

Esther Discusses
"When Playing as Declarer, the *Critical*
Importance of '*Deceiving*' Opponents
Whenever You Can"

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 talk us through "**When Playing as Declarer, the *Critical* Importance of '*Deceiving*' Opponents Whenever You Can**". Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, thanks for taking the time to be with us today!

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Esther, because I am such a "warm and caring" person!

Bruce: Errr, well, in any case, Esther, would you begin first by telling us the core ideas behind your recommendation to work as Declarer to intentionally try to **deceive your Opponents?**

Esther: Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, I will certainly try to help you.

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... Are you actually being *nice* to me?

Esther: Well, my *studious salamander*, of course I am being "nice" to you! Why wouldn't I be "nice" to you?

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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.

The basic idea of trying to **deceive your Opponents** is that:

You as Declarer must try to play from your “closed” (hidden) Hand in such a way that you give one Opponent a *false, incorrect* idea about what cards his Partner holds such that the first Opponent makes *bad* decisions about what cards to play in a Suit and whether to continue a Suit or switch to another Suit.

Bruce: Errr, well, Ms. Klinktoast..., err, I mean Esther. Well, would you please give us some examples that we can consider to make all this discussion of **deceiving your Opponents** more concrete?

Esther: Well, my *gracious giver*, I will certainly try to help you! I am going to use as examples Boards that Marc Smith presented in his excellent bridge article, “Sleight of Hand”, from the October, 2025 issue of the ACBL Bridge Bulletin (p. 46). I may have altered some of the cards in some of the Boards.

Example #1

Dealer: **SOUTH**
Vul: **NONE**

		NORTH (6)	
		S: T 6 5 2	
		H: K 7	
		D: T 7 3	
		C: K 6 4 2	
	WEST (12)		EAST (10)
	S: A 8 3		S: K Q 7 4
	H: Q 9 3		H: 8 6 4
	D: A 5 4		D: K Q 8 6
	C: Q 8 5 3		C: 9 7
		SOUTH (12)	
		S: J 9	
		H: A J T 5 2	
		D: J 9 2	
		C: A J T	

Bidding

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 H	PASS	1 S	PASS
1 NT	PASS	PASS	PASS

On Trick #1 WEST leads the Club 3, 4th the "top" of his "longest and strongest" Suit so that Partner can invoke the "Rule of 11"² to know for *certain exactly* how many Clubs higher than the Club 3 the Declarer holds (and Declarer by the same token can determine for *certain exactly* how many Clubs higher than the Club 3 EAST holds).

Bruce: Errr, well, Esther... What impressions should Declarer SOUTH form once the NORTH Dummy has been exposed?

Esther: Well, Bruce, often in bridge it is important to identify the "Danger Opponent" who can *badly* hurt you (e.g., by leading through you in a Suit in which you hold few "top" Honors and the Opponent's Partner holds several "top" Honors in that Suit) or a "Danger Suit" that you don't want to lead and you want to try to keep your Opponents from leading.

On this Board Declarer SOUTH sees not 1, but **2**, "killer" "Danger Suits" with which E/W can *profoundly* damage SOUTH's prospects for "making" his 1NT contract: Diamond and Spades! Yikes!!!

Bruce: Well, OK, Esther, that all makes sense. So, after the Club 3 is led by WEST SOUTH knows that $11 - 3 = 8$, and the NORTH Dummy holds **3** Clubs higher than the Club 3 in the Dummy, and Declarer holds **3** Clubs higher than the Club 3, therefore EAST *certainly* holds exactly $8 - 3 - 3 = 2$ Clubs higher than the Club 3, and in this case also holds exactly **2** Club cards!

Well, Esther, Declarer SOUTH in the NORTH Dummy plays "2nd Hand low" on Trick #1 with the Club 2. EAST plays the Club 9. Declarer SOUTH can "win" Trick #1 with the Club Ten, the Club Jack, or the Club Ace. Does it make any difference which of these 3 Clubs you as Declarer play? Wouldn't it be *natural* and "correct" to play your Club Ten?

Esther: Well, my *studly Studebaker*, on this Board with this dicey 1NT contract and Opponents holding not 1, but **2**, "killer" "Danger Suits", Diamonds and Spades, with which E/W can *profoundly* damage SOUTH's prospects for "making"

² Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see: "Some of the 40 or So Bridge Bidding/Play 'Rules'": <https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rules.pdf>

his 1NT contract, you *desperately* want WEST (1) to continue Clubs on Trick #2 and (2) not switch to Diamonds or Spades.

If you win Trick #1 with your Club Ten you "paint the picture" of EAST having initially held the Club 9 as his highest Club and not holding the Club A,J! EAST therefore will "switch" to either Diamonds or Spades and you will then *profoundly regret* your *improvidence* in playing the Club Ten on Trick #1!!!

Instead, you **must** "win" Trick #1 with your Club Ace!!! WEST may think that his Club Queen and EAST's (imaginary) Club J,T have thereafter all been "promoted" into E/W "winners". This "deception" *may not* work, but it is your only *desperate* hope!

On Trick #2 Declarer SOUTH leads his own Heart 2 to the NORTH Dummy Heart King. On Trick #3 Declarer SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy Heart 7 and plays his own Heart Jack for a finesse. WEST "wins" Trick #3 with his Heart Queen.

Having been successfully deceived E/W then on Trick #4 WEST leads his Club 5 toward EAST's (*imaginary*) Club A,J so that E/W can "run" a lot of Club "winners". You "win" Trick #4 with your Club Ten. You now have "won" 3 Tricks and E/W have "won" 1 Trick. On Tricks #5-#7 "cash" your remaining Heart A,T,5 "winners" for a total of 6 Tricks. On Trick #8 you "cash" the NORTH Dummy Club King for a total of 7 Tricks.

Congratulations, you just made your *perilous* 1NT contract by being either *evil* or *clever* and **deceiving** your Opponent, WEST! As Smith notes in his article on bridge deception, "As you quietly inscribe +90 in your scorecard, you notice East glaring across the table [at his Partner, WEST]". (p. 46)



"Bridge is a game that puts a *huge* premium on your ability to do "*perspective taking*" to understand clearly what both your Partner and your Opponents are seeing. Your job is to *understand* their perspectives and to *influence* those perspectives to obtain more favorable results. You want (1) to help Partner clarify the situation and (1) to *deceive* the Opponents about their circumstances so that they make mistakes in your favor! "

Bruce: Say **W-H-A-T????** Wow! Well, can you give us a second example of **deceiving your Opponents?**

Esther: Well, my *curious carnivore*, I will give you a 2nd example from Marc Smith's recent ACBL Bridge Bulletin article:

Example #2

Dealer: **WEST**

Vul: **E/W**

NORTH (13)

S: Q 7 6

H: A Q 2

D: Q 4 3

C: Q J 6 2

WEST (8)

S: J 9 6

H: 8 7

D: T 9 8 5

C: A K T 7

EAST (8)

S: A K T 3

H: 5 3

D: J 7 6

C: 9 8 4 3

SOUTH (11)

S: 8 4 2

H: K J T 9 6 4

D: A K 2

C: 5

Bidding

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
PASS	1 C	PASS	1 H
PASS	1 NT	PASS	4 H
PASS	PASS	PASS	

On Trick #1 WEST leads the Club King.

On Trick #1 WEST "wins" with his Club King. Smith says that WEST on Trick #2 "switches" to Diamonds and leads his Diamond Ten. On Trick #2 Declarer SOUTH should "win" with his Diamond Ace. On Trick #3 Declarer SOUTH crossed to the NORTH Dummy Heart Ace "winner". On Trick #4 Declarer SOUTH leads the NORTH Dummy Club Queen to (1) drive out West's Club Ace and (2) "promote" the NORTH Dummy Club Jack into a "winner". However, Declarer SOUTH did not sluff a Spade "loser" on Trick #4. Instead, on Trick #4 SOUTH *deceptively* plays his own Diamond 2 from his A,K,2 holdings to make WEST think that EAST holds the Diamond King so that on Trick #5 WEST will "continue" Diamonds. On Trick #5 WEST indeed continues Diamonds and Declarer SOUTH "wins" with the Diamond King that WEST imagined was held by EAST.

Now N/S have "won" 3 Tricks and E/W have "won" 2 Tricks. The 8 cards now held in the 4 Hands are:

	NORTH (13)	
	S: Q 7 6	
	H: Q 2	
	D: Q 4	
	C: J	
WEST (8)		EAST (8)
S: J 9 6		S: A K T 3
H: 8		H: 3
D: 8 5		D: J
C: T 7		C: 9 8
	SOUTH (11)	
	S: 8 4 2	
	H: K J T 9 6	
	D:	
	C:	

On Trick #6 from his "closed" Hand Declarer SOUTH leads the Trump Heart 6 to the NORTH Dummy's Heart Queen thus drawing all the E/W Trump Heart cards. On Trick #7 Declarer SOUTH plays the NORTH Dummy Diamond Queen and sluffs his own Spade 2 "loser". On Trick #8 Declarer SOUTH from the NORTH Dummy leads his "promoted" Club Jack "winner" and sluffs a 2nd Spade "loser" in his own "closed" Hand.

After 8 Tricks N/S have "won" 6 Tricks and E/W have "won" 2 Tricks. The 5 cards now held in the 4 Hands are:

	NORTH (13)	
	S: Q 7 6	
	H: 2	
	D: 4	
	C:	
WEST (8)		EAST (8)
S: J 9 6		S: A K T 3
H:		H:
D: 8		D:
C: T		C: 9
	SOUTH (11)	
	S: 8	
	H: K J T	
	D:	
	C:	

Declarer SOUTH will exactly "make" his 4H contract although E/W will "win" a final 3rd Spade Trick.

Here is a "Double Dummy" analysis of this Board using the "Bridge Solver" website³ and shows all the possible "makeable" contracts for all 4 players on this Board:

	♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	-	-	3	1	1
S	-	-	3	1	1
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Perhaps the "Double Dummy" software did not use *deception* when it played this contract!

³ See: https://dds.bridgewebs.com/bridgesolver/upload_from_chrome.htm
https://dds.bridgewebs.com/bridgesolver/upload_from_chrome.htm