

THE MIGHTY ARMADILLOS

By Shirley McNichols

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STORY OF THE PLAY

When the wimpy chess club members take on the football in-crowd and the local ruffians, hold on to your hula hoops! In this 1950s malt shop setting, super nerd Julius Caesar Abercrombie, captain of the Mighty Armadillo Chess Club, is accidentally hypnotized, and upon a particular signal, thinks he is the star quarterback of the high school football team. It's a lucky thing, too, because the real quarterback, Bobby Diamond, has promised the local ruffians that he will throw the big game if they will not hurt a young runaway girl. Meanwhile, the president of a very snobby sorority sets up a phony pledge party to embarrass the chess club girls. But the quiet Armadillos show how mighty they are both on and off the playing field. A kid inventor and a poetry-loving beatnik add even more rock-around-the-clock fun.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(14 m, 14 w)

Chess Club Members

JULIUS CAESAR ABERCROMBIE: Captain of the chess club.

ALBERT EINSTEIN MCNEELY: Julius' best friend, inventor.

FREDDY: Chess club member.

HORACE: Another.

STEWART: Another.

GERTRUDE HATHAWAY: Julius' girl, though she doesn't know it.

MARJORIE: Chess club member.

ALICE: Another.

VICTORIA: Another.

Other students

BOWMAR: A beatnik.

BOBBY DIAMOND: Star quarterback.

DELIA MANCUSSO: Runaway hitchhiker.

The Dillys

VANESSA HARRINGTON: Snobby club president.

DARLA: Club member.

CONNIE: Another.

SHARLENE: Another.

PAULA: Another.

The Gang

ACE: Gang leader.

BLADE: Gang member.

SHOOTER: Another.

KNUCKLES: Another.

CHAINS: Another.

LIZ: Another.

BETTY: Another.

ROSIE: Another.

Adults

HARVEY: Owner of the Burger Square.

COACH GRIDLOCK: Armadillo's football coach.

MISS VERTIGO: English teacher, sponsor of the "Dillys."

** Some gang members, Dillys, and chess club members can be doubled if a smaller cast is desired.*

The Mighty Armadillos

- 4 -

PLAYING TIME: About 90 minutes including a ten minute intermission.

SETTING/SYNOPSIS: The Burger Square restaurant, the local high school hangout in the fall, mid 1950's.

ACT I, Sc. 1: Friday afternoon.

ACT I, Sc. 2: A few minutes later.

ACT II, Sc.1: Saturday morning.

ACT II, Sc. 2: Saturday afternoon.

ACT II, Sc. 3: Saturday evening.

SETTING

The entire play takes place at the Burger Square Restaurant, the local high school hangout. There is a counter USC (*An ironing board with a skirt covering the DS side works well.*) with a black rotary phone and a basket of saltines on it. One or two stools stand DS of the counter. There are two exits at SR. One is UPS (*Leading to the kitchen and rest rooms.*), the other is DS (*Leading to a back way out.*). A small table with three or four small chairs is at SR. There is one exit at SL (*Leading to the parking lot.*). Another small table is at SL with three or four small chairs around it. A sign over the counter reads "Burger Square." A juke box, or a facsimile of a jukebox is UPS, right of the counter. Other decorations may be added to add to the 50's flavor.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: GERTRUDE, FREDDY, HORACE, VICTORIA, ALICE and MARJORIE are gathered around a table at DSR. They stand between the audience and the table so the audience can't see what is going on. The impression should be given that it is an arm wrestling match. In reality, they are watching the conclusion of a chess match between JULIUS and Stewart, two members of the Samuel Adams High School Mighty Armadillos Chess Club. The watchers are also chess club members. In today's slang we would classify these students as nerds.)

FREDDY: Come on, Julius, take him down!

HORACE: Don't give up, Stewart! He hasn't beaten you yet!

(EVERYONE in the crowd continues to loudly encourage the players until finally, JULIUS pushes his chair back and runs to CS, clasping his hands together and holding them over his head, the sign for victory, STEWART joins Julius. The others continue to block the table so the audience can't see the chess board.)

STEWART: *(Rubbing HIS wrist.)* You've won again, Julius.

JULIUS: Of course, Stewart. That's why I'm team captain. I feel ready for the big tournament.

MARJORIE: *(Coming up to JULIUS.)* Gee, Julius. You're undefeated, I find that so stimulating.

JULIUS: Aw, shucks, Marjorie. It's nothing really.

GERTRUDE: *(Coming CS.)* You're telling me! Undefeated at chess! So what? *(The OTHERS move from the front of the table now, revealing the chess board.)* If you want to know who's stimulating, it's Bobby Diamond.

FREDDY: Bobby Diamond? Big deal! Okay, he may be an outstanding physical specimen, but he's only slightly above average intelligence.

The Mighty Armadillos

- 6 -

(ALL the GIRLS giggle.)

JULIUS: *(Moving next to GERTRUDE and pushing HIS glasses up.)* Gee whiz, Gertrude. I've worked hard to become a good chess player, I've studied all the greats, read every book on the subject, and memorized key plays and strategies.

VICTORIA: That's the trouble, Julius. All you boys spend so much time playing chess you neglect everything else.

HORACE: What else is there?

ALICE: *(Moving next to HORACE.)* How about us girls? Why do you think we joined the chess club anyway?

STEWART: To play chess.

VICTORIA: No, Stewart. We thought it would be a good place to associate with young men of our own intellectual level who have similar interests and goals.

HORACE: But there's a big tournament coming up. This is no time for men's minds to be clouded with thoughts of romance.

FREDDY: *(To MARJORIE.)* You understand, don't you, Marjorie?

MARJORIE: I guess so, Freddy.

HORACE: It's not that we don't find you girls attractive. It's just that we've got to keep our minds on the razor's edge for the big competition.

(VANESSA enters SL with DARLA, SHARLENE, PAULA and CONNIE. These girls are obviously cool. Vanessa, their leader, is the coolest. They mime conversation as they tack up a poster advertising their club, the Lady Armadillos, also known as "The Dillys." It reads: "Be one of the 'in' crowd. Pledge the Dillys." After hanging the poster, they sit at the table at SL, except for JULIUS, the boys cross to CS, obviously interested in the new girls.)

VANESSA: *(Snobbishly.)* So, I said to Olivia, "If I had your hips I certainly wouldn't wear horizontal stripes!" She turned every shade of pink! It was too funny!

The Mighty Armadillos

- 7 -

(PAULA, SHARLENE, DARLA, and CONNIE giggle. FREDDY, HORACE, and STEWART move closer to them.)

VICTORIA: *(Coming behind STEWART.)* So much for concentrating on the tournament.

STEWART: What tournament?

HORACE: Hello, Vanessa.

VANESSA: *(Looking at JULIUS.)* Oh, hello. *(Back to the GIRLS.)* Anyway, Olivia's just not Dilly material.

FREDDY: That's a lovely sweater you're wearing. It brings out the color of your eyes. *(The OTHER GUYS agree.)*

VANESSA: Yes, I know, uh...who are you?

FREDDY: *(Moving closer to VANESSA.)* Freddy. Freddy Finklemeier of the Mighty Armadillos.

VANESSA: The what?

HORACE: The chess club. We're undefeated, Julius is our captain. *(JULIUS waves.)*

STEWART: You probably saw our team picture in the school paper last week.

VANESSA: No. *(To HER FRIENDS.)* Come along, girls. I want to get over to Haversham's. Their new stock is due in this afternoon and I still haven't found the perfect dress for homecoming.

DARLA: You should get a blue dress, Vanessa. To match Bobby's eyes.

SHARLENE: You're so lucky to be going to homecoming with Bobby Diamond.

VANESSA: I haven't actually decided if I'm going with Bobby yet.

PAULA: Why not? He's captain of the football team.

CONNIE: And the cutest guy in school.

STEWART: I'll bet any one of us could take him in a chess game!

(VANESSA and HER FRIENDS exchange glances, as if to say, "These guys are real idiots!" then laugh as they exit. MARJORIE, ALICE and VICTORIA approach the BOYS.)

The Mighty Armadillos

- 8 -

VICTORIA: It appears Vanessa Harrington and the Lady Armadillos...

MARJORIE: They like to be called the Dillys...

VICTORIA: ...put a little crimp on your concentration.

ALICE: What makes you think any of those girls would give any of you boys the time of day? The Mighty Armadillos. Give me a break!

VICTORIA: They probably don't have a clue about how to play chess.

HORACE: Well, they don't know how to play football but they still like football players.

STEWART: Like Bobby Diamond.

GERTRUDE: Who can blame them?

ALICE: And Bobby Diamond is only interested in the kind of girl you find on the Dilly club roster, not the chess club.

ALBERT: *(Enters SL and carries a hula hoop and a jar with a purple liquid inside.)* Good! You're still here!

STEWART: *(Pointing to the hula hoop.)* What you got there, Albert?

ALBERT: *(Holding up the hula hoop.)* It's the latest thing. It's called a hula hoop,

ALICE: What do you do with it?

ALBERT: You put it around your waist, then swing it... *(Swings HIS hips to demonstrate.)* ...keeping the hoop at waist level by utilizing centrifugal force.

HORACE: And then what?

ALBERT: That's it!

(There is a brief pause as ALL the KIDS look at each other.)

ALL: "Can I try?" "Sounds fun!" "Where can I get one?" etc.

ALBERT: Don't get too excited. I think it's gonna flop, I've been working with it all day and it's pretty much impossible.

(ONE of the GIRLS takes the hula hoop, puts it on and begins using it like a pro.)

The Mighty Armadillos

- 9 -

ALBERT: Gee, maybe my waist is off center. Anyway, on to the really important subjects. *(HE holds up the jar of purple liquid.)* I need a volunteer. *(ALL vigorously decline.)*

JULIUS: What is it this time, Albert Einstein?

ALBERT: Please don't call me that, Julius.

MARJORIE: Yeah. That's what his mother calls him when she's mad.

ALBERT: I have finally perfected my instant energy formula and I need a volunteer to test it.

STEWART: Maybe you should test it yourself, Albert.

ALBERT: I can't do that. I'm the scientist, I need to monitor the results. Come on, I promise, it's harmless. *(Still no volunteers.)* Work with me, people, this is for science! Won't one of you brave souls step forward?

(The PEOPLE at the back of the group begin to nudge EACH OTHER, then all together everyone steps back, except FREDDY who stands at the front of the crowd, unaware that the others have stepped back.)

ALBERT: At last! A brave pioneer has come forward.

FREDDY: Who's the dope? *(Looking around.)*

ALL: You are!

(The CROWD holds FREDDY as ALBERT pours the formula down his throat. After a moment they let go of Freddy and he staggers about the stage. He stops and shakes all over, then stands perfectly still. After a moment they all cautiously approach.)

FREDDY: Wow! That stuff is great! *(HE begins to hop about as though he has a lot of pent-up energy.)* I feel like I could take on the world! You should patent that stuff, Albert. You'll make a fortune... *(HE collapses at CS. ALBERT rushes to his side and takes his pulse.)*

ALBERT: He's okay. He'll just sleep for a long time. It's one of the side effects I've been trying to eliminate.

The Mighty Armadillos

- 10 -

HORACE: *(Encouragingly.)* He did have a lot of energy there for a few seconds.

ALBERT: Yeah, I just need to figure out how to extend the effect.

ALICE: Or you could sell it as a sleep inducer.

ALBERT: Perhaps. Anyway, we better get Freddy home so he can sleep in his own bed.

JULIUS: You guys take Freddy. Albert and I will catch up with you later.

(HORACE, STEWART, MARJORIE, and ALICE pick up FREDDY by the arms and legs and carry him out. VICTORIA exits first to guide them through the door. GERTRUDE is left standing in front of the pledge sign. JULIUS and ALBERT pick up the chess set at SR. They overhear Gertrude's monologue.)

GERTRUDE: *(Reading the Dillys' poster.)* "Be one of the 'in' crowd. Pledge the Dillys." Maybe if I were a Dilly, Bobby would notice me...maybe. *(Exits SL.)*

JULIUS: *(Moving to CS, and watching GERTRUDE leave.)* Albert, I want to be on the football team.

ALBERT: *(Laughing.)* That's a good one, Julius.

JULIUS: I really mean it, Albert. You're the team manager, can you talk to the coach for me?

ALBERT: Why do you want to be on the football team? Those guys play rough!

JULIUS: It's the only way I can get Gertrude to notice me. All she thinks about are football players.

ALBERT: Not just any football player, Bobby Diamond.

JULIUS: I could be as good as Bobby Diamond! Better, probably.

ALBERT: Julius, I'm pretty sure the coach isn't going to let you play. The team has been practicing together since last spring.

JULIUS: Albert, do you know a better strategist than me? I could be the guy who plans all the moves!

ALBERT: You mean the plays.

JULIUS: Yeah, the plays. What do you call that fellow?

The Mighty Armadillos

- 11 -

ALBERT: The quarterback?

JULIUS: Yes. From what I understand all he has to do is throw the ball to another player while the rest of the fellows protect him. To be honest I don't relish the idea of being knocked down.

(BOWMAR enters SL. He is dressed in black, wears sunglasses, and carries a bongo drum.)

ALBERT: Who does? But the team already has a quarterback. Bobby Diamond is all-state, he's undefeated, he's broken the record for pass completions. The coach says Diamond is the best quarterback the Samuel Adams Armadillos have ever had.

JULIUS: I'm undefeated, myself, at chess. Maybe I can be just as good at football. We'll never know unless Coach Gridlock gives me a chance!

BOWMAR: Ah, football! Modern man's civilized warfare. The battlefield. The opposing sides. The taking of territory!

JULIUS: Oh, hello Bowmar.

BOWMAR: Why this preoccupation with battle?

ALBERT: Nice outfit, Bowmar. Didn't you wear that yesterday?

BOWMAR: Why, even the seemingly innocent game of chess is a tabletop representation of warfare with the knights, the pawns, the castles and the taking of the king as the victory.

JULIUS: Gee, Bowmar, that's real interesting. But if you don't mind Albert and I -

BOWMAR: It seems almost coincidental, though we all know there are no real coincidences, that I have written a poem about just that subject. I call it "Cataclysm." It's really cool. I'll recite it for you.

ALBERT: We don't have the time right now -

BOWMAR: Conflict! Battle! Strife! *(Two DRUM beats.)*
Clash! Encounter! Struggle! *(Two DRUM beats.)*
Dissension! Hostility! Discord! *(Two DRUM beats.)*

The Mighty Armadillos

- 12 -

BOWMAR: *(Cont'd.)* Cataclysm! *(Numerous DRUM beats. There is an awkward pause.)*

JULIUS: Gee, Bowmar. That's very...inspirational.

BOWMAR: Thank-you.

(BOWMAR sits at the stool USC as COACH GRIDLOCK and BOBBY enter SL and move to CS. JULIUS and ALBERT move to the table at SR.)

COACH: On a scale of one to ten, I think we've got a pretty good chance of going all the way this season. But, Bobby, you can never let down. Even when the scoreboard says you haven't got a chance, you just keep trying.

BOBBY: Yes, sir.

COACH: And no matter how good you are, you can always improve. On a scale of one to ten I'd say there's still room for improvement.

BOBBY: Yes, sir.

JULIUS: There's the coach now. Go on. Ask him.

(ALBERT and JULIUS join BOBBY and the COACH at CS.)

ALBERT: Excuse me. Coach Gridlock?

COACH: Oh, it's the team manager, Alfred. What do you want?

ALBERT: It's Albert, sir.

COACH: That's right. On a scale of one to ten, I'm usually pretty good with names. Anyway, what do you want, kid? This isn't another one of your crazy inventions is it? I've still got blisters on my toes from those battery-powered heated socks you rigged up.

ALBERT: No, sir. I was just wondering if my friend Julius, here, could be on the football team. He's a master strategist, and the undefeated captain of the Fighting Armadillo Chess Club. He'd like to play quarterback.

COACH: *(Smiling.)* Oh. He'd like to play quarterback? *(To BOBBY.)* He'd like to play quarterback. *(Yelling.)* NO WAY, Alvin!

The Mighty Armadillos

- 13 -

ALBERT: That's Albert, sir.

COACH: On a scale of one to ten, it's a crazy idea. Why, I have the best high school quarterback in the whole state right here! (*Patting BOBBY'S shoulder.*)

ALBERT: Then how about assistant team manager?

COACH: Sure, Alex, that will be fine.

ALBERT: Albert, sir. (*To JULIUS.*) It's almost as good. You get to wear a jersey and sit with the team, Maybe she won't know the difference.

JULIUS: All right, (*Crossing to the COACH.*) But if anything happens to Bobby, will you at least keep me in mind as backup quarterback? Please will ya? Please?

COACH: Sure, kid, No problem. You'd be surprised how often they have to send in the assistant manager to take over for the quarterback.

JULIUS: Thanks, Coach. You won't regret it.

COACH: Sure, sure. Okay, Bobby, (*Pulling chair from table at SR.*) sit down. (*BOBBY sits.*) (*To JULIUS and ALBERT.*) You men move out of the way. Bobby and I are going to conduct a little experiment.

ALBERT: I love experiments! Can we watch?

COACH: Sure. Just keep quiet and don't spoil my concentration.

JULIUS: What are you going to do?

COACH: I just went to a seminar on expanding the mind. On a scale of one to ten, the mental state of a player is as important as the physical state. I'm going to hypnotize Bobby in an effort to improve his mental state.

BOBBY: You're welcome to try, Coach. But I don't think it's going to work.

COACH: On a scale of one to ten, I'll be the judge of that.

(*JULIUS and ALBERT stand a few feet behind BOBBY, Julius on the DS side.*)

JULIUS: Personally, I'm highly skeptical of hypnosis. Only the weakest of minds are susceptible.

The Mighty Armadillos

- 14 -

(The COACH pulls out a pocket watch on a chain and begins to swing it back and forth in front of BOBBY.)

COACH: You are very sleepy. You're falling into a deep sleep. On a scale of one to ten, you cannot keep your eyes open. *(BOBBY and JULIUS both close their eyes. ALBERT doesn't notice Julius.)* You are the best quarterback the game of football has ever seen. You are the toughest, the meanest, the smartest guy around. *(Pause.)* Nothing scares you. You are the captain and you lead your team to victory at any cost. *(MISS VERTIGO enters SL.)* Nothing is more important to you than winning. Whenever you hear a whistle, you will remember these things...

MISS VERTIGO: And when you hear someone snap their fingers *(SHE snaps her fingers.)* you will remember who you really are and what's really important!

COACH: Miss Vertigo! What are you doing? We're in the middle of an experiment here! *(The COACH slaps his hands together.)* Snap out of it, son.

(BOBBY and JULIUS wake up.)

MISS VERTIGO: Coach Gridlock, may I remind you that our job is to educate these young minds, not win football games!

COACH: On a scale of one to ten, Miss Vertigo, that's exactly what I am trying to do!

MISS VERTIGO: Nonsense! In the wrong hands, hypnosis can be a very dangerous thing!

BOBBY: It's all right, Miss Vertigo, I was never really under.

COACH: You weren't?

BOBBY: No. I was pretending. Just having a little fun with the coach.

MISS VERTIGO: In any case, I think the principal should be informed of what's been going on here. *(Exits SL.)*

The Mighty Armadillos

- 15 -

COACH: *(Blowing HIS whistle, which makes JULIUS straighten up and assume the posture and demeanor of a football champion. He takes off his glasses, looks at them strangely then puts them in his pocket.)* Hold it! Flag on the play! We were just kidding around! *(COACH follows HER off.)*

BOWMAR: Miss Vertigo! If you have a moment I'd like you to hear my new poem! *(HE follows THEM out SL.)*

HARVEY: *(Enters USR taking off HIS chef's apron.)* Bobby, I'm glad you're here. I gotta go see my bookie...uh, dentist, before the big game tomorrow night. I'm counting on you, boy. What an arm! Keep an eye on the place till I get back, will ya? And if Ace and his gang come in, you tell 'em I don't want no trouble here. Ace still owes me for a chair he broke over some guy's head last week.

BOBBY: Sure thing, Harvey.

HARVEY: *(Tossing apron behind counter.)* Oh, and fill the salt and pepper shakers will ya? *(To JULIUS and ALBERT.)* And you boys pick up your checkers over there. Don't leave a mess in my place!

ALBERT: You can count on us, Harvey. Right, Julius?

JULIUS: I'm the captain. I won't let you down.

HARVEY: You kids are in outer space.

ALBERT: Funny you should say that, Harvey. Did I tell you I've come up with a theory that makes space travel possible?

HARVEY: Not in my lifetime, kid. And not in yours either. *(Exits SL.)*

ALBERT: *(Following HARVEY out.)* It's really very simple. You start with the theory of relativity...

BOBBY: *(Crossing to JULIUS who is staring off into space.)* Hey, are you okay?

JULIUS: Me? I'm great. The best. Excuse me. *(Exits DSR.)*

BOBBY: Oh, well. Guess I'd better fill the salt and pepper shakers.

End of Freeview

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