In the Slam Zonet - commentary

Hand 1

North opens 1♠.
South immediately agrees spades and forces to game with 2NT.
3♥ by North now shows a void or singleton.
South bids 4♣ – 1st or 2nd round control, but North knows it must be first.
North bids 4♦ and South bids 4♥ – again it must be 1st round facing the known shortage.
North's only concern now is the trump quality, and so bids 4NT (1430 Blackwood).
South bids 5♦ showing 0 or 3 key cards. North bids 5♥ asking for the ♠Q, and South bids anything except 5♠.
Holding that card but nothing else outside South jumps to 6♠.
12 tricks are laydown losing just the ♦A.

Hand 2

East opens 1♣, West responds 1♥ and East rebids 1♠.
West's hand now becomes 6-loser and a bit good for a jump to 4♠.
If you play a jump in the fourth suit as a splinter agreeing spades in this sequence then 4♦ would be the ideal bid. However, that bid is better reserved to show a 5-card holding in the fourth suit together with game-going values. On another not very different hand that might well be the only way to find the diamond slam with no fit available elsewhere.
The solution is to travel by way of a lowest level bid in the fourth suit.
In this case West bids 2♦.
Provided that bid is played as game-forcing then East can safely bid 2NT with something in diamonds and no other feature.
West can now revert to 3♠ – a bid he could have made directly and so agreeing spades and forcing to game with at least some slam interest.
At this level it is best to bid controls directly. East bids 4♣, West bids 4♦ and East can now use RKCB to reach the spade slam. 12 tricks depend on no more than a 3-2 spade split and a 3-1 club split with some other possibilities if necessary.

Hand 3

After a 3♦ opening by South North can count 12 tricks in diamonds or no trumps, but can you find a way to check for the ♣K?

Hand 4

West opens 1NT and East transfers with 2♥.
West bids 2♠ and East can do no more than jump to 3NT – there just aren't enough points for a slam without a fit.
Both spades and no trumps make 11 tricks for the loss of just 2 spades.

Hand 5

North passes and East opens 1♥.

Even vulnerable I bid a weak 2♠ o this South hand.

With a seven-loser hand West must force to game.

It's a bit good for a jump to 4♥.

A 4♣ splinter would be ideal if that is the partnership agreement, but I much prefer this to be a fit-jump in the contested auction.

That leaves only 3♠ – the cue-raise.

East might just try a control-showing 4♣ in case partner has any extras, but 4♦ from West and 4♥ from East should end the auction.

EW make 10 tricks with the help of some club ruffs.

This hand isn't exactly in the slam zone, but either partner might consider the possibility which is why they should bid with the thought of extras in partner's hand.

Hand 6

East passes and South opens 1NT.

North bids a quantitative 4NT which South passes.

Both spades and no trumps make 11 tricks losing a spade and a diamond, although you will have to squeeze the 11th trick out of East, taking considerable care to preserve communications between the two hands.

Hand 7

South opens 1♥.

North responds 1♠ and South jumps to 3♠.

North shows some slam interest with a cue-bid of 4♣.

4D from North elicits 5♣ from South, and 5♥ from North improves the possibility of a slam no end.

If you play 5♠ as asking for 2 of the top 3 honours then this will be the best route to 6♠.

If you play 5♠ as a possible sign-off then you may well take a punt on 6♠.

Both no trumps and spades make 12 tricks

Hand 8

West opens 1♥ and East responds 2♦.

If West rebids 2♥ then East should make up a bid such as 2♠ or 3♣.

If West rebids 3♥ then East can start a cue-bidding sequence with 3♠.

Reaching 6♥ is far from easy. 12 tricks are there, but is it a good slam depending on the ♦A lying right?

Incidentally, both 6♠ and 7♣ go 4 off for NS for an excellent sacrifice of -800 when doubled.

Hand 9

North opens 1NT.

Assuming that East passes then South will try 2♣ (getting a spade response) and then try a quantitative 4NT. ((Ways of agreeing spades and then asking need to be discussed).

Most Norths will raise to 6NT with the non-minimum holding.

NS can indeed make 12 tricks from the North hand (a spade leads removes any chance of more played by South) in no trumps (or diamonds or clubs) at double dummy, but in practice it is a long shot.

With only 10 top tricks the right choice of heart finesse will bring in an eleventh, but with the diamonds not running declarer will usually lose a diamond and a spade. Can you find a certain way of endplaying East for an extra trick?

Hand 10

East opens 1♥ and West has an easy Jacoby game-force of 2NT.

On this hand a 'natural' trial bid of 3♣ works best, but it is far from the most common method.

A more common method would be to rebid 3♠ showing a void or singleton.

A typical continuation would be 4♦ (control), 4NT (RKCB), 5♦ (0 or 3), 5NT (asking for Kings), 6♣ (0), 6♠ or 6NT.

Both spades and no trumps make 12 tricks off the top with the help of a spade finesse, but cannot avoid the loss of the second diamond.

In fact clubs make 13 tricks as the diamond goes away on a heart and is a rare example of that bit of theory which states that a 4-4 fit can be superior to a 5-4 trip, but it's not a great grand slam depending as it does on the finesse. You can hardly be blamed if you finish in in 7♠ going 1 down.

Hand 11

South opens 1♥ and North forces to game with a minimum Jacoby 2NT based on a 7-loser hand.

South will rebid either 3NT suggesting 15 to 19 in a balanced hand or just possibly 3♥ suggesting any hand of 16+ depending on the partnership agreement.

In most continuations North will sign off on his minimum with 4♥.

11 tricks can be made in any strain except clubs, but a slam would be a step too far.

Hand 12

West opens 1♣, East responds 1♠ and West rebids 2C.

This is extremely difficult using basic methods.

4NT as a quantitative raise would be a rare treatment but would work on this occasion.

This is one of those rare examples on which 4NT as a key-card ask would work in the minor suit, but it is not my preferred method.

My choice is 4♣ as a key-card ask (obviously subject to partnership agreement), after which the partnership should finish in either 6C♣ or 6NT.

With 11 tricks off the top for the loss of the ♥A a finesse in either diamonds or spades will bring in the twelfth trick, but is there a more certain squeeze play?

Hand 13

North passes, East opens 1♥, North responds 1♠ and East rebids 2♥.

North now invokes RKCB agreeing hearts to check on the heart honours.

5C must be the ♥K, 5♦ asks for the ♥Q and 6♣ says yes, with a feature in Clubs. West will choose between 6♥ and 6NT.

12 tricks are easy in either hearts or no trumps losing just the ♠A.

Hand 14

After 3 passes North opens 2NT (20 to 22).

South may or may not travel by way of a Stayman enquiry but will sooner or later make a quantitative raise to 6NT.

In fact, 13 tricks are laydown in any strain except hearts, but can any bidding sequence identify the potential of that ♠J?

Hand 15

I open a nearly game-forcing 2♣ n this South hand, and rebid 3♣ (forcing) over the 2♦ response.

Some would now bid 3♠ on the North hand to show the control – I prefer 4♣ – forcing and stronger than 5♣. If you play this as RKCB then a 4♠ response will pave the way to 6♣.

The only play difficulty will be on a spade lead. One round of trumps will reveal the club split and it will then be necessary to create an entry by ruffing a heart (the twelfth trick) to facilitate the club finesse.

Hand 16

I open 3♦ on this West hand – some might prefer 1♦.

West will bid 3♥ or 4♣ provided you play these as forcing – otherwise it's a punt into 5♦.

And if West bids 5♦ at some stage can East count on at least one of the red aces to justify a push to the 6-level?

5♦ and 5♥ will be the most common contracts.

Hearts makes 11 tricks.

Diamonds can make 12 tricks but it is extremely difficult – almost a double-dummy teaser - but it is likely to involve a spade ruff in dummy and two spade discards in hand on the clubs before attacking trumps and taking the hearts.

Note that in any strain other than diamonds declarer can never get to the West hand after clearing trumps to make his long diamonds.

Hand 17

North opens 1NT.

South transfers to hearts and then bids 3NT.

North should show preference to 4♥, and South might think about a further enquiry, but probably better not to.

4♥ makes 11 tricks losing just the 2 minor suit aces provided that declarer can catch the ♣J.

Hand 18

East opens 1♦, West responds 1♥, and East rebids 2♣.

West will probably conclude the auction with 3NT.

In fact there are 12 tricks in either diamonds or no trumps, but it depends on both club honours being in the South hand, and are you really going to run the ♣9 on the first round of the suit?