Danger Hand

There are two common situations:

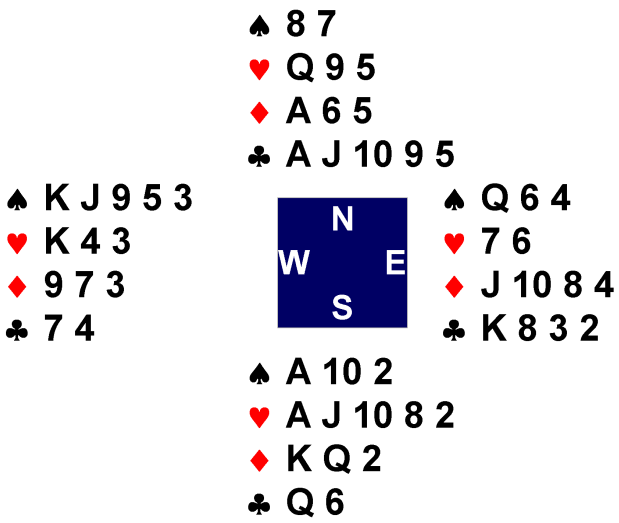
A. One player has winners established and ready to be cashed

B. You have a vulnerable honour, typically a king, they can lead through

	♠K72	If LHO leads ♠Q, you cover with ♠K & RHO wins with ♠A you will lose a lot of tricks. If, instead, RHO is on lead the ♠K will always win a trick Here we call LHO the **danger hand** and RHO the **safe hand**
♠Q		
	♠654	

AVOIDANCE PLAY is a strategy to keep the danger hand off lead

A hold-up is one of several tactics under the heading of **avoidance play.** Yes, you want to avoid going down but, more precisely, an avoidance play is a way of preventing the **danger hand** from obtaining the lead and defeating you. You may be able to establish enough tricks by allowing only the other hand, the **safe hand,** to win a trick.



♠5 is led against your 3NT to East's ♠Q. You can count 6 top tricks and can easily establish 3 more by finessing in either hearts or clubs, *even if the finesse loses,* because your intermediates are so strong. Which finesse will you take?

It looks as if ***West is the danger hand*** if he holds 5 spades.

Hold up your ♠A till the third round so that East becomes the ***safe hand,*** cut off from West's winners (or if he has a fourth spade, they take only 3 tricks in the suit).

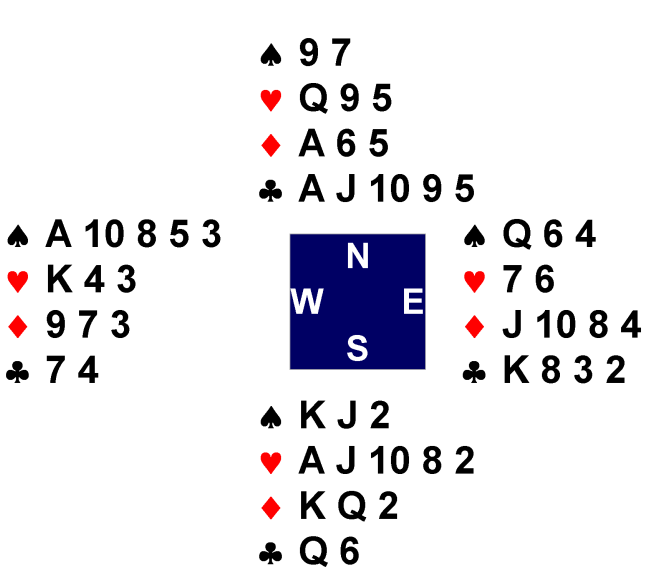
And so it is easy to choose which finesse to take. A heart finesse into the danger hand could be suicidal. You will ***finesse clubs into the safe hand,*** not even minding if it loses. And when East tries to reach his partner's hand with a heart, you don't undo your good work so far – you will refuse again to finesse into the danger hand and take your 9 tricks.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

However, if you have only one finesse to take to establish enough tricks, and it is into the danger hand, just do it. A 50% chance, remember.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

Let's change the deal a little. Still 3NT by South on ♠5 lead to East's ♠Q:



On this lead you have 1 spade trick for sure and 5 other top tricks. And the same finesse possibilities are available as before, with 4 tricks guaranteed in each even if the finesse loses.

Ask yourself: ***Who is the danger hand?*** Which opponent may be able to defeat me if he gains the lead?

You may be surprised to learn that **the danger hand is not necessarily the holder of the long suit.**

And not because he can make a dangerous shift to another suit, as we saw earlier.

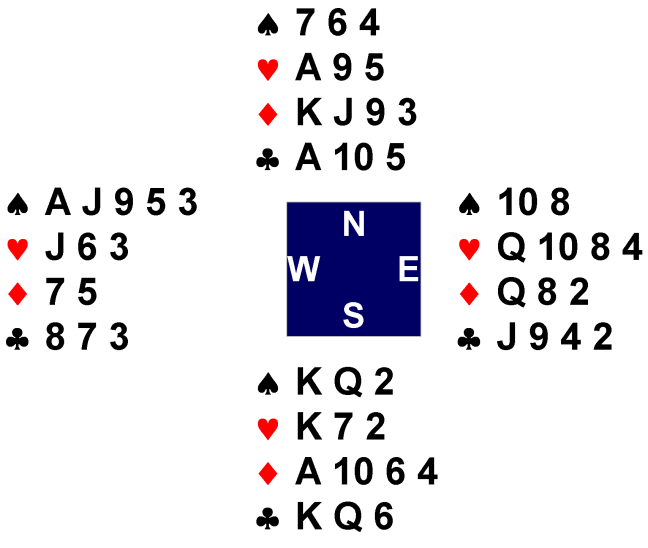
There is a different kind of danger lurking here.

If you win with the king, you will have J2 left. If *East* gets in, he will defeat you by playing a spade through you. If West gets in, he cannot continue spades without giving you a trick with your jack. Aha!

This time, ***East is the danger hand.*** And so you will cross to dummy's ♦A and take the heart finesse into West, the safe hand. And next, because you now have 9 sure tricks, you will refuse to finesse in clubs if West wins the heart and sensibly returns a club (he knows from East's play of ♠Q at trick one that you hold the jack).

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

Sometimes, even though you don't have a choice of 2 finesses, you have a **2-way finesse,** as in the following 3NT contract on ♠5 lead to East's ten:



You can always make 1 spade trick from your KQ in addition to 2 top hearts, 2 top diamonds and 3 top clubs – 8 tricks.

What about a ninth trick?

By cashing ♦AK, for example, you can promote a trick from your remaining JT – the queen may even fall doubleton as a bonus. Is that the way to go?

Or you can finesse for the queen either way – ace and low to the jack or king and low to the ten. Is it just a guess?

You need to ***consider the deal as a whole*** before you decide.

If you win the first trick, say with the queen, ***who is the danger hand?*** As in the previous deal, it is not the opening leader, presumably the one with the longer hearts, but East. If he gets in and leads through your remaining K2, you are toast.

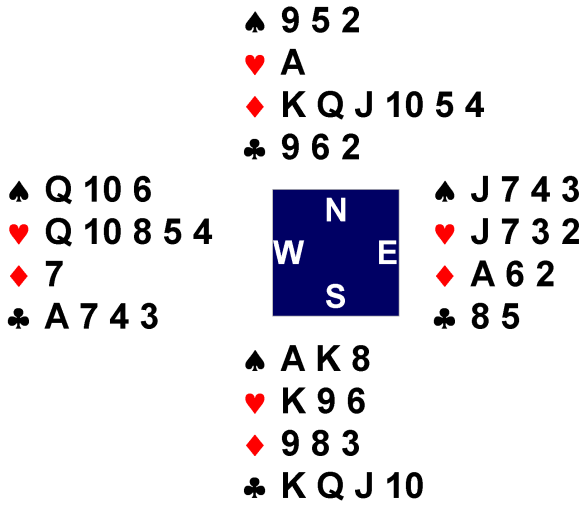
And so you play a low diamond to the king in dummy and run the jack, and then a low one if the jack wins.

The finesse works and you make 10 tricks. More importantly, you could have afforded to lose to West, the ***safe hand.*** He can't hurt you. You will make only 9 tricks unless he plays a spade, in which case you make 10. But you cannot fail.

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ ♠

Defenders too use some of the tactics available to declarer. They may employ a hold-up play to cut declarer off from her winners. What's sauce for the goose…

Consider the following contract of 3NT on ♥5 lead:



You have 4 top tricks. Your fabulous diamond suit could easily supply 5 more. The defenders can see that too. And if possible, they will try to shut you out of dummy, which no longer has an outside entry after the heart lead. And they can if they are able to hold up ♦A until you play your last one.

You hope they can't, that their ace is singleton or doubleton. You play ♦K. It wins. Then ♦Q. When it also wins, you know ***dummy is now dead.***

What next? All is not lost. Luckily you have a secret weapon – your club holding. Switch to a club and you will make 3 club tricks, 2 diamonds, 2 hearts and 2 spades.

Summary - So, as part of your planning the play of your hand, think about whether defenders are safe or dangerous to your other suits.

Suggested Videos: Link here (<5 mins)
Link here P Hollands

Bridge-Training Links

Practice these hands online

Hand 1 Hand 2 Hand 3 Hand 4 Hand 5 Hand 6
Hand 7 Hand 8 Hand 9 Hand 10 Hand 11 Hand 12

We thank Tina Zines for use of her material

EXTRA EXAMPLES

1. Contract is 3NT by South - Lead ♠K by West **(ready to cash winners)**

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

Winners: 1♠ 2♥ 2♦ 3♣ = 8. Look to diamonds for extras

Hold up ♠A until the third round by which time all of East's ♠s will be gone. West is now the danger hand with two winning ♠s. Therefore, the ♦s should be finessed towards East. Play ♦2 to the ♦10. East cannot damage you

2. Contract is 3NT by South - Lead ♠5 by West **(vulnerable honour)**

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

Winners: 3♠ 0♥ 2♦ 3♣ = 8. Look diamonds for extras

♥s is the danger suit. If East leads a ♥ and West has ♥A defence will take at least four ♥ tricks. So, East is the danger hand and the ♦ finesse should be taken towards West. Win the first trick with ♠A. Play ♦10 and let it run. If the finesse loses, no harm is done. A ♥ lead from West will make ♥K a winner.

3. Contract is 3NT by South - Lead ♠5 by West, East plays ♠Q **(opening lead creates danger)**

North	South
♠ 9 6	♠ K J 2
♥ 8 5 3	♥ A Q J T
♦ K Q 9	♦ A 6 2
♣ A K T 8 3	♣ J 9 3

Winners: 0♠ 1♥ 3♦ 2♣ = 6.

The opening lead provides a ♠ winner but now ♠J is vulnerable. You could finesse in ♥s or ♣s but East is now the danger hand - can lead through the ♠J . So, it's best to finesse ♥s towards West and repeat if successful

4. Contract is 3NT by South - Lead ♠5 by West (**lose to safe hand last)**

North	South
♠ K 6	♠ A 8 2
♥ Q J 5 3	♥ K T 9
♦ A 9 6 2	♦ Q J T 5
♣ A 5 4	♣ K T 9

Winners: 2♠ 0♥ 1♦ 2♣ = 5. Work on ♥s and ♦s

The danger suit is ♠s. Duck the first ♠ and win the second round. The plan should be to lose to East when East has no more ♠s. Either defender can have the ♥A but we can play ♦s so that only East can win a ♦. If ♦s are played first and the finesse loses, East will play another ♠. If West then happens to have the ♥A, the contract will go down. Therefore, work on ♥s first. When either defender takes their ♥A, they will play a third ♠. But now, East will have no ♠s left so ♦s can be finessed into the safe hand.

Quizzes https://forms.gle/wL49xoCkhYdo5RH28

1. In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT

DUMMY
♠ 87
♥ Q95
♦ A65
♣ AJT95

YOU
♠ AT2
♥ AJT82
♦ KQ2
♣ Q5

3NT on ♠5 lead to East's ♠Q.
Number of top tricks? Number needed?
Possible source/s?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Top tricks: 1♠ 1♥ 3♦ 1♣ = 6; **How many more needed?** 3
Danger Hand: West as may have 5 ♠s
Plan: Hold up twice, win the third round & then finesse ♣s into East - lead ♣Q & let it run. If it loses East has no more ♠s but we've promoted 4 ♣ tricks; if it wins repeat the finesse

2. In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT

DUMMY
♠ 97
♥ Q95
♦ A65
♣ AJT95

YOU
♠ KJ2
♥ AJT82
♦ KQ2
♣ Q6

Same contract on ♠5 lead to East's ♠Q.
Number of top tricks? Number needed?
Possible source/s?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Top tricks: 0♠ 1♥ 3♦ 1♣ = 5; **How many more needed?** 4
Danger Hand: East as can lead through South's ♠s to West's ♠A
Plan: Win first trick with ♠K. The remaining ♠J2 are a stopper providing the lead comes from West, so we finesse ♥s into West - lead ♥Q & let it run. If it loses West cannot damage us in ♠s & we now have 4 ♥ winners

3. In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT

DUMMY
♠ 764
♥ A95
♦ KJ93
♣ AT5

YOU
♠ KQ2
♥ K72
♦ AT64
♣ KQ6

And again the same questions after♠ 5 lead to East's Ten.
Number of top tricks? Number needed?
Possible source/s?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Top tricks: 0♠ 2♥ 2♦ 3♣ = 7; **How many more needed?** 2
Danger Hand: West as may have 5 ♠s
Plan: Hold up first round. If West has 5 ♠s then East only has 2 ♠s. When we win ♠ trick we finesse ♦s into East who cannot return a ♠. If the ♠ split is 4:3 we will only lose 3 ♠s & possible a ♦

4. In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 4♠ after West made a weak jump overcall of 2♥

DUMMY
♠ A854
♥ 753
♦ AQJT
♣ 53

YOU
♠ K763
♥ A64
♦ 53
♣ AQJT

Lead: ♥K
Number of losers?
Ways of reducing losers?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Losers: 1♠ 2♥ 1♦ 1♣ = 5
Danger Hand: West has 6 good ♥s & E/W have 2 ♥ winners set up, after you've played your ♥A, if they get the lead.
Plan: We can reduce losers by finessing in either ♦s or ♣s. If we win the first ♥ trick East will have no ♥s left. So the plan should be win the first trick, draw 2 rounds of trumps & then finesse ♦s into East

5. In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT after West made a ♥ overcall indicating 5+ ♥s

DUMMY
♠ KQ93
♥ 64
♦ AQJT5
♣ 53

YOU
♠ AJ7
♥ KQ4
♦ 53
♣ AQJT5

Lead: ♥7
Number of top tricks? Number needed?
Possible source/s?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Winners: 4♠ 0♥ 1♦ 1♣ = 6 with 4+ extras available from ♦s or ♣s
Danger Hand: East as can lead through our ♥s & so we would have only one ♥ stopper
Plan: We can win the first trick with ♥K and, as long as the lead is in West, our remaining ♥Q2 are a stopper. So win the first trick, cross to dummy using ♠s, & finesse ♣s

6. In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT after West made an overcall indicating both majors.

DUMMY
♠ KQ93
♥ 64
♦ AQJT5
♣ 53

YOU
♠ AQ7
♥ K75
♦ 53
♣ AQJT5

Lead: ♠10
Number of top tricks?
Possible source/s?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Winners: 4♠ 0♥ 1♦ 1♣ = 6 with extras available from ♦s & ♣s
Danger Hand: East as can lead through our ♥s
Plan: West likely has a good ♥ suit & so we want to avoid East gaining the lead. We win the lead & finesse in ♣s

7. In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT after West leads ♠6 & East plays ♠Q.

DUMMY
♠ 73
♥ A83
♦ QJT9
♣ KQ2

YOU
♠ AJ2
♥ K62
♦ A653
♣ A75

Lead: ♠6
Number of top tricks?
Possible source/s?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Winners: 1♠ 2♥ 1♦ 3♣ = 7 need to make extras from ♦s
Danger Hand: West as likely has good ♠s
Plan: Suppose you hold-up your ♠A until the **third** round. You need tricks from ♦s and you must finesse through East. If the finesse fails West will take his ♠ winners.

Suppose you take your ♠A at trick **one**. You need tricks from ♦s and you must finesse through East. If the finesse fails West will not be able to lead ♠s without setting up your ♠J.

8. In the following DUMMY is North and YOU are South playing in 3NT after West leads ♠6 & East plays ♠Q.

DUMMY
♠ 73
♥ A83
♦ A653
♣ KQ2

YOU
♠ AJ2
♥ K62
♦ QJT9
♣ A75

Lead: ♠6
Number of top tricks?
Possible source/s?
Which hand is likely to be the danger hand?
How will you proceed?

Winners: 1♠ 2♥ 1♦ 3♣ = 7 need to promote ♦s
Danger Hand: East as can lead through your ♠s
Plan: Suppose you take your ♠A at trick **one**. You need tricks from ♦s and you must finesse through West (eg lead ♦Q and let it run unless West plays ♦K). If the finesse fails East will lead a ♠ through your ♠J 2 and West will win their ♠s

Suppose you hold-up your ♠A until the **third** round. If the ♦s finesse fails East will be unable to return a ♠ to his partner (unless split 4-4)