

Unexpected defence

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Defence is full of possibilities, often unrealised. Consider this scenario. You hold:

♠8542
♥6
♦AT6
♣T7643

LHO is the dealer and passes. Partner opens 1D, RHO doubles and after you pass, LHO bids 1H. Partner jumps to 3D and RHO also jumps, to 4S! Everyone passes. You decide that it might be worth looking for a ruff or two and lead ♥6.

Partner wins the ace, but instead of returning a heart for you to ruff, she cashes ♣A. Now she plays back ♥2. What is going on? Why didn't partner give you the heart ruff straight away, with a suit-preference low heart to show you where her entry was so that you could return a club and she could give you another ruff? She couldn't be trying to tell you she had ♣AK because with that holding she would have cashed ♣K, not the ace.

This kind of unexpected defence should be a "wake up" call – it is sometimes referred to as an "alarm clock" signal – and is an attempt to alert partner to the existence of some abnormal situation, or a request to make some abnormal play.

Partner was absolutely right to do what she did, because if I had woken up, I would have given her a club ruff and then received another heart ruff. The full deal, from Wednesday 22 May, is below. Properly defended, 4S is two down.

Unfortunately I was, once again, more or less asleep. I was sure partner couldn't have more than one spade and didn't believe she could have a hand with two singletons. So I tried to cash ♦A and declarer promptly made his contract!

BD: 17	♠J7	Dir: N
	♥QJT75	Vul: None
	♦J84	
	♣952	
♠8542		♠9
♥6		♥A832
♦AT6		♦KQ97532
♣T7643		♣A
	♠AKQT63	
	♥K94	
	♦	
	♣KQJ8	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	T
N	2	2	2			5
S	2	2	2		4	13
E	5			1		18
W	5			1		

Full credit to Lynleigh Evans for finding the "alarm clock" signal! Creative defence like this wins tops and earns large swings at IMPs – this is an example that's worthy of your attention. However, you need to try to get partner on your wavelength, otherwise your brilliance will be wasted ...

