



Hypnosis by Stationary Cards, not Swaying Objects

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	North	
	♠AK83	
	♥A	
	♦965	
	♣QJ1063	
West		East
♠J972		♠Q106
♥K5		♥Q972
♦J843		♦A72
♣A72		♣K94
	South	
	♠54	
	♥J108643	
	♦KQ10	
	♣85	

North	East	South	West
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening Lead: ♦3

Some card combinations seem to have an inherently deceptive quality about them, in that they are much more often misplayed than correctly played. One such combination is the heart suit shown above.

When this hand took place in a teams match, both declarers went down. Each won the second round of diamonds, unblocked the trump ace (no king, queen or nine appearing) returned to hand in diamonds and laid down the ♥J straight into West's now unguarded ♥K, creating three trump losers for declarer where there should have been only two.

It's easy to work out why the correct play is a small trump at trick five. Nothing matters if the ♥KQ9x or ♥KQ9xx are in one hand, or if the trumps were divided 3-3 to begin with. The only relevant original holdings are ♥Kx, ♥Qx, or ♥9x.

The immediate play of the ♥J caters only to the third holding (♥9x), whereas the correct play of a small heart handles both the first and second options (♥Kx or ♥Qx) since the three options are equally likely.

The difficulty is probably psychological, rather than technical. It just seems so humiliating to lose to a lowly nine on the second round with jack and ten still in hand. But, really, is that worse than losing to a nine on the fourth round on twice as many occasions?

A closely related combination is 1097xxx opposite singleton king. After the king loses to the ace without the queen, jack or eight appearing, lead small next – not the ten.

In general, when you encounter an unfamiliar combination, try to work out the best play from first principles. You'll usually be able to do so in a reasonable amount of time. However, always be ready to modify abstract conclusions to suit the settings in which the combination actually occurs. That is to say, the bidding and early defense frequently alter the initial, often proper, line of play.