

## Harry Potter and the O.W.L.s

The end of term was fast approaching at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The fifth-year students were all in a tizzy, worrying about their Ordinary Wizarding Level exams. The list had just been posted and Harry, Ron, and Hermione were gazing at it with some trepidation.

"Oh, gosh," said Ron, "we don't have a day off for the next ten days. We'll be exhausted by the end."

"Well, Ron," Hermione intoned in her most soothing manner, "we do have the weekends free. And our bridge exam isn't until the second week, so we'll have lots more time to prepare. Say, what are you two doing now? Do you want to practise in the common room? What do you think, Harry?"

"What," said the bleary-eyed Potter. "Oh, bridge. I dunno. OK, if you want to. Who'll we get for a fourth?"

"Well, Longbottom's always available," Ron piped up.

Harry was about to object, and then he remembered why he should be sympathetic to Neville. "Yah, sure. Let's see if he'll play."

And soon enough the four of them were sitting around a card table in the Gryffindor common room.

This deal pleased Ron greatly.

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

Sitting North, Hermione opened one diamond, Ron responded one spade, and Hermione rebid one notrump. Ron considered his next bid. He

remembered Professor McGonagall's advice that a jump rebid by responder was invitational, not forcing, and he thought that was the best way to describe his hand. He didn't want to force to game unless Hermione was top of her count. He jumped to three spades.

Hermione knew that this bid was not forcing and she should have a maximum to raise. She was in between a minimum and a maximum but her cards were well placed. She had the queen of trumps, two aces, and a queen-jack together. She raised to game.

Neville was grateful to have an easy lead and he placed the king of clubs on the table. Ron paused to consider the play as Professor McGonagall had instructed them. When he counted winners, he arrived at ten - five spades, two hearts, two diamonds, and one club. But when he counted losers, he found four - one spade, two clubs, and a potential heart loser.

Should he rely on the heart finesse? No, Ron saw a way to make the contract without taking the heart finesse. He would discard one of his losing clubs on dummy's ace of diamonds and gladly give up a trick to the king of hearts.

Ron won the first trick with the ace, cashed the king of diamonds, crossed to the ace of hearts, and led the ace of diamonds, discarding a losing club. Only then did he lead the queen of spades to drive out the ace. The opponents could cash only a club and the king of hearts in addition to the trump ace.

"That was nice play," Harry remarked. "If you'd knocked out the ace of spades first and relied on the heart finesse, you would have failed."

"Yah, well, Professor McGonagall always told us to check carefully before playing too quickly. Always count our winners and losers and always double check."

A little later in their practice session Harry was in the spotlight, and in a grand slam.

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

After a long involved auction in which Harry opened one diamond and Neville responded two spades, Harry landed in seven notrump against which Hermione led the king of hearts. Like Ron, Harry took time to consider how to proceed.

His count of winners reached twelve - three spades, one heart, four diamonds, and four clubs. That left him one trick short. And the only place to pick up that extra trick was in the long suit, spades. Harry thought about playing spades immediately but he remembered a sharp lesson he had been taught by Professor Snape in class one day when he had prematurely played a long suit before examining other options.

"Potter," Snape snapped, "you owe me three extra points for that misplay." Harry was not about to repeat that error. Instead he won the ace of hearts, unblocked dummy's clubs and diamonds, crossed to the queen of spades, and cashed the three minor-suit winners in his hand.

On the last of these, Hermione, who had come down to J-10-7 of spades and the queen of hearts knew she had to protect spades so she discarded the queen of hearts. Since the card gods had dealt Harry, not her partner, the ten of hearts, the grand slam succeeded.

"Oh that was well done, Harry," chirped Longbottom.

"Well, I think someone once said, 'Slow and steady wins the race'", Harry remarked with a twinkle in his eye.

The noise in the Gryffindor common room had reached a fever pitch. The seat assignments had just been posted for the bridge exam the next day. Hermione, Ron, and Harry pressed forward through the throng of fifth-year Hogwarts students to find their starting positions.

Ron reached the list first. "Not bad," he shouted over his shoulder. "Padma Patel and Pansy Parkinson at my table. But, wait a minute, my partner's that annoying Zacharias Smith. Can you believe my luck?"

Each table at the exam contained a member from one of the four Hogwarts' houses - Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff and Slytherin - so that no collusion would occur among the players. Points were awarded for good plays and the competition for the House Cup was as important to all the students as their exam results.

Hermione backed off a little from the crowd. "Well," asked Ron, "how'd you do?"

"Well, I mean, it's pretty good. Hannah Abbott from Hufflepuff is my partner. She's pretty reliable. And Luna Lovegood from Ravenclaw. She's..."

"Yah," interrupted Ron, "a bit of a loony!"

"Yes, but she's nice," Hermione affirmed.

"Who's the last one?" Ron asked.

"Oh, Gregory Goyle from Slytherin. A bit nasty, but I think he's afraid of me."

They wondered why they hadn't heard from Harry. He was walking around in a bit of daze.

"What's up, mate? Who are your victims?" Ron chirruped.

"Oh, well, good and bad, I suppose," offered the stunned looking Harry. "Uh, Ernie Macmillan from Hufflepuff. We all know Ernie will have studied hard for the exam. But poor Ernie's partnered with Malfoy."

"What," shouted Hermione, "you have Draco Malfoy at your table. Bad luck, Harry."

"Yah, I suppose." Harry sighed.

"Who's your partner, Harry?" Ron asked.

"Um, Cho, Cho Chang," Harry admitted.

Ron and Hermione looked at each other and exchanged knowing glances. Harry had an enormous crush on Cho but hadn't told her about his feelings. Tomorrow might be an eventful day for Harry Potter.

The next day, before the start of the exam, Professor McGonagall announced the usual restrictions. No wands were allowed, no silent spells were to be used. "And, hem, hem, above all else, there must be no bickering at the table. All right, find your places," she instructed.

Harry was soon sitting across from Cho with Malfoy on his left and Ernie on his right. Each table had a teacher monitoring proceedings and Professor McGonagall was seated behind Harry. The first deal proved exciting.

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

Harry was the dealer and considered his options. He could open one club and then reverse into two diamonds. Possibly, over the expected one-heart response to one club he could jump to two notrump. But Harry chose another, perhaps more dangerous, option. He opened two notrump.

Cho considered her hand for a moment and then bid three hearts, transferring to spades. Over Harry's three spades, she bid four hearts, announcing another five-card suit. Harry liked his hand very much and jumped immediately to six spades, ending the auction.

Malfoy led the king of clubs, expecting to be able to cash a club trick when in with the ace of hearts but the sight of dummy told him that wouldn't be possible.

Harry did what Professor McGonagall had emphasized over and over - plan the play at trick one. Harry counted five spade tricks, four diamonds, and one club. He could develop one more trick by knocking out the ace of hearts since the king and queen were equals against the ace. That meant he needed one more trick.

Harry spotted the answer quickly. A heart ruff in hand could be the twelfth trick. Harry realized he had to be careful with his entries. He won the ace of clubs and immediately led the king of hearts. Malfoy won the ace and with nothing better to do shifted to the nine of diamonds.

Harry won the jack, trumped a heart in his hand, drew trumps and claimed his twelve tricks - five spades, one heart, four diamonds, and one heart ruff in his hand.

"Very nicely done, Potter," remarked Professor McGonagall. "Full marks on your exam for your play of the hand but no House Points I'm afraid. Your bidding was, hem, hem, a little erratic. Miss Chang, however. A full 20 points for Ravenclaw for your fine bidding. A good start everyone, although Mr. Macmillan you didn't have much to do on this deal. For extra marks, can anyone tell me if the contract can be defeated?"

Malfoy wondered if McGonagall was talking about his opening lead. Surely the king of clubs was the most natural lead in the world. Harry was quick to recognize the best lead.

"If Malfoy had led a diamond, Professor, and then a diamond again when he won the ace of hearts, I wouldn't have the entries to ruff a heart and draw Ernie's trumps since the trumps split 4-1."

"Excellent, Potter. And Gryffindor, after all, will receive 10 points for your spotting the correct defence."

### Harry Potter and the O.W.L.s - part 3

The Ordinary Wizarding Level bridge exam at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was well under way. Harry, in partnership with Cho Chang, had received full marks for his play. Harry and Cho had received almost full marks for their defence, slipping only once when Harry mistook a count signal from Cho for an attitude signal, allowing Draco Malfoy to make an overtrick in three notrump.

Malfoy, in partnership with Hufflepuff's Ernie Macmillan, had found the exam a little difficult, especially in communicating with his partner. Malfoy was not used to looking at situations from another's perspective.

Professor McGonagall had been particularly pleased with Harry's play of the deal below. For most of the exam, players were instructed to try to make as many tricks as possible on both play and defence. But on a small section of four deals, the instructions were not to be concerned about overtricks or undertricks, simply make a contract or defeat it.

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

Cho, as North, started the bidding with one club, Harry responded one heart, and Cho jumped to two notrump. Harry now bid an artificial three clubs, asking Cho if she had four spades or three hearts. When Cho responded three hearts, Harry bid game in hearts.

Draco Malfoy, who seemed to hold a lot of honour sequences in these situations, led the ten of diamonds. Harry saw that he had a potential

loser in diamonds, a sure loser in spades, and still had the trump suit to contend with.

There was no reason to rise with the ace, so Harry played low from dummy but Ernie Macmillan won the king of diamonds and shifted to the ten of clubs.

So, Harry had two losers outside trumps. That meant he had to hold his trump losers to one. After winning the king of clubs in his hand, he was about to cross to the king of hearts in dummy for a finesse of his jack, when he recalled a lesson in which Professor McGonagall had spent some time stressing the importance of safety plays in the trump suit.

Suddenly, Harry remembered this very combination. If the suit split 3-2, all would be well, but if one player held Q-10-x-x, by cashing the ace first and then leading toward the king, Harry could cater for either player owning that dangerous combination.

If Malfoy showed out on the second round of hearts, Harry could win the king and lead toward his jack, limiting Ernie to one trick; if Malfoy played a low card on the second round of hearts, Harry would insert the eight, prevailing whether or not Ernie followed suit. Of course, if Malfoy played either the queen or the ten, then Harry would play the king.

"Well done, Potter," Professor McGonagall remarked at the conclusion of play. "I see you remembered the lesson well," she quipped.

After several hands on defense, Harry sensed tiredness creeping in as the last board of the exam arrived at their table.

♠ 6 3 2	
♥ Q J 10 4	
♦ K 5 2	
♣ A Q J	
♠ A 10 8 7	♠ Q J 9
♥----	♥ 8 6 3
♦ Q J 9 7	♦ 10 8 4 3
♣ 10 8 7 3 2	♣ K 6 4
♠ K 5 4	
♥ A K 9 7 5 2	
♦ A 6	
♣ 9 5	

The bidding was straightforward. Cho opened one club, Harry responded one heart, Cho raised to two hearts, and Harry bid game. Once again, Malfoy was blessed with an honour sequence and led the queen of diamonds.

Harry spotted the danger immediately. If the club finesse lost and the ace of spades were offside, he was in danger of losing four tricks. While he was thinking about the best way to proceed, Harry thought he saw movement in the dummy.

When he rubbed his eyes and looked again, he was sure the two of diamonds had winked at him! Impossible, he thought. I must be really tired.

But then he thought he saw movement in his own hand, and when he looked down, it appeared the six of diamonds was also winking at him. He looked at Cho and at his two opponents, wondering if they had seen these movements. When Malfoy saw Harry look at him, he droned, "Well, Potter. What's the matter? Too tired to go on? Why don't you let the girl take over for you?"

Cho shot him a menacing glance but Malfoy barely noticed. Meanwhile, Harry, awakened by the winks, had given the play of the hand deeper thought. If he could score six hearts, two diamonds, and two clubs he would make his game. But could he keep Ernie, the dangerous hand, off play? Yes. There it was. Duck the queen of diamonds. That's what the diamond spots had been telling him to do!

Harry ducked Malfoy's queen of diamonds, won the diamond continuation with the ace, drew three rounds of trumps ending in dummy, discarded one club on the king of diamonds, cashed the ace of clubs and led the queen. Ernie produced the king. Harry trumped, crossed to dummy with a trump and cashed the jack of clubs, discarding a spade. Ten tricks were secured.

A loud guffaw emerged from behind Harry. Miraculously not having been seen despite his huge girth and height, Hagrid, the Care of Magical Creatures teacher, moved forward and

bellowed, "Mercy sakes, Harry, I've seen them all, but that's the most unusual duck I've ever seen."