

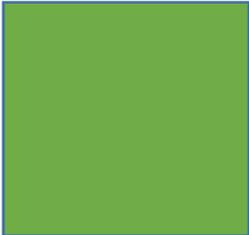
Sometimes more is Less - Norman's Notes No. 40

Big Trouble - or Escape?

The weak 1NT opening (usually 12-14 HCP) is popular, and deservedly so: it occurs frequently, is descriptive of the hand, and often has value in inhibiting opponents' bidding. But sometimes it runs into trouble when it is doubled and partner is weak. So it is important to employ a rescue system in these circumstances, and 'Houdini' and 'The Wriggle' are commonly used. I will not describe these in detail, but consider this hand:

Board 20 on June 13th

Dealer West. Both vulnerable.

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

Some Wests will open 1♦, but 1NT is a plausible alternative. North could hardly have a better double, and East? He must rescue into hearts. 'Pass' is suicidal, and this is not the time to be looking for a major suit fit, even if the system allows it. It is very likely that opener has three, or even four hearts, and a contract of two hearts (probably doubled) is almost certain to be better than 1NT doubled.

So East bids 2♥ or, preferably, the system uses transfer rescue bids. Thus:

West	North	East	South
1NT	X	2♦	Pass
2♥	??		

Even if North now passes (unlikely) South will not, and will quickly have the red card on the table. Is there - or should there be - a happy ending for East-West? Unfortunately not. Incredibly, no-trump contracts can be held to two tricks (three or four is more likely), hearts to four tricks, and if West decides to play in his 5-card diamond suit, that can be held to three tricks!

So stratospheric scores for NS? Not necessarily. One took +1400 from 3♦*-5, and one +800 from 1NT*-3. But one pair failed to double 2♥ (-4), and four North-Souths decided to play a contract themselves: 3NT+1 twice, 2NT+1 and 3♦.

Conclusions: Sometimes a 1NT bid will run into big trouble and suffer a penalty larger than any score the opponents could make in their own contract. A rescue system (which does not require a 5-card suit) will often help, but surprisingly - as here - the opponents may run to their own contract, rather than extract the larger penalty that they (should) see is available. The vulnerabilities may also be important in making decisions, although only marginally in this hand.