

BRIDGE BITES

from The American Contract Bridge League

CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

By: Brian Gunnell

If it's not too late already, try looking at just the N-S hands and decide how you are going to play that Spade suit. Where's the lady?

	♠ A873 ♥ QT9 ♦ 985 ♣ K32	
♠ 4 ♥ 876542 ♦ QJT ♣ T65	North West East Declarer	♠ Q65 ♥ AKJ ♦ 72 ♣ AJ987
	♠ KJT92 ♥ 3 ♦ AK643 ♣ Q4	

E-W Vulnerable

South	West	North	East
			1NT
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

That 1NT opening showed 15-17 HCP, after which the auction inches its way up to 4♠. West leads the ♦Q, which is won by your Ace. You have one loser in each of the side-suits, so to make your contract you must avoid losing a trump trick.

In the play of the Spades you could choose to finesse against West, or to finesse against East, or to play "for the drop" (hoping that the suit is 2-2 or the ♠Q is singleton). The general rule, when holding a 9-card fit, is to play for the drop, all things being equal that is about a 58% chance.

But why settle for 58% when you can have 100%? Yes, it's time for some counting. N-S have a combined 22 HCP, that leaves E-W with 18. West has already played the ♦Q, leaving precisely 15 or 16 HCP in the East hand. As East has already advertised 15-17 he must have all the missing high cards with the possible exception of one of the missing Jacks. So at Trick 2 you lead a Spade to Dummy's Ace and then, when East plays low on the second round, you finesse the Jack with complete confidence. That's 10 tricks for those who count, but only 9 for the rule-followers.

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