



CHESS BARBS



Baton Rouge memories...An old house has a dead man's chess notebook and two candles. Hear the wind, the hurricane. Hear Bach on rock-and-roll station KAAAY of Little Rock, Arkansas. Hear the knocking of a negligent tree. Find....

THE GREATEST CHESS GAME EVER PLAYED THE ROAD Part XIII

The reporter has to find a handle. He asks you the question that has no answer, according to the chess masters. "Jude, is the game Efwm Bogoljubov against Alexander Alekhine, Hastings, England, in 1922 the best game ever played?" You look at him and slowly shake your head in disagreement before he can finish his question. You do not dare tell him that you know the moves of the very best game, that it was played 112 years ago. No, that would take too much time.

The reporter wants to know what makes a great chess game. You tell him that your lecture tour games illustrate what the immortal game must possess. First, there must be great visual interest as the chess moves are shown to the beginner or the master. Second, the immortal chess game must be instructive and an "open" game. Third, it must be played by famous chess masters, or the public will not accept it and chess journals will not reprint it. Fourth, it must not be a long, technical "masterpiece," for it must be a game you would love to show to a friend over coffee. Fifth, it must have "wow capacity," the ability to make Paul Vayssie, Donna Comini, Dennis Waterman, Julio Kaplan, "Supervolk" and more than a thousand convicts in prisons say "Wow!" It does not have to be a perfect game, however...

Go ahead, Jude. Tell him the greatest game ever, who played it, where, when. Tell him the story. It is a television interview, and there is no time...

Huey P. Long was killed 11 blocks from 508 and 504 Convention Street. You could see the bullet holes in the governor's office now, though it was just a hallway then. You could see one of the world's most beautiful women answering the telephone in formal southern belle fashion as you entered to ask Gus Weill for some Louisiana money for a chess master, and he tells you, "Boy, there ain't gonna be no free ride. Get a job." The state legislators are taking the long way to the parking lot to see the nice lady just one more time as you head down the beautiful steps, which have every state in America engraved below your feet. You hustle a nice lady elevator operator only a few feet from where Dr. Carl Weiss made up his mind to murder Long 30 years ago.

It must have been a strange murder. Carl Weiss had watched Long push through legislation in the morning session and calmly walked to his house to get his gun off the wall. Returning for the afternoon session was just a matter of walking and waiting in the hall. Long obligingly stopped in the hall to talk at just the right moment for Dr. Weiss to put a rather harmless bullet into the senator's body.

It should not have been the end, but was because Long was able to walk to the parking lot saying "Why did he shoot me?" to O. K. Allen and refuse necessary surgery until his trusted New Orleans doctors could whiz 90 miles to big B.R. By then he was doomed to die, but hung in there for better than 20 hours before saying to hell with it. There were no conspiracy trials, no posthumous letters, just two bodies. Long's bodyguards made Weiss a very holy man, and guaranteed rumor and a hundred theories would have an eternal Louisiana playground.

As one walks down the state capitol steps, the real beauty of Louisianian green sweeps behind the statue and grove of Huey. P. Long. I reflect that T. Harry Williams, the famous Long biographer, had watched me play 20 students simultaneously in front of the LSU library. "Did you really beat all those chaps?" he said with a wink and Boyd Professor of history smile. "Why, of course, sir! Why don't you believe in the great me?" (Wink.)

The capitol grounds were the nighttime playground of Miss Gail Melton and Mr. Jude Acers. I mean that we played hide-and-seek, raced, wrestled for real. No we were not evil, readers! We smelled real flowers and explored a maze of the most beautiful gardening possible, while everyone else was being evil. Downtown Baton Rouge was deserted paradise during the night.

In 1971 I stood beside the capitol building and could see the beautiful grounds, the lake and our lady of the Lake Hospital. It was there that I sold my blood for \$11 a crack during hard times in LSU days. It was there that Long chose death rather than let one of the local surgeons put the blade to his bod. Tough.

Just five blocks along the Mississippi river bank was the "Three Coins Inn," where I kissed Mary Anne Jones for the first time. The railroad station, which no train had used in years, was seven blocks away, as was the old state capitol building, where I had kissed Mary Anne for the second and last time below the "monstrosity," as Mark Twain had labeled it a century before. The Greek Fountains, the fabulous big B.R. answer to the Rolling Stones, were playing in the century-old ballroom in hot, humid Louisiana night...until Cyril Vetter, the drummer who wrote the million-selling "Double Shot of My Baby's Love," joined the Coast Guard and killed the Greek Fountains.

There is not a block of downtown Baton Rouge or the river levee that I did not walk hundreds of times just to do something. Mr. James Bond (believe it or not!) is still the ticket agent at the Greyhound bus depot. He still remembers you were Baton Rouge's most sensational non-conformist. He still finds your lost luggage, when nobody else can, beneath the shadow of the monstrosity.

"You just might be the most remarkable young man to live in these parts," he tells Jude Acers. A fan forever. "Of course, you always looked worried, a little out of place, a little nervous in those days. Believe me, you were the talk of the town," Mr. Bond adds. "You sure did travel a lot in those years. And the newspapers used to run your picture a lot, I recall. Didn't you write a book report or something? I remember reading a long opinion you wrote. My wife saw it, showed it to me..."

The real estate people of Baton Rouge will tell you that the lily-white Baptist church wants badly to make a huge parking lot out of 508 and 504 Convention Street. Those buildings are a horror to the eyes of the congregation in the lovely all-white building on Sundays. However, the owners of 508 and 504 are not dumb-bunnies either. They just keep jacking up the price just when the church directors are ready to meet the last offer. Tucked into the walls of those abandoned shells, I lived five years while all this wheeling and dealing was a'going on.

Even though you might not like the Louisiana chess playing weirdo, you had to admit he was rather dramatic. It was less than one block from the death house of Earl K. Long (where A. J. Liebling concluded that the dying, insane, lady-crazy governor probably still had more on the ball than any Louisiana politician in history), where Jude Acers would grab hold of a huge white church pillar, stand like Napoleon on a pedestal and await the arrival of some nice Louisiana lady to take him to the movies.

It was at 504 Convention that such great classics as "The Red, Red Flashing Light of Death" and "He is Cutting, Cutting, Chopping Her to Pieces, And She Is Dying" were written and published in "The Chess Commentator." These were actual experiences published in a mimeograph stencil sheet, and they caused a minor sensation in Baton Rouge. You can still find them in the LSU library. "We've even micorfilmed them, Mr. Acers. We feel they have real historical value in the Louisiana history room. Even though you don't seem to realize what an unusual writer you are, we certainly do!" the head librarian tells you. A fan forever.

Little by little, LSU students would find me at 504 Convention. A bright-eyed sorority doll drives up and looks. "Excuse me, is this where that man almost killed that woman?" she asks Jude Acers, sitting on the porch.

"Yes, ma'am," says Jude.

"Is this really where that famous chess player named Jude lives?" the lady follows up.

"Yes, ma'am," says Jude.

"Do you actually know Jude?" she continues, amazed.

"Yes, ma'am, I do," says Jude.

"He must be fantastic to live through an experience like that. He must be a great person to write like that," she says.

"Yes, ma'am, he sure is, believe me," says Jude.

"Why does he live in this creepy building, though...?"

She drives away slowly after saying, "I sure would like to meet him sometime. Everybody talks about him. He sure is strange!" She stares back at Jude Acers one last time, as he stares at her. They never meet again. The thermometer reads 94 degrees at 6 pm...

It has been many years now. Only Mr. Bond knows that Jude Acers is in town. I walk over to the old building at 504 Convention and creak open the screen door. The late landlord, Chester Smith, had told me, "Four people have been murdered in your room since 1921. We've always had trouble renting that room until you came along." Hush, hush, sweet Charlotte. Woooooo...now silence. That corner was where the postman had tossed Albert Horowitz's Chess Openings: Theory and Practice. I did not notice it for two months, covered with dust. When I did, I sent a book review two columns long to the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate. They did not receive it from the post office for two more months, though I mailed it six blocks from the newspaper's front door. When they did get it, they did not print the review for two more months, and I did not read it for two more months after that. Things are a little slow in the southern heat, y'all understand...

Albert Horowitz, far away at the chess desk of the New York Times, simply flipped with delight at my careful review in a deep south newspaper. Only Jude Acers has the horsepower, chutzpah, cunning and all the promotional games down cold. This is what is needed to review a chess volume in the bayou country.

"How did you do it, young man?" Horowitz wrote.

"Why would you do me such a wonderful favor?"

"Because I was the eleven-year-old teeniebopper to whom you wrote an encouraging letter ten years ago, old man! That's why I did you such a wonderful favor!" Jude Acers shoots back on a postcard to Al Horowitz. "I'm your fan forever...!"

"You are going to be a famous chessmaster, young man. Remember what Frank Marshall said. If you want to come back to a chess club for an exhibition, don't win every game, and be sure to offer a draw with the key club organizer at an early stage!" the late Albert Horowitz writes. It is positively miraculous what a young man can learn from his elders without half trying. That tip must have been worth a cool \$5000 in free lodging, meals, publicity and cold cash in tough years, and the cash register is still clicking.

Well, no use standing at 504 all afternoon. Let's have one more look upstairs and go next door to look at the flat where the taxi stopped. She must be dead now. What was her name? Grave? Yes, Mrs. Grave... Go next door.

Here was where my coffeepot was plugged into the wall. People had to trek to the rear of the rooming house, through mud and drying clothes, creakup creaking steps and across creaking floorboards to knock on the only occupied room in the perpetually creepy condemned building, which only had 65 cited violations of the city building code. It was very exciting living in such a building, because just staying alive from day to day was quite a surprise. In four years, only four ladies dared enter to see me. I had already had my quota for the year when the footsteps at midnight were tapping on the pavement. Mrs. Grave was coming to see Jude Acers.

I heard light pitter-patter footsteps below my screen window, the same screen window through which I had seen (A) the kitchen light bulb next door, (B) a woman gasping and bleeding, (C) a man coming behind her and cutting her repeatedly with a knife and leaving her for dead as she tumbled unconscious out of the screen door, eyes staring in huge circles at me. After that experience, you would think that anything outside my window had to be an improvement. Not so. Paranoia strikes deep. The threat was greater than the execution. You could hear her. First she is on the sidewalk. Now the mud. Now the back steps. The back porch. Creak, creak goes the screen door. What is that sound?

Afraid to move, I wait breathlessly. There is tapping on door one at midnight. Door two. It is getting closer...

Rap, rap, rapping on the door of four. Hellooo comes the voice. I hobble to the door and lift it open, since the door has come completely off its hinges and Mr. Smith has not gotten around to fixing it after only two years. She is incredibly brave, standing there in pitch darkness and looking at your big strapping six-foot monster chess master lift the door into the hallway at midnight. I was scared to death, and this sixtyish lady is classy and calm.

"Excuse me, sir. Are you the champion chess player of Louisiana State University, sir? Mr. Jude Acers..." She was holding something with both hands.

"Well...ahhh...yes, ma'am. Ahh...Wh...What...Is something wrong?"

"Mr. Acers, my husband died in the hospital last week, and he asked me to give you his chess diary. I'm moving to Oregon tonight and had a lot of trouble finding you. I got your address from LSU student information this afternoon. I hope you don't mind me waking you like this."

Although I have never been noted for my style in etiquette, I had enough sense to be cool and invite the lady into my room for some of my poisoned coffee. Flattering for words, I learned that her husband had played chess by mail from a hospital bed and wheelchair during the last 20 years of his life. Mr. and Mrs. Grave had read the very first interview of Jude Acers ever published by a city newspaper, the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate and State Times. It was not exactly a biggie world shaking piece. Or was it?...She seemed to know something, understand what a momentous weirdo she was meeting. She treated the occasion carefully. She was assured, friendly and completely at ease.

"He wanted you to have this diary of chess games. He's been keeping these for 50 years, almost. Can you tell if they are any good, Mr. Acers?"

You look through a few pages of ink and realize that all of the games are beginner, amateur chess duels, save two Paul Morphy oldies that you spot in the middle section. Hundreds of curious but worthless games played by Mr. Grave in dozens of different inks and faded pencil. Tell her? You're dumb, but not that dumb. You lie. "Sure. Thank you ver much. I can look at these games and learn things from them." She brightens visibly and is gald she came. God, how can she stand that coffee? Ugh....

The taxi driver makes his way outside the window and taps.

"Mrs. Grave? Do you want me to stay here awhile longer? Is he here?" the man says.

"Oh, I forgot. Yes, I'll be right there. Goodbye, Mr. Acers. Thank you so much. One more thing. Exactly how do you say your first name?" You tell her and thank her again with smiles all around.

She walks carefully to the back door and she knows that we shall never meet again. It is the most agonizing thing of all, an intellectual one-night stand that goes nowhere. The taxi driver escorts her carefully down the alley and the car lights hang a left in front of the church pillar, where you do your Napoleon routine for the ladies. You turn out the lights and go to sleep. You are, as always, alone...

KAAAY of Little Rock, Arkansas is the rock-and-roll station that is humming over the battery operated radio. They know about the hurricane in Louisiana. Bach is playing. Two years have passed. You've moved to the third story attic of 504 Convention and the building is swaying one or two feet, back and forth. This is my third hurricane while hidden away in abandoned buildings in Baton Rouge. When you are Jude Acers you go it alone and wear black sweat shirts with "Jude F. Acers, US Chessmaster" printed in large white letters, of course. LSU football team, take that. Kowan-ko-uhhh-Chuga-chuga. Yes, that shirt sure does shake those fraternity guys up, as they are throwing beer bottles at you along the highway.

Still, things are getting a little hairy during this particular hurricane in the needlepoint attic. It might just break off the house and carry you all the way to Honduras. Think about it. You realize that it is you that is moving, not the tree trunk outside the attic window. You realize that men on the chessboard are

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getting up and telling themselves where to go. I actually saw Pillsbury's king leap three squares in a single bound. The two candles were sliding or was it the table moving beneath them? Pillsbury's king came right back to its original square as I was studying analysis of Pillsbury against Dr. Tarrasch, Hastings, 1895 from a newspaper clipping. The chess pieces are vibrating in extreme nervousness, if not actually moving by themselves.

Believe me, that did it. I jumped up and was now ready to move to the second floor, as the wind is screaming and shaking the tile off the roof inches away...

Suddenly you are awfully sorry about your criticism of that wonderful, sweet lady, Bette Davis. You had laughed when someone seriously suggested you see the film, "Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte," one of the most terrifying films ever made. You laughed, said Bette Davis was "over the hill, finished." But you went anyway, and little Bette Davis scared the living death out of you with her remarkable acting... What if Bette Davis did kill that man with her axe? What if she is waiting on the passageway or beneath the stairs, to take care of you Jude baby???

I swear that I actually considered the possibility, as I gingerly edged down the swaying staircase in the pitch black morgue of past generations, two flickering candles in my unsteady hands, a chessboard and pocket radio pressed beneath my arm. S-l-o-w-l-y, I went down, fully prepared to whirl right back to the attic if Bette Davis so much as said, "Hey, Jude." If she had an axe, I would simply kick the bucket to save time and keep her from getting all that blood on her dress again. Can you imagine... Serves you right for criticizing a dynamite actress and genuine lady. You'll learn. You shiver with horror with every step... Jesus H. Christ.

At the second level you see water flooding the first floor and coming up the stairs. This is routine and happens during every hurricane. You go over to the window and see the tree tapping the wall outside. You set up your candles and chess set as before. Nothing to study but the Pillsbury game. You've left all your chess books in a locker at Allen Hall, three miles down Highland Road at LSU Relax. For goodness sake, don't worry about Bette Davis murdering you with her

axe. You place the last chess piece on the board and play through ten moves of Pillsbury's attack against Tarrasch. Is Reuben Fine correct? If Black plays pawn to h6 on the 36th move, is Dr. Tarrasch actually winning? Well, gosh, I must examine this with care. Let's see...

Crash-boom-boom. Jude Acers looks up and a tree is coming through the living room wall. No kidding. There is the tree branch on the floor, a big hole in the wall! It is raining, as is normal in your average hurricane. Well, well. It's getting damp, very damp in the second floor chess room. No matter, chess players are crazy. Ignore it. The chess pieces that are very nervous on floor three are being bathed on floor two. Back to the attic.

Ignoring dangerous factors that have to be allowed anyway at the pressure stage is routine for a chess master. As grandmaster Paul Keres reminds us, the chess player must learn to suffer. So what if Bette Davis is waiting for Jude Acers with an axe as he goes back up the stairs to escape drowning or extreme cold. Then he would have three choices...

You climb up the the swaying attic. You can hear the wooden walls creaking. Yaaakh...yaaw...yaakh. Light the candles again. No chess set this time. The chess pieces are all over the floor downstairs. What if that tree keeps hitting the wall downstairs and puts, well, like a huge crease across the house, and it just snaps like a pretzel with you inside the pretzel? Jude Acers makes a crucial, crazy decision. If he is going to go, he is going to die clutching chessmen in his fingers. He goes downstairs looks for all the chessmen. As he pulls at the tree branch, he gets a horrible shock. He sees Bette Davis. For real. It was only a newspaper advertisement on the floor, but it scared Jude most horribly.

It had happened at the worst possible time. What if it wasn't a coincidence at this most unfortunate moment. Jesus H. Christ... Where is your mind, kid? ... Jude, Jude, get hold of yourself. Jude, Jude, stay calm. Think about, well, anything but Bette Davis and her axe...

Going back upstairs is accomplished in world record time. Jude is not worried, really. Jude is not superstitious. But when Jude Acers reaches the attic room, he weighs the matter most carefully and double locks the door from the inside, fastens the door bolt

and drops the chain lock...all in three seconds flat. No use taking chances. H, ha... The question is down. Can Bette Davis crack the door with her axe? The wind is going "ohh...yesss...ohhh...yesss..."

Reach out in my room. Get a book, any book. Try to read it by tilting it toward the candle. Brave Jude is not afraid; brave Jude will survive. Play the radio. Yes, turn it up, all the way up. Then you won't hear her footsteps as she comes up the stairs. You will never hear her whispering, "Jude. Jude. I've come to take you with me, Jude." Woooooooooooooo...

Yes, a book. You look in a yellow trash bucket beside your brown briefcase. It is a notebook. What is this? A book by Mr. Grave. This is the most unfortunate author... You browse through the pages in nervousness, listening and fully expecting footsteps, wide awake, terrified. The chess games in the book were boring, useless.

Mr. Grave continually played a super-duper lemon opening move, pawn to h3, when he had the White pieces in all those games from 1927 to 1960. Every single time, he wrote carefully above 1 h3, "Grave Opening!!!!). Now was the time to maintain sanity, strike back. Do what Paul Morphy and Larry Evans would do with this horrible omen. Carefully, Jude Acers went through the entire notebook and scratched out the word "Opening" and inked above it "Error" at least 200 times. This kept one busy. Relax. Everything was all right now...

It was incredible. I was closing the book, when I noticed faded pencil writing on the back cover. Most unusual. There was a comment beneath the game. I pulled the candle over and squinted my eyes, barely reading "Wow!" It was the only comment by Mr. Grave on any game in the entire book. Clearly, I must go over the moves of this game with the chessboard and chess pieces right now.

At 3:05 am Bach was playing on KAAY radio and I had found the greatest game of all time. It was unknown and has been featured in hundreds of chess lectures throughout the world ever since...

The reporter looks curiously at Jude Acers. "What do you think really is the greatest game of the chess masters, the best chess game ever played?"

Casually, Jude Acers pretends to ponder the matter for a moment. Then he whispers, "Anderssen against Lange, Breslau, 1859."

8/23-29/74