English Bridge article December 2000

It constantly amazes me how, in our beginners' duplicate, a hand can be played at four different tables and at each table something completely different happens, both in the bidding and play. Take this example that came up recently, where every table finished in 3NT on the same lead.
South dealt at Love All.

♠ A 6 4 2
♥ A Q J 2
♦ Q 5
♣ 4 3 2

♠ K 5 3
♥ 10 9 8
♦ K J 9 8
♣ A Q 5

	South	North
Table 1	1NT	2♣
	2♦	3NT

	South	North
Table 2	1NT	2NT
	3NT	

	South	North
Table 3	1NT	3NT

	South	North
Table 4	1♦	1♥
	1NT	2♠
	2NT	3NT

Which auction do you think is the best? What, if anything, is wrong with the others?

The ♣J was led and the ♣Q won the first trick. This suggests West has the ♣K as East would have played it on the jack. How should South play the hand? Put out the cards on the table and try and work out what the opponents' hands might be to give you a problem. West started with ♣ K J 10 9 8.
Count your top winners – Spades 2, Hearts 1, Diamonds 0, and Clubs 2 on the lead. You need four more. Hearts will give two tricks and three if West has the ♥K and you take the finesse. Diamonds can give two more if you drive out the ♦A. Is there any threat we need worry about? Well yes, West might get winning clubs set up and have the ♦A as an entry to cash the winners.
At table 3, Peter made nine tricks by playing a diamond towards the queen at trick 2 and, when that held, another diamond at trick 3 to the ♦J. He thought he should lose the certain loser first. West won ♦A and played another club, won by ♣A. He then led the♥10, playing low in dummy. East did not have another club to play so Peter made his contract exactly. At table 1, Janice did slightly better, she ducked the second club and won the third round. East had problems deciding what to discard on the third club and fourth heart and threw a diamond away from her 4-card holding, so Janice made ten tricks. At table 4 Robert made ten tricks too when West played the ♦A at trick 2. The disaster occurred at Table 2, where declarer led the ♥10 at trick 2. The heart finesse lost and East returned a club. West got in with the ♣A and took three club winners – one down.
Let's look at those auctions again:

Table 1	1NT	2♣	Well bid. Marion used Stayman to look for a 4-card major in partner's hand,
	2♦	3NT	then bid 3NT when no fit was available.
Table 2	1NT	2NT	Some students hate committing themselves, but 2NT shows 11-12 points not a
	3NT		full value 13 points. It was only the good intermediates ♥10 9 8 and ♦ 9 8 that persuaded South to go for game.
Table 3	1NT	3NT	If you refuse to bid Stayman, this is the second best auction
Table 4	1♦	1♥	Our newest pair of students had been told not to open 1NT without a good
	1NT	2♠	stopper in every suit. In that case this cannot be right, we would never get to
	2NT	3NT	open 1NT. 1NT does not promise the earth, certainly not good holdings in every

suit. It just shows 12, 13 or 14 points in a balanced hand. When you open 1♦ you must have a rebid ready to make over partner's reply. What would it be over 1♦ when to rebid 1NT shows 15 or 16 points?
The good news is we don't always get punished for our bidding errors, after all everybody finished up in the same contract; there are no extra brownie points for good bidding here.