



BACK

Through The

PACK



JULIAN POTTAGE

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Tales of the Ace of Spades

Power and Responsibility



‘Life’s tough being an Ace,’ the Ace of Spades continued, ‘people expect so much of you.’

‘Like writing the introduction and telling the first tale,’ someone heckled.

‘I mean when you are a small card it often doesn’t matter exactly which trick you go on. As an Ace, though, you have to put in an appearance at just the right time. Take this example:

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

All the players were in the bidding, which was as follows:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
—	—	—	1 ♥
Double	Redouble	1 ♠	2 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All Pass	

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North, with the Spades well stopped, probably considered placing the contract in 3NT – but then there would have been no story.

My human led from the top of his sequence in Clubs. Declarer won in dummy and drew two rounds of trumps with the Ace and King, on which West threw a Club. East played high-low in trumps, suggesting he held a third trump – the Jack if we were to stand a chance of beating the game.

Now declarer tackled my suit, leading the Four. What did West do?

Let me tell you. He knew, from East's bid of One Spade, that the Four of Spades was a singleton and this was the last chance to win a trick with me. He also knew that playing me would set up my subordinates, the King and Queen, as winners. He therefore made the fine sacrifice of ducking.

Winning in dummy, declarer did his best to recover by cashing a second high Club and exiting with a third round, on which East threw a Diamond. My human was on lead again, with these cards remaining:

	♠ Q 6 3	
	♥ 10	
	♦ J 8 4	
	♣ —	
	N	
	W  E	
	S	
	♠ —	♠ 10 5 2
♠ A J 8		♥ J
♥ —		♦ K 7 5
♦ Q 10 6		♣ —
♣ J		
	♠ —	
	♥ 6 5 4 3	
	♦ A 9 2	
	♣ —	

Since South held the cursed Nine of Diamonds, it would be fatal to open up the Diamond suit. (I might add that we cards always refer to the cursed Nine of Diamonds, like humans refer to “the Scottish play” rather than the name Shakespeare gave it. The Shakespearian connection may also explain why one pronounces this curs-ed.) Leading a Club, thus conceding a ruff and discard, would be no better an escape for West. He did in fact lead the one card to beat the contract: me, the Ace of Spades.

Declarer could ruff and set up dummy's Queen as a winner but he had no means to reach her. He tried a low Diamond in the hope that West had the King and Queen of Diamonds. This was not to be. West ducked, which allowed East to win, cash the Jack of Hearts and return a Diamond.

I think I played rather a special role there, being of greater value as an exit card than as a winner.'

Although cards that see themselves as playing an important part in a deal like to join in the discussion, few felt bold enough to interrupt an Ace. This was why he had the floor to himself.

'I did something equally dramatic on another deal. A defender held me once more but I executed a type of play normally reserved for declarers.

My master this time was André Robison. He was East and, though he held a fair hand, he was shut out of the bidding.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
—	—	—	1 ♣
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	3 ♣
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

West led the Three of Diamonds and dummy came down:

	♠	K Q 10 8 7 6	
	♥	10 9 2	
	♦	K 2	
	♣	3 2	
	N		♠ A J 9 3
			♥ J 7 3
W	✦	E	♦ A Q 9 5
	S		♣ Q 6

Declarer played low from dummy and the Queen took the trick. Most defenders would, without giving the matter a second thought, return the Ace of Diamonds. André knew better than that. He stopped to construct some possible hands for declarer.

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♠ 2 ♥ A K 4 ♦ J 6 4 ♣ A K 10 8 7 4	♠ — ♥ A K 4 ♦ J 6 4 ♣ A K 10 8 7 5 4	♠ — ♥ A Q 4 ♦ J 6 4 ♣ A K J 9 8 7 4
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The Diamond position was clear from West's fourth-highest lead and declarer's play of a low card from dummy. South must have at least six Clubs, perhaps seven, and some useful high cards in Hearts.

Any sensible return would beat the contract if South held the first of these hands, while there was no hope if he held the second. The key case was if he held the third. On a Diamond return, declarer would make nine tricks by way of seven Clubs, one Heart and one Diamond. A Heart return might fare no better – declarer could run the lead round to dummy's Ten.

Of course, you have all guessed the answer by now. André laid down the one card sure to beat the contract if this was the layout, me, the Ace of Spades. Look at the full deal and consider declarer's options:

♠ 5 4 2 ♥ K 8 6 5 ♦ 10 8 7 3 ♣ 10 5	♠ K Q 10 8 7 6 ♥ 10 9 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ 3 2 N W E S ♠ — ♥ A Q 4 ♦ J 6 4 ♣ A K J 9 8 7 4	♠ A J 9 3 ♥ J 7 3 ♦ A Q 9 5 ♣ Q 6
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Suppose he discards his low Heart, the guard to the Ace of Hearts and his companion Queen. Then East switches to a Heart and South must finesse. West wins and returns a Heart, which East ducks. This way the defenders score two tricks in each red suit as well as my good self.

Clearly, it is no good for South to discard a Diamond, unguarding the suit. Throwing a Club is no good either. In this case, East cashes the Ace

of Diamonds and continues the suit. West is bound to make the King of Hearts and the Ten of Diamonds to bring the defensive total to five.

A squeeze on declarer is rare enough, but a squeeze on declarer at the second trick is still more unusual, isn't it, my friends?'

A deathly hush came over the Pack of Cards as the Ace of Spades sat down. The Pack, being a pack, has a clear hierarchy, one in which each member knew his or her place. Who would dare to follow this speech?

*Who would dare to follow an Ace
He is the one who sets the pace
Who would dare to challenge an Ace
He puts a King in rightful place
Who would dare to trump an Ace
He is the one who leads the race
Who would dare to duck an Ace
He is a player who's red in face*