

Playing with Robots

Part XXXVI

By pluckycat

Merry Christmas!!! This week, I will only be analyzing two hands. These may seem paltry gifts on Christmas Day, but trust me, they are GRAND and no lump of coal. But in return, I would really like a small gift from you. Over the course of nine months, I have heard from more than a dozen of you. I would love to hear from more of you. So please write a chat to me, pluckycat, on BBO in the next few days. It need not be lengthy, but send suggestions, praise, criticism, or whatever comments you think appropriate, but do let me hear from you. It's the best gift a writer can receive. Thank you.

In the first hand, as South, you pick up a powerhouse: ♠K10 ♥AKJ10984 ♦A ♣AJ3.
Nonvulnerable against vulnerable, as dealer, what do you open?

I don't think I had much choice here. This was a 2♣ opener if ever I saw one. Sugar plums were dancing in my head as I needed very little from partner for slam. I heard a 2NT response. That bid told me it had a balanced hand and 8+ HCP. I bid 3♥ and now my mechanical partner leapt to 6N, telling me it had a balanced hand with 9+HCP.

What would you do next?

As I said repeatedly last week, I'm a big believer in bidding them up in robot IMP play. I stretch for games and slams with good results. I don't always succeed, but the outsized rewards for a game or a slam seem to me to justify the risks. I bid 7NT thinking there should be a good play for it. That is not the thinking you're told to have when bidding grand slams (you're supposed to be able to visualize 13 tricks when you bid grand slams), but this is robot IMP play and fortune does favor the brave.

I receive the ♣K lead from East and my bot, as declarer, puts down ♠AJ62 ♥Q2 ♦K105 ♣9842. Plan the play. How are you going to make 13 tricks?


I can count 12 tricks. Two spades, seven hearts, 2 diamonds and a club. How am I going to get the 13th? Well, maybe the ♦QJ will fall doubleton. Really, really unlikely, but I can see if that happens along the way. I seem to have a two-way finesse in spades and, if I guess right, I'll make the grand slam. But wait, is it really a two-way finesse? Upon further analysis, I see that I have limited entries to my hand and, if I finesse the ♠10, I have no way of getting back to my hand. So, it's a one-way finesse. Should I take it immediately?

My, by now considerable, experience in playing with robots teaches me that if I'm being steered toward a finesse, I should look long and hard for another play. Sure enough, there is one.

The ♣K lead tells me East started with ♣KQ. If it also has the ♠Q, it will be squeezed. A most fitting way to make the grand slam.

It's an easy squeeze to execute. I take the ♣A, cash my ♦A, go to my hand to with ♥Q, cash the ♦K and go back to the board to run the hearts. On the play of the last heart, hopefully East is squeezed. East pitches a spade on the last heart. In dummy, I now have ♠K10 and ♣J. In my hand, I have ♠AJ6. As long as the ♣Q has not appeared, I am committed to the squeeze, even though West follows with a second spade when I cash the ♠K and play the ♠10 to my ♠A. I still have the option of a finesse for my 13th trick, but I eschew it. Deck the halls with boughs of holly, tra la la la la—the ♠Q appears from East under my ♠A!! I pick up 13 IMPs on the hand. Most are in 6NT making six.

The full deal:

	N North	W N E S
	♠ AJ62 ♥ Q2 ♦ K105 ♣ 9842	P 2NT P P 6NT P P P P
W West		E East
♠ 98 ♥ 765 ♦ QJ9873 ♣ 76		♠ Q7543 ♥ 3 ♦ 642 ♣ KQ105
	S South	
	♠ K10 ♥ AKJ10984 ♦ A ♣ AJ3	7NT N NS: 0 EW: 0

Now, as dealer, both vulnerable, you pick up ♠AKQ104 ♥A ♦QJ973 ♣Q4.

I opened 1♠. My bot bid 2♦. I responded with 3♦. It now bid 4♣, which is a cue bid showing the ♣A, 15+ total points. When my bot started cue bidding, I knew that slam was more than a possibility; it was a probability. I cuebid 4♥. My bot bid RKC blackwood in diamonds and I responded 5♠ with my two Aces and the ♦Q.

It now bid 5NT asking about Kings. I couldn't have had a better hand for it. No point, I feel, to bidding 6♠; I don't want to be in 6NT. Again, I bid them up and bid 7♦. Only myself and one other person among the 15 players in this Instant IMP game bid 7♦. Most were in 6NT. One intrepid soul bid to 7NT and went down. Only of one us who bid 7♦ made it. Will you join me? 28 IMPs hang in the balance. If you succeed, you gain 15 IMPs. Go down and you are -13 IMPs.

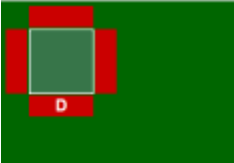
You receive the ♥3 lead. Your bot, as declarer, puts down ♠96 ♥QJ75 ♦AK104 ♣AJ5. Plan the play.

You have 5 diamond tricks and 5 spade tricks if the ♠J is no worse than tripleton. The ♥A and the ♣A make 12. Where are you going to get your 13th trick? Again, there are options. You could take the ruffing finesse in hearts or take the club finesse. I've learned—and the previous hand is a good example of it—that obvious options don't work unless they're the only option.

So, what other option did you come up with?

If the ♠J does fall under the ♠AKQ, you will have three discards on spades. If the outstanding trump are no worse than 3-1, the grand slam is guaranteed. In order, you score the ♥A, three diamonds when drawing trump, five spades from dummy (the ♠J does fall as hoped) discarding two clubs and a heart, then ♣A, heart ruff, club ruff and, to the sound of jingle bells pealing, heart ruff for the 13th trick.

The full deal:

		N Robot ♠ 96 ♥ QJ75 ♦ AK104 ♣ AJ5	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>W</th> <th>N</th> <th>E</th> <th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>2♦</td> <td>P</td> <td>1♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>4♣</td> <td>P</td> <td>3♦</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>4NT</td> <td>P</td> <td>4♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>5NT</td> <td>P</td> <td>5♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>7♣</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	W	N	E	S	P	2♦	P	1♠	P	4♣	P	3♦	P	4NT	P	4♥	P	5NT	P	5♠				7♣
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W Robot ♠ J85 ♥ K1092 ♦ 5 ♣ 107632		E Robot ♠ 732 ♥ 8643 ♦ 862 ♣ K98																									
	S pluckycat ♠ AKQ104 ♥ A ♦ QJ973 ♣ Q4		7♦ N NS: 0 EW: 0																								

Weren't the hands indeed GRAND!

This Sunday afternoon will give you another opportunity to match wits with robots (and their human partners). Be sure to join the fun.

Hope you enjoy the happiest of holiday seasons and the healthiest of new years. And do write.