

LITTLE ARMORED MEN
by David C. Meyer

Song begins:

Black square, white square,
little armored men;
me here, your there:
fun with friends.
Work on the bishop,
work on the rook,
work on the row of pawns;
play by the book.

ALL SIX SPEAKERS: (music continues as they speak)
What do you do with your hate?
What do you do with your fear?
How do you feel
How do you love;
knowing it's happening here?

Song continues:

Take you, break you,
mate you if I can;
my move, your move:
man for man.
Risk for the winning,
risk for the loss,
risk for the whole of it;
win with the toss.

ALL SIX SPEAKERS: (music continues as they speak)
Who took the freedom we owned?
Who hears the joy we demand?
Where on the earth
deprived of its mirth
live people at peace in their land?

Song continues:

Hold off, close off,
calculate each thing;
shut off, cut off:
isolate the king.
Force every gambit,
force every fault,
force every sacrifice;
don't call a halt.

#1: Expel summarily all who disrupt learning: (music)
scholarship is threatened, the faculty afraid,
research imperilled, discourse curtailed,
the university itself near death.
Stop them, stop them; get them out now.

#2: If they don't do something quick
we'll have to protect ourselves:
high fences, duplicates of everything
to store at home, and fire insurance,
even guns, guns and marksmanship drill.

#3: Two alternatives, very clearly two:
the university becomes (miraculously) moral,
or we blow it up
and burn it down. Simple.

#4: I can't tell if they're all right
or all wrong; they all make sense
and all tell lies -- and I'm confused.
Who knows what to do?

#5: Destroying public property, vandalism,
wasting tax dollars spent on their nonlearning,
arson, insolence to authority, inciting riots,
obscenity in public: I know what to do!
Jail, and throw away the key:
or better, shoot on sight.

#6: We must listen and remain calm;
listen to the voices of our young people,
considering them and their wants,
their needs and concerns in our decisions.

Song ends:

Black square, white square,
playing for my win;
me here, you there:
do you in.

#1: Where I am, exactly:
First, I teach, professorial bias
and everything that goes with taht.
I hold a prejudice toward education.
To teach requires devotion, concern,
commitment, even perhaps love --
whatever that means. My life,
my whole life, is a confession of faith,
a worshipping at the house of learning;
to know to understand, to synthesize
facts, experience, thought.
And I have suffered, my family suffered,
because of my profound faith.
And you ask me -- you!
who are you? what do you know?
or think? how have you demonstrated
your life's commitment? --
you ask me to sacrifice my life,
my work, my thought, my family's
good condition bought with years

of quonset huts, pork liver, ravelled cuffs,
and four records on a goodwill record player
with no real bass sounds; do you know what that means?
years without music!

And me at the library with them at home.
Where were you then that you ask me now
to give that all over?

I demonstrate my commitment daily;
Your demonstrations amuse me:
your cheap and easy commitments
to the public good.

I know your restaurant meals;
your stereo-tape-deck, room-filling rock.
I deny you my life to feed on;
dine on boiled kidneys and potatoes;
say or some baked brains.
Let them eat tripe.

#2: You are so sure, so arrogant, so mad,
so positive in this self-righteous hate.
You remind me of a witch burner,
joyfully, laughingly building the fire,
quaffing like perfume
the burning woman's smoke.

You might put any one of us
to the trial by fire -- all of us
if opportunity presents itself.
I feel the flames

and know that they're for me.

Incendiary! Maniac!

Why can't we stop you?

Why can't we burn you?

What's wrong with us?

Why are we the targets?

Why our lives at fault?

Though I walk through the campus
of Death, I can not fear

This meaningless baptism of fire;
this godless burning bush!

Long pause.

#5: You're brats, just brats;
used to getting your way:

wheel, whine, harass, demand, bitch.

What kind of a world you think this is?

Not in your control, thank God;

none of us appease and cringe.

I'd like to kick your crotch in.

You don't like the laws? That's tough.

Big kids play big time games.

You think we like those rules, the games

that someone else controls?

When I was a kid, I acted like a kid;

Now I tow the line:

you bend your will to the will of all.

You can't be so rigid.
You got to have rules
for people to live, or
I'd kill you, kid,
I'd sure kill you!

#3: A hostile trinity; naught, naughty.
Why, don't you know that anger isn't nice:
you aren't supposed to hate.
Please, masters and mistresses, use your reason.
Your faith, your fire, your fervor
all impress me, impress me
with your dull castrated opposition.
Bóres, just flat bores.
You live so distant from the revolution,
I cannot even certify you counter-revolutionary.

Long pause.

#5: The walls hold it together, whatever it is.

#1: You hold no care in you, no care or anything.

#2: Nazis and Jews; Inquisitors and Heretics.

Pause.

#6: But what are the issues; we stray from the point.
None of you speak to the problems at hand.
We have real disparities, real injustice,
institutions in need of constructive change;
to bicker and hate, to goad and harass
may sustain our emotional pitch,
or present opportunity for creative
and frank, honest interchange of feelings,
but such expressions do little.
Let us lower our voices and open our hearts.

#3: Cheap liberal.

#6: I will not be goaded into argument
at such a triviality. True commitments
require more internal --
professional, if you will -- discipline.
If we are to make changes, to decide --
which we are empowered to do --
we must listen closely and calmly.
We must weigh the arguments deliberately,
without passion or bias
or violent coercion, and then
decide on policy, procedure, and action.
The rational and diligent application . . .

#3: of duly granted and acknowledged power
after disciplined investigation
and deliberation must be the goal

and process of responsible,
reasonable, informed men.
This is the foundation of all co-optive
methodologies. Who are you?
What are you? Where are you?
I don't think you're there at all.
Responsible, reasonable, informed puffs of
pale air; you're not even honest enough
to show your pollution: pale gas, just gas.
Hey, you, you intellectual mother,
what you really done for niggers lately?
When did the war end that you stopped?

Pause.

#3: And what about you,
you silent schmuck?

Pause.

#4: Everybody's choosing sides;
and all of you are wrong and right.
Revolution, deliberation, education.
I don't know; I don't know.
God, what a hell of a mess.
I commit myself to little pieces of you all,
but you leave no place for me to stand,
no place for confusion and fear.
You scare me and sicken me.
The U. is command headquarters for all
your worthless wars of attrition.
There's cops and guns and bombs and rocks
and I just want to hide.
I'm going to get shot by one of you,
ruined by another, clubbed or dismissed
or ignored by others.
What kind of a mob ritual
of self-destruction have I caught
myself in? Our frenzy of terror
and bloodthirst erupts in a chaos
of ripped worlds and blasted lives.
Will you all stand back shut up,
I need breath, I need sleep.

Long pause.

PROVOCATEUR: All right, all right. Enough is enough.
You people really expect me to take you seriously?
I mean, right here in front of me,
all around town and all over campus
there are all these thousands of people
walking around with opposite sex partners
and figuring whether they're going to make it
or worrying about tests and other bookish stuff --
you know, term papers on the latent homosexuality
of Clarence the talking mule and the Sociology of

John Donne and all -- or sailing and fishing and all the rest of that outdoor deep-breathing or a thousand other things (personal stuff, unmentionables like wondering which breakfast cereal is least nutritious so they can boycott it) and you're telling me the world is falling down. We didn't notice? Or what?

#5: What do you mean?

P: I just missed "the beginning of the end of the world, or the generations battle it to the death."

#3: That generation junk is counter-revolutionary. We're opposing political forces caught in a life and death class struggle to find the values which will rule America.

P: Ha. You kid a lot. Ha. You sound like a talking book, and not a very good one, at that. Where you get that jargon, Kid? Sure as hell not from these folks who just happen by political chance to be old enough to be your parents. Who's your publisher? printer? author? Where were you bound, Revolutionist's Handbook?

#3: I'm not being clear; you missed my point. Why do I always confuse these things?

P: Well clear things up, will you?

#3: Our ages are apart from the issues. The coming revolution results from value conflicts, deep seated conflicts in belief and life style in which age is incidental. A revolution can never be a personal vendetta.

P: What? Never? Oh, wow! I never thought of that. An abstract revolution, lacking totally in the weaknesses of human motivation. Boy, kid, you really got a great thing going. See I was projecting my own generational hostilities into the conflict and assuming that they were felt universally within the revolution. Now I understand that none of you really hate the kids or the folks or other surrogate figures symbolic of the kids or the folks in your minds.

#3: Well, of course this isn't always true of everyone, much as we might wish. Sure there are some old people who just hate kids and want to stomp on us.

whether their class interests are served by that or not.

#5: And a lot of kids who just want to raise hell wreck what their fathers built, trash the older generation by ruining us.

#1: Or ruining our work, our efforts and years of blood, sweat and tears.

#3: But you can't cop out all that easy.

P: yeah. This revolution is real, man. Look at the papers; full of it. Fighting in the streets, guerrilla warfare, theatre, everything. Deaths, blowing up buildings. It's a real thing all right, and pretty big.

#5: And it's got to be stopped, crushed.

P: Do you think you can do it? Don't you fear it's too late? I mean, once the revolution's on the road . . .

#5: It's not all that big yet.

#3: I only wish it were.

#1: I wish I could believe you. But the buildings are going, the fires are set.

P: You know, I think you're right. It's only barely started. I was blind before. Why, you're all threatened. Yours worst fears are probably too weak. You know it's true; a million students moving in, taking over everything, burning, destroying, throwing out reason, banishing truth, and all your lives will be hopelessly ruined, despite all your efforts, and you are not, not any of you responsible. Innocent victims of enraged mobs.

#6: Please, please, how can we act or think responsibly in the midst of such irrational passion, such hatred, such fear. Be reasonable.

P: Yeah, who can respond accurately when you're all like this? Who can tell what's going on? Who can be calm, collected, in command and control of his faculties enough to think and know what he is doing and understand his position.

#6: Yes, yes. We must be reasonable or we can never deal with our problems in any constructive way.

P: Such childish displays of emotion can do nothing but harm, obstructing adult thought and action for the sake of trivial feelings.

#6: Well, not trivial, no not trivial. If they were trivial, after all, they could not so severely impede problem solving.

P: Or any intelligent, reasonable amount of reconciliation we might decide to agree to. Yes, of course, you're right; emotions aren't trivial; they merely impede our progress toward a joyous peace with conflicts and hatreds solved and people sensibly reconciled.

Pause.

P: Poor innocent victims of wild mobs of enraged young revolutionaries, enraged mobs of ancient reactionaries, of middle-aged enraged establishment boobs. That's us, all us innocent folks caught in our own uncontrollable passions, victims. Beyond control. Enraged mobs, even, of rational, problem-solving-oriented mature adults swept away for a moment in the passion of the hour: as it were, out of control.

#3: But that's us who will be the victims. The mobs are on the other side; we are only a handful. We the incendiaries, we shall burn.

#2: And we'll be captives, too, in what will pass for a cleansing fire.

#1: Yes, and everything lost. Our lives and everything, everything: and the innocent shall burn with the guilty, my children shall burn in the hell I put them in.

#2: And all of us impotent in our rage. So why don't you stop; I wish I could kill you all! Why don't you stop?

#5: Why don't you stop, just stop? I don't want to be caught in the blast because you insist on blowing us up.

The walls hold everything up,
and you want to blow them apart.
And something is better than nothing.

#3: I own a piece of that impotent rage
in a world I didn't make.

#6: Ladies, gentlemen, I must insist on calm,
on some attempt at calm, at non-violent sentiments,
at reasonableness. I insist, I demand it.
I will not tolerate further outbursts of
irrationality, hatred, etc.
I can't stand such stupidity and
childish impotence, such monumental weakness.
We have to all calm down or
who can be responsible?

#4: The only thing that any of us
will willingly own is a piece of the impotent rage.
Rage for the world that none of us made.
And none of us know what to do
or how to do it if we did,
and so we rage.

P: Do not go gentle into that good night:
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Long pause. Closing hymn:

Shalom chavyreem, shalom chavyreem, shalom, shalom.
Shalom chavyreem, shalom chavyreem, shalom, shalom.