA_1_24.pdf, Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen in fact is a hypothetical, and not a real person! So this article was really, really written by Bruce Thompson.

² See the "Wikipedia" article, "Stepping-Stone Squeeze":
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stepping-stone_squeeze

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, ummm... You have previously explained the "**Squeeze Endplay**" in your "Esther Bridge Lesson #67: How as Declarer to **Execute an Endplay 'Squeeze'**":

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/squeeze.pdf>

In that lesson your were describing the "**Simple Squeeze Endplay**". Would you now explain how the "**Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay**" differs from the "**Simple Squeeze Endplay**"?

Esther: Well, Bruce, the "**Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay**" occurs when (1) the Declarer has enough "winners" to take all but 1 Trick and (2) there is no communication between Declarer's Hand and the Dummy to allow the Declarer to "cash" the last "winner". So, the Declarer in the "**Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay**" forces an Opponent to lead to the "winner" in Dummy or his Hand so that this otherwise inaccessible stranded "winner" can be "cashed". The "**Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay**" is "positional" in that this endplay only works if a particular Opponent is known or expected to hold particular "guard cards".

As explained in the YouTube video channel "Bridge Slam Learning" posting, "Stepping-stone Squeeze":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVG8kb78bv8>

The following comparison of the "**Simple Squeeze Endplay**" as against the "**Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay**" is based on the video's comparison of these two "endplays":

Feature	Simple Squeeze	Stepping-Stone Sq
Main Purpose	Forces discards to create additional Tricks	Solves entry problem
Mechanism	Forces "unguarding" of a Suit "winner"	Uses Op's lead as entry to stranded "winner"
Positional? ³	Less "positional"	Highly "positional"
Material? ⁴	Usually "material"	Usually "immaterial"

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, are there any other web postings that you can recommend to help the interested reader learn more about the "**Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay**"?

³ "Positional" means that *particular* Opponent *must* hold the pivotal card.

⁴ An "immaterial"/"non-material" squeeze works by forcing discards in Suits that do not directly "promote" "winners" but instead disrupt an Opponent's Hand "structure".

Esther: Well, Bruce, sure. I also like the "Steppingstone Squeeze" article posted by Jeff Tang on his "BridgeBum" website:

https://www.bridgebum.com/steppingstone_squeeze.php

Bruce: Errr, well Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, would you please talk us through the execution of a "**Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay**" on a complete bridge Board example?

Esther: Well, Bruce, of course. On my "**Esther Bridge Lessons**" website I have previously recommended the "**BBO Bridge Master**" website:

<https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/anon/bridgemaster>

The "**BBO Bridge Master**" website allows you to declare your skill level, then shows a series of Hands and announces the final contract, each of which you then play as Declarer. At the end of play you can then request a solution in which the optimal "Line of Play" is discussed step by step. Here as an illustration I will use the *free* "**BBO Bridge Master**" Level-5 **Lesson B-29** which gives you the opportunity to see and *repeatedly practice* for *free* playing a given bridge Board. I have altered a few of the cards in these Hands from the Board.

BBO Bridge Master Level 5 Lesson B-29

Dealer: **NORTH**

	NORTH (21)	
	S: J T	
	H: K	
	D: A K 2	
	C: A K Q J 9 8 6	
WEST (5)		EAST (5)
S: K Q 9 8 7 6 4		S: 5 3
H: 8 6 5		H: Q J T 9 7
D: 4		D: Q 6 5 3
C: 5 3		C: T 7
	SOUTH (9)	
	S: A 2	
	H: A 4 3 2	
	D: J T 9 8 7	
	C: 4 2	

Bidding

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
2C	PASS	2D	3S
PASS	PASS	6NT	PASS
PASS	PASS		

WEST leads the Spade King thus "promising" the Spade Queen.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, once the NORTH Dummy is exposed what "winners" should Declarer SOUTH see?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I will try to help you. SOUTH can see as "winners" **1** Spade, **2** Hearts, and definitely **7** Clubs. Diamonds are more difficult to evaluate. WEST's pre-empt Overcall "promises" (1) **7** Spades and (2) a "weak" Hand. Thus, WEST is likely "short" in Diamonds and EAST is likely "long" Diamonds. Furthermore, because WEST "showed" a "weak" Hand EAST is therefore likely to hold the "missing" Diamond Queen within "long" Diamonds. This means that (1) SOUTH is unlikely to "drop" the Diamond Queen by playing the Diamond A,K and (2) SOUTH cannot finesse through EAST because the NORTH Dummy sits "before" EAST and Declarer SOUTH does not hold the Diamond A,K.

Bruce: Errr, well... Err, I mean... Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how should Declarer SOUTH approach playing this Board?

Esther: Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH should "win" Trick **#1** by playing his Spade Ace. On Tricks **#2** and **#3** SOUTH should "cash" the NORTH Dummy's Diamond A,K. Upon doing so the "missing" Diamond Queen will not drop, as SOUTH expected.

Declarer SOUTH wants to "target" EAST as the Squeeze Opponent. He wants to force EAST to have to make a ton of discards to then restrict EAST's choices of what to play. Therefore, on Tricks **#4** through **#10** SOUTH should "cash" all **7** of the NORTH Dummy's Club "winners".

After **10** Tricks N/S have "won" **10** Tricks and E/W have "won" **0** Tricks. The **3** cards now held in the **4** Hands are:

	NORTH (21)	
	S: J	
	H: K	
	D: 2	
	C:	
WEST (5)		EAST (5)
S: Q		S:
H: 8 6		H: Q J
D:		D: Q
C:		C:
	SOUTH (9)	
	S:	
	H: A 4	
	D: J	
	C:	

On Trick #11 Declarer SOUTH "cashes" the NORTH Dummy Heart King. After 11 Tricks N/S have "won" 11 Tricks and E/W have "won" 0 Tricks. The 2 cards now held in the 4 Hands are:

	NORTH (21)	
	S: J	
	H:	
	D: 2	
	C:	
WEST (5)		EAST (5)
S: Q		S:
H: 8		H: Q
D:		D: Q
C:		C:
	SOUTH (9)	
	S:	
	H: A	
	D: J	
	C:	

On Trick #12 Declarer SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy Diamond 2. By now SOUTH has confirmed that EAST, as expected, holds the "missing" Diamond Queen "winner". Declarer SOUTH holds a "stranded" Heart Ace "winner". SOUTH's Heart Ace is "stranded" because the NORTH Dummy has no "communication" (i.e., no remaining Heart to lead to his own Heart Ace).

WEST's long Spades led Declarer SOUTH to believe that EAST held "long" Hearts. And so SOUTH knows that on Trick #13 EAST will be **forced** to lead a Heart to Declarer's own "stranded" Heart Ace. Declarer SOUTH has successfully executed a **"Stepping-Stone**

Squeeze Endplay" against a *particular* Opponent, EAST, who held a *particular* card, the Heart Queen!



Esther says:

“Why not proceed *immediately* to ‘**Bridge Base Online Bridge Master**’ Level-5 Lesson #**B-29** to practice executing a “**Stepping-Stone Squeeze Endplay**” play? Search ‘BBO’, then Click ‘Bridge Master’, then Click ‘Play’, then Click ‘Level 5’, then Click ‘B-29’. You can play this Board *repeatedly* in Bridge Master for *free!*”

Esther also says:

“I have now prepared a ‘Map’ of all the ‘**Esther Bridge ‘Pop’ Quizzes**’ that use ‘BBO Bridge Master’ lessons to teach the ‘*Squeeze Play*’, the ‘*Elimination Endplay*’, the ‘*Loser-on-Loser Play*’, the ‘*Unblocking Play*’, and the ‘*Dummy Reversal Play*’”:

<https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/MAP.pdf>