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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POLITICAL APPLICATION \*\*\*

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John Victor Peterson lives in Jackson Heights, almost a stone's throw from La Guardia Airfield. But he doesn't just stand and watch the big planes roar past overhead. He has the kind of brilliant technical know-how which makes what goes on inside of a plane of paramount interest to him. He's interested, too, in the future superduper gadgetry, as this hilarious yarn attests.

### POLITICAL APPLICATION

by ... John Victor Peterson

If matter transference really works—neanderthalers can pop up anywhere. And that's very hard on politicians!

SOME say scientists should keep their noses out of politics. Benson says it's to prevent damage to their olfactory senses. Benson's a physicist.

I've known Allan Benson for a long time. In fact I've bodyguarded him for years and think I understand him better than he does himself. And when he shook security at White Sands, my boss didn't hesitate to tell me that knowing Benson as I do I certainly shouldn't have let him skip off. Or crisp words to that effect.

The pressure was on. Benson was seeking a new fuel—or a way of compressing a known fuel—to carry a torchship to Mars. His loss could mean a delay of decades. We

knew he'd been close, but not how close.

My nickname's Monk. I've fought it, certainly, but what can you do when a well-wishing mother names you after a wealthy uncle and your birth certificate says Neander Thalberg? As early as high school some bright pundit noted the name's similarity to that of a certain prehistoric man. Unfortunately the similarity is not in name alone: I'm muscular, stooped, and, I must admit, not handsome hero model material

Well, maybe the nickname's justified, but still, Al Benson didn't have to give the crowning insult. And yet, if he hadn't, there probably wouldn't be a torchship sternending on Mars just about now.

C. I. (Central Intelligence, that is) at the Sands figured Benson would head for New York. Which is why the boss sent me here. I registered in a hotel in the 50's and, figuring that whatever Benson intended to do would have spectacular results, I kept the stereo on News.

Benson's wife hadn't yielded much info. Sure she described the clothes he was wearing and said he'd taken nothing else except an artist's case. What was in that was anybody's guess; his private lab is such a jumble nobody could tell what, if anything, was missing.

C. I. knew his political feelings. Seems he'd been talking wild about the upcoming presidential election and had sworn he'd nip the draft-Cadigan movement in the bud. Cadigan's Mayor of New York City. He's anti-space. In fact, Cadigan's anti just about everything in science except intercontinental missiles. Strictly for defense, of course. Cadigan says.

A weathercaster was making rash promises on the stereo when the potray dinged. The potray? I certainly wasn't expecting mail. Only C. I. knew where I was and they'd have closed-circuited me on visio if they wanted contact.

The potray dinged and there was a package in it.

Now matter transference I knew. It put mailmen out of business. There's a potray in every domicile and you can put things in it, dial the destination and they come out there. They come out the same size and weight and in the same condition as they went in, provided they didn't go in alive. Life loses, as many a shade of a hopeful guinea pig could relate.

So the potray dinged and here was this package. At first glance it looked like one of those cereal samples manufacturers have been everlastingly sending through since postal rates dropped after cost of the potrays had been amortized. But cereal samples don't come through at midday; they're night traffic stuff.

The package was light, its wrapping curiously smooth. There was an envelope attached with my correct name and potray number. Whoever had mailed it must be in C. I. or must know someone in C. I. who knew where I was.

The postmark was blurred but I could make out that it had been cast from Grand Central. Time didn't matter. It couldn't have been cast more than a microsecond earlier.

The envelope contained a card upon which was typed:

"Caution! Site on cylinder of 2 ft. radius and 6 ft. height. Unwrap at armslength."

Now what? A practical joke? If so, it must be Benson's work. He's played plenty, from pumping hydrogen sulphide (that's rotten egg gas, as you know) into the airconditioning system at high school to calling a gynecologist to the launching stage at the Sands to sever an umbilical cord which he neglected to say was on a Viking rocket.

I followed the instructions. As I bent back the first fold of the strange wrapping it came alive, unfolding itself with incredible swiftness.

Something burst forth like a freed djinn—almost instantaneously lengthening, spreading—a thing with beetling brows, low, broad forehead, prognathous jaw, and a hunched, brutally muscular body, with a great club over its swollen shoulder.

I went precipitously backward over a coffee table.

It stabilized, a dead mockery, replica of a Neanderthal.

A placard hung on its chest. I read this:

"Even some of the early huntsmen weren't successful. Abandon the chase, Monk. I've things to do and this—your blood brother, no doubt—couldn't catch me any more than you can!"

Which positively infuriated me.

Do you blame me?

A few cussing, cussed minutes later I realized what Al Benson had apparently done: solved the torchship's fuel problem.

Oh, I'd seen Klein bottles and Mobius strips and other things that twist in on themselves and into other dimensions, twisting into microcosms and macrocosms—into elsewhere, in any event. And here I had visual evidence that Benson had had something nearly six feet tall and certainly two feet in breadth enclosed in a nearly weightless carton less than eight inches on the side!

Sufficient fuel for a Marstrip? Just wrap it up!

The stereo's audio was saying: "... from the Museum of Natural History. Curators are compiling a list of the missing exhibits which we will reveal to you on this channel as soon as it's available. Now we switch to Dick Joy at City Hall with news of

the latest exhibit found. Come in, Dick!"

On the steps of City Hall was a full size replica of a mastodon over whose massive back was draped a banner bearing the slogan: "The Universal Party is for you! Don't return to prehistory with Cadigan! Re-elect President Ollie James and go to the stars!"

And there was a closeup of Mayor Cadigan standing pompous and wrathful—and looking very diminutive—behind the emblem of his opposition party.

Dick Joy was saying, "Eyewitnesses claim that this replica—obviously one of the items stolen from the Museum of Natural History—suddenly materialized here. Immediately prior to the alleged materialization a man—whose photograph we show now—ostensibly bent down to tie a shoelace, setting a shoebox beside him. He left the box, walking off into the gathering crowd, and this mastodon *seemed* to spring into being where the shoebox had been.

"The mastodon replica has been examined. A report just handed me says it is definitely that from the Museum and that it could not conceivably have been contained in a shoebox. It's obviously a case of mass hypnotism. The replica must have been trucked here. There's no other possible explanation. Excuse me!"

Dick Joy turned away, then back.

"I have just been handed a notice that Mayor Cadigan wishes to say a few words and I hereby introduce him, His Honor the Mayor, Joseph F. Cadigan!"

His balding, fragmentarily curly-haired Honor glared.

"Friends," he said chokingly, "whatever madman is responsible for this outrageous act will not go unpunished. I call upon the City's Finest to track him down and bring him to justice.

"I am for justice, for equality and peace. I—"

His Honor was apparently determined to use all the time he could. Being a newscast, it was for free.

I killed the stereo. And the visio rang. It was Phil Pollini, the C. I. Chief.

"Monk," he said, "guess you've seen the stereo. Al's out to fix the Mayor's wagon."

"Say that again," I said, having a brainstorm.

"Now, look—" he started.

"Maybe you've got something there, Chief," I cut in. "Cadigan's got the superduper of all wagons—a seven passenger luxury limousine with bulletproof glass, stereo, a bar, venetian blinds and heaven knows what else. Hot and cold running androids, maybe. He prowls the elevated highways with an 'In Conference' sign flashing over the windshield. So's he can't be wire-tapped or miked, I guess. It'd be a natch for Al Benson to go for."

Pollini grinned.

"So if you were Benson what'd you do to fix the Mayor's wagon?"

"Hitch it to a star," I said, "and the closest spot to a star would be the observation platform of the Greater Empire State."

"You're probably right," the Chief said. "Get going!"

I got.

Ten minutes later I walked out onto the observation platform on the 150th floor of the Greater Empire State Building—and found an incredulous crowd gathered around the mayor's limousine. I felt good. I'd predicted.

I asked a guard, "How'd it get here?"

His eyebrows were threatening a back somersault.

"Don't know," he said. "I was looking over the side; then turned around and here it was! You have any ideas?"

Which is when I spotted Al Benson.

I settled for shoving Benson toward the elevator, being careful since he had a box under each arm. We made the elevator and went down and it stopped on the 120th floor and the operator said, "Change here for all lower floors and the street—"

As we waited on the 120th for the down elevator, the P. A. system barked:

"Attention all building occupants. By order of the Mayor no one will be permitted to leave the building until further notice. Please remain where you are. We will try not to inconvenience you for any great time."

There was no one close to us.

"Al," I said, "look, stinker, you've had your fun but this is it. I don't know what you've got in those boxes but you've got to turn them over—and yourself—to the next copper who shows. This is a civil matter, strictly local, and not C. I."

Benson grinned. "Got to make a delivery first, Monk. Look, there's a potray over there. Can I use it?"

His grin was infectious. "So what are you going to send where?" I asked as sternly as I could.

"The Mayor's personal files," he said. "I managed to carry them out of City Hall—once they'd been suitably wrapped, of course! I'm sending them to the Senate Investigation Committee. Don't worry, Monk, His Honor won't be President this or any year!"

I helped him dial the SIC number.

"What about the other package?" I asked him then.

"Insurance," he said. "Come out on the setback."

He placed the last package on the mosaic tile of the terrace, untied its string, flipped open the edge of the Benson wrapping and jumped back.

It was an NYC police helicopter.

We potrayed it back from the Sands. Suitably wrapped, of course.

That was a month ago. Most of it never came out in the papers. Nothing of Benson's invention. C. I. thought it should be squelched, at least until Benson and the boys get back from Mars.

Which would be the end except for the packages. Yes, Benson left a gross of them with me and I've been mailing them one a day to the leaders of the opposition party. I don't truly know what's in them, of course. But it's very curious that the day before the torchship left exactly one hundred and forty-four cylinders of hydrogen sulphide were missing from quartermaster stores. Coincidentally one of my C. I. friends tells me Benson had him rig up a gross of automatic releases for gas cylinders.

Adding it up, it could be a good lesson for politicians to keep their noses out of science.

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