

**MASTERCLASS**  
LESSONS FROM THE BRIDGE TABLE

FRED GITELMAN

MASTER POINT PRESS • TORONTO



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	5
Introduction	7
Avoiding Guesswork	9
Lines of Communication	12
No Losing Finesses	15
Adventures in Card Play	18
Trick Question	22
Trump Management	26
Matchpoint Technique	31
Sterling Play	36
Squeezing out an Entry	40
Winkle	45
Risk And Reward	49
A Sly Seven	53
Melting Pot	57
The Power of Positive Thinking	62
The Only Way	66
Slam Dunk	70
Reading the Auction	73
Matchpoint Puzzle	78
Redouble If You Will	82
Aid From The Enemy	85
Eye On The Ball	90
Setting Up Your Squeeze	93
The Cutting Edge	99
The Agony of Defeat	104
Reverse Gear	108
A Better Line	112
Hamman Has The Last Laugh	117

A Hand for the Squeeze Meister	121
Don't Speak Too Soon...	128
Hypothetical Slam	132
Hard to See	136
Sacrificing Your Honor	139
Never Having to Say You're Sorry	143
Open Book	147
Taking on the Field	154
The Femke Solution	158
Booby-Trapped	162
Winner on Loser Play	167
Partnership Trust Is A Wonderful Thing!	171
Juggling Trumps	175
The Strange Story of the Ace of Hearts	180
Killing The Crocodile	185
When Partner Buries You	190
Second Hand High	195
Another Day at the Office	199
Diamond Jubilee	203

# FOREWORD

I was born in Toronto, Canada in 1965 and spent the first 37 years of my life (as well as my first 20 years as a bridge player) living in that city. I owe a lot of my success as a bridge player to the fact that several of Canada's leading players took an interest in me when I was a young player. Four great Canadian stars, the late Ted Horning, Eric Kokish, George Mittelman, and Joey Silver deserve particular mention for being my mentors, partners, and friends. I am happy that some of my proudest and most successful moments as a bridge player came in major tournaments where Ted, Eric, George, and Joey were my partners and/or teammates.

*Fred Gitelman*  
*June 2005*



# INTRODUCTION

The deals that appear in this book are taken from *The Deal of the Week*, a weekly bridge column for advanced players that appeared for 393 consecutive weeks on my website ([www.bridgebase.com](http://www.bridgebase.com)) from September 1996 through March 2004.

One of the main purposes of this feature was to try to show the world that computer software and the Internet were effective and entertaining media for presenting bridge. As such, when my friend Ray Lee of Master Point Press first approached me about publishing a book based on *The Deal of the Week*, I was not sure if this was a good idea — I was concerned that the material I had written for publication on the Internet would lose something if it were translated to the medium of paper. Ray assured me that he and his colleagues were up to the challenge and I therefore gave him the go-ahead to create what would eventually become the book you are now reading.

I must say that I am impressed by the results and my thanks go out to Ray and his team for making it possible for bridge players to enjoy the material from *The Deal of the Week* in bed, in the bathtub, and in the many other places in which a book is more convenient than a computer!

My partner in business, life and sometimes bridge, Sheri Winestock, also deserves a great deal of credit for making this book possible. She was the person who did the original editing for all 393 *Deals of the Week*. She also made sure that I had a new column ready to be posted on our website every Sunday night for almost eight years. Given that things like spelling, grammar, and knowing the day of the week are not among my strongest skills, these contributions were very important!

Finally I would like to thank all the great players (many of them my friends and/or heroes) whose brilliant plays can be found in these pages. A few of the people I write about are not



famous players, but they were kind enough to email me hands that represented some of their proudest moments at the bridge table.

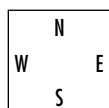
If there is a persistent theme to the deals that appear in this book, it is the near infinite variety of what is possible in this great game of ours. During the 20 years and more I have been a bridge player, I have learned something new every time I have played. I fully expect this process to continue for as long as I play bridge. I made an effort to explore new themes in card play (and occasionally in defense and bidding) in each and every *Deal of the Week*. I am therefore hopeful that even the best players and most serious students out there will be able to learn from and enjoy the deals that appear in this book.

# AVOIDING GUESSWORK

I prefer to play relatively simple and natural bidding systems, but one time at an ACBL Regional tournament I tried something new. My partner at the time was Marc Jacobus, who is now a neighbor of mine in Las Vegas, and we were playing a strong 1♣ system loosely based on Precision. The whole thing was Marc's idea and I have to admit I was skeptical when he first suggested we use a non-natural bidding system. But the fact of the matter is that I learned a great deal in a very short period of time. I found myself in new situations facing new bidding problems I had never had to consider before. I have Marc Jacobus to thank for this.

That being said, the strong 1♣ bidding system that Marc and I were playing had no impact on the bidding of this deal from the same tournament.

♠ A 10 4  
 ♥ A 10 9 6  
 ♦ Q  
 ♣ J 10 6 5 4



♠ K J 2  
 ♥ K J 8 7  
 ♦ K 5 2  
 ♣ A 7 3

Neither vul.

West	Marc	East	Fred
pass	2♣	pass	1NT
pass	4♥	all pass	2♥

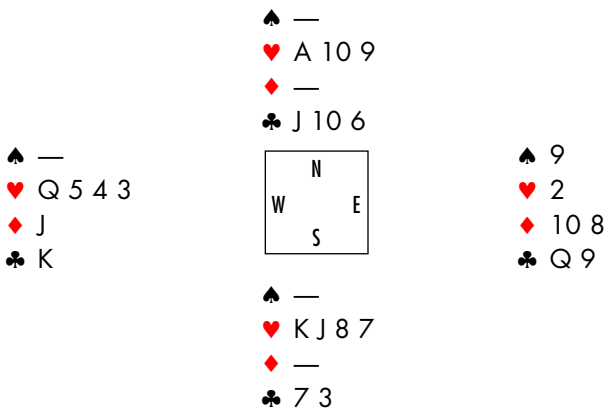
West's opening lead was the ♦3 (the defenders were using fourth-best leads). Marc put down a lovely dummy, but, alas, our hands

did not fit very well. I looked to be a favorite to make 4♥, but it was not hard to imagine that I might go down. East took the first trick with the ♦A and returned the ♠3 (also fourth best). I played low from my hand and, when West followed with a small spot card, I won the trick with dummy's ♠10.

Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on. East's spade shift certainly didn't hurt me, but it didn't give much away either — I had more than one possible way to avoid losing a spade trick. It looked like I would have to either guess the position of the ♥Q or guess how to play clubs for one loser (if that was even possible).

Fortunately, I found a nice line that largely eliminated the need for guessing: I continued with a strange finesse of the ♠J. I was certain that East held the ♠Q (West probably would have played that card on the last trick if he had it) so I was sure there was no way this finesse was going to lose.

It may not be immediately obvious what the spade finesse had to gain. Actually, I suspected it had nothing to gain since East's return of the ♠3 at Trick 2 suggested that he been dealt a three- or four-card spade suit and it was unlikely that East would falsecard. In case East had five spades, however, I thought it would be a good idea to discard a spade from dummy on my ♦K. This made it safe for me to lead a third round of spades without having to worry about West ruffing in. As I had expected, this was not necessary. West followed to the third round of spades and I pitched a club from dummy. I then ruffed my last diamond in dummy before playing a club to my ♣A and exiting in clubs. These were the cards that remained after I played the ace of clubs:



West won the trick with his ♣K. If he had returned a diamond, my club loser would have vanished, so he played a trump instead, which I won. I surrendered a club to East who now took his turn to be endplayed, and I was able to claim the rest of the tricks. The position of the ♥Q never came into play.

Suppose West had dropped his ♣K under my ♣A (a card I suppose I should have cashed earlier to make it harder for West to unblock). There are a couple of ways this might have worked for the defense. For one thing, I might simply have cashed the ♥A and ♥K next, guaranteeing the contract against a 3-2 break in hearts; that would have been fatal here, as hearts were actually 4-1. If instead I chose to continue with a second round of clubs, East would have won with the ♣Q and given his partner a club ruff. West would then have been forced to lead a diamond, which I would have ruffed, and I would have been left to guess the location of the ♥Q (or the location of the ♠9 to give me a count in the heart suit). Would I have guessed right? I have no idea and I am glad I didn't have to!

The whole deal:

	♠ A 10 4										
	♥ A 10 9 6										
	♦ Q										
	♣ J 10 6 5 4										
♠ 8 6 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 9 7 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q 5 4 3		♥ 2									
♦ J 9 6 3		♦ A 10 8 7 4									
♣ K 8		♣ Q 9 2									
	♠ K J 2										
	♥ K J 8 7										
	♦ K 5 2										
	♣ A 7 3										

# LINES OF COMMUNICATION

I played this interesting deal at an ACBL Regional tournament in Costa Mesa, California, where I partnered both Billy Miller and Alan Sontag. I have sung the praises of Billy Miller in the past and, as usual, we had a great deal of fun (and success!) playing together. This was the first time, however, that I had ever played with Alan Sontag. It was an experience I will never forget, as Alan is easily the fastest expert player I have ever seen perform. I would not have thought it possible for someone to play as quickly and effectively as Alan is somehow able to do. With two world championships to his credit, along with numerous national and international titles, there's no doubt of Alan's ability. His long-time partner Peter Weichsel says Alan would be an even better player if he stopped to think occasionally, but that's awfully hard to believe!

The way that Alan treats his partners and opponents is also worth mentioning. There are few professional players out there whose personalities are as energetic and conducive to good times as Alan's. It is hard to imagine anyone not enjoying themselves at a bridge table with him, regardless of the results. He absolutely loves playing bridge and this is clear, both from his level of play and his demeanor.

<p>♠ A 6 2 ♥ Q 9 ♦ 10 8 7 4 ♣ 9 8 6 5</p>	<p>♠ Q 8 7 ♥ A 10 7 5 4 ♦ A K Q 6 ♣ 3</p> <table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ K J 3 ♥ 8 6 3 2 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ K J 10</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	<p>♠ 10 9 5 4 ♥ K J ♦ 9 5 ♣ A Q 7 4 2</p>										

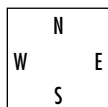
West	North	East	Fred
	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	2♦	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

With the opponents silent, I became declarer in 3NT, and West's opening lead was the ♣9. East followed suit with the ♣K and I won with my ♣A. Think about how you would play this deal as declarer before reading on.

I had already won a club trick and I still had the ♣Q. Dummy's three diamond winners brought my total up to five tricks. Barring a really bad heart break, it looked like I would be able to win at least four tricks in that suit. Establishing enough winners for my contract rated to be easy, but there was still a danger — can you see it?

The best play for four tricks in the heart suit is to start by cashing the ♥K. Suppose that both defenders follow small and that the ♥J continuation is covered by West's ♥Q. Dummy's ♥A wins the trick as East follows. On the third round of hearts, West discards a club and the fourth round of hearts is won by East.

♠ Q 8 7  
 ♥ 7  
 ♦ A K Q 6  
 ♣ —



♠ 10 9 5 4  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ 9 5  
 ♣ Q 7

Everything is fine if East returns a club at this point, but a diamond return (before or after one or more rounds of spades) will leave declarer with only eight tricks. Declarer will never win a trick with his ♣Q and his contract will fail. Do you see how I was able to avoid this danger?

Instead of leading the ♥K at Trick 2, I led the ♥J. West covered with the ♥Q and I allowed him to hold the trick. By retaining the ♥K as an entry to my hand, the threat of a diamond return by the

defense was neutralized. When a diamond came back (no other defense is any better), I was able to win in dummy, cross to the ♥K, cash the ♣Q and win the next five tricks in dummy.



*Alan Sontag*

Leading the ♥J on the first round of the suit (and ducking when West played the ♥Q) was necessary in order for me to win nine tricks against the actual layout.

♠ A 6 2 ♥ Q 9 ♦ 10 8 7 4 ♣ 9 8 6 5	♠ Q 8 7 ♥ A 10 7 5 4 ♦ A K Q 6 ♣ 3 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 10px auto; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> <span>N</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> <span>W</span> <span>E</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; width: 100%;"> <span>S</span> </div> </div> ♠ 10 9 5 4 ♥ K J ♦ 9 5 ♣ A Q 7 4 2	♠ K J 3 ♥ 8 6 3 2 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ K J 10
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As the cards lie, the hand cannot be defeated on this line of play. However, if East's four hearts include the ♥Q, he can actually defeat the contract by making the difficult play of allowing my ♥J to hold. Similarly, if West was dealt four hearts to the ♥Q, he must duck my ♥J for the defense to prevail.

# NO LOSING FINESSES

The first IOC Grand Prix Women's event took place in 1999 in Lausanne, Switzerland. The European team, made up of Sabine Auken-Daniela von Arnim (Germany), Véronique Bessis-Catherine D'Ovidio (France), Pat Davies-Nicola Smith (Great Britain) and Bep Vriend-Marijke van der Pas (The Netherlands), defeated the United States 278-210 over 128 boards.

This deal features Sabine Auken as declarer. Sabine's careful technique and accurate card reading enabled her to make a 3NT contract in which most of the field went down. The deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.

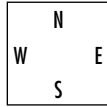
Many consider Sabine and Daniela to be the strongest women's pair in the world today. Sabine, who lives in Denmark, is currently ranked #2 in the world among women players, and her numerous trophies include two Venice Cup gold medals. She is a fine technical declarer, as you are about to see.



*Sabine Auken*



♠ A J 10 9 7  
 ♥ 7 6  
 ♦ K 9 8  
 ♣ 9 7 2



♠ 6 4  
 ♥ A K J 9 5  
 ♦ A 4 3  
 ♣ A 4 3

Neither vul.

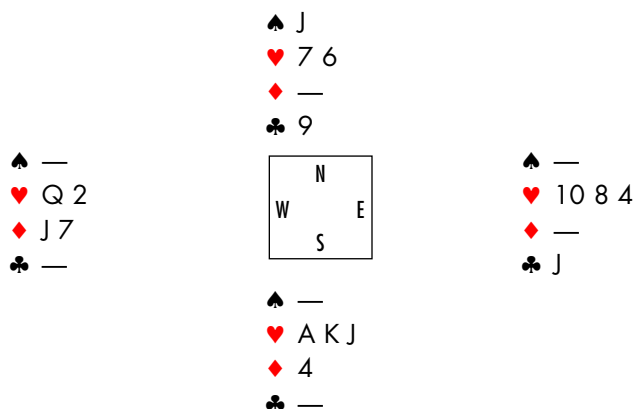
West	Daniela	East	Sabine
	pass	pass	1♣*
pass	1♠	pass	2♥
pass	2♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

West led the ♦5 (fourth best) to East's ♦Q and Sabine's ♦A. Sabine went after spades, finessing into East. East might have done better to shift to clubs, but she returned the ♦10, ducked by Sabine in dummy. When East belatedly got around to playing clubs, Sabine ducked the ♣K. She then wisely won the second round of clubs and took a successful spade finesse. Her next move was to cash the ♠A, but East's discard was a disappointment. These were the remaining cards:

<p>♠ K          ♥ Q 2          ♦ J 7 6          ♣ —</p>	<p>♠ J 7          ♥ 7 6          ♦ K          ♣ 9</p> <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> <p>♠ —          ♥ A K J 9 5          ♦ 4          ♣ —</p>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ —          ♥ 10 8 4 3          ♦ —          ♣ J 10</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

Since West was known to have four spades, five diamonds, and at least two clubs, Sabine correctly inferred that the heart suit was

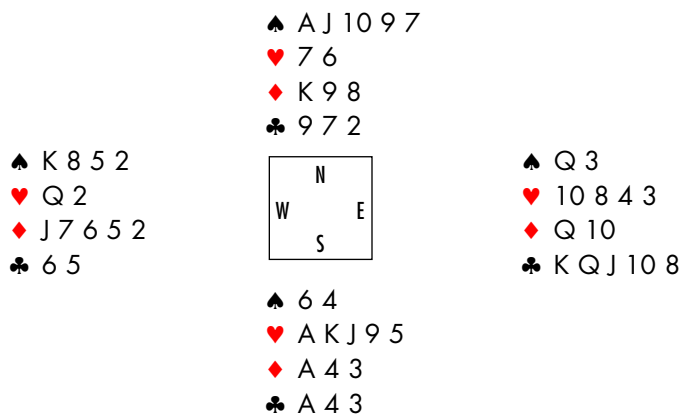
unlikely to run. There was also a good chance that West was out of clubs. Sabine therefore developed another spade trick by driving out West's ♠K. West could do no better than to return a diamond and Sabine won with dummy's ♦K.



Now, on the play of North's last spade East had to keep a club guard and so came down to a doubleton heart. In the three-card ending, Sabine knew there was no point in taking the heart finesse as one of East's last three cards was known to be a club. She knew to cash the ♥A and ♥K and made her last trick with the ♥J.

Towards the end of the deal Sabine knew she was going to make her contract, but she was pleased, nonetheless, to see the ♥Q appear on her left — perhaps her careful play would earn the European team a swing. And so it proved to be. Nicely played, Sabine.

This was the full deal:

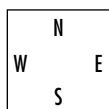


# ADVENTURES IN CARD PLAY

Norway's Geir Helgemo is widely considered to be one of the world's best players. He moved rapidly from the Junior ranks in the early 90s to playing in world-class events — and winning many of them. On his recent visits to North America he has collected several national titles, and it is surely only a matter of time before he adds a WBF gold medal to the bronze and silver ones he already owns. His brilliant exploits as declarer have appeared in many publications over the years. This deal is yet another Helgemo masterpiece; I would like to thank my friend Geo Tislevoll for bringing it to my attention.

When this deal took place, Geir was playing in a practice match with New York investment banker Jimmy Cayne, who has been winning major ACBL events for over 30 years.

♠ A K 10 4 2  
 ♥ 9 7 4  
 ♦ A 2  
 ♣ 10 7 2



♠ 3  
 ♥ A J 10 8 6  
 ♦ 8 7 6  
 ♣ A K 6 5

West	Jimmy	East	Geir
pass	1♠	2♦	1♥
pass	3♦	pass	pass
pass	4♥		3♥



*Geir Helgemo*

West did very well to lead a trump, making it unlikely that Geir would be allowed to ruff a diamond (or a club) in dummy. East produced the ♥Q and Geir won with his ♥A. Think about how you would play this hand as declarer before reading on.

Geir decided that his best chance for a tenth trick was to try to establish a spade winner in dummy. He therefore played a spade to the ♠A and cashed the ♠K for a diamond discard, East following with the ♠J. Geir led a third round of spades, on which East discarded the ♣8, and Geir ruffed in his hand. How would you play from here?

Geir continued by leading the ♥J. West followed with the ♥2 and East won the trick with his ♥K. East returned the last outstanding trump and Geir played the ♥8. West gave a lot of thought as to what he should discard on this trick.

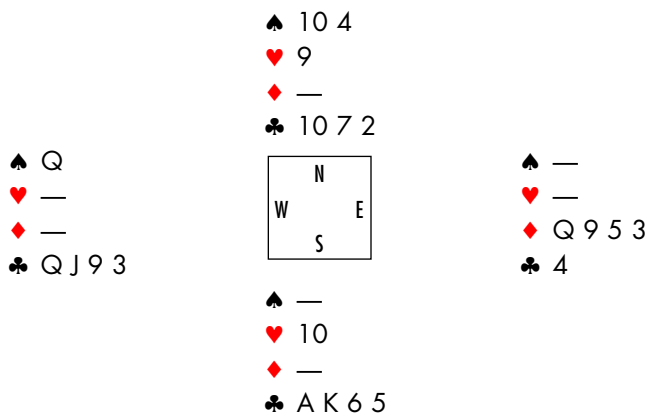
<p>♠ Q 9 ♥ — ♦ K 10 ♣ Q J 9 3</p>	<p>♠ 10 4 ♥ 9 ♦ A 2 ♣ 10 7 2</p> <table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 80px; height: 80px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> <p>♠ — ♥ 10 8 ♦ 8 7 ♣ A K 6 5</p>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ — ♥ 5 ♦ Q J 9 5 4 3 ♣ 4</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

West could not afford to discard a club or Geir would lose only one trick in that suit. If he discarded a spade, then declarer, after winning the trick with dummy's ♥9, would be able to set up his tenth winner in spades (with the ♦A remaining as an entry). West realized that he had to pitch a diamond, but he saw that discarding the ♦10 would be fatal. Can you see why?

If West discarded the ♦10, Geir, after winning the trick in dummy, would be left with several winning options. He could, for example, duck a diamond to West's now singleton ♦K, thereby endplaying West to give up a trick with his forced black-suit return. West foresaw this possibility and found the best defense of discarding his ♦K on the third round of trumps.

West had managed (at least temporarily) to avoid being endplayed, but Geir was still able to get home. He started by ducking a diamond trick, which East had to win to keep his partner off the endplay. If East had returned a club at this point, Geir would have ducked the trick to West, forcing him to give up a trick by leading away from either his remaining club honor or the ♠Q. East therefore returned a diamond to dummy's ♦A.

West could not afford to part with a club, but a spade discard looked safe since dummy's last entry was about to be removed.



Geir demonstrated that West's spade discard was not as safe as it had looked. He ruffed a spade with his last trump to remove West's remaining card in that suit, meanwhile setting up what appeared to be a useless spade winner in dummy.

Well, it turned out that the spade winner was actually quite useful — in fact, it was what the great bridge-play theorist, Geza

Ottlik, might have called a 'menace on the moon'. Geir showed this to be the case by exiting with a low club to West. West then had to lead a club; if he exited with a low club, Geir could win the trick with dummy's ♣10. Seeing this, West exited with his remaining club honor, thinking Geir would have to win the trick in his hand and that the resulting blockage in clubs would prevent declarer from winning the last two tricks in that suit. However, Geir did not need to win the last two tricks in clubs. He could win Trick 12 with dummy's ♣10 and Trick 13 with dummy's so-called 'useless' ♠10! Wow!

The full deal:

♠ Q 9 8 6 5 ♥ 3 2 ♦ K 10 ♣ Q J 9 3	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <span>♠ A K 10 4 2</span> <span>♥ 9 7 4</span> <span>♦ A 2</span> <span>♣ 10 7 2</span> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">N</td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">W</td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">S</td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;"></td></tr> </table> </div> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <span>♠ 3</span> <span>♥ A J 10 8 6</span> <span>♦ 8 7 6</span> <span>♣ A K 6 5</span> </div> </div>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 7 ♥ K Q 5 ♦ Q J 9 5 4 3 ♣ 8 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										

## MASTERCLASS

Imagine sitting beside a world-class bridge player and being able to listen to his thoughts as each hand develops... you can't help but improve your own game! Every hand in this fascinating book comes from actual play; many of them are taken from the author's own experience in world-level competition. Fred Gitelman believes that there is something to be learned from every bridge hand, whether you are a novice or an expert, and he proves it here. Just as fascinating as the bridge, however, are Fred's observations on his partners and opponents, who range from world champions like Alan Son-tag to famous amateurs like Bill Gates and Warren Buffett.

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**FRED GITELMAN** (Las Vegas) has a trophy case full of world championship medals, many of them earned playing for his native Canada. He has a well-deserved reputation as the world's leading designer and producer of bridge software, while his website, *Bridge Base Online*, is the most popular bridge-playing site on the Net. He is well known as a contributor to bridge magazines, but this is his first book.



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