



George of the Gelatin-Brains (illustration by Timothy Sparvero)

**Another Incredibly Confusing  
Story of the Most Fantastic  
Einsteinian Trekker in the  
Cosmos: Rip Tapioca, Marshal  
of the Time Stream and  
Investigative Reporter to the  
Fifth Power, with His Sidekick  
George of the Gelatin-Brains,  
As They Search for the  
Meaning of Life**

**The Second Book**

## DAVE: THE ADVENTURES OF RIP TAPIOCA & CO.

SPACE IS INFINITE. Spaceships are not. This holds true for all spaceships, but most especially the one located two light-years from the first self-aware black hole, an astronomical phenomenon who went by the name Lester and worked tirelessly to unionize the black hole industry. (To Lester's distress, the first meeting ended in disaster when all the potential members sucked each other into oblivion.) This spaceship was shaped like a bar of soap that had been sitting unused in a gas station restroom until a burly trucker named Leroy used it to plug up the washbasin so he could shave for a hot date. It floated in space serenely, like a swan gliding effortlessly across a glass-clear lake.

Then the ship blew itself to smithereens.

A reverberating oops could be heard echoing across the cosmos. The source of the oops could be traced to a man holding the remains of a thermonuclear device and a corkscrew. He angrily yanked a fish from his back pocket and poked the aquatic creature in a precise location. The ship now reassembled itself in no time flat.

"That's not it," said the man, clearly named Rip Tapioca as suggested by the title of this book and the "Hello! My name is Rip!" sticker on his forehead.

Just then another man entered the room, shorter than Rip, with a frizzy perm dyed purple and wearing day-glo high-tops. His teeth were clenched and beads of sweat rolled from his temples. "I have a favor to ask," said the little man.

"Fire away, George of the Gelatin-Brains, my faithful sidekick

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and confidante.”

“Could you take a moment to remove this bear trap from my hind quarters?” asked George, displaying the metal spikes piercing his flesh.

“And if I don’t?”

“I’ll get real real mad and tell your mother about that dreadful incident with the Smurfs.”

Eyes widening, Rip told George to hold still and pulled a device from a compartment on his computer console. George trembled abundantly as the disintegration ray came within one millimeter of his backside. “All done! Just dig those iron teeth out of your bum and you’ll be as good as new.”

“Thanks a heap, Rip. You’re so kind and sensitive,” George sarcastically blathered.

A creepy sneer crept upon Rip’s face. “I wonder how you’d look with a two-inch hole through your face,” he said, aiming the disintegration ray.

George blurted, “Did you find it yet?”

“Not yet,” said Rip, immediately crestfallen.

“But it’s not a thermonuclear device and it’s not a bear trap.”

“No. Definitely not.”

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“Do you think we’ll find it?”

“I certainly hope so.”

“Me too.” After a moment, George spoke up again: “What am I talking about?” He knew the perils of a short memory.

Rip sighed. “We are searching for the meaning of life. The Universal Tribunal wants us to study a variety of inanimate objects to see if tangible philosophy presents itself.”

“Oh.”

“Next theory to check: life is a pork chop!”

Rip followed his proclamation with a florid gesture on the Artifish, a plastic salmon that served as his portable control device, causing the air to buzz with static. George heard a popping sound and a loud squeal, and then he found himself snout-to-snout with a 700-pound hog. And an angry hog, at that.

“I’m not hungry!” screamed George, but the hog did not appear to have strong feelings about George’s hunger. The hog squealed again and took a lap around the control room gaining speed while George frantically looked for a place to hide. “You said a pork chop, Rip! This isn’t a pork chop!”

“Ah, but I like my pork chops fresh,” said Rip.

The hog charged George, knocking him to the ground and tap-dancing on his arms. George’s arms now had taken on the appearance of two half-filled tubes of ground beef. He would not

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be hugging anyone anytime soon.

Then the hog turned toward Rip Tapioca, snarling with bloodlust. Rip yawned as the hog charged toward him at top speed, and then yanked out the Artifish to tap a sequence of scales.

The hog was immediately transformed into a few hundred pounds of pork chops. The heap of meat slid across the floor and slapped into a wall. A few chops fell from the top of the pile and hit the ground with a moist plop.

“Wow!” cried George. “That’s enough pork to feed a grummon of wumbles.”

“Possibly,” Rip thought out loud. “It’s surely enough to feed a wumble of grummons.”

“Was that it?”

“No, I don’t think life is a pork chop. Keep in mind that we had to end the life of the hog to make the pork chops, and as we all know concept extinction does not lead to concept generation, even in the field of tangible philosophy.”

“I think I read that someplace,” nodded George.

“*Reader’s Digest*, maybe.”

“Hey, Rip ol’ buddy, these shattered arms are a big downer. Could you fix them, please?”

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“Only if you promise not to tell my mother about the Smurfs.”

“I promise.”

Rip burst out crying, “They were blue and weird-looking! I honestly thought they were hideously mutated rodents! It’s not my fault!”

“I know, I know.”

Recovering quickly from this display of emotion, Rip approached his computer console. “Tell me, sidekick of mine, would you like a limb transplant of some sort or should we just heal those suckers?”

“I’ll stick with my own arms.”

“Too bad. You’d look cute with flippers. Baboon arms would be a nice change, yes? They would drag in the dirt when you’re walking, and—”

“Fix me, Rip! Do it now! I’m getting an itch on my nose!”

“Hey, did you get these fingerprints on the control panel? I’ve told you a thousand times to wear gloves when you—”

“This is a major league itch!” George impatiently howled.

Sweat beaded on Rip’s brow as he struggled to remember the average annual rainfall in the Amazon basin. Suddenly remembering that George’s arms had been snapped like balsa wood,

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Rip punched a button. George jumped up, scratching furiously.

“Will that be satisfactory?” asked Rip.

“Yebbth.” George had forgotten to stop scratching. He slowly accepted that the itch was gone and started looking for another one.

“Let us continue!” decreed Rip. “The next theory: life is a radioactive isotope!” The two figures paused for several minutes as they wondered exactly what was going on. Soon they came to their senses. Then they paused for another hour as they wondered exactly why they had paused in the first place. Finally they snapped out of it. “As I was saying: life is a radioactive isotope!”

Utilizing his full cranial capacity, George uttered, “Why?”

“I don’t know,” stated Rip, “but it sounds neat.”

“Where are you going to find a radioactive isotope anyway?”

“Not an issue, my Gelatin-Brain friend. I happen to have one right here!” With that, Rip pulled a glowing rock out of his pocket. It bathed the room in a piercing yellow light.

“AAAAAAAUUUUGGGGHHHHH!” commented George. “That thing will vaporize us within seconds!”

“Oh. I didn’t think of that,” Rip muttered, replacing the rock in his pocket. Scrunching his face in deep thought, he discovered that he still had a sticker on his forehead that said “Hello! My name is Rip!”

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Without warning, George revealed, “Rip, you still have that sticker on your forehead.”

“Of *course* I do!” snapped Rip, tearing off the sticker and taking a healthy portion of Rip’s flesh along with it. The nametag fluttered to the ground and let out a barely audible scream. (Seems like this might be an important thing to remember, dear reader.)

“Okay,” nodded George. “What happens now?”

“We investigate whether life is a pizza.”

“A pizza?”

“A pizza.”

*A pizza?*”

“Yes, a pizza.”

“Oh. A pizza.” Analyzing the statement, George reacted, “Why the heck would life be a pizza?”

“Hey, if life can be a pork chop, it can sure as heck be a pizza.”

“But you just deduced that life could not be a pork chop.”

“True enough. But if what could be, is what is, then what would be, might be because of the similarities between the two. Then again, they may not be the same just because of appearances. Therefore, the analogy is irrelevant and the hypothesis is in question.”

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“Oh.”

“Therefore, assuming that the hypothesis is false puts into question the viability of the existence of the meaning of life. This is rather depressing, which leads us to accept that all that was, will be, and it is what it is only because what it was wasn’t what we thought it was.”

“Oh.” George’s brain started to vibrate.

“According to this argument, the hypothesis must be tested by consuming a pizza. This method was not used on the pork chops because they are not available for delivery.” Rip grabbed a communication device and furiously punched buttons.

Over the *Titanberg’s* public address system, a booming Italian voice whooped, “Angeloniardanolonio’s, where you can’t-a leave until your arteries start-a to harden!”

“Delivery for Rip Tapioca, Marshal of the Time Stream: one colossal combo pizza with extra cheese, no olives, loads of anchovies, a dab of butterscotch topping, and oodles of chocolate syrup.”

“Hey! What’s-a-matter-you?”

“What?”

“Don’t-a you want pepperoni?”

Receiving a nod of approval from George, Rip caved in: “Sure, throw on the pepperoni.”

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“What’s-a the address?”

“The spaceship *Titanberg*, two par-secs nebula-wise from Polaris and a couple light-years from the black hole named Lester.”

“Gotcha. Bye-bye!” The call disconnected.

George had a thought, which stung a little bit. “Isn’t Angeloniardanolonio’s almost seven million light-years from here?”

“What’s your point?”

George’s face grew white. “By the time it gets here, the pizza will be *cold!*”

“I hadn’t accounted for that,” Rip breathed ominously.

At that moment, the nametag ripped from Rip’s forehead quivered on the ground. It throbbed with an unearthly murmur. Cells multiplied and the nametag grew to huge proportions. Fangs, tentacles, and other slimy appendages sprouted from the now gigantic nametag, metamorphosing the small scrap of paper into a horrid beast. “Hello! My name is Uggllrrlggrl!” said the nametag, both across the front of his body and through audible vocalization.

Thinking quickly, Rip whipped out his notebook and asked, “Four *g*’s, correct?”

“Yes, four. Two between the *u* and the *l* and two more between the second *l* and the third *r*.” The monster gestured to the enormous nametag covering the front of his body.

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“Got it. Proceed.”

“I will now conquer this dimension!” screeched Uggllrrlggrl.

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Why would you do something like that? Seems like an awful bother.”

“Well, there’s nothing to watch on TV.”

“Nonsense! I can arrange a ride on the time-computo shaft to a Thursday night in the late 1980s. In that era, millions of television viewers tuned in to a block of quality programs every week and reached a state of perfect bliss. Ratings proved their satisfaction!”

“I’ll do it!” chirped Uggllrrlggrl.

“You’ll have a splendid evening in front of the boob tube.”

Uggllrrlggrl tensed his tentacles. “Are you referring to me as a boob?”

“Of course not, Uggllrrlggrl. ‘Boob tube’ is an American colloquialism that came about due to its charming rhyme scheme.”

“Okey-dokey.”

“THERE’S ANOTHER ONE!” cried George, breaking into the conversation.

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Rip and Uggrrllggrrl glared at the Gelatin-Brain.

“Sorry,” he shrugged.

Uggrrllggrrl begged, “Can I ride the time-computo shaft? Huh? Huh? Can I?”

“Certainly,” Rip agreed. “All you have to do is hold a kumquat and say, ‘There’s no place like home.’” Then Rip pulled a lever labeled *Kumquat Ejector* and the oblong orange fruit was flung into Uggrrllggrrl’s tentacles.

The massive nametag closed his eyes and clutched the kumquat like a teddy bear. “There’s no place like home...there’s no place like home.” His form faded and he was shafted away.

“I never realized how much nametags enjoyed situation comedies,” Rip stated. He took a moment to meditate about recent events and a shocking discovery washed over him. He stepped to the powder residue displacement surface, plainly marked with the antiquated term *Chalkboard*, and scribbled some formulas and mathematical equations. The chalk took on a supernatural quality as Rip wrote an escalating variety of variables and exponents, filling the blank space with such a confusing mass of symbols that it had to mean something.

Rip turned around, rubbing his chin in deep thought. He started pacing. In fact, this Investigative Reporter to the Fifth Power was so deep in thought that he didn’t notice that he was pacing on his sidekick. George himself didn’t notice until he had three cracked

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ribs and Timebootprints all over his face.

“What’s on your mind, Rip?” asked a concerned George.

“I’m a tad perplexed.”

“NEVER MIND PERPLEXED! YOU’RE CRUSHING MY LUNGS!”

“So sorry,” Rip apologized, leaping high into the air and doing a double backflip with three twists before sticking the landing. “It’s as I feared,” said Rip, an overwhelmed look on his face. “My probabilities are jumbled.”

“Your probabilities are jumbled? Oh no! Not that!” George paused for a moment, and then decided that standing upright would make his concern seem more genuine. He cleared his throat and repeated, “Your probabilities are jumbled? Oh no! Not that! What does this mean?”

“Every action I attempt will lead to an unpredictable outcome. Each possibility is equally probable. If I try to wiggle my toe, it’s just as likely that I will do fifty push-ups or jump into orbit.”

“No way. You’re too much of a wimp to do fifty push-ups.”

A beam of high-intensity laser light tore through George’s body like a million red-hot crowbars.

“Call me a wimp, will you?”

Rip looked at the smoldering remains of George’s body in shock. While he had planned to tear out his sidekick’s spine for the insult, he had accidentally blasted George into little pieces resembling chipped beef. This is the grave danger of jumbled probabilities.

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Rip knew that reaching for the Artifish could make him start bouncing like a rubber ball, so he instead tried to cross his eyes and gloriously found the Artifish within his grasp. Quickly rubbing a scale before it became probable that his bones were made of Styrofoam, Rip regenerated George with the awesome power of the Artifish.

“You’re not a wimp! Really! Truly! I mean it!”

“Shut up and listen to me,” whispered Rip. “I need your help.”

“The mighty Marshal of the Time Stream needs *my* help?” gasped George.

“Yes.”

“Hot diggity dog! I’m in charge now!” George stole the Artifish from Rip’s motionless hands and redecorated the *Titanberg* as any fashion-backward Gelatin-Brain would. Inflatable furniture popped into existence. Two flamingo-shaped lamps appeared atop a misshapen paperweight that acted as a coffee table. Every color clashed with every other color. Any self-respecting interior decorator would suffer a massive heart attack upon entering the spaceship.

“George...”

“Yes, my pathetic underling?”

“This spaceship had better be back to normal in the next ten seconds or I will be forced to disrupt some very painful probabilities through your abdomen.”

“I appreciate the time to think it over,” said George, strumming the Artifish and returning the *Titanberg* back to normal. You could

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almost hear the spaceship sigh in relief.

Speaking slowly to avoid any disruptions, Rip began: “I once did a report on jumbled probabilities for the Universal Tribunal. I began to feel the characteristic vibrations when I ripped the dormant Uggllrrlggrl from my forehead. I suspected it when the communication wavelengths from Angeloniardanolonio’s traveled seven million light-years instantaneously with no time-warping on my part. But after I wrote something truly meaningful on the powder residue displacement surface, it became clear that only one possible conclusion can be made: reality is illing.”

“Illing?”

“Street slang, which translates as ‘unwell.’”

“Unwell?”

“In the Gelatin-Brain manner of speech, ‘quangled.’”

“Quangled?”

“Staple your lips together, George.”

“Make me.”

Rip attempted to tie his shoe, and before long George’s lips were stapled together.

“Now,” Rip continued, “my investigative report concluded that jumbled probabilities can be negated by relocating the affected tissue mass into a planetary biosphere which supports a lifeform with unbelievably low intelligence. But how can I locate a stupid planet like that if I can’t move to use my equipment?”

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“Ooon dow kow foonf!” squealed the outraged George.

Rip considered alternatives for close to a nanosecond. “We’ll go to your home planet, George.”

“Aah woo kih wing wip?”

“No, I’m not kidding. Use the Artifish to send us there.”

The highly technological artificial salmon performed millions of calculations per second as George rolled the eye in its socket. Three scales were pressed in rapid succession to set the program in motion.

“It’s fortunate that you know the basics of the Artifish,” said Rip. “Your intense stupidity combined with its awesome power could accidentally destroy multiple star systems.”

A piercing wave of blinding light flashed through the portholes as the crumbling roar of a supernova shook the ship.

“I take that back,” said the immobile Rip. The spaceship phased away just in time to avoid a destructive solar flare.



GEORGE AND RIP felt their stomachs heave as the teleportation circuits sputtered at the end of the cycle. A loud noise erupted, like a massive spaceship being dropped into a pool of gelatin. (This forced metaphor will seem more appropriate in a moment.) Then the *Titanberg*’s lights went off with a loud zap.

Cautiously, Rip stuck out his tongue. Nothing improbable occurred! Owing this turn of events to George, Rip summoned the

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rechargeable staple remover and unfastened his sidekick's lips. "Is that better?"

"Yes indeed," nodded George. "I'll admit that I was getting used to speaking incoherently."

"You should be, considering how long you've been—" The insult came to a halt as Rip looked around in a sudden panic. "What happened to the power?"

George shrugged his left shoulder. Then he shrugged the right one.

"An unspeakably evil force is about to be unleashed upon your homeworld, and all you can do is shrug?"

"If it's so unspeakable, why are you talking about it?" George rolled his eyes.

"Never mind unspeakable, the most consequential element of that phrase is 'evil force!'"

"What evil force?"

"That evil force!" Rip pointed to a broom closet. The door shuddered and blew off its hinges with a deafening boom. Screaming like a banshee, an intangible spectre of black smoke darted through the terrified twosome, spiraled through a portal and was gone.

"Oh, *that* evil force."

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“His name is Earl,” explained Rip. “Years ago I was hired to exterminate phantasms from some planet in Alpha Centauri, and Earl was their ringleader. It took me twelve days, a hundred pounds of plutonium, and a random tornado, but I finally prevailed and trapped him in the Cosmic Cuisinart®.”

“What’s a Cosmic Cuisinart®?”

“That’s not important. All that matters is that the power failure has set him free. Even as we speak, Earl is in the process of destroying your home planet—what’s the name of this place, anyway?”

“Annodam-1, home of the Gelatin-Brains, planet of my birth! Can we visit the Upside-Down Mountain? And we need to see the River That Goes Nowhere! Can we? Can we?”

“First we save the planet, then we go sightseeing. Let’s get out of here.” Rip took the Artifish from George and teleported the two of them directly outside the non-functioning spaceship. Then they began to suffocate.

“Uhhhhrrrrr!” sucked George.

“We seem to be drowning in a gelatinous substance!” screamed Rip, but the words were not easy to decipher because his lungs were filling with gelatin. Moving in slow motion, Rip thrust a hand towards his foot and forcefully smacked one of his Timeboots, raising a shower of sparks. The circuitry activated and the delightful duo popped away.

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They returned twenty minutes later, this time on dry land. The uncanny survival instincts of the sentient galoshes zapped Rip and George through space and time to a safe environment. It's a good thing, too, or this whole paragraph would have been used to describe their motionless corpses, which doesn't make for gripping fiction.

"The Sea of Lime Gelatin!" shouted George. "We crash-landed in the Sea of Lime Gelatin! This is where we Gelatin-Brains get our gelatin brains."

"Are you serious?"

"Yeah! We scoop out some gelatin, boil it down, and pour it in through one of our ear canals. Then the gelatin hardens, forming our brains. It's a very solemn ceremony."

"I'll bet."

"Look there!" pointed George. "Someone is collecting a brain right now!"

Quickly pulling out his computer-encoded notebook and LED pen, Rip hurried over to the gelatin-scooping brain collector. The man had the jowls and wrinkles of an ancient man, yet he maintained an air of youth and shiny brown hair. He wore the attire of a rancher on a cattle drive. Rip approached the elderly cowboy, and said, "You're a Gelatin-Brain, aren't you?"

"Yes," said the cowboy, looking up with a vacant stare.

"My name is Rip Tapioca and I'm an Investigative Reporter to

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the Fifth Power. Please tell me about this brain ritual.”

“Well,” said the cowboy, letting that word burn into Rip’s brain with its presidential timbre, “I’m Zerp of the Gelatin-Brains, and I’m getting some extra brains here. Yes, I am.”

“Why do you need extra brains?” Rip queried.

“Well,” said Zerp, “my Chief of Staff informs me that I need to veto some legislation today, so I thought my old noggin could use a little bit more oomph, if you know what I mean.”

“Interesting. Tell me more about this veto.”

Zerp chuckled. “There you go again. I don’t really know what any of this means. They don’t let me know any of that.”

“Who is ‘they’?”

“My staff, my advisors, my wife, and her psychic.”

“If you have a staff and advisors, you must be a high-ranking public official.”

Zerp smiled. “Well, I have an office shaped like an oval. That’s pretty neat. Incidentally, have you seen a chimpanzee around here? He’s named Bonzo. Darn fellow keeps disappearing.”

Rip grimaced. “You need to let me know, George. Did this guy scoop up a bad batch of goop or is this typical behavior for a Gelatin-Brain?”

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George and Zerp were babbling uncontrollably about the social significance of jellybeans.

“Pay attention!” yelled Rip, bashing the two morons’ heads together. “This planet is in grave danger!”

“Well, there’s no need to get violent. I never encountered a problem that a few hundred strategically positioned nuclear missiles could fail to solve. Mutually assured destruction, you see.”

“Shut up!” cried the Marshal of the Time Stream, tackling Zerp and pounding his face with fists of rage. “I would sooner swallow a swordfish than let you touch a nuclear missile! Just tell me where to find your leader! Where is your head of state?”

“It’s [GUH!] floating above the [UGH!] Sea of Lime Gelatin! This is the brain of state [GHU!] so the head can’t be far behind!”

Rip froze in mid-pummel and glanced to the sky. A huge metropolis floated high above the planet’s surface. “How could Gelatin-Brains produce such technology?” he wondered aloud.

“We watch a lot of public television,” explained Zerp. Rip landed one more blow and knocked him unconscious.

“Come now, my loyal sidekick! We need to notify your leader of this awful menace!” Rip slapped the Artifish against Zerp’s forehead and spirited the two adventurers skyward.

Zerp pulled himself from oblivion and painfully groaned his approval. “Go out there with all you’ve got,” he said, “and win just

one for the Gipper.” Then he was washed away in the gelatin tide.

This paragraph has nothing to do with the story, but it gives me a chance to figure out what happens next. Thank you for your patience.



THE INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER TO THE FIFTH POWER and his Gelatin-Brain companion faded into view at one end of an enormous room several hundred feet long and half as wide. They could see a throne at the other end of the room, facing away from them and toward a wall of windows. Heavy stone columns lined the marble walls and noble statues were staggered along the columns. A glittering disco ball hung lazily from the ceiling.

Rip began a slow trot towards the throne. “What is your leader’s name, George? And how should I address him?”

“Don’t you know *anything* about my home planet?” George moaned.

“You expect me to commit facts to memory about a planet full of people born without brains?”

Just then, the throne spun around with a gleam of light and a sharp hum. Rip and George sheltered their eyes from the radiance. Once they adjusted to the throne’s brightness, they could see the head of state as a young woman with tousled brown hair, several layers of makeup, and all sorts of jewelry and bangles hanging

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around her neck. She wore a purple outfit made of thrift-store items; the neckline was cut quite low to augment her sultry form.

“Who’s that girl?” Rip nudged.

“That’s our leader. She is known as the True Blue Virgin.”

“Does her name hold any significance?”

“Not one bit.”

The True Blue Virgin glared at Rip and spat, “Are you the nutbar responsible for that ectoplasmic thingie outside?”

“Uh...yeah,” Rip blushed. “That is: yea verily, O mighty True Blue Virgin.”

The True Blue Virgin erupted into a volcano of exposition. “This had to happen today, didn’t it? I proclaimed this week an extended holiday so I could take some time to get away. Wouldn’t you know that as soon as I get into the groove and go over the borderline of my kingdom, mushroom clouds are sprouting all over the place? Thanks to you, I may not live to tell anyone about my vacation to the Lucky Star.” She pouted, then perked, then purred: “You guys wanna hear about it?”

“Well...not this minute. Maybe after we save the planet.”

“So you don’t want to see my slides?” screeched the outraged emperor. She stood upright and began a combination belly-dance and aerobics routine, staring deeply into Rip’s eyes as she twirled

and thrusted.

Rip Tapioca felt his body tearing into loose electrons. He became a bit unnerved as his body devolved into a visible cloud of microscopic particles. Each electron retained the belief that he was a complete Rip, and within moments there were billions and billions of tiny Rips grasping the situation. Then each electron declared itself king of the electrons. Civil war erupted and the electrons began blasting each other with itty-bitty electromagnetic bursts, each of which sounded very much like a dropping pin. George, amused by the sound of so many pins dropping, fell to the ground laughing.

The True Blue Virgin was disgusted. “Violent electrons. How I hate violent electrons!” With a thrust of the young woman’s athletic hips, the battling particles were spirited away at the speed of thought. “Go ahead and save the planet. See if I care!”

George was still rolling on the floor in delight. When he noticed that the pin-symphony had disappeared, he redoubled in laughter, thinking it hilarious that he had no reason to laugh.

The True Blue Virgin took note of this. “You’re a Gelatin-Brain, aren’t you?” she asked softly.

Forgetting that he was laughing at the fact that he wasn’t laughing at anything, George replied in the affirmative. “Folks call me George of the Gelatin-Brains,” he said.

“Enlightening,” she moaned, licking her lips. “What flavor are

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your brains?”

“Lime. I’ve got regular lime brains.”

“Uh-huh,” she continued, moving closer to him. “Mine are strawberry-flavored. They came into my possession just after The Great Idea.”

“I remember The Great Idea like it was yesterday! That was when we all decided to breathe regularly.” George wandered toward the throne. “This big chair is made of metal, huh?”

“Platinum. I’m known to be quite the material girl.”

“I’ve heard that.” He sat down on the arm of the throne.

She took her seat on the throne.

He looked to the left.

She removed her low-cut top, revealing a bustier.

He looked to the right.

She snuggled up to George, tenderly stroking his thigh.

He looked up.

“Open your heart, my angel! I wanna dress you up in my love! I’m crazy for you!” she gasped, tearing at George’s shirt.

He looked at her and asked, “Who does your ductwork?”

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Discouraged, she slumped back into the throne. “Eugene of the Gelatin-Brains,” she said.

“Oh, he’s good. He’s *very* good.”

Suddenly a wall exploded as a knight wearing copper-colored armor crashed into view. He avoided the rubble caused by his entrance and leaped to a position before the throne. The knight unlatched his helmet and removed it, revealing himself as a blond-haired man with a big nose and piercing eyes. He sneered with menace as he brandished a battle-axe and prepared to smash George into goo.

“Hello, Sean,” greeted the True Blue Virgin.

“I am Sean of the Penns, devoted husband of the True Blue Virgin and prince consort of Annodam-1!” the raging knight shouted.

“Pleased to meet you!” George waggled, stretching out his hand.

“Are you a reporter?” accusingly boomed Sean. “I hate reporters!”

“Not as far as you know.”

“Oh,” said Sean. He hooked the battle-axe back onto his belt. “My apologies, I didn’t catch the name.”

“George. George of the Gelatin-Brains.”

“Charmed,” said Sean, flashing a reckless smile. He strode over to

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the liquor cabinet and pulled out a bottle. “So what do you do for a living, my new friend?”

“I’m a professional sidekick.”

“Interesting.” Sean downed a shot of whiskey. “For whom do you sidekick?” he queried as he slugged another.

“Rip Tapioca.”

“Very good.” Sean took shot number three. The True Blue Virgin rolled her eyes in disgust as he made it four. “Rip Tapioca... where have I heard that name before?”

“Rip is well-known throughout the universe. He’s the Marshal of the Time Stream....”

Sean took a swig of whiskey from the bottle and nodded.

“...the Leader of the Semi-Intelligent Cat Toys of Arcturus-5....”

Another swig, another nod.

“...Investigative Reporter to the Fifth Power, and....”

Sean unconsciously gulped the remainder of the bottle. “That’s it! Rip Tapioca is one of those despicable IR5 types! If you’re his sidekick, you don’t deserve to live!” He tossed the bottle away and drew forth a large mace.

“...a hell of a nice guy, if I do say so myself,” continued George, not realizing that the large weapon aimed at his head was meant to

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separate his body into lots of little pieces.

The True Blue Virgin sighed loudly. She rotated her buttocks and separated George into electrons. He was spirited away just as the mace shattered the throne into splinters of platinum.

“I HATE REPORTERS!” rampaged Sean of the Penns.

“You mentioned that,” said the True Blue Virgin.



RIP'S ELECTRONS RECONSTITUTED in the gutted remains of a Gelatin-Brain skyscraper. Steam rose from the rubble. The tortured screams of Gelatin-Brains could be heard in the distance. Rip knew his duty. So he started talking to his galoshes.

“What do you say, Timeboots? Any ideas?”

“#@!&\*%\*\$!” answered the enormously intelligent Timeboots.

“Remember, the Artifish is useless on Earl.”

“@%##&\*@?#&!”

“That’s a thought,” mullied Rip, “but if I break a fingernail, gravity will cease to exist. I’m sure I don’t have to remind you about that last time that happened.”

“%.”

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“Thanks for your input,” Rip snapped. Stealthily stumbling on the uneven landscape, Rip made his way to the battlefield. Peeking around a paper clip vending machine, he witnessed the wrath of Earl. The Armed Forces of Annodam-1 were predictably ineffectual, as they were only cleared to use rubber bands as defensive weapons. In retaliation, Earl laughed like Woody Woodpecker. Fully half of the battalion were stopped in their tracks by the silly laugh and collapsed in terror. The other half passed out because it looked like the “in” thing to do.

“It’s official,” said Rip. “These are the least intelligent humanoid creatures in the cosmos.” He grabbed a flyswatter and leaped into the fray.

“Die! Die! Die!” Rip thrashed wildly, the flyswatter firmly in his grasp.

“Well, well, well,” cackled Earl, floating above Rip.

“No no no!” howled Rip, tossing some comatose Gelatin-Brains at the spectre of smoke.

“Ha ha ha!” snickered Earl, pulling together his form and swooping away to wreak havoc wherever there was havoc to wreak.

Rip collapsed, too exhausted to speak in three-word repetitions. “He’s completely invulnerable to physical forces! Even flyswatters! What can I do?” Rip concentrated intensely. Then he dozed off. It had been an exhausting day.

A few minutes later, the Marshal of the Time Stream awoke with

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a splendid idea. He yanked a rubber band gun out of the rubble and removed his left Timeboot. He placed the gun into his technologically advanced boot and pulled the Artifish out of its holster. Rip tapped a scale near the tail of the plastic salmon and wondered why grapefruits look nothing like grapes.

The Timeboot began chugging and smoking. Electrodes glowed and lights flashed. Suddenly a gun of different size and shape popped out of the Timeboot like toast from a toaster, only it was a gun and not toast at all—in this way, it was nothing at all like a toaster. The Timeboot grunted, “#%+\$!” and collapsed in exhaustion, having melted several circuits in the matter-shifting process. The Artifish also grew limp as its energy reserves were depleted.

Rip grasped the weapon, which was warm to the touch. He held it above his head and cried to the heavens: “The Timeboots are damaged! The Artifish is inoperable! The weapon is ready! The sky is blue! The square root of twenty-five is five! Everything seems to be in order.” He slid the weapon into its holster. “To the death of Earl!” he bellowed.

With an insane chuckle, he bounded into the distance with an inactive Timeboot wobbling on his ankle.



GEORGE WAS REASSEMBLED deep within a humid jungle, at the edge of a treeline at the foot of a large pyramid-shaped temple, a

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structure so tall that it almost blended into the sky. George wracked his Gelatin-Brain trying to comprehend his current status.

“My fingernails are trimmed unevenly,” he said.

A swarthy man wearing a tunic of leopard skin yelled loudly as he swung through the jungle on a leafy vine. As the vine reached George, it froze in mid-swing. The muscular swinging fellow released the vine from his grasp, straightened his leopard skin, and addressed George: “What is the meaning of life?”

“Uneven fingernails?”

The swinger nodded, stepped back onto his vine, and continued his travels with a loud squeal as he faded into the distance. George was perplexed by this exchange. He was also hopelessly stranded with no possibility of escape. Therefore, he renewed his search for the meaning of life.

He began with the supposition that life is a large temple. Staring at the great stone structure for a while, he found that it generally stood there looking quite heavy. George saw no metaphors in this line of reasoning, so he discarded the idea. He went on to allege that life is sand, bubble gum, tse-tse flies, tartar control toothpaste, or lint. Later still, he presumed that life could be a salt shaker, a Frisbee, a marshmallow, a dirty sock, an armadillo, or perhaps a zipper. These stimulating thoughts were simultaneously boring and worthless.

Noticing a handle of stone on the wall of the temple, George reasoned that life could be a doorknob. He decided to test the

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theory based on Rip's methods.

“A doorknob. A knob sticking out of a wall. What should I do with it? Perhaps I should smell it. [Sniff!] It has the distinctive smell of stone. Let me put my ear against it and see what I can hear. It doesn't sound like anything. It sounds like silence, really. I've heard that love is blind, so perhaps life is deaf? The time has come to taste the doorknob. [Lick!] It tastes like moss and fungus. How dreadful! And how do I know the taste of moss and fungus, anyway? Never mind those details—I'm onto something here. I shall test the doorknob's sense of self-survival by striking it with my fist. [Thud!] While my subject remains motionless, my hand is now wracked with pain. Let's see if it has a range of motion. Push it...nothing happens. Pull it...still nothing. It seems to twist clockwise and counterclockwise. I'll twist this way and push...no. Twist the other way and pull...not working. Twist this way and push...gadzooks!”

The door opened to reveal a stairway leading deep beneath the surface. Elated by his deduction of the doorknob's function, George forgot to prove that life is a doorknob. Rather, his brain was so exhausted that he completely blocked out memory of the valuable university class called “The Greater Art of Stair-Climbing and Descending.” Within seconds, George was tumbling end over end down the long staircase. He was having the time of his life until he hit bottom.

George landed in a ceremonial room deep within the catacombs of the temple. A man in a white toga stood behind an altar with multiple fabulous babes, scantily clad, lounging around the room in worship. All eyes were on the bouncing disruption we know as

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George.

The Gelatin-Brain jumped to his feet laughing. “Have you ridden this thing?” he asked the group. “It’s more fun than wrestling a greased pig!”

Tempers flared.



MEANWHILE, Rip was stalking the evil spectre of smoke known as Earl through the streets of Annodam-1. Rip held the weapon at his side and watched the beast pull his particles together and ram through a storefront.

The sign on the marquee advertised *Angeloniardanolonio's Pizza*. As glass shards scattered across the street, a portly man with a colorful moustache bounded into Earl's path. He wore a chef's hat and looked agitated. “What's-a-matter-you? Why you breaking up-a my store? You foul filth!”

“You're a feisty one.” Earl snatched the little man and prepared to throw him into orbit.

“Okay, you're not so foul.” The moustache twitched.

“Goodbye, flea!” said Earl.

“Golly gee!” said the pizza chef.

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“Look at me!” cried Rip.

“Glory be!” hailed the pizza chef.

“How could this be?” questioned Earl.

“Vitamin D,” suggested Rip.

“It’s time to flee,” escaped the pizza chef.

“Indubitably,” nodded Rip, completing an octet of rhyming dialogue with a smirk. “I’m giving you one chance to surrender to me, Earl. Only one chance.”

Earl pulled his particles together.

“This is your very last chance,” Rip announced, aiming the weapon. “You may beg for mercy if you wish.”

Earl formed himself into a black spear with an impossibly sharp point.

“If you must beg, please don’t blubber all over me. I can’t stand to see a grown spectre cry.”

Earl hurled himself at Rip’s forehead.

“A simple recognition of my superior intellect and battle prowess would be appreciated.”

Earl audibly pierced the air.

“What a pretty rock!” Rip gasped, bending over to examine a

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shiny stone. Earl darted past Rip, shaving a few hairs from his neck, and drilled himself into a boulder. Hopelessly trapped within the boulder, Earl's consciousness wavered away.

Rip took the radioactive isotope out of his pocket. He had previously learned that life was not a radioactive isotope but had not yet determined whether or not life is a pretty rock. He tossed the glowing specimen over his shoulder and dropped the rock into his pocket, not noticing that the radioactive isotope dissolved everything it touched and sank into the ground with a noxious odor.

Just then, a small boy skipped onto the battlefield, dressed in the garb of a commoner from the Middle Ages. The boy noticed an odd spear stuck in the boulder and approached the motionless Earl. With a curious look on his face, the boy grasped the sword in the stone, pulled it free, and held the weapon over his head. The clouds grew dark and lightning flashed. The sword glowed warmly as an otherworldly voice made bold declarations of the boy's divine right to lead his people. Startled, the boy replaced the sword into the boulder and the magical effects blinked away. "What a bloody obvious joke," the boy commented as he skipped away.

Rip grabbed his special weapon and pressed the trigger. A force field radiated from the barrel and enveloped Earl in a prison of pure energy.

"I win! I win! I win!" The Marshal of the Time Stream did a little dance and considered making a little love.

Out of nowhere, an extremely massive and furious nametag flew

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in from the upper atmosphere holding a rutabaga, tentacles flailing. A strange battle cry burst from his slimy lips: “Barbara Walters?!!”

It became clear to Rip that he would not have an opportunity to get down tonight.



AT THIS TIME, a man in a toga was growing quite annoyed by George. “I’m prefacing an orgy here,” the fellow said, his wavy blond hair standing on end. “Do you mind?”

“I’m sorry,” expressed a sorrowful George, catching an eyeful of the curvy ladies arching their backs in preparation for the ceremony.

“You foolish Gelatin-Brains know how to ruin a good time.”

“You’re not a Gelatin-Brain, are you?” George asked, looking at the man’s ear for the telltale detachment mechanism.

“Certainly not. Annodam-1 is simply a pit stop on my multi-dimensional travels. This world is famous throughout the universe for its gullible women.”

“It’s our main tourist draw,” nodded George. “But who are you?”

“Can’t you guess?”

George had a slap-in-the-face of recognition. “Are you this week’s

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lost god?”

“More than that—I am the sum total of all the lost gods in the history of Annodam-1! I am the supreme god of the Gelatin-Brains. I’M NUMBER ONE!”

“Really?” George was sweating into his eyes.

“No,” admitted the man, “but the chicks dig it.”

“So who are you?”

“A thief, a scavenger, a rebel. Some call me Nave the Knave.”

“So what’s the message behind your faith?” George asked.

“I can’t explain,” Nave waggled. “The intricate details behind the theological premises would boil your brains and cause a planetary coma.”

“How do you plan on being our god if you won’t tell us the beliefs of your church?”

Nave rubbed his chin in deep thought. “It’s...it’s a mystery of the faith?” The Gelatin-Brain babes oohed in pleasure at Nave’s total inability to defend his belief system.

“I’ll buy that,” George agreed.

“For how much?” Nave brightened.

“A handful of lint,” George offered.

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“Naaah,” Nave refused. “But since your intrusion gave my harem of worshippers a few extra minutes to work themselves into a frenzy of lust, I’ll throw in a free lesson. What do you want to know?”

A light bulb went off in George’s head. This might be another metaphor, or maybe it’s a painful reality. In either case, George will likely need years of therapy to truly understand the sensation. “How about the meaning of life? What’s your teaching on that?”

Nave cleared his throat and stood up straight as he prepared to share his wisdom: “Life is a Twinkie®.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Life is a Twinkie®. Golden sponge cake, About four inches long, filled with creamy goodness.”

“But why?”

“There is no why. There is only zee.”

“What?”

“Do you see?” Nave the Knave pointed accusingly. “This deep philosophy will only cause confusion for the Gelatin-Brains. Such is the way of the High Holy Church of Ism.”

“Ism? Just Ism?”

“It’s a breeze to spell,” Nave shrugged.

“I’ll take your word for it.”

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“Now depart! It’s time for my orgy.” Nave flicked his wrist and the Gelatin-Brain babes removed their ceremonial bikini tops.

Suddenly discovering hormones, George stammered, “Mind if I join you?”

“Ceremonial regulations of the High Holy Church of Ism dictate that I am the only male present.”

“Just asking.” With that, George headed back up the stairs against a steady stream of well-endowed Gelatin-Brain babes. “I feel so sorry for Nave the Knave,” George remarked. “Wouldn’t it be horrible to wake up every morning next to a different woman—or multiple women—and not be able to remember any of their names?”

The male portion of the readership loudly disagreed.



MEANWHILE ONCE MORE, Uggllrrlggrl the monstrous nametag swooped past Rip as he struggled to choose from among various methods of execution. “You sent me back in time to watch *20/20*, you warped space monkey.”

“But, but....” Rip stammered.

“The lead story was ‘The Secret Meaning of Foot Fungus!’”

“You were supposed to watch the NBC network! The *20/20*

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program is on ABC!” Rip defended.

“Then they went on to investigate ‘The Real Story Behind Kirk Douglas’s Dimple!’”

“Why didn’t you switch channels?”

“BARBARA WALTERS?!!”

“You win, Uggllrrlggrl. I didn’t specify the channel you were supposed to watch once arriving in 1987,” Rip groveled. “Please try to relax. It could have been worse.”

“HOW?!!” squealed the undeniably angry nametag, hurling the rutabaga.

“It could have been a *Porky’s* film festival on Cinemax.”

“That would have been preferable, you insignificant parasite!” Uggllrrlggrl dive-bombed the Marshal of the Time Stream, prehensile tentacles flailing. Some of Uggllrrlggrl’s appendages slapped against Rip’s body, sticking like flypaper and tearing at his flesh.

“Stop it!” Rip suggested.

“Give me one good reason to cease my merciless torture.”

“It hurts!”

“That’s the single indisputable underlying principle behind merciless torture.”

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“You need to get a grip and stop what you’re doing. You might set Earl free.”

“Who’s Earl?” queried Uggllrrlggrl.

“That invincible intangible spectre trapped in my force field,” Rip pointed. Earl made puppy-dog eyes at Uggllrrlggrl from inside his prison.

“You went through great pains to defeat this adversary?”

“You bet I did! I burned out the Artifish and one of my Timeboots to manufacture that force field generator.”

“To sum up, you have rendered yourself powerless and both Earl and I wish to turn your body inside-out?”

“Indeed,” said Rip. “It doesn’t look too good for our hero. Does it, kids?”

A group of small children cheered from the studio audience. “Go get ’em, Rip!” they chanted.

Uggllrrlggrl willed one of his tendrils to snag Rip’s force field generator and crush it into shards of sparking, smoking metal. Earl burst free with a tittering banshee screech. Somewhere in the cosmos, oddsmakers shifted Rip’s chance of survival from one in a thousand to one in a really, really big number.

At the same time, George wandered through the desert, destination unknown.

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“Hello! My name is Uggllrrlggrl!” greeted the grotesque beast.

“I gathered as much,” said Earl, thumbing to Uggllrrlggrl’s front. “After all, you *are* a nametag.”

“That I am. Despite our differences, we have something primal in common.”

“True. We are both fans of the British rock combo known as The Who.”

“Okay, we have *two* things in common. We enjoy the lively mod rock of The Who and both of us would like to tear Rip Tapioca’s circulatory system out of his body.”

“Shall we do so?”

“Let’s do.”

The two paranormal beings, seemingly of one mind, turned to the trembling Rip. “Run away!” yowled the Investigative Reporter to the Fifth Power, increasing his velocity step by step.

George wandered through the desert, destination unknown.

Uggllrrlggrl flexed his many tentacles and lunged at his prey as Earl buzzed Rip’s voluminous pompadour. Unable to run at top speed because of the limp galoshes on his feet, Rip grumbled something about bloodstains being difficult to clean. Then he remembered that his right Timeboot was still functioning.

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George wandered through the desert, destination unknown.

Rip reached down in mid-stride and adjusted a knob on his functional Timeboot. He disappeared just in time to avoid bloody death by means of sticky tentacles, daggers of solid smoke, and razor-sharp monster teeth.

George wandered through the desert, destination unknown.

Rip popped back into view a few yards away from the terrible twosome, mocking them. “So you thought me defenseless, did you? Think again! I’ll show you guys!”

George wandered through the desert, destination unknown.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Where is this  
God-forsaken story going? Get  
George back into the action  
RIGHT NOW. This book is dying!*

*— Rich Wanker*

George appeared on the battlefield, wondering why he wasn’t still wandering through the desert, destination unknown.

“Watch out for the nametag and the spectre of smoke!” warned Rip.

“Do you think that potato chips with ridges are superior to plain

chips?” said the brain-scrambled George.

“Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!” Earl said twice.

George somehow deduced that “kill” was not an alien word for the phrase “would you like to play volleyball with me?” He looked to Rip for guidance, and watched his friend promptly disappear from his stance in front of a billboard advertising hi-tech toenail clippers. Uggllrrlggrl smashed into the billboard and found himself hopelessly adhered to the surface.

George was confused. “Where did Rip go? Didn’t we send Uggllrrlggrl back in time to watch quality television programs like *Cosby* and *Cheers*? How did I get here? And most importantly, why do I have the opportunity to ask so many questions without being murdered by Earl, the evil spectre of smoke?”

“I popped through space and time,” answered Rip, reappearing.

“I tuned in to ABC,” moaned Uggllrrlggrl, collapsing.

“Editorial edict,” winked the pizza chef, shrugging.

“I defeated the spectre,” announced the True Blue Virgin, gyrating. “My magical booty trapped Earl in this earring.” She held up the three-pound bauble and pointed at the whimpering Earl.

“As I suspected,” said George, who wasn’t entirely certain what he suspected but it probably wasn’t any of that.

“Your fortuitous assistance is greatly appreciated, O mighty

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Virgin,” thanked Rip. “You may now tell us about your vacation.”

The sultry empress smiled as she pulled a slide projector from her purse. Rip climbed onto her lap and nuzzled her earlobe as the slideshow began. “Here I am signing an autograph for the stewardess on my flight. And here I am eating dinner with the captain of the starship. And here I am completely naked in a pool of Vaseline®—well, we can skip that one.”

“Where’s Sean of the Penns?” asked George.

“He got arrested again.”

“Who’s Sean of the Penns?” Rip asked, running his fingers through the True Blue Virgin’s hair.

“My husband.”

“Your...husband!?” Rip sputtered. “Why was he arrested?”

“He pummeled another reporter to death for daring to take a snapshot. Okay, next slide...oh, this is an aerial shot of the Nudist Colony for Obese Albinos. Look at that glare!”

“I’m too cute to die,” Rip whimpered.

“Don’t fret,” said the True Blue Virgin. “Sean is in jail and should be indisposed for at least—”

“Touch my beloved and perish!” howled a man in copper armor, swooping from the sky on an antigrav surfboard. Sean of the Penns

landed solidly near the three figures.

“Crap on a cracker,” breathed the True Blue Virgin.

“I have been released from imprisonment so I can kick off a new quest! Being a celebrity does have its perks.” Then he looked at the time-traveling twosome and bellowed, “Prepare to bleed!”

At that very moment, the planet began to vibrate like a Mixmaster. Sean fell flat on his face. Rip and George struggled to remain standing. The True Blue Virgin was having the time of her life.

Rip thought quickly as he vibrated. “George! Is the core of Annodam-1 unstable to any extent?”

“Oh, big time! A small radioactive isotope left unattended could make the whole planet—” George saw the telltale frown on Rip’s face. “You didn’t. Did you?”

“I did.”

The soon-to-be-destroyed-world-famous Gelatin-Brain and the Marshal of the Time Stream made a hasty retreat. Meanwhile, the True Blue Virgin was removing Sean’s armor. “Does this vibrating give you any ideas?” she whispered sexily.

Rip and George did their best to avoid the crumbling architecture as they fled to the Sea of Lime Gelatin. Rip mumbled under his breath about how he never really developed his talent in the art of saving planets.

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“Can we stop for a rest?” George asked. “I’m getting a cramp.”

“Do you have a particular interest in experiencing an agonizing death?” Rip retorted. The duo found the edge of the floating city and warped away. They quickly reached the Sea of Lime Gelatin.

“Watch it wiggle! See it jiggle!”

“Calm down, George. Can we swim in this stuff?”

“Absolutely! I have many nostalgic childhood memories of swimming in the brains.”

“That’s impossibly disgusting,” said Rip.

“I know,” smiled George.

“SWIM!” The dysfunctional duo dove into the thick substance. They floundered about, searching for the spaceship *Titanberg*, when all of a sudden Rip felt the mental energy of the Sea of Lime Gelatin tickling in his own brain. The goofy thoughts radiated in his mind. Rip may have succumbed to the tremendous brain if not for the tiny centipede stowed away in his pocket whose intelligence greatly outmatched that of the Sea of Lime Gelatin.

Fortunately, they stumbled upon the *Titanberg* and swiftly scrambled into the airlock before suffocating. George pinched himself repeatedly. Rip couldn’t tell if he was testing his bodily functions or if this was some new form of entertainment.

“Now what?” George asked. “We have no power. Did we come

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here to die in a familiar setting?”

“Have you no faith? I picked up some replacement batteries at a shopping mall in your capital city.”

“That must be WanderWorld. We Gelatin-Brains congregate there to walk around aimlessly, and if we get bored we stop into a store and trade money for merchandise. It passes the time.”

Rip whipped out the batteries and placed them into a cavity on the control panel. A loud crunch echoed through the room. “Oops. I vaporized the batteries. I guess we’re going to die.”

“WHAT?”

“Psych!” Rip flicked a switch and the engines roared to life. The *Titanberg* ripped out of the Sea of Lime Gelatin and quickly attained escape velocity. As they left the atmosphere, George peered out of a porthole and watched his home planet crumble. Meanwhile, Rip appeared to be playing “Jingle Bells” on the recharged Artifish.

“Another homeworld down the drain,” George sighed.

“Don’t be so sure,” Rip spoke up.

Annodam-1 exploded with a blazing fury into millions of chunks of crumbling matter.

“Okay, be sure.”

A tear ran down George’s cheek. “Did all of those Gelatin-Brains

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have to die?”

“No. In fact, they didn’t die at all.”

“Huh?”

“You may have lost your home planet but I saved its population,” Rip stated proudly. “I transported all of the Gelatin-Brains to safety before the planet blew.”

“Transported where?”

“Detroit, Michigan. They will be employed as auto workers from now on, and they will work without a pension. I relocated the Sea of Lime Gelatin into Lake Erie. I’m reasonably sure no one will notice.”

“Great! Everyone survived!”

“Well, I neglected to snag Sean of the Penns and the True Blue Virgin. They were...um...in the middle of something, and it seemed rude to interrupt.”

“Wasn’t Sean out for your head?”

“That, too.”

George noticed that the powder residue displacement surface was covered with scribbles and, hoping to persuade Rip to let him visit Detroit, he began erasing it. “By the way, I found out the meaning of life while we were on Annodam-1. It turns out that life is a

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Twinkie®.”

Rip looked up from his control panel. “Never mind all those theories. I wrote the true meaning of life on the powder residue displacement surface—what the heck? You erased it?”

“Oops,” said George. He couldn’t think of another word that applied to this circumstance.

“I’ll never remember those formulas, and they existed outside of space and time! The meaning of life is lost forever!”

“Oops,” said George. It still applied quite well.

“Don’t you recall that I wrote something meaningful when my probabilities were jumbled?”

“You never told me it was the meaning of life.”

“What’s more meaningful than the meaning of life?”

“But I was so sure that life is a Twinkie®. Nave the Knave said so, and he was quite convincing.”

“Who’s this Nave character?”

“He’s my lost god. And a heck of a nice guy, if I do say so myself.”

“Oh.” Rip took a seat.

“Where are you going with that seat?” George asked.

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Rip sighed. “It’s merely a figure of speech, my moronic companion.” Bored, Rip began drumming his fingers rather near the self-destruct button.

“So what do you want to do?” George asked.

“I don’t know. What do *you* want to do?” Rip answered.

Just then a knock could be heard in the next room. George wandered out to find the source of the sound. Moments later, George strutted back with a big smile on his face and a flat box in his hands. “Pizza’s here!”

“What?” Rip was pleased but baffled.

“The owner of Angeloniardanolonio’s was so pleased to have a new franchise in Detroit that they sent a delivery boy through hyperspace to bring us a free pizza.”

“Where’s the boy?”

“Oh, he perished in the vacuum of space.”

“Ah. Pity. Well, he died for a good cause.” Rip cleared a space on the table by pushing everything onto the floor. A few thermonuclear devices tumbled into the corner.

“They forgot the chocolate syrup!” George gasped, inspecting the meal.

“Never fear. We’ll eat now and sue their pants off later. Accidentally destroying planets never fails to leave me in a good mood.” Rip tore off a slice and munched away.

George joined him. “M’m m’m good!” he commented, risking

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trademark infringement.

“Maybe life is a pizza after all,” Rip hypothesized. “We never had a chance to test that theory.”

“I’m pretty sure that life is a Twinkie®,” George contradicted.

“Hey! Maybe life is a Twinkie® pizza!”

And so it goes.

# FINIS



Uggrrlggrl and Earl (illustration by Timothy Sparvero)