



Gracies Dinnertime Theatre



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**Mal-content is barefoot
and pregnant.**



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Socio-Political Themes in *The Smurfs*

by J. Marc Schmidt

1.) Introduction:

This is a discursive analysis of the television programme *The Smurfs*, created by Peyo, and first aired during the greater part of the eighties. In other words, it is an analysis of some of the socio-political themes I have noticed in the show.

The Smurfs is a unique programme. It is, first and foremost, a cartoon, and as such it is aimed at children. The discussion could end there, however, unlike many other cartoons, or indeed other television programmes, *The Smurfs* is about an entire society and its interactions with itself and with outsiders, rather than the adventures of just a few characters. Hence I believe it is, in short, a political fable, in much the same way that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was a fable about Christianity. Rather than Christianity, however, *The Smurfs* is about Marxism.

I am not accusing *The Smurfs* of being some kind of subversive kiddie propaganda—although if it was, would it really be that much worse than the spate of ‘toyetic’ cartoons of the same decade that only existed to sell plastic toys? In any case, this essay should be seen as the highest kind of praise. What other children’s’ shows would address the issue of Marxism in such a way, and at such a pivotal point in the history of the Cold War? The Smurfs should be praised for using metaphor and the device of the fairy tale to introduce children to political themes. If Peyo was a socialist, however, he was obviously not the sort who had much time for the version of it practiced by the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc police states. He was a utopian. There is a distinct lack of any kind of army or police in the Smurf Village. On rare occasions when it is necessary, they form their own civilian militia to fight off threats. Otherwise, it is the absolute opposite of the police state.

After my brief analysis of Marxism in *The Smurfs*, I will also be addressing the issues of feminism and homosexuality in the show. But the main concern of this essay is to argue that *The Smurfs* was a Marxist fable.

2.) The Smurf Village as a Marxist Utopia:

The Smurf Village itself is a perfect model of a socialist commune or collective. It is self-reliant, and the land is not owned by individuals, but by the entire collective of all the Smurfs, if the word ‘owned’ is even appropriate.

Papa Smurf represents Karl Marx. He is not so much the leader of the Smurfs as an equal revered by the others for his age and wisdom. He has a beard, as did Marx, and thus could conceivably be a caricature as well. And

lastly, he wears red, which is the traditional color of socialism. Brainy Smurf could represent Trotsky. He is the

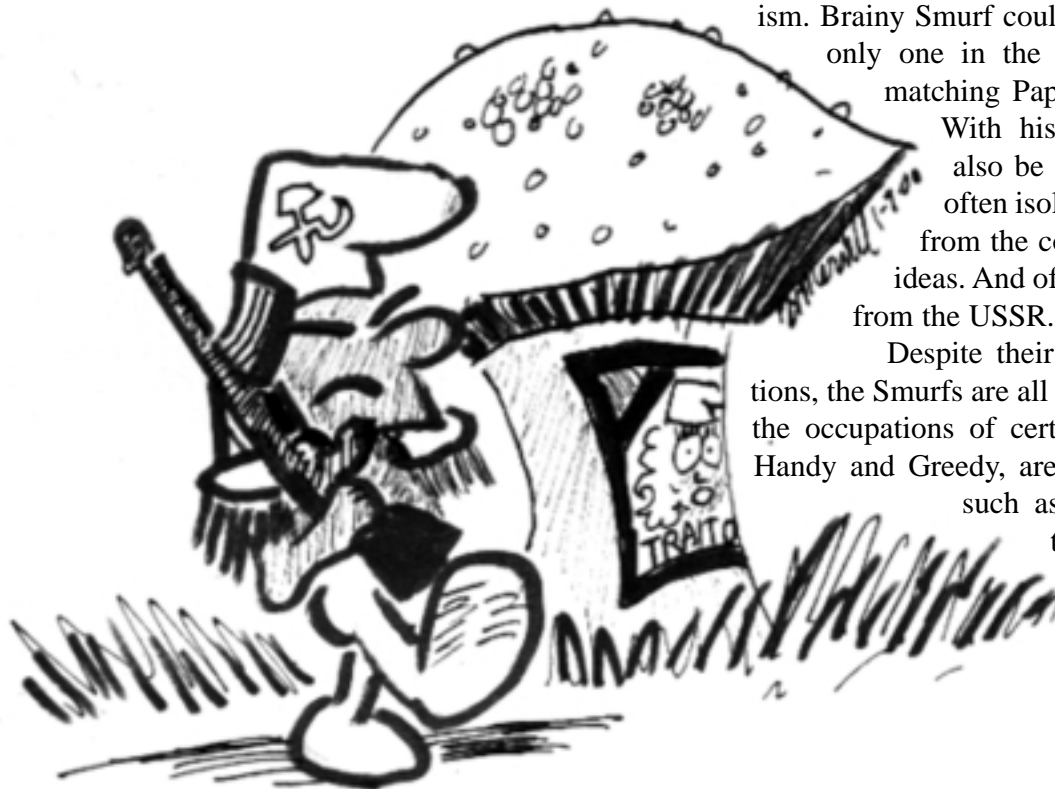
only one in the village who comes close to matching Papa’s intellect—he is a thinker.

With his round spectacles, he could also be a caricature of Trotsky. He is often isolated, ridiculed or even ejected from the commune of the village for his ideas. And of course, Trotsky was banished from the USSR.

Despite their different professions/distinctions, the Smurfs are all completely equal. Thus, while the occupations of certain Smurfs, such as Farmer, Handy and Greedy, are more important than others,

such as Clumsy, Grouchy, or Lazy, there is no feeling that certain

Smurfs are superior or inferior to others because of their work, or level of skill, because ultimately, everyone is a Smurf first.





Economically, the Smurf Village is closed-market. There is no money, and all possessions are communal property of the collective. Everyone is equally a worker and an owner. The Smurfs reject the idea of a free-market economy, with its greed and inequities, and the collective is more important and valuable than the individual. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. John Lennon asked us to ‘imagine no possessions’. The Smurf Village achieves that goal. In fact, many of the ideas expressed in that song are reality in the Village. There is one large piece of capital or produced means of production, in the Smurf Village: the dam. It is owned, operated and repaired by the entire collective.

The Smurfs all refer to one another by the same title; ‘Smurf’. E.g., Brainy Smurf, Handy Smurf, Jokey Smurf, Lazy Smurf, Papa Smurf. This is highly reminiscent of socialist states’ use of the word ‘comrade’ when referring to others, instead of more elitist titles.

Adding to the idea of complete equality in the Village, most of the Smurfs wear the same kind and color of clothes. It is a general work uniform, and with the distinctive caps and blue skin, is highly reminiscent of the so-called Mao Suit, common in Maoist China.

In the tradition of pure Marxism, the Smurf Village is atheist. There is no god, and there is no Priest Smurf. There are only the ‘real’ forces of nature and physics, and these are represented metaphorically by the characters of Mother Nature and Father Time. Of course, there is also magic, as practiced by Papa, Gargamel, Balthazar and others, but it is simply another tool, something that occurs in nature, that has physical properties and can be tapped into, with the right know-how. It is not, as many religions are, a way of understanding the universe in a supernatural context.

The episode “The King Smurf” was the ultimate illustration of the Marxian conflict between the bad, oppressive kind of government, where greedy kings (and capitalists) exploited the population for their own ends; and the good, egalitarian political model Marx had formulated. In the episode, a militia is formed to overthrow Brainy, who has become King in Papa Smurf’s absence, and utopian order is restored when Papa Smurf returns. In this instance, Papa Smurf, as Marx himself, represents the ideal form of Marxism. The evil wizard Gargamel represents capitalism. He embodies everything bad about capitalism. He is greedy, ruthless, and his only concern is with his own personal gratification. He is what happens when the individual makes himself more important than the society he lives in. Not coincidentally, he is also a crazy old hermit with no real friends.

What does Gargamel want to do with the Smurfs? He has two ideas. The first is to eat them. This is unusual, because the Smurfs are small and rare, and would not make as good eating as, say, a deer. It is similar to Sylvester’s obsession with eating the golf ball sized meal that is Tweety Bird. There are two explanations. The first is that metaphorically; he wants to devour socialism, as the West wanted to do to the USSR and its satellites during the Cold War through its tactic of encirclement. The second is that as a pure capitalist, he wishes to turn everything into a commodity—including people. The second thing Gargamel plans to do to the Smurfs once he catches them is to turn them into gold. As the ultimate super-capitalist, he is more concerned with his own wealth than with equality and fairness. Like any Adam Smith style capitalist, it is his ‘natural’ state to want as much money as he can get.

Gargamel is a cold, bitter and ultimately empty man. This is because he has nothing else in his life but a soulless quest for wealth and possessions. A definite statement about the anti-social effects of economic rationalism.

Gargamel’s ginger cat, Azrael, represents the worker in the ruthless, free-market state that is Gargamel’s house. He is uncomplaining, or, since he has no voice (i.e. Trade Unions), is metaphorically unable to complain. He cannot negotiate his wage—he eats whatever he is given by his master. He is smaller and less well off than Gargamel, and metaphorically, he represents the proletariat, while Gargamel represents the

bourgeoisie. Azrael is exploited and oppressed. He risks his life fighting and hunting for his master, and does not have the intellectual capacity to question this state of affairs, just as the worker suffered his fate for centuries because education was off limits to him, and he had no other option but to work for his bosses.

Gargamel owns his house and everything in it, including the capital of his alchemical equipment, in nothing like the way that the Smurfs own their village. If the same political structure existed at Gargamel's house, both he and Azrael would be equal owners, regardless of Gargamel's superior size, knowledge and skill. But Azrael owns nothing.

The incursion of the new characters later in the series/eighties, such as the Smurflings, with their colors and different clothes and looks, can be viewed in the real world as an incursion by commercial interests to increase the popularity and salability of the show. In the show, metaphorically, they represent Western intrusion to the utopian harmony of the Smurf Village, just as Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika reforms in the mid to late eighties heralded the ultimate demise of the Soviet Union.

3.) Feminism and *The Smurfs*:

Monique Wittig wrote that women are defined as women, while men are defined by their occupation, the idea being that men have occupations but women do not. For example, if an accident was being reported, the victims might be described as 'a teacher, a plumber and a woman'. Smurfette is unique in the village in that she is not defined by an occupation or a personality trait like the male, or real Smurfs, but by her sex. She is not a real member of society because of her sex, and this is represented metaphorically in the show by the fact that she was created by Gargamel.

The diminutive suffix of 'ette', common in our society, also identifies Smurfette as being not the equal of the males. She is the second sex.

Above I asserted that everyone in the Village was equal. In a sense, this is still true. In the beginning, it was all male, and Smurfette's introduction did not disrupt the patriarchal order. Thus, Smurfette is equal to the others politically, but not socially.

In an ideal, sexist, patriarchal state, women are not a part of the community. They do not occupy the 'public sphere' of work and the outside world, and they certainly do not work. Smurfette's main occupation seems to be standing around looking pretty, i.e. 'being the woman', although when it comes to problem solving, the producers have not, thankfully, made her a brainless bimbo. She is quite a bit sharper than the rest of the Smurfs, except of course, for Papa.

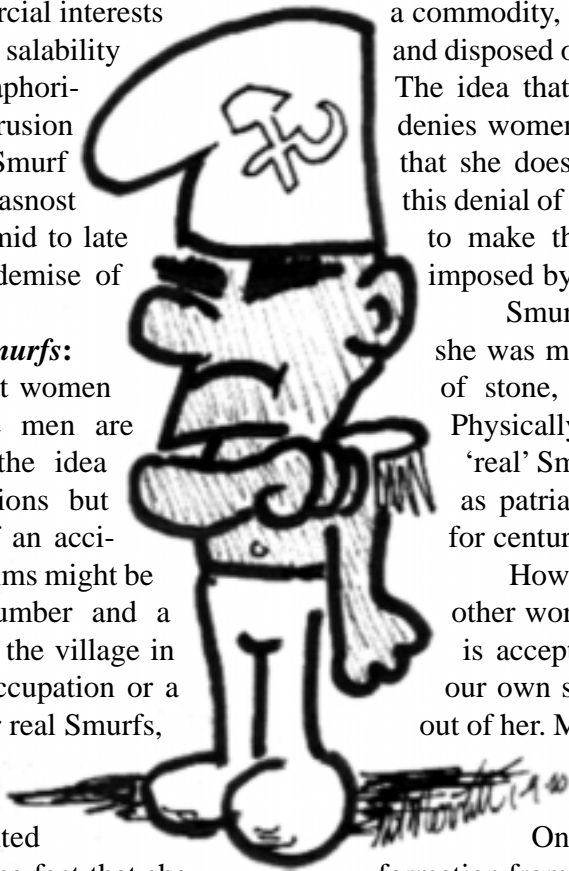
Smurfette is definitely the 'object' of the male gaze. Since she is the object, the males are the subjects. They are active, she is passive.

Smurfette has no breasts. I believe this is significant when we consider how Smurfette was created. She began life as the almost Frankensteinian creation of Gargamel. As a capitalist, he naturally is treating her as a commodity, something which can be made, used and disposed of, all ultimately to make him money. The idea that a woman can be made by a man denies women's key role in procreation. The fact that she does not possess breasts goes further to this denial of nature, an attempt to control women, to make them conform to the societal norm imposed by the patriarchal order.

Smurfette is a secondary creation, in that she was made after the males. She has a heart of stone, and technically, she is unnatural. Physically and metaphorically, she is not a 'real' Smurf. She is, in short, bad and wrong, as patriarchal cultures have viewed women for centuries.

How do you make a better woman? In other words how do you make a woman who is acceptable by society (i.e. the Village or our own society)? One, you take all the fight out of her. Make her compliant, make her toe the line created and maintained by the male-dominated social structure.

One visual example of this is her transformation from a brunette to a blonde. Western society traditionally stereotypes dark-haired women as brainy, but blondes as dumber, but more beautiful and desirable. And that is another way to make a better woman. You make her beautiful. Essentially, when Papa Smurf casts his spell to make Smurfette a 'real' Smurf, the visible difference was that she was more 'beautiful' as well. Thus it follows that before, she was ugly. So when it comes to women, ugly equals wrong, and beautiful equals right, and in a sense, real. But why is one



thing beautiful and another thing not? Who says? Ultimately, the patriarchal order. And the Smurf Village, with its 99:1 ratio of males to females, is definitely a patriarchy. This adds to the idea of woman as commodity—she is changed and made by men, and is beautiful by their standards. And at the end of it she is thankful.

Gloria Steinem once wrote that ‘women were history’s first drag queens’, meaning that ideals of beauty are all imposed by the patriarchal order, and there is no reason for women to look ‘like women’ other than a need for distinction between the sexes, and to reinforce the idea of women as mere objects, as the focus of male gaze. Smurfette is no exception.

In an ideal patriarchal society, there are no women. Can you imagine what the Smurf village would be like if the ratio of males to females were 50:50? One thing is certain, it would not be the same utopia it is presented as in the show. Perhaps this means that the ideal Marxist State can only truly operate when everyone is equal, including sexually, although it is almost impossible to imagine an all-female Smurf Village. This is probably more due to deep, intrinsic sexism in our own society than any other reason. If female was the ‘natural’ sex for Smurfs, I cannot see why they would all look like Smurfette. The concept of beauty, if it existed at all, would have no basis, no frame of reference in which to be equated with ‘blonde and cute’.

4.) The Smurf Village as Homotopia:

The Smurf Village was always all male, until Smurfette came along, when it was still overwhelmingly male. This means that they did not procreate by traditional means, and thus, ‘heterosexuality’ would not be the norm.

Much like ancient Greek city-states such as Athens, which many believe is the closest to a pure democracy the world will ever come, government was by all the people, and by ‘all the people’ they meant males only. Women are not invited to participate in public affairs. In Athens, homosexuality was not uncommon, nor was it particularly frowned upon.

No Smurf ever forms a relationship with Smurfette. Although she is the focus of some childish heterosexual rivalries, especially between Hefty and

Handy, there is never any real heterosexual tension in the Village. The tension is more between Hefty and Handy themselves, who seem to be more interested in impressing each other than Smurfette. If the Smurf Village existed for ages without any females, how would the Smurfs have been able to understand what the Smurfette was? Certainly, nature would provide examples of male-female bonding that the Smurfs would have been able to observe, but in their own sphere, there were never any women, and never any heterosexuality. Thus, how could Smurfette have been able to seduce anyone? Are the creators trying to say that heterosexuality is the natural state, even if it never existed in society and there was never any frame of reference for understanding what heterosexual attraction was? On this point, I’m prepared to let the creators off. They probably weren’t even thinking about it, because in our society, heterosexuality is very much seen as the norm. Lastly, I believe the characters of Hefty, Handy and Vanity are gay archetypes. Vanity is the kind of gay archetype commonly presented by the straight entertainment industry, for example in the UK sitcom *Are You Being Served?* while Hefty and Handy are gay archetypes in the same vein as the Village People, with their extremely iconic masculinity, exaggerated to the point of camp. Meanwhile, I believe Clumsy and Brainy represent a stereotypical gay couple.

5.) Conclusion:

I believe that at the very least, Peyo was attempting to present certain Marxist theories in the form of an allegorical fairy tale. *The Smurfs*, then, succeeds in the way the best kind of fantasy literature does—by shining a light on the real world we all live in. There is much evidence to suggest that *The Smurfs*, as a narrative, is a utopian socialist fable. And ultimately, I think a large part of the appeal of the show comes from this utopian ideal, because even if it is unlikely to ever occur in the real world, with all its complexities, we can still imagine.

*Send comments to: j_marc_s@hotmail.com
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<http://www.Geocities.com/Hollywood/Cinema/3117/sociosmurf2.htm>*

One of the hardest things about putting together GDT every week is the folding. The printer gives us GDT issues unfolded, and we have to fold every issue by hand.

We could use some help, and we'll pay you.

Contact Sean Hammond: seant@hellskitchen.org

Howard's Happy Hour

Poetry by Howard Hao

Effigy of an Evil Flatmate

This one's for
That thorn in my side
For oh so very long...
Fuck you, bitch!
Kicked out of school for being an idiot
And succumbing again for a second round,
Now an assistant for the rest of her pathetic life.
Nasty and dirty
And picks through garbage.
Slams doors, leaves stains,
Always on the damned telephone—
Hair all over the damned place!
Never buys new stuff, just gets
Worn out, old shit—used shit
From the dump, like that package of oversized
Underwear you brought home and paraded around.
Not that frugality is bad, but to the

Extent that she prevails...
Doesn't leave messages after calls;
Guess what you harridan! Revenge is sweet!
Take that you wicked wench,
Penny-pinching scoundrel
With the fucked up family
That won't shut the hell up even at
Two in the fucking morning!
Booming, maniacal laughter and haughty
Voices echoing in the middle
Of the night. The closet door
Slamming, waking me at three fucking AM!
Well, eat shit and die, bitch!
My sincerest best wishes to the other,
The kind and gentle flatmate.
My sincerest "FUCK YOU" to the harlot;
If our paths should ever cross again
It would be a doomed fate!

That Despicable Milkman

Mommy, the Milkman is at the door again!
Please explain to me why I need to hate him.
He doesn't seem all that bad.
He doesn't seem to be any sort of cad.
You said once that he did a bad thing...

Doesn't the word Forgiveness have any meaning?
I am certain he isn't too deplorable;
Give him a chance, he may be adorable!
So let him be and you will plainly see,
That...hey! Why the hell does he LOOK LIKE ME?

Guilty Pleasures

Take that you fucking morons!

Yeah, watch them splatter and laugh maniacally in glee
Such a guilty pleasure.
It's only a video game,
Distortion and human-created electronic distraction.

God, I love you to death!

Yeah, caressing the blossoming bosoms with great interest
Such a guilty pleasure.
It's only a magazine picture,
Attraction and perfectly-photographed scant human beauty.

I love to gorge on this stuff!

Yeah, pile it on my plate and watch me go
Such a guilty pleasure.
It's only a prepared dish,
Gluttony and a human-created ensemble of spices and taste.
The guilty pleasures of man and woman are many
But the antidotes are far and few between.



Episode 5...

Big Daddy: Hey there kiddees, Big Daddy here! Today's show is about the brain. The brain consists of tiny little sausage-shaped cells on strings. Cells are the packets of gunk that make up your body. Brain cells are called neurons. Can you nuur-nonn?

Kids: Dendrites!

Big Daddy: Good! And your neurons are strung together in long chains that have belt-buckles every few inches. Really Tiny Belt Buckles. The purpose of these buckle cells is to secrete brain oil, which lubricates the ideas

swimming around in your brain, and lets you think faster. The problem with the buckle cells is that they are easily incapacitated.

Kids: Lubricate Cheryl!

Big Daddy: You sure learn fast, kids, Cheryl isn't worth a damn without half a tube of... Anyway, the most common problem occurs when you eat ice cream. Ice cream is not what they call a "brain food" because when you eat it, your teeth get really cold, and since your bones are such good heat conductors, that chills your whole skull by almost ten degrees. When your brain gets cold the pressure inside decreases because the buckle cells stop making brain oil.

Kids: Texaco cures Parkinson's!

Susie: Grandma takes dopamine, is that like brain oil?

Big Daddy: Exactly! And since there's not enough brain oil in your head, the thoughts get stuck on the strings and they start tugging on them really hard trying to move.

Kids: Ouch!

Big Daddy: That's right, kids. Because the thoughts are pulling so hard trying to migrate through the neurons, the doctors call this a "migration headache." You probably hear

Big Daddy's Biology Show



© 1997 Melancholy Predator, appearing here courtesy of Hell's Kitchen

your parents talking about these all the time... things like, "If you don't cut out that racket, you're gonna give me a migration headache!" and "Shh, kids, Daddy's got a migration tonight and he needs his whiskey and some peace and quiet."

Kids: Drug therapy!

Big Daddy: When it works, it works. Since ice cream decreases the pressure in your skull, the volume increases (that's Boil's Law, go watch *Snoopy Ruxpin's Physics Show* for more details on Boil and his graduate students who did all the work).

Kids: Binary fusion!

Big Daddy: And since the skull is pretty solid, confining stuff, the brain starts to overlap and get tangled on itself. This does two things. First, the migrating thoughts get really stuck in the neuronal quagmire, but worse, some of the sausage-shaped neurons start bursting and spitting hot, greasy juices onto the thoughts.

Kids: Natural casings!

Big Daddy: This would be a good lubricant, but because it's so hot, the thoughts start disintegrating under the barrage. This is referred to as "losing your train of thought." This huge heat buildup does have one good side effect, though, which is heats up the skull again, and melts the ice cream so you can take another bite.

Kids: Hooray!

Big Daddy: That's all for this week, kids. You're the smartest kids I know!

Camera Operator: ...and we're out...

Big Daddy: Too damn smart for their own good, some days. Cheryl! Have you been telling those brats stories again?



Episode 6...

Big Daddy: Hey there kiddees! Big Daddy here. Today's show is about how plants get their food. Lots of people will tell you that plants can make their own food, so they don't need to hunt or scavenge like animals. These are people that have never been tripped by a bramble late at night in a dark forest. Don't let 'em fool you, kids, there's no such thing as a living being that doesn't have to hunt down its food one way or another. Humans go hunting at the grocery store, and plants go hunting in the forests. Those brambles are especially patient little beasties. They lie in wait for a roaming chlorophyll to trap and then they hoard them in their roots. That's why it's so hard to pull them out of the ground, even when wearing thick gloves. Their roots get so bloated with excess chlorophyll that they grow stringy little extensions around all the nearby rocks and hold tight.

Bobby: What about the small plants that can't catch as many chlorophyll?

Big Daddy: Good question for a change there, B, are you trying to stay out of the Wrong Room for a while? Anyway, smaller, more flexible plants have another method of getting food. No need to wait when you have thin little roots that you can pick up and carry around with you. These plants are the carnivores. Remember what carnivore means, kids?

Kids: Bread-eaters!

Big Daddy: Right! And that's what these plants do. They get hungry for the same reason you and I do, which is that their hypothalamus is stimulated by the estrogen called Thalidomide.

Kids: Babies!

Big Daddy: And so these hungry plants run through the forests at night endlessly, needing the nourishment of chlorophyll to live. They have to be careful not to over-eat, though, as well, because chlorophyll has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory rats, and to most young plants, that's a really scary idea.

Kids: Surgeon General!

Big Daddy: Very Good! And everybody knows that when a cancer gets into a new body, it heads straight for the prostate gland and sets up camp there, and it's all over for the poor sucker who caught the cancer.

Kids: Sucker!!

Big Daddy: Aaabsolutely! Well, that's all the time we have for today, kids, but remember to watch out for that chlorophyll, if you eat too much of it, you'll become a lab rat just like those poor little cancer-ridden prostate plants out there.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

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