

Introduction to Squeezes for the Intermediate Player

by Ed Rawlinson

This tutorial is intended to provide a basic introduction to squeezes for the intermediate player. There are many types of squeezes. While some are quite difficult to recognize, others are more achievable for intermediate players. In addition, there are certain basic techniques to follow in implementing squeezes which are easy to learn and which may allow a squeeze to be executed even when declarer hasn't recognized the squeeze in advance.

This introduction will only cover the "simple squeeze". More complex squeezes are beyond the scope of this tutorial. Learners interested in such techniques should obtain a good book on squeezes (e. g., Bridge Squeezes Complete, by Clyde E. Love).

A squeeze occurs when a defender must stop (or guard) two suits. The squeeze forces the defender to give up his stop in one of the suits. The four primary requirements for a squeeze to work are:

	Requirement	Comment
B	One defender must be B usy trying to protect two suits (the threat suits).	In most cases, you have no control over this. It depends on the lay of the cards.
L	You must reach a point in the play when you have only one L oser left.	If you are not at this point, you must (if possible) give up losers to reach this situation. This is called "rectifying the count".
U	At least one of your "threat cards" must be in the " U pper hand", i.e., <u>behind</u> the opponent being squeezed.	A "threat card" is a loser (or at least an uncertain winner) which you hope will become a winner as a result of a squeeze.
E	You must have an E ntry to all threat cards.	Defenders can sometimes prevent a squeeze by removing your entry to a threat card. However, declarers who don't understand proper squeeze techniques frequently ruin their own chances by unwittingly destroying their own entries. In most cases, the way to avoid this is to cash all your winners outside the threat suits before using your transportation in the threat suits . There are some exceptions to this "rule of thumb", which will be discussed later.

These may sound confusing at first, but several examples may help clarify them. In all of the examples, South is the declarer.

1.	♠-AKQx		
	♥-xxx		
	♦-AQx		
♠-xx	♣-KQx	♠-J1098	
♥-xx		♥-J1098	
♦-xxxx	♠-xxx	♦-xxx	
♣-xxxxx	♥-AKQx	♣-C-xx	
	♦-Kxx		
	♣-Axx		
Contract: 7N		Opening Lead: ♣8	

Analysis: Declarer has 12 top tricks. A thirteenth trick will be available if either spades or hearts split 3-3. Declarers who know nothing of squeeze techniques may try these two suits first to see if they split. If they do this, they will go set if neither suit breaks. Declarers who understand proper squeeze technique will know that there is an additional chance, which is that one defender must guard both hearts and spades and can therefore be squeezed.

Let's assume one defender (either one) must protect both spades and hearts. If so, Requirement 1 would be met. Requirement 2 is also met, since declarer has 12 winners out of 13 tricks. Declarer's threat cards (potential winners) are the fourth spade in dummy and the fourth heart in declarer's hand. Thus, at least one threat card is behind either defender, and Requirement 3 is met. You have entries to both threat cards, so Requirement 4 is met. All that remains to execute the squeeze is to cash the winners in the non-threat suits first. After winning the first club, suppose South cashes the three diamond winners and a second club winner. This leads to the following situation.

	♠-AKQx		
	♥-xxx		
	♦-		
♠-xx	♣-Q	♠-J1098	
♥-xx		♥-J1098	
♦-x	♠-xxx	♦-	
♣-xxx	♥-AKQx	♣-	
	♦-		
	♣-x		

Now when the last club is cashed, East is squeezed and must unguard one of the majors. Note that the squeeze still works if the East-West hands are interchanged. It may be useful for the learner to lay out the hand and see what happens if the spades and hearts are cashed first. It will be clear that the defenders will have no problems discarding.

2.	♠-AKxx	
	♥-xxx	
	♦-AQx	
♠-Qx	♣-KQx	♠-J1098
♥-xx		♥-J1098
♦-xxxx	♠-xxx	♦-xxx
♣-xxxxx	♥-AKQx	♣-xx
	♦-Kxx	
	♣-Axx	
Contract: 6N Opening Lead: ♣8		

Analysis: Declarer has 11 tricks. A 12th trick could be developed if either spades or hearts split 3-3. The correct play, even for a declarer who knows nothing about squeeze technique, is to duck a round of spades at trick 2 so that one major can be tested while maintaining control of the other. There is, of course, a third possibility, and that is that one defender must guard both hearts and spades and can be squeezed. If we assume that is the case,

Requirement 1 would be met. It was essential to duck the spade early to meet Requirement 2 (declarer now has 11 winners out of 12 remaining tricks). Since the spade threat (the 4th spade) and the heart threat (the 4th heart) are in opposite hands, one of them must be behind the defender to be squeezed, satisfying Requirement 3. There are entries to both threats, meeting Requirement 4. All that's necessary is to cash the winners in the non-threat suits first. After ducking the spade and cashing 6 minor suit winners, all hands will be down to 6 cards. East can not hold his 3 remaining spades and 4 hearts and will have been squeezed. The East-West hands could have been switched, but the result would have been the same.

3.	♠-Axxxx	
	♥-Kx	
	♦-xx	
♠-xx	♣-Qxxx	♠-QJ10x
♥-xx		♥-QJ109xx
♦-KQJ10xxx		♦-xx
♣-xx	♠-Kx	♣-x
	♥-Axx	
	♦-Ax	
	♣-AKJ10xx	
Contract: 6N after Opening Lead: ♦K West preempts in diamonds		

Analysis: This hand illustrates how the bidding can suggest the possibility of a squeeze. Declarer has only 11 tricks and no hope of a 12th trick by normal means. However, the bidding suggests that East might have to guard both spades and hearts. If so, Requirement 1 would be met. Declarer has 2 losers and must give up one before Requirement 2 is met. Declarer can solve this by ducking the opening diamond lead. Declarer's threat cards are the 3rd round of spades in dummy and the 3rd round of hearts in

hand. The heart threat is behind East, satisfying Requirement 3. There are entries to both threats, satisfying Requirement 4. Declarer simply has to cash his non-threat suits first. After ducking the first diamond, winning the second diamond, and cashing 6 clubs, all hands will be down to 5 cards. East can not hold three cards in both hearts and spades and will have been squeezed.

4.		♠-Kxx		
		♥-Jxx		
		♦-AQxx		
	♠-Ax	♣-Qxx	♠-xx	
	♥-8x		♥-AQ109x	
	♦-Jxxx	♠-QJxxxx	♦-Kxx	
	♣-xxxxx	♥-Kxx	♣-Jxx	
		♦-xx		
		♣-AK		
Bidding:	N	E	S	W
	1♦	1♥	1♠	P
	2♠	P	4♠	All Pass
Opening Lead:	♥8 to Ace. Spade return to Ace. Heart return, small, 10, K.			

Analysis: This is another example in which the bidding suggests the possibility of a squeeze. Declarer has won 1 trick and has 9 more winners. Declarer could pitch his heart loser on the 3rd round of clubs and take the diamond finesse for an 11th trick. However, who is likely to hold the ♦K? East is a big favorite to hold that card for his overcall. Also, if West had the ♦K, the ♠A, and maybe a jack, he may have bid over 1♠. So if we really believe that West has the ♦K, then he has to guard both diamonds and hearts, satisfying Requirement 1. After 3 tricks, declarer now has 9 winners out of 10 remaining tricks, satisfying Requirement 2. The

threat behind East is declarer's small heart (the ♥J in dummy is irrelevant), satisfying Requirement 3. The second threat is the ♦Q. There are entries to both threats, satisfying Requirement 4. Declarer now cashes his winners in the non-threat suits (but must be careful to handle the transportation correctly). The play continues with cashing the AK of Clubs, spade to the King, cash the ♣Q discarding a diamond (don't throw away your heart threat card), spade back to South and run the spades. With 1 spade left to cash, the hands will be:

4A.	♠-	
	♥-J	
	♦-AQ	
	♣-	♠-
Irrelevant		♥-Q
		♦-Kx
	♠-x	♣-
	♥-x	
	♦-x	
	♣-	

South cashes the last spade and discards the ♥J from dummy. East can not discard his ♥Q or else declarer's small heart will be good. Thus, he must unguard his ♦K. South now plays a diamond to the ace, dropping the bare king.

Sometimes it is not clear from the bidding that a defender is likely to have to guard two suits. However, that may be suggested by the play.

5.	♠-QJ2		
	♥-KJx		
	♦-Axxx		
♠-109xxx	♣-Qxx	♠-AKxxx	
♥-xx		♥-A	
♦-Qx	♠-	♦-J10xx	
♣-Kxxx	♥-Q109xxxx	♣-xxx	
	♦-Kxx		
	♣-A10x		
Bidding:	N	E	S
			W
			3♥ P
			4♥ All Pass
Opening Lead:	♠10 to Q, K, ruff. Heart to K and A. Club to King. Spade 9...		
5A.	♠-J		
	♥-		
	♦-Axx		
	♣-	♠-A	
Irrelevant		♥-	
		♦-J10x	
	♠-	♣	
	♥-x		
	♦-Kxx		
	♣-		

Analysis: South has won 1 trick and has 9 winners out of the remaining 10 tricks. This should ring a bell (Requirement 2). Perhaps there's a squeeze. It's clear that East must guard spades. If East has 4 or more diamonds, then he is the only one who can guard them. It costs nothing to try that (and assume that Requirement 1 is met). What are the threat cards? The SJ is one (don't waste it at trick 4). We need one behind East and we have it with the 3rd round of diamonds in the South hand (satisfying Requirement 3). We have entries to both threats, meeting Requirement 4. Now we simply cash our winners in the non-threat suits. Continuing the play from trick 4, play a small spade from dummy and ruff it. Pull the remaining trump, cash the 2 Club winners and the trumps. With one trump to go, the hands will be as shown at right. South now cashes the last heart, pitching a diamond from dummy. East must now either pitch the ♠A or his diamond guard.

Notice that it was essential to keep the ♠J in dummy. If you cover the 9 with the J, East covers with the A and you ruff. Now

it is possible for **West** to protect spades. East can forget about spades and hold his diamonds.

6.	<p>♠S-542 ♥-AK53 ♦-KQ53 ♣-73 N E S W 1♣ P ♠-QJ3 1♥ P 1N P ♥-Q82 2N P 3N P ♦-A42 ♣-KQ102</p> <p>Contract:3N Opening Lead: ♦J North wins ♦Q; leads a club to the K, which wins. Heart to A (East plays the 10). Low club (East wins A; west follows). Low spade to Q and K. Low spade to East's A. Low spade to J, all following.</p>								
6A.	<p>♠- ♥-K53 ♦-K53 ♣- ♠- ♥-Q8 ♦-A4 ♣-Q10</p>								
6B.	<table> <tr> <td>♠-K96</td> <td>♠-A1087</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♥-9764</td> <td>♥-J10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♦-J1098</td> <td>♦-76</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♣-95</td> <td>♣-AJ864</td> </tr> </table>	♠-K96	♠-A1087	♥-9764	♥-J10	♦-J1098	♦-76	♣-95	♣-AJ864
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♦-J1098	♦-76								
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♣-95	♣-AJ864								

Analysis: South has 7 winners: 3 hearts, 3 diamonds and 1 club. Two additional winners emerge when the defense takes the ♣A and sets up a spade trick. South can make an overtrick if either diamonds or hearts split 3-3. The conditions are also in place for a heart-diamond squeeze against West (See diagram 6A). The general rule of thumb is to cash side suit winners first. If South cashes the ♣Q, West will discard a low heart. If South assumes that West started with four hearts and four spades (such as in diagram 6B), then South should discard a diamond from dummy. **However, what if East didn't start with 4-4 in diamonds and hearts but instead started with 5 hearts and 3 diamonds (such as in diagram 6C)?** Then diamonds were 3-3 all along. So West would still have hearts stopped and South has thrown away the long diamond. **This confusion can be avoided.** It is an exception to the rule

of thumb. This squeeze situation is a special case called a **positional squeeze**, which means that **both** of your threat cards are behind the opponent being squeezed. In prior examples, the threat cards were divided between the North-South hands. The solution to the problem is, when executing a positional squeeze, to cash winners in one of the threat suits before cashing the squeeze card. Which suit should South cash? The answer is that it makes no difference, as long as declarer preserves an entry to dummy when the squeeze card is cashed. Return to diagram 6A, and observe what happens if South cashes two hearts and returns to the ♦A. Now, South will know whether West has one or two hearts left and whether the heart discard is "fatal". Likewise (in 6A), if South cashes two diamonds and returns to the ♥Q, South will know whether diamonds split or whether West has been squeezed into discarding a heart.

7.	♠-5	
	♥-	
	♦-104	
♠-	♣-A5	♠-
♥-876		♥-
♦-		♦-98
♣-92	♠-J7	♣-K87
	♥-	
	♦-5	
	♣-Q6	

Diagram 7 illustrates another exception to the rule of thumb to cash all winners in non-threat suits first. South has 2 winners in spades, 1 in diamonds, and 1 in clubs. He has threats in clubs and diamonds. If South cashes the ♠J, East discards a club. If South cashes the ♠7 and discards the ♣5, East can discard another club. The ♣A will drop the K, but there is no entry back to the ♣Q. The solution is to cash the ♣A before cashing the spades. So

cash the ♣A, then 2 spades. On the second spade, East must either unguard diamonds or discard the ♣K, allowing South to cash the ♣Q. This play (cashing winners in a threat suit to avoid blocking transportation to a threat card) is called the **Vienna Coup**. The Vienna Coup occurs when a threat card (in suit A) and the squeeze card are in the same hand and there are winners in suit A in the opposite hand. You must cash those winners first.

8.	♠-AK3	N	E	S	W
	♥-A1063	1♥*	P	2♣	2♦
	♦-J5	3♣	P	4♣	P
	♣-Q864	5♣	All pass		
	♠-J97	*Playing a			
	♥-K4	4-card major			
	♦-1064	system.			
	♣-AKJ92				
West leads the AK of diamonds, East playing the 2, then the 8. West shifts to the H9, 3, 7, and K.					

Here's an example from a complete hand. Analysis: It appears that East has 3 diamonds and both heart honors. South has a likely spade loser. However, if East has the ♠Q, perhaps he can be squeezed in hearts and spades. Our squeeze card will be the last club. The threat in the South hand is the ♠J. Since we have winners in that suit in the opposite hand, we must cash them before cashing the squeeze card. Thus, the play should go: cash AK of clubs (West showing out on the second round), ruff a diamond with the ♣Q, cash the AK of spades and the J9 of clubs. This leads to diagram 8A. Now, when South cashes the ♣2, pitching the S3, East is squeezed.

8A.	S-3	
	H-A10	
	D-	
Irrelevant	C-	S-Q
		H-QJ
		D-
	S-J	C-
	H-4	
	D-	
	C-2	

9.	♠-AQ32	
	♥-A965	
	♦-A9	
	♣-AK5	
	♠-K54	
	♥-KQJ102	
	♦-K5	
	♣-932	
Contract: 7♥	Opening Lead: ♣8	
East plays ♣Q.		

Analysis: South has 12 tricks. If spades are 3-3, there is a thirteenth. It appears that West has made a top-of-nothing lead, and that East has QJ10 (perhaps with others). If East also holds 4 spades, an extra chance arises by squeezing East in spades and clubs. The threat card behind East is the ♣9. The squeeze card will be the last heart. South must cash his club winners before cashing the squeeze card. The play will go: win the club lead, pull trumps, cash the ♣K, cash the AK of

diamonds, and cash all but one trump. This leads to diagram 9A.

9A.	♠-AQ32	
	♥-	
	♦-	
Irrelevant	♣-5	♠-J976
		♥-
		♦-
	♠-K54	♣-J
	♥-2	
	♦-	
	♣-9	

Now South cashes the ♥2, pitching a club from dummy. East is squeezed.

The lead of the ♣8 and South's possession of the ♣9 were hints that East may have the sole burden of guarding clubs. South should still try for the squeeze even if his original club holding was 234. East will still have the sole burden of guarding clubs if he holds 5 of them. The squeeze costs nothing to try. It is simply an extra

chance.

10.	♠-AK32	
	♥-Q1032	
	♦-652	
♠-J987	♣-AK	♠-Q106
♥-87		♥-9
♦-QJ1098	♠-54	♦-73
♣-Q5	♥-AKJ654	♣-J1098764
	♦-AK4	
	♣-32	
Contract: 6♥	Opening Lead: ♣Q	

One requirement for a squeeze is that one opponent must have the sole responsibility of guarding two suits. Sometimes declarer must take some "preparatory action" to meet this requirement.

Analysis: South is cold for his slam and can think about an overtrick, although hopes are slim. South could hope that one defender holds 5 diamonds (sole responsibility for diamonds). However, if spades are 4-3, either defender can protect

against the third round of spades. The solution is simple: just ruff the third round of spades, making one defender the sole guard. South hopes that one defender holds 4 spades and 5 diamonds. The play should go: win the club lead, pull trumps, cash AK of spades, ruff a spade, cash the last heart (pitching a diamond). Now, when South leads a club to dummy, West is squeezed. The East-West hands could be interchanged, and the squeeze still works.