

DON'T LISTEN TO THE DEMONS!!

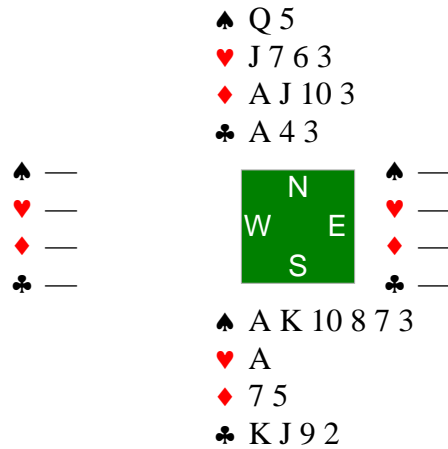
The past four days I have been playing on a fun team consisting of Jim Rasmussen-Parul Jain, Maxim Silin- Carrie Liu, Selen Hotamisligil and myself. We were one of 24 teams vying for 8 slots in the MontreAlt with teams from all over Europe and the US competing.

On the third day of the competition, Selen and I sat out after the first set. There were 3 fourteen board segments each day, and our chances didn't look great with 5 matches to play. Before I left to do some grandparenting, I gave Parul a little pep talk. She was a bit apprehensive about having to play all three sets that day. I emailed Parul, wished her good luck and advised her to "not listen to the demons! - those nasty voices in every bridgeplayer's head that keep telling you to make the wrong bid or play - even though your gut feeling tells you to do something else that would invariably worked.

When the day was over, we still had an outside chance of qualifying for the next stage of this competition, largely because of this great hand...!

Don't Listen to the Demons

Dealer North
 IMPs NS Vul
 Opening Lead 4 of ♥



West	North <i>Jim Rasmussen</i>	East	South <i>Parul Jain</i>
Pass	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	1 N	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	4 N
Pass	5 ♠	Pass	6 ♠
All pass			

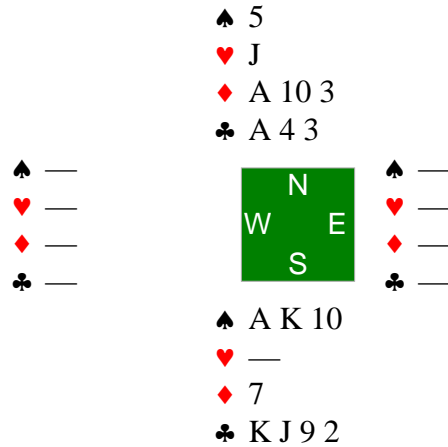
6 ♠ by South

The opponents were playing 3/5 leads against suits. Parul stopped to think and assess her chances before playing to trick 1. Parul saw that if spades split, she had 6 spade tricks, 1 heart, and 2 top clubs, and 1 sure diamond for a total of 10. She could get up to 4 club tricks but that would require either the person on her right started with Qxx - about a 36% chance. (She could actually run the J of clubs if the person on her right had Qxx and the person on her left had 10xx - but the odds of that are dismally low.) Playing for at least one diamond honor would bring her up to 11, so before even playing one trump, she won the heart lead in hand and immediately played a diamond to the J. This was a great play! By playing a diamond immediately, she didn't waste her spade Q entry and she was able to get some important information about the lie of the cards and the distribution. This lost, and East returned the 2 of hearts - a very telling card! Where was the heart K? - Obviously if East had it, he would have played it, not the 2. And since West didn't lead the K of ♥, the heart honors were split. The opening lead showed that West started with either Kxx of hearts or Kxxxx of hearts. Now Parul played a spade to the Q and ruffed another heart - East following with the Q!

For those of you who have been following my lessons on squeeze play, this is the Master Class!

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Dealer North
 IMPs NS Vul
 Opening Lead 4 of ♥



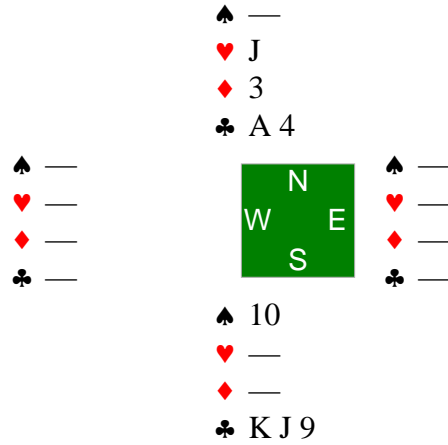
West	North <i>Jim Rasmussen</i>	East	South <i>Parul Jain</i>
Pass	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	1 N	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	4 N
Pass	5 ♠	Pass	6 ♠
All pass			

6 ♠ by South

Parul knew that West started with Kxxxx of hearts and East started with Qxx. Assuming West had the other high diamond and spades came home she had good squeeze chances in addition to the fall back position of the club finesse. She played another diamond now and West followed with the 9 (He played the 8 on the first round). She took a deep breath and cleansed her mind of the demons that were telling her the diamond finesse was going to lose and finessed the 10 - which held! Now she still warded off the demons and cashed the A of diamonds, noting the K on her left. The position for my famous Lake Chargoggaggoggmanchaugagaugchabunagogg squeeze was there! West could fish on his side with the K of hearts, and East could fish on his side with the fourth diamond, but nobody could fish in the middle with the Q of clubs! She cashed the A of spades and was happy to see both opps follow and she played the K of spades as West parted with a heart. She retained her diamond and heart threats in dummy by pitching a small club from dummy.

Don't Listen to the Demons

Dealer North
 IMPs NS Vul
 Opening Lead 4 of ♥



West	North <i>Jim Rasmussen</i>	East	South <i>Parul Jain</i>
Pass	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	1 N	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	4 N
Pass	5 ♠	Pass	6 ♠
All pass			

6 ♠ by South

Now she played the last trump. West pitched a club, and since the J of hearts was no longer needed, Parul pitched it and East discarded a club. Parul played a club to the A and when she played a club back, East followed with the 10! With the courage of her convictions, she went up with the K and scored the last two tricks! This was the full hand...

Don't Listen to the Demons

West Deals
N-S Vul

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

West	North <i>Jim Rasmussen</i>	East	South <i>Parul Jain</i>
Pass	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	1 N	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	4 N
Pass	5 ♠	Pass	6 ♠
All pass			

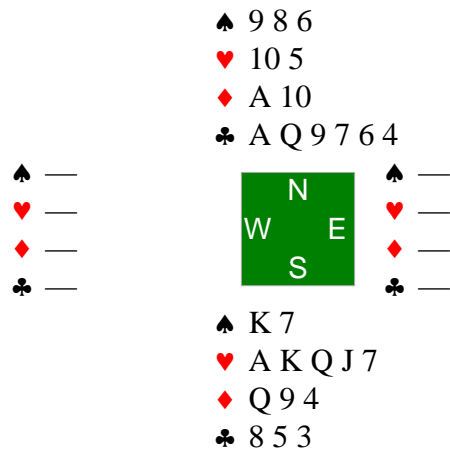
6 ♠ by South

That evening, Parul sent me a note. She said, "Mark, thank you very much! I followed your advice and I didn't listen to the demons!"

Well, Selen and I went on to clobber our opponents in the 10th of 12 matches and with just two rounds to go, we were in 11th place with 8 teams qualifying. If I could only shut off the demons.

Here was the very first board of the 14 board penultimate round...

Don't Listen to the Demons



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 N
Pass	2 ♠	Dbl	3 ♣
Pass	3 N	All pass	

3 N by South

My style is to open 1N when I have 15-17 hcp and a five card major if I don't need help in the suit to develop tricks, or my suit is Jxxxx or worse. So I opened 1N and pard transferred to clubs which was doubled. (I probably would have just bid 3N directly with the North hand, but then there would be no story.) The 2 of spades was led to the A, and East returned the J. I won my K and West unblocked the Q. On the run of the hearts, East followed to 2 rounds then, East's first discard was the 10 of clubs, playing standard carding. On the fourth and fifth hearts, East pitched two diamonds. Now it sure looked like a diamond to the Ace and a spade off dummy would require East to lead away from the K of clubs. But a demon in my head said - no , they are trying to talk you out of the club finesse and are your going to look silly. So I took the club finesse and went down like a dog! Here was the full hand...

Don't Listen to the Demons

South Deals
None Vul

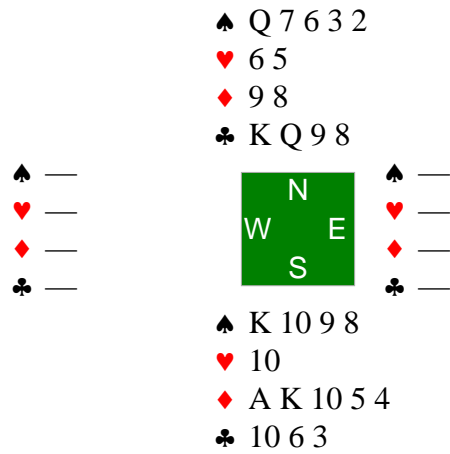
♠ 9 8 6			
♥ 10 5			
♦ A 10			
♣ A Q 9 7 6 4			
♠ Q 3 2	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	♠ A J 10 5 4	
♥ 6 4 3 2		♥ 9 8	
♦ K J 8 7 2		♦ 6 5 3	
♣ J		♣ K 10 2	
♠ K 7			
♥ A K Q J 7			
♦ Q 9 4			
♣ 8 5 3			

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 N
Pass	2 ♠	Dbl	3 ♣
Pass	3 N	All pass	

3 N by South

Sure enough. A diamond to the A and a spade from dummy would have endplayed East and I would have made this great hand, but instead I listened to the demons in my head that said, "Don't be silly. Don't go against the field. They are trying to fool you with the 10 of clubs play. Take the club finesse!"

Don't Listen to the Demons



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥	Dbl
2 N	3 ♣	3 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	All pass		
4 ♥ by East			

This was the 2nd board of the set. This is a classic! After 1H -x -2N (limit raise or better), I decided I would start with 3C to direct the defense, then bid up to 4S if the opps bid game. I know 3C is unusual, but as they say, "the devil made me do it!" Well, sure enough, the bidding went as predicted, but after West bid 4H, I froze. I listened to the demons that told me "don't bid 4S, you are red against white! You have an edge because partner will lead a club!"

Don't Listen to the Demons

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J	♠ Q 7 6 3 2	♠ A 5 4
♥ A J 4 2	♥ 6 5	♥ K Q 9 8 7 3
♦ Q J 7 2	♦ 9 8	♦ 6 3
♣ A 7 5 4	♣ K Q 9 8	♣ J 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K 10 9 8	
	♥ 10	
	♦ A K 10 5 4	
	♣ 10 6 3	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥	Dbl
2 N	3 ♣	3 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	All pass		

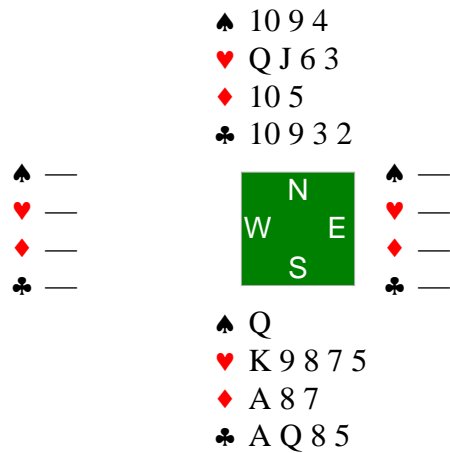
4 ♥ by East

This was the full deal. Oh well, it is possible to defeat 4S via a club ruff, but how likely is that on this auction? And whereas my teammates not unreasonably sacrificed in 5H doubled down 1, had I bid a game on this auction, I really don't think anyone will be diving. We'll never know!

I just knew that two hands in a row I had done the wrong thing, listened to the demons, and our chances of survival in this competition were, "slip sliding away." But there are still 12 hands to play, and one never knows what is happening at the other table.

Don't Listen to the Demons

IMPs
EW Vulnerable



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♥
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	4 ♠	All pass
4 ♠ by East			

On board 9, this hand came up... I passed as dealer. Selen opened 1 ♥ in 3rd seat and West bid 2H showing spades and diamonds in there methods. I have a really crappy hand, and partner could have a weak 3rd seat opener. A voice inside of me, said, "Do something!" 3H seemed nuts, but perhaps I should double to show hearts. But no, another voice said, " Don't be crazy. Just pass." So, I passed and East made a preemptive 3S bid, it went pass to me, and now West cue bid 4H. Once again, one voice said, "Double", but another voice said, "Sit in your seat, if you show heart length you may help them get to a slam." So, I listened to that voice, and passed. Now the bidding went 4S passed around to me. Last chance. Sure looked like sacrificing would be right at these colors, but another voice said, "Don't be crazy, you might go for 1100 or drive the opponents to a makeable slam." So, I passed. You can guess what the complete deal was..

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North Deals
E-W Vul

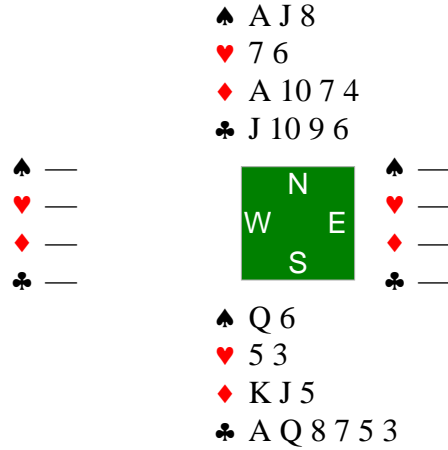
♠ A K J 8 7	♠ 10 9 4	♠ 6 5 3 2
♥ A 4	♥ Q J 6 3	♥ 10 2
♦ K Q 6 3 2	♦ 10 5	♦ J 9 4
♣ 4	♣ 10 9 3 2	♣ K J 7 6
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 0 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q	
	♥ K 9 8 7 5	
	♦ A 8 7	
	♣ A Q 8 5	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♥
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	4 ♠	All pass
4 ♠ by East			

4S makes 4 on a heart lead, but 5Hx only goes for 300 as the cards lie. Another opportunity to win imps down the drain. If you've ever seen the movie "The Replacements" starring Gene Hackman and Keanu Reeves, you'll remember the locker room scene in which Hackman asks a team of replacement football players what they fear. Reeves replies, "Quicksand". He goes on to state how when things are going bad, you feel like you are sinking in quicksand and there is no way out. Well this is how I was starting to feel right about now.

Don't Listen to the Demons

NS Vul
 IMPs
 South Dealer
 Opening Lead 2 of hearts



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♣
1 ♥	Dbl	2 ♣	Dbl
2 ♥	3 ♣	3 ♥	4 ♣
All pass			

4 ♣ by South

This was the next to last hand of the set. I opened a club, and the bidding went as shown. After the 2C cue bid, I was tempted to bid 3C, but a demon said, "oh no, don't do that your suit is anemic and you have no place to go if partner doesn't have clubs", so I listened to the demon and just doubled.

Don't Listen to the Demons

South Deals
None Vul

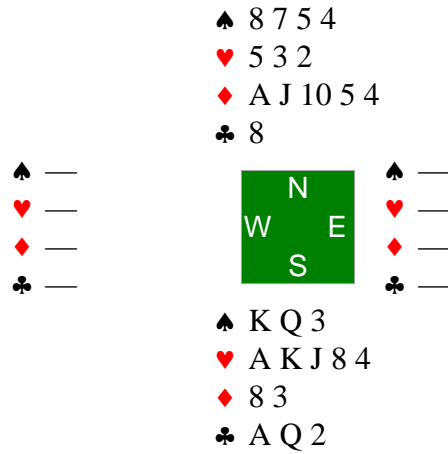
♠ K 9 7 5	♠ A J 8	♠ 10 4 3 2
♥ Q 10 9 4 2	♥ 7 6	♥ A K J 8
♦ Q 9 3 2	♦ A 10 7 4	♦ 8 6
♣ —	♣ J 10 9 6	♣ K 4 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q 6	
	♥ 5 3	
	♦ K J 5	
	♣ A Q 8 7 5 3	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♣
1 ♥	Dbl	2 ♣	Dbl
2 ♥	3 ♣	3 ♥	4 ♣
All pass			

4 ♣ by South

This was the complete deal. As you can see, had I bid 3C, Selen may have bid 5C, as she would have assumed I started with 6 clubs. 5C would have been very lucky, but would have made for plus 600 and a ton of imps our way! But no, I listened to the demons.

Don't Listen to the Demons



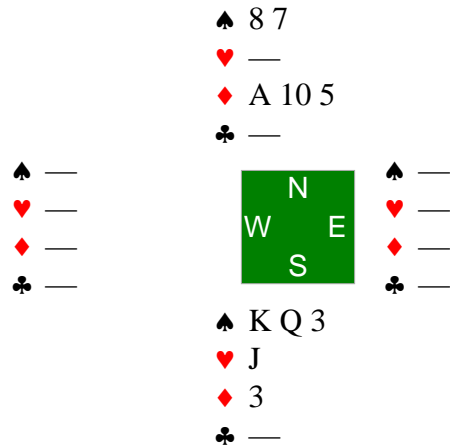
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♦	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	Pass	Rdbl	Pass
1 ♠	Pass	Pass	3 N
All pass			

3 N by South

Here was the coup de grace. The final hand of the set.

A low club to my Q made me a little worried. I had 2 clubs, probably 4 hearts 1 spade and 2 diamonds. I should have won the Q of clubs and immediately played 1 top heart before playing a diamond up. West has to duck as you can see, and I will win the J. Now I should play a heart towards my hand. I probably should finesse, but the demons were at work! Perhaps there is a doubleton Q? Oh yes, I listened to the demons and played the K of hearts at trick 3! They told me the heart Q was doubleton, but no, both followed low. Now I played a diamond and thought my goose was cooked because if West rose, the best I could do was win and give up the heart now. I was certainly going down. But West ducked! Now I had to give up a heart and a club came back. I ducked and won the club continuation. I ran my hearts and this is the end position with one heart to cash....

Don't Listen to the Demons



So this was the position as I am about to cash the J of hearts. I have 4 hearts, 2 clubs and 1 diamond in at this point. West discarded the K of clubs. West had pitched two spades so it looked like he was down to stiff Ace on this bidding. It looked like I was cold, but playing a low spade could be risky in case West actually started with 4 spades, as this could be ducked around to East who had clubs to cash. If I played a high spade, they would get a diamond and a spade. But I listened to some damned demon who said, you are cold if you play a diamond, because East started with at least 4 diamonds and will have to split, then will will the spade and give you the last trick with a diamond. So, I played a diamond to the Ace and threw away another 10 imps. This was the full deal.

Don't Listen to the Demons

West Deals
None Vul

♠ A 10 9	♠ 8 7 5 4	♠ J 6 2
♥ 10 7	♥ 5 3 2	♥ Q 9 6
♦ K Q 6	♦ A J 10 5 4	♦ 9 7 2
♣ K 7 5 4 3	♣ 8	♣ J 10 9 6
	♠ K Q 3	
	♥ A K J 8 4	
	♦ 8 3	
	♣ A Q 2	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♦	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	Pass	Rdbl	Pass
1 ♠	Pass	Pass	3 N
All pass			

3 N by South

I was really jobbed by the bidding on this hand, as East made an SOS redouble with 3 card diamond support, and West bid a 3 card spade suit at the one level as opposed to venturing to the 2 level with his 5 card club suit. They did nothing wrong. Their bidding was actually quite prudent, and in the end position, I was 100% cold for 9 tricks by playing the K of spades, not a diamond. It was a total braincramp by me.

But I wasn't really thinking straight after this session from hell. I was now completely in need of an exorcism!

Here's what might have been. On board 1, had I endplayed my RHO into leading away from the K of clubs to make 3N, I would have won 10 imps, as 3N went down at the other table. At the other table, the bidding went On board 2, had I bid 4S, I probably would have won 11 Imps. Our teammates sacrificed in 5H and went down 1. On the hand where I held QJxx of hearts and out, the board was a push, but our bidding 5H would have probably resulted in our winning at least 8 Imps. On the penultimate board, the hand had we bid 5C, our teammates were in 4Hx down 1. We lost 2 imps. We would have won 9. And finally, on this hand, I pitched another 10 Imps. That totals a whopping 48 IMPS! We lost the set by a score of 37 to 0 and the team we lost to actually went on to finish 8th overall - making the cut by a fraction of a VP.

So, the lesson is. Don't listen to the demons! Listen to the good voices that tell you what in all likelihood is a very reasonable thing to do. The demons tell you finesses will win when you know they won't and finesses will lose when the odds favor them to be working. They'll tell you to pass when you should bid, and bid when you should pass. It's hard to filter out the angels and the demons, but that is the key difference between winning and losing at bridge.