

# THE PRICE

By Jude Acers (US Senior Master)

Are you a "gas pumper," "fool" or a "player?" . . . It is the 33rd city on the United States chess tour by the greatest chess lecturer and exhibition player who ever lived. What to do, what to do? . . . The Rolling Stones and Steppenwolf drop television sets out hotel windows. You settle for smashing telephones against the Holiday Inn wall in Wichita Falls. You think you will never be cheated, spit upon, scorned as Albert Horowitz and George Koltanowski experienced on their murderous bygone tours. Miller and Edmondson had warned you. You think you are getting away with it. Think again, Jude, baby. It is time to pay in your blood. The bill is past due. Pay up.

I walk up to the Holiday Inn desk. I have ignored Blubber's hastily worded offer to try to sell chess lessons to chess players in Wichita Falls. I have said nothing as he scrambles luggage to the door of the -- credit where credit is due -- very beautiful hotel and its second deck pool. The clerk asks me what type of room will be wanted. "The best room for one" is the reply. I flip my American-Express-Richard-Brautigan-club-membership-card across the desk. Blubber is shook and follows me to the door of my room. I open the door and turn half-way around toward Blubber Cadillac. No offer from Blub.

"I'll phone Mr. Miller, my tour manager, immediately. It's his decision," I say without raising my voice in deeply felt anger. They do this to nice guys like Bisguier and Gligoric, not me, buster. Blubber bursts out, "Mr. Acers, you can't leave now. We have done all the publicity and it's too late. . . ."

I say nothing, but hustle three bags into the room and close the door on Blubber Cadillac forever. It is not hard to predict what will happen. He will race home and phone every chess club member possible. Those phones wires will hummm . . .

For ten minutes in my room I consider what to do to avoid going crazy permanently. The T.V. set. Yes; that's it. Yes, I will drop it out the window like the Rolling Stones do on tour. I grab the T.V. set and lift it off the table. I will throw it through the window and smash it into a thousand pieces. Then I will pick up the telephone and politely inquire as to how much the T.V. costs. They will say a general figure or that they can find out for me. I will reply, "Find out and charge it to my room, please," and mysteriously hang up in the manner of evil Dick Tuck and Hunter S. Thompson.

There are three problems. First, the television set cannot possibly fit through the panel windows of the Holiday Inn. Second, I do not have a 50-yard extension cord for the television set. Third, I am not being featured on an evening newscast for the purpose intended.

You see, Steppenwolf started the world famous television demolition tradition on tour many years ago. The Rolling Stones, however, introduced fashionable variations of play that simply cannot be ignored by the active, top-notch demolition theoretician. You must now have a long extension cord, so that at the precise instant that you appear on the T.V. newscast, you can drop the television like a bomb to the street below and watch yourself explode in living color on NBC. Believe me, it is the supreme high. It is your tough luck if you do not drop the television evenly, so that it falls face toward you all the way. Try again next tour city. And, of course, the Rolling Stones did newscasts in already sold out cities for the express purpose of television demolition in the evening, even though camera news crews would never dream of this. Naturally, half the blast is calling the desk in an all innocent honesty and reporting the accident, concluding with "charge it to my room, please. Thank you very much." You have to pay willingly every cent of the damage or you are not class.

However, I can't consider a television set which is not being dipped out of a window or over the old balcony. My hotel had provisions for neither. Thus, I set the television down. I had my pride. I absolutely could not open my door and toss it out. That would not indicate world class. The television set of Room 204 was saved by an absolute triple miracle. That left the telephone to die. Die, telephone, die.

## I

looked sorrowfully at my room's telephone.

It was now doomed. I shall be released only by smashing something to smithereens. I picked it up and prepared to hurl it into the wall a dozen times, when I realized that the formal cancellation of the exhibition had not yet occurred. Only Russell Miller could do this. Hysterically, I phoned him and screamed obscenities. "What am I doing here? Weren't all housing expenses paid, guaranteed?" Twenty expletives delted. "Get me out of here, Miller! Crash. Boom."

Miller cannot believe that for only the second time in 600 chess exhibitions and lecture appearances, we are going to be cheated. It's going to be a bath, in fact, a flood. He promises to call back in five minutes after venting his own heated brain on Blubber Cadillac. I do not tell Miller that in that five minutes my phone is ended.

Hanging up, I raise the telephone to the sky. I push it with terrific force across the room and it actually rings while it is in the air, just leaving my hand. K - boom goes the phone against the wall, crashing to the floor. Incre-

dibly, it is still in one piece. I decide to pick up the receiver, because the person will become upset and might phone the hotel, worried that some madman is in my room and breaking up my telephone. It is a high school kid on the other end of the wire.

"Mr. Acers, this is Joe Senior calling to ask you to reconsider your decision to cancel your appearance in our city. Please, Mr. Acers. All of us are most anxious to see and play against a chess master this Friday. Please stay, Mr. Acers."

The kid is wonderful. But he cannot know the horror of the last hour and a thousand degree brain. Politely I say, "I'm sorry, but even if I should stay, it would be all-expenses paid and the cost to your chess club would be ten times the fee agreed upon earlier. I was doing it as a benefit."

The boy is audibly sorry. "Mr. Acers, I'm sorry this happ.. ."click. You hang up and raise the telephone into the air. It will be a tremendous shot to the wall this time.

As I wind up the phone rings in my hand and I hear Miller tell me that he has called Blubber and cancelled the exhibition with a few choice words of disillusionment *en passant*. I thank Mr. Miller after he says, "They're really in a spot down there now. They have to offer you mucho money or it's all off." Horsetrader Miller does not realize that I would not appear in Wichita Falls if the Bank of England paid for it. He does not realize that my telephone has received the last reprieve. I hang up and smash the telephone against a chair and the wall, until pieces were all over the floor.

## L

ater that evening I

went down to the lobby and encountered the night desk lady. "Excuse me, ma'am. I have just noticed that there is no telephone in my room."

"How very strange, sir," the lady said. "Somebody must have taken it away in his suitcase," I suggested. (This was so very true.) She said she was sorry, would I like another room? "No, that'll be all right. I'm leaving in a few hours anyway."

As I was leaving Wichita Falls, Texas on the Greyhound bus, I could see a telephone company truck parked in the driveway of the Holiday Inn. I suppose that it must have been a strange case. I kept part of the receiver as a memento for several years. I finally lost it at the Hotel Jerome bar in Aspen, Colorado, the same day I met Dr. Hunter Thompson. Blame it on him. It was all totally wrong, insane. . . .

It had been tough. Now came no breather with Austin, Texas. I was relaxed as the hound pulled past the tower where a man murdered 16 people and shot about 30 in all. I had already considered the matter of a man shooting people from a tower, as in Albert Camus' book, "The Stranger." It seemed to me that the reaction of people during the horrifying massacre at Texas University could be curiously defined. First, when the shooting began, there were those who did not need to look up to the university tower to see where bullets were coming from, bullets that had just killed someone near them. They lit out for places unknown or dove for cover without question. That would be rational, safe and not very adventurous. But I understand it well. They are the "gas pumpers." The second and third groups are the "fools" and the "players."

I go to great lengths to explain my concept of the "fools" in life and the "players" in life, so that you will understand the reason why Austin, Texas all but destroyed my existence, why Austin, Texas happened to me at all. Please try to understand.

The first group of fleeing people are the wise people who will live to old age or have best chances of so doing. I respect these people, although Janis Joplin horrified me by calling them "gas pumpers." Yes, Janis was going back to her high school reunion to tell all her old school chums who spurned her. "I made it big doing my thing. And what are you doing in Port Arthur. . . . still pumping gas?" As if there was something really wrong with living quietly, working in a library or service station, raising a family and dying. To be fair, Janis went back home and was quite a lady, not insulting as she had promised to be when faced with "group A, the gas pumpers."

The second group are the "fools" in life. Group B. These people are those who do not recognize physical reality. The "fools" (not a derogatory term but one of classification) are the people who have to look up again and again at the University of Texas tower to check what they have already experienced: bullets are indeed coming down like hailstones. You stand there and you are shot down a moment later. If you have any reaction time at all and do not escape, you are a "fool." (Shock does not count at all, since you have no reaction time then. You are not in control of your senses, virtual-



ly incapable of making a decision of a gas pumper, fool or player.) So, if you can look up at the tower to see where the bullets are coming from, refusing to believe that they are coming at you despite proof, you are a "fool."

The most common example of a "fool" is, of course, the traffic cop-citizen motorist confrontation. You do not show an officer of the law who stops you for "non-existent" speeding only normal courtesy and respect. You are a "fool" because you do not recognize what has been proven beyond a doubt. The cop's gun can kill you in practice as well as in theory, no matter how contemptuous you might be. We know the policeman may honestly believe you are reaching for a weapon. We know all human beings have their mistaken and evil moments. Stated pure and simple, you could die for no reason at all by the authority of the policeman possesses. It is not paranoia but common sense to realize that a gun fires real bullets and is present and could kill you by the road.

A most dramatic example of the "fools" category was the Kent State murders by the state militia. That the four students who died were unjustifiably murdered by National Guardsmen, according to John Mitchell, US Attorney General (to say nothing of the brilliant documentary by Peter Davies), has absolutely nothing to do with categorization of the victims in the "fools" bracket. They did not wish to believe that real men with real guns and real bullets really would murder them. If they were given the choice, forced to them on paper in writing today, all would have chosen to remain alive or unwounded. They were not taking a risk for a "cause." They repeatedly refused to even think of a bullet entering flesh from a football field length away. That such does not happen in America very often or ever again does not matter for our terms.

It is a curiosity that it was exactly these "fools" who seemed to drive Lenin up the proverbial wall. He hated demonstrators who did it for a holiday, refusing to realize extreme danger when confronting real authority or guns. He hated revolutionary anarchy by its very nature, without organization, planning, timing or follow-up after futile conquest. Recognition of danger and reality escapes the "fools."

By the same token, I know that you would then hold that, for better or for worse, the six SLA people who died in the Los Angeles fire and police action are "fools." No, this is not the case at all. They are "Players" (Group C) and they are totally unlike the Kent State shooting victims.

The SLA individuals were absolutely certain that they would soon die. They repeatedly said so in many ways. They were "players" if they really believed their own words. Whatever their goals, they recognized their certain fate. A "player" sees clear physical facts and play anyway. I am not trying to make heroes, martyrs or villains out of the SLA people, although I am very sorry that they have died. (My political and specific knowledge of the SLA is quite inadequate to judge anything.)

**A**

"player" plays, if necessary, just for the hell of it. He or she tries to climb Mt. Everest solely because it is there. But you must admit the danger. Let us return to the tower, where a man with a brain tumor is murdering people for miles around with a high-powered rifle. The man who went up to the stairway to end the sniper's lifetime is a "player." He knows he must die if he encounters the killer atop the stairway, but plays anyway. You can't say, "Well, it was his job." You didn't see anybody else but two policemen go up those stairs in eight hours, did you? Believe me, there were few volunteers! Think about that

long, long, long climb to the top of the tower with you-know-who waiting at journey's end. Scary isn't it? Yooo-whooo....Peek-a-boo.... Think about it awhile.

The policeman's death would have been totally different from the policeman, hours before, who could not believe dozens of reports coming over his squad car radio that a man was shooting people from the campus tower. So what does he do? He gets out of his car an incredible six or eight blocks away from the sniper and puts his head squarely between two fence railings to gaze up at the tower. He is squarely in the crosshairs of the killer's telescopic gunsight and click. The squad car policeman is one of the "fools," while the stair climber is a "player," even though their fate might easily be the same. A "fool" might not live, a "player" might die.

A final, excellent example of the "players" in Austin, Texas were the ambulance daredevils on campus. They realized the danger, but said to the man in the tower, "You have the gun. For the hell of it I'm going to zig-zag around in the open territory and 'rescue' the wounded people out there whether you shoot or not." They played for no profits, of course, they and the people they were dragging could focus the attention of the assassin on them, getting everybody killed anyway.

It is never better to be a gas pumper, fool or player. Fate decides who lives or dies. I am merely pointing out the extreme accuracy with which it is possible to see human beings react to danger or a stimulus of pressure or life and death situation of any kind. You will understand that I happen to be a player without exception, though this certainly is not complimentary to me. It is just me in Austin.

Are all people in the world gas pumpers, fools, players? No! Go to the racetrack. All the people who are spectators watching the gas pumpers, fools, players are non-doers. They are not in the horserace of life. They do nothing in the way of participation, really. These are the people who believe a president is a good person because he wears a suit and tie and goes to church on Sunday and has been president already. These are the people who believe fighting, bombing for America is good, while not fighting, not bombing for America is very evil. "Spectators" are total mechanical people without existence, watching T.V. football games, drinking beer and reading comic books. It is not "wrong" to be a spectator, remember. We observe that most people, particularly the aged, are spectators. They could live, but refuse. No real conscious decisions are made by the spectator. He is not a doer. He does not strive for excellence, quality. He accepts.

All the racehorses on the track are probably 30 per cent of all people. The rest are not really alive at all. Incidentally, the man in the tower with the brain damage doesn't count as a rational figure. He is destroyed, helpless, tragic, forgotten in our view as he seemed to be by the university psychiatrist who told him, "Come back next week, please," when the gunman begged for help as he was having "this vision of shooting people from the campus tower." If he had been a 34-24-34 lady, perhaps.....

All of these thoughts about living had passed my mind so many years ago, when I was a student worker in the Louisiana State University Library, below the LSU tower and watching a killer shoot people from Texas University's tower, while a television camera viewed him from the Texas University library! The T.V. cameraman was, of course, a "player." In one hour I, too, would be met with a dilemma which forced me to prove my nature. The tower faded from the bus window....

As I am climbing into a cab, I realize that the taxi driver who really likes his job and strives toward excellent knowledge of Austin streets is a "player." If it is just a boring job to rip off the customer's money, if he doesn't care about his whole professional existence, then he is a zombie "spectator" or "fool," not recognizing that greater joy or self identity is possible, despite much evidence throughout his lifetime. A closed mind can be deadly. You die before dying.

Gas pumpers lead a meaningful, productive, but quiet existence that involves thinking, happiness, decision making. For example, most taxi and greyhound drivers seem to care about their existence, I believe. They are gas pumpers. They get out there and shake a leg.

You can find your own examples or challenges to the whole structure. It seems to be an interesting way to view all people: Do you try to be a doer and do you try to do well? Naturally, I hold that activity breeds survival, that activity is life itself. If you are really trying to cook marvelously, play chess well, grow plants, play violin beautifully, etc. then you breathe. You live. Otherwise, no. A common horror is the mother of six children who thinks she is alive and playing because she is the mother of children! Nonsense. She is already dead, a spectator in death phase. We pull into the motel and Austin begins.

I am wondering if it will be possible to see a strange pot-bellied hick singer named B.W. Stevenson at a nightclub behind the motel. Hurry, lady, hurry. B.W. Stevenson is the talk of Austin radio. The cab driver says B.W. is dynamite. Two Texas ladies have hyped the singer, their eyeballs wide with amazement as they spoke to me. "He's gonna be a biggie, baby." Good show. Hurry, lady, hurry.

She knocks on the motel door and a clipboard, Sheaffer pen and yellow legal pad are in your hands instantly. She is smiling and very excited. "Well, hi! At last you are here, Mr. Acers. We've been working night and day on your chess exhibition and all of your other Austin appearances. Do you know that the demand to play you has been so great that 300 hundred chess players have been in a play-off tournament for weeks, just to get a chessboard at your performance tomorrow?"

You smile nicely, flattered that she has really shot the works on this one. Then you look down at the legal pad and read the writing slowly, painfully. Oh, boy. This is it, Acers, baby. The end of the line and you know it immediately. Jesus Christ.

Because Russell Miller cannot dream that the Dobie Mall has a wonder-worker woman on the case, because how are we to know that she is leaving promotion in Austin forever after this "magnum opus, you might say, of all commercial promotion in my city," you are faced with a schedule whipped together in five days that is gonna take care of you, Jude baby. You are gonna feel it in your bones. And there is no way out, because you are a player.

**M**

iller had told her to go ahead and try to arrange public school appearances. He did not tell her that with only five days notice we knew that public school appearances can never be arranged. He forgot about Fischer, who was badly shaking up newspapers and television stations from coast to coast. He forgot about how strange it was to see a grandmaster named Bent Larsen (Denmark) and another one named Mark Taimanov (USSR) lose all six games they played with Bobby Fischer. It was enough to give any chess master nightmares. But, most of all, Russell Miller forgot about wonder-worker woman, who went berserk on her last project, "something for Austin to remember her by." Ha. Ha. Ha.

All that is scheduled in 17 neat hours is that: (A) You are to teach five large groups of elementary school children how to play chess from "A" to "Z" in five separate schools scattered all over Austin, Texas. You will be driven to each school by three volunteer drivers, who will, of course, not have the faintest idea where they are going. All in eight hours. Great. What next?...

(B) At 4:30 p.m. you must deliver a one-hour address at the Dobie Mall. It's for the hundreds of wild-

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# IS AUSTIN

## PART TWO

ly enthusiastic chess players of Austin. It's a main event and must be dynamite. You will be completely exhausted even before it begins. Great. What next?...

(C) Afterward, you must play all "40" chess players, seeded from hundreds in the city. Of course, 17 extra players are gonna sneak in, just to make it tough. "Ha, ha, ha, ha. Fun, fun," like Charles Applewhite says in peckerwood country. Great. What next?...

(D) One hour later, you must be at the airport to rush to Savannah, Georgia. Thousands of people, three television stations and the mayor are waiting for you at dawn for the Oglethorpe Mall chess exhibition, which will be the first in Savannah history. A prison exhibition a day later is all set as well.

Consider the possibilities briefly. That's five beginner chess classes. Another one-hour public lecture. Playing 40 chess players who are really 57 chess players. Catch the midnight plane and barely make it to Savannah. Think about it. Laugh about it. Because you have to do it. . . player.

The schedule is, of course, not possible. You know from a thousand appearances that your voice and mental energy are too strong to die. You operate 100 volts more than any other human. But here you have six hours of lectures, three madhouse drivers and the real meany bad-guy chess buffs of Austin are waiting at the end of the line after you've been suitably "softened up." They do this sort of thing to Yugoslav grandmaster and all-American nice guy Svetozar Gligoric each year, when he visits the US. Yes, they take Gligo the Great to a great banquet just before the exhibition and insist upon filling his glass with just six dabs of wine and just "one more" dab of champagne. Strangely, Gligo sits there and talks to all the ladies along the table one by one. Strangely, he staggers from the banquet and beats 20 or 30 chess opponents anyway, after being thoroughly softened up. Nobody on the west coast can figure it out. "We tried it three times and it didn't work once!" recalls a Mechanics' Institute Chess Club member, laughing with delight. In Los Angeles they succeeded with vodka!

**R**emember Frank J

Marshall, the legendary chess hustler from New York, who climbed off a ship to get a surprise in Sweden just before his exhibition there? The surprise was delayed action "Swedish punch," so powerful that it begins to get to you about the time those last 20 tough games get tough. The result was that Marshall's score in the Swedish punch exhibition was unprintable. He was furious and accepted another booking in Sweden just to get even. Then he beat the brains out of all 44 players who competed in that one. And he drank straight coffee thereafter on his European tour. . . There are other ways to soften up the visiting master nowadays. . .

The head of Jude Acers is spinning with the second Coca-Cola. He manages a weak fake-out smile as the lady is leaning toward him. It's right out of "Clockwork Orange" as she says, "I hope it's all right, Mr. Acers. Mr. Miller said that you are the very best chess lecturer for children in the entire world. We just couldn't miss this opportunity. All the newspapers have been announcing your schedule for days. The children are very excited and we've been getting lots of phone calls from parents and even children asking for more information. There is even a car full of chess players who may follow you from place to place all day, or so I heard at the elimination chess tournament today! I hope it's all right to have so many events in one day. Frankly, Mr. Acers, we don't know how you can do it, Mr. Acers. Good luck, Mr. Acers!" . . . Her words sink in very slowly. She cannot imagine opening and closing a demo chessboard six times in one day, she cannot know. . .

Yes, Jude Acers would do it. For the climb alone. For the hell of it. It would kill any chess master in the world to perform the schedule. It will put him out of commission on that plane. Get to the plane in one bodily piece. Try to make the plane in any condition. That is what you must keep saying to yourself, Jude. Make the plane. All Georgia waits at the height of Fischer chess mania 24 hours from now. The plane. . .

"Mr. Acers, I hope the three people who volunteered to drive you around have all the road directions figured out. Austin is an easy place to get lost in. Did you hear about the little boy they didn't find for three days last week in downtown Austin? He got lost and was too scared to ask anyone where he was. He just kept walking around, not saying anything to anybody he met." Jude Acers bolts upright in his chair with eyes as big as coffee cup saucers. Then he calms down. Ha, ha. It's a joke. Ha, ha. She is leaving now and thanking you gratefully, wishing you good luck again.

When you book a tight schedule on a three country chess tour, nothing can be allowed to go wrong or you are up the river and drowning. We had gotten away with crucifying schedules dozens of times. So why not now as before? Miller had booked this one airtight and had thrown in a carte blanche for disaster, wonder-worker woman. You angrily, frantically telephone Miller to give him a choice sampling of your feelings at this moment. Fortunately, Miller is not at home in Yakima, Washington. That's right. Miller is directing his thousandth chess tournament competition at the Park Haviland Hotel in Portland, Oregon. As almost always, Miller is losing money on his chess tournaments and is refereeing this chess tournament for free as well. This is so that Russell Miller will have something to do while he is losing more than \$10,000 on Jude Acers chess tours in the good old days. You'll have

to phone Miller in Portland to curse him out. He has not arrived at the Park Haviland at this hour, the telephone operator discovers. O.K. Miller gets a one-hour curse out reprieve. Wait an hour to phone again. What to do, what to do?...

What the hell. It is not going to matter if you get six hours sleep before dawn. When those children, drivers, lecture audiences, reporters and killer Austin chess players get through with you, there will be nothing left to remember but B.W. Stevenson.

You write a note to remind yourself: "Call Miller and curse him out." Then write the Park Haviland Hotel phone number beneath it. Then you stick it on the motel door. You ponder how you are in this fix. This is a chess tour by United States Chess Federation senior master Jude F. Acers. You are the greatest of all time. You have to produce. Why do you think the New York Times newspaper runs announcements of your chess tour, talks repeatedly about Jude Acers nationwide chess tours and gives Mr. Miller's address? You couldn't buy promotion like that.

Why in the hell do you think Fredrich Chevalier runs four motheroo tour notices during one year in his Christian Science Monitor chess column? Why are your tours officially endorsed by the United States Chess Federation and the American Chess Foundation, despite the fact that they know you are nuts, out of your ever lovin' mind? Why did Kenneth Smith write in Chess Digest that Jude Acers might look a little weird, might have that long hair, but the good old Louisiana boy would offend nobody with what he had to say? Yes, why?

Because you are "good product." Because you get unbelievable results. Because you are a born entertainer, a damn Phineus T. Barnum promotional dream. Your donkey can be sold. You are the greatest of all canned goods. Instant Acers of chess. You are mad, but so, so harmless, except to telephones. Hopefully, nobody will be envious of you or even notice you as you quietly cart your first one million dollars into the bank. "Jude the obscure," as the man wrote in "Larry Evans on Chess." Creep, creep, creep along...Shh. Nobody will ever do what you will do this day in Austin. Shut up, Acers. Produce.

You decide to give the motel telephone a terrific smash into the wall. Boom! Boom! K-boom! But it is still in one piece. Texas telephones are tough. According to Smith, everything in Texas is tough. We'll try again later on in the morning. Off to B.W. . . No, wait. Just one more smash of this telephone into the wall. Jesus, it still works. Telephone number two is doomed. Curse the phone. Curse Miller.

Across the parking lot the great road singer B.W. Stevenson is playing in dungarees, dirty T-shirt, which is all you need when you are as good as B.W. Stevenson is. His bass player and his drummer were his friends back in kindergarten, so, therefore, they are really tight now. It's been a long, long time.

It is intermission time. Jude and B.W. talk. B.W. is almost unknown. He tells Jude Acers that good times are ahead. Three Dog Night had promised to record a song he wrote called "Sham-ba-la." But it didn't come out on their last album. "They promise me it will be on the next one for sure," he says without nervousness and with sheer unmitigated guts.

I do not tell him about Slim Harpo and Excello records. How Slim's "Raining in My Heart" sold several million records before Slim died. How hidden dummy record factories made the records Slim never got paid for. I do not tell him at least 20 ways that a recording artist, much less a song composer, can get robbed blind by the twist of a recording channel button. I do not tell B.W. Stevenson that, of all the hundreds of recording groups that I have known or even talked with, only six later hit with million selling records even once. Arthur Alexander, Buddy Holly, Slim Harpo, Dale and Grace, John Fred and the Five Americans. All others also ran. I am sorry for him. I know he is only dreaming. He doesn't care about the odds. The test of greatness.

B.W. Stevenson wants to be sure that Jude Acers gets the message. Not only is his song "Sham-ba-la" sure to be recorded, it is going to be a monster hit for Three Dog. He looks Jude in the eyeballs and wills a million selling record that he wrote. Before I hit St. Petersburg, Florida, "Sham-ba-la" is the monster hit playing on my Sony CF 350 screaming machine. I play it very, very loud while I smash telephones.

B.W. Stevenson has to go back on stage. He says that he has recorded a single release, a hooker song called "My Maria." It will be a hit, too, says B.W. And Jude Acers just smiles. "My Maria" is the hottest record in the nation by the time Jude Acers blasts into Atlanta, Georgia. Jesus, you can hear the mother playing on the loudspeaker beside the Marriott swimming pool. . .

You wonder how some people make it like Picasso, B.W. Stevenson, Larry Evans, Irving Chernev and Jude Acers. Because they have a good donkey that can be sold to real live people. They are good product. They show up on time. They can be contracted, sold. They work with bookkeepers, shopkeepers, bankers, managers, good guys and bad guys. They are not out there. They are in there. They know that children, reporters, cab drivers and disc jockeys are tremendously important. They see novels where others do not see postcards. All that is missing is the suit and tie.

B.W. Stevenson goes into a golden oldie routine and takes Jude Acers back to the school hop at Mandeville High. Dance with Sandra again. Squeeze. Squeeze. It is time to leave B.W., who is only dreaming to dream. You do. The motel, another motel is await-



# THE PRICE IS AUSTIN

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or go to jail... Come on, now. I don't want to take you to jail... I mean move... Where is your ticket?..."

Jude Acers is grabbed by the collar as he sees that nobody is behind the Texas International Airlines desk. "Okay, sir. Okay..." He drags the bags in the wrong direction, then reverses himself toward the door. Jude Acers does not know where he is. He hears a bell, no, a telephone, as he is stepping on the automatic door opener. He is now crying. He stares blankly at the ringing pay telephone as the guard is forcing him out of the airline terminal entrance.

"Please, sir. May I answer the phone? Please... Please." The pay telephone stops ringing. The sound of silence.

"Look, leave and you'll be all right. I see you in here again without a ticket and you go to jail. We don't fool around here, boy. You gotta go." He jams his night stick into Jude Acers' side to help Jude plan his moves. Jude moves. Here is the cab. Get in. Say, "Any good hotel, please, sir." It pulls quickly away.

Miller thinks everything is all right. He will begin to call the airlines for Jude Acers desperately, when Acers does not show up in Savannah hour after hour. Miller also has the job of fielding the tremendous heat that begins to pour over telephone lines from Georgia's

commercial and club organizers who had worked countless hours on the prison, shopping center and television appearances of Jude Acers.

Miller would not know for many hours that it was over, that the machine was out cold in a motel, that we would never make it. Miller hoped until there was no hope left. He writhed in Portland agony. If only this. If only that. Last minute airline schedules that could mean nothing anymore. Dreams. But it was over. The heat on Miller would now become tremendous. A perfect team, a miracle of teamwork, even in this jet age, would cough and sputter and die.

There was only the prison exhibition left a day later now. We were spending all of our money on Georgia now. And if Oglethorpe Mall sued, it would be terribly tough right down the line... "But if they sue, I'm getting Bill Waguespack of New Orleans. I'm calling Karl Kavanaugh in Denham Springs, Louisiana. They will never let me get killed. They will defend, wheel, deal. My tour will live. I did nothing wrong. My tour must live. I must save it. I live for my tour," my mind whispers, prays. If it goes to court, it's all the way with legal weasel Waguespack in court and Kavanaugh for research, baby. They play for keeps, daddy-o. We go to the wall.

I debated calling them. No. Wait. Hope. Georgia will

be fair. They will understand in Georgia. But the bad publicity is now. You must pay the price of Austin. You are certain of that. You can read the Georgia newspapers and chess newsletters before they are printed. It's going to be tough, tough.

The Righteous Brothers are fighting to make a comeback on somebody's car radio. I listen to them. "If you believe in forever, then life is just a one night stand" is coming through the window of Pushkin's Truck Stop, bar, grill and motel, where I wearily write about Austin for the last time in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. There will be four radio commercials an hour, announcing that Jude Acers is in town at the Lebanon Plaza. There is a quarter-page announcement with two photographs. Very well. Think of the good things. Forget the past...

No, it doesn't really matter now. It doesn't matter that I lost more than \$50,000 in cash bookings in Savannah, Georgia that day. It can mean nothing that Savannah's people despise Jude Acers. The very nice lady from the Oglethorpe Mall called Miller yesterday and politely asked for the return of the \$130 deposit. She does not wish to begin anew. She could not understand or believe what happened. She does not hate Miller or me. It is all gone now. Remember...

"If you believe in forever, then life is just a one night stand."