

## THE ELECTION SKETCH

by Fred Coppersmith

ARTHUR

Good evening. Tonight on the Dancing Penguin Report, we take a hard, deep, and probing look at the world of politics today, the politics of yesteryear, and the politics of days to come. But mostly, the politics of today, because it's quicker, cheaper, and, frankly, we're on a budget tighter than my new red pair of edible undies. Ooh.

(shivers noticeably with  
delight)

Now most people, myself included, would rather be stabbed in the head repeatedly with knitting needles than actively examine the political process. So we've brought with us a big bag of extra sharp pointy ones that we'll be handing out as the evening drags on. But in the meantime, kiddies, perhaps we ought to examine what's been happening in some of the local districts as this year's presidential race...well, races on. We go live now to our on-the-spot reporter, Nagadoches Troutcage, who I believe has some of the early results from our affiliate in Las Ventricle, Nebraska.

NAGADOCHES

Hello, and good evening to you, Arthur. And to our viewers at home - - Mum, Dad, Aunt Patrice and the kids, little friends. It's certainly shaping up to be some sort of close race here in godforsaken Las Ventricle, what with all the nonstop campaigning, mudslinging, question-dodging, back-stabbing and other election-type-style verbs I haven't yet had a chance to jot down or look up. I think there's even been a little nude yodeling tossed in there somewhere, but that might just be my last gin and tonic talking. We've laughed. We've cried. Entire empires have been built, toppled, and have crumbled into dust. Frankly this

reporter hasn't seen anything like it since they cancelled *Cop Rock*.

ARTHUR

Yes, dearie, but what about the results?

NAGADOCHES

But what, you may very well ask yourself, Arthur, *about* the results? Who is going to be crowned the proverbial Mayor McCheese this evening and walk away with the most votes and matching tie and handkerchief set? Well I've never been able to read a pie chart worth a damn -- and I am, remember, two sheets to the wind -- but early polls seem to favor one Dr. John Amber Thiessen Magillicutty of the Hello Sailor Party and recent parolee, who attributes his newfound dominance in the polls partly to heavy campaigning and media saturation, but mostly -- mostly -- to a steady intake of heroin and other illegal substances.

ARTHUR

Nagadoches, darling, I understand that you have with you Dr. Magillicutty's campaign manager, advisor, and personal orthodontist, is that right?

NAGADOCHES

Arthur, I'm joined here now by Tobias J. Strungberk, D.D.S., Magillicutty's campaign manger and long-time confidante, who has agreed to speak with us this evening in the hope that it might land him a guest spot on MTV's the Real World.

(beat)

Also, I've paid him thirty dollars and recommended a decent prostitute whose landlord won't mind the sheep, so that can't have hurt things any. Mr. Strungberk, if I may...

STRUNGBERK

Look, look, if it's about the drugs, and I'm sure it is, then I already

know what you're going to say: sure,  
drugs are bad, drugs will kill,  
drugs made me dig up my dead  
grandmother and make hot, sweaty  
monkey love to her rotting corpse  
under a moonlit September sky. I've  
heard it all before, believe me. And  
yes, so it's true that every morning  
before breakfast Johnny snorts  
enough heroin to kill a small horse.

(beat)

Or a small country.

(beat)

Sometimes two if he's feeling  
festive and his disability check  
from the clown college has arrived.  
But is that really so terrible? Does  
that really make him a bad person?  
Unfit for government? Unwilling to  
make the world a better place where  
little children can sing and dance  
in the streets? To that, sir, I say  
'Ha.' 'Ha' and 'Ha' again. At the  
end of the day, he's still standing.  
Wobbly, glassy-eyed, mumbling  
something about evil space overlords  
coming to vivisect his brain -- but  
still standing. And I think the  
people respect that.

NAGADOCHES

Yes, but the people are, let's face  
it, Toby, ignorant schmucks with a  
drinking problem. And wasn't it  
Oscar Wilde who once noted that  
respect is a hellish bitch goddess  
with a double-edged sword in her  
brassiere and lots of nasty pointy  
bits sticking out of peoples'  
pockets?

(beat)

Or maybe it was Aristotle, I'm not  
sure. At any rate, it doesn't  
matter, because I've just been  
informed that the majority of votes  
cast this evening have been not for  
your smack-fiend friend  
Magillicutty, but for -- and I quote  
-- "the girl with the biggest tits".  
Which only goes to show.

STRUNGBERK

(sighing)

Yes. We probably should have seen that one coming.

NAGADOCHES

Well they are a lovely pair of knockers. And speaking of lovely pairs of knockers, are you still there, Arthur?

ARTHUR

Yes, pumpkin, I am. And may I just add that I'm presently as giddy as a schoolgirl and as tingly as a pussycat in heat. I'm a complicated man and no one understands me but my woman.

(beat)

But enough of that. I've just been informed via carrier pigeon that there's been a recent development in the third district of West Paralysis, Nevada. Incumbent senator and lounge act Gordon Lapdog, claiming to be channeling the disembodied spirit of Carmen Miranda, has challenged the other third district candidates to an impromptu debate-cum-boxing match -- which isn't too likely to change his low standing in the polls but ought to keep the kids happy and off the streets. When asked whether she would participate in the debate, Republican candidate Francine Rogers had this much to say about her tropical fruit-clad opponent: "He's the hairy-handed gent who ran amok in Kent. Lately he's been overheard in Mayfair. You better stay away from him. He'll rip your lungs out, Jim. I'd like to meet his tailor." Telling words indeed. But for now, and for no obvious reason, we go live to Dry Rot, Wisconsin, where your friend and mine Nagadoches Troutcage has defied the laws of physics and frequent flyer miles to bring us this breaking news story from the headquarters of the newly formed Excitable Boy Party.

NAGADOCHES

Well, frankly, Arthur, this really isn't much of a breaking news story, nor is the Excitable Boy Party doing much to live up to its recently acquired new name. The positively dreary Arch Bishop Vanessa Kendrick, the party's first, and most likely last, stab at presidential glory, currently trails every other candidate in the polls -- including philosopher David Hume, who's been stone dead for over two hundred years and is only on the ballot because we thought it might be funny. Shows what we know. But Kendrick, lobotomized and under twenty-four hour house arrest for possession of a kumquat with intent to sell, remains ever confident...poor deluded soul that she is. They really never should have discontinued the electroshock. So, so very sad.

ARTHUR

Nagadoches, can you describe for us the mood there in Dry Rot?

NAGADOCHES

No.

(beat)

But I can tell you that one of Kendrick's main rivals in this race is the almost equally lackluster Mitzy "Rumpypumpy" Vanderhosen, once a professional duelist and cement taster, as well as the lead guitarist for Air Supply before, quote, "things got too weird." When asked to comment on the Excitable Boy's chances for success, Vanderhosen shrieked repeatedly, spilled all of the millet seed on the bottom of her cage, and broke out in a rash which her doctors aren't quite sure what to make of -- but which they assure us ought to earn her a spot in the Guinness Book...if not on a cold slab in the morgue. A pity, then, that nobody gives a damn. Back to you, before my brain runs out of oxygen, Arthur.

ARTHUR

This rash, Nagadoches...do you think it will hurt her chances with the more conservative voters in the district?

NAGADOCHES

With those few who give two shits? No, Arthur, not likely. Most everyone in the district, you must understand, is suffering from one form of brain damage or another. I think it's something in the water. And they'd all be just as happy eating paint chips as casting their vote. But the actual tallying should get underway any moment now -- once they start fishing the bodies out of the water -- so we'll know soon enough.

ARTHUR

Do you expect it to swing a certain way?

NAGADOCHES

Well I would think left to right and back again would be normal, Arthur. It shouldn't go in upside down, certainly, or you'll need some heavy ointment and a good physician. And I don't care how much you've had to drink -- that's no place for a cantaloupe.

ARTHUR

No, no, I meant, do you have any predictions for us this evening?

NAGADOCHES

Well...suede will come back in style. And so will pajamas with feet. I feel very strongly about that. Disco will remain dead...sometimes I'll feel like a nut, sometimes I won't...college tuition will rise...and the warlike Harry, like himself, shall assume the port of Mars; and at his heels, leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire crouch for employment.

(beat)

But mostly the pajamas with feet thing.

ARTHUR

No, I meant for the election.

NAGADOCHES

Oh. Then no, not really. But if I had to hazard a guess, I'd say the strongest contender for this district *would* appear to be Patrick Weevel, a last-minute addition to the ballot and one hell of a clog dancer once he sets his mind to it. Many now point to the retired professor of Esperanto and ice cream logistics as the district favorite, and while he's had a rocky go of things thus far, political insiders say that while Weevel may wobble, he won't fall down.

(sighing)

I'm sorry. Sorry. That's a terrible joke. Remember, kids, never let a stripper named Bubbles write your material on a cocktail napkin while you pay for gas.

(beat)

At any rate, Mr. Weevel has been kind enough to share a few words with us this evening and to discuss his recent rise to the top of the charts. Mr. Weevel, thank you.

WEEVEL

No, thank you. It was either this or masturbating to violent cartoon porn, and...well, frankly I'm spent.

NAGADOCHES

Yes, well...how nice. Mr. Weevel, what do you think your chances are this evening?

WEEVEL

Hmm. That's a tough call, but I think I'd have go with "pretty damn shitty and doomed to failure". That always seems to work.

NAGADOCHES

You seem remarkably calm about it.

WEEVEL

Oh, well you see, to me, it's not about who wins or loses. It's not about keeping score, saying that this person will hold office while that person won't, *this* person will be president while *that* person can go crawl into a ditch and die. None of that, Nagadoches, none of that is important. The real issue, if I may be so bold -- and I believe that I may -- the real issue is...where the friggin' hell is my Cat Fancier magazine?! I sent the damn subscription renewal in four months ago! My god! A man's patience has its limits!

NAGADOCHES

Well I'm sure it's just --

WEEVEL

No, I'm sorry, the magic's gone.  
Interview over. {storms off}

NAGADOCHES

Well then. A distinguished professor, a lover of felines -- Arthur, one could say that this is one candidate who has it all...including syphilis, which might hurt his chances in this traditionally conservative district -- and ought to make getting a date to the inaugural ball more than a little tricky. But then, that's what prostitution and heavy drinking were invented for. Back to you, sweetums.

ARTHUR

Thank you, Nagadoches, for that breathtaking, and may I add time-consuming, bit of reportage. I know I personally will never look at a litter box quite the same way again.

(beat)

Of course, we don't want to give you, the viewers at home, the impression that politics is just fun and games and coughing up hairballs while nobody's looking. Meow. It's a serious business, and like any serious business, it wouldn't be any



fun without massive abuses of power and gratuitous sex and violence. But gratuitous sex and violence don't come cheap, so we'll be back after this short pandering word from our sponsor. Enjoy.

#### BROCHURE

Hello and good evening. My name is Derek Brochure, and I'd like to speak with you tonight on behalf of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Muskrats. Yes, muskrats. Now, most people don't know this -- or very much care -- but muskrats really are a joy to have around the house. Their long, scaly, laterally compressed tails make them ideal pets, as you might well imagine, and children will delight for hours in crying, "Mommy, there's a drowned rat in the toilet!" and contracting the plague. These lovable rodents have also been known to get a giggle or two out of the elderly...but that's probably due more to the drugs we slipped into Grandma's applesauce at lunch than anything else. Now, if you haven't yet slipped into unconsciousness yourself from listening to me prattle endlessly, you're probably wondering what any of this -- any of it at all -- has to do with the presidential election currently underway, and whether it might not just be best to shoot yourself and be done with it right now, because I'm likely to go on and on again about how wonderful muskrats are, how special and furry and cuddly and lovely they can be, how muskrats are the second coming, and how they defeated the evil robot invaders and saved humanity from slavery aboard the mad overlord Krango's ship in 4027, and you never hear about that on the evening news or in USA Today, now do you?! No!

(sing-songy)

Muskrat Susie, Muskrat Sam, do the jitterbug out in muskrat land...

BROCHURE looks sheepishly at the camera.

BROCHURE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I -- I get a little carried away sometimes. But please, vote for a muskrat today...if not for me, then for your country! And for your country's country! And your children's children, who really ought to get off the streets and stop vandalizing my car, the damn crack-addicted bastards! I just had it detailed!

(beat)

Even if a muskrat isn't running for office in your district -- and most likely they're not, being rodents and everything -- vote for them as a write-in candidate. I've got crayons if anyone needs. One government, by muskrats, for muskrats.

(beat)

Did I already say by muskrats?...under God. Or, y'know, whatever. Thank you.

ARTHUR

(looking off-camera)

No, I swear, she had the implants removed. And all the time I thought the mountain goat was there just for -- what? Oh, we're back!

(turning to face  
camera/audience)

Well now...if that wasn't a kick in the crotch, I don't know what is. You know, any way you slice it, it's all too clear that political ambition and scandal often walk hand in hand.

(beat)

In fact, they've been seen necking in the woods up near Potter's Farm and groping each others' privates when ambition's girlfriend was out of town, so hand in hand is really no big deal. But no scandal has so rocked the political arena as today's surprising admission by spasmodic candidate Harold Manglewood, who has confessed not only to a total of thirteen and a half murders, but also to being a

practicing necrophiliac, cannibal, and Celine Dion fan. We sent the positively dreamy Nagadoches Troutcage to speak with Senator Manglewood at his home in Burbank, California. But we were greeted there by a company of large men with pointed sticks, attack dogs, and a tactical nuclear device referred to more than once as Mister Sparky. Eventually, we hope the scars will heal. We were, however, permitted a brief interview with Manglewood's attorney Jessica James Überfruit, which we go live to now because we have nothing better to do and are desperate for attention.

NAGADOCHES

Ms. Überfruit, your client has been called...well, a number of things we're not legally permitted to repeat on the air, especially at this early hour. But among them, certainly, are murderer, degenerate, and icky, icky, yucky man. Most shocking, I think, however, was his apparent fondness for decapitation and the taste of human flesh. And let's face it, nobody really likes Celine Dion. The Los Angeles district attorney has threatened to press charges if your client continues to seek re-election in the state, and even a few of his fellow senators have called for his impeachment. How do you and your client respond to all this negativity?

ÜBERFRUIT

With tears, mostly. Giving way to uncontrolled sobbing, vicious name calling, and prolonged bouts of occasional yipping.

NAGADOCHES

Yipping?

ÜBERFRUIT

Yes, high-pitched yipping, like an over-excited dog. "Yip! Yip! Yip!" -

- that sort of thing. Not very productive -- in fact it hurts the throat -- and it's more than a little annoying. But anything that keeps Harold from chopping peoples' heads off and sticking them in the Easy Bake can't be all bad, now can it?

NAGADOCHES

Yes, but...*yipping*?

ÜBERFRUIT

Well obviously we'd *like* to respond with violence. Lots of it. We'd like to respond by swinging a large plank of wood with a rusted nail stuck through it. Very satisfying, that. But planks of wood are very expensive nowadays, to say nothing of the nails. And I'm afraid most of our money is currently tied up in keeping Harold heavily sedated.

NAGADOCHES

I see. Would it be at all possible to speak directly to your client about today's revelations?

ÜBERFRUIT

Ah, well I *will* need you to first sign this release form here and list your next of kin, should, uh...should something unforeseen happen.

NAGADOCHES

Then I think not. But thank you for your time.

ÜBERFRUIT

Hey, no sweat.

She leaves.

NAGADOCHES

So there you have it, Arthur. The deranged people-eater speaks. But surprisingly, not all the candidates in this election are homicidal maniacs hopped up on happy pills. A few, like my next guest, Wisconsin Senator Beaumont T. Skincancer,

actually think this might be a bad thing. Senator, welcome.

SKINCANCER

Thank you for having me, kind sir, on your lovely televisual program. And may I just add for the record that she told me she was eighteen, and what was she doing in the strip club with an orangutan anyway if she wasn't?

NAGADOCHES

Right enough. Senator, I'll get right to it: what's so bad about killing people?

SKINCANCER

Well, it's messy for one thing. Blood gets everywhere, hard to clean up, and elected officials have to look presentable. On the face of it, sure, I can't really argue that homicide is a *bad* thing. I mean, it's pretty much a victimless crime, now isn't it? And who among us *hasn't* committed a murder here or there, or sacrificed a loved one to the all-consuming corn god, He Who Walks Between the Stalks? Right? Am I right? But as a member of the Senate with a sacred duty to uphold the Constitution and that sort of thing, I have to admit it's a pretty big no-no. And if my three bastard children out of wedlock and massive cocaine habit are public knowledge, I don't see why this Manglewood's trail of bloodshed shouldn't be fair game. This is, after all, America. Land of the brave, home of the free, huddled masses yearning and all that shit. We can't elect a president who's going to kill and eat ambassadors from other countries. It just wouldn't look good on the evening news. So yeah, I've publicly denounced Senator Manglewood and asked for his resignation. Because I love America. It's where I keep all my stuff. Sure, there are other countries that are nice. Ireland, Australia, bits of Zimbabwe, Peru,

and Wales -- and any place called Bangkok gets my vote -- but America...yeah, that's where it's at. And I can dig it. Can you?

NAGADOCHES

Oh indubitably, Senator.  
Indubitably. Now please go away.

SKINCANCER leaves.

NAGADOCHES (CONT'D)

Well, Arthur, I think that's about all the time we have this evening, and so I'd just like to say --

ARTHUR

Well actually, Nagadoches, we had hoped you might stay on a little longer and speak with some of Manglewood's local supporters...

NAGADOCHES

That would imply there were local supporters, Arthur...when, aside from his attorney, Manglewood's only defender has been a small lump of greenish clay he keeps in his trouser pocket and has, for some reason, named Tommy Bodkins -- and which will more than likely be his only running mate in the upcoming elections. Provided, of course, he isn't accidentally squished first. Most everyone that gets close to Manglewood also gets tossed into a pot with some seasoning and parsley. So there's really no reason for me to stick around, now is there?

ARTHUR

What about Manglewood's main local opposition, then, former activist and tree hunter, Bob Thyroid? Hasn't his group been campaigning heavily in the area this evening?

NAGADOCHES

(sighing)

You really do hate me, don't you, Arthur?

(beat)

Fine. Bob Thyroid. Right here. Right now. Mr. Thyroid...

THYROID

Good evening.

NAGADOCHES

Can you tell the viewers at home a little bit about your organization, the Pennsylvanian Society for People Who Like Stuff?

THYROID

Sure. Well, we started out as a grass roots movement. But we've since discovered that you can't really get high from smoking grass roots. So we've moved on to other things: shrubs, berries, mushrooms, tequila and twigs, hashish, mescaline, and the phallic secretions of underwater, plankton-eating mammals, which we market as an aphrodisiac and inhalant in the Happy Valley area.

NAGADOCHES

I'm sorry, are you...are you trying to say you've been sniffing whale sperm?

THYROID

Only as a precautionary measure, yes.

NAGADOCHES

A precautionary measure against what?

THYROID

Oh, all sorts of things: foreign terrorists, the CIA, Swiss moneylenders, the hypnotic mystique of Lou Diamond Phillips. We're not entirely sure. But that's why we're asking for donations. This isn't a cheap operation, you know.

NAGADOCHES

No?

THYROID

No. I mean, first you have to *find* the whales. No small task there: they're all underwater. And then you have to convince Shamu to do his thing in a little plastic cup. That's embarrassing. And you just *try* and find some whale porn and a doctor's office with an open mind and a fifty thousand gallon fish tank on a busy Saturday night. It's tough, let me tell ya.

NAGADOCHES

(disbelievingly)

I'm sorry. I think I've lost all capacity for rational thought. *Whale sperm?*

THYROID

Yeah, whale sperm. But that's not really the issue. I mean, we didn't kill anyone. We didn't eat anyone. And we sure as hell didn't listen to any Celine Dion. What consenting adults and a few marine animals do in their spare time is nobody's business but their own. We don't need Big Brother telling us what we can and cannot stick up our noses, thank you very much. And, really, after Abraham Lincoln, I don't think this country needs another cannibalistic president, am I right?

NAGADOCHES

You know, I hear the words, and I see your lips moving, but I honestly no longer give a damn. I hope you and your baby beluga are very happy together, Mr. Thyroid. Arthur, back to you.

ARTHUR

Thank you, Nagadoches. And that really is all the time we have for tonight on the Dancing Penguin Report. Please join us next time when we'll be cancelled and something better will be on in our place. Like dead air or the test pattern or that episode of Scooby-Doo when Velma and Daphne finally



did it like rabbits on the dirty,  
dusty floor of the van while Shaggy  
spasmed violently into his own  
twitching outstretched hand. Or  
maybe just a nice poetry reading  
with tea and cupcakes afterwards.  
Until then, goodnight.