

Chess Master's True Adventures by **BEGINNING** **Jude** **DON'T MISS A WORD** **Acers** **Start below**

Berkeley



Barb

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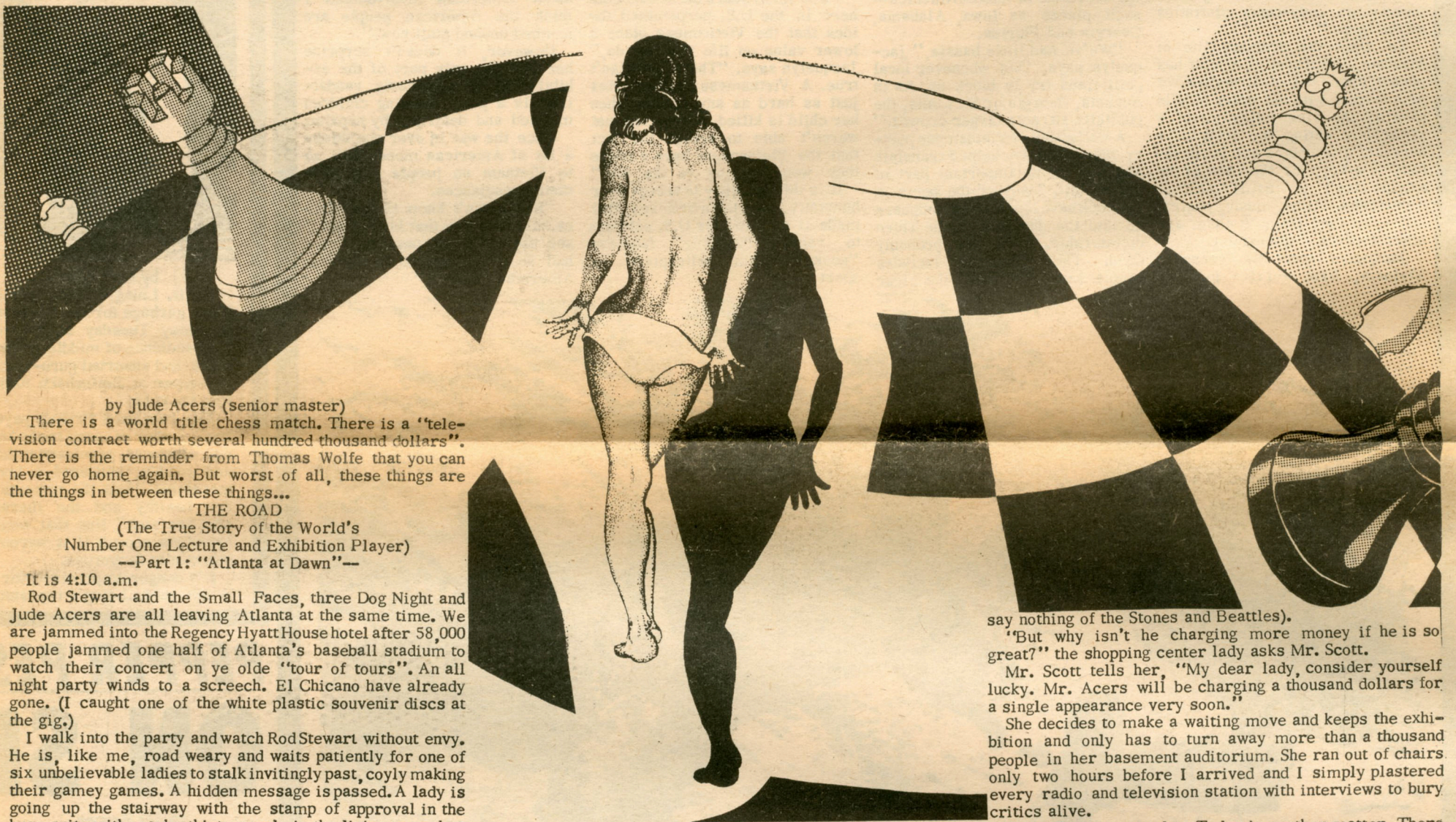
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25¢ OUTSIDE OF BAY AREA 15¢ BAY AREA



by Jude Acers (senior master)

There is a world title chess match. There is a "television contract worth several hundred thousand dollars". There is the reminder from Thomas Wolfe that you can never go home again. But worst of all, these things are the things in between these things...

THE ROAD

(The True Story of the World's
Number One Lecture and Exhibition Player)
--Part 1: "Atlanta at Dawn"--

It is 4:10 a.m.

Rod Stewart and the Small Faces, three Dog Night and Jude Acers are all leaving Atlanta at the same time. We are jammed into the Regency Hyatt House hotel after 58,000 people jammed one half of Atlanta's baseball stadium to watch their concert on ye olde "tour of tours". An all night party winds to a screech. El Chicano have already gone. (I caught one of the white plastic souvenir discs at the gig.)

I walk into the party and watch Rod Stewart without envy. He is, like me, road weary and waits patiently for one of six unbelievable ladies to stalk invitingly past, coyly making their gamey games. A hidden message is passed. A lady is going up the stairway with the stamp of approval in the huge suite with maybe thirty people in the living room below. One of them is me, sitting on the floor with a beer bottle that is not going to be used as I do not drink. In only two hours I will be on a plane to August, Georgia, and a 40-board simultaneous chess exhibition, but people-watching is the name of the game until I absolutely must go.

Several ladies, all semi-nude, check me out. I could lie, but explain that I am a professional chessmaster on a U.S. tour and am really not invited to this here gathering. I continue sitting on the floor. Rod Stewart, with honey No. 1,009 in the loft is moving stealthily toward the stairway when something routine but nifty happens. A hand pops Stewart a white sign. He puts the little placard on the third stair-step and climbs past it. Now you know I am going to have to read that sign. It says, "To whom it may concern: Do not come up these stairs. This means you!"

I would never dream of trespassing. However, I now become guilty. Just above me there is, unbelievably, a crack in the loft wall and a sensuous, nice, nifty lady is outlined in the magnificently placed lightbulb. Wow! What would Martin Morrison and Russell W. Miller (the two people who have booked all my exhibitions and lectures since 1968) say? Morrison, a Latin instructor and classics scholar, would add, "Look on, Jude! Peeping toms have been known since the days of the centurions." Miller would say, "Just goes to prove my client is always in the right place at the right time." Miller would then proceed to sell chess books to everybody in the band. Boy, would they be surprised!

In the middle of the living room a knockout lady is telling how she likes to whip men and that her current flame is due for hard times. "He will do anything I tell him to," she says. Next week in Texas she plans to make him undress and leave him in the middle of the road during the long drive from Dallas to New Mexico. "He'll think I'm joking when I leave him there and that I am coming back. But I'll floor it all the way." Oh. It will be so neat. So unexpected. Sure.

Time for one last look at the bathtub of a top pop group party. It is jammed with dozens of unopened champagne bottles, beer bottles and ice that simply does not seem to melt at all.

And now, Jude Acers, it is time for you to go. You are leaving on a jet plane. All your bags are packed. A girl looked at me for the fourth time in a moment, "Are you really a chess player...for a living, I mean?" she says. "Yes, Ma'am," you say and you leave. She stares, curious.

knowing that she has blown it by games. "Jude, that's a good name for a chessplayer," she says slyly. "Jude, Jude." You are gone now.

The cab is \$5.55 to the airport and you of course make the plane by one minute, of course using the ticket, of course, provided by U.S. Tour Manager Russell W. Miller and of course the schedule Miller provides is perfectly correct. The cab driver has seen three photographs of you on the front page of the city newspapers, has seen you twice on NBC nationwide news and knows that you are the biggest cash attraction in the chess world save a shark from Brooklyn. He tries to push off cab far, is thrilled to talk to you. You insist on paying: multimillionaire. Karl Bach has taught you well: pay for service, always be very courteous, and be thankful it's him, not you driving the cab. He gets you to autograph the morning newspaper. Wow!

Several passengers on the plane recognize you instantly. A lady says, "My boy played you, Mr. Acers. Did you really grow up in an orphanage where they took away your chess set? You're terrific on T.V." You autograph a magazine for her little boy.

The stewardesses all stop to talk to me, stare wide-eyed as they pass. Without exception, they are smiling: A-plus inviting smiles. I wonder curiously about this. Is it the hairy chest? Or is it my sexy looks in general? Or is it another case of the times-they-are-a-changing? Translation: Gee, thanks again Mr. Robert James Fischer and Boris Spassky!

You hide the horrible problem that awaits you in Augusta, Georgia. It is so bad that you cannot know how bad. You are suddenly nervous, drink cokes and three quick cups of coffee. You have been warned by Miller that a crank has passed the word to store and shopping centers throughout Georgia that your exhibitions will not draw 3,000 people in Atlanta in a single hour plus 6 television stations. The fast action of Atlanta veteran expert William Scott III (the first black chessplayer ever to play in a Southern whitey chess tournament) saved your Atlanta exhibition appearances. The publisher of the Negro paper "The Atlanta Daily World", Scott found his father shotgunning to death in their garage when he was a small boy. Scott, unaffected by the past, is always helping, caring, giving a damn about things. He rushed around Atlanta, explaining that Jude Acers was the greatest thing since Wrigley's chewing gum and Elvis Presley (to

say nothing of the Stones and Beatles).

"But why isn't he charging more money if he is so great?" the shopping center lady asks Mr. Scott.

Mr. Scott tells her, "My dear lady, consider yourself lucky. Mr. Acers will be charging a thousand dollars for a single appearance very soon."

She decides to make a waiting move and keeps the exhibition and only has to turn away more than a thousand people in her basement auditorium. She ran out of chairs only two hours before I arrived and I simply plastered every radio and television station with interviews to bury critics alive.

But that was yesterday. Today is another matter. There is no way out. No exhibition has ever occurred in Augusta. Only one radio and television station has booked an interview with you and only because she pleaded desperately.

Five hundred miles away she is behind a desk in her small office. Her name is Ruth and her son has been killed in a horrible motorcycle accident just a few weeks ago. Her job as promotion director stands to be shaky and is riding on the booked appearance of a chessmaster she has never seen. Her house is badly in need of plumbing repair and she has many other worries. She barely recalls booking me and now knows that she has a disaster with no public interest in a simultaneous chess exhibition. She phones her man at the airport who is to rush me to interviews. The last plane touches down and Ruth's man does not believe that a mop-haired, blue-jean kid could be the most successful chessmaster ever to tour. He lets me walk right past and rush to a cab. It is a hopeless mess of disorganization, lack of enthusiasm and probably the end of Ruth's job. The sun blazes into the window and you pull the cab visor down and the wheels are going for Augusta, Georgia.

Unknown to Ruth, however, there are a few simple facts which give her a chance. Russell W. Miller, two thousand miles away is beginning to hit. Angered by lack of cooperation by local chess players and organizers in Georgia, Miller flips when he receives a curt note, insulting, guaranteeing that Acers's appearance will be poorly received. It is from critic No. 1 again. Miller kills.

The word was passed to me by a long distance phone call that it's going to be tough in Augusta. Miller floods newspapers, radio, television stations (one hundred miles around Augusta) with press releases at the last second. He tells me, "Jude, we must keep going. We've got to prove to Edmondson and everybody else that our methods work." He tells me to bomb Augusta with the full treatment.

Naturally, I know that all prison exhibitions, repeat bookings will be affected by a poor exhibition. ...the cab keeps moving.

Ruth is phoning the television station, fighting tears, to tell them that Jude Acers has not arrived when Jude Acers walks into the television station. The whole television station comes alive. I have switched to a burgundy shirt and tie, mind whirring. Ruth is hysterical, knowing that

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ACERS LATEST QUAKER

'The Road'

→ From page 1

she has been unable to promote the exhibition, that she has "failed". She is crying almost and asks me not to leave but to try the exhibition anyway.

In that moment the die is cast. Overwhelmed, I say, "Ma'am, when you sent a postcard a year ago to my manager, you knew nothing about chess or me. My manager has told me to play here and believe me it's going to go great. And I have news for you—I am going to take this city apart. Augusta, Georgia is going to shake, rattle and roll. By this afternoon the entire city will be phoning every shopping center, television station and newspaper, asking for details about my exhibitions, and the newspapers and television stations that refused to promote my exhibitions are going to beg for interviews within hours, and the answer which you are to give to all these Monday morning quarterbacks is 'No, period.'"

Ruth is stunned, but suddenly understands that amateur day is over, that something is happening, frenzied, different. She audibly regains confidence on the other end of the line. "And Ruth, let me clue you in: I am not just great, I am tremendous. I am dynamite. I make things happen. Augusta, Georgia has never seen the likes of me. I am the greatest exhibition and lecture player who ever lived, and we shall soon see what happens to all these idiots who give you trouble. My manager is on the case already. See you later."

I hang up and tell the T.V. people: "Get ready, because this interview is going to be dynamite." It was. For 10 minutes, videotaped for later showing as well, I discussed the Fischer-Spassky match, the four great myths of chess: (1) Chess is a hard game to learn to play (I've taught hundreds of children how to play in half an hour with a large demonstration board or a private lesson.); (2) "Women cannot play chess—I could give any woman a knight odds," boasted Fischer (Nonsense! Nona Gaprindashvili would beat Fischer 20-0 with those odds.); (3) Chess takes years to play (I've played more than 100 games in one exhibition in less than 9 hours. I once played Peter Manetti, a U.S. master, hundreds of games without a break even for food in 1968.); (4) Chess is an old man's (young man's) game (Masters occur, even grandmasters, in all age groups--Lasker, Botvinnik, Reshevsky were powerhouses in their sixties, beating the best in major tournaments!).

I touch on my fight with the U.S. Chess Federation. Southerners love a feud! Then it is over with. A gracious "thank you for my courteous reception in Augusta."

Within one half hour the entire television station switchboard is swamped with phone calls. I refuse to speak to anyone, even media people who want me badly now.

I know from enormous experience on my 200 city tours that those people will now mercilessly hound all media for details. "Is it free?" "Who is he?" "How can I play him?" The media deserve this.

Ruth's shopping center telephone begins to ring, the first

of more than 500 telephone calls she will get this afternoon. Suddenly she must reverse her thinking--she now realizes that out of sheer pride and machismo, yes, for the hell of it, a man is going to pack her shopping center so that breathing will be difficult. "Where am I going to put the people? I can't believe this! Oh God, I can't believe this!" But that's her problem, one she is delighted to have. Newsmen are going crazy. "Is he Fischer or something?" one asks Ruth. "Comparing him to anybody is hopeless. He is so, so speedy. So sure of himself," she laughs, and you hear her hang up. She has the boss attraction. She's the boss now.

Twenty-five minutes after the television interview you come face to face with a crippled radio newscaster who has been in this building in the middle of nowhere for thirty-five years. You like him immediately and his tiny right arm only adds to his novelty. The only in-depth interview (besides Scott's one hour radio program) that you have agreed to give in Georgia. The interview went like gangbusters, 20 minutes of discussion by question and answer that every listener can easily understand. You tell about grandmaster Walter Browne of Australia and his can of beans! About Koltanowski's world record blindfold exhibition in which he played 35 opponents at one time blindfolded (mentally) WITHOUT LOSING ONE GAME! Augusta, Georgia goes crazy. Phone calls just pour into EVERY radio station. As I am leaving I refuse to answer any phone calls. Let the people of this city announce that Jude Acers is here, I think to myself.

I rush to my motel, tell the desk that I am not accepting calls from anyone but Miller and Ruth. And I sleep for twenty hours straight and eat a huge steak. Everybody in the restaurant recognized me immediately and this is before my exhibition, mind you. And now the time has com. You call a cab. ...

I tell the driver to drive me around to the back of the shopping center twenty blocks away. I already know that the crowd will be ten deep at the little courtyard exhibition site, which had seemed so cold, barren on cursory examination yesterday. I have made arrangements with Ruth to sneak into a rear entrance door like any normal superstar to avoid the crowd. Nevertheless, three reporters are waiting beside the small door, respectfully watching as I enter like a speeding bullet. They are awestruck at my arrogance, confidence. I give quick routine answers to questions I have heard. They leave and suddenly I notice a reporter standing all alone, trembling with a tape recorder. He could not be a day over 18. "Mr. Acers, my father sent me down to get an interview. God damn trouble is that I don't know a God damn thing about chess, Mr. Acers." He is shook. I smile, relax and tell him four questions to ask. Then I give him the most powerpacked, ricker-racker-rocker interview his father's damn radio station will run if it lasts longer than Rome itself. He is grateful. "You're the greatest, Mr. Acers," he says as

he hurries out. "I know!" I scream after him, laughing.

And now I am alone in the back room. I get one last cup of coffee and stare down the long hall, which I walk down a few minutes later. I pick up my demonstration board, blast down the hall, swing open the door and there are more than a thousand people staring at the door.

Ruth, aglow with worry, whirls and kisses me.

"Mommy, that's him. That's the real live chessman. The Chess King!" one child excitedly cries and runs to grab my hand. I smile and pat his head, moving quickly.

I never give a lecture at such a public exhibition, but today make an exception. With the polished stage presence developed in dozens of prison and club freebees so many years ago I set up my demonstration chess board (a movie screen with plastic insert chess pieces that can be seen for a city block) and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, you do me great honor by coming to this exhibition. I would like to show you my favorite game of all time: Adolph Anderssen against Dr. Max Lange, Breslau, Germany, 1858." A thousand people were absolutely quiet. I owned the place. I could have conducted a fire drill in the open air or a circus. I mean it was unbelievable.

The game analysis and whole presentation had been worked out in countless hotel and motel shower rooms. (I take at least 6 showers a day, usually. This makes for a lot of chess lectures, about 45 in all prepared so far.)

A thundering ovation followed the lecture and then down to business. Almost 50 players (all that could possibly be squeezed into the table rectangle) opposed me. I used major grandmaster theory on almost every board. This is really pointless and cruel for a simultaneous exhibition, but I was not in any mood to do anything but kill my opponents. I wanted my detractors to know my class and I put three USCF experts out of there in less than three hours. In the end I think I lost two games out of 47 and fought ferociously in those. It was over. Hundreds stayed all 5 hours, until midnight.

Morning. It is raining. Your bags are packed. You're leaving on a jet plane. The public sees only the "money", the "fame" of a chess master. Your tiredness, critics, loneliness will never go away. You know that you will be on the road until the day you die. At the airport, waiting.

Two thousand miles away Russell Miller is typing out press releases, grinning sometimes and licking stamps for the next exhibition. He has not seen you in a year.

You see that your photograph is on the FRONT PAGE of the Augusta, Georgia newspaper.

You turn at the top of the plane stairs and look at the homey, southern airport.

In a moment of insanity you call out, "Augusta, Georgia, now you know me!"

You turn and a curious stewardess purses her lips to ask something, but decides not to. She gives you a phoney plastic smile. She knows you are mad.

It is over.