Squeezes: Tutorial #1

What is a squeeze?
A squeeze is a technique by which you can make an extra trick in a contract, so long as the cards are laid out correctly. This is best demonstrated in a couple of examples.

South is on lead, and leads the ♦ A. West and dummy follow suit, but now East must throw away something. If East throws the heart, declarer cashes his heart and then two clubs, making contract. If East throws away a club, declarer cashes the top two clubs, and finds that the ten of clubs is now good too. Whatever happens, declarer can make all the tricks: East is squeezed.

South is to lead, and begins by cashing the ♠ JT. On the first discard, West and dummy can quite happily follow with a club. On the second discard, however, West is squeezed. If he throws away his heart, dummy pitches a club, and declarer then cashes dummy’s club and heart. If he throws away a club, dummy pitches the heart, and declarer then cashes two club tricks. Again, declarer can make all of the tricks.

Some terminology
Let us begin by introducing some terminology for discussing squeezes. For a squeeze to work, declarer must have two threats. Threats are cards which would win, if only a defender would throw away a key defending card (known as a guard). The suits in which these threats lie are known as threat suits; the other suits are called free suits. Identify the threat suits, threats, free suits, and guards in the above two examples.

Your aim is to squeeze one of the defenders, which we will sometimes call the victim. The hand that declarer controls that plays before the victim is known as the lower hand, and the hand that declarer controls that plays after the victim is known as the upper hand. Identify the victim and the upper and lower hands on the above two examples.
Conditions for a squeeze to work
There are a variety of different types of squeezes. The most straightforward is known as the “simple squeeze”. There are four conditions that must be satisfied for a simple squeeze to work. More complicated squeezes occur when one or more of these four conditions are not met, and must be corrected for.

The four conditions required for a simple squeeze to work can be summarized in the acronym BLUE:

- **BUSY**: One defender must hold the guards in two suits. He must be BUSY defending.
- **LOSER**: The LOSER count must be correct. Declarer must have only one loser remaining. Declarer may need to duck tricks early in order to “rectify the count” to set up a squeeze (get to a situation with only one loser remaining).
- **UPPER**: One of the threats must be in the UPPER hand.
- **ENTRY**: You must have an ENTRY to cash the established threat, once a defender discards his guard.

Identify that BLUE is met in each of the examples above.

Running a Simple Squeeze
To operate a simple squeeze, declarer should first identify potential threats. Next, he should check that BLUE is met. One defender should be busy guarding two suits. Declarer should have one loser. One (or both) of the threats should be in the upper hand, and declarer will need an entry to cash the established threat (once it becomes established). Then, he runs off all of his free suit winners. The last of these winners is the squeeze card: the trick it is played to is known as the squeeze trick. Identify the squeeze trick and squeeze card in each of the examples above.

Important: The squeeze card must lie opposite at least one threat.

Note that this means that if one hand holds both threats, then you can only squeeze one opponent, and you need the squeeze card to be in the other hand. If the threats are split, you can squeeze either opponent, and so long as your entries work out, the squeeze card can be in either hand.

Exercises
That’s enough theory - you now know everything you need to know to run a simple squeeze. You’ll learn how to operate squeezes by running through lots of examples. What I want to cover in these tutorials is a little theory each week, and a tonne of examples. Here is your first exercise:

♠️ 65
♥️ AK42
♦️ J65
♣️ AJ83

♠️ AT3
♥️ Q8
♦️ AKQ
♣️ KQ742

The contract is 7NT. West leads the ♠️ 9, and East inserts the ♠️ J on the first trick. You can see twelve top tricks, but that’s where it ends. Good luck!

References
“Bridge Squeezes for Everyone” by David Bird, “Kelsey on Squeeze Play” by Hugh Kelsey, and “Bridge Squeezes Complete: Winning Endplay Strategy” by Clyde E. Love (the bible on squeezes).