1. N E S W
2♥ P P X
P 3♠ AP

Comments: East has a close X v P decision, only because East can anticipate that West will have a difficult time balancing with some modest hands where 2♠ makes. The ♣KQ and lack of ♦ spots makes mass more appealing.

West also has a close decision. The ♥Q is wasted, and his hand is flat. However, E/W will often belong in 2♠ against this auction, and doubling keeps a penalty pass in the picture.

East makes an invite to game, in case West happens to have a sound opening hand. Notice that with invitational values, East cannot show information about his lack of a ♥ stopper as well.

Play: After the ♥A (North encouraging) and the ♥K, North leads a 3rd round of ♥s. The goal is to start a forcing defense by shortening West’s trump length and then East’s. Notice that his doesn’t give away a trick in the minor suits.

There is no way for declarer to avoid losing a ♦, two top ♥s and the ♠A. The defense’s noble attempts at tapping declarer do not work today.

1. N E S W
 -- P 1♣ P
1♥ P 2♦ P
3♣ P 3♠ P
?

Comments: 2♦ is a reverse (forcing to 3♣, implying xx45 distribution). North’s 3♣ bid is natural and forcing to game. With a weaker hand, 2N would have been the correct bid. South bids 3♠ to determine whether 3N is possible. North, with a fast ♠ stopper and great shape, may elect to look for a ♣ slam at this point. Most players would probably try 3N here as an attempt to get to the most practical game.

Play: On a ♠ lead, declarer must keep in mind the need to ruff ♦ losers before drawing trumps. This is particularly important in the slightly ambitious 7♣ (3♦ need to be ruffed). Declarer will elect to play for the drop in ♣s after seeing ♦s split 4-4.

1. N E S W
-- -- 1♦ P
1N 3♥ P 4♥
AP

Comments: West elected to pass rather than overcall 1♠ (he has a normal looking takeout double of ♥s should the opponents come in, and the defensive potential is excellent against ♦s/NT). East has the next significant problem – how many ♥s? Picturing West with 6-9 HCP (given North’s range and South holding a minimum balanced hand, the most likely pattern), there are a smattering of hands that give 4♥ a chance. However, it is often right to give West the option to pass when he holds a quacky 8 count. A 3♥ preempt looks right with this hand vulnerable – the suit is excellent and the shape is terrible (notice the ♦QJ will rarely be worth the full 3 points when South opens 1♦).

West opts to raise to 4, as he expects a decent suit and has 2 ½ tricks to sport. There’s no guarantees by any means. At a different vulnerability, West would pass without much thought (picture East with QT9xxxx).

Play: When South leads the ♦3, declarer has little alternative to trying a couple finesses: First the ♦ twice, then a ♠ to the ♠Q, pitching a ♣ on the ♦A and then finessing the ♥s.

This line looks reasonable because South didn’t lead ♣s (he likely has the ♣A). When the ♦ finesse holds, declarer reasons that South is a 4:3 favorite to hold the ♠K. If the finesse fails, declarer can determine the best way to tackle the ♥ suit afterwards.

1. N E S W
--- --- --- P
1♥ 1N P P
2♣ X AP

Comments: After North opens 1♥, East must choose between 2♦, X, and 1N. Overcalling 1N looks right on values, but East would prefer to have a better ♥ stopper. N/S may run the first 5-7 tricks. Doubling will leave East in a similar predicament, plus the possibility of being preempted out of a comfortable rebid. Overcalling 2♦ could lead to a missed game, but there is less risk of having a rebid problem later (a redouble of a reopening double, or another subsequent double will usually be adequate). 1N appears to be the safest bet.

Now North must choose whether to reopen, double, or pass. 1N does not appear to set, despite having 5 tricks at the ready. If South has a 6 count, 1N will go down, but it is safer for North to try playing his own partscore. Due to this, he shows his second suit.

East doubles this (takeout), and West stops to consider whether to try a penalty pass or convert to 2♦ (this is the point of doubling as opposed to immediately bidding 2♦). With poor ♣ spots and no guarantee of a fit, this is a difficult decision. Passing looks correct, as it seems unusual for anyone to be bidding after 1N this way. With the points evenly split, anything is possible, and +200 would be a nice result. Plus, partner may have a ♣ honor that contributes to the defense.

This is a situation in which less than accurate defenders may choose to run to 2♦ and test their luck as declarer. Should 2♦ make, it will tie with 1N = (given the position of the ♣K, 1N making 2 seems a little far off unless there’s horrid defense at other tables).

North cannot pull to 2♥ here. The defense will simply create a forcing defense and ruin declarer’s trump control. 2♣ might find South with 4-card support, while 2♥ is guaranteeing -1.

Play: East leads the ♦A to determine whether to shift a trump or start a forcing defense. Since dummy is entry-less, it seems correct to tap declarer and only then attempt to draw trumps. Partner should be able to stop declarer from running the entire ♥ suit with his trump.

After three rounds of ♦s (North pitching a ♠), East must be careful not to lead two rounds of ♣s. Instead, East must continue trying to tap declarer by leading a ♠! This sets up an entry and prevents declarer from getting an undeserved trump trick. Notice that this works when West holds one or two ♣ honors.

1. N E S W
P 1♣ 1♠ 2♥
3♠ P P 4♦
P 4♥ P 4N
P 5♥ P 6♥
AP

Comments: East opens 1♣ (not 1N) for a couple reasons. First, East would like West to facilitate all invitational+ auctions starting at the two level. Second, East can raise a 1♠ response to 2 and avoid a bad ♥ contract when possible by opening 1♣. Third, 1N from East’s side will be wrong-sided when partner has lots of Qs and KJs. Notice that it is to E/W’s advantage to let the opponents bid NT, as any penalties are larger than E/W making 1N. Against this, it can become considerably harder to compete effectively after a 1N opening.

South elects a simple 1♠ overcall. 2♠ may be more appropriate with a singleton ♥, but the ♥ void suggests that if E/W get to ♥s, there will be a bad split. It appears best to not imply this too much in the bidding.

North

1.