

# Bridge

## Janet de Botton

Ye Gods! 'Tis the season to be merry has become 'tis the season to be totally paranoid.

Ever since I wrote about the world's most irritating player, an orderly queue has formed of anxious chappies, hands wringing, furry brows knitted, all with one urgent question on their dry lips: 'Is it me???' 'For heaven's sake, lads,' I want to scream. 'Do YOU think it's you?' For all those who have asked me, I wish to state, in print, here and now, NO, it is not you!

A smidgen of paranoia never hurts when playing a hand. Take a look at this one that came up recently at rubber bridge, and if you fancy, cover the E/W hands and decide how you play at trick two:

Dealer East

N/S vulnerable

|            |  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|------------|--|---------|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|-------|
|            | ♠ J 10 8 3   |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|            | ♥ 9 7 3  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|            | ♦ A Q 4  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|            | ♣ A 7 5  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
| ♠ 4        | <table border="1"><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 |  | ♠ 9 5 |
|            |  | N       |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
| W          |  |         | E |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|            |  | S       |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
| ♥ A Q J 4  |  | ♥ 6 5 2 |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
| ♦ K J 10 7 | ♦ 8 6 3 2  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
| ♣ Q 10 8 3 | ♣ K 9 4 2  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|            | ♠ A K Q 7 6 2  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|            | ♥ K 10 8   |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|            | ♦ 9 5  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |
|            | ♣ J 6  |         |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |       |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       | Pass | 1♠    |
| X    | 2NT   | pass | 4♠    |
| Pass | pass  | pass |       |

West led the ♦J and dummy's Queen held the trick. Apart from regretting you didn't bid 3NT, what do you do now?

It looks like you have an easy journey if East has either the Jack or Queen of hearts, but paranoia set's in and you decide to see what you can do if West has all three heart honours. Although the right play is perfectly logical, not many would make it, and you can allow yourself an extra mini mince pie if you found it. At trick two declarer played a small diamond to his 9!

West shifted to a club but it was too late. The Ace was won, a club was discarded on the ♦A and a club ruffed. A trump to dummy for another club ruff and another trump to dummy completed the elimination. Now a heart to the eight finished West off!

How irritating for poor West!

Merry Christmas, everyone, and play well in the New Year.