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.*

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.

(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!

End of Freeview

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