


A close-up photograph of several playing cards. The Ace of Spades is the central focus, showing its large 'A' and spade symbol. To its left, the Ace of Hearts is partially visible, and below it, the Ace of Clubs is also partially visible. The cards are slightly overlapping and the lighting is soft.

5th EDITION

**ROMAN
KEYCARD
BLACKWOOD**

THE FINAL WORD

EDDIE KANTAR



MASTER POINT PRESS
TORONTO • ONTARIO

ROMAN KEYCARD BLACKWOOD

THE FINAL WORD

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I also want to thank Linda Lee, Ron Bishop, and Roy Hughes for helpful suggestions.

And I mustn't forget my wife, Yvonne, who went over every chapter organizing the headings, forcing me to shorten sentences that never ended, and ended by asking me intelligent keycard questions. We already play some of this stuff, and now maybe we can play a little more! Who would have thunk it? I just read this to her and her comment was, "Thunk", after all of my corrections?

Finally, I must tell you that Howie Weinstein, a world-class player, has moved to Los Angeles. Sort of. He lives here six months a year and happens to be a very good table tennis player so we often play... and discuss bridge during the timeouts. Naturally, I run my keycard ideas by him to see what he thinks. He has a practical approach to the game and agreed that many of the ideas were sound, but feared there could be a memory overload with a few of them. I took this into consideration. Idly, I asked him how many pages of notes he and his partner, Steve Garner, have. He said they used to have 200, but it now logs in at 350!

Eddie Kantar

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

It's been four years since the last edition of this book saw the light of day. Things have changed. Many more partnerships are playing RKB (Roman Keycard Blackwood) and I've noticed, happily, that many more strong partnerships throughout the world now use 1430 responses to keycard asks as opposed to 3014 responses. But I'm still not satisfied. I still think the optimum way to use this convention is to use both sets of responses. In fact, I'm sure of it. Knowing when an RKB ask requires 1430 as opposed to 3014 responses is basically a no-brainer as you will see in the first chapter. Once you start using both sets of responses, you'll see how much easier slam bidding can be.

So how is this edition different from the last? The asks have been simplified so that now even I can remember them! When one starts changing things to improve or even simplify, sometimes it's tough to remember the 'latest' changes. I'm sure you've been there!

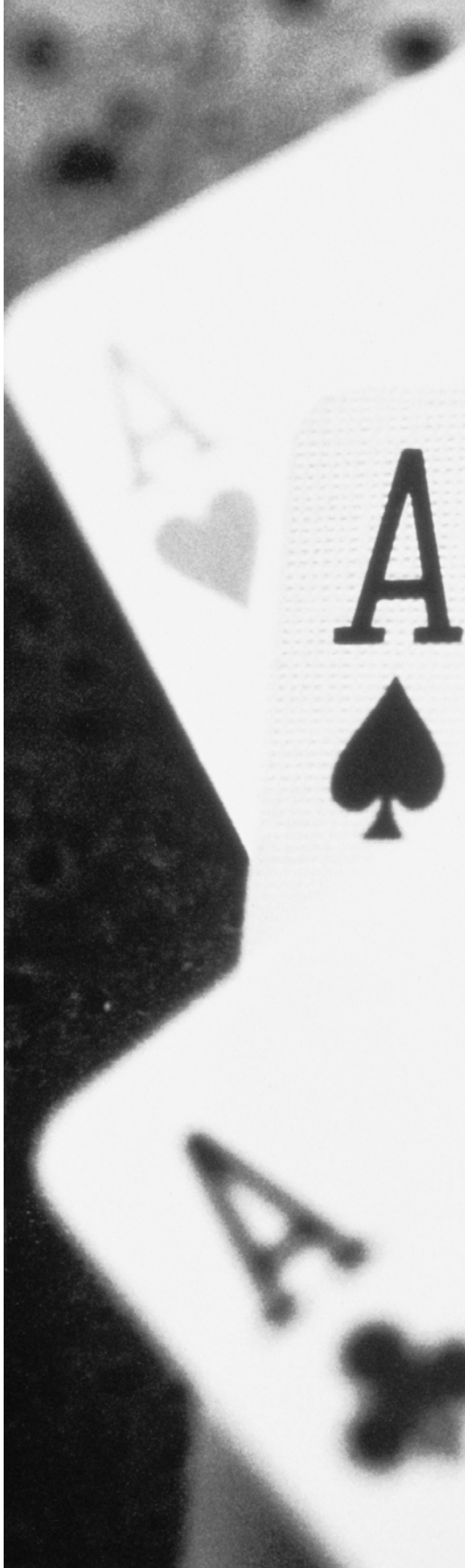
New example hands abound and some of the old ones now feature a slightly different bidding approach. (I hate to get to the wrong contract in consecutive editions!)

Clearly, the second half of the book dealing with RKB asks after minor-suit agreement requires a certain amount of expertise. When you start flirting with keycard asks that start as low as 4♣ or 4♦, and could be 4♥ or 4♠, you and your partner must be in sync. The good news is that 4♣ and 4♦ dominate minor-suit keycard asks and give you more bidding space for further asks. Our formerly beloved 4NT is now demoted mainly to major-suit agreement auctions.

So how can you best use this book? If you don't have a regular partner, you can't; don't even try. You can learn the asks and responses backwards and forwards, but if your partner isn't secure with them, multiple disasters are in your future. Let's assume you have a willing and expert or near-expert partner, what should you do? You should each have a copy of the book and a red pencil. You want to underline the agreements that you decide to play. Nobody is going to want to play everything suggested here. In fact, if you play half of what is suggested, I will be flattered. The idea is to pick and choose and use what blends in with your methods. As is mentioned in the book, 'Even a bad agreement is better than no agreement'. Much better.

I feel much more confident about slam bidding after having written this book, and I hope you will as well. Keycard comments and questions (easy ones that I can answer) can be sent to me at kantarbridge@gmail.com.

Eddie Kantar



THE BASICS

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

TWICE THE FUN — TWO KEYCARD ASKS!

You and your partner have agreed upon a trump suit and someone wants to ask for aces. Not just aces any more! From now on you will be asking for *keycards*. What is a keycard? The four aces and the king of the agreed suit are keycards. Suddenly there are *five* keycards. And let's not forget the queen of the agreed suit, but we'll save that for the next chapter.

Now that you have five keycards to deal with, how do you answer a Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKB) ask? Assume that the ask is 4NT, which is what it will be after major-suit agreement. After minor-suit agreement, you don't want to know what the ask is just yet.

Throughout this book we will be using two sets of responses to an RKB ask: 1430 and 3014. There is good reason to do this, as you will see.

RESPONSES TO A 1430 ASK

These are the responses you will be using most of the time. Think 'fourteen-thirty'.

- 5♣, the first step = 1 or 4 (the 'fourteen')
- 5♦, the second step = 3 or 0 (the 'thirty')
- 5♥, the third step = 2 (or 5) without the queen of the agreed suit
- 5♠, the fourth step = 2 (or 5) with the queen of the agreed suit.

Note: If you have '2' keycards without the queen, but know that your side has a ten-card trump fit, respond 5♠, telling partner you have the queen. If partner has the queen, partner won't think you are lying, but rather that you know of a ten-card trump fit.

RESPONSES TO A 3014 ASK

These are the responses you will be using after you, the opener, have shown a strong hand and partner asks *you* for keycards. Think ‘thirty-fourteen’.

- 5♣ = 3 or 0 (the ‘thirty’)
- 5♦ = 1 or 4 (the ‘fourteen’)
- 5♥ = 2 (or 5) without the queen of the agreed suit.
- 5♠ = 2 (or 5) with the queen of the agreed suit.

As you can see, the 5♥ and 5♠ responses are the same, but the 5♣ and 5♦ responses are interchanged. So what’s the big deal? The quick answer is that using both asks increases the number of 5♣ responses, responses which *greatly* simplify further asks, particularly the queen-ask.

Note: A ‘5’ keycard response (meaning the asker didn’t have a single keycard!) is so rare that it will not be included in any further listing. Also ‘2’ without the queen or ‘2’ with the queen will be referred to as ‘2 without’ or ‘2 with’.

When responder bids 5♣ or 5♦, there is some ambiguity in the answer. However, the alternative keycard holdings for each of these responses differ by 3. It is assumed that a player of your caliber will know from the bidding which number partner has. If your partner has trouble differentiating, gin rummy is a viable option.

1430 OR 3014?

OK, let’s say there has been suit agreement and you decide to ask for keycards via 4NT. How do you know which ask you are making? And equally important, how does partner know which set of responses to use?

There are two rules which determine which ask it is:

- (1) When the *opener* asks, it is always a 1430 ask. Is that easy enough?
- (2) When the *responder* asks, it is also a 1430 ask most of the time. Only if opener has shown ‘*extras*’ does it morph into a 3014 ask, an ask that generates many 5♣ responses.

The following bids indicate that the opener has shown extras:

- a. Any opening bid that immediately shows extra strength such as 1♣ or 2♣, artificial and strong, an opening bid of 1NT (15-17 or stronger), or a natural 2NT opening bid.
- b. A jump shift, a jump raise, a splinter jump, a jump in the original suit, a jump in notrump or bidding two suits and then making a third-round jump. ‘Fast arrival’ jumps are not included in this category.
- c. A reverse after a *one-level* response.

Your entire bridge life you have played these bids as showing extras, so there is nothing new here. If the opener doesn't make any of the listed opening bids or rebids, the opener is considered to have a minimum opening bid and responds 1430 to an RKB ask.

EXTRAS OR NO EXTRAS?

Inevitably sequences may pop up that a pair might wish to add to their extras list. Go for it! Here are a few teasers:

Opener	Responder
1♥	2♦
2♠/3♣	3♠
4♠	4NT?

Is opener showing extras by bidding 3♣ (called a 'high reverse' by some) after a *two-level* response, particularly after a game-forcing two-level response? If the answer is an *unqualified* yes, 4NT is a 3014 ask. If the answer is 'it may not', then 4NT is a 1430 ask.

In a similar vein:

Opener	Responder
1♠	2NT (Jacoby)
3NT/4♣/4♦	4NT?

Is opener showing extras after any of these rebids? If the answer is 'yes', 4NT is a 3014 ask. If the answer is 'maybe not', then 4NT is a 1430 ask.

When the opener asks (always 1430), the assumption is that the *opener has a decent hand* and *rarely, very rarely*, will have fewer than two keycards. Therefore, a 5♣ response to a 1430 ask, showing '1' or '4', will show '1' 98% of the time. (If opener does ask with '1', opener must have the agreed suit queen as well.)

What about when the responder asks and gets a 5♣ response to a 3014 ask? A 3014 ask means a strong hand is being asked, so clearly '3', not 'zero' keycards are being shown. Similarly when the response is 5♦, '4' is light years more likely than '1'.

WHEN OPENER DOES THE ASKING (THINK 1430)

Opener	Responder
1♥	2♣
2♥	3♠
4NT?	

3♠ is a splinter and 4NT is RKB, hearts agreed. Since opener is asking it is *automatically* a 1430 ask.

Opener	Responder
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♠	3 ♠
4 ♣	4 ♦
4NT?	

Same story. Opener is asking, so it is a 1430 ask. Had responder asked, it would be 3014 because opener has jumped.

Is it even possible for opener to make a 3014 ask? Yes. If responder makes a strong jump shift and opener winds up asking for keycards. Do not hold your breath waiting for this to happen. Think 1430 when opener asks.

WHEN RESPONDER ASKS FOR KEYCARDS

When responder asks for keycards after opener has shown extras (see list of extras on page 5), it is a 3014 ask. If opener has not shown extras, it is a 1430 ask.

Let's practice. This is not difficult!

Opener	Responder
1 ♦	1 ♥
2 ♥	4NT?

Opener has not shown extras by jumping or making a strength-showing reverse, so it is a 1430 ask. However, if opener had jumped to 3 ♥ or 4 ♥ and responder had bid 4NT, then it would have been a 3014 ask.

Opener	Responder
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♦	3 ♥
4 ♥	4NT?

Opener has reversed after a *one-level* response showing extras, so it is a 3014 ask.

Opener	Responder
1 ♠	2 ♣
2 ♠	3 ♦
4 ♠	4NT?

This is a 1430 ask. In order for a *third-round* jump to generate a 3014 ask, opener must have bid *two* suits prior to the jump, not the same one.

Opener	Responder
1 ♣	1 ♦
1 ♥	1 ♠
3 ♠	4NT?

3014. Opener has bid two suits and then jumped.

Opener	Responder	
1NT	2♦ ¹	
2♥	3♣ ²	1. Transfer.
3♥	4NT?	2. Clubs.

After an opening bid of 1NT or 2NT, strong, any keycard ask by the responder is a 3014 ask. You might be thinking that maybe the responder has an even stronger hand than the opener. Once in a while that is actually the case. However, when a great hand asks a very strong hand, how bad can that be no matter which set of responses you are using?

TWO THIRTEEN-CARD HANDS, FINALLY!

Opener	Responder	
♠ K Q 5	♠ A J 7 4 3	
♥ A K 8 6 3	♥ 5 4	
♦ 4 2	♦ K Q J 6 3	
♣ Q 8 4	♣ A	
1♥	1♠	1. RKB (1430): Opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
2♠	4NT ¹	2. '2 with'.
5♠ ²	6♠ ³	3. One keycard missing.
pass		

NOT EVERY HAND IS A SLAM!

Opener	Responder	
♠ J 9 4 2	♠ Q 10 8 7 6	
♥ A K Q	♥ 6	
♦ A Q J 4	♦ K 10 9	
♣ Q 5	♣ A K J 7	
1♦	1♠	1. RKB (3014): Opener has jumped.
4♠	4NT ¹	2. '2 without'.
5♥ ²	5♠ ³	3. Two keycards missing.
pass		

This hand illustrates the advantage of counting the ♠K as a keycard. It allows the asker to know that two of the five keycards are missing, the signal to stay out of slam!

TAKEOUT DOUBLES FOLLOWED BY AN RKB ASK

If the takeout doubler makes a keycard ask, it is a 1430 ask. If the partner of the doubler asks for keycards, it is a 3014 ask.

AN OVERCALL FOLLOWED BY AN RKB ASK

If an overcall is followed by a keycard ask, it is a 1430 ask, period.

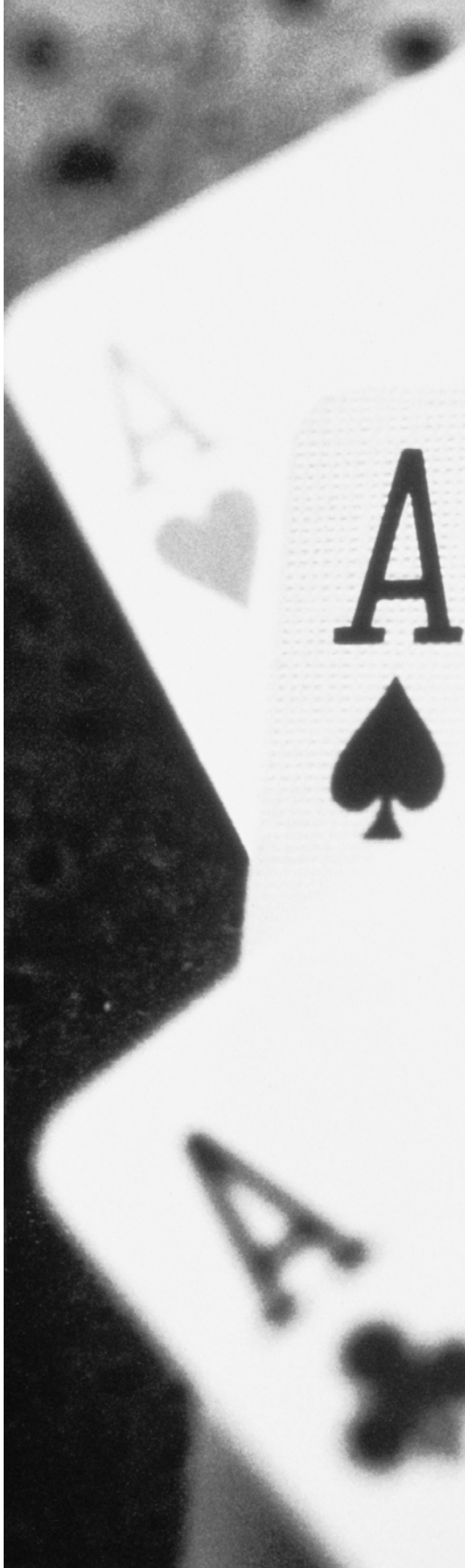
THE BOTTOM LINE

Is it really worth all of this trouble to save one tiny step? Yes! You will see how important that one tiny step can be in future chapters. It is an important key to better slam bidding. You can handle it!

Assuming you are willing to try two sets of asks and responses, maximizing your chances for a 5♣ response, this is what you have to remember:

1. If opener asks, it is a 1430 ask and normally shows at least two keycards. Making a 1430 ask holding only one keycard is a major exception. To justify such a weak ask, the asker must have the queen of the agreed suit, a distributional hand, and be a glib talker in the post-mortem.
2. A 5♣ response to a 1430 ask shows '1' or '4'. The asker assumes '1' and bids accordingly.
3. If responder asks, it is also a 1430 ask, unless the opener has shown 'extras' in which case it is a 3014 ask.
4. A 5♣ response to a 3014 ask shows '3' or '0' and a 5♦ response shows '1' or '4'. Bet the family jewels on the larger number.

Using this method, 1430 asks come up more often than 3014 asks and 5♣ responses come up more often than 5♦ responses. After you see the myriad of examples throughout this book, you will have no trouble playing both 1430 and 3014 asks and responses.



MAJOR- SUIT AUCTIONS

PART TWO

CHAPTER 2

THE TRUMP QUEEN-ASK

Suppose after major-suit agreement you decide to ask partner for keycards via 4NT and find you are missing *two* keycards. You sign off at the five-level and hope you can make it.

Say you ask partner for keycards and find you are missing *one* keycard. If you have the queen of the agreed suit, you bid slam. If you don't, you ask partner for the queen. If partner has it, you bid slam. If partner doesn't have it, you sign off at the five-level — unless you are willing to gamble on bidding a slam missing the queen plus an ace. (Check out the upcoming percentage table to see what your chances are.)

Note: With a known ten-card trump fit including the ace-king, assume no losers in the trump suit, queen or no queen.

Say you ask partner for keycards and find you have them all. If you are missing the queen, you can't consider bidding a grand until you find out if partner has the queen. If partner doesn't have it (nuts!), you settle for a small slam. If partner has it, there may well be a grand slam in your future. Obviously, the queen of the agreed suit is a *big, big* card.

A *huge* part of this book deals with how to decide whether to bid six or seven when you have all the keycards plus the queen of the agreed suit (or a ten-card fit without the queen). Equally important, is when to bid, and when to stay out of a slam missing the queen plus an ace.

First, the numbers (your chance of not losing a trump trick) when you are missing the queen with a *nine*-card fit.

AKxxx	facing	xxxx	40%	(No queen, no jack.)
AKxxx	facing	Jxxx	53%	(No queen, but jack.)
AKJxx	facing	xxxx	53+%	(No queen, but jack.) Gives you a finesse option.

AKJ10x facing xxxx 58% (AKJ10 in one hand or the AKJ109 are held jointly.) Now you can handle some 4-0 breaks.

To bring in an *eight*-card fit without the queen for no losers is pretty dicey. Unless you are looking at the J10, it is probably best to forget it.

With these percentages in mind, you might intelligently decide to bid a slightly iffy slam: perhaps, late in a team match when your team is trailing, or in tournament play you feel you need to go against the odds to get a top board.

WHAT IS THE QUEEN-ASK?

The queen-ask, if needed, follows a 5♣ or 5♦ response to RKB. (After a 5♥ or 5♠ response, the queen situation has been clarified.)

After a 5♣ response, a follow-up bid of 5♦ is the queen-ask, hearts or spades agreed.

After a 5♦ response, a follow-up bid of 5♥ is the queen-ask, hearts or spades agreed. In other words, there are only two queen-asks. In this chapter, we are concerned with the possible responses to each.

Important: It matters not if a next-step queen-ask is in an unsupported suit your partner has bid. It is still the queen-ask. For example:

Opener (you)	Responder
1♠	2♦
3♠	4♠
4NT (1430 ask)	5♣ ('1' or '4')
5♦ (queen-ask)	

Even though diamonds is partner's first-bid suit, it has not been supported, so it can be used to ask for the spade queen.

1. THE QUEEN-ASK OF 5♦ FOLLOWING A 5♣ RESPONSE TO AN RKB ASK (1430 OR 3014)

After a 5♣ response to RKB, 5♦ is the queen-ask. The queen-denial response after major-suit agreement is *always* a return to the agreed suit. *All* other responses show the queen. These are responder's options when holding the queen:

- a. With an outside king, bid the king suit. With two kings, bid the king suit that can be shown at the cheaper level.
- b. Lacking a king but having *any* outside queen, doubleton, or singleton, bid 5NT.

- c. In the rare case when you have no outside king, no outside queen, and no outside singleton or doubleton, jump to the six-level of the agreed suit; the *weakest* queen-acceptance response. This combination of events is unlikely to happen in your lifetime!

Responses (a) and (b) could lead to a grand slam.

COMING UP SHORT

Opener

♠ A 8 4 3

♥ A 9

♦ 5 2

♣ A K Q 6 3

1 ♣

4 ♠

5 ♣²

5 ♠⁴

Responder (you)

♠ K 7 6 5 2

♥ K Q 4

♦ K Q J 6

♣ 2

1 ♠

4NT¹

5 ♦³

pass⁵

1. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
2. '3'.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Negative.
5. Once you discover that an ace and the ♠Q are missing, slam becomes a dubious proposition.

Note: If you had the KJ10xx of spades or even the KJxxx, bidding a slam would be slightly more than an even-money proposition. However, without either the jack or the jack-ten and not knowing whether partner has those cards, check out at 5 ♠.

SHOWING A SIDE-SUIT KING

Opener

♠ A Q 5 2

♥ A 7

♦ A 9 7 3 2

♣ K 4

1 ♦

4 ♠

5 ♣²

6 ♣⁴

pass

Responder

♠ K J 10 9 6

♥ K J 5

♦ 5

♣ A Q 10 5

1 ♠

4NT¹

5 ♦³

7 ♠

1. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
2. '3'. The most common response to a 3014 ask.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Yes, with the ♣K.

It's hard to construct any hand partner can have where 7 ♠ is not a virtual lay-down. A grand slam does not have to be underwritten by Lloyds of London, you know.

The 5NT response to the queen-ask

The 5NT response to the queen-ask shows the queen, denies a side-suit king, but does show at least one side-suit third-round control: a small doubleton, a queen, or even a singleton. Chances are *overwhelming* that if you have the queen without a side-suit king, you will have at least one third-round control. In order *not* to have a third-round control, you must have some 4-3-3-3 pattern without a side-suit queen!

The follow-up ask after a 5NT response

If a keycard is missing, there will be no follow-up ask after the 5NT response. The asker will sign off in the agreed suit. A follow-up ask after a 5NT response is a grand slam try. The asker bids the suit where a third-round control is needed, called — a ‘third-round ask’.

Responding to a follow-up third-round ask

After a follow-up third-round ask over a 5NT response, there is the simple set of responses:

- (1) With third-round control or a singleton, leap to a grand slam in the agreed suit.
- (2) Lacking third-round control, sign off in the agreed suit.

A more detailed version of the 5NT response and the follow-up ask can be found in Chapter 9. It caters mainly to serious tournament players who lust to get to 7NT rather than seven of the agreed suit when 13 top tricks can be counted.

I JUST MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU

Opener

♠ K 6 4 2
♥ 6
♦ A K J 9 3
♣ A 10 4

1 ♦
3 ♥¹
4NT³
5 ♦⁵
6 ♠⁷

Responder

♠ A Q J 7 3
♥ 8 7 4
♦ Q 7
♣ 6 5 2

1 ♠
4 ♠²
5 ♣⁴
5NT⁶
pass

- 1. Splinter for spades.
- 2. Played as strong spades, little else. Some play it as a signoff.
- 3. RKB (1430): opener asking.
- 4. ‘1’.
- 5. Queen-ask.
- 6. I have the queen and no side-suit king, but I do have a third-round control (♦Q).
- 7. Glad you remembered the system, but we’re off an ace!

TEN IS WHEN

Opener

♠ A K 4
 ♥ A K 7 5 3
 ♦ 5
 ♣ K Q J 5

 1 ♥
 4NT²
 5 ♦⁴
 6 ♥⁶

Responder

♠ Q 6
 ♥ J 8 6 4 2
 ♦ A J 7 4
 ♣ 7 3

 3 ♥¹
 5 ♣³
 5NT⁵
 pass

1. Limit raise.
2. RKB (1430): Opener asking.
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Shows the queen (known ten-card fit), denies a side-suit king, but does show at least one third-round control. In this case, responder has two third-round controls: the doubleton club and the ♠Q.
6. Not interested. We are missing an ace!

2. THE QUEEN-ASK OF 5 ♥ FOLLOWING A 5 ♦ RESPONSE TO RKB, HEARTS AGREED

It may seem strange (some would say 'bizarre') to use 5 ♥ as the queen-ask when hearts is the agreed suit. What if you want to sign off in 5 ♥? Keep in mind that 5 ♥ is the queen-ask only after a 5 ♦ response. Let's review what a 5 ♦ response shows.

If it is a 1430 ask, it shows '0' or '3' keycards. If partner has '0', you usually want out in 5 ♥; you could be missing two keycards. If you are missing one keycard, there is no room for a queen-ask beneath 5 ♥. You must either play it safe and stop in 5 ♥, or gamble partner has the queen and bid 6 ♥. However, if partner has '3', you will surely want to know whether partner has the queen as a grand slam might be there for the taking. The solution: bid 5 ♥ in either case. Partner *must* pass with '0', but treats 5 ♥ as the queen-ask with '3'. Partner *cannot* pass with '3'! ('3' is a *huge* response to a 1430 ask.)

What about after a 5 ♦ response to a 3014 ask, responder having shown a powerful hand? Same solution: Bid 5 ♥. If responder has '1' (very rare), he *must* pass, and *must bid on* with '4'.

Keep in mind you always have a queen-ask available if partner shows '1' in response to a 1430 ask. The response to 4NT is 5 ♣ and you will be right there with a 5 ♦ queen-ask.

Playing both 1430 and 3014 asks, and treating 5 ♥ as the queen-ask after a 5 ♦ response, hearts agreed, saves a step, allows for both a signoff and a queen-ask, and offers little downside.

P.S. If you are determined to ask for the queen after a '0' response, use some form of the Grand Slam Force. Why ask for keycards when you know partner doesn't have any?

P.P.S. If you want to be in slam anyway, knowing partner has ‘1’ for their 5♦ response, don’t pussyfoot around with a 5♥ bid, as you’ll end up playing there. Just bid the slam.

Responding to a 5♥ queen-ask, hearts agreed

Here is a simple method for responding to the 5♥ queen-ask, hearts agreed, with the *greater* number of keycards:

- Without the queen: raise to 6♥
- With the queen: jump to 7♥. (More on this in Chapter 9.)

Playing 3014 responses exclusively

Some players only use 3014 responses. Using this method there is a problem with a 5♦ response that shows ‘1’ or ‘4’. A return to 5♥ must be to play so the queen-ask must be 5♠ – unwieldy to say the least.

For this reason, 3014 players use ‘Kickback’. Kickback means using 4♠, not 4NT, as RKB when hearts is the agreed suit. The bid saves a step (a huge plus) and now the ‘1’ response of 5♣ allows for a user friendly 5♦ queen-ask. However, there are downsides to this method, particularly when spades is a bid suit and you would like to cuebid 4♠ or splinter to 4♠.

Many years ago I asked multiple world champion Paul Soloway about Kickback. At that time, he and Bobby Goldman, both now deceased, were playing Kickback using 3014 asks exclusively. Paul said that they had page after page of notes dealing with Kickback. In this book, because we are using two keycard asks, I’m sticking with 4NT when asking for keycards, hearts agreed.

NICE SUPPORT

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ 8 6 2	♠ A K	1. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
♥ A K Q 8	♥ J 9 7 6 4 3	2. ‘0’ or ‘3’
♦ 5 4	♦ A K 9 3	3. Queen-ask facing ‘3’; to play facing ‘0’.
♣ A 8 7 4	♣ 2	4. Confirms the ♥Q, denies a side-suit king, but shows at least one third-round control.
1♣	1♥	5. Does the third-round control happen to be in diamonds?
2♥	4NT ¹	6. Yes, yes, yes!
5♦ ²	5♥ ³	
5NT ⁴	6♦ ⁵	
7♥ ⁶	pass	

If opener had the same hand with two little spades and three little diamonds, the response to 6♦ would be 6♥, denying third-round diamond control and a no-play grand slam would be avoided.

Final note: When *spades* is the agreed suit and the RKB response is 5♦, 5♥ is still the queen-ask. The negative response is 5♠, so the hand can still play at the five-level.

DANCING IN THE TULIPS

With spades agreed, things are simpler:

Opener

♠ A 8 6 3
♥ 9
♦ A K Q J 7 2
♣ K 5

1♦
1♠
4NT¹
5♥³
6♦⁵

Responder

♠ K 7 5 2
♥ A J 7 6 4
♦ 5
♣ A 8 3

1♥
4♠
5♦²
5♠⁴
pass⁶

1. RKB (1430): opener asking.
2. '3' or '0' — must be '3' given the leap to 4♠.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Sorry, don't have it.
5. When the RKB bidder returns to his first-bid suit at the six-level, it is to play, even if there has been jump agreement in a secondary suit. This topic will be covered in the chapter entitled 'Second Suit Options'.
6. If you wanted to play 6♠, you would have bid it!

ONCE IN A BLUE MOON

Opener

♠ A K 8 7
♥ 6 3
♦ A 4
♣ A Q J 7 3

1♣
4♠
5♦²
5♠⁴

Responder

♠ 10 6 4 3 2
♥ K Q J 8
♦ K Q
♣ K 4

1♠
4NT¹
5♥³
pass

1. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
2. '4'.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Negative.

It is very rare (off-the-wall rare) to ask for keycards without at least one key-card, get a '4' response and not play slam! This responding hand is the exception to the rule with a happy ending.

AN INFERENCE

Opener

♠ 5 2
 ♥ Q 10 6 5
 ♦ A K 8 7
 ♣ K 4 3

 1 ♦
 2 ♥
 5 ♣²
 6 ♣⁴
 pass

Responder (you)

♠ A Q 7 4
 ♥ A K J 7 2
 ♦ 6
 ♣ A Q 5

 1 ♥
 4NT¹
 5 ♦³
 6 ♥⁵

1. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Confirms the ♥Q, shows the ♣K, but denies the ♠K, a king that could have been shown at a lower level.
5. Missing the ♠K, responder settles.

The 6♣ response to 5♦ denies the ♠K, but does not deny the ♦K. But you were interested in the ♠K, not the ♦K. Keep the faith.

STILL WORKING WITH HEARTS

Opener

♠ A Q 9 3
 ♥ K Q 5 2
 ♦ 9 5
 ♣ Q 6 2

 1 ♣
 2 ♥

Responder (you)

♠ 7
 ♥ A J 10 9 6 4 3
 ♦ K Q J
 ♣ K J

 1 ♥
 ?

If you carelessly whip out your 4NT 1430 ask, partner's '2 with' response of 5♠ puts you in la-la land. True, you could survive this ask if spades was the agreed suit because you could pass. Unfortunately, hearts is the agreed suit.

Rule: When considering a 1430 ask, hearts agreed, it is definitely healthier to have at least '1 with' yourself. With less, do something else, anything else. In real life, a player who makes a 1430 ask usually has at least two keycards.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- After a 5♣ response to an RKB ask, hearts or spades agreed, 5♦ is the only queen-ask.
- After a 5♦ response to an RKB ask, *hearts* or spades agreed, 5♥ is the only queen-ask.
- A '3' response to a 1430 ask is a huge response and frequently leads to slam.
- If a next-step queen-ask is partner's first-bid suit, it can be used as the queen-ask as long as the suit has not been supported.
- In major-suit agreement auctions, the negative response to a queen-ask is a return to the agreed suit at the cheapest level. Any other response shows the queen.
- If the responder to a queen-ask knows of a ten-card trump fit, responder answers as if holding the queen.
- After a 5NT response to a queen-ask, denying a king, but showing at least one side third-round control, a follow-up bid at the six-level is a grand slam try looking for a third-round control in that suit.

THE SPECIFIC KING-ASK AND LATER ASKS

THE SKA

After a 4NT RKB ask, hearts or spades agreed, a follow-up bid of 5NT asks for specific kings in ascending order: clubs before diamonds, diamonds before hearts, etc. The king of the agreed suit is not included as it has already been accounted for. The 5NT bid, called the Specific King-Ask (SKA), promises joint possession of the four aces as well as the king and queen of the agreed suit. It is a grand slam try.

In response to a SKA, a return to the agreed suit denies a king. If the responder has one king, he bids that suit. With two kings, the cheaper king is shown first. With three kings, responder jumps to 6NT (or bids a grand in the agreed suit when aware of a nine-card or longer trump fit). Any time the responder can count thirteen tricks, he need not respond specific kings: responder is allowed, even encouraged, to leap to a grand. Just do it! Showing a specific king denies the ability to count thirteen tricks — and also denies three kings.

In the world of tournament bridge, playing matchpoints, some partnerships use 5NT in an effort to find a specific king in order to land in 6NT instead of six of the agreed suit. They do not promise all four aces and the king-queen of the agreed suit, so 5NT is not necessarily a grand slam try.

We are going the other route: 5NT after 4NT promises joint possession of the four aces as well as the king-queen of the agreed suit and is a grand slam try.

NOT THIS ONE, THAT ONE

Opener

♠ A 8 4 2

♥ K 9 5

♦ 4 3

♣ A J 5 2

1 ♣

2 ♠

5 ♥²

6 ♥⁴

Responder

♠ K Q 7 6 3

♥ A

♦ A Q 8 7 2

♣ K 4

1 ♠

4NT¹

5NT³

6 ♠⁵

1. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
2. '2 without'.
3. SKA.
4. ♥K, denying a minor-suit king.
5. Responder knows the ♦K is missing and settles for 6♠. Had opener responded 6♦ to the 5NT ask, 7♠ would be the final contract.

THE SECOND KING-ASK

After the 5NT bidder hears of one king, he may be interested in another. This other king must be a higher ranking king, as any lower ranking king has already been denied. To find out if partner has the desired king, the asker bids that suit. Lacking the king of the second king-ask suit, responder signs off in the trump suit. Holding the king, responder leaps to a grand slam in the agreed suit.

However, if the response to a queen-ask happens to be 5♥ or 5♠, confirming the queen of the agreed suit and showing the king of the bid suit, a follow-up bid of 5NT asks partner for a minor-suit king.

A more detailed version of responses to a second king-ask can be found in Chapter 9.

LOOKING FOR MR. RIGHTKINGS

Opener

♠ A Q J 9 6 3

♥ A Q 5

♦ A Q 6

♣ 4

1 ♠

4NT²

5NT⁴

6 ♠⁶

Responder

♠ K 10 5 4

♥ K 7

♦ 8 7 4 2

♣ A K 5

2NT¹

5 ♥³

6 ♣⁵

pass

1. Jacoby 2NT, a game-forcing balanced raise. After this start, the bidding should result in either an immediate or eventual keycard ask by the opener.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 without'.
4. SKA.
5. ♣K — may also have the ♦K or the ♥K, but not both.
6. Opener signs off in 6♠ knowing responder cannot have both red-suit kings (with three kings, responder jumps to 6NT or 7♠ in response to 5NT).

Note: A reviewer mentioned that if you are willing to gamble a grand slam here on a possible heart finesse if partner has the $\heartsuit K$, why not try $6\heartsuit$ over $6\clubsuit$, a second king-ask? After all, partner might have KJxx or a somewhat unlikely Kxxxx of diamonds making a grand slam cold. Even Kxxx, not to mention K10xx, gives you a good chance of avoiding the finesse. The reviewer made a good point.

FINDING MR. RIGHTKINGS

Opener	Responder	
\spadesuit A Q 9 8 6 3	\spadesuit K 10 5 4	1. Jacoby 2NT, game-forcing balanced raise with 4+ spades.
\heartsuit A Q 5	\heartsuit K 8 7 4	2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
\diamondsuit A Q 6	\diamondsuit K 2	3. '2 without'.
\clubsuit 4	\clubsuit A 10 7	4. SKA.
1 \spadesuit	2NT ¹	5. $\heartsuit K$ — no $\clubsuit K$, but maybe the $\heartsuit K$.
4NT ²	5 \heartsuit ³	6. Looking for a grand if responder has the $\heartsuit K$.
5NT ⁴	6 \diamondsuit ⁵	7. I've got it!
6 \heartsuit ⁶	7 \spadesuit ⁷	8. Might as well score the extra 10 points; we have thirteen top tricks.
7NT ⁸		

Commercial: If you were not using the SKA in response to 5NT, partner would show two kings, but you wouldn't know which two!

RESPONDING TO A SKA, HEARTS AGREED, HOLDING THE $\spadesuit K$

When hearts is the agreed suit, the responder to a SKA of 5NT may feel a bit queasy about bidding $6\spadesuit$ to show the $\spadesuit K$. A $6\spadesuit$ response more or less commits the partnership to a grand. Should responder show the $\spadesuit K$? Yes and no! (Great answer, Kantar.)

It works like this: If your response to an RKB ask is $5\clubsuit$, $5\diamondsuit$, or $5\heartsuit$ and there has been no previous splinter bid, do *not* show the $\spadesuit K$ in response to a follow-up SKA of 5NT. The reason is that partner can use a tricky $5\spadesuit$ bid to find out all about your spade holding. You will read more about this ask in Chapter 9.

When your response to RKB is $5\spadesuit$, precluding a $5\spadesuit$ ask, and partner bids 5NT, this is the scene when gazing at the $\spadesuit K$:

If there has been a previous splinter bid, respond in the splinter suit, by agreement showing the $\spadesuit K$.

If there has been no previous splinter bid, show the $\spadesuit K$, but only if you are

sure from the bidding that partner has more than one spade (e.g. has shown a balanced hand, has supported spades). If you can't be sure, don't show it.

HAVING MR. SCARYKING

Opener

♠ A
♥ A Q 8 7 5 4
♦ A Q J 3 2
♣ 4

1 ♥
3 ♦¹
4NT²
5NT⁴
pass

Responder

♠ K 8 2
♥ K J 2
♦ 6 5
♣ A Q 8 7 4

2 ♣
4 ♥
5 ♥³
6 ♥⁵

1. Strong two-suited hand (some play 3 ♦ as a splinter).
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 without'.
4. SKA looking for the ♦K, not interested in the ♠K.
5. Do not show the ♠K! There has been no splinter bid and partner could have bid 5 ♠ to find out about the ♠K.

Knowingly bidding a grand slam that is dependent upon a finesse is against the odds; bidding a small slam dependent upon a straight finesse is a basically a 50-50 proposition. Make partner happy and pass. It's just too depressing to go down in a grand slam that depends upon a finesse. You need 65-70% odds to make a grand slam a worthwhile gamble.

USING THE SPLINTER SUIT BOTH TO ASK FOR AND SHOW THE ♠K WHEN HEARTS IS THE AGREED SUIT — LIVING IN THE FAST LANE

If an RKB ask follows a splinter jump, the splinter suit, if not a next-step queen-ask, can be used to ask for the ♠K! The splinter suit can also be used in response to a 5NT SKA to *show* the ♠K. Long live splinter suits!

IN NETHER NETHER LAND

St. Tropez, 1990

Opener

♠ 6
♥ A J 10 8 4 3
♦ A 8
♣ A Q 5 4

1 ♥
4NT²
5NT⁴
6 ♥⁶

Responder

♠ A K 8 2
♥ K Q 6 2
♦ Q
♣ 10 8 3 2

4 ♦¹
5 ♠³
6 ♦⁵
pass

1. Splinter jump agreeing hearts.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 with'.
4. SKA.
5. Responding to the SKA in the splinter suit, hearts agreed, shows the ♠K. Equally important, it denies the ♣K.
6. Right color, wrong suit.

I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER!

Opener

♠ A Q 4 3
♥ K Q 8 7 2
♦ A 4
♣ A 7

1 ♥
4NT²
5NT⁴
6 ♥⁶

Responder

♠ K J 6
♥ A J 6 4 3
♦ 9
♣ Q 10 5 2

4 ♦¹
5 ♣³
6 ♦⁵
pass

1. Singleton diamond (typically 11-14 HCP).
2. RKB (1430) — opener asking.
3. '1'.
4. SKA.
5. Responding in the singleton suit shows the ♠K, but denies the ♣K.

Note: If responder had both black kings, responder would bid 6 ♣, the cheaper king suit. After a 6 ♣ response, opener can ask for the ♠K via 6 ♦. Keep the faith.

DON'T SHOW IT! FOR GOD'S SAKE, DON'T SHOW IT!

Opener

♠ 7
♥ A Q J 3
♦ A Q 10 6 2
♣ K Q 5

1 ♦
3 ♠¹
4NT³
5NT⁵
pass

Responder

♠ A K 4 3
♥ K 6 4 2
♦ 5 3
♣ A 7 4

1 ♥
4 ♣²
5 ♦⁴
6 ♥

1. Splinter.
2. Cuebid.
3. RKB (1430): opener asking.
4. '3'.
5. SKA.

When the asker has splintered in spades, showing shortness, and then asks for specific kings, do not show the ♠K. Do not even think of showing the ♠K. It is frequently worthless facing a singleton.

Asking For and Showing the ♠K, Hearts Agreed

You might as well get your money's worth when it comes to using a known short suit to both ask for and show the ♠K, hearts agreed.

You may have a *known* void in which case you would not show it in response to an RKB ask. Therefore, you can use your void suit to show the ♠K in response to a SKA. And partner can use your void suit to ask about the ♠K after an RKB response.

VOID-SHOWING RESPONSE

Opener (you)

♠ A Q 4 3

♥ A K Q 8 5

♦ 7

♣ K Q 2

1♥

4NT²

5NT⁴

7♥

Responder

♠ K 7 6 5

♥ J 9 7 6 3

♦ A Q 8 4

♣ —

4♣¹

5♠³

6♣⁵

1. Club void, by agreement.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 with' (ten-card fit).
4. SKA.
5. Using the void suit to show the ♠K.

You can afford to use the SKA of 5NT even if you are looking for the ♦K. If partner shows the ♠K via a 6♣ response, you can bid 6♦, a second king-ask.

THE WHOLE TAMALE

Opener (you)

♠ A 8

♥ Q 10 4

♦ A Q 6

♣ A 9 7 5 4

1NT

2♥

4NT³

5NT⁵

6♦⁷

pass⁹

Responder

♠ K 7 5

♥ A K 8 6 3 2

♦ K 7 5

♣ 2

2♦¹

4♣²

5♥⁴

6♣⁶

7♥⁸

1. Transfer.
2. Shortness, slam try.
3. RKB (1430): opener asking.
4. '2 without'.
5. SKA.
6. Responding in the splinter suit to show the ♠K.
7. Do you have the ♦K also?
8. Yes. I bid more grand slams on one page in this book than I do in a whole year at the table.
9. And they all make! It's great to be the author.

Keep in mind that you should only bid a grand when you can count thirteen tricks or have *oodles* of chances for a thirteenth trick. If you can't be sure, settle for six. On this hand, you can be pretty sure. If partner has at least three spades, you can ruff a spade in your hand. If clubs break 4-3, you can set up your fifth club. If partner has two spades and four diamonds, diamonds might break 3-3 or partner might have the ♦J. Go for it!

Notice the 6♣ bid to show the ♠K (the king that could be shown at the lowest level).

THE BOTTOM LINE

When hearts is the agreed suit:

- After an RKB ask and response (in a splinter sequence), a follow-up bid in responder's short suit asks for the ♠K.
- If the RKB response to 4NT, hearts agreed, is 5♣, 5♦, or 5♥, and the follow-up bid is 5NT, do *not* show the ♠K. (Partner could have asked for the ♠K, via 5♠.)

If there has been a splinter jump, the ♠K can be shown by bidding the splinter suit.

WHEN A BALANCED HAND FACES A TWO-SUITER

When a *balanced* hand faces a known two-suiter, presumably 5-5, and a fit is found and an RKB ask follows, the kings of *both* long suits are counted as keycards. However, only the queen of the *agreed* suit is included in the RKB response. There are *six* keycards in play, but the responses remain the same.

In these sequences, a '2' response actually is '2' or '5', but put your family savings on '2'. There is no such animal as a '6' keycard response. If you have six keycards and partner asks *you* for keycards, bid 11 of the agreed suit, expect to make overtricks, and get a new partner. Quickly.

A SIX-KEYCARD AUCTION

Los Angeles Regional, 2005

Opener

♠ 4 3
♥ K 8 6 2
♦ A Q 5 4
♣ A Q J

1NT

2♠

4♣³

5♣⁵

pass

Responder

♠ A Q 10 6 5
♥ A Q 10 4 3
♦ 7
♣ K 6

2♥¹

3♥²

4NT⁴

6♥⁶

1. Transfer.
2. Five hearts, game force.
3. Presumed cuebid for hearts. With a fit in spades, opener should superaccept the transfer or bid 3♠ over 3♥ to set the trump suit.
4. RKB (3014): when responder asks for keycards after partner has opened 1NT or 2NT, it is a 3014 ask; opener is known to have extras.
5. '3' including a possible ♠K.
6. Knows one of the six keycards is missing.

To bid a small slam with confidence when a balanced hand faces a two-suited hand, the partnership should have five of the six keycards plus the queen of the agreed suit.

Give opener the Kx of spades and the Axx of clubs and the response to 4NT would be 5♦ showing ‘4’. Now the responder has an easy 7♥ bid.

GOING FOR THE EXTRA 10 POINTS AT MATCHPOINTS

Opener

♠ A K 7 5 3

♥ Q J 4

♦ K 4 2

♣ 6 2

1 ♠

3 ♥

5 ♣²

5 ♠⁴

6 ♦⁶

Responder

♠ 6

♥ A K 7 6 5 3

♦ A 8 3

♣ A Q J

2 ♥

4NT¹

5♦³

5NT⁵

6NT⁷

1. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Yes, plus the ♠K.
5. Have a minor-suit king?
6. How does the ♦K grab you? (No ♣K.)
7. With 12 countable tricks, I'm about to get us a top by playing this hand in notrump.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- After a 4NT RKB ask and response, 5NT is the Specific King-Ask (SKA). It is a grand slam try confirming joint possession of the four aces as well as the king and queen of the agreed suit.
- In response to 5NT, responder is allowed to waive the king-showing response and bid a grand directly if thirteen tricks can be counted.
- When responding to a second king-ask after a king-showing response to 5NT, a grand slam try, the simple method is to sign off in the trump suit without the king and bid the grand with it.
- When a balanced hand faces a two-suited hand and a keycard ask sequence ensues, the kings of both suits are counted. There are six keycards in play. However, only the queen of the agreed suit is included in a '2 with' response.

THE THIRD-ROUND CONTROL ASK

A SKA asks for specific kings, but the asker might need a third-round control (a queen or a doubleton, but a singleton counts too!) for a grand. The asker may have AKxx(x) and may not be able to bid seven confidently without confirmation of a third-round control in partner's hand. The asker may have Kxxx(x) — and even though the asker knows partner has the ace, he needs to find Ax, or AQ(x), not Axx(x) to bid a grand. Third-round controls are *grand slam* tries and should be a welcome addition to your armory of asks.

WHEN TO USE A THIRD-ROUND CONTROL ASK

There are four scenarios where a third-round control ask can be used:

- (1) Directly after an RKB response. If the queen-ask is not needed, a follow-up bid in the non-queen-ask suit is a third-round control ask. To ask for a third-round control in the queen-ask suit, jump to the six-level of that suit.
- (2) After partner shows a king in response to a queen-ask. If 5NT is still available for a second king-ask, a follow-up bid at the six-level instead is a third-round control ask.
- (3) After a 5NT response to a queen-ask (a response that shows at least one third-round control), a follow-up bid at the six-level is a third-round control ask.
- (4) Whenever a king-showing response to a queen-ask has denied a particular king, a follow-up bid in a 'king-denied suit', is a third-round control ask.

SIMPLIFIED RESPONSES TO A THIRD-ROUND CONTROL ASK

There are two sets of responses to a third-round control ask: simple and detailed. The more detailed set, catering to serious tournament players, is listed in Chapter 9.

The simple set of responses to a third-round control ask

Lacking a third-round control (holding xxx or worse), sign off in the agreed suit.

With a third-round control, jump in the agreed suit. This may mean jumping to a grand slam facing a six-level ask. Do it!

LOOKING FOR A THIRD-ROUND CONTROL

Opener

♠ 5 4
♥ A K 8 7 6 5
♦ A K 6 3
♣ A
1 ♥
3 ♦
4NT¹
5 ♦³
6 ♦⁵
pass

Responder

♠ A K J 7
♥ Q J 2
♦ 7 5 4
♣ Q 8 4
1 ♠
4 ♥
5 ♣²
5 ♠⁴
6 ♥⁶

1. RKB (1430): opener asking.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask (next step).
4. Yes, with the ♠K.
5. Do you have third-round diamond control? (Would bid 5NT to look for the ♦K.)
6. Sorry.

LOOKING FOR A THIRD NOT A FOURTH

Opener

♠ Q 7 6 3
♥ 9 4 2
♦ A Q 9 4
♣ K J
1 ♦
2 ♠
3 ♠
5 ♣²
6 ♣⁴
6 ♠⁶

Responder

♠ A K J 8 2
♥ A K 6 5 3
♦ 7
♣ A 5
1 ♠
3 ♥
4NT¹
5 ♦³
6 ♥⁵
pass

1. RKB (1430): opener has not jumped or reversed.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Yes, with the ♣K.
5. Third-round control ask in hearts.
6. The denial response, a return to the agreed suit, showing xxx(x).

When a king-showing response (6♣) to a queen-ask has denied a particular king (♥K), a follow-up bid in a king-denied suit (6♥) is a third-round control ask.

LOOKING FOR GOLD, FINDING GOLD

Opener	Responder
♠ A Q 7 6 4 2	♠ K J 8 3
♥ A	♥ J 6 3
♦ A K 6 5 2	♦ 4 3
♣ 8	♣ A K J 6

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1♠	3♥	4♥ ¹	pass
4NT ²	pass	5♥ ³	pass
6♦ ⁴	pass	7♠ ⁵	all pass

1. Strong spade raise.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 without'.
4. Third-round control ask. 5NT would be used to ask for the ♦K.
5. Confirms third-round control by jumping in the agreed suit.

NEEDING SO LITTLE, FINDING LESS

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ A Q	♠ 6
♥ K J 5 2	♥ A Q 8 6 4 3
♦ A Q 7 5	♦ 2
♣ J 5 4	♣ A K 6 3 2
1NT	2♦ ¹
3♥ ²	4NT ³
5♣ ⁴	6♣ ⁵
6♥ ⁶	pass ⁷

1. Transfer.
2. Four hearts.
3. RKB (3014): when asking a 1NT or 2NT opening bidder, it is always 3014.
4. '3'.
5. Third-round control ask.
6. Negative — xxx(x).
7. Looks like a club loser is staring you in the face.

HOW SWEET IT IS

Opener

♠ A K J 10 7 3

♥ A

♦ A K

♣ K 7 3 2

2♣

2♠

4NT¹

5♦³

6♣⁵

pass⁷

Responder (you)

♠ Q 9 5 2

♥ Q 8 6

♦ J 9 7

♣ A 5 4

2♦

3♠

5♣²

5NT⁴

6♠⁶

1. RKB.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask, the next step.
4. Shows the queen, denies a king, and promises at least one third-round control (♥Q).
5. Is that third-round control in clubs?
6. No, sorry, it isn't.
7. Then I'm afraid we have a club loser.

If responder had Ax or AQ(x) of clubs, both third-round controls, then responder would jump to 7♠ after the 6♣ ask.

INFERENCES

Opener (you)

♠ A Q 9 4

♥ A J 5

♦ A 7 3

♣ A J 9

2NT

4♠²

5♦⁴

6♠⁶

Responder

♠ K J 10 3 2

♥ K Q 10

♦ K 9 5 4

♣ 7

3♥¹

4NT³

5♥⁵

pass⁷

1. Transfer.
2. Four spades.
3. RKB (3014): the opening bid was 2NT.
4. '4'.
5. Queen-ask.
6. Yes, I have the queen, but I have no side-suit king and no-side suit third-round control either! Kantar says this never happens.
7. It doesn't, but Kantar is writing a book. In the meantime, if you don't have a third-round control, we have a diamond loser.

If you had the Ax or the AQx(x) of diamonds, your response to the 5♥ queen-ask would have been 5NT, showing at least one third-round control. Partner would bid 6♦, asking if your third-round control was in diamonds, and you would bid 7♠. Bingo!

From responder's point of view, your hand is an open book. You have shown four aces plus the ♠Q for 18 HCP; you have denied a suit king, a side-suit queen or a side-suit doubleton, so your distribution must be 4-3-3-3 with a couple of jacks in the side suits.

Even if you had the ♦J (not clear), a diamond finesse would still be needed to make a grand slam.

NO QUEEN-ASK NEEDED

Opener (you) Responder

♠ A Q 10 8 7 5

♥ A K 7 2

♦ J

♣ K 5

1 ♠

4NT²

6 ♥⁴

pass

♠ K J 6 2

♥ 4 3

♦ A 6 3 2

♣ A 4 3

2NT¹

5 ♦³

7 ♠⁵

1. Game-forcing spade raise.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '3' (can't be '0'). 2NT shows a good hand.
4. Third-round control ask.
5. A jump in the agreed suit in response to a third-round control ask shows a third-round control in the ask suit.

You took charge asking for keycards directly rather than rebidding 3 ♦, the conventional rebid to show a singleton. Why reveal your distribution when you know where you are heading? Since 5 ♥ is the queen-ask, a jump to 6 ♥ is a third-round heart control ask.

POINTS SCHMOINTS

Opener

♠ K 7

♥ A K 8 3 2

♦ K 9 4 2

♣ A 10

1 ♥

4NT²

6 ♦⁴

Responder (A)

♠ A Q J

♥ Q J 10 7 6

♦ A 8 5 3

♣ J

4 ♣¹

5 ♠³

6 ♥⁵

Responder (B)

♠ A 6 5

♥ Q 10 7 6 5

♦ A Q 5 3

♣ J

4 ♣¹

5 ♠³

7 ♥⁶

1. Splitter.
2. RKB.
3. '2 with'.
4. Third-round control ask.
5. Denies third-round diamond control.
6. Shows third-round diamond control.

Responder (A) and responder (B) both have the same distribution. Responder (A) has 2 HCP more than responder (B), however, as is often the case, it is not how many HCP a player has, but rather *where* those points are. In this case, the ♦ Q is the critical card and responder (B) has it; responder (A) doesn't.

WHEN A THIRD-ROUND CONTROL ASK IS MADE IN A SUIT THAT THE RESPONDING HAND HAS BID

When a third-round control ask is made in a suit that the responding hand has bid, but has not been supported, shortness is not an issue and the ace is a *known* quantity. The asker is looking for the queen, the king, or both. Responses are by steps and the agreed suit, the signoff response denying both, does not count as a step.

- First step = the queen.
- Second step = the king.
- A raise of the ask suit = the king and queen (the bingo response).

LOOK WHAT I FOUND!

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ Q 6 5 4	♠ A 8	1. Nobody likes to splinter with a singleton ace. If you prefer to treat this as a balanced hand, jump to 4♥.
♥ A J 10 3	♥ K Q 6 5 2	2. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
♦ A	♦ 9 8 6	3. '3'.
♣ A Q 3 2	♣ K J 5	4. An ask in a previously-bid suit. The responses include both the queen and the king.
1 ♣	1 ♥	5. A first-step response, 6♦, shows the queen.
3 ♦ ¹	4NT ²	6. Knows a spade can be dumped on a club, as opener must have at least four clubs having a singleton diamond.
5 ♣ ³	6 ♣ ⁴	
6 ♦ ⁵	7 ♥ ⁶	
pass		

You have now been exposed to the four asks this book suggests in major-suit agreement sequences: the queen-ask, the specific king-ask (SKA), the second king-ask, and the third-round control ask. Are you still there?

THE BOTTOM LINE

- A third-round control ask is often used directly after a response to RKB. It can also be used after a king-showing response to a queen-ask — if the ask is made in a previously denied king suit.
- After a king-showing response to a queen-ask, if 5NT is available for a second king-ask, a follow-up bid at the six-level instead is a third-round control ask.

- The queen or *any* doubleton are both considered third-round controls. Think of Kx or Ax as having a third-round control, but not Kxx or Axx.
- If the keycard asker wishes to make a third-round control ask in the queen-ask suit, the asker must jump in the queen-ask suit.
- In splinter sequences, with hearts agreed and the ♠K having been *denied* by a previous response, a bid in the splinter suit asks for third-round spade control.

HANDLING VOIDS

PART I: ASKING FOR KEYCARDS WITH A VOID

When a void suit enters the mix, bidding slams accurately can present problems. Blackwood seldom works. For example, if you use RKB with two aces and a void and partner shows one ace, you may have to guess which ace it is.

There are several ways to go with slam-going hands that contain a void:

- (1) Cuebidding. This may or may not lead to a RKB sequence. However, it is dangerous to cuebid a void. Partner may hold the king or king-queen of the void suit and go ballistic.
- (2) Use Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (EKB). An unusual jump (one level higher than a splinter jump) is made with a void and is an EKB jump. You are asking partner for keycards outside of the void suit. *Partner doesn't count the ace of the void suit.* In EKB sequences, there are only four keycards in play: the three 'working' aces plus the king of the agreed or last-bid suit.

EKB jumps after major-suit agreement are jumps *above* the game level in any unbid suit, in any suit an opponent has bid, but not in any suit partner has bid. A jump in a void suit does *not* require prior suit agreement. *The last-bid suit is considered the agreed suit.*

Opener

1 ♠
5 ♦¹

Responder

2 ♥

1. Unusual jump beyond the game level.

5 ♦ is EKB, hearts agreed. Note that 'last-bid suit agreed' is a necessary and useful agreement. This is because a player wishing to use EKB must do so immediately or risk not being able to do so at all. In this sequence, if opener raises to 3 ♥ (forcing), responder might bid 4 ♥. Now 5 ♦ would be a cuebid. Thus, anticipation is a key factor when planning an EKB ask.

Why is there not an Exclusion Ask in a suit partner has bid? This has always been a thorny problem. For example:

♠ A K 10 x x x x ♥ K x ♦ — ♣ K J 10 x

Opener	Responder (you)
1 ♦	1 ♠
2 ♠	5 ♦!

One could make a very strong case for playing 5 ♦ as EKB, but it opens up a can of worms like you wouldn’t believe. The literature is replete with expert disasters in somewhat similar sequences.

The player who makes an exclusion jump in a suit partner has bid always thinks the bid makes perfect sense. But it frequently sounds natural to the partner who often time passes! Without *crystal clear* agreements, trotting out one of these EKB asks in a suit partner has bid is akin to giving a child a loaded gun. We’ll let it go at that.

‘Exclusion jumps’ are made at such high levels that the asker must be prepared to handle an ‘unlucky’ response, a response that could find the partnership missing two keycards!

BEING PREPARED

Opener (you)	Responder (A)
♠ A K 9 7 5 2	♠ Q 10 4 3
♥ K Q 8 4 3	♥ A 2
♦ K Q	♦ J 6 4
♣ —	♣ K 8 7 3

Opener (you)	Responder (B)
♠ A K 9 7 5 2	♠ Q 10 4 3
♥ K Q 8 4 3	♥ 6 2
♦ K Q	♦ 7 6 4
♣ —	♣ A Q J 3
1 ♠	3 ♠
5 ♣	?

After a 1 ♠ opening and a limit 3 ♠ response, you would like to play in 7 ♠ facing both red aces, 6 ♠ facing one red ace, and 5 ♠ facing neither red ace. The solution is to ask for keycards *outside* of clubs, your void suit because you don’t want partner to count the ♣A in with his goodies. Leap to 5 ♣, a jump above the game level showing a void and asking for keycards outside of clubs.

EKB leaps after major-suit agreement are all made at the five- or six-level, except for a leap to 4 ♠, after two- or three-level heart agreement. Notice that the jump to 4 ♠, hearts agreed, is *above* the game level.

Responses to EKB are simple. The first step is ‘0’, the most important step to remember. EKB jumps are neither 1430 nor 3014 asks.

Responses to EKB

First step	=	0
Second step	=	1
Third step	=	‘2 without’
Fourth step	=	‘2 with’
Fifth step	=	3 (do not hold your breath)

In the example, responder (A) bids 5♥, a second-step response, showing ‘1’ keycard *outside of clubs*, and opener bids 6♠. Responder (B) responds 5♦, a first-step response, showing ‘0’ keycards outside of clubs (i.e. the ♣A is not counted); opener signs off in 5♠.

You need a whale of a hand to fly off into outer space, and the more room partner has to respond, the better off you are.

OUTER SPACE AND THE RIGHT ACE

Opener	Responder	
♠ A K Q 6 4 3	♠ 8 7 5 2	
♥ —	♥ K 8 6 5	
♦ K 3	♦ A 8 7 2	1. Waiting.
♣ A K Q 7 6	♣ 3	2. Splinter.
2♣	2♦ ¹	3. Exclusion (don’t count the ♥A, partner).
2♠	4♣ ²	4. ‘1’. Trust me, for once.
5♥ ³	5NT ⁴	5. Great! It must be the ♦A.
7♠ ⁵	pass ⁶	6. You're so clever.

THE RIGHT ACES

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ A 8 2	♠ K J	1. Transfer.
♥ J 5	♥ A K Q 8 7 4 3 2	2. Exclusion (don’t count the ♦A, partner).
♦ K Q J 4	♦ —	3. ‘2 without’ (♣A and ♠A).
♣ A 9 7 2	♣ K J 10	4. Even though only twelve top tricks are staring you in the face, there are so many chances for a thirteenth trick that you have to go for it.
1NT	2♦ ¹	
2♥	5♦ ²	
5NT ³	7♥ ⁴	
pass		

IN THE NICK OF TIME

Opener

♠ A K 8 5 3

♥ K J 6 4 2

♦ —

♣ K Q 8

1 ♠

5 ♦¹

pass

Responder

♠ —

♥ Q 8 7 5 3

♦ A K Q 5 2

♣ J 4 3

2 ♥

5 ♥²

1. EKB (don't count the ♦ A, partner).

2. '0'; I'm not counting anything.

A leap above game after a one- or two-level major-suit response is EKB agreeing responder's major.

A MISSED CONNECTION

Opener

♠ K 5 4 2

♥ 6

♦ A Q 8

♣ Q J 7 3 2

1 ♣

1 ♠

5 ♠²

Responder (you)

♠ A Q J 8 3

♥ K Q 7 5 4 3

♦ —

♣ K 5

1 ♥

5 ♦¹

pass³

1. A serious EKB leap!

2. '1' (excluding ♦ A).

3. Missing two keycards.

This is a rare EKB sequence for two reasons: 1) it comes after a one-level rebid; 2) the asker has only one keycard. However, because the ask comes at a relatively low level, even an unthinkable '0' response would leave you in a playable contract.

FURTHER ASKS AFTER AN EKB RESPONSE

Nine times out of ten, the EKB bidder places the contract after hearing the first response. However, if the asker has room and is looking for a *grand*, other asks are available.

1. The queen-ask after a '0' or '1' response

The next step after an EKB response of '0' or '1', including the void suit (but not including 5NT, which remains the SKA), is the queen-ask.

Opener (you)

♠ —
 ♥ A K 8 3 2
 ♦ A K Q 7 3
 ♣ K 10 9

1 ♥
 4 ♠²
 5 ♦⁴
 6 ♥

Responder

♠ A 10 5
 ♥ J 7 6 4
 ♦ 4 2
 ♣ A 8 3 2

3 ♥¹
 5 ♣³
 5 ♥⁵
 pass

1. Limit raise.
2. EKB (a leap over game).
3. '1' (does not count ♠A).
4. Queen-ask (next-ranking suit).
5. Negative. With any five hearts, ensuring a ten-card fit, responder would leap to 6 ♥.

2. *The third-round control ask*

A bid of any suit that is not the queen-ask is a third-round control ask. (See Chapter 4.)

EKB PLUS A 'THIRD'

Opener

♠ A K 8 6 3 2
 ♥ A K 6 5 4
 ♦ K 6
 ♣ —

1 ♠
 5 ♣²
 6 ♥⁴
 pass⁶

Responder

♠ Q J 7 5
 ♥ 9 3 2
 ♦ A 8
 ♣ K 9 7 3

3 ♠¹
 5 ♥³
 6 ♠⁵

1. Limit.
2. EKB.
3. '1' outside of clubs.
4. Third-round control ask (5NT, the SKA) is available to find out about the ♥K.
5. Negative. No third-round control.
6. We have a heart loser.

3. *The Specific King-Ask (5NT) after EKB*

IN THIS BOOK, PARTNER ALWAYS HAS THE RIGHT KING!

Opener

♠ A K 8 6 5 3
 ♥ A Q J 5
 ♦ K J 4
 ♣ —

1 ♠
 5 ♣²
 5NT⁴
 7 ♠

Responder

♠ J 10 4 2
 ♥ K 7
 ♦ A 6 2
 ♣ Q 9 5 3

3 ♠¹
 5 ♥³
 6 ♥⁵
 pass

1. Limit.
2. EKB.
3. '1' — must be the ♦A.
4. SKA (6 ♣ would be the queen-ask).
5. ♥K. Lacking a king or with the ♣K (the void suit king), responder would sign off in 6 ♠.

No need to worry about the ♠Q with a ten-card trump fit.

4. *Rebidding the void suit*

Rebidding the void suit after an EKB response is the queen-ask if it is the next step. But what if it isn't? Rebidding the void suit if not the next step is a third-round ask in the queen-ask suit. You wouldn't want to lose that ask, would you? Don't answer. I know what you are thinking.

REVIEWING THE FOUR FOLLOW-UP ASKS AFTER AN EKB RESPONSE

Opener	Responder
1 ♠	3 ♠
5 ♦ ¹	5 ♠ ²
?	

- 1. EKB with a diamond void.
- 2. '1' — 5♥, the first step, shows '0'. The EKB bidder has the following grand slam tries available after partner's 5♠ response:

5NT	SKA (Specific King-Ask).
6♣	Queen-ask (first-step, excluding 5NT).
6♦	Asking for third-round <i>club</i> control (the queen-ask suit).
6♥	Asking for third-round heart control.

ANOTHER QUEEN-ASK — JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

Opener	Responder
♠ —	♠ J 10 6 3 2
♥ A K 9 8 5	♥ J 7 6 4 3
♦ A K 7	♦ 2
♣ K Q 10 5 4	♣ A 6
1 ♥	4 ♥
5 ♠ ¹	6 ♣ ²
6 ♦ ³	7 ♥ ⁴
pass	

- 1. EKB.
- 2. '1'.
- 3. Queen-ask — next step.
- 4. Accepts knowing of a ten-card fit.

DON'T GET CONFUSED BY EKB LOOK-ALIKES

Opener

1♥

Responder

4♠/5♣/5♦

Opener

1♠

Responder

4♥/5♣/5♦

First-round jumps by responder to the game-level are natural and preemptive, *not* EKB asks. (Note: Some play 1♠-4♥ as shortness.)

WHEN AN EXCLUSION ASK IS DOUBLED

If the opponents are foolish enough to double an EKB ask, you can take advantage:

Opener

♠ A K 9 7 6 3
♥ K Q 8
♦ —
♣ K Q J 4

Responder (you)

♠ Q J 5 2
♥ A 4
♦ Q 7 6 4 3
♣ 7 2

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1♠	pass	3♠ ¹	pass
5♦ ²	dbl	?	

- 1. Limit.
- 2. EKB.

When an EKB ask is doubled, your side has been presented with two extra bids, ‘redouble’ and ‘pass’, and you should use them both:

- redouble = 0 keycards
- pass = 1 keycard
- First step = ‘2 without’
- Second step = ‘2 with’
- Third step = ‘3’ (not going to happen)

In the previous sequence, responder would pass to show ‘1’ and opener would bid 6♠. With ‘0’, responder would redouble and opener would sign off in 5♠. Finally, when responding to EKB with a void, don’t show it! Forget it!

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Exclusion Keycard Blackwood, EKB, is a leap above game holding a void in the jump suit.
- There are four keycards to be considered when responding to EKB: the three aces outside of the jump suit, plus the agreed-suit king.
- An Exclusion Ask can be made in any unbid suit, or in any suit an opponent has bid.
- If an Exclusion Ask is made prior to agreement, the last-bid suit is considered the agreed suit.
- When responding to an EKB ask, do not count the ace of the jump suit and disregard any void suit you may have. Responses are by steps and start with '0'.
- After an EKB response, bidding a new suit that is not a next-step queen-ask is a third-round control ask.
- After an EKB response, a rebid in the void suit is a third-round ask in the queen-ask suit.
- After an EKB response, 5NT, if available, is the SKA.
- If the opponents double an EKB ask, responder redoubles to show '0' keycards, passes with '1' keycard, and bids the next step up to show '2' keycards.

PART II: RESPONDING TO RKB WITH A VOID

When you use EKB, you have a void in the jump suit. *However, if the responder to an EKB jump ask also has a void, it is to be ignored.*

But what if the responder (you) to a normal 4NT 1430 or 3014 RKB ask has a void? How is it shown? Piece of cake!

Responder (you) has an even number of keycards — respond 5NT

Note that with '0' keycards, an even number, it is risky to jump to 5NT to show a void. It could be the 'wrong' void (a suit in which partner has the ace) and if partner has '3' keycards, you will be missing two keycards. If partner has '4' keycards, it won't cost and might be the only way to get to a grand if it is the 'right' void. I'd talk this one over with partner before jumping to 5NT with '0'. That way it won't be my fault if anything goes wrong.

However, with '2' keycards, also an even number, it is mandatory. You show '2' by jumping to 5NT. Partner has to figure out where the void is, but it is usually obvious.

IT DOESN'T TAKE AN EINSTEIN
Toronto Regional, 2005

Opener (you)

♠ K J 5 4 3

♥ A K Q 10

♦ Q 5 2

♣ 8

1 ♠

4NT²

6♣⁴

pass

Responder

♠ A 10 8 7

♥ 7 6 4 2

♦ —

♣ A Q 6 4 3

4♦¹

5NT³

6♠⁵

1. Splinter — played as a singleton or void.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2' with a void, clearly in diamonds.
4. Queen-ask (next step).
5. Negative.

Knowing partner has the ace, you are prepared to play a grand slam facing the ♠Q or any five spades.

Responder (you) has an odd number of keycards – more leaping

With an odd number of keycards, '1' or '3', jump to the six-level in your void suit. If your void suit is higher-ranking than the trump suit, jump to the six-level in the trump suit.

It is assumed that the previous bidding has told partner whether you have '1' or '3'. Although it may kill you, trust your partner to know which you have.

After a six-level leap, if there is room, the next step is the queen-ask.

(a) Opener (you)

1 ♥

4NT

Responder

4 ♥

6♣, 6♦, 6♥

(b) Opener

1 ♠

4NT

Responder

4 ♠

6♣, 6♦, 6♥

In (a), leaps to 6♣ and 6♦ show voids in the bid suit and a leap to 6♥ shows a spade void, a void in a higher ranking suit than the trump suit.

In (b), each response shows a void in the jump suit.

Given that 4♠ is a preemptive bid, it is clear that responder has one key-card.

REMEMBERING EVERYTHING

Opener

♠ A K 10 5 4 2

♥ K Q 7

♦ A K J

♣ A

2♣

2♠

4NT¹

6♥³

pass

Responder (you)

♠ 8 6 3

♥ A 4 3 2

♦ —

♣ 7 6 5 4 3 2

2♦

3♠

6♦²

6♠⁴

1. RKB (1430).

2. '1' or '3' (surely '1') with a diamond void.

3. Queen-ask (next step).

4. Negative.

TALK ABOUT HAVING THE RIGHT HAND!

Opener

♠ A K 8 7 4 3

♥ K 8 5 2

♦ A K

♣ 2

1♠

4NT¹

7♠³

Responder (you)

♠ J 9 6 5 2

♥ —

♦ J 7 5 4

♣ A 7 4 3

4♠

6♥²

pass

1. RKB (1430).

2. '1' (♠A) with a heart void.

3. Opener knows of ten, possibly eleven, total trumps.

THE BOTTOM LINE

These are the responses to RKB when you are holding a void:

- With two keycards and a void (but not in partner's first-bid suit), leap to 5NT.
- With '1' or '3' keycards, jump to six of the void suit. If the void suit is higher-ranking than the agreed suit, jump to the six-level in the agreed suit.
- After a void-showing response to RKB, the next step by the asker, excluding the trump suit (signoff) and 5NT (SKA), is the queen-ask. If there is room, new suits are third-round asks.

CHAPTER 6

GAME-FORCING DOUBLE AGREEMENT

This is a friendly chapter. You bid a suit and partner bids a suit. You support partner's suit and partner supports your suit. The bottom line is that you have agreement in two suits, the second agreement taking place at the three- or four-level. Some of these double-agreement sequences may generate a keycard ask. If they do, the kings and queens of *both* suits are included in the response. Basically, there are *six* keycards in play: the four aces and the two agreed kings, not to mention the two agreed-suit queens. What fun!

Let's look at some three-level double-agreement sequences, hearts and spades agreed. We'll see which ones 'might' generate a keycard ask, that is what this chapter is all about. The keycard ask in all heart-spade double-agreement sequences is 4NT.

1. BOTH MAJORS AGREED

Double agreement after a one-level response

(a)	1 ♥ 2 ♠	1 ♠ 3 ♥	(b)	1 ♦ 1 ♠ 3 ♥	1 ♥ 2 ♠
(c)	1 ♥ 2 ♣ 3 ♠	1 ♠ 3 ♥	(d)	1 ♥ 2 ♣ 2 ♠	1 ♠ 2 ♦ 3 ♥

Notice that each sequence started with a *one*-level response. One-level responses ending with double agreement at the three-level seldom generate a keycard ask. And if it happens, the asker must be unlimited. With *six* keycards in play, a player who makes a 1430 double-agreement RKB ask should have at least '2 with'. A player who makes a 3014 RKB ask needs at least two keycards.

In (a), assuming 3♥ is forcing, responder is unlimited and can later ask for keycards.

In (b), opener didn't jump shift (1♠ can be passed) and responder is limited. This sequence is not about to lead to a keycard ask.

In (c), assuming 3♥ can be passed; responder is limited, but opener can still have quite a good hand. In theory, only opener can ask for keycards. If opener makes a slam try however, responder can ask for keycards.

In (d), responder is unlimited. If 2♠ is limited then only responder can use RKB. If 2♠ is unlimited, either player can ask for keycards.

Double agreement after a two-level response

(e)	1♠	2♥	(f)	1♠	2♥
	3♥	3♠		2♠	2NT
				3♥	3♠

Here we have double agreement after a *two-level* response. If the two-level response is a game force, either player can ask for keycards. If it is not a game force, only the unlimited hand can ask for keycards.

In (e) if 3♥ is not forcing, only responder can ask for keycards.

In (f) if 2♥ is not a game force, both players are limited, so no keycard ask.

Double agreement ending at the four-level

And finally, double agreement sequences ending at the *four-level*. These sequences are far more apt to generate keycard asks.

(g)	1♠	2♥	(h)	1♠	2♥
	4♥	4♠		3♦	3♠
				4♥	

In (g), even if 4♠ isn't considered forcing it must be forward going, so opener can keycard.

In (h), responder is clearly unlimited and can keycard.

The queen-ask in double-agreement sequences

Before we get to the example hands, there is still the matter of *both* queens. To accommodate both in the keycard response when responder has exactly two keycards, we need an expanded version of the '2' response! Here it is:

5♥	=	2 keycards without either queen
5♠	=	2 keycards with the lower ranking queen
5NT	=	2 keycards with the higher ranking queen
6♣	=	2 keycards with both queens

If a queen-ask follows a first or second-step response to RKB, the same four steps responses are in play.

The queen-ask following a ‘3’ response.

After a ‘3’ response to a RKB ask, the next step is a queen-ask even if it is one of the agreed suits. Keep in mind the player who makes an RKB ask in a double agreement sequence is supposed to have at least two keycards so the partnership has at least five keycards after a ‘3’ response.

OFF TO A FLYING START

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ A Q 5 3 2	♠ K J 8	
♥ A 6 4 2	♥ K Q 9 7 5 3	
♦ 9 4	♦ A 7	1. Double agreement.
♣ Q 6	♣ A 4	2. RKB (1430): opener has neither jumped nor reversed.
1 ♠	2 ♥	3. ‘2 with the higher ranking queen’.
3 ♥	3 ♠ ¹	4. Can count thirteen top tricks: five spades, six hearts and two minor-suit aces.
4 ♥	4NT ²	
5NT ³	7NT ⁴	

If opener had responded 5♥ (‘2 without either queen’), you would check out in 6♥ — though it could be a five or seven hand!

2. MINOR-MAJOR DOUBLE-AGREEMENT SEQUENCES

In minor-major double agreement sequences, the minor-suit agreement precedes the major-suit agreement.

If the major-suit agreement takes place at the three-level, *four of the agreed minor* is RKB. (Goodbye 4NT.)

If the major-suit agreement takes place at the four-level, 4NT is RKB. (Hello 4NT.) But the hand that asks must be unlimited.

Using 4♣ or 4♦ to ask for keycards in some double-agreement sequences is a mini-introduction to lower-level RKB asks, asks that dominate the latter part of this book.

The step responses to lower level RKB asks are identical to step responses to 4NT. The difference is that they come at a lower level and allow more room for future asks, particularly the queen-ask.

Lower level RKB asks are either 1430 or 3014 asks depending upon who is asking, using our same rules: opener always 1430, responder also 1430 unless opener has shown extras, in which case it becomes a 3014.

Three-level minor-major double agreement after a one-level response

Let's take a look at some three-level minor-major double-agreement sequences, the minor-suit agreement coming first.

- | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| (a) | 1 ♣ | 1 ♠ | (b) | 1 ♦ | 1 ♥ |
| | 2 ♣ | 3 ♣ | | 2 ♦ | 3 ♦ |
| | 3 ♠ | ? | | 3 ♥ | ? |
| | | | | | |
| (c) | 1 ♣ | 1 ♥ | | | |
| | 2 ♦ | 3 ♣ | | | |
| | 3 ♥ | ? | | | |

All minor-major double-agreement sequences ending with delayed major-suit support at the three-level are forcing. Those that start with a one-level response seldom generate a keycard ask unless the opener has reversed, jump shifted, or responder has used the fourth suit.

Sequences (a) and (b) cannot generate a keycard ask because both players are limited. These sequences could wind up in four of the agreed minor.

Sequence (c) could easily generate a keycard ask (4♣), as both players are unlimited.

Three more minor-major sequences after a one-level response ending at the three-level:

- | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| (d) | 1 ♦ | 1 ♥ | (e) | 1 ♣ | 1 ♥ |
| | 1 ♠ | 2 ♣ | | 1 ♠ | 3 ♣ |
| | 3 ♣ | 3 ♥ | | 3 ♥ | ? |
| | ? | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| (f) | 1 ♦ | 1 ♥ | | | |
| | 2 ♠ | 3 ♦ | | | |
| | 3 ♥ | ? | | | |

Sequence (d) is *not* a double-agreement sequence. It is a 'look alike', since 2♣ (the fourth-suit bid) is considered artificial, not a bona-fide suit.

Sequence (e) is not a candidate for a keycard ask. Responder is limited and though opener's 3♥ bid is forcing, it is not a game force. If responder bids 4♣, opener can pass.

Sequence (f) is a candidate for an RKB ask. Both hands are unlimited so either hand can ask. The opener, the powerful hand, usually does the asking; the responder, the weaker hand, usually does the telling (cuebidding, etc.).

Minor-major agreement ending at the four-level after a two-level response

(g)	1 ♥	2 ♣	(h)	1 ♠	2 ♥
	4 ♣	4 ♥		3 ♦	4 ♦
	?			4 ♥	?
(i)	1 ♠	2 ♣			
	2 ♥	3 ♦			
	4 ♣	4 ♥			
	?				

In each of these sequences, a keycard ask is possible. In each sequence ‘?’ is unlimited. After four-level minor-major agreement, the RKB ask is 4NT.

If opener (g) or (i) asks, it is 1430 because opener is doing the asking.

If responder (h) asks, it is a 3014 ask assuming 3 ♦ shows extras. If it does not, it is a 1430 ask.

TWO-OVER-ONE PLUS DOUBLE AGREEMENT

This hand from the ’99 Spingold illustrates how responders with strong hands tread water in a game-forcing auction to extract as much information as possible before using RKB. Just my luck to be playing against these guys.

Opener	Responder	
♠ J 5 2	♠ A 10 7	
♥ A K 10 8 6 3	♥ Q J	
♦ Q 7 4	♦ A 10 5 3 2	1. Game force.
♣ Q	♣ A K 8	2. Looking for more info before ‘busting out’.
1 ♥	2 ♦ ¹	3. Double agreement.
2 ♥	2NT ²	4. Nothing more to say.
3 ♦	3 ♥ ³	5. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
4 ♥ ⁴	4NT ⁵	6. ‘2 with the lower ranking queen’.
5 ♠ ⁶	6 ♥ ⁷	7. One keycard missing.
pass		

PROTECTING ROYALTY

Opener

♠ K 5
 ♥ A K 10 4 3
 ♦ K 7
 ♣ A Q 10 5

 1 ♥
 3 ♣
 4 ♣³
 6NT⁵

Responder

♠ A J
 ♥ Q J 6
 ♦ 6 4 2
 ♣ K J 7 3 2

 2 ♣¹
 3 ♥²
 5 ♣⁴
 pass

1. Game force.
2. Minor-major double agreement now in place ending at the three-level.
3. RKB.
4. '2 with the higher-ranking queen' (third-step).
5. Protecting whichever king that may need protection.

If 2 ♣ is not a game force, but the raise to 3 ♣ is forcing, responder bids 3 ♥ and now 4NT by the opener is a double-agreement keycard ask. All roads lead to Rome.

3. MAJOR-MINOR DOUBLE AGREEMENT

Game-forcing three-level major-minor agreement ending in 3 ♣ or 3 ♦

These sequences that generate a keycard ask usually start with a game-forcing two-over-one response.

After game-forcing three-level major-minor suit agreement ending in 3 ♣, 4 ♣ is RKB.

After game-forcing three-level major-minor suit agreement ending in 3 ♦, 4 ♦ is RKB. In both cases, there are four queen-showing responses: neither, lower, higher, both.

SPADE-CLUB DOUBLE AGREEMENT

Opener

♠ Q 10 7 6 5
 ♥ K Q J 3
 ♦ 9
 ♣ K Q 6

 1 ♠
 2 ♥
 3 ♣
 4 ♦³
 5 ♦⁵
 pass

Responder

♠ K 3 2
 ♥ A 4
 ♦ A 5 4
 ♣ A J 10 3 2

 2 ♣¹
 2 ♠
 4 ♣²
 4 ♥⁴
 6 ♣

1. Game force.
2. RKB 1430.
3. '1'.
4. Next-step queen-ask.
5. '2 with both queens' (fourth-step).

Responder knows that either the ♠A or the ♣K is missing and elects to play in the likely stronger trump suit. Besides, diamond ruffs can be taken in the short trump hand.

Major-minor double agreement starting at the two-level, ending at the four-level

Major-minor double-agreement sequences that end at the *four-level* and start with a *two-level* response are strong candidates for a double keycard RKB ask. If the two-level response is a game force, *either* player can do the asking. If it is not, only the unlimited hand can.

If the agreement ends in 4♣, 4♦ is double keycard.
 If the agreement ends in 4♦, the non-agreed major is double keycard.

- (a)

1 ♠

2 ♣

2 ♥

3 ♠

4 ♣

?
- (b)

1 ♥

2 ♦

2 ♣

3 ♥

4 ♣

?
- (c)

1 ♠

2 ♦

2NT

3 ♠

4 ♦

?

Even though it could be argued that the last bid in each sequence is a cuebid, this book takes the position that it shows support. Translation: the king and queen of the agreed minor are both counted in the keycard response.

In (a) and (b) 4♦ is double agreement RKB.
 In (c) 4♥ is double agreement RKB.
 Each ask is 1430.

FOUR-LEVEL HEART-DIAMOND DOUBLE AGREEMENT

Opener	Responder
♠ 9	♠ A 10 8
♥ A 8 6 4 2	♥ J 10 5
♦ Q 10 3	♦ A K J 8 6 4
♣ A K Q 7	♣ 6
1 ♥	2 ♦
3 ♣	3 ♥
4 ♦ 1	4 ♠ 2
5 ♥ 3	6 ♦ 4
pass	

- Four-level double agreement.
- RKB (the non-agreed major).
- '2 with the lower ranking queen'.
- Playing in what must be the stronger trump suit.

Responder did well to wind up in diamonds rather than hearts, but 7♦ is an even better contract. Is it biddable? Not really. For all responder knows, opener has the ♥K and not the ♥A. Remember, each is considered a keycard. One problem when using RKB occurs when the RKB bidder has neither the ace nor the king of an agreed suit and one keycard is missing. The asker doesn't know which it is.

4. MINOR-MINOR DOUBLE AGREEMENT

After double agreement in the minors

Double agreement in the minors is rare. If it comes up, and if by your methods you are in a *game-forcing* sequence, this is the keycard scene:

(a)	1♦	2♣	(b)	1♣	1♦
	3♣	3♦		3♦	4♣

If the double agreement ends in 3♦ (a), 4♣ is RKB. If the double agreement ends in 4♣ (b), 4♦ is RKB. In double agreement sequences the king and queen of both suits are included in the response.

GAME-FORCING DOUBLE AGREEMENT IN THE MINORS

Opener	Responder	
♠ 7	♠ A 10 8	1. Game-forcing agreement.
♥ A K 7 5	♥ 3 2	2. Double agreement in place.
♦ A Q 4	♦ K 9 6 3 2	3. RKB.
♣ A K J 9 3	♣ Q 8 4	4. '2 with the lower-ranking queen', a second-step response.
1♣	1♦	5. Grand slam try looking for an undisclosed extra.
2♥	3♣ ¹	6. I have a fifth diamond and a doubleton heart. Enough?
3♦ ²	3♠	7. In this book it will be more than enough!
4♣ ³	4NT ⁴	
5NT ⁵	7♣ ⁶	
pass ⁷		

TWO MORE FOR THE ROAD

PROTECTING A LADY

Opener

♠ A 6
 ♥ A Q 7 6 5
 ♦ 8 2
 ♣ K 7 6 3

 1 ♥
 3 ♣
 3 ♠²
 4 ♥⁴
 5 ♦⁶
 pass

Responder

♠ 4
 ♥ K J 3
 ♦ A Q 5 4
 ♣ A J 10 5 2

 2 ♣
 3 ♥¹
 4 ♣³
 4 ♠⁵
 6 ♣⁷

1. Game-forcing, double agreement.
2. Cuebid.
3. RKB (1430): after game-forcing three-level club-heart, club-spade or club-diamond double agreement, 4♣ is RKB.
4. '3' including the ♣K.
5. Queen-ask.
6. Third-step response = higher ranking of the two agreed-suit queens.
7. Playing in the likely nine-card fit while protecting the ♦Q from a frontal assault.

PLAYING IN THE RIGHT SUIT — ENDING ON A SWEET NOTE

Opener

♠ A Q 5
 ♥ A J 10 7
 ♦ A J 10 6 2
 ♣ 3

 1 ♦
 2 ♥
 3 ♠²
 4 ♥⁴
 5 ♦⁶
 pass

Responder

♠ K J 10 6 2
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ K Q 5
 ♣ A 8 4

 1 ♠
 3 ♦¹
 4 ♦³
 4 ♠⁵
 7 ♠

1. Game-forcing agreement.
2. Double agreement.
3. RKB (3014): opener has reversed. In game-forcing double agreement sequences ending at the three-level, four of the agreed minor is RKB.
4. '3'.
5. Queen-ask After a '3' response, the next suit, even if it is an agreed suit, can be used as the queen-ask. (The asker must have at least two keycards.)
6. Third-step response = the higher ranking queen. Responder can count thirteen tricks if partner has a likely 3-4-5-1 pattern: five spades, five diamonds, the ♥A, the ♣A and a club ruff. Besides, in this book nobody goes down in a grand slam on the last hand in the chapter!

- There are six keycards in play: the four aces plus the kings of both agreed suits. The keycard ask depends on which two suits are agreed upon as well as the level of the last agreement.
- The queens of both suits are considered equally important. Both are included when responding to an RKB ask.
- When responding to a RKB ask with two keycards there are four queen-showing responses. The same four responses are used in response to a queen-ask.
- There are no void-showing responses to RKB asks.
- Step responses to keycard asks that start lower than 4NT are the same as the step responses to a 4NT keycard ask.
- With six keycards in play you need at least five keycards between the two hands plus the agreed-suit queen to bid a slam with some confidence.
- The asker should have at least two keycards plus one agreed-suit queen to make a 1430 RKB ask. To make a 3014 ask, two keycards are enough.
- After a '3' response to an RKB ask, the next suit, including a possible agreed suit, is the queen-ask.

C H A P T E R 7

WHEN THERE IS NO AGREED SUIT

This book is divided into two main sections: the majors and the minors. Each has a subsection dealing with agreement and non-agreement sequences, the keycard asks available plus the follow-up asks. Clearly, it is easier to deal with sequences where there is a clear-cut agreed suit. Would that life were always that simple.

This chapter deals with sequences *before* agreement takes place and what effect that has on the meaning of the ‘agreed suit’ when someone launches into RKB.

When opener rebids his suit and responder has a slammish hand

Look at this sequence:

Opener	Responder (you)
1 ♠	2 ♥
2 ♠	4NT?

How do you play 4NT? Is it RKB for spades, the last-bid suit? Is it RKB for hearts? Or is it a simple ace-ask with no agreed suit?

If you play two-over-one, this can’t logically be RKB for spades. Why? You could have raised to 3 ♠, setting spades as the agreed suit, and then bid 4NT.

Incidentally, two-over-one adherents enjoy a significant advantage when it comes to setting the agreed suit. There is no need to squander this advantage by playing ‘last-bid suit’ when game-forcing three-level agreement is possible. If you can make a game-forcing three-level agreement before asking for keycards, do it!

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ K Q 10 6 4 3	♠ 7
♥ 5	♥ A Q J 10 6 3 2
♦ K 6 5	♦ A
♣ A 4 2	♣ K Q J 8
1 ♠	2 ♥
2 ♠	?

You would like to bid 4NT, RKB for hearts, wouldn't you? However, this won't work if partner thinks spades is the agreed suit. Partner will count the ♠K as a keycard and tragedy is right around the corner. What to do?

If you play two-over-one, it's a piece of cake. If a spade keycard ask is on your mind, bid 3♠ and then bid 4NT. A jump to 4NT playing two-over-one should *not* agree spades. It should agree hearts or there should be no agreed suit.

If you don't play a raise to 3♠ as forcing, you have several options. If you *know* all along that you want to keycard in spades, make a game-forcing spade raise originally and then bid 4NT. You can even make a forcing raise with three-card spade support if you are sure you want spades to be the trump suit.

Alternatively, if you wish to ask for keycards after partner rebids 2♠ and you play that jumps to 4♣ or 4♦ are splinter jumps, make the jump, singleton or no singleton!

If you try this, you should have the ace or king of the jump suit so as not to disappoint partner too much. After all, partner is expecting shortness. The truth of the matter is that you, not partner, will be the one asking for keycards most of the time and at least partner will know that the agreed suit is spades.

Given that you can agree spades one way or another, a jump to 4NT over 2♠ should agree hearts. You could have this agreement: after a two-level response followed by responder jumping to 4NT, *responder's* suit, *not* the last-bid suit, is the agreed suit. However, if opener has *jump rebid* the original suit, 4NT by responder should agree *opener's* suit.

Opener	Responder	
1 ♠	2 ♥	1. Agrees hearts.
2 ♠	4NT ¹	

Opener	Responder	
1 ♠	2 ♥	2. Agrees spades.
3 ♠, 4 ♠	4NT ²	

When opener bids two suits and responder has a slammish hand

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ A J 8 5 4	♠ 3
♥ K Q 7 3	♥ A J 10 5
♦ Q 6 5	♦ A 3 2
♣ 8	♣ A Q J 6 4
1 ♠	2 ♣
2 ♥	?

If you are playing two-over-one, raise to 3♥ and then bid 4NT. If you are not playing two-over-one and you don't play a raise to 3♥ as forcing, jump to 4♦ to agree hearts and then bid 4NT.

I know what you are thinking. Partner will think I have a singleton diamond and I don't want to confuse the poor guy. The reality is that after partner bids *two* suits, if you have a singleton, it is *far* more likely to be in partner's first-bid suit.

It seems more practical to play that a *jump* reverse at the three-level (1♦ - 1♥, 2♣-3♠) or a jump in the fourth suit at the four-level after partner has bid *two* suits is a slam try agreeing the *second* suit. The jump shows the ace in the jump suit plus shortness in *partner's* first-bid suit.

Partner now has a very good picture of your hand and maybe able to take charge. If partner doesn't, you can still keycard with 4NT.

Again I can hear you thinking: But I play last-bid suit is the agreed suit. Why go through all of this? Why not jump to 4NT immediately, agreeing hearts, the last-bid suit?

'Last-bid suit' is a great and convenient convention provided you have support for the last-bid suit, but I have a question for you: what if you don't? What if you had this responding hand in the previous sequence?

♠ 3 ♥ 5 ♦ A K 2 ♣ A Q J 9 7 6 5 4

Not exactly the right hand to jump to 4NT agreeing hearts, is it?

Here's another toughie. In the following sequence, opener bids two suits, but this time the second suit has entered the arena at the *three-level* and you have slam on the brain:

Opener	Responder (you)
1 ♠	2 ♥
3 ♦	?

If you want to keycard in spades, bid 3♠ to agree the suit and then bid 4NT.

If you want to keycard in hearts, bid 3♥ and then 4NT to agree hearts.

If you want to keycard in diamonds, raise to 4♦ and then bid 4NT unless partner keycards first.

If you are too strong to bid 3NT and not strong enough to bid 6NT, bid 4NT, natural. The reason 4NT can be played as ‘natural’ is that you have a way to keycard in each of the other suits.

Jumping to 4NT over partner’s opening bid

Opener	Responder (you)
1♠	4NT?

It makes sense to have a general rule governing a direct 4NT response to an opening bid. If the responder doesn’t agree opener’s suit with a game-forcing response, opener’s suit should *not* be considered the agreed suit. It is easy enough to agree spades with a forcing raise. In this sequence there is no agreed suit and this should be a simple ace-ask. Period.

Do you remember the good old days, before anyone ever heard of Keycard Blackwood, when you just bid 4NT to ask for aces? When there is no agreed suit, a nostalgic jump to 4NT is reasonable. These are the responses.

- 5♣ = ‘0’ or ‘4’ (forget ‘4’)
- 5♦ = ‘1’
- 5♥ = ‘2’
- 5♠ = ‘3’ (also unlikely)

There is no queen-ask in these sequences and it is better to start with 5♣ to show ‘0’ in case the asker’s suit is clubs and two aces are missing.

SURPRISE ENDING

Opener (you)	Responder	
♠ K Q J 5 4	♠ 7	
♥ K Q 10 8 6	♥ A	
♦ 8 6 2	♦ A K Q J	
♣ —	♣ K Q J 10 8 4 3	
1♠	4NT ¹	1. RKB for aces — responses starting with ‘0’.
5♣ ²	pass	2. ‘0’.

When you first picked up your hand, the last thing on your mind was to wind up playing 5♣ from your side, but that’s life in the big city. Besides, how often do you find that kind of trump support in the dummy?

If you are playing ‘last-bid suit’, this type of hand can be a nightmare. However, if you are one of a dying breed that plays strong jump shifts, you can play that a strong jump shift followed by 4NT agrees your suit.

KEEPING THE FAITH

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ A 9 7 4 3	♠ K 2
♥ 6	♥ A K Q 10 5 4 2
♦ A J 4 2	♦ K Q 7
♣ Q J 6	♣ 3
1 ♠	4NT
5 ♥	6 ♥
pass	

Since partner could have agreed spades and didn’t, hearts must be responder’s long suit and you should pass 6 ♥ confidently!

WHAT YOU MAY HAVE TO DO

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ K Q 8 5 3 2	♠ A J 6	
♥ K Q 7	♥ A 8 4	
♦ J 3	♦ K 6	
♣ J 2	♣ A K Q 5 4	
1 ♠	2 ♣ ¹	1. Game force.
2 ♠	3 ♠	2. RKB (1430).
4 ♠	4NT ²	3. ‘1’.
5 ♣ ³	5 ♦ ⁴	4. Queen-ask.
5 ♥ ⁵	6NT ⁶	5. Yes, with the ♥K.
pass		6. Protecting the ♦K.

The sequence moves along smoothly when 2 ♣ is a game force, but what if it isn’t? What if you play a raise to 3 ♠ is not forcing in this sequence?

Well, if you play 2NT as Jacoby, you might try that and then bid 4NT.

Alternatively, if you play ‘last-bid suit’, you can leap to 4NT after 2 ♠.

If you don’t play ‘last-bid suit’, agree spades with a jump to 4 ♦ and then bid 4NT. Most of these ‘agreed suit’ problems can be overcome.

When opener preempts and responder has a slammish hand

Opener	Responder
2♥ (weak)	4NT?

Is this RKB for hearts? In Chapter 23, ‘The Last Round Up’, it is suggested that after a preemptive opening bid, a direct response of 4♣ be treated as RKB for the preemptor’s suit. If you buy into this, 4NT is a simple ace-ask, no agreed suit.

When the last suit bid can be considered the agreed suit

There are times when playing ‘last-bid suit’ as the agreed suit is logical:

- (1) After a 1♣ or 1♦ opening bid and a 1♥ or 1♠ response, a direct leap to 4NT by the opener is RKB.

Opener	Responder
1♣ or 1♦	1♥ or 1♠
4NT	

The opener invariably has a freak two-suited hand. This should be treated as ‘last-bid suit’ 1430 ask, opener asking.

- (2) After responder bids and rebids a suit ending at the three- or four-level.

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
(a) 1♥	1♠	(b) 1♥	1♠
3♣	3♠	3♥	4♠
4NT	?	4NT	?
Opener	Responder		
(c) 1♣	1♠		
2♦	2♠		
?			

In (a) and (b), it makes sense to play 4NT as RKB for spades (1430 in both cases). In (c), if a raise to 3♠ is forcing, make things simple, raise to 3♠ and then bid 4NT. If you don’t play 3♠ forcing, a leap to 4NT should agree spades.

In (c), if opener has:

♠ — ♥ A x ♦ A K J x ♣ K Q J x x x x

and 4NT would agree spades, opener has to force in clubs before asking for keycards.

Without agreements, bridge is a game of accidents waiting to happen. Even with agreements accidents happen, but not as often.

(3) Directly after opener jumps in the original suit.

Opener	Responder
1 ♠	2 ♦
3 ♠ or 4 ♠	4NT

Here 4NT agrees spades. This is a 3014 ask because opener has jumped.

If responder has a mega-powerful hand with solid diamonds, responder should consider jumping to 4NT originally, a simple ace-ask, and then placing the contract in diamonds.

When interference interrupts the RKB process

At times interference can work to your advantage if you have a fit with partner's last-bid suit plus a strong hand. You can cuebid or jump cuebid the opponents' suit to agree partner's suit, eliminating possible agreed-suit ambiguity.

A TELEPHONE CALL

While editing this book, I received a telephone call from a friend who was wondering what 4NT meant in this sequence:

Opener (you)	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♠	4 ♥	4NT	pass
?			

Is 4NT keycard for spades? Does it show both minors? Is it a simple ace-ask? Is it natural, perhaps with a solid minor plus a heart stopper? The truth is that an argument could be made for each case. Imagine how you would feel as the opener without an agreement. We've all been there.

One possibility (among many) is to play that after a 4♠ overcall, 4NT is for takeout, but a simple ace-ask after any other four-level overcall. What's important is an agreement.

Coincidentally, during the time that I was writing this chapter I picked up this hand, playing rubber bridge with an unfamiliar partner:

♠ 7 ♥ A Q 10 9 7 6 3 ♦ 10 7 ♣ A K 9

Partner opened 1♣ and the next hand bid 3♠. What should I do, and would partner understand?

Of course I could bid a cowardly 4♥ or make a macho jump to 6♥. It

would be nice to invite slam with 5♥, but will partner think I am worried about spades? And what about 4NT? Will partner think it is keycard for clubs, the last-bid suit? I closed my eyes and bid 6♥.

It all worked out because partner had:

♠ A 5 ♥ 8 4 2 ♦ A K 6 ♣ Q J 6 3 2

Hearts broke 2-1 so there was no problem.

I was lucky. Even though I think 5♥ should be a slam try and not a ‘spade-ask’, I should have bid 4NT, hoping partner would just answer aces. After all, we could have been off two aces.

In a way the ♣K protected me. Even if partner thinks clubs is the agreed suit, he can only show me aces when I have the ♣K. Partner would have answered 5♥ showing two aces and would have wound up playing 6♥ from his side! As ever, agreements would have helped.

Finally, a confidence builder to end this miserable chapter.

Sitting South, you hold:

♠ K Q J 6 ♥ A Q J 7 2 ♦ J 5 ♣ J 3

West	North	East	South (you)
			1♥
3♣	3♦	pass	3♠
pass	4NT	pass	?

What does 4NT mean? Is it keycard for hearts? Spades? Diamonds? Is it a simple ace-ask with no agreed suit, or is it natural showing a hand too strong to bid 3NT? Good luck, I’m outta here.

Hate to leave a chapter with a bad joke. Trying to analyze this sequence can lead to a big headache. Off the top, it seems that spades should not be the agreed suit as partner could have cuebid 4♣ before bidding 4NT to agree spades. Of course if you play last ‘bid suit’....

A general rule is needed in complicated ‘no agreement’ slam hand sequences messed up by a three- or four-level preempt. If ‘last-bid suit’ is not your cup of tea, another possibility is to play 4NT for aces only.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Inevitably, you will run into sequences where you want to ask for aces and/or keycards without a fit in the last-bid suit. You might want to consider these suggestions:

- If game-forcing agreement can be made beneath the game level, do it before making a keycard ask.
- If you play two-over-one, it is much easier to make game-forcing three-level agreements after having made a two-level game-forcing response.
- A direct response of 4NT to an opening bid should be for aces only as responder could have agreed opener's suit instead.

RKB AFTER A SPLINTER

Splinter auctions in major-suit agreement sequences often lead to keycard asks, as well as to sequences that avoid keycard asks.

COMMON SLAM-INVITATIONAL SPLINTER SEQUENCES

- (1) After a major-suit opening bid followed by a splinter response.
- (2) After a major-suit has been opened and rebid and responder splinters.
- (3) After responder bids and rebids a major at the two-level and opener splinters.
- (4) After a 1NT opening bid followed by a two-level transfer to a major followed by a jump in another suit, a splinter jump.

A major-suit opening bid is greeted by a splinter jump

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ A Q J 7 5	♠ 8 6 4 3 2
♥ K 8 2	♥ A Q 6
♦ A 9	♦ 10
♣ K 7 3	♣ A J 6 2
1 ♠	4 ♦ ¹
4NT ²	5 ♠ ³
6 ♠	pass

1. Game-forcing splinter.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 with'; ten-card fit.

A few points:

1. A direct splinter jump is a mild slam try.
2. When you keycard in spades and partner shows you the ♠Q and you have the ♠Q, either partner knows of a ten-card fit or has the ♣Q mixed in with his spades.
3. When you are short in partner's short suit, your hand is not as good as it looks. Had you one more diamond and one less club, 6♠ would be cold. As it is, it is a great contract.

Opener rebids a major suit and responder splinters

Opener (you)	Responder	
♠ A K J 4 3 2	♠ Q 9 5	
♥ 8 7 4 2	♥ 10	
♦ K 4	♦ A 10 7 3	
♣ 2	♣ A K 10 5 4	
1♠	2♣	1. Slam-invitational splinter.
2♠	4♥ ¹	
4NT	5♠	
6♠	pass	

Even though you have a minimum, you have many plusses:

- 1) a strong trump suit;
- 2) length along with no wasted honor strength in partner's short suit;
- 3) a control in the unbid suit.

The bad news is that splinter auctions frequently attract trump leads. Even so, this is a playable slam.

Responder rebids a major, and opener splinters (turnabout is fair play)

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ Q 7 4	♠ A K 10 9 5 3	
♥ A K 5 4 3	♥ 9	
♦ A K 9 3	♦ 8 6 4	
♣ 5	♣ 10 9 2	
1♥	1♠	1. Slam-invitational splinter.
2♦	2♠	2. Strong spades, nothing else.
4♣ ¹	5♠ ²	3. Should be enough.
6♠ ³	pass	

You have a great hand on the bidding, a strong trump suit, no wasted strength in partner's short suit, and a partner who is making a slam try! If you tell partner that you have a strong spade suit with nothing to cuebid, partner should be well placed to determine whether to go on to slam.

When possible, the weaker hand should avoid asking for keycards. The weaker hand tells, the stronger hand asks.

A 1NT opening bid is greeted with a two-level transfer to a major suit, followed by a splinter jump — a slam invitation

How should the opener (you) react upon discovering that partner has a six-card major, shortness in the jump suit and 12-14 HCP? 12 HCP is an exception, 13-14 HCP is more common. Here is the latest from the psychiatric ward:

- 1) If you have no slam interest, sign off in partner's major.
- 2) If you feel you can take charge, bid 4NT, RKB, partner's major agreed.
- 3) And here's the kicker: with certain hands, it might actually be better to answer the splinter jump by steps as if it were Keycard Blackwood! A first-step response shows '2 with', excluding 3NT, which is to play (if available), also excluding the four-level of the agreed suit, a signoff, and 4NT which is RKB.

Why would you ever want to do this? Because hands with aces and spaces (aces and kings) do better to cede control to partner, who should have an easier time counting tricks. Partner will know that you have no strong side suit and *no side-suit queen*. Think of it as a wholesale cuebid.

These are the step responses and what they show:

- First step = '2 with' (two aces + two kings + trump queen)
- Second step = '3 without' (three aces + one king)
- Third step = '3 with' (three aces + one king + trump queen)
- Fourth step = '4 without' (any four keycards)

If you don't buy into this, it is back to cuebidding. Cuebidding does save the day when both hands have two quick losers in the same suit.

A 'FILLER' ASK

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ A Q	♠ K J 10 6 3 2
♥ J 10 7	♥ 4
♦ K Q 5 2	♦ A 4 3
♣ K Q 7 6	♣ A 4 3

1NT
2♠
4NT³
6♠

2♥¹
4♥²
5♦⁴
pass

1. Transfer.
2. Singleton slam try.
3. RKB (1430): opener asking.
4. 3 keycards.

You have a hand that should take charge: nothing wasted in partner's shortness plus fillers in the minors making it easy to count tricks.

Responder has only 12 HCP, an absolute minimum to make a slam try, but it is a 'pure 12'.

ACES AND SPACES

Opener (you)

♠ A 8 3
♥ K 8 6 2
♦ A 5 2
♣ A J 6

1NT
2♠
5♣³
pass

Responder

♠ K Q J 6 5 4
♥ A 5 4
♦ 8
♣ K 7 2

2♥¹
4♦²
6♠

1. Transfer.
2. Singleton slam try.
3. Second-step response, showing '3 without' (three aces + one king).
Note that 4♠ (to play) and 4NT (RKB) are not counted as steps.

TALK ABOUT THE WRONG HAND

Opener

♠ K Q J 4
♥ J 5
♦ A Q 7 5
♣ Q J 3

1NT
2♥
3NT³

Responder

♠ 8
♥ A Q 6 4 3 2
♦ K 6 3
♣ A 4 2

2♦¹
3♠²
pass⁴

1. Transfer.
2. Singleton slam try.
3. To play, knowing partner has a singleton spade and six hearts, etc.
4. Faith.

ANOTHER 'WRONG' HAND

Opener (you)

♠ J 6
♥ K Q J 4
♦ A Q 6 3
♣ Q J 7

1NT
2♠
4♠³

Responder

♠ A K 7 5 3 2
♥ 8
♦ K 5 2
♣ K 5 4

2♥¹
4♥²
pass

1. Transfer.
2. Singleton slam try.
3. You would love to go in reverse and back up to 3NT, but the rules don't allow it; meanwhile 4NT is RKB.

TAKING CHARGE

Opener (you)

♠ K 8 2
♥ K 4
♦ A K 6 4 3
♣ K 7 2

1NT

2♥

4NT³

6♥

Responder

♠ A 5
♥ A Q J 7 6 3
♦ 2
♣ Q 6 4 3

2♦¹

4♦²

5♠⁴

pass

1. Transfer.
2. Singleton slam try.
3. RKB (1430): opener asking. With what appears to be an establishable five-card suit, you should take charge.
4. '2 with'.

A ROLE REVERSAL COMMERCIAL

Opener

♠ A K 4
♥ A 4 3 2
♦ A 10 9 4
♣ 10 5

1NT

2♠

5♠³

6♦⁵

pass⁷

Responder

♠ Q J 10 8 3 2
♥ 7
♦ K 6
♣ A K 8 3

2♥¹

4♥²

6♣⁴

7♠⁶

1. Transfer.
2. Singleton.
3. '4 without', a fourth-step response; 4♠ and 4NT are not counted as steps.
4. Third-round control ask after a RKB response.
5. First-step response = xx.
6. I just knew you'd have the right hand.
7. Of course I do. This is a commercial — didn't you see the title of the hand?

Had opener one more club and one fewer red card, the response to 6♣ would be 6♠, denying third-round club control, and responder would pass.

If you really buy into this 'role reversal' bit, you can also use it after a four-level splinter to an opening bid. You can sign off, take charge by bidding 4NT, or show keycards in response to the splinter by steps starting with '2 with'.

Obviously, there is more than one way to bid a bridge hand and you should be asking yourself how you and your regular partner would be doing on these hands.

- After a game-forcing major-suit agreement via a splinter, 4NT is RKB.
- In sequences where the responder has splintered, the opener can ask for keycards via 4NT or, by agreement, show them via step responses, a suggested substitute method for wholesale cuebidding.
- After a keycard response following a splinter jump, a new suit by the asker that is not a next-step queen-ask is a third-round ask.

C H A P T E R 9

DETAILED RESPONSES TO THE VARIOUS ASKS

This chapter deals with the more detailed responses to the various asks. It includes: the 5♥ queen-ask, hearts agreed; an update on the 5NT response to the queen-ask; the king-ask; the second king-ask; the third-round control ask; and a new spade-control ask, hearts agreed. Don't you dare leave!

Assume that these asks all take place after major-suit agreement, meaning the RKB ask is always 4NT (unless you play Kickback). Also, be reminded that any ask made above the five-level of the agreed suit is a grand slam try. If you are lucky enough to have what partner is looking for, you should wind up in a grand slam.

The simpler set of responses to these asks has been covered.

DETAILED RESPONSES TO THE 5♥ QUEEN-ASK, HEARTS AGREED

After a keycard response of 5♦, 5♥ is the queen-ask, hearts *or* spades agreed, a grand slam try.

If it is a 1430 ask, a 5♦ response shows ‘0’ or ‘3’; if it is a 3014 ask, it shows ‘1’ or ‘4’. When the responder has the *fewer* number of keycards (0 or 1), responder passes 5♥. However, when the responder has the *greater* number of keycards (3 or 4), responder cannot pass 5♥! *Cannot!*

What does responder do with the greater number of keycards? Keep in mind that the following responses are geared to arriving at 7NT if 13 tricks can be counted.

- 1) If responder does not have the ♥Q, responder raises to 6♥. (If spades is the agreed suit, the responder bids 5♠ to deny the ♠Q.) All other responses show the ♥Q.
- 2) If responder has a side-suit king, the king suit is mentioned. If responder has two kings (overkill), the lower ranking king is bid first.
- 3) If the responder has no side-suit king and no ‘important’ third-round control (explanation coming right up), responder bids 5NT.
- 4) Finally, if responder has any 4-3-3-3 distribution without a side-suit king or queen, responder bids 6NT, giving the asker one last chance to jump ship.

JUMPING SHIP!

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ A 10 8	♠ K Q 4	1. Transfer.
♥ K Q 6 5	♥ A J 10 8 7	2. Good hand for hearts with four hearts.
♦ A 10 6	♦ K 5	3. RKB (3014): opening bid was 1NT.
♣ A 7 3	♣ K 8 6	4. ‘4’.
1NT	2♦ ¹	5. Queen-ask facing ‘4’.
3♥ ²	4NT ³	6. Yes, with no side-suit king, queen, or doubleton.
5♦ ⁴	5♥ ⁵	7. There must be a club loser.
6NT ⁶	pass ⁷	

You know partner’s hand! Partner has three aces plus the ♥KQ for a total of 17 HCP. Partner has shown four hearts and has denied side-suit shortness. Therefore, partner’s distribution must be 3-4-3-3 with Axx in each side suit! There are only twelve tricks!

THE 5NT RESPONSE TO A 5♦ QUEEN-ASK, HEARTS OR SPADES AGREED

Holding the agreed suit queen and no side-suit king, the 5NT response to a 5♦ queen-ask shows what could be an important third-round extra. It works like this after *major-suit* agreement:

- 1) If the asker has bid a side suit, 5NT shows the queen of the asker's side suit, period.
- 2) If the asker has not bid a side suit, but the responder has, 5NT shows the queen of responder's side suit, period.
- 3) If neither has bid a side suit, the 5NT response shows at least one side-suit third-round control, a queen, a doubleton, or even a singleton.

ADVANCE CUEBID PLUS THE RIGHT QUEEN

Opener

♠ A K J 4 2
 ♥ A K 10 5 3
 ♦ A
 ♣ 7 6

 1 ♠
 3 ♥
 4NT²
 5 ♦⁴
 7 ♥⁶

Responder

♠ Q 7
 ♥ Q 7 6 4
 ♦ 10 8 7
 ♣ A 10 8 2

 1NT
 4 ♣¹
 5 ♣³
 5NT⁵
 pass

1. Cuebid for hearts
2. RKB
3. '1'
4. Queen-ask
5. Yes, with the ♠Q, your first-bid suit; I remembered, now let's see if you did.
6. Are you kidding me?

THE MORE PRECISE SET OF RESPONSES TO A SECOND KING-ASK

First a review of the simple set of responses to a second king-ask: Jump to a grand slam in the agreed suit if you have the king, sign off in the agreed suit if you don't.

More detailed set of responses to a Second King-Ask

The more detailed set of responses are by steps, excluding the agreed suit, which denies the king. These are the suggested step responses if you have the king:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| A first-step response | = | Kxx(x). This response may allow the contract to brake at the six-level if the asker needs Kx to bid a grand. |
| A second-step response | = | Kx. |
| A raise of the ask suit | = | the KQ and any length (may lead to 7NT). |

Holding a singleton in the second king-ask suit, trump length is critical.

If the asker has bid the suit, 4+ trumps are needed to jump to a grand. If the RKB bidder has not bid the suit, three trumps are enough to jump to a grand. With fewer than the required number of trumps, responder returns to the agreed suit.

SECOND KING-ASK MAGIC

Opener

♠ 2
♥ A Q 9 8 6
♦ K Q 5
♣ K 4 3 2

1 ♥
3 ♠²
5 ♣⁴
6 ♣⁶
7 ♦⁸
pass

Responder

♠ A 10 9
♥ K 10 4 2
♦ A J 8 4
♣ A 7

2NT¹
4NT³
5 ♦⁵
6 ♦⁷
7 ♥⁹

1. Forcing heart raise.
2. Singleton.
3. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
4. '1'.
5. Queen-ask.
6. Yes with the ♣K.
7. Do you have the ♦K as well?
8. You're going to like this, I have the KQ.
9. I love it. I can count 13 tricks.

CLOSE, BUT NO CIGAR

Opener

♠ Q J 8 7 2
♥ A Q 4 3
♦ A 8
♣ A 10

1 ♠
4NT²
5NT⁴
6 ♥⁶
pass

Responder

♠ A K 10 6 4
♥ 10 7 6
♦ 10
♣ K Q 7 6

4 ♦¹
5 ♠³
6 ♣⁵
6 ♠⁷

1. Splitter.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 with' — ten-card fit.
4. SKA.
5. ♣K.
6. Do you have the ♥K?
7. No.

If the responder had the Kxx(x) of hearts, the proper response to 6♥ would be 6NT, a first-step response excluding the agreed suit. With Kx of hearts, a second-step response of 7♣ would be on the money.

FINDING EVERYTHING

Opener (you)

♠ K Q 6 3 2
♥ A Q 6
♦ A Q 5 2
♣ 4

1 ♠
4NT²
5NT⁴
6 ♦⁶
7 ♠⁸

Responder

♠ A 10 7 4
♥ 9
♦ K 8 6 3
♣ A K 10 5

4 ♥¹
5 ♥³
6 ♣⁵
6 ♥⁷
pass

1. Splitter with 4+ spades and opening bid values.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '2 without'.
4. SKA.
5. ♣K.
6. Second king-ask
7. First-step response showing Kxx(x)
8. I knew you'd have that king.

Some play 4♥ in this sequence as natural.

DO THE RIGHT THING!

Opener

♠ A
 ♥ A K 7 6 5 3
 ♦ A Q 5 4 2
 ♣ 8
 1 ♥
 3 ♦
 4NT²
 5 ♦⁴
 6 ♦⁶
 pass

Responder (you)

♠ 8 6 4 3 2
 ♥ Q J 2
 ♦ 7
 ♣ A K 6 4
 1 ♠
 4 ♥¹
 5 ♣³
 6 ♣⁵
 6 ♥⁷

1. Good trumps, some slam interest.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Yes (ten-card fit) with the ♣K.
6. Second king-ask.
7. With only 3 trumps, even with a singleton in the ask suit, sign off at the six-level if partner has bid the suit (the case here), but bid a grand if the ask suit is an unbid suit.

WALKING A TIGHTROPE

Opener

♠ A K 8 7 4 3
 ♥ 2
 ♦ A 8 4
 ♣ A Q 8

Responder

♠ 10 9 6 5 2
 ♥ A 6 3
 ♦ K 6
 ♣ K 10 4

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♠	4 ♥	4 ♠	pass
4NT ¹	pass	5 ♣ ²	pass
5 ♦ ³	pass	6 ♣ ⁴	pass
6 ♦ ⁵	pass	6NT ⁶	pass
7 ♠ ⁷	all pass		

1. RKB (1430).
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Yes, with the ♣K.
5. Do you have the ♦K?
6. Yes, second-step response, excluding 6 ♠, showing Kx.
7. There goes my diamond loser.

Had responder Kxx of diamonds, a 6 ♥ response showing Kxx(x) would have kept the partnership out of a grand slam.

ANOTHER ANSWER TO THE ♠K PROBLEM, HEARTS AGREED, NO SPLINTER BID INVOLVED

If there has been a minor-suit splinter bid in heart agreement auctions, the splinter suit can be used either to ask for or show the ♠K.

But what if there has been no splinter bid? And what if the asker is interested in finding a minor-suit king, not the ♠K? It is dangerous to bid 5NT as partner may respond 6♠. On the other hand, what if the asker wants to know if partner has the ♠K?

The answer: After keycard responses of 5♣, 5♦, or 5♥, hearts agreed, use 5♠ to discover partner's *exact* spade holding, the king, the queen, shortness, whatever. You might as well get your money's worth.

This all purpose '5♠ ask' is called a Specific Suit Ask (SSA) and is used in minor-suit sequences.

The responses to the SSA of 5♠ are by steps starting with 5NT.

5NT - first step = third-round control, either the queen or a doubleton.

6♣ - second step = Kxx(x)

6♦ - third step = Kx

A raise to 6♠ shows the KQ(x).

A jump to 7♥ shows a singleton.

A return to 6♥ denies second- or third-round control: xxx(x). The death response.

THE ALL-PURPOSE 5♠ SSA IN ACTION!

Opener

♠ A Q 8 4

♥ K Q 7 4 3

♦ A K Q

♣ 2

1♥

4NT²

5♠⁴

7♥

Responder (you)

♠ K 3 2

♥ A 8 6 5

♦ J 7 3

♣ A J 9

2NT¹

5♥³

6♣⁵

pass

1. Game-forcing major-suit raise.
2. RKB.
3. '2 without' (the 'right' hand to take charge immediately).
4. Your new toy, a SSA in spades.
5. Second-step response showing Kxx(x) of spades.

If you had:

♠ 10 3 2 ♥ A J 6 5 ♦ J 7 3 ♣ A K 9

you would respond 6♥ to 5♠, showing xxx(x) of spades, and partner would pass.

THE THIRD-ROUND CONTROL ASK

After a response to RKB, a follow-up bid in a new suit that is not the queen-ask is a third-round control ask. The simple way to deal with this ask is to jump to a grand slam with third-round control or sign off in the agreed suit without it.

Matchpoint players in particular might want to use the more detailed set of responses in order to reach 7NT facing the queen or the queen-jack as opposed to a small doubleton.

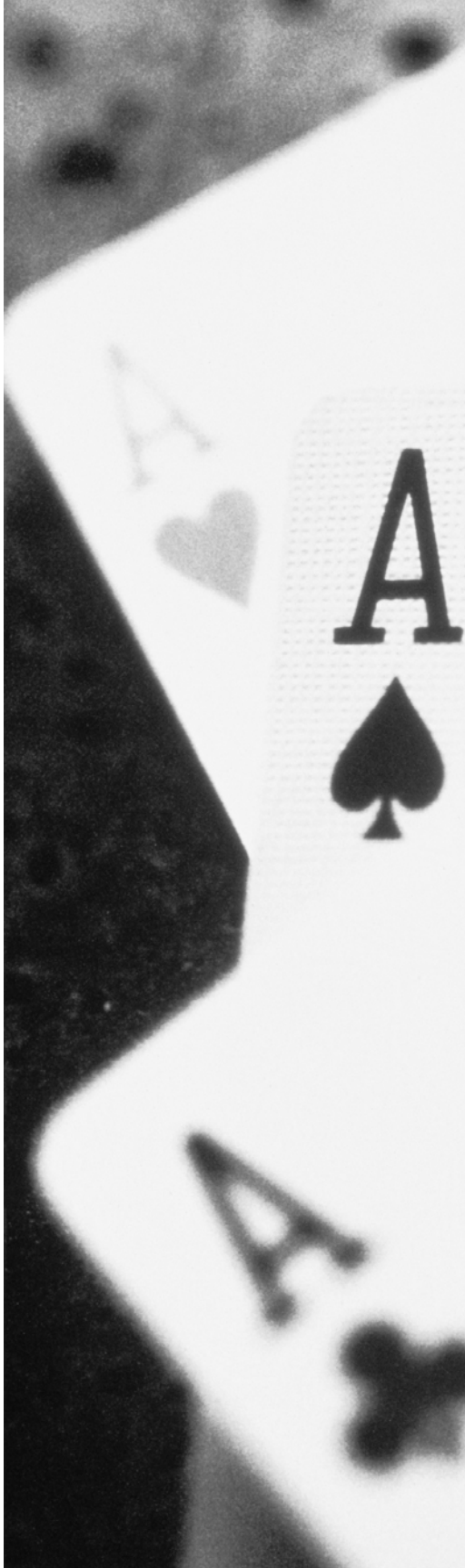
It works like this: After a third-round control ask, a grand slam try, these are the detailed responses by steps:

- First step = xx (or a singleton with 2+ trumps).
- Second step = the queen.
- Raise of the ask suit = QJ(x).
- Jump in the agreed suit = a singleton with 3+ trumps.
- Sign off in the agreed suit = xxx(x) in the ask suit.

MEMORY TEST

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ A 8	♠ 5	1. RKB (1430)
♥ Q 7 5 3	♥ A K J 8 6 2	2. '2 with'.
♦ Q 4	♦ A K J 3 2	3. Third-round ask in diamonds. To ask for the ♦K, bid 5NT.
♣ A J 5 4 2	♣ 7	4. Second-step response showing the queen; 6♠ would show xx.
1 ♣	1 ♥	5. With a civilized diamond division, I count thirteen notrump tricks.
2 ♥	4NT ¹	6. Not to worry, diamonds will <i>not</i> be 5-1 in this book.
5 ♠ ²	6 ♦ ³	
6NT ⁴	7NT ⁵	
pass ⁶		

The idea is to arrive at 7NT on similar layouts playing matchpoints.



MINOR- SUIT AUCTIONS

PART THREE

RKB AFTER TWO-LEVEL MINOR-SUIT AGREEMENT

Well, gang, fun and games are over. Your 4NT crutch to ask for keycards is almost history with a capital ‘H’. It’s too elevated an ask once you’ve agreed to play in a minor suit. You can do better. Once you get the knack of making keycard asks starting as low as 4♣ or 4♦ (most do), you will have more room to make follow-up asks and improve your slam bidding.

Confession time: Once in while when diamonds is the agreed suit, the RKB ask could be 4♥ or 4♠ and on a really bad day, the dreaded 4NT. Keep in mind that in the old days we used 4NT for *all* of our Blackwood asks — some still do. If you lead a clean life, clubs will be the agreed suit.

What follows are several rules for determining what the keycard ask is after two-level agreement, plus the follow-up asks. Finally, keep in mind that barring exceptions, most covered in Chapter 14, *the agreement is not the RKB ask. The ask follows the agreement.*

THE RKB ASK AFTER TWO-LEVEL SUIT AGREEMENT

The RKB ask directly following two-level minor-suit agreement, game-forcing or not, is a jump to the four-level of the agreed minor.

In order to increase the likelihood of an RKB ask after two-level agreement, we assume that the partnership plays ‘inverted minors’. Playing ‘inverted minors’, the raise from the one-level to the two-level can be played as showing limit-raise values or better, or it can be played as a game force.

If a single raise is a game force, then Crisscross, a jump shift in the other minor, can be used to show a limit raise. This frees the direct jump to the three-level to be a weak raise equivalent to a simple raise from the one- to the two-level. All of these raises presume five-card trump support, minimum. If ‘Crisscross’ isn’t your cup of tea, use whatever you have been using to deal with limit raise hands.

In this chapter, a single raise (not in competition) will be considered a game force. If you play that it shows a limit raise or better, not much changes.

To help sort things out *after* you make a keycard ask, you have the queen-ask, the Specific King-Ask (SKA) and the Specific Suit Ask (SSA) available.

The Seldom Available Specific King-Ask (SKA)

Before progressing to the example hands, it should be noted that after minor-suit agreement followed by a keycard ask, 4NT, if available, is the *only* SKA (Specific King-Ask). In minor-suit agreement sequences 5NT is *not* a SKA but a grand slam try looking for an *undisclosed* extra. For more on responses to 5NT, check out Chapter 23.

The Far More Readily Available Specific Suit Ask (SSA)

Since 4NT is seldom available for a SKA, any new suit after a keycard response that is not a next-step queen-ask is a Specific Suit Ask (SSA). The response tells you exactly what partner has in that suit.

These are the step responses to a SSA:

- | | | |
|-------------|---|---|
| First step | = | Third-round control (queen or a doubleton). |
| Second step | = | Kxx(x). |
| Third step | = | Kx. |

A raise of the ask suit shows the KQ with any length.

With a singleton in the ask suit, responder jumps in the agreed suit.

A return to the agreed suit is the death response showing xxx, xxxx, etc.

Okay, you’re ready!

If the SSA is made in a suit partner has bid, but which has not been supported, the responses are a bit different. The ace is a known quantity and shortness is not an issue. The responses by steps, excluding the agreed suit, are:

- First step = the queen.
- Second step = the king.
- A raise of the ask suit = the KQ. (A response your partner loves to hear!)
- A return to the agreed suit denies either the queen or the king. (A response your partner hates to hear.)

FINDING GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS Philadelphia NABC, 2003

Opener	Responder	
♠ A 8 7 4	♠ K 5	1. Game force.
♥ A K	♥ 10 8 3	2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
♦ 4	♦ A Q 7	3. '1'.
♣ A K 8 7 5 2	♣ Q J 6 4 3	4. SSA. A new suit after an RKB response that is not the queen-ask is a SSA. (In this sequence, 4♥ would be the queen-ask and 5♥ a SSA in hearts.)
1♣	2♣ ¹	5. Third-step response, including 4NT, but excluding 5♣ (the agreed suit), shows Kx.
4♣ ²	4♦ ³	
4♠ ⁴	5♥ ⁵	
7♣	pass	

RKB AFTER A FIT-SHOWING JUMP FOLLOWING A 1♣ OR 1♦ OPENING BID

Keycard asks may occur after a passed hand jump shift. In the modern game, a jump shift by a passed hand does *not* show 'an almost opening bid'. It shows a two-suited hand (usually 5-5) with at *least* five cards in opener's minor, typically 8-10 HCP concentrated in the two suits. These jumps are forcing to the three-level of opener's minor, but often end up much higher.

If opener jumps directly to the four-level of the agreed minor, it is a key-card ask, the minor suit agreed only.

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
	pass		pass
1♣	2♥ or 2♠	1♦	2♥ or 2♠
4♣		4♦	

In each sequence, the immediate jump to the four-level of the agreed minor is RKB (1430), opener asking.

A FIT-SHOWING JUMP — DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT

Opener	Responder (dealer)	
♠ 7	♠ K Q 6 5 2	
♥ A Q 6	♥ 3 2	
♦ A Q J 5	♦ 8	1. Fit-showing jump by a passed hand.
♣ K Q 8 7 3	♣ A 10 6 5 2	2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
	pass	3. '1'.
1 ♣	2 ♠ ¹	4. Responder figures to have ten black cards with at least five clubs and they have to lead something!
4 ♣ ²	4 ♦ ³	
6 ♣ ⁴	pass	

The 2NT rebid by opener after a fit-showing jump

With a game-going hand or stronger, the opener can bid 2NT, a game force, asking responder to show a singleton if he has one. After a singleton-showing response, four of the agreed minor by the opener is RKB. When the 2NT ask precedes a keycard ask, it is a double-agreement ask. In other words, the asker has a fit with responder's first-bid suit.

Opener	Dealer	
	pass	1. Fit-showing jump by a passed hand.
1 ♦	2 ♠ ¹	2. Do you have a singleton?
2NT ²	3 ♣ ³ , 3 ♦ ⁴ , 3 ♥ ³	3. Singleton-showing bids.
		4. No singleton 4-2-5-2 (3 or 4 honors in spades).

After any response, 4♦ by the opener is keycard for both diamonds and spades.

LET'S SEE IF THIS WORKS (IT SHOULD — I MADE UP THE HAND!)

Dealer (Responder)	Opener	
♠ 9	♠ J 10 8	1. Fit-showing jump (at least five clubs and five hearts presumed).
♥ A Q 9 3 2	♥ K 7 6	2. Game-forcing distribution ask.
♦ 10 9	♦ A Q	3. Singleton.
♣ K 10 8 7 3	♣ A 9 6 5 4	4. RKB, both clubs and hearts agreed.
pass	1 ♣	5. '2' with the higher-ranking queen only. When 4♣ is RKB in double agreement auctions, there are four '2' queen-showing responses: neither, lower, higher, both.
2 ♥ ¹	2NT ²	
3 ♠ ³	4 ♣ ⁴	
5 ♣ ⁵	6 ♣	

If responder had two spades and one diamond, the response to 2NT would be 3♦ and the opener fearing two spade losers would sign off in 4♥.

RESPONDER'S TURN TO ASK FOR KEYCARDS

Can the responder, the one who has made the agreement, ask for keycards? Yes, if a single raise is played as a game force, four of the agreed minor by either player *at any time* is RKB. However, once the bidding slips past four of the agreed suit without an RKB ask, the next RKB on-ramp is 4NT.

RESPONDER'S TURN TO SHINE

Opener

♠ 5 4 2
♥ A K 3 2
♦ 7
♣ A J 10 8 3

1♣
2♥²
4NT⁴
7♣⁶

Responder (you)

♠ A J
♥ 8
♦ A Q 10 6
♣ K Q 7 6 5 2

2♣¹
4♣³
5♦⁵
pass

1. Game force.
2. Heart cards.
3. RKB (1430): opener has not jumped or reversed.
4. '2 with'. Responder has guaranteed five clubs so there is a ten-card fit.
5. SSA (any suit that is not the queen-ask).
6. A singleton is enough to jump in the agreed suit.

DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY

Another two-level agreement sequence that can lead to a keycard ask:

Opener

♠ J 5
♥ Q 6
♦ 10 8 5 2
♣ A K Q 5 4

1♣
2♦¹
4♥³
4NT⁵

Responder (you)

♠ K Q 7 3
♥ A K 8
♦ A K 6 4 3
♣ 6

1♦
4♦²
4♠⁴
?6

1. Presumed four-card support.
2. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Queen denial (see below).
6. Pass. All things considered (missing an ace and the ♦Q), playing 4NT, particularly at matchpoints, is your best bet for a good score. At IMP scoring or playing rubber bridge, 5♦ could be a safer contract.

After minor-suit agreement followed by a queen-ask, the negative response, if available, is 4NT. Given this agreement (thank you, Danny Kleinman), it is possible to get out at 4NT when two keycards or an ace and the trump queen are missing.

When 4NT is a possible response to a queen-ask

4NT is the response to a four-level queen-ask when the responder does not have the queen, but it still leaves responder three options when responder does have the queen. Responder can:

- 1) Return to the five-level of the agreed suit lacking a king or an outside third-round control.
- 2) Bid a king suit, the cheaper king with two kings.
- 3) Bid 5NT without a king, but having a third-round control (Chapter 12 has more on this response).

RKB AFTER TWO-LEVEL AGREEMENT IN A COMPETITIVE AUCTION

Let’s talk about interference directly *after* two-level agreement.

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♦ ?	pass	2 ♦	2 ♥ or 3 ♥

Let’s start with the 2♥ bid. Whether or not the 2♦ raise is game-forcing, a jump to 4♦ is RKB. In other words, *two-level* interference is disregarded when it comes to making a direct RKB ask.

After three-level interference, it does matter whether the agreement is game-forcing or not. If the agreement is game-forcing, four of the agreed suit remains RKB.

If the agreement is *not* game-forcing, bidding four of the agreed minor is simply a competitive non-forcing bid; responder is expected to pass. In order to ask for keycards, opener must *jump* to the cheapest unbid suit at the four-level. If the overcall is 3♠ (those rats), jump to 4NT.

Opener (you)	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♣	pass	2 ♣	3 ♦ or 3 ♥ or 3 ♠

Assuming 2♣ is *not* a game force, how would you ask for keycards after the various three-level interference bids in this auction?

- After 3♦, leap to 4♥.
- After 3♥, leap to 4♠.
- After 3♠, leap to 4NT.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- After *game-forcing* two-level agreement, four of the agreed minor by either player is RKB, competition or no competition.
- If the two-level agreement is not game-forcing, only the unlimited hand can ask for keycards via a jump to the four-level of the agreed minor.
- After *non-game-forcing* two-level agreement followed by three-level interference, bidding four of the agreed minor is not forcing. To ask for keycards, jump to the four-level of the cheapest unbid suit. If the interference bid is 3♠, jump to 4NT.
- The negative response to a queen-ask is 4NT, if available.
- In minor-suit auctions, a new suit after an RKB response that is not a next-suit queen-ask is a Specific Suit Ask (SSA).

RKB AFTER THREE-LEVEL MINOR-SUIT AGREEMENT

PART I: GAME-FORCING THREE-LEVEL AGREEMENT SEQUENCES — OPPONENTS SILENT

On frequency, three-level agreements that lead to keycard asks come up far more often than either two- or four-level agreement sequences.

Three-level agreement can be game-forcing, forcing for one round, or not forcing at all. If the agreement is not forcing, it may be invitational or it may be a signoff.

If the agreement is game-forcing, four of the agreed minor can be used as RKB by an unlimited hand as long as 3NT has not entered into the picture. You can survive this section of the chapter with that one rule.

A limited hand should not even think of asking for keycards unless partner makes a slam try, usually by splintering.

Note: All RKB asks by the opener are 1430 asks; all RKB asks by the responder are 1430 asks *unless* the opener has shown extras, as listed in Chapter 1. In those cases we are looking at a 3014 ask. Consider all asks as 1430 unless otherwise mentioned.

Three-level game-forcing agreements come in many packages:

(1) *After a game-forcing two-over-one response followed by agreement*

After a two-over-one game-forcing start, *both* players are considered unlimited. Until one hand makes a bid that the other can pass, *either* player can ask for keycards *after* three-level agreement. These are the sequences in question.

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
(a) 1♥, 1♠	2♣, 2♦	(b) 1♥, 1♠	2♣
3♣, 3♦	?	2♦	3♦
		?	

In each of these sequences four of the agreed minor by responder (a) and opener (b) are RKB asks.

What if the *opener* wishes to ask for keycards directly before agreement?

My preference, not shared by many two-over-one authorities, is to raise to the three-level, hear one more bid from partner, and then use four of the agreed minor to ask for keycards. This method retains the natural meaning of the jump raise as a slam try describing a concentrated two-suited hand, typically 5-4, possibly 5-5, lacking a control in the unbid suit.

Many two-over-ones like to play that the direct jump to four of responder's minor is RKB, giving up on the natural meaning of the jump raise. And so it goes.

Regardless of the sequence leading up to a four-level keycard ask and response, the asker has many follow-up options available including: the ever-present queen-ask, the Specific Suit Ask (SSA) which comes directly after the RKB response, the Specific King-Ask (SKA) including a second king-ask, and a Third-Round Control Ask. Let's take a look.

HEY PARTNER, HOW GOOD IS YOUR SUIT SPECIFICALLY?

Opener

♠ K 6 5
♥ A 10 9 8 2
♦ K Q 3 2
♣ 6

1 ♥
3 ♦²
5 ♣⁴
6 ♦⁶

Responder (you)

♠ A Q 7
♥ Q 5
♦ A J 10 7 5
♣ A K 5

2 ♦¹
4 ♦³
5 ♥⁵
pass⁷

1. Game force.
2. Unlimited (not strong enough to keycard).
3. RKB.
4. '2 with'.
5. SSA in hearts, a previously-bid suit. Willing to bid a grand if partner has the ♥K knowing partner has the ♥A.
6. Signoff. Denies the king or queen of hearts.
7. Looking at a heart loser.

A KILLER DILLER SSA

Opener

♠ 8 5 2
♥ J 10 8
♦ A 9 6
♣ A K Q 3

1 ♣
3 ♦²
4NT⁴
6 ♣⁶
pass

Responder (you)

♠ A K
♥ A
♦ K Q 10 7 4 3 2
♣ 6 5 4

2 ♦¹
4 ♦³
5 ♣⁵
7NT⁷

1. Strong (a dying breed).
2. The agreement.
3. The RKB ask.
4. '2 without'.
5. SSA in a previously-bid suit.
6. The raise of the ask suit shows the KQ.
7. Can count thirteen tricks.

The key bid is the SSA in clubs knowing partner has the ace — and praying partner has the KQ.

THE SPECIFIC KING-ASK (SKA) FOLLOWED BY A SECOND KING-ASK

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ A 5	♠ 8	1. Game force.
♥ K 7 5 3 2	♥ A 4	2. RKB.
♦ K 6	♦ A Q 7 3	3. '2 without'.
♣ K 10 8 3	♣ A Q 7 5 4 2	4. SKA.
1 ♥	2 ♣ ¹	5. ♦K, may have the ♥K.
3 ♣	4 ♣ ²	6. Do you have the ♥K?
4 ♠ ³	4NT ⁴	7. Yes — second-step response showing the king.
5 ♦ ⁵	5 ♥ ⁶	8. He has so much fun making up these perfect fitting hands.
5NT ⁷	7 ♣ ⁸	9. Don't you think everybody knows that?
pass ⁹		

After a king-showing response to a SKA, a follow-up ask in a non-denied king suit is a second king-ask.

Not to fret if you don't play two-over-one. The second half of this chapter deals with non-game-forcing three-level agreements.

(2) *After a two-level reverse is followed by three-level agreement*

LOOKING, LOOKING, LOOKING

Opener	Responder	
♠ A 5	♠ Q 8 6 3 2	1. Game-forcing agreement.
♥ A K J 10	♥ 8 7 4	2. RKB.
♦ K Q 10 7 5 2	♦ A J 6	3. '1'.
♣ 3	♣ Q 8	4. SKA (4♠, the next step, would be the queen-ask).
1 ♦	1 ♠	5. A return to the agreed suit denies a side-suit king.
2 ♥	3 ♦ ¹	6. The hand is off an ace and the ♠K.
4 ♦ ²	4 ♥ ³	
4NT ⁴	5 ♦ ⁵	
pass ⁶		

When three-level agreement follows a reverse (unless the original response was 1NT), the agreement is game-forcing. After the agreement, either player can ask for keycards via the four-level of the agreed minor. After the 4♥ ‘1’ response, 4♠, a suit that has not been supported, could have been used as the queen-ask if needed.

(3) After responder bids the fourth suit at the two-level and then agrees one of opener’s suits at the three-level

THE FOURTH SUIT IN ACTION

Opener	Responder	
♠ A J 6 3	♠ K 5 2	1. Fourth suit.
♥ 7 4	♥ A K 10 2	2. Minimum hand, fewer than three hearts.
♦ K J 6	♦ 4	3. Game-forcing three-level agreement.
♣ K J 8 2	♣ A Q 10 9 7	4. Not interested — now a limited hand.
1♣	1♥	5. RKB. Too strong to give up the ship. Partner must have at least four clubs, having denied three hearts.
1♠	2♦ ¹	6. ‘2 without’.
2NT ²	3♣ ³	
3NT ⁴	4♣ ⁵	
4♠ ⁶	6♣	
pass		

Responder is clearly interested in a club slam. In order to work in a low-level keycard ask, responder engineers a game-forcing three-level agreement liberating 4♣ to be a keycard ask.

(4) After opener or responder makes a strong jump shift followed by three-level agreement

JUMP SHIFT + AGREEMENT + BRAKES

Opener	Responder	
♠ A K J 6	♠ 3 2	1. Game-forcing three-level agreement.
♥ K 5	♥ Q J 6 4 3	2. RKB.
♦ 9	♦ A 7 5	3. ‘1’.
♣ A Q J 7 4 3	♣ 10 8 2	4. Could be off two aces if partner has the ♠K.
1♣	1♥	
2♠	3♣ ¹	
4♣ ²	4♦ ³	
5♣ ⁴	pass	

PUTTING ON THE BRAKES

Opener

♠ 7 6
♥ K Q J 5
♦ K J
♣ A K Q 5 2

1 ♣
2 ♥
3 ♦¹
4NT³

Responder

♠ K Q J 5
♥ 3
♦ A Q 10 9 6 3 2
♣ 7

1 ♦
2 ♠
4 ♦²
pass⁴

- 1. Game-forcing three-level agreement.
- 2. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
- 3. '2 without'. (A player who jump shifts seldom has '2' keycards.)
- 4. At matchpoints, 'pass' is clear. Opener figures to have the missing kings and queens to justify a jump shift. If 'pass' is too unsettling, bid 5♦.

A 'POINTLESS' SLAM

Opener

♠ 9 8 5
♥ K 4
♦ K 8
♣ A K 9 6 4 3

1 ♣
2 ♣
4 ♣²
6 ♣

Responder

♠ 3
♥ A 7 6 3 2
♦ A J 5
♣ Q 8 7 5

1 ♥
3 ♠¹
4NT³
pass

- 1. Game-forcing splinter.
- 2. RKB.
- 3. '2 with'.

This is a beautiful 24-point slam because responder has the right singleton. When ten of the opponents' HCP in spades are going to take exactly one trick, that leaves your side playing with a 30-point deck in the other three suits. If the opponents have some worthless honor cards in the other suits, slam can be made with 20+ HCP!

JUMP AGREEMENT TO THE FOUR-LEVEL VERSUS THREE-LEVEL AGREEMENT FOLLOWED BY FOUR-LEVEL AGREEMENT

Opener

(a) 1 ♣
2 ♦
3 ♥, 3 ♠, 4 ♣

Responder

1 ♥
3 ♦
4 ♦

Opener

(b) 1 ♣
2 ♦

Responder

1 ♥
4 ♦

Responder (a) was planning to ask for keycards all along by making a game-forcing three-level agreement (3♦) and followed it up with a keycard ask. Clearly, responder (a) has a spade control and might have:

♠ A x ♥ K Q x x x ♦ A J x x ♣ x x

In (b), 4♦, a jump raise, is a game-forcing agreement slam try. It is *not* RKB. Responder (b) has temporarily *given up* control in order to make a ‘picture’ bid. The jump raise describes a two-suited hand with strong trump support, in theory lacking a control in the unbid suit. The jump describes a hand too strong to settle for 3NT, perhaps

♠ x x ♥ A K J x x ♦ A J 10 x ♣ x x

MORE THREE-LEVEL AGREEMENT EXAMPLES

SET THE TRUMP SUIT IF YOU CAN

Opener

♠ A K J 8 5

♥ 9 3

♦ K J 5 2

♣ 4 2

1 ♠

2 ♦

3 ♠³

4NT⁵

pass

Responder

♠ 6 4

♥ A 7 2

♦ A 10 6 3

♣ A K Q 7

2 ♣¹

3 ♦²

4 ♦⁴

6 ♦⁶

1. Game force.
2. Setting the trump suit early — a good idea.
3. Decent spades.
4. RKB.
5. ‘2 without’.
6. Going for it.

Those who do not play 3♦ as forcing and wish to ask for keycards directly after the 2♦ rebid are dealing with RKB asks after two-level non-agreement. This is discussed in Chapter 18.

ANOTHER FITTING HAND – MURPHY’S LAW

Opener

♠ A K Q 7 4

♥ 6 4 2

♦ 10

♣ A J 6 2

1 ♠

3 ♦¹

4 ♠³

pass

Responder

♠ 3

♥ A K 10 3

♦ 4 3 2

♣ K Q 10 7 5

2 ♣

4 ♣²

6 ♣

1. Game-forcing splinter. Some play 3♦ shows a strong 5-5. Murphy’s Law: Whichever way you decide to play 3♦, you will always get the other hand.
2. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
3. ‘2 without’.

This 26-point slam comes rolling home mainly because responder has no wasted secondary honors opposite opener's singleton. Notice that when there is a fit and one hand has a side suit of xxx(x) facing a void, 10 of their HCP will not take a single trick! You are playing with a 30-point deck!

COMPLEX AUCTION
North America vs. Italy, Nations Cup

Opener	Responder	
♠ K 4	♠ A J 6 3	1. An artificial checkback used to create later forcing auctions.
♥ K 7 2	♥ A 5	2. Denies four hearts or three spades.
♦ K 8 4	♦ A 2	3. Game-forcing three-level agreement.
♣ A 10 7 5 4	♣ K Q 6 3 2	4. RKB.
1 ♣	1 ♠	5. '1'
1NT	2 ♣ ¹	6. Specific King-Ask (4♥ would be the queen-ask and 4♠ a SSA).
2 ♦ ²	3 ♣ ³	7. Shows three kings.
3NT	4 ♣ ⁴	8. Knows partner has Kx of spades having denied three spades.
4 ♦ ⁵	4NT ⁶	
6NT ⁷	7 ♣ ⁸	
pass		

PART II: THREE-LEVEL NON-FORCING AGREEMENT (NFA) SEQUENCES, ONE HAND UNLIMITED, NO COMPETITION

After three-level NFA, one hand unlimited, the unlimited hand may be strong enough to ask for keycards. We can survive with one rule:

A direct raise to the four-level of the agreed minor by the unlimited hand is RKB. If the unlimited hand does not ask for keycards immediately, the next RKB on-ramp is 4NT.

Opener	Responder (you)
1 ♣	1 ♦
3 ♦	4 ♦

3 ♦ is non-forcing, but you are *unlimited*, so a raise to 4 ♦ is RKB. If you wish to invite game, any suit further describing your hand will do.

Opener	Responder (you)
1 ♥	1 ♠
2 ♦	3 ♦ (now limited)
3 ♥, 3 ♠, 4 ♣	?

After a game try, a return to the four-level of the agreed minor by either player at any time is not forcing.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ A	♠ J 9 6
♥ A K Q 5	♥ 6 4 2
♦ K J 9 8 7 3 2	♦ 10 6 5
♣ 7	♣ A K 4 3
1 ♦	1NT
2 ♥ ¹	3 ♦ ²
4 ♦ ³	4 ♥ ⁴
4 ♠ ⁵	4NT ⁶
?	?

1. One-round force.
2. Three-level NFA
3. RKB (1430) opener asking.
4. '1'.
5. Queen-ask.
6. Queen denial in minor-suit agreement sequences.
7. Close call. If partner has Axx of diamonds, you are a heavy favorite to make 6 ♦. Even if partner has three small diamonds, you have a reasonable chance to bring home this slam.

MAKING IT SIMPLE

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ A	♠ Q 8 3
♥ 6	♥ A J 4
♦ A Q J 9 7 4	♦ K 6 5 3 2
♣ A 7 6 4 2	♣ 5 3
1 ♦	3 ♦ ¹
4 ♦ ²	4NT ³
5 ♣ ⁴	5 ♥ ⁵
6 ♦ ⁶	pass

1. Limit raise. (Playing Crisscross, the bid is 3 ♣.)
2. RKB.
3. '2 without' — five-card support presumed.
4. SSA in clubs.
5. First-step response, excluding the agreed suit, shows third-round control: xx or the queen.
6. A club loser.

In response to a SSA, the return to the agreed suit denies first- or second-round control in the ask suit, xxx(x). It is the weakest response and does not count as a step.

REDUCED TO A GUESS

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ A	♠ 8 3 2
♥ K 5	♥ A Q 10 3
♦ A Q 9 8 5 2	♦ K J 10 4
♣ K J 5 3	♣ 7 4
1♦	1♥
2♣	3♦ ¹
4♦ ²	4NT ³
6♦	pass

1. Not forcing.
2. RKB.
3. '2 without'. Is this operation a success or did the patient die? Only time will tell.

FITTING DISTRIBUTIONAL HANDS = HAPPINESS

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ 5	♠ A K 7 4 2
♥ A K 8 5 3 2	♥ 6
♦ 9	♦ Q 6 3
♣ A Q 8 6 3	♣ J 5 4 2
1♥	1♠
2♣	3♣ ¹
4♣ ²	4♦ ³
5♣ ⁴	pass

1. Not forcing.
2. RKB
3. '1'.
4. Don't even think of bidding 6♣ — you could be off two aces.

After a non-forcing raise to the three-level, four of the agreed minor can be used as RKB as other game tries are available. Opener is considered unlimited having bid two suits.

MATCHPOINT MANIA

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ A K 10 6	♠ 4
♥ A Q 7	♥ J 5 2
♦ 6	♦ K Q J 4 3
♣ K J 6 4 2	♣ A 9 5 3
1♣	1♦
1♠	3♣ ¹
4♣ ²	4♦ ³
4♥ ⁴	4NT ⁵
26	

1. Non-forcing agreement.
2. RKB (Rule #1).
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Denies the ♣Q.
6. A close call. You are off an ace plus the ♣Q. Your choices are: pass, 5♣, or 6♣. At matchpoints, pass or bid 6♣ — playing safe in 5♣ usually doesn't cut the mustard because you lose to the 3NT bidders who take ten tricks.

DELAYED ASK

Opener

♠ 6
♥ 8 3 2
♦ A 6 4 3
♣ A K Q 10 4

1 ♣
2 ♣
3 ♦¹
4 ♣²
4NT⁴
pass

Responder (you)

♠ A 10 9 5 3 2
♥ K Q
♦ K Q J 10
♣ J

1 ♠
2 ♦
3 ♠
4 ♦³
6 ♦

1. NFA.
2. Cuebid.
3. RKB after the limited hand cuebids.
4. '2 without'.

Even if partner had signed off in 4♦ after your 3♠ bid, you could still have keycarded via 4NT. However, once partner cuebids (4♣), 4♦ by the unlimited is RKB.

The limited hand having honors of interest (keycards) for partner

Say you make a weak limited response (limit raise) and partner invites slam via a splinter jump, or via a four-level cuebid higher than the four-level of the agreed suit.

If you are gazing at *two* honors of interest (aces, the king of the agreed suit, the king of a suit partner has cuebid, or a side-suit king after partner has splintered), you are in the slam zone. It's up to *you* to let partner know about these two honors by cuebidding even if it means bypassing the game level in the agreed suit.

COMING TO LIFE

Opener

♠ A 9 2
♥ A K 6 3
♦ 5
♣ A Q J 7 2

1 ♣
4 ♦²
6 ♣

Responder (you)

♠ Q 3
♥ 7 2
♦ A J 6 3
♣ K 10 8 6 4

3 ♣¹
5 ♦³
pass

1. Limit raise (2♦ if you play Crisscross).
2. Splinter jump – slam try
3. Cuebidding *beyond* the game level with two keycards.

The limited hand with trump support to die for — after partner makes a game or slam try

If partner makes a *three-level game try* after you have limited your hand with a non-forcing agreement, jump to 4NT to show great trumps! This is not a ‘standard’ agreement, but many good players use 4NT in these sequences to show great trumps and nothing to cuebid. It makes no sense for a weak hand to leap to 4NT, RKB, after a presumed game try.

If partner makes a slam try splinter, or a four-level cuebid beyond the four-level of the agreed suit, leap to slam with strong trumps. The rationale is if partner can make a slam try facing a known weak hand with a weak trump suit, he must have everything else.

What is the definition of strong trumps? Sort of like the definition of pornography: you know it when you see it. Typically it will be a six-card suit headed by two of the top three honors, or a five-card suit headed by AKQ or AKJ10.

HUMUNGOUS TRUMP SUPPORT—SHOW IT!

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ J	♠ 10 9 7	
♥ A K 5	♥ 7 6	
♦ A K 3 2	♦ 8 6	1. Limit raise. Playing Crisscross, respond 2♦.
♣ Q J 5 4 3	♣ A K 10 7 6 2	2. Apparent game try; actually opener has slam on the brain.
1♣	3♣ ¹	3. Unbelievable trump support, nothing on the side.
3♦ ²	4NT ³	
6♣	pass	

Had opener splintered to 4♠, you should leap to 6♣ on the basis of your powerful trump holding. You won’t find this treatment in too many other books!

When a two-over-one response is not a game force

Opener	Responder
1♥, 1♠	2♣, 2♦
3♣, 3♦	

We have already discussed how responder asks for keycards after opener makes a non-game-forcing raise to the three-level. Responder raises the agreed minor to the four-level.

If the *opener* wishes to keycard *before* agreement, head for Chapter 18 dealing with keycard asks when partner’s last bid is 2♣ or 2♦.

Here are examples of a three-level raise after a two-over-one response that is not a game force, but is forcing to either 3NT or four of the agreed minor.

STOPPING ON THE PROVERBIAL DIME

Opener (you)

♠ K Q 9 7 3

♥ Q 6

♦ 5 3

♣ A Q 10 7

1 ♠

3 ♣²

4 ♣⁴

Responder

♠ 6

♥ 7 4 2

♦ A K J 4

♣ K J 9 8 2

2 ♣¹

3 ♦³

pass

1. Not a game force.
2. Forcing for one round.
3. Considered a game try.
4. Signoff.

Most partnerships would shudder at such a sequence, but if you are of this persuasion, this hand is for you. Besides, you can rejoice knowing that if a two-over-one player responds 2♣, the partnership is headed for a minus score in any game contract, but not you!

With a slightly better hand (holding ♠AQ973 say), leap to 5♣ after partner makes a game try.

ARE YOU KIDDING ME?

Opener

♠ A K J 9 5

♥ J 4

♦ A 10

♣ 9 8 6 5

1 ♠

3 ♣¹

pass

Responder (you)

♠ 3 2

♥ A K Q

♦ K Q J 4

♣ Q J 10 3

2 ♣¹

4NT²

1. Forcing for one round.
2. Natural.

What is going on? Whether 3♣ is game-forcing or not, 4♣ by you would be RKB. As long as there is a direct lower keycard ask, you can use an immediate jump to 4NT as a natural slam invitation.

THE BOTTOM LINE

AFTER THREE-LEVEL NON-FORCING AGREEMENT

(SILENT OPPONENTS)

- If the unlimited hand makes a game try (which could be a slam try), a return to the four-level of the agreed suit by either hand is not forcing.
- If the unlimited hand makes a game try and later wishes to ask for key-cards, 4NT is the only ask available.
- A direct bid of four of the agreed minor by the unlimited hand is RKB.
- When a raise to the four-level of the agreed minor is RKB, a jump to 4NT is natural.
- When an unlimited hand makes a slam try, and a known weak hand has two working honor cards, slam is right around the corner and the weak hand is expected to bid aggressively.
- When a weak limited hand hears partner make a three-level *game* try, a jump to 4NT by the limited hand shows great trumps with no outside ace or king. It is not Keycard Blackwood!
- If the unlimited hand makes a four-level *slam* try, the limited hand with great trump support should jump to slam!

PART III: INTERFERENCE *PRECEDING* THREE-LEVEL NON-FORCING AGREEMENT (NFA) — THEY HAVE FOUND THEIR VOICE

When there is interference *preceding, but not following*, non-forcing three-level agreement, happy days are here again.

The unlimited hand bids as if the interference never happened. A raise to the four-level of the agreed suit is still RKB and new suits, including any suit an opponent has bid, is still a presumed game try.

If a game try is accepted with a return cuebid, the unlimited hand can use four of the agreed minor or 4NT (if four of the agreed minor is history) as RKB. On the other hand, if the limited hand signs off in four of the agreed minor, the bidding can end right there. In other words, nothing has changed.

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♠	2 ♣	2 ♦	pass
3 ♦	pass	3 ♥, 3 ♠, 4 ♣, 4 ♦	?

3♥ is probably a stopper-showing bid looking to play 3NT; 3♠ completes game-forcing double agreement; 4♣ is a presumed game-try cuebid, though it could turn out to be more; and 4♦ is RKB.

BRUSHING THEM ASIDE

Opener	Responder
♠ K Q 5 3	♥ 7 2
♥ A K	♥ 8 5 3
♦ 7	♦ A J 6
♣ K Q 9 8 5 4	♣ A 7 6 3 2

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1♣	2♥ ¹	3♣	pass
4♣ ²	pass	4♠ ³	pass
6♣ ⁴	all pass		

1. Weak.
2. RKB, four-level raise.
3. ‘2 without’.
4. Perfect.

PART IV: INTERFERENCE *FOLLOWING* THREE-LEVEL NFA
— BAD NEWS, VERY BAD NEWS

Opener (you)	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1♣	2♥ ¹	3♣	3♥
?			

1. Weak.

Say RHO crashes your party by interfering at the three-level following your non-forcing three-level agreement.

When RHO intervenes after non-forcing three-level agreement, four of the agreed minor is no longer RKB, in fact it isn’t even forcing! It is competitive and partner is expected to pass. So goodbye four of the agreed minor as RKB.

Unbid suits or any suit an opponent has bid are considered game tries. If the interference bid makes it impossible to make a game try, doubling the inteferece bid is considered a ‘game try double’. But what about RKB?

To ask for keycards after three-level interference by RHO, it’s ‘jump time’.

The unlimited hand can jump to the cheaper (or only) *unbid* suit at the four-level. If none is available, jumping to 4NT is the default RKB ask.

Let's look at some other sequences where RHO ruins your day. Say you are the opener. How would you ask for keycards?

Opener (you)	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♣ ?	pass	3 ♣ ¹	3 ♦ or 3 ♥ or 3 ♠

1. Limit raise.

If the overcall is 3 ♦, 4 ♥ is RKB, cheapest unbid suit.
 If the overcall is 3 ♥, 4 ♠ is RKB, the only available suit at the four-level that can be used.
 If the overcall is 3 ♠, 4NT is RKB. After 3 ♠ interference, 4NT is always RKB.

DEAL WITH IT!

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ K Q 10 6	♠ J 5 2
♥ 9	♥ K Q J
♦ A K 4	♦ 8
♣ A J 10 7 3	♣ Q 9 6 5 4 2

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♣	pass	2 ♦ ¹	3 ♦
4 ♥ ²	pass	4NT ³	pass
5 ♣	all pass		

- 1. Crisscross.
- 2. RKB: a jump to the four-level in the cheaper unbid suit.
- 3. '0'.

BOTTOM LINE AFTER THREE-LEVEL AGREEMENT IN COMPETITION

1. If LHO interferes at the two-level, and three-level NFA follows, four of the agreed minor by the unlimited hand is RKB. New suits are game tries.
2. When three-level NFA is followed by three-level competition, four of the agreed minor by the unlimited hand is to play. To keycard, the unlimited hand must jump to the four-level of the cheapest unbid suit. If none is available, 4NT is RKB.
3. When a jump to the four-level in an unbid suit is the only RKB ask available, it supercedes the meaning of a splinter jump in that suit.

PART V: A SLAM TRY IN THE AGREED MINOR FOLLOWING A 3NT BID

Are you wondering if this chapter will ever end? You aren't the only one. But we're nearly there.

When you bid 3NT after game-forcing three-level minor-suit agreement, you are limited. If your *unlimited* partner persists by bidding four of the agreed suit, that is RKB.

If your unlimited partner follows up your 3NT bid with a four-level slam-try cuebid, what you *can't* do is ask for keycards. This is what you *can* do:

1. Return the favor and cuebid.
2. Bid 4NT, to play.
3. Sign off in the agreed suit.
4. Close your eyes and bid slam.

Opener	Responder
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♦	3 ♦
3NT	4 ♣, 4 ♦, 4 ♥, 4 ♠?

4 ♣, 4 ♥ and 4 ♠ are cuebids, 4 ♦ is RKB. If responder had six hearts and four diamonds, responder probably would have rebid hearts. After a cuebid, opener can sign off in 4NT, sign off at the five-level of the agreed suit, or bid slam.

I WANT OUT!

Opener	Responder	
♠ K Q J 8 4	♠ 5	1. Game force.
♥ K Q 10	♥ 8 3	2. Game-forcing three-level agreement.
♦ Q 6 3 2	♦ A J 9 8	3. Natural slam-try
♣ 4	♣ A K Q J 3 2	4. No interest whatsoever, 4 ♦ would be RKB.
1 ♠	2 ♣ ¹	5. Don't ever tell me that I don't trust you.
2 ♦	3 ♦ ²	
3NT	4 ♣ ³	
4NT ⁴	pass ⁵	

This chapter is over. Who do you think is happier, you or me? Don't bet on it.

THE QUEEN-ASK AFTER MINOR-SUIT AGREEMENT

There are three essential elements to a queen-ask after either minor- or major-suit agreement:

- (1) Knowing what the queen-ask is.
- (2) Making the proper response.
- (3) Knowing which follow-up asks are available after the response.

1. KNOWING WHAT THE QUEEN-ASK IS

When the agreed suit is a major, 4NT is RKB and the two responses that can generate a queen-ask are 5♣ and 5♦. After a 5♣ response, 5♦ is always the queen-ask; after a 5♦ response, 5♥ is always the queen-ask. So much for major-suit agreement queen-asks (covered in Chapter 2).

After minor-suit agreement, the good news is that the two most common RKB asks are 4♣ and 4♦. The bad news is that after four-level diamond agreement, 4♥, 4♠ and even 4NT are possible RKB asks leading to some strange next-step queen-asks! As ever, only the first two responses, both denying the queen, can generate a next-step queen-ask.

2. MAKING THE PROPER RESPONSE TO A QUEEN-ASK

You actually have a choice of responses to a queen-ask: one simple, one more detailed. Keep in mind that if you have the queen, you are headed for at *least* a small slam.

The simple set of responses to a queen-ask

If you don't have the queen, sign off at the five-level of the agreed suit. If you have the queen, bid six of the agreed suit.

The more detailed set of responses to a queen-ask

This set of responses can make it easier to get to a grand slam and also allows the partnership to bail out at 4NT when missing two keycards, or one keycard plus the trump queen. The following set of responses will be used in this book.

1. If you don't have the queen, bid 4NT. (If the queen-ask is specifically 4NT, a return to the agreed suit denies the queen. *All* other responses show the queen.).
2. Bidding a side suit shows the queen with the king of the bid suit. With two side-suit kings, bid the king suit that can be shown at the lower level first.
3. Bidding 5NT shows the queen, denies a king, but shows a 'specific third-round extra'.
4. A return to the five-level of the agreed suit denies a king or a specific third-round extra. It is the weakest queen-acceptance response.

The 5NT response showing a specific third-round extra

In *major*-suit auctions, the 5NT response to a queen-ask shows the queen, denies a side-suit king and shows at least one 'random' third-round extra. The RKB bidder can then ask for the needed third-round control by bidding that suit.

In *minor*-suit auctions, the 5NT response also shows the queen and denies a side-suit king. However, due to space limitations for follow-up asks and responses, the responder must be far more precise as to the meaning of the 5NT response.

1. If the asker has bid a side suit, 5NT shows the queen of that suit.
2. If the asker has not bid a side suit, but the responder has, 5NT shows the queen of the responder's side suit.
3. If neither the asker nor the responder has bid a side suit, 5NT shows some third-round extra: a queen, a doubleton, possibly a singleton even though it is not a third-round control.

3. RKB ASKS AND QUEEN-ASK FOLLOW-UPS

SYSTEM AND THEN SOME

Opener

♠ A K 4
 ♥ A K 8 3 2
 ♦ A J 8 4
 ♣ 4

1 ♥
 2 ♦
 4 ♦¹
 4 ♠³
 6 ♦⁵

Responder

♠ 8 7 2
 ♥ 9
 ♦ Q 9 3 2
 ♣ A K Q J 9

2 ♣
 3 ♦
 4 ♥²
 5 ♣⁴
 pass

1. RKB after three-level agreement by an unlimited hand.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Yes, with the ♣K.
5. One keycard missing.

A nifty non-systemic response to a queen-ask when holding the queen plus a lower ranking solid five-card side suit is to jump in the suit (6♣). Had this agreement been in place, the final contract, certainly at matchpoints, would have been 6NT. The jump appears to have no loss factor and gives the asker additional options.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Opener

♠ 5
 ♥ K Q 10 7 4 3
 ♦ 8 7
 ♣ Q 8 3 2

2 ♥
 4 ♣
 4 ♠²
 pass

Responder

♠ A K J 8
 ♥ 5
 ♦ A K J
 ♣ K J 10 7 5

3 ♣
 4 ♦¹
 4NT³

1. RKB. (See Chapter 13.)
2. '0' or '3', obviously '0'
3. The queen-ask facing '3'; to play facing '0'.

When the response to an RKB ask is '0', a follow-up bid of 4NT is to play. I consider this a solid agreement. One of my editors does not. He thinks it is better to preserve 4NT as a next-step queen-ask even when responder has '0'.

He envisioned the following responding hand to make his point:

♠ A K Q x ♥ A ♦ A J x ♣ A K 10 x x

(and I thought I made up strong hands!). He said that if 4NT wasn't the queen-ask, how could the responder discover if opener had the ♣Q? Good question.

I doubt if I would have come up with the answer at the table, but given a few minutes, I did. After the raise to 4♣, bid 5♦, a fake Exclusion Ask! Since

you have all of the missing keycards the response will be 5♥ showing ‘0’. Now you can bid 5♠, a next-step queen-ask, a grand slam try. If partner has the ♣Q, partner bids 7♣. Without the ♣Q, partner signs off in 6♣.

When the queen-ask is 4♥ or 4♠

It’s possible for a queen-ask to be 4♥ (after a 4♦ response to a 4♣ 1430 ask), or 4♠ (after a 4♥ response to a 4♦ 1430 ask). The responses are as follows:

Without the agreed-suit queen, bid 4NT.

With the queen, no side-suit king and no precise side-suit extra, return to the agreed suit at the five-level.

With the agreed-suit queen and a side-suit king, bid the king suit.

With the agreed-suit queen and a precise side-suit extra, bid 5NT.

DISREGARDING A QUEEN DENIAL

Opener

♠ A Q 4 3 2

♥ 9 4

♦ 10 2

♣ A K 8 3

1 ♠

3 ♣

4 ♥²

4NT⁴

pass

Responder (you)

♠ J

♥ A K 8 3

♦ A K Q

♣ J 10 7 6 2

2 ♣

4 ♣¹

4 ♠³

6 ♣⁵

1. RKB.
2. ‘0’ or ‘3’, must be ‘3’.
3. A next-step queen-ask
4. Denies the queen
5. Too risky to bid a grand slam with a nine-card trump fit missing the queen.

A bid of 4♠, partner’s first-bid suit, can be used as a next-step queen-ask as long as the suit has *not been supported*. If it has, 4♠ would be to play and the queen-ask would be 4NT.

The asker’s options after a queen-ask response

After a queen-showing response, more often than not the asker places the contract. However, if the queen-ask response has shown a king, a follow-up bid in another suit is a second king-ask. In the rare case that 4NT is still available, 4NT can be used as a second king-ask.

In the following example sequence, pretend clubs is the agreed suit and 4♣ is RKB. Consider *your* options after partner’s 4♠ king-showing response to your 4♥ queen-ask.

Opener (you)	Responder
4♣ ¹	4♦ ²
4♥ ³	4♠ ⁴
4NT ⁵	5♦, 5♥, 5♠ ⁶

1. RKB (1430).
2. '1'.
3. Next-step queen-ask.
4. Yes, with the ♠K.
5. Any other king?
6. Third-round control asks.

When 4NT can be used as a *second* king-ask, five-level bids in other suits are grand slam tries asking for a third-round control in the bid suit.

As a reminder, Specific Suit Asks can only be used *directly* after an RKB response, not after a king showing response to a queen-ask.

A DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE HEART

Opener	Responder
♠ 6	♠ A 9 7 6
♥ A K 7 5	♥ 8 3 2
♦ K 4	♣ A 9
♣ A Q J 7 6 5	♣ K 10 8 3
1♣	1♠
2♥	4♣ ¹
4♦ ²	4♠ ³
5♥ ⁴	6♣ ⁵
pass	

1. A jump preference agreement is not the ask; after a reverse it is a slam try.
2. The ask (1430)
3. '0' or '3'; obviously '3'.
4. SSA in hearts, a grand slam try.
5. Denies second- or third-round heart control. If responder had a doubleton heart, the response to 5♥ would be a first-step response of 5♠, leading to a grand slam.

4NT following a 4♦ or 4♥ response to RKB

After a 4♦ or 4♥ response to a RKB ask, a follow-up bid of 4NT is the SKA because there is room to make a next-step queen-ask of 4♥ or 4♠. However, if the response to a 1430 ask has shown '0' or '1' to a 3014 ask, 4NT is to play.

A 4♠ response to an RKB ask of 4♦

1. A 4♠ response to a 4♦ 1430 RKB ask shows '3' or '0'. A follow-up bid of 4NT is to play facing '0', the queen-ask facing '3'.
2. A 4♠ response to a 3014 ask shows '1' or '4'. A follow-up bid of 4NT is to play facing '1', the queen-ask facing '4'.

Note: Do *not* confuse the above two 4♠ responses with a '1' response of 4♠ to a 1430 keycard ask of 4♥. In that case, 4NT is a next-step queen-ask. After a '1' response to a 1430 ask, there is *always* a queen-ask available.

'1' IS PLENTY

Opener

♠ 8 2

♥ A J

♦ A K 7 2

♣ A K Q 10 9

1 ♣

2 ♦

4 ♥¹

4NT³

5NT⁵

pass

Responder

♠ A K Q 3

♥ 9 7

♦ Q 10 9 8 3

♣ 7 3

1 ♠

4 ♦

4 ♠²

5 ♠⁴

7 ♦⁶

1. RKB.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask. after a '1' response to a 1430 ask.
4. Yes, with the ♠K.
5. Anything extra for a grand?
6. The fifth trump and the ♠Q look pretty good.

Unless otherwise agreed, a jump raise after a reverse is a natural slam try. Shortness in the LONGER trump hand is not considered an extra. It shows great trump support, strength in the first-bid suit, but lacks a control in an unbid suit. If responder wants to keycard in diamonds, he could bid 3 ♦, a game force, and then 4 ♦, RKB. Keep the faith.

RKB AFTER FOUR-LEVEL MINOR-SUIT AGREEMENT

Depending upon the previous bidding, *four-level* agreement can be a slam try, an invitational raise, a forcing raise, a non-forcing preference, or RKB!

Barring exceptions (coming up in the next chapter), *the agreement is not the ask*. The ask *follows* the agreement and is made by an unlimited hand. The limited hand can only ask for keycards *if* partner splinters, initiates a slam-try cuebid or has the perfect fitting hand facing a two-suiter.

If both hands are limited, the agreement isn't forcing, so there is no ask.

When the agreement is forcing, a lower-level keycard ask is usually available.

When clubs is the agreed suit, 4♦ is RKB and 4NT is a diamond cuebid.

When diamonds is the agreed suit, 4♥ is RKB and 4NT is a heart cuebid.

If hearts is a first-bid suit, 4♥ is natural so 4♠ is RKB and 4NT is a spade cuebid.

When both hearts and spades are *first-bid* suits, both 4♥ and 4♠ are natural and 4NT is the only RKB ask. (Mercifully, this doesn't happen very often.)

Let's take a look at some four-level minor-suit agreement auctions. The key is knowing whether the agreement is forcing or not.

PART I: FOUR-LEVEL MINOR-SUIT AGREEMENT, NO PREVIOUS 3NT BID

A) When clubs is the agreed suit, think 4♦ if you want to keycard

QUEEN-ASK DENIAL
Pittsburgh NABC, 2004

Opener

♠ 6
♥ K 7
♦ A Q J 6
♣ A K 9 6 5 3

1 ♣
2 ♦
3 ♣
4 ♦³
4 ♠⁵
5 ♣⁷

Responder

♠ A 10 5 3
♥ Q J 3 2
♦ 5 4
♣ J 4 2

1 ♥
2NT¹
4 ♣²
4 ♥⁴
4NT⁶
pass

1. Natural, game force.
2. Game-forcing agreement, not the ask.
3. The ask.
4. '1'.
5. Queen-ask.
6. The negative response to a queen-ask of 4♥ or 4♠ is 4NT. This response gives the asker the option of passing.
7. Opener knows the hand is off an ace, the ♣Q, and perhaps the ♦K as well. Too much missing to bid slam, too risky to pass 4NT.

DIAMONDS ARE A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND WHEN CLUBS IS THE AGREED SUIT

Opener

♠ A K 7 6 3 2
♥ 6
♦ 10
♣ A J 10 6 5

1 ♠
3 ♣
4 ♦²
5 ♣⁴

Responder

♠ 5
♥ K 8 7 5 3 2
♦ K Q
♣ K Q 4 3

2 ♥
4 ♣¹
4 ♥³
pass

1. Game-forcing agreement, not the ask.
2. RKB.
3. '1'.
4. Two keycards missing.

This hand brings up an important point. What would 4♠ by the opener mean after the 4♥ response? Would it be a next-step queen-ask or would it be to play? This is the rule:

If the next step after a RKB response is in *responder's* first-bid suit, a suit that has not been supported, it is the *queen-ask*. If the next step after the RKB response is the *asker's* first-bid suit, it is *to play*. In this sequence, the queen-ask after the 4♥ response would have to be 4NT.

A REPLACEMENT CUEBID

After four-level club agreement, 4♦ is RKB and 4NT is a diamond cuebid.

Opener

♠ 7
♥ 9 5 3
♦ A Q 8
♣ A Q 10 9 6 5

1 ♣

2 ♣

4NT²

pass

Responder

♠ A K Q 4 2
♥ 6 2
♦ K J
♣ K J 4 3

1 ♠

4♣¹

5♣³

1. Four-level jump raises and four-level jump preferences are game-forcing agreements, not RKB asks.
2. Diamond cuebid (4♦ is RKB), surely denying a heart control.
3. No heart control + no heart control = no slam.

When you use low-level RKB asks, you lose the ability to cuebid the 'RKB ask suit' (in this case, diamonds). 4NT plays the role of the 'replacement cuebid'. You can handle it.

After a *one*-level response followed by the opener repeating an original minor at the two-level, the jump raise is best played as natural.

STRIKING GOLD, FINALLY

Opener

♠ 4
♥ Q J 9 5 4
♦ A K 6
♣ K 7 5 2

1 ♥

2 ♣

4NT²

pass

Responder (you)

♠ A K 6 3 2
♥ —
♦ 10 7 3
♣ A Q 6 4 3

1 ♠

4♣¹

6♣³

1. Game-forcing agreement, not the ask.
2. Diamond cuebid (4♦ is RKB).
3. Music to your ears.

GETTING YOUR MONEY'S WORTH

Opener

♠ A K Q 7 6
♥ 4
♦ 4
♣ A K 9 5 3 2

Responder

♠ 3
♥ J 10 9 5 3
♦ A K 10 6 2
♣ Q 6

Opener

1 ♣
 2 ♠
 3 ♠
 4 ♦²
 4 ♠⁴
 6 ♣⁶

Responder

1 ♥
 3 ♦
 4 ♣¹
 4 ♥³
 5 ♦⁵
 pass

1. Game-forcing agreement.
2. RKB (1430)
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Yes, with the ♦ K.
6. One keycard missing.

The asker's second suit (spades), even if it has been rebid, can be used as a next-step queen-ask. However, a return to a first-bid suit after a keycard response, agreed suit or not, is to play.

IT'S ALL OVER BUT THE PASSING

Opener

♠ K Q 7 6 4 3
 ♥ J 8
 ♦ J 6
 ♣ K J 3
 1 ♠
 2 ♠
 4 ♣¹
 4 ♥³
 pass

Responder

♠ J 5
 ♥ A 4
 ♦ K Q 5
 ♣ A Q 10 6 4 2
 2 ♣
 3 ♦
 4 ♦²
 4 ♠⁴

1. Game-forcing agreement.
2. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
3. '1'.
4. To play. After a keycard response, a return to the RKB responder's first-bid suit (in this case, the opener's spades) is to play if the suit has been rebid. If it has not, it is the queen-ask.

Note: After a queen-ask response, a return to the ASKER'S first-bid suit is to play. Period.

FOUR-LEVEL JUMP-PREFERENCE AGREEMENT

Opener (you)

♠ K Q J 6
 ♥ A
 ♦ A 4 2
 ♣ A Q 7 6 4
 1 ♣
 2 ♠
 4 ♦²
 5 ♦⁴
 7NT⁶

Responder

♠ A 3
 ♥ 9 6 2
 ♦ K Q 6 5
 ♣ K J 3 2
 1 ♦
 4 ♣¹
 4NT³
 6 ♦⁵
 pass

1. Jump-preference agreement, a slam try. Not the ask!
2. RKB.
3. '2 without'.
4. Specific Suit Ask (clubs agreed).
5. A raise of the ask suit shows the KQ with any length.
6. Can count thirteen tricks.

After an RKB response, a new suit that is not the queen-ask is a SSA. Discovering partner's diamond holding should be your number one priority and the SSA solved that problem.

ROSENBLUM QUALIFYING

(World Championship Open Teams event held every four years)

Opener (Alan Sontag)

♠ 7 4
♥ 8 3
♦ A K Q 6 4
♣ K 8 3 2

Responder (Me)

♠ K 9
♥ A K Q
♦ J 7
♣ Q J 10 7 6 5

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1♦	1♠	2♣	3♠ ¹
4♣ ²	pass	4♦ ³	pass
4NT ⁴	pass	5♣ ⁵	all pass

1. Preemptive.
2. The agreement.
3. The ask (1430): I'm unlimited.
4. '2 without'.
5. You don't think I'm going to put anything in here where we get to slam off two aces, do you?

A 'CLUB' TEST

What is the keycard ask, if one is possible, in each of these four-level club-agreement sequences?

Opener Responder

1♦ 2♣
4♣ ?

4♦. After four-level game-forcing club agreement, 4♦ is RKB.
(Two-over-oners might opt to play 4♣ as RKB – see Chapter 11.)

Opener Responder

1♣ 1♥
3♣ 4♣
?

The raise to 4♣ by an unlimited hand is a slam try presumably lacking a control in an unbid suit. After partner makes a slam try, a limited hand can ask for keycards. 4♦ would be RKB, 4♠ would be a cuebid lacking a diamond control and 4NT would be a diamond cuebid lacking a spade control.

B) When diamonds is the agreed suit, think 4♥ if you want to keycard (usually)

Quick review: If the sequence is game forcing, 4♥ is RKB. If hearts is a first-bid suit, 4♠ is RKB, and if hearts and spades are both first-bid suits, 4NT is RKB. (If spades is a second-bid suit, it can be used to ask for keycards when hearts is a first-bid suit.)

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS (1993)

Opener

♠ K 7
♥ A K 4 2
♦ A Q J 8 6 3
♣ 4

1♦
2♥
3♦
4♥²
6♦

Responder

♠ J 5 2
♥ Q 6
♦ K 5
♣ A K J 10 5 2

2♣
3♣
4♦¹
5♣³
pass

1. Game-forcing agreement.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '2 without'.

Opener might have rebid 3NT over 3♣, but what's the rush? In this sequence, hearts is not a first-bid suit, so 4♥ can be used as RKB after game-forcing four-level diamond agreement. When 4♥ is used as RKB, 4NT is a heart cuebid.

AFTER A SINGLE RAISE

Opener

♠ A J 6 4 3
♥ —
♦ A 8 7 3
♣ A 5 4 2

1♠
2♠
4♦¹
5♦³
6♦⁵

Responder

♠ Q 5
♥ A K Q 4 2
♦ K Q 6 5 2
♣ Q

2♥
3♦
4NT²
5NT⁴
pass

1. Game-forcing agreement, not the ask.
2. RKB. Hearts and spades are both first-bid suits, so 4NT is RKB.
3. '3'. Responder is too strong for it to be '0'.
4. Anything extra? I know you are short in hearts and have three aces.
5. As long as you know that, I've nothing else to report.

It is not considered a bright idea to show a void in partner's first-bid suit when responding to a keycard ask. A void in partner's first-bid suit is not considered an extra, it is considered a minus!

Now try this:

THE 'LEGENDARY' REPLACEMENT CUEBID

Opener	Responder (you)
1♥	2♦
4♦	4NT?

Assume 4♦ is a natural slam try jump raise. But what is 4NT?

To answer that question you have to know what 4♥ and 4♠ would mean. 4♥, opener's first-bid suit, would be natural. After four-level game-forcing diamond agreement, with two unbid suits, the suit that can be shown at the lower level is RKB. Translation: 4♠, normally a cuebid, is RKB. But you haven't lost your spade cuebid. 4NT is the replacement spade cuebid denying a club control. Perhaps you have:

♠ A Q J ♥ 7 ♦ K Q 10 5 4 ♣ 6 5 3 2

Note: Two-over-oners might opt to play the direct jump to 4♦ as RKB. If played 'natural', the hand for it might look like this:

♠ 8 4 ♥ A K Q 8 7 ♦ A Q J 3 ♣ 10 7

Don't even think of leaving this chapter yet!

A 'DIAMOND' TEST

How would you ask for keycards in these sequences?

Opener (you)	Responder	
1♥	2♣	1. The agreement, not the ask.
2♦	2♠	
3♦	4♦ ¹	
?		

4♠ is the winner; you can't use 4♥ because it is a first-bid suit, but you can use 4♠ because it is a second-bid suit.

What's the RKB ask here?

Opener (you)	Responder	
1♠	2♣	1. The agreement, not the ask (not RKB. (See Chapter 11.)
2♦	4♦ ¹	
?		

An easy one: 4♥ (1430), and 4NT would be a heart cuebid. Are you starting to get the hang of this? Humor me and nod.

How about this next one?

Opener (you) Responder

1 ♠	2 ♣
3 ♦ ¹	4 ♦
?	

1. Natural (many use it as a splinter).

4 ♥, the unbid suit, is RKB (1430).

Opener (you) Responder

1 ♦	2 ♣
2 ♥	2 ♠
3 ♦	4 ♦ ¹
?	

1. The agreement.

The RKB ask is 4 ♥. After four-level diamond agreement, 4 ♥ is RKB, as long as hearts is neither player's *first*-bid suit.

Opener (you) Responder

1 ♦	1 ♥
2 ♣	2 ♠
3 ♦	4 ♦
?	

Hearts is a first-bid suit, so 4 ♠ can be used to ask for keycards. Imagine how thrilled your partner is going to be to play these lower-level asks. Did I hear you say, "What partner?"

If any of these suggested agreements 'rankle', chuck them and play something you can live with. Just be sure you have some agreement. As Mark Feldman, a world-class player, said, "Even a bad agreement is better than no agreement." Truer words were never spoken.

PART II: WHEN FOUR-LEVEL AGREEMENT FOLLOWS A 3NT BID

When forcing four-level minor-suit agreement follows 3NT, it is considered a slam try. Our concern is with the meaning of the 3NT bidder's follow-up bids. These are the options (no asking for keycards):

1. Bid 4NT to play.
2. Raise to game, a sign off
3. With slam on the brain, cuebid. A cuebid shows at least '2 with'.

Now let's see if this works!

FACING A SINGLETON

Opener

♠ A Q 6 3 2
♥ A Q 10 3
♦ K 6 2
♣ 7

1 ♠

2 ♥

4 ♦¹

pass

Responder (you)

♠ 5
♥ K J 5
♦ A J 7 4 3
♣ K Q J 4

2 ♦

3NT

4NT

1. The agreement.

You have an easy 4NT bid, natural, with all that wasted club strength facing partner's singleton.

SHOWING RATHER THAN ASKING

Opener

♠ A Q 6 3 2
♥ A K 7 3
♦ K 6 2
♣ 7

1 ♠

2 ♥

4 ♦¹

5 ♥³

pass

Responder (you)

♠ J 5
♥ Q 6 5
♦ A Q J 7 4
♣ A J 4

2 ♦

3NT

5 ♣²

6 ♦⁴

1. The agreement.
2. Cuebid showing at least '2 with'
3. Cuebid hoping to hear 5♠.
4. Nothing more to show that partner doesn't already know.

TRIAL SPIN

Opener

♠ A K J 10 3 2
♥ 7
♦ Q 6 5
♣ A Q 6

1 ♠

3 ♠

4 ♣¹

pass

Responder (you)

♠ —
♥ K Q 10 4
♦ K J 9 2
♣ K 7 5 3 2

2 ♣

3NT

4NT²

1. The agreement, not the ask.
2. With your aceless wonder, plus oodles of secondary strength in the reds, not to mention a relatively weak club suit, it is crystal clear to sign off in 4NT.

GIVING PARTNER A CHANCE

Opener (you)

♠ A Q 4
♥ Q 10 4
♦ 2
♣ A K J 10 4 3

1 ♣
3 ♣
3NT
4 ♠²
pass

Responder

♠ 5 2
♥ A J 9
♦ A K 9 5 4
♣ 9 8 5

1 ♦
3 ♥
4 ♣¹
6 ♣³

1. The agreement.
2. Cuebid.
3. Bidding what you think partner can make!

A FINISHING TOUCH

Opener

♠ A K 7 3 2
♥ 4
♦ A K 6 3
♣ K J 2

1 ♠
2 ♦
4 ♣¹
4NT³
5NT⁵
pass

Responder (you)

♠ 6 5
♥ A K 8
♦ Q 7 2
♣ A Q 7 4 3

2 ♣
3NT
4 ♥²
5 ♠⁴
7 ♣⁶

1. The agreement.
2. Cuebid showing at least '2 with'.
3. RKB.
4. '2 with' as advertised.
5. Anything extra for a grand like the ♠Q or the ♦Q?
6. You just knew he would give me one of those cards.

When responding to 5NT, a grand slam invitation in minor-suit agreement sequences, a queen in any suit partner has bid is considered enough of an extra to bid a grand slam.

Happy Slamming!

WHEN THE AGREEMENT IS THE KEYCARD ASK

Earlier in the text, hints were made of the existence of some sequences that contradict a major guideline for keycard asks, namely: ‘first the agreement, then the ask’. This chapter points out those sequences where the agreement *is* the ask.

Rule breakers when the ‘*agreement is the ask*’ come up in auctions following:

- (1) A strong, artificial, 2♣ opening bid.
- (2) A reverse that guarantees extra values, particularly after a one-level response where there is no disagreement as to extra strength.
- (3) A strong jump shift by either the opener or the responder.
- (4) Some two-over-one game-forcing sequences (see Chapter 11).

It goes without saying that RKB asks by the stronger hand are 1430 asks, and by the weaker hand, a 3014 ask. Expect the stronger hand to do most of the asking.

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT AUCTIONS WHEN THE AGREEMENT IS THE ASK

1. *Responder bids 3♣ or 3♦ (natural) following a strong, artificial 2♣ opening*

Opener	Responder	
2♣	3♣ ¹	1. Natural.
4♣ ²		2. RKB for clubs.

Opener	Responder	
2♣	3♦ ¹	1. Natural.
4♦ ²		2. RKB for diamonds.

Opener	Responder	
2♣	2♦ ¹	1. Artificial.
2♥	3♦ ²	2. Natural.
4♦ ³		3. RKB for diamonds.

Opener	Responder	
2♣	2♥ ¹	1. Natural.
2♠	3♣ ¹	2. RKB for clubs.
4♣ ²		

In each sequence, the agreement *is* the ask. A truly strong hand should be permitted to ask for keycards without having to agree the suit. In the case of a 2♣ opener, any minor-suit bid naturally at the three-level is fair game.

SAVING TIME AND ENERGY

Opener	Responder	
♠ A K Q J	♠ 5 2	1. RKB after a natural 3♦ response.
♥ A K 9 5 2	♥ 4 3	2. '1'.
♦ A J 6	♦ K Q 10 7 5 4	3. Queen-ask.
♣ Q	♣ K 6 2	4. Yes, with the ♣K.
2♣	3♦	5. A home run (call 911 if partner has a singleton king of clubs!).
4♦ ¹	4♥ ²	
4♠ ³	5♣ ⁴	
6NT ⁵	pass	

2♣ OPENERS HAVE ALL THE FUN

Opener

♠ A K J 7 6

♥ K 3

♦ A 8

♣ A K 5 2

2♣

2♠

4♣²

4♥⁴

5NT⁶

pass⁸

Responder

♠ 4

♥ A J 10 4 2

♦ 7 6 5

♣ Q J 9 3

2♥¹

3♣¹

4♦³

5♣⁵

6♣⁷

1. Natural; 2♥ did not promise two of the top three honors.
2. RKB — the agreement is the ask.
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask. It is okay to use responder's first-bid suit as a next-step queen-ask suit as long as the suit has not been supported.
5. Shows the queen, denies a side-suit king and denies the ♠Q, the queen of the asker's first-bid suit.
6. Grand slam try, *never* the SKA after minor-suit agreement. Opener is looking for an undisclosed extra, perhaps a fifth club, perhaps the ♥Q? (A singleton in partner's first-bid suit is not considered an extra.)
7. I know what I need and I don't have it. Trust me for once.
8. Okay, but we both know you don't have a great track record.

A STUMBLING BLOCK?

Opener (you)

♠ A Q 6 4 3

♥ A

♦ A K Q 5

♣ K Q 6

2♣

2♠

4♦³

?

Responder

♠ 7

♥ 9 6 2

♦ J 8 7 6 4 2

♣ A J 3

2♦¹

3♦²

4♥⁴

1. Waiting.
2. Natural.
3. RKB (1430).
4. '1'.

What now? Assuming partner has six diamonds (looking at your diamonds it looks likely) along with the ♣A, a grand is right around the corner. If partner has three or more hearts, thirteen tricks are there for the taking (two heart ruffs in your hand). If partner has a 2-2-6-3 pattern without the ♠K or an unlikely five-card diamond suit, you will be reduced to a spade finesse. When you feel you are close to having a 70% chance to make a grand slam, go for it.

Just for drill, see if you can figure out what these bids by the opener would have meant after the 4♥ response: 4♠, 4NT, 5♣, 5♦, 5♥.

4♠ and 5♦ are to play.

4NT is the queen-ask, next cheapest step excluding 4♠ which is to play.

5♣ and 5♥ are Specific Suit Asks.

SOMETHING NEW HAS BEEN ADDED

Sacramento Regional 2005

Opener

♠ A Q 2

♥ A K 7 3

♦ A 9 3

♣ A K 4

2♣

4♦²

4♠⁴

5NT⁶

7NT⁸

Responder (you)

♠ K 9 3

♥ 10 4

♦ K Q J 8 6

♣ Q 10 2

3♦¹

4♥³

5♠⁵

6♣⁷

pass⁹

1. Natural. Does not promise two of the top three honors.
2. RKB (1430). The lower level the ask, the better.
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Confirms the ♦Q and the ♠K, but denies the ♣K or the ♥K.
6. Grand slam try. Not a SKA.
7. Shows the ♣Q having denied the ♠K with the 5♠ response.
8. I can count thirteen tricks!
9. Well, just take them!

In this minor-suit sequence a follow-up bid of 5NT after the RKB response is a general grand slam try looking for an undisclosed extra. Here, you can actually show your 'queen extra' by bidding 6♣ rather than leaping to 7♦ to confirm *some* third-round extra. The ♣Q might be just the card partner is looking for to bid 7NT.

2. *Opener reverses after a two-level response showing extras; responder bids and rebids a minor at the three-level*

GO FOR IT!

Opener

♠ A K J 10

♥ A

♦ A J 10 6 3

♣ K 8 2

1♦

2♠¹

4♣²

4♥⁴

7♣⁶

Responder

♠ 6 2

♥ J 10 7

♦ K 5

♣ A Q J 10 4 3

2♣

3♣

4♦³

5♦⁵

pass

1. Played as showing extras.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask,
5. Yes, with the ♦K.
6. Should be far more than a 70% chance.

Settling for 6♣ knowing partner has the ♦K would be wimpy. Partner is known to have six clubs and if partner has three hearts, there will be thirteen tricks (two heart ruffs in the closed hand). If partner has the ♠Q, there will be thirteen tricks. At worst, you will be able to combine your chances in spades and diamonds for a thirteenth trick. Grand slams don't have to be sure things, you know — this one is good enough.

If 2♠ doesn't *promise* extras, we have a three-level non-agreement sequence on our hands. In such sequences a four-level raise is forcing and a jump to 4♦ after the 3♣ rebid is RKB (Chapter 19).

3. Opener jump shifts; responder bids and rebids diamonds at the three-level

A DOSE OF REALISM

Opener	Responder	
♠ A K J 7	♠ Q 3 2	
♥ 4	♥ J 10 6	
♦ A 6 3	♦ Q 10 7 5 4 2	
♣ A K 6 5 3	♣ J	
1♣	1♦	1. RKB (1430) — an ask before agreement. It helps to be the jump shifter.
2♠	3♦	2. '0'.
4♦ ¹	4♠ ²	3. That's all she wrote.
5♦ ³	pass	

Again the ask comes before the agreement. As always, it is a super-strong hand that breaks 'the agreement is not the ask' rule.

Reminder: After a '0' response to RKB, 4NT is to play. However, this is definitely not the time to pull that rabbit out of your hat!

4. Opener jump shifts to 3♣ after a 1NT response; responder introduces diamonds at the three-level

TALK ABOUT SEEING RED

Opener	Responder	
♠ K 10 6 5 3	♠ 4	
♥ A	♥ Q 7 6 4 2	
♦ A Q 5	♦ K J 10 6 4 3	
♣ A K 10 2	♣ 6	
1♠	1NT	1. RKB (1430).
3♣	3♦	2. '1'.
4♦ ¹	4♥ ²	
6♦	pass	

In this sequence 3♦ is presumed to show a six-card suit and is treated as if the suit has been rebid. Thus 4♦ is RKB.

5. *Responder jump shifts; opener bids and rebids the same minor, ending at the three-level*

If the responder jump shifts, he can ask for keycards bypassing the agreement stage. It can happen when opener bids and rebids a minor ending at the three-level. A raise to the four-level of opener’s minor is RKB (1430).

Opener	Responder	
1♣	2♦ or 2♥ or 2♠ (strong)	1. RKB (1430).
3♣	4♣ ¹	

Opener	Responder (you)	
1♦	2♥ or 2♠ or 3♣ (strong)	1. RKB (1430).
3♦	4♦ ¹	

PUTTING ON THE BRAKES

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ K Q 6	♠ 4	
♥ 3	♥ A K Q 5 4	
♦ K Q	♦ A J 10	1. Strong.
♣ Q 10 9 6 5 4 2	♣ K J 8 7	2. RKB (1430). The agreement is the ask by the jump shifter after partner rebids a minor.
1♣	2♥ ¹	3. ‘0’.
3♣	4♣ ²	4. Two aces missing.
4♥ ³	5♣ ⁴	
pass		

Here’s hoping you get hands strong enough to make one of these ‘asks before agreement’.

RKB AFTER GAME-FORCING MINOR-SUIT SPLINTER AGREEMENT

A splinter jump by an unpassed hand is a game force and frequently attracts a keycard ask. After a game-forcing minor-suit splinter agreement, either player, including a limited hand, can keycard.

After three- or four-level splinter agreement

Opener

1 ♦
4 ♦²

Responder

3 ♠¹

1. Game-forcing splinter.
2. RKB (1430). Four of the agreed minor is RKB.

Opener's other options here include: 3NT (wasted values in the splinter suit); 5 ♦ (to play — strong trumps with nothing to cuebid); and cuebids of 4 ♣, 4 ♥ and 4 ♠.

When a cuebid bypasses the four-level of the agreed suit, the next RKB on-ramp is 4NT. When a splinter jump bypasses the four-level of the agreed suit, the cheaper (or only) *unbid* suit at the four-level can be used to keycard. If no unbid suit is available, 4NT is the ask.

MAGIC FACING A SPLINTER

Opener

♠ 7 5 4

♥ 3

♦ A 6 2

♣ A K 10 6 5 4

1 ♣

2 ♣

4 ♥²

5 ♦⁴

pass

Responder

♠ A K

♥ 10 9 4

♦ K 10 8 7 5 4 3

♣ 2

1 ♦

3 ♦¹

4 ♠³

6 ♦

1. Limited — both hands are now limited.
2. Splinter.
3. RKB (1430): cheapest unbid suit.
4. '2 without'.

Both hands are limited, but after the splinter bid of 4♥, responder's hand has become huge and has an easy keycard ask of 4♠, the unbid suit.

NOT MUCH WASTED HERE EITHER

Opener

♠ A J 5

♥ 7

♦ A Q 10 8 6 3

♣ J 5 2

1 ♦

2 ♦

4 ♦²

6 ♦

Responder

♠ K 6 3

♥ A J 10 3 2

♦ K J 4 2

♣ 9

1 ♥

4 ♣¹

5 ♣³

pass

1. Game-forcing splinter.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking. Not much wasted in the splinter suit.
3. '2 with'. Ten-card fit — opener is presumed to have six diamonds.

A four-level splinter jump by the opening bidder or by an unlimited responder promises the ace or king of the unbid suit. This agreement allows partner to keycard without having to worry about the opponents cashing the ace-king of the unbid suit against a slam contract. We all know the feeling.

If a splinter jump conflicts with an RKB ask, the RKB ask takes precedence.

THAT'S ALL SHE WROTE

Opener

♠ 7

♥ A K J 5

♦ K Q 10 7

♣ Q 6 4 3

1 ♦

3 ♠¹

pass

Responder (you)

♠ Q 6 2

♥ Q 3

♦ J

♣ A K J 10 7 5 2

2 ♣

5 ♣²

1. Game-forcing splinter.
2. Clubs man, just clubs.

After opener splinters agreeing your suit, your best descriptive rebid with strong trumps and no ace or king on the side to cuebid is to leap to game in your suit. Partner should be able to figure out what to do next.

A WASTE-NO-TIME SPLINTER

Opener	Responder	
♠ A 7 4	♠ K J 3	1. Game-forcing splinter.
♥ K Q 8 5	♥ A 6 2	2. Heart strength. Opposite a splinter, strength in the side suits is useful and kings can be cuebid freely.
♦ 10 9 7	♦ 3	3. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
♣ A J 2	♣ K Q 7 6 4 3	4. '2 without'.
1 ♣	3 ♦ ¹	5. Specific King-Ask (SKA).
3 ♥ ²	4 ♣ ³	6. ♥K.
4 ♠ ⁴	4NT ⁵	
5 ♥ ⁶	6 ♣	
pass		

After the 4♠ response, responder uses 4NT, the SKA, to verify the ♥K. A SKA of 4NT should be considered a small slam try. If opener had three hearts and four clubs, slam would depend upon a spade finesse.

Splintering by the weak-two bidder (rare)

The partner of the preemptive opening bidder is almost always the one making the keycard ask. If the Weak-Two bidder does the asking, it is a 3014 ask and the strong hand should be giving serious thought to finding a new partner!

THE WEAK HAND TELLS, THE STRONG HAND ASKS

Opener	Responder	
♠ 7	♠ A 8 5	1. Forcing, natural.
♥ A Q 10 7 4 3	♥ K 5	2. Splinter, agreeing clubs.
♦ 10 6 2	♦ K 8	3. RKB (1430): opener has preempted.
♣ Q 8 3	♣ A K J 6 5 4	4. '1'.
2 ♥	3 ♣ ¹	5. Opener figures to have either the ♣Q or four clubs.
4 ♠ ²	4NT ³	
5 ♣ ⁴	6 ♣ ⁵	
pass		

Note: A four-level splinter jump to 4♠, clubs agreed, *promises* at least one keycard — in blood! This agreement avoids the ‘deafening silence’ following a 5♦ ‘0’ response to a 4NT 1430 ask, clubs agreed, when the partnership is missing two keycards.

Opener splintering after a two-level response

A SPLINTER OR A WOUND?

Opener

♠ A K Q J 6

♥ Q 7 5

♦ 7

♣ A Q 7 4

1 ♠

3 ♦¹

4 ♣³

7 ♣⁵

Responder

♠ 5 4

♥ A 6 3

♦ A 8 4

♣ K J 6 5 2

2 ♣

3 ♥²

4 ♥⁴

pass

1. Played as a game-forcing splinter.
2. Cuebid.
3. RKB.
4. '3'.
5. Can count thirteen tricks including a diamond ruff (or two) in dummy.

Not everyone plays the jump to 3♦ as a splinter agreeing partner's suit. Some play it as showing a strong 5-5 spade-diamond hand. Here, it works well to use it as a splinter. (Why do I feel like the doctor who always suggests surgery?) Also, the 2♣ response suggests a five-card suit.

A splinter jump facing a strong 2♣ opener

RESPONDER GETS INTO THE ACT

Opener

♠ A K Q

♥ K

♦ A J 8 2

♣ A K Q J 3

2 ♣

3 ♣¹

4 ♠³

7 ♣⁵

Responder

♠ 7 4

♥ A Q 6 5 4 3

♦ 6

♣ 10 7 6 5

2 ♥¹

4 ♦²

4NT⁴

pass

1. Natural.
2. Splinter, singleton diamond, club support.
3. RKB, the unbid suit after a four-level splinter bypasses the agreed suit.
4. '1'.
5. My diamond losers are covered.

When either hand can ask

When both hands are strong, there may be a question as to who should ask and who should tell (cuebid). In general, after a splinter jump, a balanced hand with aces and spades cuebids and the hand with the strong side suit asks because it is easier for that hand to count tricks.

SINGLETON FACING SINGLETON

Opener

♠ K Q J 5
 ♥ A 10 9
 ♦ 4
 ♣ K 10 7 6 4

 1 ♣
 4 ♣²
 6 ♣⁴

Responder

♠ A 4 3
 ♥ 3
 ♦ K Q 7
 ♣ A 9 8 5 3 2

 3 ♥¹
 4NT³
 pass

1. Game-forcing splinter.
2. RKB. The hand with the 'chunky' side suit does the asking.
3. '2 with'. Six-card support = the queen!
4. Opener should bid 6♣ even if the response was 4♠ '2 without'. A splinter jump in response to a minor-suit opening promises five-card support, minimum.

Cuebidding beyond the four-level of the agreed suit

Once a cuebid following a splinter jump bypasses the four-level of the agreed suit, the next possible RKB ask is 4NT; other suits remain cuebids.

A CHICAGO BYPASS
NABC 2006

Opener

♠ 7 5
 ♥ 9 8 7
 ♦ A Q J
 ♣ K Q 8 6 2

 1 ♣
 4 ♦²
 5 ♠⁴
 pass

Responder (you)

♠ A K 3
 ♥ 6
 ♦ K 7 6 3
 ♣ A J 5 4 3

 3 ♥¹
 4NT³
 6 ♣

1. Game-forcing splinter.
2. The bypass cuebid suggesting zilch in spades. Opener's hearts make slam a live possibility.
3. RKB (1430): opener hasn't jumped or reversed.
4. '2 with'.

After the diamond cuebid, your hand is strong enough to take charge.

Showing strength in the unbid suit after a splinter jump

Opener

1 ♣
 2 ♣

Responder (you)

1 ♦
 3 ♥¹

In this sequence, 3♥, a jump reverse, is a splinter. If the response had been 1♥, a jump to 3♦ would be natural, not a splinter.

A three-level splinter suggests some strength, or at least length, in the unbid suit, spades, in case partner wants to bid 3NT with spade length and no stopper.

Opener

1 ♠
4 ♦¹

Responder

2 ♥

1. A four-level splinter promises the ace or king of the unbid suit, here clubs.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- No suit bid by an opponent or the splinter suit itself can ever be used to ask for keycards; these are all cuebids.
- A splinter jump to 4 ♠, agreeing clubs, promises at least one keycard.
- Once *cuebidding* bypasses the four-level of the agreed suit, the next possible RKB ask is 4NT.
- When *splinter agreement* bypasses the four-level of the agreed suit the cheapest unbid suit can be used to ask for keycards.
- A *three-level* splinter jump suggests a stopper (or length) in the unbid suit.
- A four-level splinter jump by a hand that has opening bid values should guarantee the ace or king of the unbid suit.
- If both hands are equally strong, it usually works out better for the player who can make the cheaper RKB ask to take charge — more room for further asks.

HANDLING VOIDS AFTER MINOR-SUIT AGREEMENT

PART I: EXCLUSION KEYCARD BLACKWOOD (EKB) ASKS, RESPONSES AND REBIDS

After major-suit agreement, a jump in a void suit *above* the game level is an EKB ask. A jump over game is also considered EKB if the last suit bid is a major and there has been no agreed suit. The last-bid suit is considered the agreed suit. So much for the majors. (Chapter 5.)

After minor-suit agreement, an EKB ask is a jump one level higher than a splinter jump.

After two-level agreement, if a three-level jump is a splinter, a four-level jump is EKB.

After three-level agreement, if a four-level jump is a splinter, a five-level jump is EKB. You have to be on firm ground to make a five-level EKB ask. You are up in the clouds, way up. The bottom line is that five-level exclusion asks in the minors are rare.

Unless the exclusion ask is a jump specifically to 5♣, diamonds agreed, you have to be prepared to play in slam after a '0' response!

REBIDS FOLLOWING THE RESPONSES TO AN EXCLUSION JUMP

Exclusion responses start with a first step of '0', a second step of '1', a third step of '2 without', a fourth step of '2 with' and an unheard of fifth step of '3'. The king of the agreed or last-bid suit is counted as a keycard. There are four keycards in all.

The next step after an exclusion response, including 4NT, is the queen-ask. If 4NT is not needed as a queen-ask, it is a SKA; bids in other suits are Specific Suit Asks. 5NT, as ever, is a grand slam try looking for that elusive ‘undisclosed extra’.

A) EKB AFTER TWO-LEVEL AGREEMENT — YOUR LUCKY DAY

After two-level agreement, a jump one level higher than a splinter jump is EKB.

Opener

1 ♣
4 ♦, 4 ♥, 4 ♠¹

Responder

2 ♣

1. EKB — All of these jumps are one level higher than a splinter jump.

JUMPING FOR JOY

Opener

♠ A Q J 7
♥ —
♦ K J 9 8 6 3
♣ K Q 5

1 ♦
4 ♥²
5 ♠⁴
6 ♦⁶

Responder

♠ 4 3
♥ K J 6
♦ A 7 5 4 2
♣ A 6 2

2 ♦¹
5 ♣³
5NT⁵
pass

1. Inverted.
2. EKB — one level higher than a splinter jump; 4 ♦ would be RKB.
3. ‘2 without’, a third-step response. Five-card length is presumed.
4. Specific Suit Ask (SSA); a new suit that is not the queen-ask.
5. First-step response shows a third-round spade control. It must be xx as the asker has the queen.
6. Bidding a grand slam on a finesse is against the odds, however, bidding a small slam on a finesse offers acceptable odds.

LIFE-SAVING SECOND ASK

Opener

♠ K Q
♥ —
♦ A Q J 6 5 4
♣ A K 7 6 3

1 ♦
4 ♥²
6 ♣⁴
pass

Responder

♠ A 5
♥ A J 8
♦ K 8 7 3 2
♣ 8 4 2

2 ♦¹
5 ♣³
6 ♦⁵

1. Inverted.
2. EKB — a jump one level higher than a splinter; 4 ♦ would be RKB.
3. ‘2 without’, a third-step response.
4. SSA in clubs (prepared to bid a grand facing a first-step response of 6 ♥ which would show a third-round control).
5. A return to the trump suit denies third-round control and does not count as a step.

NOT EXACTLY ACCORDING TO HOYLE,
PLUS A BIT OF GENIUS (MADNESS?)

Opener (you)

♠ —
♥ K Q J 5
♦ A K J
♣ K Q 7 6 4 2

1 ♣
4 ♠²
?4

Responder

♠ A K 6
♥ 4 3
♦ Q 8 7
♣ J 10 9 5 3

2 ♦¹
4NT³

1. Crisscross. Think 3♣ if you play limit raises.
2. 3♠ would be a splinter, so 4♠ is EKB. Playing 3♣ as a limit raise, 4♠ would be a splinter and a risky 5♠ would be RKB. Ouch!
3. 'O'.
4. You are off two aces and partner has about 9-10 HCP. Partner has at most 3 HCP in the minors and no ♥A. Guess where partner's points are? At matchpoints, consider passing, particularly with the lead coming up to partner's spade strength! Yes, you've read that last sentence correctly, and no, no refunds.

SHORT AND SWEET

Biarritz World Championships 1982

Opener

♠ Q J 7 2
♥ A 6
♦ K Q 7 5 4 2
♣ 8

1 ♦
2 ♦
5 ♥²
pass

Responder (you)

♠ —
♥ K J 5
♦ A 8 6 3
♣ A K J 5 4 2

2 ♣
4 ♠¹
7 ♦

1. EKB (3♠ would be a splinter).
2. '2 with' a fourth-step response.

After opener repeats a minor at the two-level, exclusion asks are available by jumping one level higher than a splinter.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- After two-level club agreement, three-level jumps are splinters, four-level jumps are EKB asks.
- After two-level diamond agreement, jumps to 3♥, 3♠ and 4♣ are splinters and jumps to 4♥, 4♠ and 5♣ are EKB asks.

B) EKB AFTER THREE- OR FOUR-LEVEL AGREEMENT

After three- or four-level agreement, jumps to the five-level in unbid suits are EKB asks. The good news is that there won't be any confusion because there is no such animal as a five-level splinter. The bad news is that the ask is so high that you can seldom use it.

UP, UP AND AWAY WE GO!

Opener (you)

♠ A Q 7 6 4 3

♥ —

♦ A Q 5 4 3

♣ K 2

1 ♠

2 ♦

5 ♥¹

2³

Responder

♠ —

♥ 8 7 3 2

♦ K J 10 6

♣ A Q J 5 4

2 ♣

3 ♦

6 ♣²

1. EKB after three-level agreement.

2. '2 without', a third-step response.

3. At the fork — either you go for it or you don't.

Several points:

- (1) Responder does *not* show a void in response to an exclusion ask; a void in partner's first suit is usually a minus.
- (2) Two-over-oners are not quite strong enough to respond 2 ♣ (the dreaded 11-point hand) and would start with 1NT and then pick up the slack.
- (3) It is risky to bid a grand slam. Partner doesn't figure to have more than one spade and if dummy's clubs or diamonds are not that strong, there may be handling charges.

LOOKING FOR ONE, FINDING NONE

Opener

♠ K Q 5 3

♥ K Q J 4

♦ A K 8 3 2

♣ —

1 ♦

5 ♣²

pass

Responder

♠ 10 8 4

♥ 6

♦ Q J 10 5 4

♣ A Q 6 5

3 ♦¹

5 ♦³

1. Limit raise (3 ♣ for Crisscross users).

2. EKB — a five-level jump.

3. '0', the first step.

Notice how important it is to reserve '0' as a first-step response. An important K.O. match in a National Championship was lost because of a misunderstanding about the zero response to EKB. One player thought that 1430 responses were in play and gave a *second-step* response to show '0'. Man overboard! Naturally, I was on that team!

WRONG ACE

Opener

♠ A K 8 7 4 3

♥ —

♦ K 4

♣ A Q 9 3 2

1 ♠

3 ♣

5 ♥¹

6 ♣

Responder (you)

♠ —

♥ A 10 9

♦ Q J 9 7 6 4

♣ K J 10 6

2 ♦

4 ♣

5NT²

pass

1. Exclusion — don't count the ♥A!

2. '1', a second-step response. I didn't!

Exchange the ♦A for the ♥A and a nice grand can be reached. Some might bid 3♥ with the responding hand over 3♣; opener bids 4♣ and things could get sticky. More often than not, setting the trump suit with a forcing bid at as low a level as possible simplifies the bidding.

C) EKB ASKS BY SUPER STRONG HANDS

1. EKB after a jump shift by the opener

After opener jump shifts, a follow-up jump after three- or four-level agreement by the jump shifter is EKB. It is beneath the dignity of a jump shifter to splinter. A jump shifter asks for information; he doesn't dish it out via a splinter (see Chapter 14).

WHEN TWO ARE MISSING, STOP WISHING

Opener

♠ —

♥ A 3

♦ A Q J 6 5 4

♣ K Q J 5 2

Responder

♠ J 8 6 5

♥ K Q 5 2

♦ 8 7 2

♣ 6 3

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♦	pass	1 ♥	1 ♠
3 ♣	pass	3 ♦ ¹	pass
4 ♠ ²	pass	4NT ³	pass
5 ♦ ⁴	all pass		

1. Game-forcing three-level agreement.

2. EKB. After opener jump shifts, a jump after agreement is EKB, 4♦ would be RKB.

3. A big fat 'O'.

4. Two keycards missing.

ANOTHER JUMP SHIFT

Opener

♠ A K J 6
♥ K 6 2
♦ —
♣ A K J 7 4 3

1 ♣
2 ♠
4 ♦²
4 ♠⁴
6 ♣⁶

Responder

♠ 4 3 2
♥ Q J 10 5
♦ J 10 4
♣ Q 6 5

1 ♥
3 ♣¹
4 ♥³
5 ♣⁵
pass⁷

1. Three-level game-forcing agreement.
2. EKB (4♣ would be RKB). A follow-up jump by a jump shifter is Exclusion.
3. '0'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Yes, with no side-suit king; a 4NT response would deny the queen.
6. I know you are weak, but I am bidding it anyway. He can't stand to see any of his example slam hands go down.
7. I'll believe it when I see it.

This is an awkward sequence because the opener can't be sure responder is so weak. It would help if responder had some way to show a near bust hand facing a game-forcing jump shift.

2. Responder joins the EKB party by jump shifting

After a strong jump shift by the responder followed by three-level agreement, a follow-up jump by responder is EKB, not a splinter.

Opener

♠ A Q 8
♥ 6 2
♦ Q 5 3
♣ A 7 6 4 2

1 ♣
3 ♦²
5 ♣⁴
pass

Responder

♠ —
♥ K J 7
♦ A K J 10 7 6 2
♣ K J 5

2 ♦¹
4 ♠³
6 ♦

1. Strong jump-shift.
2. The agreement.
3. EKB (4♦ would be RKB) — a follow-up jump by the jump shifter after agreement.
4. '1' — doesn't count the ♠A.

3. EKB jumps after opener reverses

When opener reverses after a one-level response and gets three-level preference to a first-bid suit, or hears partner raise a second-bid suit, a follow-up jump by the reversing hand is EKB, not a splinter.

The bottom line is that a very strong hand does not splinter with a singleton plus a fit, but takes control instead. This liberates a jump to show a void and ask for keycards at the same time.

REVERSERS HAVE RIGHTS!

Opener

♠ K 6
♥ —
♦ A K 6 4 3
♣ A K 8 6 5 2

1 ♣
2 ♦
4 ♥²
4NT⁴
pass

Responder

♠ Q J 5 3
♥ A 9 2
♦ 7 5 2
♣ Q 4 3

1 ♠
3 ♣¹
4 ♠³
6 ♣⁵

1. Game-forcing agreement.
2. EKB (4♣ would be RKB). A follow-up jump by a reversing opener after three-level agreement is an EKB ask, not a splinter.
3. 'O'.
4. Queen-ask (next-step). If 4NT were not the next step, it would be the SKA.
5. Got it with no side-suit king.

This is not a book on the play of the hand, but you do have chances with a heart lead. I'm sure you'll work it out.

4. EKB after a strong 2♣ opening, no agreed suit

If a player who reverses or jump shifts doesn't have to lower himself to splinter, you just *know* that a strong 2♣ bidder doesn't have to either.

JUMPING YOUR WAY OUT OF TROUBLE

Opener

♠ Q 6 4 3
♥ A K Q J 7
♦ —
♣ A K Q J

2 ♣
2 ♥
4 ♦²
4 ♠

Responder

♠ J 8 7 5 2
♥ 6 2
♦ A Q 8 5
♣ 10 9

2 ♦¹
2 ♠
4 ♥³
pass

1. Waiting.
2. EKB, spades agreed.
3. 'O', first-step response.

Even 5♠ is in jeopardy.

D) EKB IN A SUIT THE OPPONENTS HAVE BID

No problem: just buckle up and jump in their suit one level higher than a splinter jump.

Opener

1 ♣

Oppt.

1 ♥

Responder (you)

?

Oppt.

Say you are gazing fondly at:

♠ K Q 5 ♥ — ♦ K J 6 3 ♣ A Q J 7 6 2

If you wish to ‘exclude’ in hearts, jump to 4♥, one level higher than a splinter.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Before using EKB and leaping madly into outer space with a void, be sure you can handle a ‘0’ or ‘1’ response.
- Normally, an EKB ask is one level higher than a splinter jump.
- When responding to EKB, do not count a void in your hand, and do not count the ace of partner’s void suit.

In case you haven’t realized it, EKB jumps are accidents waiting to happen. Some would say this whole book is. If you can’t remember the ask, or you don’t think partner can, or if the level of the ask is so high that you can’t handle an ‘unfortunate’ response, forget the whole thing. You can survive without EKB, millions have. However, it does come in handy when you have the right hand.

PART II: RESPONDING TO RKB WITH A VOID

Void, voids, voids. Love them or hate them, you have to deal with them. A lady in my class with a spade void called me over to tell me she only had twelve cards. I looked under the table and found the ace of spades and handed it to her. She said, “Now you’ve gone and ruined my entire hand.”

In the first section of this chapter, the void was in the asker’s hand leading to an EKB ask. For the remainder of the chapter, your partner will make a simple RKB ask and you will be the one looking at a void.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW WHEN RESPONDING WITH A VOID

- (1) Do not show a void in partner’s first-bid suit. Disregard it.
- (2) Only show a void in partner’s second suit with five-card trump support, or a strong side suit that will furnish discards.

When clubs is the agreed suit

When clubs is the agreed suit, the keycard ask will be 4♣ or 4♦. Void-showing responses to RKB asks start with *the raise of the ask suit*.

These are the void showing responses when 4♣ is the RKB ask:

- 5♣ = '0' or '2' keycards (an even number) with an unknown void.
 5♦, 5♥, 5♠ = '1' or '3' keycards (an odd number) with a void in the bid suit.

Note: It is dangerous to show '0' keycards with an unknown void unless partner has opened 2♣ or jump shifted. The advice from here is to show '0' in those cases only.

Cheer up. In some sequences your 'unknown' void will be a 'known' void. You may have splintered, you may have bid two other suits, etc. In such sequences, partner will know your void, your opponents will know your void and you will know that they know. The whole world will know!

LIKE A CHARM

Opener (you)

♠ —

♥ K J 7 6 3

♦ A 6 4 3

♣ A J 5 2

1♥

3♠¹

5♣³

pass

Responder

♠ Q 6 5 3

♥ 2

♦ K Q

♣ K Q 8 7 6 4

2♣

4♣²

6♣⁴

1. Splinter, singleton spade presumed.
2. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
3. '2' with an obvious spade void.
4. There must be a good play for this facing two aces and a spade void.

Your splinter jump to 3♠ normally shows a singleton. You are not strong enough to use EKB (a jump to 4♠), so you make due with 3♠. However, in response to partner's keycard ask, you can clarify your shortness.

WHEN THE WHOLE WORLD KNOWS

Opener

♠ 5

♥ K Q 7 3

♦ A K

♣ A Q 8 7 6 3

Responder (you)

♠ A Q 10

♥ —

♦ J 10 5 3 2

♣ K J 10 5 4

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1♣	1♥	3♥ ¹	dbl
4♣ ²	pass	5♣ ³	pass
7♣ ⁴	all pass		

1. Splinter, game force, at least five clubs (4♥ would be EKB).
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2' with some void. Guess where my void is, partner?
4. Can't see any losers.

When 4♦ is the RKB ask, clubs agreed

When 4♦ is RKB, clubs agreed, void-showing responses start with the raise of the ask suit, 5♦.

- 5♦ = '0' or '2' with an unknown void.
 5♥, 5♠ = '1 or 3' with a void in the jump suit.
 6♣ = '1 or 3' with a diamond void. (Can't jump to 6♦!)

TOUGH CALL

Gopher Regional 2004

Opener

♠ A K 7
 ♥ 6
 ♦ A 10 7 4
 ♣ A K 6 5 2

 1♣
 2♦
 4♦²
 pass⁴

Responder

♠ 10 4 3 2
 ♥ A Q 10 5
 ♦ —
 ♣ Q J 8 7 3

 1♥
 4♣¹
 6♣³

1. The agreement, not the ask.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '1' (can't be '3' when the asker has '3') with a diamond void.
4. Tempting to shoot the moon, but risky, as partner may have four small spades and no ♥K.
 Translation: you may have a spade loser.

A jump to the six-level in the agreed suit in response to an RKB ask shows '1 or 3' keycards with a void in a higher-ranking suit than the trump suit. In this sequence it must be in diamonds. If the void were in spades, the response to 4♦ would have been 5♠.

Notice that it is okay to show the diamond void, partner's second suit, with *five-card* trump support.

When diamonds is the agreed suit

When *diamonds* is the agreed suit, the RKB ask will be 4♦ or 4♥ more than 90% of the time. We've covered the responses to a 4♦ RKB ask, so let's take a look at the responses to a 4♥ diamonds agreed RKB ask:

- 5♥ = '0' or '2' with an unknown void.
 5♠, 6♣ = '1 or 3' with a void in the jump suit.
 6♦ = '1 or 3' with a heart void (too risky to bid 6♥)

A next-step queen-ask after a void-showing response

Whether the void is known or not, the next step after a void-showing response is the queen-ask and other suits are Specific Suit Asks.

IT WORKS, IT WORKS!

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ K Q 6	♠ A 7 3
♥ K Q	♥ A 9 5
♦ A K J 6	♦ 9 8 7 5 4 3 2
♣ 8 7 6 5	♣ —

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♦	2 ♣	4 ♣ ¹	dbl
4 ♦ ²	pass	5 ♦ ³	pass
5 ♥ ⁴	pass	7 ♦ ⁵	all pass

- 1. Shortness, game-forcing diamond agreement.
- 2. RKB (1430).
- 3. '2' with some void, obviously clubs.
- 4. Queen-ask.
- 5. Seven-card support must equal a queen!

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Void-showing responses in response to RKB asks start with the raise of the ask suit.
- After a void-showing response, the asker has the option of additional asks. The next step, including the void suit, is the queen-ask; other suits are Specific Suit Asks.
- No void-showing responses with a void in the asker's first-bid suit.

Congratulations. You (we) have survived another chapter.

REVIEWING THE MINOR-SUIT ASKS AND RESPONSES

Minor-suit asks are by nature different from similar asks after major-suit agreement. Minor-suit RKB asks usually start lower than 4NT. As a result, responses and follow-up asks also start at a lower level. Happiness.

Correspondingly, *any* ask *beneath* the five-level of the agreed minor is considered a small slam invitation because the contract could still wind up in game after a negative response.

Any ask made *above* the five-level of the agreed minor is a grand slam invitation because the contract is fated to wind up at the six-level facing a negative response.

The action starts after the response to an RKB ask. The asker can:

- a) Place the contract.
- b) Make a queen-ask.
- c) Make a Specific King-Ask (SKA) of 4NT, if available, and this may be followed by a Second King-Ask.
- d) Make a Specific Suit Ask (SSA).
- e) Sit there trying to remember the asks!

The following 'Asks' are discussed in this chapter.

- (1) The Specific Suit Ask (SSA).
- (2) The Specific King-Ask (SKA).
- (3) The Second King-Ask.
- (4) The Third-Round Ask.

1) THE SPECIFIC SUIT ASK (SSA)

When the trump queen is not an issue, the asker may want specific information about a particular side suit. Enter stage center, the SSA.

If the asker bids a new suit directly after the RKB response (other than a next-step queen-ask), it is a SSA. Note: in order to make a SSA in the queen-ask suit, the asker must jump one level higher than the queen-ask.

Responses to the SSA are by steps:

- First step = the queen or a doubleton.
- Second step = Kxx(x).
- Third step = singleton or Kx (or a singleton K).
- A raise of the ask suit = KQ with any length.
- A return to the agreed suit, the death response, denies second- or third-round control in the ask suit (Jxx(x) or worse).

When the responder has a singleton in the ask suit

If a SSA ask is made in a side suit that the asker has bid previously, *four* trumps are needed to jump in the agreed suit.

If the SSA ask is made in an *unbid* suit, *three* trumps are needed to jump in the agreed suit.

If the responder lacks the necessary trump length to make a jump response, the singleton is treated as a small doubleton and a first-step response given.

When a SSA is made in a suit partner has bid

A SSA might be made in an unsupported suit partner has bid. Shortness is not an issue and the ace is already known. These are the responses:

- First step = the queen.
- Second step = the king.
- A raise of the ask suit = KQ.
- A return to the agreed suit denies the king and the queen.

JUST IN TIME

Naples, Italy "Citta da Napoli" 1994

Opener (you)

♠ A J 7 3
♥ A K
♦ A Q 8 4 3 2
♣ 2

1 ♦
4 ♦²
5 ♠⁴
6 ♦⁶

Responder

♠ K 5 2
♥ 9 8 7
♦ K 10 9 6 5
♣ A 10

3 ♦¹
4NT³
6 ♣⁵
pass

1. Limit raise (playing Crisscross, bid 3♣).
2. RKB.
3. '2 without' (five-card support presumed)
4. SSA in spades.
5. Second-step response showing Kxx(x).
6. Unwilling to bid a grand on a finesse.

6♣, a second-step response to the SSA, shows Kxx(x); here, it must be Kxx because partner did not respond 1♠ originally. Warning: whenever you make a high-level SSA, check to see that you can stand a response that may propel you

beyond the six-level of the agreed suit. If that happens and you can't risk a grand slam, be prepared to play 6NT... or be prepared to look for another partner.

2) THE SPECIFIC KING-ASK (SKA) AND RESPONSES

In minor-suit auctions, the *only* SKA is 4NT, and even that comes with disclaimers:

1. If the RKB response is '0' to a 1430 ask, a follow-up bid of 4NT is to play.
2. If the RKB response is '1' to a 3014 ask, a follow-up bid of 4NT is to play.
3. If the RKB response is 4♠ showing '1' to a 1430 ask, a follow-up bid of 4NT is the queen-ask.

At matchpoints it can be argued that after a 4♠ '1' response to a 1430 ask, 4NT is to play. The downside is that you lose your queen-ask when clubs is the agreed suit.

As a reminder, 5NT is *not* a Specific King-Ask (SKA). It is a general grand slam try (think of a last gasp effort) asking partner to bid a grand slam with some significant extra not shown during the bidding. These 'extras' are listed in Chapter 12.

Responses to a SKA

Assuming the stars are in alignment and none of the negative conditions exist, these are the responses to a SKA:

1. With one king, bid the king suit.
2. With two kings, show the king that can be bid at the lower or cheaper level.
3. With three kings, leap to 6NT or to a grand slam in the agreed suit, confirming a nine-card fit.
4. Without a king, sign off in the agreed suit.

USING YOUR ARSENAL

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ 2	♠ A 8 7 3	1. Game-forcing splinter.
♥ A Q 10 7 4	♥ 5 2	2. RKB after game-forcing three-level agreement; (3014): opener has jumped.
♦ A K 7 6	♦ Q J 10 8 5 4	3. '3'.
♣ Q 10 2	♣ A	4. Specific kings? (4♠ would be the queen-ask.)
1 ♥	2 ♦	5. Sorry, no side-suit king. The trump king has already been shown in the keycard response.
3 ♠ ¹	4 ♦ ²	6. You're sorry?
4 ♥ ³	4NT ⁴	
5 ♦ ⁵	6 ♦ ⁶	
pass		

On a good day, you would find partner with the ♣K or the ♥K making 7♦ a virtual lock.

3) THE SECOND KING-ASK

A second king-ask appears in only two guises:

1. After a king-showing response to a SKA of 4NT, a follow-up bid in a new suit is a second king-ask
2. After a king-showing response to a queen-ask, a new suit or 4NT (whichever is cheaper) is a second king-ask.

Note: When a king showing response to 4NT, has denied a particular king, a follow-up bid in a king-denied suit is a third-round control ask.

Simple and detailed responses to a second king-ask at the five-level (a grand slam try)

There are two suggested sets of responses to a second king-ask. The simple set:

1. With the king, leap to a grand slam in the agreed suit.
2. Without the king, sign off in the agreed suit.

The more detailed set (the one used in this book — naturally):

1. With Kxx(x), make a first-step response.
2. With Kx or a singleton king, make a second-step response.
3. With KQ(x), raise the ask suit.
4. With a singleton in that suit and sufficient trump length, jump in the agreed suit. With insufficient trump length, sign off in the agreed suit.
5. Lacking the king, sign off in the agreed suit.

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE DETAILED SET OF RESPONSES

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ K 9	♠ A 6 5	1. Game force. (No kidding.)
♥ K J 3	♥ A Q 5	2. RKB (1430).
♦ J 10 8 7 6	♦ A K Q 4 3 2	3. '1'.
♣ A J 7	♣ 4	4. SKA.
1♦	2♦ ¹	5. ♥K (denies the ♣K).
2NT	4♦ ²	6. Second king-ask.
4♥ ³	4NT ⁴	7. Kx (second-step).
5♥ ⁵	5♠ ⁶	8. You can count thirteen tricks: six diamonds, three hearts, the ♣A, the AK of spades, and a spade ruff in partner's hand.
6♣ ⁷	7♦ ⁸	
pass		

If partner had no way of differentiating Kxx from Kx of spades, you would not be able to bid a grand slam confidently.

DOUBLE CATCH!

Mixed Pairs Italian Championship, Salsomaggiore 1994

Opener

♠ Q J 8 6 5
♥ 4
♦ A Q 8 5
♣ K J 4

1 ♠
3 ♦
4 ♥²
5 ♣⁴
7 ♦⁶

Responder (you)

♠ A
♥ A Q 7 6
♦ K J 10 3 2
♣ A Q 7

2 ♦
4 ♦¹
4 ♠³
5 ♥⁵
pass

1. RKB.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask — next-step.
4. Yes, with the ♣K.
5. Second king-ask looking for the ♥K for a grand.
6. A singleton with four trumps = a jump in the trump suit.

In this sequence, opener can bid 7♦ with only three diamonds because hearts is an unbid suit. Had you bid hearts before bidding 5♥, four trumps would be needed to jump to 7♦.

MULTIPLE ASKS — THE BIG TIME

Opener (you)

♠ A K 7 6
♥ A
♦ 4 3 2
♣ A K J 10 6

1 ♣
2 ♠
3 NT
4 ♦³
4 ♠⁵
5 ♥⁷
7 ♣⁹

Responder

♠ 5
♥ K 8 6 5 3
♦ A K 7 5
♣ Q 8 2

1 ♥
3 ♦¹
4 ♣²
4 ♥⁴
5 ♦⁶
5 ♠⁸
pass

1. Presumed natural after a jump shift.
2. The agreement, not the ask. Apparently a slam try with a diamond control.
3. RKB after four-level club agreement (1430).
4. '1'.
5. Queen-ask.
6. Yes, with the ♦K.
7. After a king-showing response to a queen-ask, a follow-up bid is a second king-ask. This one happens to be in a previously-bid suit.
8. A first-step response shows the king.
9. Voila! A resting place for my third diamond.

4) THE THIRD-ROUND CONTROL ASK – A GRAND SLAM TRY

In minor-suit auctions, third-round control asks are a rare commodity. They take a back seat to the SKA and the SSA. However, they can come in handy.

In order to make a third-round control ask, the ace-king of the suit must be accounted for. Basically, you are looking for a doubleton or the queen in the ask suit. And yes, a singleton will also do quite nicely. For example, you might have Kxx(x) in the ask suit, know partner has the ace and be looking for Ax or AQx(x) as opposed to Axx or Axxx. Ax is third-round control; Axx and Axxx are not.

When the third-round control ask can be used

- (1) After a particular king has been denied by a SKA, a follow-up bid in a king-denied suit is a third-round control ask.
- (2) After a king-showing response to a queen-ask has denied a particular king(s), a follow-up bid in a king-denied suit is a third-round control ask.
- (3) When 4♥ is the queen-ask after a 4♦ response to RKB, and the response is 4♠ showing the ♠K, 4NT is a second king-ask, and a new suit at the five-level is a third-round control ask. Do not hold your breath.

There are two suggested sets of responses to a third-round control ask in a higher-ranking suit than the agreed suit.

The simple set of responses:

Holding third-round control or a singleton in the ask suit, jump to a grand slam in the agreed suit. Partner must have the ace-king. Lacking third-round control, sign off in the agreed suit.

The more detailed set of responses (used in this book):

First step = xx.

Second step = the queen.

A raise of the ask suit = the QJ(x).

With a singleton in the ask suit, jump to a grand slam because partner has the AK.

Lacking third-round control, sign off in the agreed suit.

Again we are dealing with memory overload versus more accuracy. The difference here is that being able to differentiate the queen or the queen-jack from a small doubleton may allow the asker to bid 7NT, a bonus for tournament players. It may also be critical in deciding whether or not to bid a grand slam.

CLEAR THE DECKS FOR A THIRD-ROUND ASK

Opener (you)

♠ A Q 5 2

♥ A

♦ A K 6 5

♣ K J 9 2

1 ♣

4 ♣²

4 ♥⁴

5 ♦⁶

7 ♣⁸

Responder

♠ K 7 3

♥ J 10 8

♦ 9 2

♣ A Q 10 8 4

3 ♣¹

4 ♦³

4 ♠⁵

5 ♥⁷

pass

1. Limit Raise.
2. RKB.
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Yes, with the ♠K.
6. Third-round control ask. (4NT would ask for another king.)
7. First-step response showing xx.
8. I don't see any losers.

AND IT ALL LOOKED SO PROMISING

Opener (you)

♠ A

♥ A Q

♦ A K Q 8 7 4

♣ K 9 6 5

2 ♣

3 ♦

4 ♥²

5 ♣⁴

6 ♦⁶

Responder

♠ K 9 6 4

♥ J 8

♦ J 10 3 2

♣ A 8 3

2 ♦¹

4 ♦

4 ♠³

5 ♦⁵

pass

1. Played as a positive response.
2. RKB after four-level diamond agreement as long as hearts is not a first-bid suit. If hearts is a first-bid suit, 4♠ is RKB.
3. '1'.
4. SSA in clubs. 4NT would be the queen-ask so there is no SKA.
5. Denies third-round control — must have Axx(x).
6. Too risky to bid a grand slam with a likely club loser.

TWO-LEVEL MINOR-SUIT NON-AGREEMENT SEQUENCES

This chapter deals with sequences where a *last* bid of 2♣ or 2♦ is not forcing, there has been no prior agreement, the facing hand is unlimited and interested in asking for keycards. Fortunately frequency is low.

WHEN A LAST BID OF 2♣ OR 2♦ IS *NOT* FORCING

If the last bid is 2♣, a leap to 4♦ is RKB (1430), period. If the last bid is 2♦, a leap to 4♦ is also RKB (1430), period.

1. *Opener repeats the original minor at the two-level*

	Opener	Responder (you)		Opener	Responder (you)
(a)	1♣	1♦, 1♥, 1♠	(b)	1♦	1♥, 1♠
	2♣	?		2♦	?

In (a), if you wish to keycard in clubs, jump to 4♦.

In (b), if you wish to keycard in diamonds, jump to 4♦.

Why not play that after 2♣, 4♣ is RKB? Because you can do better. You can use a jump to 4♣ as a concentrated two-suited slam try (5-4, or 5-5) lacking a first- or second-round control in an unbid suit.

It is the diamond agreement sequences that are so awkward. If you don't use 4♦ to ask for keycards, you have to use 4♥ or 4♠. You lose a natural jump to 4♦ as a two-suited slam try, but in return you get to make a lower level

keycard ask and reserve leaps to 4♥ or 4♠ to be EKB asks.

If you have a slammish hand in diamonds lacking a control in an unbid suit, force with a new suit, follow it up with game-forcing diamond agreement, and then play it by ear. Four of the agreed minor, if available, and 4NT are both possible keycard asks.

2. Responder bids the fourth suit at the one-level, opener rebids the first suit

Opener	Responder (you)
1♣	1♦
1♥	1♠
2♣	?

If you wish to keycard in clubs, leap to 4♦. It doesn't matter that diamonds is your first-bid suit.

When not to use RKB

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ Q 3 2	♠ 8 6
♥ 7	♥ A K 6 3
♦ A Q J	♦ K 9
♣ Q J 10 8 7 4	♣ A K 6 5 2
1♣	1♥
2♣	?

You have a terrific hand for clubs, but lack a spade control. If you launch into RKB with 4♦ and find you are missing a keycard, you can't be sure of the spade position. Lacking a control in an unbid suit, it is wiser to go another route, the *jump raise* route.

A leap to 4♣, a game-forcing slam try, may elicit a spade cuebid, a keycard ask or a signoff. Whatever happens, you will be better placed.

As it happens, opener would like to cuebid 4♦. Not so fast. 4♦ is RKB after four-level club agreement (Chapter 13). When a cuebid conflicts with an RKB ask, the RKB ask takes precedence.

In order to cuebid diamonds, opener must bid 4NT, a replacement cuebid for the lost cuebid. 4NT shows the ♦A and denies a spade control. If opener has no spade control and you don't have one either, it's time to bail out in 5♣. Of course, if your opponents are breathing, they will lead a spade without looking at their hands.

HAVING CONTROLS IN BOTH UNBIDS

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ A J 2	♠ 8 6
♥ 7	♥ A K 6 3
♦ A 6 5	♦ K 9
♣ K J 10 8 7 4	♣ A Q 6 5 2
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♣	4 ♣
?	

Partner has made a slam try, but this time you have controls in both unbid suits. Your choices are to start a grand-slam investigation or simply bid 6♣, what you think you can make.

There is much to be said for the simple approach. For openers, it greatly extends the lifespan of a partnership. It also brings to mind what my former partner Bob Hamman once told me, “Edwin, I *never* have the hand you want me to have, so please stop looking for it!” Best advice I ever got.

Notice if partner has the ♥AKQx you have a grand slam. There I go again.

LIKE FALLING OFF A LOG

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ Q 9 3	♠ 6
♥ 7	♥ A K 6 2
♦ K Q 9 8 6 3	♦ A J 5 2
♣ A J 4	♣ K Q 5 3
1 ♦	1 ♥
2 ♦	4 ♦ ¹
5 ♣ ²	6 ♦
pass	

1. RKB (1430): opener minimum.
2. ‘2 with’.

You have the strength and the controls to keycard.

MORE TWO-LEVEL NON-AGREEMENT SEQUENCES

Two-level non-agreement sequences that generate immediate keycard asks are rare enough after a minor suit has been rebid, but it is pushing the envelope to ask for keycards when 2♣ or 2♦ is opener’s *second* suit.

When opener rebids 2♣

Opener	Responder (you)
1♥	1♠
2♣	?

You can bid the fourth-suit 2♦, creating a game-forcing auction, later support clubs and then use 4♣ as RKB. Or you can jump directly to 4♦.

When opener rebids 2♦

Opener	Responder (you)
1♥	1♠
2♦	?

This is an awkward keycard sequence. Why not make life easy and use a jump to 4♦ as RKB? If you don't have the goods for a keycard ask, bid 3♣, the fourth suit, and then support diamonds. There is always 4NT as a last resort measure.

TAKING CHARGE

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ 5	♠ A K 8 3 2
♥ K J 6	♥ A 7
♦ A J 6 4 3	♦ 2
♣ K 9 3 2	♣ Q J 7 5 4
1♦	1♠
2♣	4♦ ¹
4NT ²	6♣ ³

1. RKB.
2. '2 without.
3. One keycard missing.

You have a good hand with which to keycard, so why not do it immediately? A jump to 4♣ would be a slam try indicating no heart control.

When responder makes a non-game-forcing 2♣ or 2♦ response to an opening bid and opener wants to ask for keycards:

After a 2♣ response, a direct jump to 4♦ is RKB.

After a 2♦ response a jump to 4♦ is RKB.

GETTING IT OVER WITH QUICKLY

Opener

♠ A K 7 6 5 2

♥ 8

♦ 4

♣ A Q 9 8 4

1 ♠

4 ♦²

5 ♣⁴

Responder

♠ 4

♥ K 3 2

♦ K Q J 4

♣ K 10 7 5 3

2 ♣¹

4 ♥³

pass

1. Not a game force.
2. RKB. Opener asking.
3. '1'.
4. Not enough.

SAVING TIME AND ENERGY

Opener

♠ 4

♥ A K 8 7 4

♦ K 7 6 4

♣ A K Q

1 ♥

4 ♦²

7 ♦⁴

Responder

♠ A Q 3

♥ 3

♦ A J 9 5 3 2

♣ 9 5 3

2 ♦¹

5 ♣³

pass

1. Not a game force.
2. RKB.
3. '2 with'. Opener should have at least four diamonds.
4. Figures to be an easy thirteen tricks.

Players who play 'two-over-one' are well placed after a 2 ♣ or 2 ♦ response to a 1 ♥ or 1 ♠ opening bid. They can agree to play that the direct jump to the four-level of the last-bid minor is RKB, or they can raise partner's minor to the three-level, hear another bid, glean a little more information, and then bid 4 ♣ to ask for keycards.

If the partnership wishes to adopt the delayed method, the jump raise can be played as a slam try lacking a control in the unbid suit. My preference.

RKB after partner overcalls 2 ♣ (always 1430 after an overcall)

No problem. If you want to keycard in *clubs*, jump to 4 ♦.

OLD FAITHFUL, 4 ♦ AS RKB AFTER 2 ♣ NON-AGREEMENT

North

♠ A Q 5

♥ J 10 9

♦ 7

♣ Q J 10 8 7 3

South (you)

♠ K 3

♥ 5

♦ A K J 5 4 3

♣ K 9 6 2

West	North	East	South (you)
1 ♥	2 ♣	pass	4 ♦ ¹
pass	4 ♥ ²	pass	5 ♣ ³

1. RKB (1430).
2. A disappointing '1'.
3. Two aces missing.

As long as you can leap to 4 ♦ after a 2 ♣ overcall, it can be used as RKB.

After a 2 ♦ overcall, a jump to 4 ♦ is preemptive. The only way you can keycard lower than 4NT is to cuebid the opponent's suit and hope to jump to 4 ♦ next. If you can't, 4NT is still available.

CUEBIDDING TO SOLVE THE DIAMOND PROBLEM

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

West	North	East	South
1 ♥	2 ♦	pass	2 ♥
pass	3 ♦	pass	4NT ¹
pass	5 ♠ ²	pass	6NT ³

1. RKB. After a cuebid, responder must jump to 4 ♦ to ask for keycards. Without the jump, 4 ♦ is invitational.
2. '2 with'.
3. Buying time to avoid a heart lead through the AQ in a contract of 6 ♦.

When opener reverses

Opener	Responder (you)
1 ♣	1 ♥ or 1 ♠
2 ♦	?

Say you want to keycard in diamonds — what can you do? After a reverse, a raise to the three-level is a game force. This allows you to raise to the three-level and then use RKB via four of the agreed minor (3014).

After a reverse there is no need for a jump raise to be RKB. It can be used as a natural two-suited slam try denying a control in the unbid suit.

Say you want to keycard in clubs, what should you do? No problem. Bid 3♣, a game force, and then 4♣ to ask for keycards (3014).

THE JUMP RAISE AFTER A REVERSE — A BONUS

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ 3	♠ K Q 7 5 4	1. Slam try lacking a control in the unbid suit, hearts.
♥ A K 8	♥ 6 2	2. After game-forcing four-level diamond agreement, the unbid major can be used as RKB (Chapter 13).
♦ K J 7 2	♦ A Q 10 5 4	3. '1'.
♣ A Q 5 4 2	♣ 3	4. Next step queen-ask.
1♣	1♠	5. Yes, with the ♠K.
2♦	4♦ ¹	
4♥ ²	4♠ ³	
4NT ⁴	5♠ ⁵	
6♦	pass	

After a 4♠ '1' response to a 1430 ask, 4NT is a next-step queen-ask, not a SKA. After a 4♠ '1' response to a 3014 ask, 4NT is to play.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- After *any* non-game-forcing 2♣ bid, a leap to 4♦ by an unlimited partner is keycard for clubs; a jump to 4♣ is a natural slam try indicating a lack of control in the unbid suit.
- After any non-game-forcing 2♦ bid, a leap to 4♦ is RKB. The natural jump raise to 4♦ is lost.
- After a 2♣ overcall, a jump to 4♦ is RKB 1430.
- After a 2♦ overcall, a jump raise to 4♦ is preemptive. To keycard the responder must cuebid first and then jump to 4♦. If that is not possible, 4NT is available after diamond agreement.
- After a two-level reverse, opener's first or second suit being a minor, responder can keycard in either minor by agreeing the minor at the three-level and then bidding the minor at the four-level, RKB (3014).

THREE-LEVEL MINOR-SUIT NON-AGREEMENT

This chapter deals with three-level *non-agreement* bids of 3♣ and 3♦ that might lead to an RKB ask.

Keep in mind that in three-level non-agreement sequences, the raise is not the ask. To ask for keycards, assuming an ask is possible, the asker has to *jump*!

WHEN THE LAST BID IS 3♣ OR 3♦ AND BOTH HANDS ARE LIMITED

When both hands are limited, no keycard ask is available and *highly* unlikely to develop unless a splinter jump enters into the mix.

(a)	South	North	(b)	South	North
	pass	1♥		1♣	1♦
	2♦	2♥		2♣	3♦
	3♦	?		?	

The best North (a) or South (b), both limited, can do to indicate slam interest is to make a splinter jump. A single raise would be invitational.

WHEN A LAST BID OF 3♣ OR 3♦ IS NOT FORCING, SIX CARDS IN THE SUIT *GUARANTEED*, THE FACING HAND UNLIMITED, A KEYCARD ASK IS POSSIBLE

(c)	Opener	Responder	(d)	Opener	Responder
	1♥	1NT		1♥	1NT
	2♦	3♣		2♠	3♦

In (c) 2♦ is not forcing, so opener is somewhat limited; responder is severely limited. This means you are not looking at a keycard sequence.

In (d) 2♠ shows serious ‘extras’ so a keycard ask is possible after responder’s non-forcing 3♦ bid.

After three-level non-forcing non-agreement, a six-card minor guaranteed, this is the keycard scene by an unlimited hand:

- 1) After 3♣, a leap to 4♦ is RKB.
- 2) After 3♦, a leap to 4♥ is RKB. If hearts is a first-bid suit, 4♠ is RKB.

In sequence (d), if opener wished to keycard in diamonds, a jump to 4♠ would be the way. A jump to 4♥, a first-bid suit, cannot be used to ask for keycards in diamond non-agreement sequences.

WHEN 4NT IS NATURAL AFTER THREE-LEVEL NON-AGREEMENT

Opener	Responder (you)
1♣	1♥
3♣	4NT (natural)

Your hand:

♠ K Q J 4 ♥ K 10 9 7 ♦ A Q 8 ♣ 10 4

It looks like you should bid more than 3NT, but 6NT is a bit excessive. The solution is to invite with 4NT and let partner make the last mistake.

WHEN A TWO-LEVEL RESPONSE IS FOLLOWED BY A THREE-LEVEL REBID, A KEYCARD ASK IS POSSIBLE

CANDY FROM A BABY

Opener	Responder
♠ A K 6 4 3	♠ 5
♥ K Q J 4	♥ 7 2
♦ 8	♦ A 6 5 2
♣ A 8 5	♣ K Q J 10 4 3

1♠	2♣	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Three-level non-agreement, opener unlimited, six clubs guaranteed. 2. RKB. 3. ‘2 with’.
2♥	3♣ ¹	
4♦ ²	5♣ ³	
6♣	pass	

It doesn’t matter whether 3♣ is forcing or not. A jump to 4♦ is RKB when the asker is unlimited and there has been no prior agreement.

DON'T GO NUTS

Opener (you)

♠ A Q 5 2
♥ 3
♦ K J 5
♣ A K 9 4 3

1 ♣
1 ♠
4 ♥ 2
6 ♦ 4

Responder

♠ 6 4 3
♥ A 7 6
♦ A Q 10 7 3 2
♣ 5

1 ♦
3 ♦ 1
5 ♦ 3
pass

1. Invitational.
2. RKB.
3. '2 with'.
4. Forget 7 ♦! Partner has shown 10 HCP (♦AQ, ♥A) so can't have the ♣Q or the ♠K and make a non-forcing 3 ♦ bid.

A hand that has bid two suits facing an invitational jump can ask for keycards.

RKB POSSIBILITIES AFTER OPENER MAKES A JUMP REBID

Three-level non-agreement sequences most likely to lead to a keycard ask find opener starting with 1 ♣ or 1 ♦ and then making a jump rebid to 3 ♣ or 3 ♦ facing an unlimited partner (you).

- a) **Opener** **Responder (you)**
 1 ♣ 1 ♦ or 1 ♥ or 1 ♠
 3 ♣ ?
- b) **Opener** **Responder (you)**
 1 ♦ 1 ♥ or 1 ♠
 3 ♦ ?

If in (a) you want to ask for keycards directly, the ask is 4 ♦ (3014) — opener has jumped. A raise to 4 ♣ would be a forcing slam try because you are unlimited. If you were limited, it would be invitational.

If in (b) you want to ask for keycards after a 1 ♥ response, 4 ♠ is RKB; after a 1 ♠ response, 4 ♥ is RKB. These RKB jumps should not be confused with splinter jumps although they sound like them! *When a keycard ask and a splinter jump conflict, the keycard ask meaning prevails.* A raise to 4 ♦ would be a forcing slam try.

Another RKB possibility is when opener makes a jump rebid in the original minor after having slipped a second suit in between. Of course, partner is unlimited.

- c) **Opener** **Responder**
 1 ♣ 1 ♦
 1 ♥ 1 ♠
 3 ♣ ?

In (c), 4 ♦ is RKB (3014) because opener has jumped. It doesn't matter that diamonds is a previously-bid suit. 4 ♦ is RKB and 4NT is natural.

WHEN RESPONDER SPLINTERS OR MAKES A GAME-FORCING RAISE AFTER OPENER MAKES A NON-FORCING JUMP REBID

After a one-level response, a limited opener who has made a non-forcing jump rebid cannot ask for keycards unless responder splinters or makes a slam try single raise.

Similarly, a limited responder, who has made a non-forcing jump rebid, cannot ask for keycards unless opener splinters.

A SLAM TRY RAISE

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

1 ♣

3 ♣

4 ♠²

pass

1 ♥

4 ♣¹

5 ♣³

1. Forcing, responder unlimited.

2. Cuebid, denying a diamond control.

3. That makes two of us.

What if opener wanted to keycard after the 4 ♣ raise? After 4 ♣ agreement, 4 ♦ is RKB and 4NT would be a diamond cuebid denying a spade control.

A PLETHORA OF TENS

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ 10	♠ 8 6 5 4
♥ A 10 5	♥ 8
♦ K 4 2	♦ A Q J 10
♣ A K Q 10 5 3	♣ 8 7 6 2

1 ♣

3 ♣

4 ♠³

6 ♣⁵

1 ♦¹

4 ♥²

4NT⁴

pass

1. Some would respond 1 ♠.

2. Splinter, clubs agreed.

3. RKB (1430): opener asking.

4. '1'.

5. Partner figures to have a bit more than the ♦A and a stiff heart for a slam-invitational splinter jump.

When a splinter jump bypasses the four-level of the agreed suit, the cheapest unbid suit can be used to ask for keycards.

When opener makes a non-forcing jump rebid, a four-level splinter by the responder, the weaker of the two hands, does not promise a control in the unbid suit, spades. When the shoe is on the other foot however, and the responder, the weaker hand, makes a limited three-level 3 ♣ or 3 ♦ rebid, a

four-level splinter by the opener, the stronger hand, does promise a control in the unbid suit.

After a splinter jump by the stronger hand, if the weaker hand decides to key-card, he should not have to worry about the opponents cashing the first two tricks in the unbid suit.

BREAKING A RULE AND PAYING THE PRICE

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ 6	♠ A 10 9
♥ 7 5 3	♥ 9 4
♦ A J 6	♦ K Q 10 5 4 3 2
♣ A K J 6 4 2	♣ 5

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♣	pass	1 ♦	dbl
2 ♣	2 ♠	3 ♦ ¹	pass
4 ♠ ²	pass	4NT ³	pass
5 ♥ ⁴	pass	6 ♦	all pass

1. Not forcing.
2. Splinter.
3. RKB.
4. '2 without'.

The opponents led a heart, surprise, down one.

Whose fault? Partner's of course. It's always partner's fault. But this time it really is. Partner, the stronger hand, broke ranks making a four-level splinter jump lacking a first-or second-round control in the unbid suit, hearts, after you, the weaker hand, made a limited three-level rebid. Opener does better to cuebid 3♠ pinpointing the heart weakness.

A NEAT IDEA?

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ Q 6	♠ A K J
♥ 4	♥ K Q J 5 2
♦ A K Q J 7 5 3	♦ 4 2
♣ K 8 5	♣ Q J 6
1 ♦	1 ♥
3 ♦	4NT ¹
5NT ²	pass ³

1. Natural; 4♥, a first-bid suit, would also be natural, 4♠ would be RKB. You cannot splinter in spades, sorry. The bottom line is that you are free to use 4NT as a 'natural' jump bid.
2. This is not an original idea, but it seems like a good idea to play that after an invitational 4NT bid, a response of 5NT is an acceptance with one ace.
3. If we are on the same wavelength, the bad guys have two aces.

RKB POSSIBILITIES WHEN A LAST BID OF 3♣ OR 3♦ IS FORCING AND PARTNER IS UNLIMITED

In order to ask for keycards when the non-agreement is *forcing*, nothing really changes as long as the player being asked has promised a six-card minor, minimum, or the suit *has been rebid*. If either of these conditions are in place, an unlimited partner can jump to 4♦ after a 3♣ bid, or to 4♥ (or 4♠) after a 3♦ bid to ask for keycards.

THREE WAYS TO GO

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ A J	♠ K Q 5 3
♥ 6	♥ A K J 5 2
♦ K Q 10 3 2	♦ 4
♣ Q 7 6 4 3	♣ A J 2
1♦	1♥
2♣	2♠
3♣	?

After partner's 3♣ bid, you have options: you can ask for keycards via 4♦; you can make a slam try forcing raise to 4♣; you can jump to 4NT, natural. As it turns out, a keycard ask will land you in 5♣ because two keycards are missing. A raise to 4♣ will get you 5♣, a signoff, and a jump to 4NT will get you a pass, a fast pass, a very fast pass.

DOWN TO THE WIRE

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ 5 3	♠ A K 6 2	1. Fourth suit.
♥ A Q 7 4 3	♥ K 5	2. Forcing.
♦ 7	♦ A Q 6 2	3. RKB after a second suit has been rebid.
♣ A J 4 3 2	♣ K 7 6	4. '2 without'.
1♥	1♠	5. At matchpoints, try 6NT. At IMP scoring, there is much to be said for bidding 6♣; a heart ruff may be needed. A good partner would have had stronger hearts, or at least the ♠10.
2♣	2♦ ¹	
3♣ ²	4♦ ³	
4NT ⁴	? ⁵	

Opener

♠ 8 7 5

♥ —

♦ A K 7 6 3 2

♣ A Q 5 2

1 ♦

2 ♣

3 ♦¹5 ♣³6 ♦⁵**Responder (you)**

♠ A 4

♥ A K 6 5 4 2

♦ J 8 4

♣ K 4

1 ♥

2 ♠

4 ♠²5 ♦⁴

pass

1. Six diamonds assumed.
2. RKB 1430. Can't use 4♥, it is your first-bid suit.
3. '0 or 3'. Bet on '3'.
4. To play facing '0'; the queen-ask facing '3'.
5. Denies the ♦Q.

A '3' response to a 1430 ask is a *huge* response (the player being asked has not jumped or reversed) and usually leads to slam. A 1430 asker should have at least '1 with' and even that is a major exception.

When the next step *after* a '0' or '3' response to a 1430 ask is the agreed suit, bidding the agreed suit (5♦) is to play facing '0', and the queen-ask facing '3', a grand slam try. Without the queen, raise to 6♦, with the queen, get thee to a grand slam.

When the next step after a '0' or '3' response to a 1430 ask is 4NT, 4NT is to play after a '0' response, the queen-ask after a '3' response.

GOLD CUP FINAL, GREAT BRITAIN

Opener

♠ 6 5

♥ J 10 5

♦ A K Q 10 6 2

♣ J 3

1 ♦

2 ♦

3 ♦¹5 ♦³

pass

Responder (you)

♠ A K Q 3

♥ A 4 2

♦ J

♣ A K 10 5 2

2 ♣

2 ♠

4 ♥²7 ♦⁴

1. Forcing, at *least* six diamonds.
2. RKB.
3. '2 with'.
4. Thirteen tricks if opener has seven diamonds, the ♠J, the ♣Q, or if the clubs set up for an extra trick. Also, let's not forget a possible 3-3 spade division if partner has three little spades. It is clearly right to go for the gold.

WHEN A SECOND-BID MINOR SUIT IS INTRODUCED FOR THE FIRST TIME AT THE THREE-LEVEL

When either opener or responder introduces a *second*-suit minor at the three-level, there is no keycard ask available until the suit has been rebid or supported.

Opener

1 ♠
3 ♣ or 3 ♦

Responder

2 ♥
?

Opener

1 ♥
3 ♣ or 3 ♦

Responder

1 ♠
?

Opener

1 ♥
2 ♥
?

Responder

2 ♦
3 ♣

In none of these sequences can ‘?’ ask for keycards in the last-bid minor until it has been rebid or supported. Be patient. Raise the suit and find out more about partner’s hand. Partner might surprise you by having support for your suit, not to mention having a three-card suit (3 ♣) looking for notrump!

Here are three ways to show a fit for a second-bid minor with slam on the brain.

- 1) Raise the minor to the four-level, forcing by an unlimited hand.
- 2) Bid the fourth suit and then raise the minor.
- 3) Jump in the fourth suit — a fit-showing, control-showing, slam try for the second suit. (By agreement as some play it as a splinter.)

OKBRIDGE SPECIAL

Speaking of having a fit with partner’s second suit, this hand was presented to me as a bidding problem. You try it without looking at partner’s hand:

As opener you hold:

♠ A 6 ♥ A Q J 10 7 3 ♦ — ♣ 7 6 4 3 2

You open 1 ♥, partner responds 2 ♦, you rebid 2 ♥, and partner bids 3 ♣. Now what?

Opener

♠ A 6
♥ A Q J 10 7 3
♦ —
♣ 7 6 4 3 2

Responder

♠ 7 4 2
♥ 4 2
♦ A K J 10 6
♣ A 8 5

1 ♥
2 ♥
?

2 ♦
3 ♣

I shouldn't admit this in print, but I fleetingly thought of bidding 4♠, my beloved fit showing jump showing the ♠A, great trump support (at the time I thought the support was pretty good) plus heart shortness. Don't ask what havoc this would have wrought.

The player who had the hand raised to 4♣ and when partner tried to get out at 4♥, he 'signed off' in 6♣! Clubs broke 4-1, the heart finesse was off, and no game contract could be made!

What does it all mean? It means that it is much easier to bid when you can see both hands.

FAR OUT?

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ A Q J 5 4	♠ 7	
♥ 4 2	♥ A Q J 6 5	
♦ A 5	♦ K Q J 3	
♣ A K 4 3	♣ Q 6 2	
1 ♠	2 ♥	1. Played as showing extras.
3 ♣ ¹	4NT ²	2. Natural, 14-16+ HCP.
6NT ³	pass	3. It adds up.

After opener introduces a minor suit at the three-level following a two-level response, responder has many ways to agree a suit prior to making a keycard ask. Therefore a leap to 4NT should be, and is, natural.

WHEN INTERFERENCE OCCURS AND OPENER IS FORCED TO THE THREE-LEVEL TO INTRODUCE A SECOND-BID MINOR

When interference rears its ugly head and opener is forced to the three-level to introduce a second-bid minor, nothing changes.

Say you are responder holding this hand:

♠ K Q 5 ♥ A K J 6 2 ♦ J 8 ♣ Q J 7

Opener	Oppt.	Responder (you)	Oppt.
1 ♦	1 ♠	2 ♥	pass
3 ♣	pass	?	

What is the keycard scene? Sparse. Non-existent to be exact. A jump to 4NT is natural, so what's left? If you have a club fit, raise to 4♣, forcing, and then bid 4NT. If you have a diamond fit, jump to 4♦, not RKB, just the agreement. Why not 3♦? Is 3♦ forcing? I think not. Opener, forced to bid, may be minimum and 2♥ in competition can show as few as 11 HCP.

It is important to know which bids are forcing and which aren't no matter what system you play. You need a regular partner to play this game and a memory like an elephant doesn't hurt either.

RAISING TO THE FOUR-LEVEL AFTER THREE-LEVEL NON-FORCING NON-AGREEMENT

1. *If there has been no previous jump bid, a raise is invitational.*

Opener	Responder	
1 ♠	1 NT	1. Invitational. No previous jump bid by either player.
2 ♥	3 ♦	
4 ♦ ¹		

2. *If the responder makes a non-forcing jump rebid and the opener is unlimited, a raise is forcing. If the opener is limited, the raise is invitational.*

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1 ♣	1 ♦	1 ♣	1 ♦
2 ♣	3 ♦	1 ♥	3 ♦
4 ♦ ¹		4 ♦ ²	

1. Invitational, opener limited.
2. Forcing, opener unlimited.

3. *If the opener makes a non-forcing jump rebid and an unlimited responder raises, the raise is forcing. If the responder is limited, the raise is invitational.*

Opener	Responder	Dealer	Opener
1 ♣	1 ♥	pass	1 ♣
3 ♣	4 ♣ ¹	1 ♥	3 ♣
		4 ♣ ²	

1. Forcing, responder unlimited.
2. Not forcing, responder (dealer) limited.

- After non-forcing three-level non-agreement and a keycard ask is possible, it must be a jump to another suit.
- After three-level club non-forcing non-agreement, the jump is to 4♦. After three diamond non-forcing non-agreement, the jump is to 4♥. If hearts is a first-bid suit, then the jump is to 4♠.
- When a jump rebid of 3♣ or 3♦ by either opener or responder is not forcing, a raise to the four-level by a limited partner is invitational. A four-level raise by an unlimited partner is forcing.
- When a keycard ask is available after three-level non-agreement, a jump to 4NT is natural.
- In order to make a keycard ask after three-level non-agreement, forcing or not, the player being asked must have rebid the suit or have shown a six-card suit, minimum.

FOUR-LEVEL NON-AGREEMENT —THE ‘BROKEN RECORD’

FOUR-LEVEL NON-AGREEMENT, NOTRUMP NOT IN THE PICTURE

A player who bids and rebids the same minor all the way to the four-level, perhaps sneaking another suit in between, is presumed to have a ‘presentable’ suit. Think of a suit that can play opposite a singleton without cringing. However, it isn’t always a solid suit (only the opponents hold those); it is more apt to be a seven-card one-loser suit, even a two-loser eight-card suit at times. Lone ranger adventures at the *four*-level by either the opener or the responder are not preemptive hands; they are stronger, usually much stronger.

The player who takes one of these odysseys into outer space will henceforth be called ‘broken record’ (BR). Either opener or responder can be a BR. When BR’s last bid of $4\clubsuit$ or $4\diamondsuit$ is not forcing and partner is limited, there is no keycard ask.

However, if BR’s partner is unlimited, or BR’s last bid is forcing, BR’s partner can make a keycard ask, BR’s suit agreed.

These are the guidelines:

1. If there are no unbid suits, the 4th suit is RKB.
2. If there is one unbid suit, that suit is RKB.
3. If there are two unbid suits, no keycard ask. Bidding either suit is a cuebid suggesting no control in the other.
4. 4NT is to play.

When it comes to #3 (cuebidding), a suit the opponents have bid is considered an unbid suit.

When the BR suit is diamonds, and clubs is the fourth suit or the unbid suit, scratch $5\clubsuit$ as RKB. Instead, the asker’s second suit gets the honor of being RKB.

Opener (you)

1 ♥
 3 ♣
 3 ♠
 ?

Responder

2 ♦
 3 ♦
 4 ♦¹

1. A BR suit, wouldn't you say?

You are unlimited and can ask for keycards. What is the ask? There are no unbid suits, so spades, the fourth suit, is the winner. 4 ♠ it is.

Let's look at some other BR sequences, opener having the mile-long minor suit. Determine what the RKB ask is, assuming one is available.

a) **Opener** **Responder (you)**

1 ♣ 1 ♥
 2 ♣ 3 ♥
 4 ♣ ?

b) **Opener** **Responder**

1 ♦ 2 ♣
 2 ♦ 2 ♠
 4 ♦ ?

c) **Opener** **Responder**

1 ♦ 2 ♣
 2 ♦ 2 ♠
 3 ♦ 3 ♥
 4 ♦ ?

In (a), both hands are limited (3 ♥ is not forcing and neither is 4 ♣), so no RKB ask.

In (b), responder is unlimited, the unbid suit is hearts, so 4 ♥ is RKB (1430). A jump in a repeated suit must be a second-round jump, not a third-round jump, to be considered an opening hand with 'extras'.

In (c), responder is unlimited, there are no unbid suits, and the fourth suit is hearts, so 4 ♥ is RKB (1430). Opener did not jump to 3 ♦ originally.

A BR bid following a cuebid. What now?**Opener**

1 ♥
 3 ♥
 4 ♠

Responder

2 ♦
 4 ♦
 4NT?

4 ♠ is a cuebid lacking a club control. So what does 4NT mean? If BR is limited, 4NT is natural and passable. If BR is unlimited, the case here, 4NT is RKB (3014). Opener has jumped.

Showing a solid minor after a reverse

NOW I KNOW EVERYTHING

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ A K 5 4	♠ 2
♥ A K 6 4 3	♥ 2
♦ Q J 5	♦ 7 6 4 2
♣ 2	♣ A K Q J 5 4 3
1 ♥	2 ♣
2 ♠	4 ♣
4NT	pass

What’s going on? When a jump rebid to the *four-level* (here 4♣) follows a reverse or a jump shift, a common agreement is to play that it shows a solid six- or seven-card suit, and no outside ace or king. After that ‘picture bid’ opener can usually place the contract. Here you have an easy 4NT bid, natural, knowing the ♦AK are missing. No point in using RKB when you know partner’s hand.

Let’s look at some more four-level broken record sequences that may or may not lead to keycard asks

EVERYTHING UNDER CONTROL

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ A 7 2	♠ J	
♥ 5	♥ A Q J 3	
♦ K Q J 8 7 6 4 3	♦ 10 2	
♣ 4	♣ A K 7 6 5 3	
1 ♦	2 ♣	1. BR diamonds, minimum hand.
2 ♦	2 ♥	
4 ♦ ¹	?	

Partner’s jump to 4♦ must be considered in context with the 2♦ rebid. If partner had a BR suit strong in high card points, 3♦ would have been rebid. Nevertheless, you are strong enough to risk a keycard ask. In this sequence, 4♠, the unbid suit, is RKB and it is a 1430 ask. If partner responds 5♦ ‘2 without’, you can pass; if partner responds 5♥ ‘2 with’, you will bid 6♦.

Time out: Say you have KQJ3 of hearts, not AQJ3. Now you cannot afford to keycard. A ‘2 with’ response of 5♥ puts you in La-La land.

Tip: Making a 1430 ask having ‘1 without’ is playing with fire unless you can get out safely after either ‘2’ response.

THE ETERNAL STRUGGLE

Opener (you)

♠ —
♥ K 7
♦ Q 6 3
♣ A Q J 7 6 4 3 2

1 ♣

2 ♣

4 ♣¹

23

Responder

♠ A Q J 10 5 3 2
♥ A J 4 3 2
♦ 8
♣ —

1 ♠

2 ♥

4 ♠²

1. Great clubs, minimum hand. I want clubs to be trumps, do you hear me?
2. Yes, I hear you, but I want spades to be trumps, do you hear me?
3. The moment of truth!

After you have shown a BR suit and partner stubbornly rebids a first-bid suit at the game level, trouble has just arrived... in spades (ha, ha). It is even worse when partner’s suit outranks yours. From such sequences come partnership breakups, divorces, or worse! If you decide to overrule, you had better be right! In this case, it would be right *not* to overrule.

A DISEASED HAND

Opener (you)

♠ K Q 7 5 2
♥ A J 4 3
♦ —
♣ Q 6 4 2

1 ♠

2 ♥

?

Responder

♠ —
♥ K 6 2
♦ A K 10 7 5 4 3 2
♣ K 7

2 ♦

4 ♦

You are in a game-forcing auction and you want out big time. You dare not pass a forcing bid, Big Brother may be watching. There are four ways to get out of this mess:

1. Pass and lose partner's confidence forever.
2. Bid 4NT, to play, and declare this abomination.
3. Raise to 5 ♦ and let partner play it.
4. Excuse yourself from the table and never come back. If you decide to stay, raising with a void shows real class.

Deciding the keycard ask in the following BR sequences

What do you think is the keycard ask in the following BR sequences — and is it a 1430 or a 3014 ask?

Opener	Responder
1 ♠	2 ♦
2 ♠	4 ♦
?	

Trick question. There is no ask — two unbid suits. The best opener can do is cuebid one unbid suit denying a control in the other. After a cuebid, if responder (BR) is unlimited, he can, if he wishes, pick up the ball and bid 4NT RKB (1430).

Opener	Responder
1 ♠	2 ♦
2 ♥	4 ♦
?	

RKB is 4 ♥ (1430). When the unbid (or fourth) suit is clubs facing BR diamonds, the asker's second suit, hearts in this case, can be used to ask for keycards. If opener is 6-6 or 6-5 in the majors, I don't know you.

Opener	Responder
1 ♦	2 ♣
2 ♠	3 ♣
3 ♦	4 ♣
?	

This one is easy: RKB is 4 ♥ (1430), the unbid suit, opener asking.

Opener	Responder
1 ♦	1 ♥
3 ♦	4 ♣
4 ♦	?

4 ♠, the unbid suit is RKB (3014 because opener has jumped *initially*).

A suggestion for those who play two-over-one as a game force

Opener	Responder (you)
1 ♠	2 ♦
2 ♥, 2 ♠, 3 ♣	4 ♦ ?

If you play two-over-one and also play that 2 ♦ followed by 3 ♦ is a *game force*, you could agree (maybe you have already) that the jump to 4 ♦ is RKB, diamonds agreed.

3NT FOLLOWED BY A LIMITED FOUR-LEVEL BR BID

A player who bids 3NT is limited. If BR is also limited and removes 3NT to four of the BR suit, the bid is not forcing, it is a plea for mercy.

A PLEA FOR MERCY

Opener (you) Responder

1 ♠	1NT
2NT	3 ♦ ¹
3NT ²	4 ♦ ³
♣ ⁴	

1. Not forcing.
2. Should have a diamond fit.
3. Even a fit is not enough to make game with this hand.
4. Partner has spoken. If you over-rule and bid again, it's on your head.

3NT FOLLOWED BY A FOUR-LEVEL BR BID, BR UNLIMITED

When the player with the BR suit is unlimited, removing 3NT to four of the BR suit is not only forcing, but is also a slam try. Facing a slam try, the 3NT bidder has options, but they do not include passing or asking for keycards:

1. Cuebid to show slam interest.
2. Bid 4NT to play.
3. Raise the minor to game or slam.

ACBL BULLETIN BIDDING COMPETITION HAND

Opener

♠ A K 6 5 3
♥ K 5 4 2
♦ Q
♣ Q 6 3

1 ♠
2 ♥
3NT
4 ♠³
5 ♣⁵
5 ♠⁷
6 ♥⁹
pass

Responder

♠ Q 2
♥ A 7
♦ A K J 10 8 4
♣ A 5 2

2 ♦
3 ♣¹
4 ♦²
4NT⁴
5 ♥⁶
5NT⁸
7 ♦¹⁰

1. 3 ♦ not played as forcing.
2. BR suit, unlimited hand, slam try.
3. Cuebid. The 3NT bidder is not allowed to ask for keycards.
4. RKB (1430) After partner cue-bids, BR can ask for keycards via 4NT.
5. '1'.
6. Queen-ask (5 ♦ would be to play)
7. Yes, with the ♠K.
8. Any other king?
9. How does the ♥K grab you?
10. That should be enough.

Responder can envision setting up spades for club discards using the ♥K as a later entry.

Notice the 5♥ queen-ask. When *diamonds* is the agreed suit and the RKB response to a 1430 ask is 5♣ showing ‘1’ or an unlikely ‘4’, a return to 5♦ is to play facing ‘1’, the queen-ask facing ‘4’.

Say you wish to make queen-ask after a 5♣ response showing ‘1’. Since 5♦ would be to play, you must bypass 5♦ and bid 5♥, a next-step queen-ask, a grand slam try. Partner must bid 6♦ *without* the queen and choose one of various other responses with the queen.

ESCAPE HATCH

Opener	Responder	
♠ Q J 7 6 4 3	♠ 2	
♥ A Q 10	♥ J 8	
♦ 6	♦ A K Q 10 5 4	
♣ Q J 2	♣ A K 4 3	
1♠	2♦	1. Four-level slam try with a BR suit.
2♠	3♣	2. Natural. Not interested. Too much secondary strength, too little primary strength.
3NT	4♦ ¹	
4NT ²	pass	

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Lone Ranger suits can lead to keycard asks when partner is unlimited or the last Broken Record bid is forcing.
- When a cuebid follows a *forcing* BR bid, a follow-up bid of 4NT by BR is RKB.
- When a cuebid follows a non-forcing BR bid, a follow-up bid of 4NT by BR is to play.
- A jump rebid to the four-level after opener reverses or jump shifts, shows a solid six- or seven-card suit, no outside ace or king.
- When a four-level slam try BR bid follows 3NT, the 3NT bidder cannot ask for keycards. The best the 3NT bidder can do with slam interest is cuebid or jump to slam. 4NT is to play.
- After a 5♣ ‘1’ response to a 1430 RKB ask, diamonds agreed, 5♦ is to play facing ‘1’. To ask for the queen, bid 5♥.
- If the opener has a BR suit and does not jump in the suit immediately and responder winds up asking for keycards it is a 1430 ask. Hang in there.

RKB FOR MINORS IN NOTRUMP SEQUENCES

Notrump bids are limit bids, so if slam is in the air, it is usually the partner of the notrump bidder who makes the keycard ask or invites slam. However, facing a slam invitation or having the perfect hand facing a game-forcing *two-suiter*, the notrump bidder is allowed to ask for keycards.

It should go without saying that if the responder asks for keycards it is a 3014 ask while if the notrump bidder asks it is a 1430 ask.

RKB POSSIBILITIES AFTER A 1NT OPENING BID

There are several methods currently in vogue when it comes to showing either one or both minors in response to an opening bid of 1NT. The two most common are:

1. 2♠ showing both minors, weak or strong, but not a game force.
2. Four-suit transfers.

When looking at the following examples, substitute your own method(s) for showing the minors, but keep these suggestions in mind:

- 1) After three-level non-game-forcing agreement, a raise to the four-level is invitational. To keycard, jump to 4♦ after three-level club agreement and to 4♥ after three-level diamond agreement.
- 2) After three-level game-forcing agreement (rare), four of the agreed minor by either player is RKB.
- 3) If a keycard sequence develops, the kings of both minors are counted along with the queen of the agreed suit.

WHEN TWO ARE MISSING IT'S TIME TO GO FISHING

Opener

♠ K Q J
♥ J 10 9
♦ A J 6 2
♣ K 10 9

1NT

3♦²

5♣⁴

pass

Responder (you)

♠ 9
♥ 3
♦ K Q 10 5 4
♣ A Q J 6 5 3

2♠¹

4♥³

5♦⁵

1. Both minors.
2. 4+ diamonds.
3. RKB. 4♦ would be invitational
4. '2 without' including the ♣K.
5. Two keycards missing.

When the notrump bidder faces a two-suiter

Although most RKB asks are made by the responder, a notrump opener has a little leeway facing a game-forcing two-suiter. Once there has been three-level agreement in a game-forcing auction, opener can use four of the agreed minor as RKB given a spectacular fitting hand.

A SPECTACULAR FITTING HAND

Opener

♠ A J 4
♥ A Q 3
♦ Q 8 6 4 3
♣ A 6

1NT

3♦²

4♦⁴

6♦⁶

Responder

♠ 6
♥ 4 2
♦ K J 7 5 2
♣ K Q J 5 3

2♠¹

3♠³

4NT⁵

pass

1. Both minors.
2. 4+ diamonds.
3. Singleton, game force.
4. RKB.
5. '2 without' including the ♣K.
6. One keycard missing.

Responder shows a singleton spade, creating a game-forcing auction. This allows the opener to keycard with a spectacular fitting hand.

FACING A BALANCED SLAM TRY

Reno Nationals, 2004

Opener

♠ A K 6 3
♥ A 5
♦ K 4 2
♣ Q J 9 8

Responder

♠ 10 2
♥ K Q
♦ A Q 10 5 3
♣ K 10 3 2

1NT	2♠ ¹	1. Minors.
3♣ ²	3NT ³	2. 4+ clubs.
4♣ ⁴	4♠ ⁵	3. 14+-16 HCP.
6♣	pass	4. RKB.
		5. '2 without'.

3NT is a balanced *slam try*, the reason the opener, limited, can keycard with a 'to die for' fitting hand.

Four-suit transfer responses that could lead to RKB asks

Four-suit transfers are very popular these days. Playing four-suit transfers, 2♦ is a transfer to hearts, 2♥ is a transfer to spades, 2♠ is a transfer to clubs and 2NT is a transfer to diamonds. We are concerned with the 2♠ and the 2NT transfer responses only. Keep in mind there are several ways to play this convention.

Opener	Responder (you)	Opener	Responder (you)
1NT	2♠ ¹	1NT	2NT ¹
2NT ² , 3♣ ³	?	3♣ ² , 3♦ ³	?
1. Transfer to clubs.		1. Transfer to diamonds.	
2. Maximum for clubs.		2. Maximum for diamonds.	
3. Minimum for clubs.		3. Minimum for diamonds.	

Say you want to keycard in clubs. In order to keycard when the agreement is not game-forcing, you have to jump. The key word is *jump*. After 2NT, you can jump to 4♣ to ask for keycards and after 3♣, you can jump to 4♦.

Say you want to keycard in diamonds after your 2NT response. Same story, you must jump! After 3♣, a jump to 4♦ is RKB and after 3♦, a jump to 4♥ is RKB. All of these jumps are 3014 jumps because you are asking a strong one notrump opening bidder.

So much for responder asking for keycards immediately. What about the opener, the limited hand? Is he an orphan? Not exactly. The opening 1NT bidder can keycard if responder makes a *slam try*.

How does responder make a slam try after transferring? There are at least two ways:

1. Responder bids 3NT, a balanced slam try with a six-card minor. Now the opener can ask for keycards via four of responder's minor or can raise to 4NT, natural, etc.
2. Responder bids a new suit. This one depends upon the meaning of a new suit. If it is played as a game try, no keycard ask. If it is played as a singleton *and* a game force, opener can keycard via four of responder's minor. Once the partnership is in a game-forcing auction, either player can use four of the agreed minor to ask for keycards.

UNHAPPY START, HAPPY ENDING

Opener

♠ K Q 7 4

♥ Q J 8

♦ K Q 6 2

♣ K 4

1NT

3♣²

4♠⁴

pass

Responder (you)

♠ 5

♥ K 3

♦ A 5 4

♣ A Q J 6 5 3 2

2♠¹

4♦³

4NT⁵

1. Transfer to clubs (weak or strong).
2. Minimum hand for clubs.
3. RKB.
4. '1'.
5. To play.

After partner's unsettling '1' response to a 3014 ask, a return to 4NT is to play. It is *not* a further ask of any kind. Note: After a 1430 ask and a 4♠ '1' response, 4NT is a next-step queen-ask, it is not to play.

ANOTHER HAPPY ENDING

Opener

♠ A J 5 3

♥ K 6 4

♦ A J 6

♣ A 6 5

1NT

3♣²

4♥⁴

5♥⁶

pass

Responder

♠ K 6

♥ A Q 2

♦ K Q 8 7 4 3 2

♣ 3

2NT¹

4♦³

4NT⁵

7NT⁷

1. Transfer to diamonds.
2. First-step response = maximum for diamonds.
3. RKB (a jump)
4. '3'.
5. SKA.
6. ♥K.
7. Bingo!

Double transfer sequences after a 1NT opening bid

Opener

1NT

2♥

?

Responder

2♦¹

3♣²

Opener

1NT

2♠

Responder

2♥¹

3♦²

?

1. Transfer to hearts.
2. Natural, game force.

1. Transfer to spades.
2. Natural, game force.

Double transfer sequences after a 1NT opening bid may lead to a keycard ask, usually by the responder, the unlimited hand. However, if the opener has a

beautiful fitting hand with primary support for responder's *minor*, opener can keycard by jumping to 4♦ if responder's second bid is 3♣.

If responder's second bid is 3♦, opener jumps to the four-level of the major that responder doesn't have. The kings of both suits are included in the RKB response, but only the queen of the agreed suit makes the cut.

With a fit for the minor and a promising hand for slam, but lacking a first- or second-round control in one of the unbid suits, opener does best to raise the minor.

If opener raises the minor, responder can keycard.

After four-level club agreement, 4♦ is RKB.

After four-level diamond agreement, the unbid major is RKB.

AGREEMENT MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

Opener

♠ K 6
♥ A 8 7 4
♦ J 7 3
♣ A K 8 2

1NT
2♠
4♣³
4♠⁵
pass

Responder (you)

♠ A Q 5 3 2
♥ 3
♦ A
♣ J 10 7 6 5 4

2♥¹
3♣²
4♦⁴
7♣⁶

1. Transfer.
2. Natural, game force.
3. The agreement (presumed 4+ clubs).
4. 4♦ is RKB after four-level game-forcing club agreement. (3014)
5. '4' including the ♠K.
6. Clear, knowing partner has ♣AKxx and the ♠K.

COUPE DE FRANCE CHAMPIONSHIPS (2003)

Opener (you)

♠ K 5
♥ A 9 4
♦ A K 3
♣ Q 9 7 5 3

1NT
2♠
4♦³
6♣

Responder

♠ A Q 7 3 2
♥ 6
♦ Q 7 2
♣ K J 10 6

2♥¹
3♣²
4NT⁴
pass

1. Transfer.
2. Game-force, usually a five-card suit.
3. RKB.
4. '2 without' counting both black kings.

With a choice between making a forcing raise to 4♣ or keycarding via 4♦, the ask stands out with the magic holding in spades, great trump support, plus coverage for partner's three likely red cards.

THE RIGHT SINGLETON

Opener

♠ J 7 3
 ♥ K 6
 ♦ A Q J 5
 ♣ A J 6 2

 1NT
 2♥
 3♦³
 4♦⁵
 pass

Responder (you)

♠ 2
 ♥ A Q 10 4 3
 ♦ 7 2
 ♣ K Q 10 4 3

 2♦¹
 3♣²
 4♣⁴
 6♣⁶

1. Transfer to hearts.
2. Natural
3. Concentration of strength.
4. RKB for clubs (3014)
5. '3' including the ♥K
6. Should be playable facing a likely ♥K.

When partner bids 3♦, the inference is that partner's spades aren't so hot and partner has a *club* fit. Since you are in a game forcing auction you can use four of the 'agreed' minor to ask for keycards. If partner had a heart fit, you would have heard about it sooner.

MAJOR-MINOR TRANSFER SEQUENCES AFTER A 2NT OPENING – KEYCARD POSSIBILITIES

(a) Opener

2NT
 3♥
 ?

Responder

3♦¹
 4♣²

1. Transfer to hearts.
2. Natural.

(b) Opener

2NT
 3♠
 ?

Responder

3♥¹
 4♦²

1. Transfer to spades.
2. Natural.

When responder (a)'s last bid is 4♣, what does opener's next bid mean, and what is the keycard picture?

4♦	Keycard for clubs.
4♥, 4NT, 5♣	To play.
4♠	Cuebid, denying a diamond control.

When responder's second suit is 4♦, (b), what does opener's next bid mean, and what is the keycard picture?

4♥	The unbid major is keycard for diamonds.
4♠, 4NT, 5♦	To play.
5♣	Cuebid, denying a control in the unbid major.

As ever, both kings plus the agreed-suit queen are counted when responding to a keycard ask.

The rationale for opener's keycard ask to agree the second-bid minor is that opener had a chance to show a maximum for the major and did not.

SEE IT ALL IN ACTION

Opener (you)	Responder	
♠ A 5	♠ K 10 6 4 2	1. Transfer.
♥ A J 7 3	♥ 4	2. Natural — game force.
♦ K Q 8 6	♦ A 7 5 3 2	3. RKB — the unbid major, diamonds inferentially agreed.
♣ A Q 4	♣ J 3	4. '2 without' including the ♠K.
2NT	3♥ ¹	5. Grand slam try looking for extras.
3♠	4♦ ²	I already know you have the ♠K, the ♦A, and ten presumed cards in your two long suits. Anything else?
4♥ ³	5♣ ⁴	
5NT ⁵	6♦ ⁶	
pass		6. Well, if you know all that, no!

In this sequence, the ♣K, the ♥K, or the ♠Q would be enough for responder to bid 7♦. Short suits in the longer trump hand are not considered extras.

ANOTHER SIX-KEYCARD SEQUENCE

Opener	Responder	
♠ A 6 2	♠ K 9	1. Hearts.
♥ A 5	♥ Q 10 7 3 2	2. Clubs.
♦ A K Q 6	♦ 5	3. RKB, clubs agreed.
♣ A 10 5 4	♣ Q J 8 6 2	4. The big zero!
2NT	3♦ ¹	5. Questionable. Both key kings are missing. However, there is a reasonable chance that responder has the QJ in one or both of the long suits.
3♥	4♣ ²	
4♦ ³	4♠ ⁴	
6♣ ⁵	pass	

RESPONDING TO 2NT WITH BOTH MINORS — KEYCARD POSSIBILITIES

Opener	Responder	
2NT	3♠ ¹	1. Shows both minors with some slam interest.
?		

What are opener's options and what is the keycard scene?

- 1. Opener can agree a minor by bidding 4♣ or 4♦, showing 4+ cards in that suit.
- 2. 4♥ is RKB for clubs, ♦K included.
- 3. 4♠ is RKB for diamonds, ♣K included.
- 4. 3NT is to play.

The 2NT opener may not have the right hand to ask for keycards directly; a cuebid might be needed. Therefore 4♣ and 4♦ are agreements, not asks.

If the 2NT opener has all the controls plus a nice fit, he can ask for keycards directly via 4♥ (for clubs) or 4♠ (for diamonds).

If opener agrees a minor, responder may wish to ask for keycards. After four-level club agreement, 4♦ is RKB. After four-level diamond agreement, the unbid major is RKB.

A FIND!

Opener	Responder	
♠ A K 8	♠ 4	1. Minors.
♥ Q 6 3	♥ 2	2. 4+ clubs. The agreement, not the ask (can't ask for keycards with that heart holding).
♦ K J 5	♦ A Q 8 6 2	3. RKB (3014).
♣ A K 4 3	♣ J 10 7 6 5 2	4. '4' including the ♦K — don't forget the ♦K!
2NT	3♠ ¹	5. One keycard missing; six keycards are in play when a balanced hand faces a two-suited hand.
4♣ ²	4♦ ³	
4♠ ⁴	6♣ ⁵	
pass		

SAVING TIME

Opener

♠ K Q
♥ A 7 3
♦ A Q J 8 4
♣ K J 2

2NT

4♠²

6♦

Responder

♠ 6 5
♥ 8
♦ K 9 7 5 2
♣ A 7 6 5 4

3♠¹

5♦³

pass

1. Minors.

2. RKB for diamonds.

3. '2 without'.

Opener bypasses the agreement (4♦) and takes control with a direct keycard ask (4♠) based on his minor-suit fillers plus controls in both majors. This slam could go down! A touch of realism.

SIMPLE GERBER AFTER AN OPENING BID OF 1NT OR 2NT

A direct leap to 4♣ after an opening bid of 1NT or 2NT is a simple ace-ask called Gerber. The asker has a mile long suit, almost surely including the king and queen, and wants to know how many aces the opening notrump bidder has — period. Just like the good old days.

Opener

1NT or 2NT

Responder

4♣¹

1. Simple Gerber.

These are the ace-showing responses to simple Gerber, no suit having been bid.

4♦ 0 or 4 aces

4♥ 1 ace

4♠ 2 aces

4NT 3 aces

A SIMPLE PLAN

Opener

♠ K Q 6 3
♥ K Q J 5
♦ K Q 2
♣ A 6

2NT

4♥²

pass⁴

Responder

♠ 4

♥ 2

♦ A J 5

♣ K Q J 8 7 5 4 3

4♣¹

4NT³

1. Simple Gerber, no agreed suit — just aces, please.

2. One ace.

3. What kind of partner are you? To play.

4. It's not me, it's Kantar. He loves to end up in 4NT.

After a simple Gerber Ask, a follow-up bid of 4NT is to play. A follow up bid of 5♣ is the king-ask by number with the same step responses.

If responder’s suit is clubs, and two keycards are missing, responder had better sign off in 4NT because 5♣ is a king-ask!

If your methods allow for a minor-suit transfer followed by a keycard ask, that could be better. It gets the king and queen of the long suit into the game, not to mention the hand being played from the notrump bidder’s side.

KEYCARD GERBER (4♣) AFTER A 1NT OR 2NT REBID

After a suit response to an opening bid followed by the opener rebidding 1NT or 2NT, a follow-up jump to 4♣ by the responder is RKB, *responder’s suit agreed*.

If the 1NT rebid and the non-jump rebid to 2NT show a minimum in your methods, 4♣ is a 1430 ask. If any of the notrump rebids show extras in your methods, the jump to 4♣ is a 3014 ask. Responses are by steps and include the king and queen of responder’s suit.

If responder wishes to keycard in opener’s suit, responder must agree the suit first.

TALK ABOUT LONG SUITS!

Opener	Responder (you)	
♠ Q 6 2	♠ A 10 9	
♥ A J 9 6 4	♥ 2	
♦ 8 2	♦ A K Q 9 7 5 4 3	
♣ K Q J	♣ 3	
1 ♥	2 ♦	1. Keycard for diamonds
2NT	4♣ ¹	(1430). 2NT played as showing a minimum.
4♦ ²	6♦ ³	2. ‘1’ (can’t be ‘4’).
pass		3. One ace missing.

After the 4♦ ‘1’ response, you have these options:

- 4♥ = the queen-ask. If you had heart support, you would have bid 3♥ over 2NT.
- 4♠ = SSA.
- 4NT = to play.
- 5♣ = king-ask by number starting with ‘0’.
- 5♦, 6♦ = to play.
- 6NT = a matchpoint gamble.

KEYCARD GERBER AFTER A MINOR-SUIT OPENING AND A 2NT RESPONSE

Opener	Responder
1 ♣ or 1 ♦	2NT
4 ♣	

In this sequence, a direct keycard ask from opener is far more likely if the 2NT response shows 13-15 HCP. If it shows 11-12, it is not forcing and less likely to attract a keycard ask. However, if opener jumps to 4 ♣ after a 2NT response, it is RKB for *opener's* suit.

GET A LOAD OF THIS

Opener (you)	Responder	
♠ 5	♠ A 7 2	
♥ A J 8 3	♥ K Q 5	
♦ A K Q J 8 6 4	♦ 7 5 2	
♣ 3	♣ A 10 6 5	
1 ♦	2NT ¹	1. 13-15 HCP.
4 ♣ ²	4 ♠ ³	2. RKB, diamonds agreed.
5 ♥ ⁴	6 ♥ ⁵	3. '2 without'.
7NT ⁶	pass	4. SSA in hearts.
		5. The KQ, any length.
		6. Can count thirteen tricks.

You can risk a SSA in hearts because you can sign off in 6 ♦ if you are not thrilled with the response. Clearly, this is a tailor-made hand (another one!) giving responder every perfect card. If we gave responder:

♠ Q J 7 ♥ K Q 5 ♦ 7 5 2 ♣ K Q 6 5

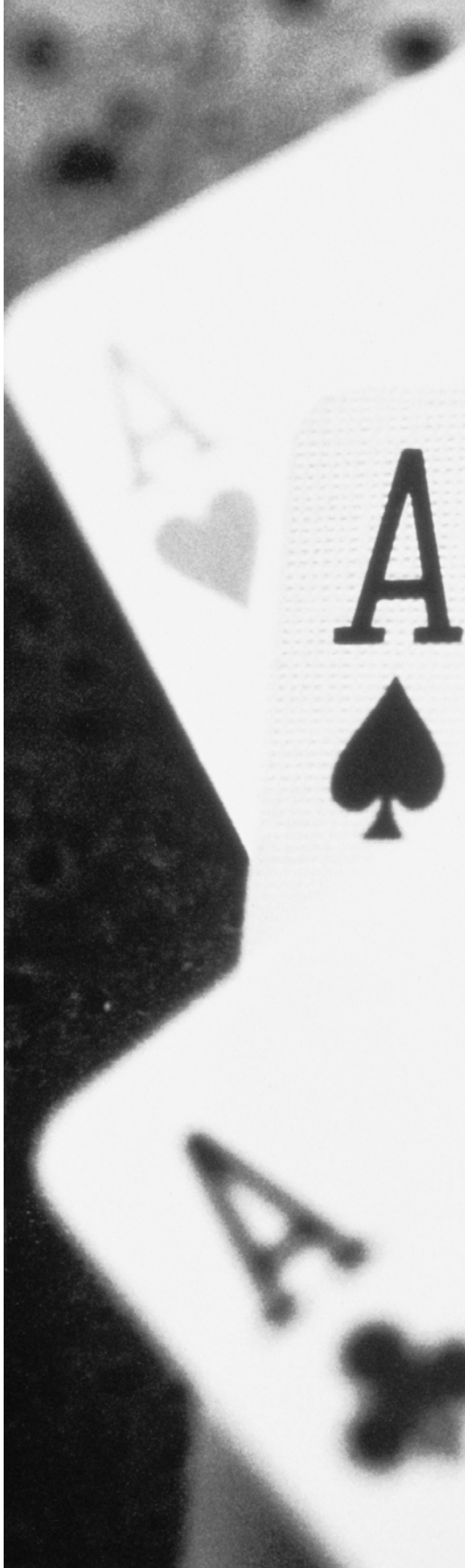
the response to 4 ♣ would be 4 ♥ showing '0' and you'd sign off in 4NT or 5 ♦.

To review: These are the responses to the 5 ♥ SSA in this sequence.

- First step: 5 ♠ = third-round control, xx or the queen, surely the queen.
- Second step: 5NT = Kxx(x)
- Third step: 6 ♣ = Kx
- Fourth step: 6 ♦ = the agreed suit, ye olde death response, denies second- or third-round heart control.
- 6 ♥, a raise of the ask suit, shows the KQ(x), just what the doctor ordered.

A closing thought: After 1 ♦ -2NT, use 4 ♦ as RKB for diamonds and a leap to 4 ♣ to show a slammish minor two-suiter, at least 5-5.

- After a 1NT or 2NT opening bid, it is usually the responder, the unlimited hand, who asks for keycards.
- If three-level minor-suit agreement is not forcing, the keycard ask must be a jump bid.
- If the agreement is game-forcing, four of the agreed minor by either hand is RKB.
- After a major-minor transfer sequence following a 2NT opening bid ending in 4♣, 4♦ by the 2NT bidder is RKB, clubs agreed.
- After a major-minor transfer sequence ending in 4♦, four of responder's non-major is RKB for diamonds.
- In all double transfer RKB ask sequences, the kings of both long suits are included in the response, but only the queen of the agreed suit is included.
- After a 1NT or 2NT opening bid, a direct jump to 4♣ by responder is Simple Gerber asking for aces. A follow-up bid of 4NT is to play and a follow-up bid of 5♣ asks for kings by number. Both responses start with 0.
- After a one-over-one or a two-over-one response followed by opener rebidding one or two notrump, a jump to 4♣ by responder is Keycard Gerber for *responder's* suit.
- After a 1♣ or 1♦ opening bid followed by 2NT response, a follow-up jump to 4♣ by the opener is keycard for opener's suit.
- In two-suited transfer sequences that include at least one minor suit, a follow-up bid of 5NT by the RKB bidder is a general grand slam try, not a SKA.



THE WRAP-UP

PART FOUR

SECOND-SUIT OPTIONS AFTER MAJOR-SUIT AGREEMENT

This chapter deals with follow-up bids at the five- or six-level by the RKB bidder, mainly after major-suit agreement. Responses to an RKB ask of 4NT begin at the five-level. Follow-up asks (the queen-ask, third-round control asks) can be made at the five- or six-level.

Most follow-up bids however, are not asks, but rather ‘choice of contract’ bids. This chapter deals with trying to sort out the difference between whether the follow-up bid is an ask or choice of contract.

DECIDING ON THE AGREED SUIT WITH RKB POSSIBILITIES

When a major suit is opened and jump-supported *directly*, or jump-supported later, or responder’s first-bid major is jump-supported directly, that ‘seals the deal’ as far as the agreed suit is concerned. However, there are many other sequences where the agreement is not as straightforward. These sequences can be classified as ‘iffy’. We will be looking at some iffy and not so iffy agreement sequences, mostly iffy ones.

1. After simple preference agreement

This bid often shows a doubleton and the asker's second suit may offer the better fit. This is definitely an iffy sequence.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED

Opener (you)

♠ A Q 10 7 2

♥ 8

♦ A K Q 10 4

♣ K Q

1 ♠

3 ♦

4 ♦²

4NT⁴

6 ♦⁶

Responder

♠ K 5

♥ A K 6 4 3

♦ J 3 2

♣ J 7 6

2 ♥

3 ♠¹

4 ♥³

5 ♥⁵

pass⁷

1. Simple preference — could be honor doubleton.
2. Natural.
3. Cuebid.
4. RKB, spades presumably agreed.
5. '2 without'.
6. Choice of contract.
7. I have chosen.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE GOOSE IS GOOD FOR THE GANDER

Opener

♠ K Q

♥ A 8 4

♦ A 7 3

♣ A J 6 4 2

1 ♣

2NT

3 ♠¹

4 ♥³

5 ♦⁵

pass⁷

Responder (you)

♠ A 6 5 3 2

♥ Q 6

♦ K Q 6 5 2

♣ 5

1 ♠

3 ♦

4 ♦²

4NT⁴

6 ♦⁶

1. Simple preference. Usually three spades in this sequence, but not written in blood — KQ doubleton is impressive preference support for a first-bid suit.
2. Two-suiter.
3. Cuebid.
4. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
5. '4'.
6. Choice of contract.
7. I have chosen (and correctly).

How can it be wrong to give partner a 'choice of contract' bid? Partner can always return to the agreed suit.

Possible simple preference follow-up ambiguities

An ambiguity can arise when opener has a major-*diamond* two-suiter.

Opener

1 ♠

3 ♦

4 ♦

4NT

5 ♦

Responder

2 ♥

3NT

4 ♠

5 ♣

?

Spades is considered the agreed suit, but responder clearly has a doubleton. In this auction, 4NT is RKB (1430) and 5♣ shows '1'. We now have a situation where a suit that has been rebid, diamonds, is also a next-step queen-ask.

Is it to play or is it the queen-ask? Here 5♦ is to play and 5♥, partner's unsupported first-bid suit, can substitute as the queen-ask suit. A jump to 6♦ would be a choice of contract bid.

Assume opener has a major-club two-suiter and the bidding comes up identically. After the 5♣ response, 5♦ is the queen-ask and 6♣ is a choice of contract bid.

2. *Jump preference agreement to a first-bid suit (not an iffy sequence)*

There is a world of difference between simple preference agreement, a bid often made with a doubleton, as opposed to *jump preference agreement*, a bid that shows three-card major-suit support. A jump preference to a first-bid minor typically shows four- or five-card support.

When jump preference agreement to a first-bid major suit is followed by a keycard ask, a return to a previously bid suit is either a next-step queen-ask, or a third-round control ask if not the next step. It is not 'choice of contract'. This is the rare time when a third-round control ask can be used.

JUMP PREFERENCE AGREEMENT TO A FIRST-BID MAJOR

Opener

♠ A
♥ K Q J 5 4 3
♦ 2
♣ A K 10 9 4

1♥
3♣
4NT²
6♣⁴
7♥⁶

Responder (you)

♠ Q 7 5 3 2
♥ A 8 6
♦ A 7 5
♣ 6 3

1♠
4♥¹
5♥³
6♦⁵
pass⁷

1. Jump preference to a first-bid suit — the table is set.
2. RKB.
3. '2 without'.
4. Third-round control ask.
5. First-step response showing xx. A second-step response would show the queen.
6. I remember this hand from the last edition.
7. Not so fast. In the earliest editions of this madness, Kantar used this example and gave me ♥A10x to more or less lock up the grand. In the last edition, he gave me the A9x because he lives with guilt. In this edition I have been reduced to the A8x. Has he gone mad? We could go down!

The more detailed responses to a third-round ask (used here) differentiate between a small doubleton and the queen and should have kept you out of this grand, but you overbid so I could get the joke in. This book needs humor! Badly.

JUMP PREFERENCE AGREEMENT TO A FIRST-BID MINOR

Opener (you)	Responder	
♠ A 6 3	♠ K Q 4 2	1. Game-forcing minor-suit jump preference.
♥ A K 8 3	♥ 6	2. RKB (1430). After four-level diamond agreement, 4♥ is RKB unless hearts is a first-bid suit. If it is, 4♠ is RKB.
♦ A Q 7 6 2	♦ K 9 8 5 4 3	3. '1'.
♣ A	♣ 10 8	4. SSA in spades, an unsupported suit — besides, there has been <i>jump</i> agreement to a first-bid suit solidifying that as the agreed suit.
1♦	1♠	5. The KQ. The raise of an SSA shows the KQ with any length.
2♥	4♦ ¹	
4♥ ²	4♠ ³	
5♠ ⁴	6♠ ⁵	
7♦	pass	

3. *A single raise of a suit that has been rebid can be of suspect length. Translation: alternative contracts may loom (iffy sequence).*

After a suit has been rebid, it can be raised with a doubleton, usually a doubleton honor. In other words a longer stronger trump fit might exist in another suit.

WORLD CHAMPIONS IN ACTION

This hand took place in international competition. France’s Christian Mari and Alain Levy, both former world champions, were West and East respectively.

Mari	Levy	
♠ 10	♠ A K 7 6 5 4 3	1. Fourth suit looking for more info.
♥ K J 7 3 2	♥ 6	2. RKB.
♦ A 7 3	♦ 5	3. '2 without'.
♣ A 8 6 3	♣ K Q 4 2	4. Choice of contract.
1♥	1♠	5. Once Levy discovered that the ♠Q was missing, 6♣, a previously-bid suit, was 'choice of contract'.
2♣	2♦ ¹	Mari had no trouble at all choosing. Talk about giving 'delayed' support at the six-level!
2♥	3♠	
4♠	4NT ²	
5♥ ³	6♣ ⁴	
pass		

4. After a queen-ask denial (more iffy sequences)

In the previous hand, a queen-denial response to an RKB ask led to an alternative contract. Here is an example of a queen-denial response to a queen-ask also leading to an alternative contract:

CHANGING HORSES IN MIDSTREAM

Opener (you)	Partner
♠ A	♠ 9 8 7
♥ A K 7 6 5 3	♥ 10 2
♦ 8	♦ A 9 7 4 2
♣ A K Q J 9	♣ 10 3 2

You	Second Hand	Partner	Fourth Hand
2♣	2♠	pass ¹	3♦
3♥	3♠	pass	pass
4♣	pass	4♥	pass
4NT ²	pass	5♣ ³	pass
5♦ ⁴	pass	5♥ ⁵	pass
6♣ ⁶	pass	pass ⁷	pass

- Shows values.
- RKB (1430).
- '1'.
- Queen-ask.
- No queen.
- Choice of contract.
- I have chosen.

After a queen-denial response, a six-level bid in a previously-bid suit (yours or partner's) is 'choice of contract'. The convenient ♣10 practically guarantees 6♣ and makes 7♣ a reasonable contract; 6♥ has no play if hearts are 4-1.

SURPRISE, SURPRISE!

Opener (you)	Responder
♠ 6	♠ J 10 8
♥ A K J 8 7 6 4	♥ 10 9
♦ A Q 7	♦ K J 10 4 3
♣ K 6	♣ A Q J

1♥	2♦	1. RKB (1430).
3♥	4♥	2. '1'.
4NT ¹	5♣ ²	3. Queen-ask.
5♦ ³	5♥ ⁴	4. Negative.
6♦ ⁵	pass	5. Choice of contract.

5♦, partner’s unsupported first-bid suit, is the queen-ask. After a queen-ask *denial*, a return to partner’s first-bid suit at the *six*-level is ‘choice of contract’. Partner will correct to 6♥ with three hearts.

5. Four-level interference can ruin your whole day (more iffy sequences)

The idea is to survive high-level interference without an ‘accident’. Think the ‘best result possible’, not the ‘best possible result’. (S. J. Simon)

CAN'T DO EVERYTHING

Opener	Responder
♠ J 8 4	♠ A K 7 3 2
♥ 6	♥ A 10
♦ A Q 10 9 4	♦ K J 7 3 2
♣ A Q 4 3	♣ 2

Opener	Oppt.	Responder (you)	Oppt.
1♦	2♥	2♠	4♥
4♠	pass	4NT ¹	pass
5♥ ²	pass	6♦ ³	pass
pass ⁴	pass		

1. RKB (1430). Even though opener figures to have extras for that 4♠ bid, by the rules it is a 1430 ask unless opener has jumped prior to the ask.
2. ‘2 without’.
3. Choice of contract.
4. An easy choice.

Competition has precluded showing your diamond support if you want to keycard in spades. Of course, you might have leaped to 6♦ over 4♠, but that’s a bit practical for this book. Finding the ♠Q in partner’s hand might lead to a grand slam... in diamonds!

As long as you can be secure that an eventual bid of 6♦ or 7♦ will be to play, it is safe to keycard in spades.

What follows is a general rule dealing with a keycard ask follow-up bid after first-suit *non-jump* agreement. In other words, we are dealing with what could be an eight-card trump fit.

The rule: After a keycard ask followed by a queen-ask, a follow-up bid in partner’s first-bid suit at the six- or seven-level, supported or not, is ‘choice of contract’.

This scenario is most apt to occur after heavy duty interference making it impossible to both support partner’s suit and ask for keycards in the agreed suit at a convenient level.

DONE IN BY THE 'RULES'

Consider the following hand, reported by Chip Martel playing with Lew Stansby, both world champions at the time. First, look at the auction before peeking at their hands.

Chip	Oppt.	Lew	Oppt.
	2♥ ¹	pass	4♥
dbl	pass	4♠	pass
4NT ²	pass	5♣ ³	pass
5♦ ⁴			

1. Weak.
2. RKB (3014 in their methods).
3. Known to be '0'.
4. What does 5♦ mean? Is it a queen-ask or is it natural?

Here are the actual hands:

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

When making a takeout double with a long strong suit, and competition makes it *impossible* both to show your suit and to ask for keycards beneath the level of 4NT, trouble lurks. If you bid 4NT after partner's response, partner will think his suit is the agreed suit, exactly what happened, and before the smoke cleared they wound up in 6♦.

Oddly, had they been playing 1430 responses (why don't they read this book? Or worse, maybe they have!), the response to 4NT would have been 5♦, '0', which Chip could have passed!

Chip suggested that in sequences like this you should be able to use the opponents' suit as the queen-ask suit.

The other side of the coin: Many years ago I asked a friend of mine if he could help me out with a tip for my bidding tips book. This is what he came up with, "Never preempt against *weak* opposition"! "Why?" I asked. "Because you take away all those bidding levels that they could be using to screw themselves up."

SECOND-SUIT AGREEMENT FOLLOWED BY A RKB ASK

Some agreements are second-suit agreements, some are second-suit jump agreements. In any case, we are talking about a likely 4-4 fit. So what does it all mean?

Follow-up bids after second-suit agreement

After second-suit agreement if the asker returns to his first-bid suit at the five- or six-level after an RKB ask it is to play. Period.

BACK TO NUMBER ONE

Opener

♠ 2
♥ A K Q J 10 8
♦ A K 6 2
♣ K Q

2♣

2♥

3♦

4♠³

5♥⁵

Responder

♠ K J 3
♥ 4
♦ Q 7 5 3
♣ 10 8 6 5 4

2♦¹

2NT²

4♦

5♣⁴

pass

1. Waiting.
2. Scattered values.
3. RKB.
4. 'O'.
5. To play (asker's first-bid suit).

After game-forcing four-level diamond agreement, 4♠ is RKB when hearts is a first-bid suit; 4♥ would be to play.

TO OVERRULE OR NOT TO OVERRULE?

Opener

♠ A 8 6 3
♥ K Q
♦ 6
♣ A K Q J 9 4

1♣

2♠

4NT²

6♣⁴

Responder (you)

♠ K Q 5 2
♥ A 9 7 2
♦ 8 5 4 3
♣ 5

1♥

4♠¹

5♠³

?

1. Emphasizing the quality of the spades.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '2 with'.
4. To play.

A return to the asker's first-bid suit overrides second-suit agreement, even second-suit jump agreement! Even second-suit jump agreement followed by trump-queen confirmation!

Dare one *ever* overrule a return to a first-bid suit? One can, but one had better be right!

In order to overrule 6♣, the asker's first-bid suit and play in a presumed eight-card second-suit fit (spades), the AKQJ of the second suit must be held jointly. You know partner has the ♠A and partner knows you have the ♠KQ. However, partner must not have the ♠J, and you don't have it, so give it up. If you were looking at the KQJ5, you could risk an overrule.

TOUCHY, TOUCHY, TOUCHY

Opener	Responder (you)
♠ A 7 4	♠ K Q 8 3 2
♥ K Q J	♥ 7
♦ 5	♦ A J 9 8 6
♣ A K Q J 9 6	♣ 4 3

Opener	Oppt.	Responder	Oppt.
1 ♣	2 ♥	2 ♠	4 ♥
4NT ¹	pass	5 ♠ ²	pass
6 ♣ ³	all pass		

1. RKB — presumably for spades, but even that is not clear because of the four-level competition.
2. '2 with'
3. To play.

Even if spades 'sounds' like the agreed suit, after four-level interference responder must make allowances. A return to the asker's first-bid suit at the six-level is to play.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TRUST

This is your hand as responder:

♠ J 7 4 2 ♥ A K 9 6 3 2 ♦ — ♣ 9 6 5

Opener	Responder (you)	
2 ♣	2 ♥ ¹	1. Natural.
3 ♦	3 ♥	2. RKB (1430).
3 ♠	4 ♠	3. '1'.
4NT ²	5 ♣ ³	
6 ♦	?	

What should you do? Do you know what the best bid in bridge is? It is PASS, and that's what you should do. Your spades aren't good enough to overrule. Partner heard you raise and still wants to play 6 ♦. Let partner play 6 ♦! It's a first-bid suit!

Passing with a void in partner's suit shows real character. And don't look down when you display your dummy, look up!

Partner's hand:

♠ A Q 9 3 ♥ 4 ♦ A K Q J 8 7 4 ♣ A

On a more reassuring note, in spite of some of the example hands in this chapter, most RKB asks mercifully end up with the asker placing the final

contract in the agreed suit. Second-suit option sequences are not the norm. It is important to know that they exist however, and what the warning signs are.

To restore your faith in humanity, and the agreed suit, this one is for you.

SPADES AND HEARTS

Opener (you)	Responder	
♠ A K J 7 3 2	♠ Q 9 4	
♥ A K 7 5	♥ 6 3	1. Game force.
♦ K 4	♦ A 9 8	2. Three spades (if 2♣ was not a game force, you would bid 3♠ here).
♣ 4	♣ A Q 10 6 2	3. RKB (1430): opener asking.
1 ♠	2♣ ¹	4. '2 with'.
2 ♥	2♠ ²	5. Third-round control ask.
4NT ³	5♠ ⁴	6. Second response showing xx.
6♥ ⁵	6NT ⁶	7. Should be enough.
7♠ ⁷	pass	

Anytime opener has spades and hearts and *knows* partner has 3+ spades and *fewer* than four hearts, a follow-up heart bid at the six-level is a third-round ask.

THE BOTTOM LINE

First-suit jump agreement or even *first-suit* jump preference agreement are sequences that could generate a third-round control ask at the six-level. In *all* other sequences a return to a *previously-bid suit* by either player at the six-level is a 'choice of contract' bid.

- Agreement sequences most apt to lead to choice of game contracts are:
- (a) After simple preference to a first-bid suit (usually a doubleton);
 - (b) After a rebid suit has been raised (can be made with a doubleton);
 - (c) After a queen-denial response to the RKB ask;
 - (d) After a queen-denial response to a queen-ask;
 - (e) After four-level interference.

A return to the asker's first-bid suit at the five- or six-level is to play after second-suit agreement.

After reading this chapter, my former partner Billy Eisenberg had this to say: 'Eddie, you are telling them about problems that they didn't know they had.' Also about problems I didn't know I had!

THE LAST ROUND-UP

This chapter deals with several as-yet-uncovered RKB topics. You didn't really think we were through yet, did you?

- 1) RKB after partner preempts
- 2) Interference following an RKB ask
- 3) RKB after a Stayman sequence
- 4) Responding to a 5NT grand slam try

RKB AFTER PARTNER PREEMPTS

Responding to a Weak Two with a lower-level RKB ask

After partner opens with a weak two-bid, it makes sense to use a lower RKB ask. If you are missing two keycards, it is far safer to stop in 4♥ or 4♠ rather than put the contract at risk at the five-level.

The suggested method is to use an immediate leap to 4♣ to ask for keycards. The responses are different because '3' and '4' responses are not in the game. Even '2 with' is an unlikely response.

Opener	Responder	
2♥ ¹	4♣ ²	1. Weak two. 2. RKB, hearts agreed.

Say the opening bid is a weak 2♥ bid and responder jumps to 4♣, RKB.

The responses are:

4♦	=	first step	'0'
4♥	=	second step	'1 without'
4♠	=	third step	'1 with'
4NT	=	fourth step	'2 without'
5♣	=	fifth step	'2 with'

After a first-step response of '0' (the only response where the queen isn't a known quantity), it is more efficient to play that a follow-up bid in a new suit is a SSA.

THE 4♣ RESPONSE IN ACTION

Opener

♠ K J 10 9 3 2

♥ K J 3

♦ 9 6

♣ 8 3

2♠¹

4♥³

pass

Responder

♠ A 8 4

♥ 8

♦ K Q J 8

♣ A K Q 9 6

4♣²

4♠

1. Weak.

2. RKB.

3. '1 without' (second-step response)

Clearly, it is more comfortable to play a contract of 4♠ than a contract of 5♠ missing two aces (not to mention the ♠Q).

RKB after partner makes a three-level preempt

After opening bids of 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠, next hand passing, a response of 4♣ can also be used to ask for keycards, opener's suit agreed. After a 3♣ opening, a response of 4♣ is natural and furthers the preempt; a jump to 4♦ is RKB for clubs.

UPPING THE ANTE

Opener

♠ A 6

♥ K 10 9 7 5 3 2

♦ 4

♣ 8 7 6

3♥

4NT²

6♥⁴

pass

Responder (you)

♠ K 9

♥ A Q 6

♦ A Q 7 6 5 3

♣ A 3

4♣¹

5♦³

7♥⁵

1. RKB.

2. Fourth-step response = '2 without'.

3. SSA in diamonds.

4. Jump in trump suit = singleton.

5. Hoping to establish the diamonds to discard losing clubs.

You are prepared to play a grand slam in hearts facing either the king or a singleton diamond. If partner has third-round diamond control which must be a doubleton as you have the queen, partner's 5♠ response will leave you playing 6♥ on a finesse after a club lead. Considerate opponents will lead a spade.

Dealing with interference directly over partner's preemptive opening bid

When there's an overcall following a weak two-bid and a *jump* to 4♣ is still available, it remains RKB. If a jump is not available, 4♣ is natural and 4NT is RKB.

If there is interference following a *three-level* preempt, 4♣ is natural and 4NT is RKB.

If an opponent makes a takeout double after any preemptive opening bid, 4NT is the only RKB ask.

Opener	Oppt.	Responder
2♥	2♠	4♣ ¹
2♥	3♦	4♣ ²
2♥	3♦	4NT ³

1. RKB. A jump response.
2. Natural. A non-jump response.
3. RKB. Only RKB ask available; 4♣ is natural.

Opener	Oppt.	Responder
3♦	3♥	4♣ ⁴
3♦	3♥	4NT ⁵

4. Natural. A non-jump response.
5. RKB. Only ask available after interference; 4♣ is natural.

WHEN THERE IS INTERFERENCE FOLLOWING A RKB ASK

When the opponents interfere directly after partner's RKB ask, thank them. They have just presented you with two additional responses, 'double' and 'pass'.

Since most asks are 1430 asks, let's deal with those responses first. Incidentally, if your agreed partnership responses to a keycard ask after interference have been working, stick with them and go on to the next topic.

When the interference is *beneath the six-level of the agreed suit and it is a 1430 ask*, think of the acronym DOPI (pronounced 'dopey', as in the Snow White story) and it should be easy.

dbl	=	0 (the DO part)
pass	=	1 (the PI part)
first step	=	2
second step	=	3

When the interference is *above the six-level of the agreed suit and it is a 1430 ask*, use the acronym DEPO (pronounced like 'depot' in the USA).

dbl	=	0 or 2 (Double = an <i>even</i> number of keycards (the DE part).
pass	=	1 (Pass = an <i>odd</i> number of keycards (the PO part)
first step	=	3

When responding to a 3014 ask after interference, expectations are higher.
 For practical purposes, a ‘0’ response doesn’t exist and a ‘1’ response is rare. Only one set of responses is needed.

When the interference is *above or beneath the six-level of the agreed suit after a 3014 ask*, responses are:

dbl = 1 or 3 (Assume ‘3’ unless you have ‘3’!)

pass = 2

first step = 4

Suppose you hold:

♠ 5 2 ♥ A Q J 7 6 ♦ A 8 ♣ J 10 4 2

You	Oppt.	Partner	Oppt.
1 ♥	pass	2NT ¹	3 ♠
pass	4 ♠	4NT ²	5 ♠
?			

1. Jacoby, strong heart raise.
2. RKB (1430).

The interference is beneath the six-level of the agreed suit, so DOPI responses (double = 0, pass = 1) are in play. You have ‘2’ keycards, so make a first-step response of 5NT.

Had the interference bid been 6 ♠, a bid above the six-level of the agreed suit, DEPO (double = even, pass = odd) responses would have been in play.

You would double to show an even number of keycards, ‘0’ or ‘2’. Since you opened the bidding, partner should figure you for ‘2’.

How about this one?

♠ 4 3 ♥ K 2 ♦ K J 6 ♣ A J 7 6 3 2

Partner	Oppt.	You	Oppt.
1 ♣	1 ♥	2 ♥ ¹	pass
4 ♣ ²	4 ♦ ³	?	4

1. Limit or better in clubs.
2. RKB (1430) after two-level agreement.
3. Interference is below the six-level in the agreed suit, so you are playing DOP (Double=0, Pass=1).
4. You have ‘1’ so pass.

One more. You hold:

♠ A J 10 6 ♥ A Q 4 ♦ 7 3 ♣ A K 8 4

You	Oppt.	Partner	Oppt.
1 ♣	1 ♦	1 ♠	2 ♥
4 ♠	pass	4NT	5 ♦
?			

This is interference after a 3014 ask, so it doesn't matter whether the interference is above or beneath the six-level of the agreed suit. 'Double' always shows '1' or '3'; 'pass' always shows '2'; and a first-step response, 5 ♥ in this case, shows '4'. You have '3', so 'double'.

The queen-ask after interference

There are no direct queen-showing responses to RKB asks after interference. However, a follow-up queen-ask can be made *after* the response. The next step, excluding the agreed suit, but including 5NT, is the queen-ask. Responder signs off in the agreed suit without the queen and jumps in the agreed suit with it.

LOOKING FOR MY FAIR LADY

You	Partner
♠ A 10 6 4 3	♠ K 8 5 2
♥ K Q J 7 4	♥ A 6 3 2
♦ 10	♦ A
♣ A K	♣ 6 5 4 3

You	Oppt.	Partner	Oppt.
1 ♠	2NT ¹	4 ♦ ²	pass
4NT ³	5 ♦	5 ♠ ⁴	pass
5NT ⁵	pass	6 ♠ ⁶	all pass

1. Minors.
2. Splinter.
3. RKB.
4. '3'. DOPI — interference beneath the six-level of the agreed suit.
5. Queen-ask (next step, including 5NT).
6. Queen denial. With the queen, partner bids 7 ♠.

Reminder: When 5NT is the next step after a RKB response that has neither shown nor denied the queen, it is the queen-ask, not a SKA.

Dealing with more hands involved with RKB interference

♠ K 6 4 3 2 ♥ 8 ♦ 6 5 3 ♣ A K 8 7

Partner	Oppt.	You	Oppt.
1 ♠	2 ♥	4 ♥ ¹	pass
4NT ²	5 ♦ ³	♣ ⁴	

1. Strong spade raise with heart shortness.
2. RKB (1430).
3. Interference below six of the agreed suit.
4. Bid 5 ♥. Dbl = '0'; pass = '1'; 5 ♥ = '2'.

♠ A K 4 2 ♥ 6 5 ♦ 4 3 ♣ A Q J 6 3

You	Oppt.	Partner	Oppt.
1 ♣	1 ♥	1 ♠	3 ♥
4 ♠	pass	4NT ¹	5 ♦
♣ ²			

1. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
2. This is a 3014 ask so responses are the same regardless of the level of the interference. Dbl = '1 or 3', pass = '2' and the next step = '4'. You have '3', and should double.

♠ A Q 6 5 ♥ 9 ♦ K 7 ♣ A K Q 4 3 2

You	Oppt.	Partner	Oppt.
1 ♣	pass	1 ♠	2 ♥
4 ♥	pass	4NT ¹	6 ♦ ²
♣ ³			

1. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
2. Determined to make your life miserable.
3. This is a 3014 ask. Dbl. = '1 or 3', pass = '2' and first step = '4'. You have '2', so 'pass'.

Remember: If opponents interfere immediately following a keycard ask, 'double' and 'pass' can be used as the first two-step responses.

After an RKB response following interference, the next step is the queen-ask. In response to a queen-ask, jump in the trump suit with the queen, sign off in the trump suit without it.

RKB AFTER A STAYMAN SEQUENCE

After this start:

Opener	Responder (you)
1NT	2♣
2♥ or 2♠	?

How can you ask for keycards with a fit in partner's major and slam on the brain?

How about 4NT? Not so hot. In this sequence, 4NT is best played as natural showing the unbid major with 16-17 HCP. Identical to an original 4NT response.

Many play that a jump to 4♣ after either a 2♥ or 2♠ response is RKB, opener's major agreed.

HAVING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Opener	Responder	
♠ A 2	♠ K J 9 3	
♥ K J 8 6	♥ A Q 9 3 2	
♦ K 6 5	♦ A J 7	
♣ K J 8 6	♣ 3	
1NT	2♣	1. RKB.
2♥	4♣ ¹	2. '2 without'.
4♠ ²	6♥	
pass		

The 4♣ bid can also be used after a 2NT opening bid and a similar start. Warning: This assumes you have some other way of showing clubs!

RESPONDING TO A 5NT GRAND SLAM TRY, A MINOR SUIT AGREED

After major-suit agreement, 5NT is the SKA. After minor-suit agreement, it is a grand slam try looking for an undisclosed extra. Here is a list of possible undisclosed extras:

- (1) A four- or five-card side suit headed by the KQ or, better.
- (2) A five-card suit headed by the king that can be set up for discards.
- (3) Any side-suit queen, attached to a king or not.
- (4) Side-suit shortness, but only with the same number or fewer trumps than partner.
- (5) Extra trump length.

What to respond with an undisclosed extra

If you are lucky enough to have an undisclosed extra, in theory you are entitled to leap to a grand slam in the agreed suit or even to 7NT if you can count thirteen notrump tricks.

However if your side-suit extra is a queen, it can't hurt to bid the queen suit regardless of rank. This queen-showing response has the advantage of showing partner where your extra is. This response may allow the asker to bid 7NT. It may also allow the asker, who may suddenly develop a case of cold feet, to bail out at 6NT.

If you have nothing extra, sign off at the six-level of the agreed suit.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- After a Stayman response of 2♣ followed by opener bidding 2♥ or 2♠, a leap to 4♣ can be played as RKB for opener's major.
- 4♣ as RKB can also be used after a 2NT opening bid followed by a Stayman response, opener bidding 3♥ or 3♠.
- In minor-suit auctions 5NT by the asker is looking for an extra.
- If the responder has an extra the hand should play in a grand slam.
- In response to a 5NT 'extra' ask, if the responder's extra is a side-suit queen, responder should bid the queen-suit at the six-level.

C H A P T E R 24

52 PICKUP RKB TIPS

- 1** Don't even think of playing two versions of RKB until you are sure of your asks, your responses and your partner! And start with the majors!
- 2** Not every slam problem can be solved by using RKB. Cuebidding is still allowed! Also, there is not a slam in almost every hand, as there is in this book!
- 3** To simplify slam bidding it helps if there is early game-forcing agreement. Those who play 'two-over-one' or open 1♣, strong and artificial, can make game-forcing agreements at lower levels.
- 4** If opener asks for keycards, it is a 1430 ask unless responder has made a strong jump shift. If so, it is a 3014 ask.

- 5** If responder asks for keycards, it is a 1430 ask unless opener has shown extras. If opener has, it is a 3014 ask.
- 6** After major-suit agreement followed by a 5♣ response to RKB, 5♦ is the queen-ask. After a 5♦ response, 5♥ is the queen-ask.
- 7** Do not even think of making a 1430 ask unless you have at least ‘1 with’ and even that is an exception.
- 8** The weakest response to any ask is a return to the agreed suit at the lowest level. (Exception: 4NT is the queen-denial response to a four-level queen-ask, minor suit agreed.)
- 9** The strongest response to any ask, other than jumping to a grand slam, is a raise of the ask suit.
- 10** When responding to a queen-ask with a known ten-card fit, respond as if you have the queen, whether you have it or not.
- 11** After major-suit agreement followed by a 4NT keycard ask, a follow-up bid of 5NT by the asker is a Specific King-Ask. After minor-suit agreement 5NT is a grand slam try looking for an undisclosed extra.
- 12** The majority of keycard asks come directly after agreement. The ask follows the agreement. Barring exceptions, the agreement is *not* the ask.
- 13** If opener reverses after a *two*-level response, a follow-up RKB ask by the responder is a 3014 ask if the reverse has *promised* extras. If it has not, it is a 1430 ask.
- 14** Any ask beneath the five-level of the agreed suit is at least a small slam try. Any ask above the five-level of the agreed suit is a guaranteed grand slam try.
- 15** When responder to any ask can count thirteen tricks, responder should jump to a grand slam rather than respond to the ask. Not jumping to a grand slam denies the ability to do so.

- 16** In *major-suit* agreement auctions, a follow-up bid after the RKB response that is not a next-step queen-ask is a third-round control ask.
- 17** In *minor-suit* agreement auctions, a follow-up bid in a new suit after the RKB response that is not a next-step queen-ask is a Specific Suit Ask.
- 18** In most keycard auctions, the stronger (unlimited) hand makes the keycard ask. A limited hand does not ask for keycards unless partner has splintered, *initiated* a slam try cuebid, or has the perfect fitting hand facing a two-suiter.
- 19** In double-agreement keycard sequences six keycards: the four aces and both kings (and both queens) are in play, and there are no void showing responses.
- 20** After a game-forcing *three-level* splinter, clubs or diamonds agreed, four of the agreed minor by either player is RKB.
- 21** When a *four-level* splinter jump bypasses the four-level of the agreed minor, the cheapest unbid suit (or the fourth suit) is the RKB ask suit. If clubs is the fourth suit or the unbid suit, the asker's second suit is RKB.
- 22** Whenever a *cuebid* takes the partnership beyond the four-level of the agreed minor, 4NT is the next RKB on-ramp.
- 23** A 4♠ splinter jump, clubs agreed, promises at least one keycard in blood!
- 24** No suit an opponent has bid can be used as the RKB ask suit. A single jump in a suit the opponents have bid shows shortness; a double jump shows a void and is an Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (EKB) ask.
- 25** EKB responses start with '0' and the queen is not included in the '0' or '1' response. The next step after a '0' or '1' response is the queen-ask. Any other follow-up bid is a Specific Suit Ask.

- 26** After major-suit agreement, a leap above game in a non-agreed suit is EKB, never a splinter.
- 27** If *any* ask conflicts with a keycard ask, the keycard ask takes precedence.
- 28** After a natural 3NT bid followed by four-level minor-suit agreement, 4NT by the 3NT bidder is to play.
- 29** After the fourth suit any follow-up agreement is game-forcing and a leap to 4NT is natural.
- 30** After *three-level* minor-suit agreement, when four of the agreed minor is RKB, a jump to 4NT is natural.
- 31** After a ‘0’ response to a 1430 ask or a ‘1’ response to a 3014 ask, both rare responses, a return to 4NT by the asker is to play.
- 32** After game-forcing *three-level* minor-suit agreement, four of the agreed minor by either player is RKB.
- 33** After game-forcing four-level club agreement, 4♦ is RKB. After game-forcing four-level *diamond* agreement, 4♥ is RKB. If hearts is a first-bid suit, 4♠ is RKB. If both are first-bid suits, 4NT is RKB.
- 34** 4NT is the only SKA in minor-suit agreement sequences. The SSA is the substitute ask when 4NT is not available.
- 35** A direct response of 4NT to an opening bid is an ace-ask with no agreed suit. Responses are by steps, starting with ‘0’. A follow-up bid of 5NT is a king-ask also by steps starting with ‘0’.
- 36** A direct response of 4♣ to an opening bid of 1NT or 2NT is Simple Gerber, aces only. Responses are by steps starting with ‘0’.
- 37** After a 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠ response to an opening bid followed by a 1NT or 2NT rebid, a leap to 4♣ is Keycard Gerber for responder’s suit. It is a 1430 ask if the notrump bid did not show extras, 3014 if it did.

- 38** After a invitational bid of 4NT, 5NT by partner shows the strength to accept, but only one ace.
- 39** When a balanced hand faces a two-suited hand and a keycard ask ensues, the kings of both suits are considered keycards, but only the queen of the agreed suit is included in the response.
- 40** In double-agreement auctions followed by a keycard ask, if responder has ‘2’ keycards, there are four queen showing responses.
- 41** Neither a strong 2♣ opener nor a player who has made a jump shift can splinter. A follow-up jump by either agrees partner’s last-bid suit and is an Exclusion Keycard Blackwood ask.
- 42.** After a standard preemptive opening bid of 2♦, 2♥, 2♠, 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠, a direct response of 4♣ is RKB for opener’s suit. After a 3♣ opening bid, a response of 4♦ is RKB and a raise to 4♣ is natural.
- 43** After jump agreement of opener’s or responder’s first-bid suit, that is the agreed suit — period.
- 44** In a double-agreement RKB sequence when it is discovered that two *kings* are missing, bidding a slam offers a reasonable chance of success if one or two finesses are available.
- 45** If second-suit agreement in the asker’s second suit is followed by a keycard ask, a return to the asker’s first-bid suit is to play.
- 46** If you make more than one keycard ask a year with zero keycards, you will be eligible for the *Guinness Book of Records*!
- 47** If you know in your heart that partner is not going to be able to field one of your brilliant asking bids, shelve it. Shelf it!
- 48** Don’t expect every slam to make as it does in this book. A spot-card or an honor-card change here or there and suddenly a good slam is a lousy slam.

-
- 49** If you never go down in a slam you are not bidding enough slams!
-
- 50** When planning on making a keycard ask, try to make it clear to partner what the agreed suit is. Crystal clear.
-
- 51** The idea when playing RKB is to know when not to use it!
-
- 52** Be tolerant of partner's errors. Your turn may be just around the corner.
-

THE GRAND FINALE

SIXTY HANDS TO BID WITH YOUR FAVORITE PARTNER

This last chapter of the book contains sixty hands for you to bid with your favorite partner — take turns being opener and responder, if you like. Use your own bidding methods, but try to incorporate some, most, or all of the asks outlined in this book. Then look at the section headed ‘My Auctions’, which will be my suggested path to the ‘correct’ contract. (Of course, I have the advantage of seeing both hands!) I will try to be fair — but it's tough! Also, I will try to mention various ways to bid the hand, keeping in mind that no two pairs play all the same conventions. Assume IMP scoring, though mention will be made if the hand might be bid differently at matchpoint scoring.

Let it be known that players who use a strong 1♣ system have a decided advantage on slam hands because they start one level lower. Also, players who play ‘two-over-one’ are better placed on slam hands because they can make game-forcing agreements at a lower level. Have fun!

The following are the basic agreements used in my suggested auctions:

1. 1NT = 15-17 HCP; 2NT = 20-22 HCP; Transfers.
2. Strong 2♣ opening; 2♦ response is waiting.
3. Inverted minors: a raise from 1♣ to 2♣ or from 1♦ to 2♦ is game-forcing — optional.
4. Crisscross — optional. Limit raises will be mentioned in conjunction with Crisscross.
5. 4NT after the fourth suit is natural.
6. Limit raises in the majors.
7. Two-over-one — optional. Sequences will be discussed both ways if it matters.
8. After a two-over-one initial response, a jump by the opener to a lower-ranking suit is a splinter agreeing partner's suit.
9. Strong jump shifts — optional. Sequences will be discussed both ways.
10. All asks suggested in the book including both 1430 and 3014 RKB asks.
11. Exclusion Keycard Blackwood.
12. Jacoby 2NT response to a major-suit opening bid.

OPENER'S HANDS

HAND 1

♠ A K J 6 2
♥ A K Q J
♦ A K J
♣ 3

HAND 2

♠ 7 5 4
♥ K J 8 3
♦ A 7 5 2
♣ A 9

HAND 3

♠ 4
♥ Q J 9 8 6 4 3
♦ 5 2
♣ K Q 7

HAND 4

♠ 3
♥ A K 9 7 5
♦ A 4
♣ K Q J 7 6

North overcalls 1♠; South bids 3♠

HAND 5

♠ K Q 8 7 5 2
♥ 4
♦ A Q 6 4
♣ A 3

HAND 6

♠ K Q J 6
♥ 8
♦ Q 7 6
♣ A 7 5 3 2

HAND 7

♠ 9 8 5
♥ 3
♦ K Q 2
♣ A K 10 8 7 3

HAND 8

♠ A K Q 8
♥ A 6 2
♦ A 10
♣ K 9 8 3

HAND 9

♠ A K J 5 2
♥ 4 2
♦ A Q 8
♣ 10 8 5

HAND 10

♠ 2
♥ A J 9 4
♦ 10 9 7
♣ A Q J 10 6

HAND 11

♠ A K 10 8 6 4
♥ 8
♦ Q
♣ A J 10 5 2

HAND 12

♠ A K 7 5 4
♥ A Q 6
♦ 9 5 2
♣ 10 3

HAND 13

♠ —
 ♥ K Q 8 6 5
 ♦ A K J 5 3 2
 ♣ K 6

HAND 14

♠ A 6 3
 ♥ 9 8 4
 ♦ A Q J 2
 ♣ K J 9

HAND 15

♠ A 6
 ♥ A 8 4
 ♦ K J 10 6 2
 ♣ A J 7

HAND 16

♠ A Q 6 4 3
 ♥ 5
 ♦ A K 4 2
 ♣ K 7 5

HAND 17

♠ 10
 ♥ 10 7
 ♦ A K J 8 4
 ♣ K J 10 8 7

HAND 18

♠ A Q 8 7 5
 ♥ 3
 ♦ K 8 6 4
 ♣ Q J 10

HAND 19

♠ A 9 2
 ♥ A K 7 3 2
 ♦ 9
 ♣ K 10 6 2

HAND 20

♠ J 7 2
 ♥ A J 9 7 5
 ♦ A Q 9 3 2
 ♣ —

HAND 21

♠ 5
 ♥ A K Q 6 3
 ♦ Q 10
 ♣ A J 8 7 4

HAND 22

♠ J 10 7
 ♥ A K Q
 ♦ A K 8 2
 ♣ 5 4 2

HAND 23

♠ A K Q
 ♥ 7
 ♦ A 10 8 7 5 2
 ♣ Q 4 2

HAND 24

♠ A 6
 ♥ K Q 4 3 2
 ♦ 8 6
 ♣ K Q 5 2

HAND 25

♠ A 6 3
♥ A J 8 6 4 2
♦ A 5 4
♣ 7

HAND 26

♠ A 10 5
♥ K J
♦ Q 7 2
♣ A K Q 9 2

HAND 27

♠ A 8 5 4
♥ Q 10 3 2
♦ A J
♣ J 6 5

LHO overcalls 2♦, RHO raises ♦

HAND 28

♠ Q 10 9
♥ A 10 6 5
♦ K Q J
♣ Q J 10

HAND 29

♠ 6
♥ Q J 10
♦ A J 10 9
♣ A K Q 8 6

HAND 30

♠ K Q 8 5 4
♥ A Q 7 5 3
♦ —
♣ A J 6

HAND 31

♠ 7 4
♥ A K 5
♦ K Q 9 3 2
♣ A Q 5

HAND 32

♠ —
♥ A Q 8 7 5 2
♦ K Q 7
♣ A Q 10 3

HAND 33

♠ K Q 10 7 2
♥ A K Q 3
♦ 2
♣ 9 4 3

HAND 34

♠ A Q J 7 6
♥ 9
♦ A 8 6 2
♣ A 7 3

HAND 35

♠ K 4
♥ K J 6 3 2
♦ A K 9 7 5
♣ A

HAND 36

♠ 5
♥ 10 9 8 4
♦ A Q J 10 8 6 3
♣ A

RHO opens 3♥ in front of you.

HAND 37

♠ Q 10 4
 ♥ A J 10
 ♦ 2
 ♣ A Q 8 6 3 2

HAND 38

♠ 3
 ♥ Q 6 5
 ♦ K Q 4
 ♣ A J 10 6 5 3

HAND 39

♠ 4
 ♥ K Q 10 8 4 3 2
 ♦ Q 6
 ♣ 5 4 2

HAND 40

♠ A Q J 5
 ♥ 10 8 7 4
 ♦ —
 ♣ K Q J 6 4

HAND 41

♠ A K 7 4 3 2
 ♥ A K 7 3
 ♦ K 5
 ♣ 2

LHO overcalls 3♣

HAND 42

♠ A Q J 4 2
 ♥ 8
 ♦ A K 8 6 3
 ♣ 5 4

HAND 43

♠ K Q 6 2
 ♥ Q 8 3 2
 ♦ K Q J
 ♣ 4 2

HAND 44

♠ 6 5 4
 ♥ A K J 6 4 2
 ♦ 7
 ♣ Q J 8

HAND 45

♠ A K 7 6
 ♥ A K Q J 9 8 5
 ♦ 4
 ♣ 8

HAND 46

♠ K J 6
 ♥ 4
 ♦ A K 5 3
 ♣ A Q J 4 2

HAND 47

♠ A 6
 ♥ K Q 4 2
 ♦ 10 7 3
 ♣ A Q J 4

HAND 48

♠ K Q 9 8 6 5
 ♥ K J 7 6
 ♦ A K
 ♣ A

HAND 49

♠ 6 3
♥ A Q 7 3
♦ A J 4 2
♣ K Q 6

HAND 50

♠ 6 4
♥ A 10 2
♦ K 7
♣ A J 10 6 4 3

HAND 51

♠ Q J
♥ K Q 7 4 3
♦ K 8
♣ Q J 5 2

HAND 52

♠ A Q J
♥ 4
♦ A K J 10 8 6 5
♣ 8 2

HAND 53

♠ K 10 8
♥ —
♦ Q J 10 9 4 3 2
♣ 9 7 5

HAND 54

♠ A K 10 5
♥ 4
♦ A Q 10 3 2
♣ K Q 8

HAND 55

♠ K 8 7 4 3
♥ K Q J 5
♦ 9
♣ K Q 6

HAND 56

♠ 10 9
♥ A Q J 2
♦ 5
♣ Q 10 8 7 3 2

HAND 57

♠ J 7 5 4
♥ J 10
♦ K Q J 2
♣ A K 4

HAND 58

♠ A 3
♥ A K 8 5
♦ K Q 10 2
♣ A 8 6

HAND 59

♠ 7
♥ A K Q 10
♦ A 10 6 4
♣ A 8 3 2

RHO opens 1 ♠

HAND 60

♠ A 9 8 2
♥ 6
♦ A K 10 9 5
♣ A 10 4

RESPONDER'S HANDS

HAND 1

♠ 8 7 5 4 3
♥ 9 4
♦ 7 6 5
♣ A Q 2

HAND 2

♠ A K 6 2
♥ A Q 7 6 4 2
♦ 4
♣ K 7

HAND 3

♠ A K J 6
♥ 7 5
♦ A K Q 4
♣ A 3 2

HAND 4

♠ J 8 4
♥ Q 3
♦ K Q 9 3 2
♣ A 5 4

HAND 5

♠ A J 3
♥ A J 7
♦ 5 2
♣ K J 6 4 2

HAND 6

♠ 3
♥ K Q J 4
♦ A K J 5 4 3 2
♣ 4

HAND 7

♠ 2
♥ A J 10 5 4
♦ A J 9 8
♣ Q J 2

HAND 8

♠ J 7 6 4 3
♥ K
♦ Q 2
♣ A Q J 6 5

HAND 9

♠ 6
♥ A K Q 5
♦ K J 10 6 4 2
♣ 3 2

HAND 10

♠ A J 10 6 4
♥ 3
♦ A
♣ K 8 7 5 3 2

HAND 11

♠ 9 7 5 3 2
♥ A Q 6
♦ 9 8 4
♣ K 3

HAND 12

♠ Q J 2
♥ K 8 5 4 3 2
♦ A 8
♣ A 7

HAND 13

♠ A K J
 ♥ J 10 9 7
 ♦ —
 ♣ Q J 8 4 3 2

HAND 14

♠ K Q J 9 5 4
 ♥ 6
 ♦ 10 9 8
 ♣ A Q 10

HAND 15

♠ K 7 5 3 2
 ♥ 2
 ♦ A Q 5 4 3
 ♣ 3 2

HAND 16

♠ J 2
 ♥ K Q 10 7 4
 ♦ Q J
 ♣ A Q 10 3

HAND 17

♠ A 6 5
 ♥ K Q 8 3 2
 ♦ 2
 ♣ A Q 8 3

HAND 18

♠ 2
 ♥ A 9 7 5 2
 ♦ A Q J 9 3 2
 ♣ A

HAND 19

♠ K Q 4
 ♥ 10 6
 ♦ 10 8 3
 ♣ A Q J 5 3

HAND 20

♠ Q 8 6
 ♥ 2
 ♦ K J 7 5
 ♣ A K 10 8 6

HAND 21

♠ A K J 2
 ♥ 5
 ♦ J 9
 ♣ K Q 10 6 5 2

HAND 22

♠ 4
 ♥ 7
 ♦ Q J 10 7 6 5
 ♣ A K 7 6 3

HAND 23

♠ 8 6
 ♥ K Q 9
 ♦ Q J 6 4 3
 ♣ A 10 3

HAND 24

♠ 10 9
 ♥ A J 5
 ♦ A K 3
 ♣ A J 10 7 4

HAND 25

♠ 4
 ♥ K Q 5
 ♦ K 10 8 6 2
 ♣ A 10 8 6

HAND 26

♠ 9 8
 ♥ A Q 10 9 6 5
 ♦ K 8 4
 ♣ 6 3

HAND 27

♠ K 3
 ♥ A K 9 6 5
 ♦ 8
 ♣ A K 8 6 3

HAND 28

♠ A K J 8
 ♥ K 9 8 4 3 2
 ♦ 4
 ♣ K 6

HAND 29

♠ A K Q 9 2
 ♥ 7 4 2
 ♦ K Q 6 5
 ♣ 3

HAND 30

♠ A 9 7 5 2
 ♥ J 8 4
 ♦ A K J 8
 ♣ 4

HAND 31

♠ K Q J 9 8 3 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ 8
 ♣ K 9 7 4

HAND 32

♠ K 7 6 3
 ♥ K 6 4 3
 ♦ A 4
 ♣ 6 5 2

HAND 33

♠ A J 9 5
 ♥ J 2
 ♦ A 10 8 5
 ♣ K J 10

HAND 34

♠ K 8 3 2
 ♥ A 7 5 3
 ♦ 10
 ♣ K Q J 2

HAND 35

♠ A 10
 ♥ A 8 7 5 4
 ♦ 8 4 3
 ♣ K Q 8

HAND 36

♠ A K J 10 6
 ♥ —
 ♦ K 7 5 2
 ♣ K 7 4 3

HAND 37

♠ A 5
♥ K Q 6
♦ 8 4 3
♣ K J 10 9 5

HAND 38

♠ A K J 7 4 2
♥ A
♦ A 9 7
♣ Q 4 2

HAND 39

♠ A 10 7 6
♥ A 6
♦ A K J 5 2
♣ A 8

HAND 40

♠ K 3
♥ K Q J 5 2
♦ A K J 4 3
♣ 5

HAND 41

♠ 10 9 8 6 5
♥ 8 4
♦ A 7 4
♣ A 7 6

HAND 42

♠ —
♥ A K 6 3
♦ Q J 9 5 4 2
♣ Q J 10

HAND 43

♠ J
♥ A K J 9 5 4
♦ 10
♣ K Q J 10 8

HAND 44

♠ K Q J
♥ 3
♦ A K Q 9 8 6 3 2
♣ A

HAND 45

♠ Q 8 3 2
♥ —
♦ K J 9 8 7 2
♣ Q 10 3

HAND 46

♠ 8 3
♥ A K 6 5 2
♦ Q J 7 4 2
♣ 6

HAND 47

♠ K 7
♥ A J 10 6 5
♦ A K 8 4 2
♣ 3

HAND 48

♠ A 10 7 4 2
♥ —
♦ 10 6 5 3 2
♣ J 9 4

HAND 49

♠ K Q J 10 7 4 2
 ♥ 5
 ♦ K Q 7 6
 ♣ 4

HAND 50

♠ A K Q J 9 3 2
 ♥ K 5 3
 ♦ A
 ♣ 8 5

HAND 51

♠ A K 6
 ♥ 5
 ♦ A J 4
 ♣ K 9 7 6 4 3

HAND 52

♠ 3
 ♥ A K 8 5 2
 ♦ Q 9 7
 ♣ 9 6 4 3

HAND 53

♠ 3
 ♥ A Q 10 7 3 2
 ♦ Q 8 7
 ♣ A K J

HAND 54

♠ J 9 7 2
 ♥ K Q 7 5 3
 ♦ 6
 ♣ A J 3

HAND 55

♠ A J 2
 ♥ A 2
 ♦ A 5 4
 ♣ A J 9 3 2

HAND 56

♠ J 8
 ♥ K 7 4
 ♦ A Q J
 ♣ A K 9 5 4

HAND 57

♠ A
 ♥ A K 6 5 4 3
 ♦ 3
 ♣ Q J 9 5 2

HAND 58

♠ Q J 6 4 2
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ A J 7 5 3
 ♣ 3

HAND 59

♠ 10 8 4 2
 ♥ 3
 ♦ K Q
 ♣ Q J 10 9 5 4

HAND 60

♠ K Q J 10 7 5
 ♥ Q J 9
 ♦ 6 3 2
 ♣ 8

MY AUCTIONS

Under each hand is my suggested auction. I will try to be objective.

1. Opener	Responder	
♠ A K J 6 2	♠ 8 7 5 4 3	
♥ A K Q J	♥ 9 4	
♦ A K J	♦ 7 6 5	1. Waiting.
♣ 3	♣ A Q 2	2. Positive.
2♣	2♦ ¹	3. RKB (1430).
2♠	3♠ ²	4. '1'.
4NT ³	5♣ ⁴	5. Queen-ask (next step).
5♦ ⁵	5NT ⁶	6. Yes, (ten trumps known) plus at least one third-round control (♣Q, doubleton heart).
7♠	pass	

It is difficult to imagine a dummy where 7♠ is not cold. However, if worst comes to worst, there is always the diamond finesse. When a ten-card fit is known, answer as if you have the queen even if you don't.

2. Opener	Responder	
♠ 7 5 4	♠ A K 6 2	
♥ K J 8 3	♥ A Q 7 6 4 2	
♦ A 7 5 2	♦ 4	
♣ A 9	♣ K 7	
1♦	1♥	1. RKB (1430): opener is limited by the
2♥	2♠	2♥ rebid.
4♥	4NT ¹	2. '3'.
5♦ ²	5♠ ³	3. SSA.
6♥ ⁴	pass	4. Denies second- or third-round control.

After major-suit agreement, the next suit after the RKB response that is not a queen-ask is a third-round control ask. However, when *hearts* is the agreed suit, after a 5♣, 5♦ or 5♥ response to 4NT, a 5♠ bid is a SSA, not a third-round control ask. The return to the agreed suit denies second- or third-round spade control.

3. Opener	Responder
♠ 4	♠ A K J 6
♥ Q J 9 8 6 4 3	♥ 7 5
♦ 5 2	♦ A K Q 4
♣ K Q 7	♣ A 3 2

3♥
4♦²
pass

4♣¹
4♥³

1. RKB after a preempt.
2. 'O'. A first-step response shows 'O'.
3. Missing the AK of hearts!

This hand illustrates the advantage of using a 4♣ response to a preemptive opening bid as a keycard ask. A contract of 5♥ is in some jeopardy.

4. **Opener (West) Responder (East)**

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

Opener	North	Responder	South
1♥	1♠	2♦	3♠ ¹
4♣	pass	4♥	pass
4NT ²	pass	5♣ ³	pass
6♣ ⁴	pass	pass ⁵	pass

1. Preemptive.
2. RKB (1430), hearts agreed.
3. '1'.
4. Choice of contract.
5. More clubs than hearts.

After a keycard ask follows simple preference agreement to a first-bid suit (often made with a doubleton), a follow-up bid at the six-level in a previously-bid suit is 'choice of contract'.

5. **Opener Responder**

♠ K Q 8 7 5 2	♠ A J 3
♥ 4	♥ A J 7
♦ A Q 6 4	♦ 5 2
♣ A 3	♣ K J 6 4 2

1♠	2♣
2♦	2♠ ¹
4NT ²	5♥ ³
5NT ⁴	6♣ ⁵
6♦ ⁶	6♠ ⁷
pass	

1. 3♠ if 2♣ is not a game force.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 without'.
4. SKA.
5. ♣K.
6. Second king-ask for the ♦K.
7. Negative.

If responder's clubs were KQJxx, responder should bid 7♠ in response to 5NT, a grand slam try promising all the aces plus solid trumps.

6. Opener	Responder (you)
♠ K Q J 6	♠ 3
♥ 8	♥ K Q J 4
♦ Q 7 6	♦ A K J 5 4 3 2
♣ A 7 5 3 2	♣ 4
1 ♣	1 ♦
1 ♠	2 ♥
3 ♦	4 ♦
4 ♥	5 ♦
pass	

Whether or not 3 ♦ is played as a game force, 4 ♦ is RKB because other bids are available as game tries.

7. Opener	Responder
♠ 9 8 5	♠ 2
♥ 3	♥ A J 10 5 4
♦ K Q 2	♦ A J 9 8
♣ A K 10 8 7 3	♣ Q J 2
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♣	3 ♠ ¹
4 ♣ ²	4NT ³
6 ♣ ⁴	pass

1. Game-forcing splinter.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '2 with'.
4. Opener, though limited, is strong enough to keycard facing partner's splinter jump. Three small facing a singleton is huge. After game-forcing *three-level* splinter agreement, four of the agreed minor is RKB.

8. Opener	Responder
♠ A K Q 8	♠ J 7 6 4 3
♥ A 6 2	♥ K
♦ A 10	♦ Q 2
♣ K 9 8 3	♣ A Q J 6 5
2NT	3 ♥ ¹
4 ♠ ²	4NT ³
5 ♦ ⁴	5 ♥ ⁵
6 ♣ ⁶	7NT ⁷
pass	

1. Transfer.
2. Maximum for spades with four spades.
3. RKB (3014).
4. '4', a second-step response.
5. Queen-ask
6. Yes, with the ♣K.
7. Thirteen notrump tricks ready for the taking.

9. Opener	Responder	
♠ A K J 5 2	♠ 6	
♥ 4 2	♥ A K Q 5	1. Could be the start of a slam try or could be an effort to get to 3NT.
♦ A Q 8	♦ K J 10 6 4 2	2. Good spades. Does not want to get past 3NT and can play 4♠ facing honor doubleton.
♣ 10 8 5	♣ 3 2	3. Slam try, denying a club control.
1 ♠	2 ♦	4. No club control facing no club control = no slam.
3 ♦	3 ♥ ¹	
3 ♠ ²	4 ♥ ³	
5 ♦ ⁴	pass	

Whether or not 2 ♦ is played as a game force, the bidding should go identically.

10. Opener	Responder	
♠ 2	♠ A J 10 6 4	1. RKB after two-level club <i>non</i> -agreement; 4♣ would be a forcing slam try typically made lacking a control in an unbid suit. (One more heart with one less spade or one less club.)
♥ A J 9 4	♥ 3	2. '2 with'.
♦ 10 9 7	♦ A	3. SSA in spades.
♣ A Q J 10 6	♣ K 8 7 5 3 2	4. Singleton.
1 ♣	1 ♠	
2 ♣	4 ♦ ¹	
5 ♣ ²	5 ♠ ³	
7 ♣ ⁴	pass	

When the responding hand to an RKB ask (opener is the responding hand in this sequence) has *rebid* the agreed suit, a singleton is more than enough to jump in the agreed suit in response to a SSA.

11. Opener	Responder	
♠ A K 10 8 6 4	♠ 9 7 5 3 2	
♥ 8	♥ A Q 6	1. Limit.
♦ Q	♦ 9 8 4	2. Cuebid.
♣ A J 10 5 2	♣ K 3	
1 ♠	3 ♠ ¹	
4 ♣ ²	4 ♥ ²	
4 ♠	5 ♣ ²	
6 ♠	pass	

A player who makes a limit raise looking at two important cards (the ♥A and the ♣K) facing a partner who makes a slam try (4♣) should show both of those important cards even if it means bypassing the game level.

12. Opener

♠ A K 7 5 4
♥ A Q 6
♦ 9 5 2
♣ 10 3

1 ♠

3 ♥

4 ♥

5 ♦³

5NT⁵

pass

Responder

♠ Q J 2
♥ K 8 5 4 3 2
♦ A 8
♣ A 7

2 ♥

3 ♠¹

4NT²

5 ♥⁴

7NT⁶

1. Game-forcing double agreement.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '3'.
4. Queen-ask after a '3' response.
5. Second-step response = the lower-ranking queen only.
6. Thirteen tricks: six hearts, five spades and two aces.

After a '3' response to a double agreement 1430 RKB (a huge response), the next step at the five-level, including an agreed suit, is a double queen-ask with four possible step responses: none, lower, higher, both.

13. Opener

♠ —
♥ K Q 8 6 5
♦ A K J 5 3 2
♣ K 6

1 ♦

2 ♥

4 ♠¹

5 ♥³

Responder

♠ A K J
♥ J 10 9 7
♦ —
♣ Q J 8 4 3 2

2 ♣

3 ♥

4NT²

pass

1. EKB.
2. 'O', first-step response.
3. Two aces missing.

After major-suit agreement, a jump *beyond* the game level is EKB, *never* a splinter. When responding to EKB, responder ignores a void in any suit partner has bid as well as the ace of partner's void suit.

14. Opener

♠ A 6 3
♥ 9 8 4
♦ A Q J 2
♣ K J 9

1NT

2 ♠

4NT³

6 ♠

Responder

♠ K Q J 9 5 4
♥ 6
♦ 10 9 8
♣ A Q 10

2 ♥¹

4 ♥²

5 ♠⁴

pass⁵

1. Transfer.
2. Singleton with six or seven spades, 12+ HCP.
3. RKB (1430). The right hand to ask holding xxx facing a known singleton plus multiple honor cards in the side suits.
4. '2 with'.
5. What's going on? In the last edition, I had the ♦K and the ♣A and 6 ♠ was a spread.

This hand illustrates why a strong hand is needed to splinter in this sequence. This responding hand is a minimum.

15. Opener

♠ A 6
♥ A 8 4
♦ K J 10 6 2
♣ A J 7

1NT
2♠
4♥³
5NT⁵
pass

Responder

♠ K 7 5 3 2
♥ 2
♦ A Q 5 4 3
♣ 3 2

2♥¹
3♦²
5♦⁴
6♦⁶

1. Transfer.
2. Natural, game force.
3. RKB (1430). 4♦ would be natural.
4. '2 with'.
5. Anything extra for a grand? (Knows of the ♦AQ and the ♠K.)
6. Nothing you don't know about.

It is unusual for a limited one notrump opening bidder to take charge and key-card, but the opener has an awesome fitting hand facing a known two-suiter. With a forward-going, but not an awesome, hand for diamonds, opener does best to raise to 4♦.

If responder had the KQxxx of spades, that would be enough of an extra to bid 7♦.

16. Opener

♠ A Q 6 4 3
♥ 5
♦ A K 4 2
♣ K 7 5

1♠
3♦
pass²

Responder

♠ J 2
♥ K Q 10 7 4
♦ Q J
♣ A Q 10 3

2♥
4NT¹

1. Natural.
2. The singleton heart, not to mention the non-existent spade spots, are both major turnoffs.

In this sequence, 4NT is considered natural. If responder has slam interest in spades, responder bids 3♠; with slam interest in diamonds, responder raises to 4♦ (the agreement, not the ask) and then keycards. Also, it helps to know whether 3♦ show extras in this sequence.

17. Opener

♠ 10
♥ 10 7
♦ A K J 8 4
♣ K J 10 8 7

1♦
2♣
4♣²
6♣

Responder

♠ A 6 5
♥ K Q 8 3 2
♦ 2
♣ A Q 8 3

1♥
3♠¹
4NT³
pass

1. Slammish with a club fit and the ♠A.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '2 with'.

This one is a repeat commercial for a jump reverse at the three-level in the fourth suit from a lower to a higher-ranking suit to be a slam try. It shows the ace of the jump suit, a fit for opener's second suit, and shortness in partner's first suit.

The key to this slam is opener's major-suit distribution. If opener has two spades and one heart, slam is not such a hot proposition, but with one spade and two hearts it is. Opener knows how many spades he has, knows that a spade is the expected lead, and bids accordingly.

18. Opener

♠ A Q 8 7 5
♥ 3
♦ K 8 6 4
♣ Q J 10

1 ♠

3 ♦

4NT²

7 ♦⁴

Responder

♠ 2
♥ A 9 7 5 2
♦ A Q J 9 3 2
♣ A

2 ♦

4 ♦¹

5 ♥³

pass

1. RKB.

2. '2 without'.

3. SSA in hearts.

4. Four-card support with a singleton.

Even if 3 ♦ is not played as a game force, a direct bid of 4 ♦ by the responder is RKB and unbid suits are game tries. Responder keycards immediately in order to use a SSA in hearts at the five-level, the key to the grand.

19. Opener

♠ A 9 2
♥ A K 7 3 2
♦ 9
♣ K 10 6 2

1 ♥

3 ♦¹

4 ♦³

5 ♥⁵

pass

Responder

♠ K Q 4
♥ 10 6
♦ 10 8 3
♣ A Q J 5 3

2 ♣

4 ♣²

4NT⁴

6 ♣

1. Played as a splinter.

2. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.

3. '3'.

4. SKA.

5. ♥K.

After game-forcing splinter agreement, four of the agreed minor by either hand is RKB. Had opener responded 5 ♣ to 4NT, denying the ♥K, 6 ♣ would depend upon a heart finesse... at best.

If you play 3 ♦ as natural, a jump to 4 ♦ would be a splinter and the cheapest unbid suit at the four-level (4 ♠), would be RKB (3014).

20. Opener

♠ J 7 2
♥ A J 9 7 5
♦ A Q 9 3 2
♣ —

1 ♥
2 ♦
3 ♠²
pass

Responder

♠ Q 8 6
♥ 2
♦ K J 7 5
♣ A K 10 8 6

2 ♣
3 ♦¹
3NT³

1. Forcing.
2. Not wanting to get past 3NT if partner has a spade stopper.
3. Spade stopper.

After forcing three-level minor-suit agreement, new suits beneath 3NT should be considered probes for 3NT though they could turn out to be slam tries in disguise if opener bids again over 3NT.

21. Opener

♠ 5
♥ A K Q 6 3
♦ Q 10
♣ A J 8 7 4

1 ♥
4 ♣¹
5 ♣³

Responder (you)

♠ A K J 2
♥ 5
♦ J 9
♣ K Q 10 6 5 2

2 ♣
4 ♠²
pass

1. Forcing, slammish, indicating a lack of a first- or second-round control in at least one unbid suit.
2. Cuebid — no diamond control.
3. That makes two of us.

After game-forcing four-level club agreement, 4♦ is RKB and 4NT is a diamond cuebid. You don't have the right hand to make either bid. You have a spade control but no diamond control, so cuebidding 4♠ is the way to get that message across. Partner, also lacking a diamond control, signs off.

22. Opener

♠ J 10 7
♥ A K Q
♦ A K 8 2
♣ 5 4 2

1NT
3 ♦²
4 ♠⁴
5 ♦⁶

Responder

♠ 4
♥ 7
♦ Q J 10 7 6 5
♣ A K 7 6 3

2 ♠¹
4 ♥³
5 ♣⁵
pass

1. Minors.
2. 4+ diamonds, the agreement.
3. RKB (3014).
4. '3'.
5. SSA.
6. Denies third-round control.

2♠ is not a game force and a raise to 4♦ would be invitational, so the jump to 4♥ is RKB. Playing four-suit transfers, you need a method to show both minors.

23. Opener

♠ A K Q
♥ 7
♦ A 10 8 7 5 2
♣ Q 4 2

1♦
3♥²
pass

Responder

♠ 8 6
♥ K Q 9
♦ Q J 6 4 3
♣ A 10 3

2♦¹
3NT

1. Inverted.
2. Game-forcing splinter.

Whether or not the single raise is a game force or shows a limit raise or better doesn't matter. Responder will always bid 3NT facing a singleton heart.

24. Opener

♠ A 6
♥ K Q 4 3 2
♦ 8 6
♣ K Q 5 2

1♥
3♣
3♠²
4♥⁴
5♥⁶

Responder

♠ 10 9
♥ A J 5
♦ A K 3
♣ A J 10 7 4

2♣
3♥¹
4♣³
4♠⁵
7NT⁷

1. Double agreement.
2. Cuebid.
3. RKB in a double agreement sequence.
4. '3' including both kings.
5. Queen-ask.
6. Fourth-step response showing both queens.
7. Thirteen top tricks: five hearts, five clubs, two diamonds and a spade.

25. Opener

♠ A 6 3
♥ A J 8 6 4 2
♦ A 5 4
♣ 7

1♥
2♥
4NT²
5NT⁴
6♥

Responder

♠ 4
♥ K Q 5
♦ K 10 8 6 2
♣ A 10 8 6

2♦
3♠¹
5♠³
6♦⁵
pass

1. Slam try splinter.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '2 with'.
4. SKA, a grand slam try.
5. ♦K, no ♣K.

Opener relies on responder bidding 7♥ with the ♦KQ. Responder knows the partnership has all four aces because 5NT is a grand slam try.

26. Opener

♠ A 10 5
♥ K J
♦ Q 7 2
♣ A K Q 9 2

1 ♣
2 NT
3 ♠²
4 NT³
5 ♦⁵
6 ♥

Responder

♠ 9 8
♥ A Q 10 9 6 5
♦ K 8 4
♣ 6 3

1 ♥
3 ♥¹
4 ♦²
5 ♣⁴
6 ♦⁶
pass

1. Unlimited.
2. Cuebid.
3. RKB (1430): opener asking.
4. '1'.
5. Queen-ask.
6. Yes, with the ♦K.

Facing a balanced hand, it is fair game to cuebid a king beneath the level of a keycard ask. Opener, though limited, has the right hand to keycard after the diamond cuebid.

27. Opener

♠ A 8 5 4
♥ Q 10 3 2
♦ A J
♣ J 6 5

Responder

♠ K 3
♥ A K 9 6 5
♦ 8
♣ A K 8 6 3

Opener	Second Hand	Responder	Fourth Hand
1 ♣	2 ♦	2 ♥	3 ♦
3 ♥	pass	4 ♣ ¹	pass
4 ♥	pass	4 NT ²	pass
5 NT ³	pass	6 ♥ ⁴	all pass

1. Double agreement.
2. RKB (both kings and both queens included in the response).
3. '2 with the higher-ranking queen', a third-step response. First step is 5 ♥ = '2 without either queen'; second step is 5 ♠ = '2 with the lower-ranking queen'.

In a double-agreement sequence, when holding two keycards, both queens are included in the RKB response.

28. Opener

♠ Q 10 9
♥ A 10 6 5
♦ K Q J
♣ Q J 10

1 NT
2 ♥
4 ♥²

Responder

♠ A K J 8
♥ K 9 8 4 3 2
♦ 4
♣ K 6

2 ♣
4 ♣¹
pass

1. Keycard Gerber (3014) in this sequence.
2. '1'. The asker has '2' so it can't be '4'.

Using 4♣ to ask for keycards after a 2♥ or 2♠ response to Stayman saves room and avoids ‘accidents’. This hand is an accident waiting to happen if the partnership winds up in 5♥ and hearts are 3-0.

29. Opener	Responder	
♠ 6	♠ A K Q 9 2	
♥ Q J 10	♥ 7 4 2	
♦ A J 10 9	♦ K Q 6 5	
♣ A K Q 8 6	♣ 3	
1 ♣	1 ♠	1. The agreement, not the ask, denying a heart control.
2 ♦	4 ♦ ¹	2. 4NT would be a heart cuebid.
5 ♦ ²	pass	

After game-forcing four-level diamond agreement, 4♥ is RKB unless hearts is a first-bid suit. If it is, 4♠ is RKB and 4NT is a spade cuebid.

If both are first-bid suits, 4NT is RKB. In this sequence 4♥ would be RKB and 4NT, a heart cuebid.

Not another idea!

It hurts not to be able to bid 4NT, natural, with the opener’s hand. It should be possible to play that in game-forcing four-level agreement sequences, where there is *one* unbid suit, a suit that can be used to ask for keycards beneath 4NT, then 4NT should be a possible contract.

In this sequence, for example, the opening bidder has shown extras by reversing, but it could also have been by jump shifting. If such a powerful opening bidder also had a heart control, wouldn’t he keycard directly by bidding 4♥? Of course he would. A powerful opening bidder doesn’t need the 4NT cuebid. When opener is strong, 4NT should be to play.

If the opener *hasn’t* shown extras, then 4NT should be a ‘replacement heart cuebid’ showing the ♥A with mild slam interest. If this agreement was in place, opener would bid 4NT, responder would pass, and everyone would live happily ever after.

30. Opener (you)

♠ K Q 8 5 4
 ♥ A Q 7 5 3
 ♦ —
 ♣ A J 6

 1 ♠
 5 ♦²
 5NT⁴
 6 ♠

Responder

♠ A 9 7 5 2
 ♥ J 8 4
 ♦ A K J 8
 ♣ 4

 4 ♣¹
 5 ♠³
 6 ♦⁵
 pass

1. Splinter.
2. EKB.
3. '1' (5♥, the first step, would show '0'.)
4. I'm looking for the ♥K.
5. I don't have it, but I have the AK of diamonds.

After an exclusion response in *major-suit agreement* sequences, the next step excluding 5NT, the SKA, is the queen-ask. 5NT asks about the ♥K. It can't be for the ♣K, responder's singleton suit, and it can't be for the diamonds, opener's void suit. But....

If responder's *only* king is in opener's void suit, and responder also has the ace of the void suit, and the void suit is *lower* ranking than the agreed suit, show the king. It could lead to a 6NT contract.

31. Opener

♠ 7 4
 ♥ A K 5
 ♦ K Q 9 3 2
 ♣ A Q 5

 1 ♦
 2NT
 4 ♠²

Responder

♠ K Q J 9 8 3 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ 8
 ♣ K 9 7 4

 1 ♠
 4 ♣¹
 pass³

1. Keycard Gerber, responder's suit agreed — 3014, opener has jumped.
2. '2 without'.
3. Not enough.

The lower ask allows for a safer contract.

32. Opener

♠ —
 ♥ A Q 8 7 5 2
 ♦ K Q 7
 ♣ A Q 10 3

 1 ♥
 4 ♠¹
 5NT³
 pass

Responder

♠ K 7 6 3
 ♥ K 6 4 3
 ♦ A 4
 ♣ 6 5 2

 3 ♥
 5 ♦²
 6 ♥⁴

1. EKB.
2. '2', third-step response, 0, 1, 2.
3. SKA.
4. No minor-suit king.

When responding to EKB, the trump queen is not included in the response, and when responding to a SKA, the king of the asker's void is not included. If

the asker was interested in the ♥Q, then 5♠, the next step excluding the trump suit, would be the queen-ask.

33. Opener

♠ K Q 10 7 2
♥ A K Q 3
♦ 2
♣ 9 4 3

1 ♠
3 ♦²
4 ♥⁴
5 ♠⁶
pass

Responder (you)

♠ A J 9 5
♥ J 2
♦ A 10 8 5
♣ K J 10

2NT¹
3 ♠³
4NT⁵
6 ♠

1. Jacoby.
2. Singleton.
3. Tell me more.
4. Cuebid.
5. RKB (1430).
6. '2 with'.

Tough hand. If opener had the ♣Q instead of the ♥Q, 6♠ would be cold. As it is, you have a good play if they don't take the first two club tricks. Your ♥J is a big card.

34. Opener

♠ A Q J 7 6
♥ 9
♦ A 8 6 2
♣ A 7 3

1 ♠
4NT²
5NT⁴
pass

Responder

♠ K 8 3 2
♥ A 7 5 3
♦ 10
♣ K Q J 2

4 ♦¹
5 ♥³
7 ♠⁵

1. Splinter.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '2 without'.
4. SKA.
5. Thirteen tricks: five spades, four clubs, two red aces and two diamond ruffs in dummy.

This hand illustrates the importance of playing that 5NT, the SKA, guarantees joint possession of the four aces plus solid trumps. It affords the responding hand the option of leaping to a grand slam without having to worry that an ace or a possible trump loser is lurking.

35. Opener

♠ K 4
♥ K J 6 3 2
♦ A K 9 7 5
♣ A

1 ♥
4NT²
6 ♦⁴
pass

Responder

♠ A 10
♥ A 8 7 5 4
♦ 8 4 3
♣ K Q 8

2NT¹
5 ♠³
6 ♥⁵
pass

1. Jacoby 2NT.
2. RKB (1430).
3. '2 with'. Ten-card trump fit known.
4. Third-round control ask.
5. A return to the agreed suit, the death response, showing xxx(x).

After a keycard response in a major-suit agreement sequence, a new suit by the asker that is not a next step queen-ask is a third-round control ask.

36. You	Partner
♠ 5	♠ A K J 10 6
♥ 10 9 8 4	♥ —
♦ A Q J 10 8 6 3	♦ K 7 5 2
♣ A	♣ K 7 4 3

Dealer	You	Third Hand	Partner
3♥	4♦	pass	5♥ ¹
pass	6♣ ²	pass	7♦ ³

1. EKB.
2. '2 with', a third-step response.
3. Looks promising.

37. Opener	Responder (you)
♠ Q 10 4	♠ A 5
♥ A J 10	♥ K Q 6
♦ 2	♦ 8 4 3
♣ A Q 8 6 3 2	♣ K J 10 9 5
1♣	2♣ ¹
3♦ ²	4♣ ³
4NT ⁴	6♣ ⁵
pass	

1. Inverted. Limit raise or better.
2. Game-forcing splinter.
3. RKB (3014): opener has jumped.
4. '2 with'
5. No room to find out if opener has the ♠K or four hearts.

A no-play slam without a favorable spade lead. Partner didn't have the decency to have the ♠K, the ♠QJ, or a fourth heart. Good for you if you managed to stop at 5♣ via cuebidding.

38. Opener	Responder (you)
♠ 3	♠ A K J 7 4 2
♥ Q 6 5	♥ A
♦ K Q 4	♦ A 9 7
♣ A J 10 6 5 3	♣ Q 4 2

There are many ways to bid this hand to 6♣ after opener bids and rebids clubs. The bottom line is that *you* should arrange to keycard in clubs. You can respond 1♠ and then jump to 4♦ after partner rebids 2♣ or you can jump to 2♠ originally (if you play that way), and raise 3♣ to 4♣ to keycard.

39. Opener

♠ 4
♥ K Q 10 8 4 3 2
♦ Q 6
♣ 5 4 2

3♥
4♠²
5NT⁴
pass

Responder

♠ A 10 7 6
♥ A 6
♦ A K J 5 2
♣ A 8

4♣¹
5♦³
7NT⁵

1. RKB (1430) in response to a pre-empt.
2. '1 with', third-step response.
3. Third-round control ask in diamonds.
4. A second-step response, excluding the agreed suit, shows the queen.
5. Fourteen top tricks if partner has seven hearts.

40. Opener

♠ A Q J 5
♥ 10 8 7 4
♦ —
♣ K Q J 6 4

1♣
2♥
3♠
5♣²
pass

Responder

♠ K 3
♥ K Q J 5 2
♦ A K J 4 3
♣ 5

1♥
3♦
4NT¹
5♥³

1. RKB (1430): opener has not jumped or reversed.
2. '1'.
3. Two aces missing.

In response to RKB, it is better *not* to show a void in partner's first-bid suit (not the case here) or in any suit partner might be cuebidding. This advice is doubled and redoubled when you are the opening bidder and have only *one* key-card. *Don't show the void!*

If opener were a bit stronger, a direct jump to 4♦ would show a diamond void (3♦ would show a singleton) and opener would not have to worry about showing the void in response to the RKB ask.

In the last edition, responder jumped directly to 4NT after the raise (not unreasonable) and responder bid 6♦ showing '1' or '3' keycards with a diamond void. This led to a contract of 6♥, down one. I couldn't bear to go down in 6♥ in consecutive editions.

41. Opener

♠ A K 7 4 3 2
♥ A K 7 3
♦ K 5
♣ 2

1 ♠ 3 ♣
4NT¹ pass
6♥³ pass
7 ♠ pass

Responder

♠ 10 9 8 6 5
♥ 8 4
♦ A 7 4
♣ A 7 6

3 ♠ pass
5 ♠² pass
6NT⁴ pass
pass pass

1. RKB (1430).
2. '2 with'. Ten-card fit.
3. Third-round control ask.
4. First-step response, excluding the agreed suit, showing xx.

42. Opener

♠ A Q J 4 2
♥ 8
♦ A K 8 6 3
♣ 5 4

1 ♠
4♦¹
5♦³

Responder

♠ —
♥ A K 6 3
♦ Q J 9 5 4 2
♣ Q J 10

2♦
4NT²
pass

1. Natural. Slam try lacking a control in an unbid suit.
2. Heart control, no club control. 4♥, the unbid major, would be RKB (1430).
3. No club control either.

This hand illustrates why cuebidding is preferable when holding two quick losers in an unbid suit until there is confirmation of a control. Holding the ♣A while lacking a heart control, responder should cuebid 5♣.

43. Opener (you)

♠ K Q 6 2
♥ Q 8 3 2
♦ K Q J
♣ 4 2

1♦
2♥
5♦²
pass

Responder

♠ J
♥ A K J 9 5 4
♦ 10
♣ K Q J 10 8

1♥
4NT¹
5♥³

1. RKB (1430): opener has not jumped or reversed.
2. '0 or 3'.
3. Queen-ask facing '3'; to play facing '0'.

Partner could have three aces and the ♥Q (or any four hearts), in which case you want to be in a grand! If opener has '0', you want out!

When the response is 5♦ to a 1430 ask, hearts agreed, 5♥ is the queen-ask facing '3', a grand slam try, but to play facing '0', a plea for mercy.

44. Opener

♠ 6 5 4
♥ A K J 6 4 2
♦ 7
♣ Q J 8

1 ♥
5 ♦²
pass

Responder (you)

♠ K Q J
♥ 3
♦ A K Q 9 8 6 3 2
♣ A

4NT¹
6 ♦

1. RKB for aces only, no agreed suit!
2. '1' ace. Simple Blackwood responses.

This sequence assumes you are not playing 'last-bid suit'. To agree hearts, you can bid 2NT, Jacoby and then 4NT.

Yes, you could have responded 2 ♦, but this seems more direct. Besides, you get to see partner's face when he realizes who is playing the hand!

45. Opener

♠ A K 7 6
♥ A K Q J 9 8 5
♦ 4
♣ 8

2 ♣
2 ♥²
3 ♠
4NT³
5 ♥⁵

Responder

♠ Q 8 3 2
♥ —
♦ K J 9 8 7 2
♣ Q 10 3

2 ♦¹
3 ♦
4 ♠
5 ♦⁴
pass⁶

1. Waiting.
2. Some play that a jump to 3 ♥ shows a solid suit asking partner to cuebid.
3. RKB for spades.
4. '0'.
5. To play.
6. It only hurts for a little while.

After any opening bid is followed by second-suit agreement (spades) and a keycard ask ensues, a return to the asker's first-bid suit at the five- or six-level is to play. It is not a queen-ask and to overrule, responder needs to *know* that there is eight-card agreement in the second suit, minimum, and the two hands have the top four trump honors between them.

46. Opener

♠ K J 6
♥ 4
♦ A K 5 3
♣ A Q J 4 2

1 ♣
2 ♦
4 ♠²
5 ♣⁴
6 ♦

Responder

♠ 8 3
♥ A K 6 5 2
♦ Q J 7 4 2
♣ 6

1 ♥
4 ♦¹
4NT³
5 ♥⁵
pass

1. The agreement, not the ask. Slammish hand, superior trump support, but lacking a control in the unbid suit.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.
3. '1'.
4. Queen-ask.
5. Yes, with the ♥K.

Notice the RKB ask after game-forcing four-level diamond agreement in this sequence is 4♠; 4♥ is out when hearts is a first-bid suit.

47. Opener

♠ A 6
♥ K Q 4 2
♦ 10 7 3
♣ A Q J 4

1NT
3♥²
5♣⁴
5NT⁶
6♥⁸

Responder (you)

♠ K 7
♥ A J 10 6 5
♦ A K 8 4 2
♣ 3

2♦¹
4NT³
5♦⁵
6♦⁷
pass

1. Transfer.
2. Most hands with four hearts.
3. RKB (3014): opener has opened 1NT.
4. '3'.
5. Queen-ask.
6. The ♥Q, no side-suit king, but at least one third-round control.
7. Is that third-round control in diamonds?
8. No.

The third-round control ask prevents you from gambling on a grand slam.

48. Opener (you)

♠ K Q 9 8 6 5
♥ K J 7 6
♦ A K
♣ A

1♠
4NT¹
7♠

Responder

♠ A 10 7 4 2
♥ —
♦ 10 6 5 3 2
♣ J 9 4

4♠
6♥²
pass

1. '1' with a heart void.
2. RKB (1430): opener asking.

Assuming partner has five spades, it's hard to visualize a loser.

49. Opener

♠ 6 3
♥ A Q 7 3
♦ A J 4 2
♣ K Q 6

1NT
4♠²

Responder

♠ K Q J 10 7 4 2
♥ 5
♦ K Q 7 6
♣ 4

4♣¹
pass³

1. Gerber, aces only by steps, no agreed suit.
2. '2', a third-step response.
3. Two aces missing.

50. Opener

♠ 6 4
♥ A 10 2
♦ K 7
♣ A J 10 6 4 3

1 ♣

3 ♣

4 ♥¹

5 ♥³

6 ♦⁵

pass

Responder (you)

♠ A K Q J 9 3 2
♥ K 5 3
♦ A
♣ 8 5

2 ♠

3 ♠

4NT²

5NT⁴

6 ♠ or 6NT

1. Cuebid for spades.

2. RKB (1430).

3. '2 without'.

4. SKA.

5. ♦K.

You can count twelve top tricks with chances for a thirteenth, but unless you can be pretty darn sure that there is great play for a thirteenth, settle for a small slam.

If you don't play strong jump shifts, create a forcing auction, rebid spades, and then use 4NT to keycard in spades.

51. Opener

♠ Q J
♥ K Q 7 4 3
♦ K 8
♣ Q J 5 2

1 ♥

3 ♣

4 ♥²

pass

Responder (you)

♠ A K 6
♥ 4
♦ A J 4
♣ K 9 7 6 4 3

2 ♣

4 ♣¹

5 ♣³

1. RKB (1430). Two unbid suits.

2. '0'.

3. Two aces missing.

At matchpoints it must be right to bid 4NT, to play, after the '0' response.

52. Opener

♠ A Q J
♥ 4
♦ A K J 10 8 6 5
♣ 8 2

1 ♦

3 ♦

4NT²

pass

Responder (you)

♠ 3
♥ A K 8 5 2
♦ Q 9 7
♣ 9 6 4 3

1 ♥

4 ♦¹

5 ♦³

1. Forcing by an unlimited hand.

2. Spade cuebid.

3. No club control.

After three-level diamond non-agreement, 4♥ is RKB unless hearts is a first-bid suit in which case 4♠ is RKB. There goes your 4♠ splinter, so a forcing raise to 4♦, a slam try, is a good compromise lacking a club control.

Back to the opener: After four-level diamond agreement, 4♥ is RKB unless hearts is a first-bid suit, which it is. In that case, 4♠ is RKB. However, opener should avoid using RKB lacking a control in an unbid suit, clubs. Opener would like to cuebid spades. The answer is to use 4NT, the replacement spade cuebid. After the spade cuebid you sign off in 5♦ lacking a club control.

53. Opener

♠ K 10 8

♥ —

♦ Q J 10 9 4 3 2

♣ 9 7 5

3♦

4♦²

pass

Responder

♠ 3

♥ A Q 10 7 3 2

♦ K 8 7

♣ A K J

4♣¹

5♦³

1. RKB: after opening bids of 3♦, 3♥ or 3♠.
2. '0', first-step response to an RKB ask after a preempt.
3. Two keycards missing.

What about showing the heart void by bidding 5♥ over 4♣? It is just too dangerous to commit the hand to slam by showing a void with zero keycards. To show a void with '0' keycards only works when partner does *not* have the ace of your void suit.

54. Opener (you)

♠ A K 10 5

♥ 4

♦ A Q 10 3 2

♣ K Q 8

1♦

1♠

4NT¹

5♥³

pass⁵

Responder

♠ J 9 7 2

♥ K Q 7 5 3

♦ 6

♣ A J 3

1♥

4♠

5♣²

5♠⁴

1. RKB (1430): opener asking.
2. '1'.
3. Queen-ask.
4. Sorry.
5. Me too.

After *second-suit* jump agreement followed by an RKB ask, a return to the asker's first-bid suit is to play. The bid cannot be used as a next step queen-ask. Opener can, however, use responder's unsupported first-bid suit, hearts, as a next step queen-ask.

55. Opener

♠ K 8 7 4 3
♥ K Q J 5
♦ 9
♣ K Q 6

1 ♠
2 ♥
4 ♣²
5 ♣⁴
7 ♣⁶

Responder

♠ A J 2
♥ A 2
♦ A 5 4
♣ A J 9 3 2

2 ♣
3 ♠¹
4 ♦³
5 NT⁵
pass

1. Slam try playing two-over-one, forcing and unlimited not playing two-over-one.
2. Double agreement in place.
3. RKB (1430): After double agreement ending in 4♣, 4♦ is RKB.
4. '2 with the lower-ranking queen only'.
5. Grand slam try, not the SKA after double agreement.
6. The trick-taking potential of the heart suit justifies the leap.

56. Dealer

♠ 10 9
♥ A Q J 2
♦ 5
♣ Q 10 8 7 3 2

pass
2 ♥¹
3 ♦³
pass

Opener (you)

♠ J 8
♥ K 7 4
♦ A Q J
♣ A K 9 5 4

1 ♣
2 NT²
4 ♥⁴

1. Fit-showing jump.
2. Game force, asking for distribution.
3. Singleton.
4. To play. They must have the first two spade tricks. If partner has four hearts, they should be headed by three of the top four honors.

You could also bid 5♣ knowing that contract is ice cold. However, at tournament bridge, it's a neat coup to play a hand like this hand in 4♥.

57. Opener

♠ J 7 5 4
♥ J 10
♦ K Q J 2
♣ A K 4

1 NT
2 ♥
3 ♦²
4 ♥
5 ♥⁴
pass

Responder (you)

♠ A
♥ A K 6 5 4 3
♦ 3
♣ Q J 9 5 2

2 ♦¹
3 ♣
4 ♣
4 NT³
6 ♣⁵

1. Transfer.
2. Diamond strength, probably weak in spades.
3. RKB for hearts.
4. '2 without' including the ♣K.
5. Choice of contract.

When a balanced hand faces a two-suiter and a keycard ask ensues, the kings of both suits are included in the response, but only the queen of the agreed suit gets the nod. After a queen-denial response, it is often a good idea to give partner an option of playing in another long suit; partner can always correct to the agreed suit.

58. **Opener (you)**
♠ A 3
♥ A K 8 5
♦ K Q 10 2
♣ A 8 6

2NT
3♠
4♥²
6♦⁴

Responder
♠ Q J 6 4 2
♥ 4 3
♦ A J 7 5 3
♣ 3

3♥¹
4♦
4♠³
pass

1. Transfer.
2. RKB (1430) for diamonds, ♠K included.
3. '1'.
4. We are missing a key king.

After a 2NT opening bid followed by a double transfer ending in 4♦, 4♥, the unbid major is RKB, diamonds agreed. The ♠K and the ♦Q are included in the response. If the double transfer ends in 4♣, 4♦ is RKB, clubs agreed, both kings and the ♣Q are included in the response.

59.

Second Hand
♠ 7
♥ A K Q 10
♦ A 10 6 4
♣ A 8 3 2

Fourth Hand (you)
♠ 10 8 4 2
♥ 3
♦ K Q
♣ Q J 10 9 5 4

Oppt.	Second Hand	Third Hand	Fourth Hand
1♠	dbl	pass	3♣ ¹
pass	4♦ ²	pass	4♠ ³
pass	?		

1. Invitational
2. RKB (1430): 3♦ would be forcing.
3. '0'.

First the jump to 4♦. After a takeout double followed by a forward-going 3♣ response, a jump to 4♦ is RKB since a 3♦ rebid would be forcing. The only time the doubler can use anything other than 4NT to ask for keycards is after a natural 2♣ response or a forward-going 3♣ response.

What about the question mark? The hand is off two keycards, the usual signal to sign off beneath slam. After all, two aces might be missing. In this case, two aces are not missing. The missing keycards are the ♠A and the ♣K. With the opening bidder sitting under the strong hand, if a club finesse is

needed, it figures to work. Bidding 6♣ is a reasonable shot and shows imagination.

60. Opener (you)	Responder	
♠ A 9 8 2	♠ K Q J 10 7 5	
♥ 6	♥ Q J 9	
♦ A K 10 9 5	♦ 6 3 2	
♣ A 10 4	♣ 8	
1 ♦	1 ♠	1. Game-forcing splinter.
3 ♥ ¹	4 ♠ ²	2. Strong spades with no outside ace or king.
5 ♦ ³	5 ♠ ⁴	3. Third-round control ask
pass ⁵		4. No third-round control.

There is only so much you can do. After the jump to 4♠ there is no need to worry about a spade loser so why ask for keycards?

Your problem is partner’s diamond holding, your first-bid suit. After *first-suit* jump agreement, that is the agreed suit, period. Follow-up bids, including the asker’s first-bid suit, can be used as a next step queen-ask or a third-round control ask if not the next step. In this sequence 5♦ would be a third-round control ask.

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