

**Esther Discusses "1 of the 4 Methods  
for 'Placing' 'Missing' Honors:  
The 'Desperation Method' "**

**Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen<sup>1</sup>**

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

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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 "**1 of the 4 Methods for 'Placing' 'Missing' Honors: The 'Desperation'**". 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, at the start would you please briefly remind us what you mean by "placing" "missing" Honors?

**Esther:** Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, I will certainly try to help you. When you are playing bridge as Declarer it can be very helpful if you can successfully intuit where a particular "missing" Honor lies. For example, is a "missing" Club Ace held by your RHO sitting "before" your own Club K,Q,x holding?

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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](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**.

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

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther... Hmmm... What methods can you as bridge Declarer use to intuit the placement of "missing" Honors?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, I will certainly try to help you. There are basically 4 methods that a Declarer can use to infer which Opponent holds a particular "missing" Honor:

1. If an Opponent bid a Suit in which you are "missing" an Honor you may infer that this Opponent rather than his Partner is more likely to hold a "missing" Honor in that Suit. Or, if an Opponent bid a Suit that is not the Suit in which you are "missing" an Honor you may infer that the Partner of the bidding Opponent holds the "missing" Honor.
2. The lead may help inform your "placing" a "missing" Honor. For example, if your LHO leads the Diamond Queen, thus "promising" "touching" Honors and "long" Diamonds or a Diamond doubleton, you may assume that your LHO does not hold the "missing" Diamond Ace because most experienced bridge players will not lead "away" from an Ace.
3. If an Opponent PASSED throughout the auction and during play has played Honors worth **8**, **9** or **10** HCPs you may infer that this Opponent does not hold your "missing" Honor. For example, if both Opponents were silent throughout the auction and your RHO has played an Ace and 2 Queens this Opponent is unlikely to hold a "missing" Ace or that Opponent likely would have bid during the auction.
4. The final way to "place" "missing" Honors is called the "**Desperation Method**". Sometimes you can "place" "missing" Honors in situations in which cards *must* lie a certain way or your contract is doomed so then you *must* "place" the "missing" Honors where the cards must lie for you to "make" your contract.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther... Isn't that nothing more than "wishful thinking"?

**Esther:** Well, my *loquacious linkster*, no indeed! On the one hand, if your Opponents cards lie such that your contract is doomed in any case then making a more favorable assumption that in fact is incorrect will not hurt you any more than if you had not made this incorrect card placement assumption. But if your assumed favorable placement indeed is correct you are allowing yourself an opportunity to

"make" your difficult contract! You are simply allowing yourself to achieve a favorable outcome when you can do so!

**Bruce:** Hmmm, well, Esther... Can you give us a concrete example of a Declarer using the "Desperation Method" to "place" "missing" Honors?

**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-1 **Lesson A-36** 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 1 Lesson A-36**

Dealer: **SOUTH**

		NORTH (8)	
		<b>S:</b> A 3 2	
		<b>H:</b> A 4 3 2	
		<b>D:</b> 5 3 2	
		<b>C:</b> 5 4 2	
	WEST (8)		EAST (9)
<b>S:</b>	K Q J T		<b>S:</b> 9 8 6
<b>H:</b>	7 5		<b>H:</b> 6
<b>D:</b>	Q T 9 8 6		<b>D:</b> K J 7 4
<b>C:</b>	7 6		<b>C:</b> A J T 9 8
		SOUTH (15)	
		<b>S:</b> 7 5 4	
		<b>H:</b> K Q J T 9 8	
		<b>D:</b> A	
		<b>C:</b> K Q 3	

**Bidding**

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 <b>H</b>	PASS	2 <b>H</b>	PASS
4 <b>H*</b>	PASS	PASS	PASS

\*SOUTH uses the "Rule of 5"<sup>2</sup> to help in his decision to bid Game. SOUTH counts as "missing" "top" Honors 3 Spades, the Spade A,K,Q, 1 Heart, the Heart Ace, 0 Diamonds, and 1 Club, the Club Ace. Because 3 + 1 + 0 + 1 = 5 or less SOUTH concludes that a 4H contract is likely "makeable".

WEST leads the Spade King thus "promising" "touching" Honors and "length" in Spades. Declarer SOUTH "wins" Trick #1 with the NORTH Dummy's Spade Ace.

**Bruce:** Errr, well, Esther... Once the NORTH Dummy is exposed what "losers" can Declarer SOUTH see?

**Esther:** Well, my *inquisitive interlocutor*, SOUTH sees 2 inescapable Spade "losers" and 0 Trump Heart and 0 Diamond "losers". So, SOUTH must hold his Club "losers" to 1 or else his 4H contract will be "set".

**Bruce:** Well, Esther, how can SOUTH hold his Club "losers" to 1?

**Esther:** Well, Bruce, Declarer SOUTH must assume that WEST does **not** hold the Club A,x,x or else N/S will "lose" both to the E/W Club Ace and Club Jack. In short, Declarer SOUTH must assume that EAST holds the Club A,x,x... SOUTH must make that assumption and then finesse in Clubs twice through EAST.

The NORTH Dummy holds 2 Aces and 11 very "low" cards. So, after "winning" Trick #1 with the NORTH Dummy's Spade Ace on Trick #2 SOUTH must lead a "low" Club from the NORTH Dummy. EAST likely "ducks" on Trick #2. Declarer SOUTH plays his Club King and SOUTH "wins" Trick #2. SOUTH now knows that EAST indeed holds the Club Ace.

N/S together hold 4 + 6 = 10 Trump Hearts. On Trick #3 SOUTH plays his Heart King and both WEST and EAST "follow". On Trick #4 SOUTH "drops" the last E/W Trump Heart ending in the NORTH Dummy by playing the Dummy's Trump Heart Ace. On Trick #5 Declarer SOUTH leads a 2<sup>nd</sup> "low" Club from the NORTH Dummy. N/S will "win" 2 Club Tricks regardless of how EAST plays on Trick #5 and will exactly make their 4H contract! Thus is the magic of using the "Desperation Method" to "place" "missing" Honors!

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<sup>2</sup> Within the "Esther Bridge Lessons" see "The 'Rule of 5'":

[https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rule\\_5.pdf](https://esther-bridge.com/pdf/rule_5.pdf)



**Esther says:**

“Why not proceed *immediately* to ‘**Bridge Base Online Bridge Master**’ Level-1 Lesson #**A-36** to practice using the ‘**Desperation Method for ‘Placing’ ‘Missing’ Honors**’? Search ‘BBO’, then Click ‘Bridge Master’, then Click ‘Play’, then Click ‘Level 1’, then Click ‘A-36’. You can play this Board *repeatedly* in Bridge Master for *free!*”