

Blue Company / Kind of Blue

a novel in e-mail

by

Rob Wittig and Scott Rettberg

Illustrations by Rob Wittig

Part One: Blue Company

by

Rob Wittig

Date: Mon, 13 May 2002

Subject: . . . um . . . "hello"

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dated this day, May the . . . probably about . . .
stares at stars, counts on fingers
carry the two . . . about May the 13th, right?

Dear . . . you,

. . . er . . .

remember me

question mark

nervous cough

. . . um . . .

smile

I have a **good excuse** for why I haven't written you.

You knew I got transferred, right?

Well, it turns out that I **really** got transferred!

My Good Excuse

My new job sucks.

Here's what I did at work this morning.

I dressed up like a late medieval knight,
got on a late medieval horse

and rode down a late medieval canyon
in the late medieval Alps,
through the late medieval snow
with the other forty-four people
from our business unit

Here's a Typical Afternoon

I mean, OK **this afternoon** ---

We're all descending

single file



and we've all got hike-brain

--- we're spaced, hypnotized ---

we stopped singing a loooong time ago

we're hearing nothing but mule grunts

the tinkle of chain mail

and the rattle of mortar shell cases



When the whisper comes back up the line

"village"

"village"

"village"



and everyone nervously looks up at the walls of the canyon

for **hick town ambushwhackers**

who love to rob wandering knights

And Then . . .

. . . we come around the corner
into a village



and the assembled **villagers freeze**

because

they are in the "**middle**" of "**something**"

There Is:

a) a bonfire

b) the men all standing on one side,
the women all standing on the other

c) four rabbits
tied to four stakes
wearing tiny wedding gowns

d) a ceremonial altar

e) a naked old man
in a mountain goat headdress
with a shiny hatchet in his hand

f) an incredibly incredibly incredibly
incredibly incredibly incredibly
awkward silence.

Then they shot an arrow at me.

Hi there

"Ta-da."

. . . so anyway, um . . .

Hi there.

I'll bet you didn't think you'd be hearing from me again.

But here I am.

smile

In a mildewy wool tent

In the dark

On this forbidden secret laptop computer
my buddy Skip got through his "connections"

(we are in deep shit if anyone catches us)

LOL

In what will some day be called the Italian Alps

In the year 1368

pause

I got transferred Overseas and Overtime

And we're not supposed to have e-mail.

that's my excuse

smiles

It's good to see you again.

Now, for the Important Stuff

For the last 24 hours
all I've been thinking about is

**"What am I going to tell her when I get
my 15 minutes on the laptop?"**

(we all have to share this computer
and everyone's dying to write home)

And I've been thinking about
your reaction
when this shows up
in your e-mail inbox . . .

REACTION A: Bert who?

REACTION B: Oh crap! That little fling I had is back to haunt me?

REACTION C: Yipes, a stalker!

or . . . perhaps . . .

REACTION Z: How nice to hear from Bert . . .

So I have to ask
. . . ahem . . .

Do you Still Like Me?

I . . . um . . . really enjoyed our few days (and nights) together

blushes

looks at the ground

and I've been thinking about you

NOTE: Thinking about you in a balanced, normal,
not-weird, non-stalkerish, rather-sweet kind of way

clears throat

My Hope

and I've rather been hoping

musters courage

that you are un-otherwise-romantically-involved

and might want to . . . um . . . see me
when I get back to the 21st century in June
from my idiotic tour of duty in the past

Full Disclosure

Just so you know . . .
I haven't met anyone special back here.

Especially given that she'd be 600+ years old
when I get back to 2002

. . . anyway . .

Whew! **There!** I said all the hard stuff!

Here's What the Poster On the Wall of the Coffee Room at My Old Position Said

"Transfer to the Renaissance for a Year.
Enjoy History First-Hand"

Here's What I Say

Bull-shit.

Renaissance, Schmenaissance!

A.D. 1368 is the **Dark Fucking Ages!**

(at least up here in the mountains)

Honestly.
It's the Late Medieval Era at best!

Here's What We Do When Late Medieval Hicks Shoot Arrows at Us

Regine says "Pull"



and Julio throws something up in the air
like a water jug
and Sharpshooter Sue
(former skeet champion)
goes **Kaboom** with one of the automatic rifles
we brought with us from the future
and the water jug disintegrates

It worked great this morning

Impressed the villagers

and they let us stay here
south of town

Here's What Our Captain, Regine Wants People to Call Us



The Witch's Company

Here's What People Back Here Actually Call Us

The Blue Company

The Blind Company

Northern Lances

Dijon Lances

The Company of Eight
(eight? where do they get this shit?)

This is a big problem
because I'm The Marketing Guy

and I'm responsible for the Brand Identity
of our stupid little fighting force

It means more work for me

We're Terrible

As we were tiptoeing out of the village square
so they could continue
whatever [the hell] they were doing

Skip gets a hungry look on his face
and says to me:
"Say folks . . . are you gonna be **eatin'**
those rabbits? 'Cause, if not . . ."

We're terrible.

Now It's Dark

. . . and our tents are up

and our fires are lit

and Cookie made us boiled millet balls
again
blecch!

AND I HAVE A MILLION THINGS TO TELL YOU

-- like how I'm going to get to meet the poet Petrarch

(my hero)

-- and about the Quixote Boys, and Goth Kids, and Civil War Nerds
who make up the ridiculous daily costume drama of our company

-- and about my Roman antiquities collection I can't bring back

(not that I'm trying to entice you
to REPLY to me, or anything)

but I have to give up the laptop now

Write Back Only if You Want To

tell me how you're doing, what's been going on

hoping against hope

no pressure

fingers crossed

under his breath "please, please, please, please, please"

Having a Blast in the Past,
I am
The Man They Call
Berto Alto



Date: Tue, 14 May 2002

Subject: best news

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

You Still Like Me!

Yeeee-hooooooo!

echo, echo, cho, ho, o, o

You can hear me shouting across the centuries.

That's the **best news** I've had in a long time.

Except maybe the news
that we have **squirrel fritters** for dinner.

No.

Definitely your news is better.

(sorry for the bad joke
your news has made me daffy
thanks for such a lovely letter!)

Think on it! ---
a woman who won't be conceived for centuries
is going to feel favorably RE:me

high five!

(squirrel tastes like shrew, only fattier)

A Bouquet of Flowers for You

the first ones to appear in the slush



they've been dead for 633 years . . .

I'm unprepared

They told us we wouldn't be able to communicate
at all from back here!
(I'm **tongue-tied**)

I'm overprepared

I've been using the 14th century silence
to cram my head with stories to tell when I get back!
(I'm too **gabby**)

apologies for both

I'm Tired of Being Cold

even with your back against a rock
a fire like this only warms one side of you
my typing fingers are fah-reezing

Utterly Foreign

Thanks for the news briefs, too.

Mind bending!

After being back here almost eleven months
2002 seems ghostly & fantastical

the great towers fallen

fighting along the Silk Road

fighting in the Holy Land

Bent minds!

The holy lands I was raised near
were holy only to Native Americans
We didn't notice them.

Now Jerusalem, Bethlehem
don't seem so holy.
Even God might feel unsafe there.

Utterly Familiar

I personally know guys who besieged
the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem!
(back in the 1340s)

Bush-the-son
pursuing Bush-the-father's
personal vendetta against Iraq ---

That kind of shit
happens all the time back here!

Welcome to my world!

rueful smile

Mayday, May Day!

I wish you'd have been here
for May Day!

Rural country calendrage is still very approximate
so, if you missed it, you're still in plenty of time

Here's how to celebrate the good, ol' fashion way:

- 1) **Dress up like your boss** and imitate them
in front of everybody
(that's the fun part)
but, of course, they get to imitate you, too
(which is very . . . cough . . . um . . . informative)
- 2) Do **unspeakable** things with eggs
- 3) Get drunk and celebrate, with your lover,
a round of **heavy petting**
(it's absolutely forbidden to get pregnant until June
'cause one would be too big to help with Fall harvest)

Cluck Cluck Cluck

thanx so much for your concern . . .
BUT don't worry!
I'm not in much danger

We're exactly the kind of namby-pamby soldiery
that Nick Machiavelli is going to bitch about
in 140 yrs. or so

We're essentially **Showy Blowhards**
who ride around looking tough
gathering information
and doing our level damndest
to **never ever ever fight**

Our standing orders are to **Run Like Chickens**

The other free companies basically earn their money from:

- a) protection rackets
- b) ransom
- c) negotiation

and we earn our spending money from that. . .
and our real money from doing something-or-other
that Regine's not allowed to tell us about

Anyway, they so much as **promised** us
we'll never have to fight

Here's Skip

Here's Skip doing his Regine imitation
a few days ago



Skip's Regine is right on.

Here's Regine

doing a devastating Skip imitation



Sacred Roadside Shrine or Child's Sandcastle?

Who knows?



in a high-mountain slush-flurry this morning

Just a second!

Hey, I just realized that
since you're forwarding this to mutual friends
there are going to be
other people reading this e-mail . . .



let's you-and-me get out of earshot



You other folks are still listening, aren't you?

bug off



mmmmmm so much . mm mm m m
m m mm all the time mmmm mm
you mmm mmmm

Grade A-Choice Awkward Moment

Here's my nomination
for **Awkward Moment of the Week**, so far ---
one of the Goth Rock kids
(who constantly gripes about wearing blue
instead of black)
sitting opposite the Civil War Re-enactment Nerd
in his Union Blue uniform
and **glaring** at each other
over the campfire

You could just tell that the Goth kid
was thinking
"What a pretentious asshole with that uniform"

and the Civil War Re-enactment dude
was thinking
"What a pretentious asshole with her eyebrow piercings"

I just about spit out my food laughing

All the Good Names are Taken

Maybe I should call us
"The Showy Blowhards" Company

We can't be called the Witch's Company
because we heard (even up here in the mtns)
there is **already** a Witch's Company
that campaigned along the Adriatic
for Venice about 3-4 years ago
with a Female captain.
Regine was hilarious.
"That bitch! I'll kick her ass"

Ah, Marketing, Marketing!

At least we have a reputation for being nuts

How Big of Nuts We Are

We're such nut nut nutty knuckleheads

that we **hid out** in der frickinge Alps
in der frickinge month of Marz!

What was it like?

Let's put it this way

The half of us that **were** doing Regine's breathing exercises
didn't get frostbite.

As of today, **everybody** does Regine's breathing exercises
religiously
every morning

Frostbite is charcoal skin
surrounded by a delicate border of snow white
It comes loose in chunks

And we ate a horse

Raw

That's how nuts we are

Hang In 'til Summer

I so sympathize about your job!
it sounds horrible

Take me, take this message, as an excuse,

yeah I'm talking to you
for real

to **STOP** right there at work
or wherever you are

and give yourself some time to dream about the future

beyond your stupid deadline
beyond your stupid job

to what you really want to be doing in 2 years
in 5 years

Life comes first.

My job?
Even when I'm peeling usable clothes
off of dead people I go
"At least I'm not back at my Old Position!"

Hang in 'til Summer,
I'll be home in June, remember!!

(did I mention I'm tired of being cold?)

We'll weave ribbons around a belated Maypole

Your Correspondent
Berto Alto

P.S. Raw horse tastes like mountain goat . . . chewy

Date: Wed, 15 May 2002

Subject: glimpses

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

DearYou,

Sorry if your **spam-blocker** has been
resisting these e-mails

Many doctrinaire e-mail servers block out e-mail
from centuries where **neo-classicism** is on the rise!

(By Mercurius!)

What's It Like Back Here?

You ask for **glimpses**.
Well . . . everything is totally different.
For example:

Kids Today are Glued to the Tube

. . . crowded around the mountain-village storyteller
and her scary, hollow-wooden-tube,
"voice of God" digeridoo

Branding

You're inundated by personal and company **logos**
back here . . .

Knights (I mean **real** knights,
not us **fake** knights)
are always flouncing their logos around

(logos being the coat of arms on their shields)

and their squires are drawing their logos
with charcoal on every wall and milestone
they pass

Every surface is **crawling with graffiti** back here.

Every member of our Blue Company
knows how to draw the Blue Company double arrow



. . . and we leave it everywhere.
I insist!
That's my job!

. . . and of course
some guys get a captor's logo **burned**
into their **skin** with **hot metal**

Advertising

To attract attention at a crowded market
you've got to yell . . .
. . .and since there's not a hell of a lot else to do
back here
people pour their **creativity**
into their **yelling**.

Like . . . the smoked-eel store people
do these elaborate skits
(Rated L=Language, AS=Adult Situations)
whilst waving smoked eels
out the front of their pants

The **smoked-eel value proposition**
is medicinal ---
smoked eels equal virility & bedroom stamina.

Say you're approaching a town
in which there are two competing inns . . .

Each inn sends out a team of 2-4 people
who **race out** onto the high road
and start doing a little roadside performance

ARTHUR

I'm King Arthur and I'm weary
where should I stay the night?

GOLDEN ANGEL TOUT

Why, sire, you should stay
at the Golden Angel
where we have the **driest bedding straw**
in all of Christendom!

ANNOUNCER

Be sure to ask about our Spring Special,
a bed, a meal, and a hand job
all for the **low, low price** of . . .

Greener Grass

Star Wars II is opening, eh?
All the costumed Vaders and Obiwans

sleeping in line at the theater . . .

One **big fad** back here right now
is for knights to go to tournaments
dressed up as King Arthur characters.

The **irony** has not escaped some of us.

Embarrassing as it is to admit,
most of us transferred back here
because we felt we were **uncool**
and we wanted to participate
in the **coolness** of being **real knights**

so we discover

that the **real knights** feel that **they're uncool**
and want to participate
in the **coolness** of being **real real knights**

It never ends.

The fire's gone out
and I'm sleepy . . .

A Groggy Good Night
From

Yr Bddy, Brt Alt

Date: Thu, 16 May 2002

Subject: bouncing merrily

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

Trying to Start on an "Up" Note

You shoulda seen the

huge eerie gorgeous
triangular herds of birds
ricocheting around the narrow valley
rippling and squawking and shitting
this morning.

(I'm trying to start on an "Up" Note
before the whining begins in earnest)

There are more birds now
than in the future
I'm sure of it

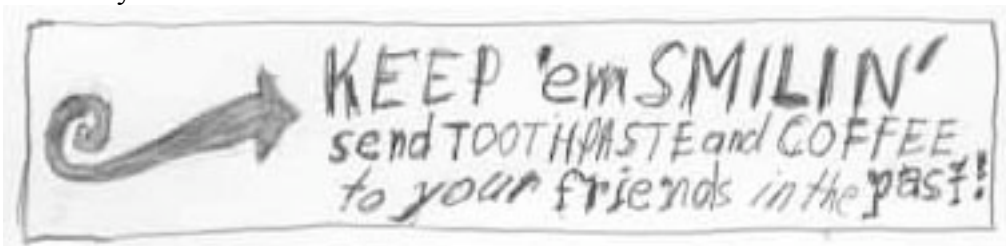
Lucky birds ---
high enough to see
the food-filled flatlands



My Ad

It cracks me up
that when you reply to me
your e-mail contains ads!!!

Here's my ad!



Bouncing Merrily

After the All-Company Meeting
all day my **mood** was like the stuff
on the pack mule in front of me . . .

. . . gradually gradually gradually
sagging

until some bag of pancake batter
or box of ammunition
goes bouncing merrily down the creekbank

and the whole company stops

and swears

and loosens all the ropes
and tries to jam everything up high on the mule again

I got into an utter depressing
"What am I doing with my life?!"

by mid afternoon

The Gang Crossing a Creek



Flip Out

One of the sweet Heavy Metal
Goth Rock Kids
flipped out today

They sent him to me
(like they often do}
And Skip handed him the reins
and let him walk beside me
while I rode Nastibelle

The Idiotic Protocol back here
requires that Knights ride
and Squires & Grooms walk
(I'm playing Knight this month)

. . . when the natural thing
would have been to **let the kid ride**

he was **sobbing** and hyperventilating
it was terrible

So I listened and tried gingerly
to figure out what was up

Turns out it's his sister's birthday
and he's guilty he couldn't send her anything
They were basically orphans together

. . . anyway, we patched him up
and wrote her a funny poem
that he sent tonight already on this laptop

Our Story So Far

. . . so's you can understand the impact
of the bombshell Regine dropped today . . .

1) All last **Spring** and **Summer**
we shuffled up and down the Po Valley
between Greater Venice and Greater Milan
looking cool,
negotiating double deals,
and trying our damndest not get into a fight.
Meetings, meetings, meetings!

2) By **Autumn** when we finally inked a contract
with the Viscontis of Milan
it was the end of the fightin' season!

Time to pack up the weapons and
go to Winter Camp! Woo hoo!

3) **Winter Camp** in Switzerland:
working out, sleeping, drinking, telling stories
Did I mention being bored out of our minds?

4) Then they told us the only thing we'd have to do
before going **Home**
is make a ceremonial appearance
at this big **Visconti Wedding Party** in Milan
at the beginning of June

Co-Ed Pee Break on the Trail



(we're way beyond modesty)

Skip Hovering for the Laptop

Skip is next in line to use this laptop

I can see him **glaring** with **theatrical impatience**
out of the corner of my eye
But I when I look over
his face softens and he looks at the tent-roof **sweetly**
by candlelight

now he's saying mock-sarcastically:
"What? **What?** Why are you staring at me?
Take all the time you want!"

so I've gotta hurry

Company Meeting: The New Business Plan

An All-Company Meeting is never a good thing.



After breakfast Regine announces that there's a

"reason"

we're going to the Visconti Wedding in Milan
(I **knew** there was something strange about it, god damn it!)

The corporation wants her to go
meet with an English General Contractor

the man they call Sir John Hawkwood

and fucking try to **sign on** with his **army**

and actually go **campaign** for Milan for a while!!!

They told us Hawkwood was our enemy!

They switch sides so often back here
it makes your **head spin!**
Just like Afghanistan.

They told us we wouldn't have to fight!

We all thought we were home free.

Enough About Me

So sorry to read that you had to work
late again.

Did you make it to yoga?

Tell your supervisor they'd better
hire a replacement for what's-her-face
Tell 'em you can't be expected to carry
the whole team on your back!!!

Are you wearing your **wrist braces**, my friend?
Are you taking care of your computer-sore hands?
Are you switching your mouse from the left side
to the right side and back?

Here's the view

. . . of the gorgeous Italian landscape



I had today

But, Hey, What Am I Worried About?

The worst that could happen is that we get bought
by another company . . . we'd have to change

banners and logos
big "boo hoo"

Look deep into **History**
and you will find
yours truly,

Bert Hault

Date: Fri, 17 May 2002

Subject: rooster duty

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

I traded some information (7th grade genetics)
for a new blue Renaissance Crayon!

Fair Warning

whispers

Good morning.

And I really **mean** "good morning"!

beckons you closer

In fact, I feel it's my responsibility to warn you
that I am a . . . um . . . **morning person**

hope that's OK

crosses fingers

I know in some cases that can be a relationship-killer

I mean . . .

I'm relentlessly and ruthlessly cheerful & gabby
in the mornings

For example . . .

whispers excitedly

I am so stoked about having this lifeline
of words and pictures with you
(write me if I'm being too obnoxious)
that all day yesterday I was planning **this here** e-mail
wherein I **now** propose to take you around with me on . . .

Rooster Duty!

still whispering

. . . which is where MPs (Morning People) like me
roust everyone

and it gives me the opportunity to show you around the camp

tiptoeing; beckoning

C'mon!

hehehehehe

hohohhohoho

BWAHAHAHAHAHA!

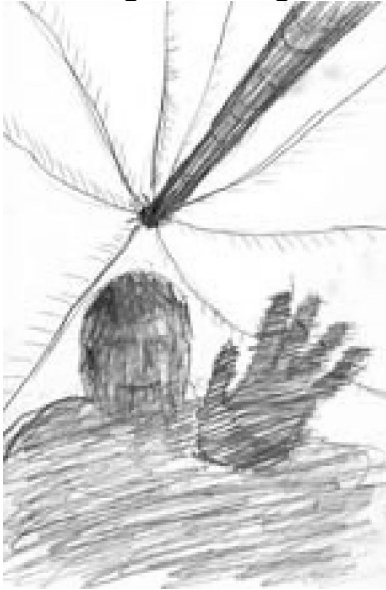
Lay of the Land

This morning we're in a typical mountain field-camp set-up
which means most of the knights are in
these big stupid heavy wool tents

with their squires and grooms
sleeping outdoors nearby

So . . . protocol, protocol . . .

I have to give the knights a first call, like this . . .



Hee-haw, Jamie!

laughs

This knight is Jamie-the-Bull
a broker from Chicago
and he is **completely** grumped out . . .

But, protocol aside,
the Lay of the Land in camp
is essentially by **cultural affinity group**

. . . for example, let's visit the . . .

The Historical Re-enactment Crowd

. . . who, from the first day,
have always congregated in a clump
despite their different re-enactment specialties:
Medieval, Civil War, Renaissance Swordplay, etc.

Their part of camp always feels like
a traditional American family campsite

(well, that's partially because one of them adopted a kid
and Jr. is always tottering around the open fire
making me want to run in and scoop him away from it)

I didn't think about it before I got back here ---

Q: Who would **want** to go back into the past?

Q: Who would be **good at it** and get hired?

A: Historical re-enactment buffs!

Well, it makes sense, I suppose
but it still caught me by surprise . . .

Who are the most experienced jousters?
People who used to work **Renaissance Faires**
and **Medieval Times** restaurants!

Fantasy becomes reality.

It's like if there was a planet of cartoon characters
people with **theme park experience** would be
among the first to voyage there.

My brain hurts.

Five Civil War Buffs Under One Blanket



Rise and shine!

It's amazing how fast you get used to sleeping outdoors

Even in the mountains when its cold

The Goth Kids

"spawn of the dark"
"sprawled with drool"

the sweet Heavy Metal Goth Kids awake hungover
out of habit
whether they've boozed or not



Cock-a-doodle-god-damn-doo.

Everyone's so sweet and vulnerable
when they're just waking up

The Goth Kids are the precise opposite of morning people

The Goth Kids arguably take the **prize**
for "Most Surprised by What It's Like Back Here"

(the prize itself, incidentally, is a bronze
statuette of a guy smacking himself on the forehead
and going "Shoulda stayed awake in History class!")

Regine and the Hard Corps

Regine, of course, is awake and sitting around already



along with the hard corps
(**Skip, Julio, Superstar**, some others)

These are the people that
(unofficially) run Blue Company

(even though the Financial Types
are supposed to call the shots)

Regine really "Rides the Snake"---
She's here for very definite personal reasons
. . . she keeps them private . . .
but you can tell there's a spiritual component

and her hobby is talking with midwives
and collecting medical know-how

which is so smart!

Because the **big crimes** for us are:
a) leaving objects in this time period, and
b) taking objects from this time period

. . .so she collects **knowledge**

She's a great example of Job Survival Skills.

Portfolio Analyst Assessing Overnight Mouse Damage To Her Tunic



Up and at 'em!

The Financial Types

These are the people for whom the corporation
is their life

it's frat/sorority city in this part of camp

this, in some insane way, is part of their
career path

They spend their time talking about investments
and houses their gonna buy when they get back
to the 21st

They're the whiniest

They gripe about this job as though it was just a normal job

They're insane.

Here's What's Hysterical:

When an emissary approaches our camp
early in the morning

By the time the emissary is allowed through the sentries

we have to be all completely
in traditional hierarchy
Knights, Squires, Grooms

you should see people
waking up **bleary**
trying to remember
if they are playing Knight or Groom this month

wobbling like toddlers

trying to find their horse and lance

Quixote Boys

When we first got here
somebody dubbed
two particularly **gung-ho** Medieval Re-enactment lads
"The Quixote Boys"

. . . but since then, Skip and I've been using
the gender-neutral noun "Quixote"
to denote a state of mind

to which everyone's susceptible

"We're all Quixotes in this company."

. . . and we go back and forth about
whether it's a good or bad thing

Sometimes it seems so phoney.

Sometimes it seems like the only way for people to **evolve** ---

by trying things out
by **pretending**
by being "**pretentious**"

What do you think?

Virii

Thanks for your warning on the computer viruseseses.
I hope I don't accidentally send you one.

But, unlike disease delivered by regular mail
a computer virus can't kill you. Yet.

Everyone's Awake Now I've Got to Run

They're standing in line to brush teeth with twigs
(Thanks for your kind offer to send us back
a tube of toothpaste! Root-beer flavor, please!)



(note the two Financial love-birds who always wear the same blanket)

After eleven months
so many of the company **still** get dressed up
in their costumes
and kinda
parade up and down in front of each other
in the morning

the Goth Kids over here

the Re-enactment types over there . . .

it's so sweet!!

Your friend,
Bert'aut

Date: Sat, 18 May 2002

Subject: work work work

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

Awwwwwww . . .

I notice from your message header
that you're writing me from **work**
on Saturday!

I thought you were trying
for a **real weekend** this week.

Poor you!

(I **think** it's Saturday, isn't it?)

Up here in the mountains
days of the week **vary** from village to vilage

These here folks believe it's Sunday
and they were in a Sabbath-esque mood today . . .

. . . although . . .

it's hard to tell if the whole "Jesus from Nazareth" concept
has really captured people's imaginations

or not . . .

In the village we're camped near tonight
They were singing to **this thing**:



which is about 3 feet high
made of marble
and is leaning up against
the Village Chief's house
with a little roof over it

I don't see one bit of Christian
iconography in it . . .

It's **pure Roman**

It's essentially E.T. in a toga

shrugs

Whatever.

crosses himself

looks to the sky for thunderbolts

touches wood

laughs

Saturday Mood

I'm in a typical Saturday mood tonight

which is odd, really . . .
because we do the same shit every day

Saturday mood equals
(at least in the "old days" of the 21st)
Going Out **Drinking** With the Gang
and **Complaining About Work**

I should be happy
We had roast stoat and wheat bread

Pep Talk for You

Dust Off Your Resume, god damn it!

You don't need them!

Go in there to your Performance Review on Monday
and give 'em Hell!

If I was there with you right now
I'd help you **rehearse!**

We'd stand up
and I'd sing
one of our **silly Provençal marching songs**
with you



and then we'd keep marching
and you'd repeat your **Performance Review Mantra:**



"I've made you so much money
"I've made you so much money"
"I've made you so much money"

which **cancels out their**

"We're doing you a favor"

"We're doing you a favor"
"We're doing you a favor"



and then I'd hear you **sing out**

"I'll make you more money if I'm happy"
"I'll make you more money if I'm happy"
"I'll make you more money if I'm happy"

Motion Sickness on the Trail



This poor Renaissance Faire Wench
was puking her guts out today

I hope we get out of the mountains soon

Skip in the Drive-Through

Stoats are kind of a cross
between a gopher, a weasel, and a power saw.

So we're standing in the dinner line,

and Skip says to one of the Goth Kitchen kids
"I would like the **Stoat Super Value Meal**
with a superslice of bread
and a large diet spring water please"

What does stoat taste like? hmhhh . . .
Stoat tastes kinda like baby fox, but stringy.

My Job

You ask what my job is?

Pretty much what it always was --- **Marketing**.

except Marketing is a bit different back here

Marketing =

1) Creating a fearsome field reputation for the company
--- rumor mongering, essentially ---

so that people are

a) eager to contract us

b) loath to fight us

It's all about the brand!

2) Doing parlays

--- meetings, meetings, meetings ---
ransom, safe passage, blah blah blah

3) 'Ragging and Bragging'

(as we call it)

i.e. riding up and issuing these very **ornate challenges**
at the top of our lungs

'If you are idiotic enough

to fuck with the Blue Company

you'll end this day by begging to crawl back

into your mother's womb

to escape us!" yadda yadda

It's fun.

4) Oh, yeah, and maybe the main thing:

I'm an **Information Officer**.

People pay fortunes for political and military information
back here.

It's an information economy.

That's how we got all our roastin' stoats ---
telling this Village Chief about some troop movements
we saw in Switzerland.

"I warned you"

I'm glad the Democrats are pressuring Bush again

. . . but realistically, how can a warlord sift out
which of the million warnings
is gonna come true . . .
(I know, I'm an Information Officer ---
"Warnings R Me")

When I'm consulting for gangster warlord
I just tell His Local Highness Whoever
to **act fairly in the world**

. . . that's better prevention than paranoia . . .

But do they ever listen? **Hah!**

Taking my Job Too Seriously

Yeah I know what you're saying about
me taking **my** job too seriously, too . . .

But if only you were here to see
how **intense** all this shit is . . .

. . .but then I know everybody says **that**
about **their own** job . . .
You're right; you're right.

Everybody Else Who's Reading This E-Mail Get Lost And Skip Over This Next Section!!

So . . . you . . .
I want you to close your eyes
right there on your chair . . .

right in front of your computer, your e-mail . . .

. . .and imagine that you can feel my warm fingers . . .

sloooooooooowly, sloooooooooowly unbuckling
your wrist braces

and gently massaging the base of your thumb . . .
. . . kneading your poor sore wrists

squeezing sloooowly and sweeeeeetly
down your forearms

taking the pressure off your poor carpal tunnels

and ending with a little soft soft kiss
right on your enflamed

tendons . . .

Voyeurs Beware!

OK! If any of the rest of you read that
I'll have you drawn and quartered!

Don't laugh.
I've seen it done.

laughs

Actually, roast stoat tastes kinda like fried ermine

Take care,
Signed,
Barrow il Gigante

Date: Sun, 19 May 2002

Subject: Foof!

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

Foof!

It's been another one of those
frustrating mountain canyon days

where the spring **snow melt**
has wrecked last year's trail
and this year's trail hasn't been built yet

and we have to hand-carry our gear
through the **whitewater**

and we progress only a couple of miles
for all our labor

and we donate a few hours
(as all good travelers do)
to **pick & shovel** trail maintenance.

Regine is mixing up **poultices & teas**
for all the **cuts & bruises**.

Everyone is beat.

In fact,
everyone here had a really **tough week**
this third week of May.

Is it the same with you and your friends?

The Wolf Club

By Mercury! So much **stuff to tell you**.
Did I tell you I'm a **wolfman**?
At winter camp there were these sweet
Alpine Hillbillies and I befriended this one kid

And he got kinda attached to me
I taught him how to fish and sing the Beverly Hillbillies song
(OK, OK, we're **awful** back here, I know!
we're all **going to hell** for making fun of people!)
And So . . . his dad came to visit
and we all got drunk on honeywine together

(don't try it; terrible hangover)

and the dad made me a member of **the Wolf Club**

Firelight Ritual

some really old vanished language
your friend Berto howling at the moon



I wore a **smelly wolfskin**
and they taught me a Wolf Club gang sign

The point of the Wolf Club seems to be
to give you an **animal** to pattern your **body language** after
when you're hunting
or **when you're scared**
seems like an old hunter/gatherer thing
to keep you from getting freaked in the dark
a set of **mental images**

Plus, of course, hanging out with the boys
down at the Wolf Club lodge and drinking on club nights

Everybody Else Who's Reading This E-Mail Will Kindly Evaporate And Rejoin Us Below the Asterisks

I can't help it.
I'm **dreaming** about you a lot.

Dreaming about you being back here
and us talking **face to face**
and holding hands . . .

. . . tenderly of course
to take care of your keyboard-sore wrists

Hope that's not too forward of me.

They put a lot of **stock** in dreams back here.

I keep trying to dream of **me** being in **your century**
but I can't make the leap.

Wonder if that means anything.

Just a thought --- could you please try dreaming
of **me** being **there with you**?

The are . . . um . . . really **sweet** dreams, by the way.

blush

Pageantry Drill

We're camped at a little wide spot in the canyon
where there's room to **ride horses**

and Regine has called an hour of Pageantry Drill
by torchlight



so that we'll be ready to **look sharp**
for the big Visconti Wedding in Milan

"Lil' Gramps Griper" the grip is moaning
and **joking** and keeping our mood up (as usual)
as we **don** our **damp** armor
and hoist our Blue Company arrow flags
and get ready
to **trot creakily** through our entrance routine.

Gotta ride.

Take care,
Signed,
Barrow il Gigante

Date: Mon, 20 May 2002

Subject: long day

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

Long Day, Tired E-Mail

Regine got us up **early**
drove us **hard** all day

She mounts up before dawn and **yells**:

"I'm sick of these mountains!



We're gonna blow through them **today!**"

There's some kind of fire under her butt now
to make it to Milan

I was **sore-footin' it** most of the day
while Skip rode Nastibelle

But . . . we're into an actual, **decent-sized valley** now
with actual **decent-sized towns**

and churches with resident priests

. . . and all of a sudden Skip and I are nostalgic
for the hills and their 'billies

sigh

Yep, we're definitely within the purview of Sivilisation
again

(such as it is)

darn it

Chatting Up the Villagers

Plus . . . when we got to this lil' hamlet
about sundown

Regine insisted that she and I
go **talk** to people
(the last thing I wanted to do)

. . . so I haven't eaten yet . . .

She wanted me to do some **focus tests**
and see if anyone has heard of us

Yes they **have** heard of us
. . . and they've heard of Regine and Julio
by name . . .

but nobody's **heard** of me, Berto the Giant

Which is gonna look bad
at **my** Performance Review!

While I did that
Regine had obie-gynie talk
with some of the grammas

Blondes Drink More Blood

Have I told you how sometimes people **jump & cower**
when I walk into a hovel . . .
. . . because I'm **blonde**?

Every place we've ever been back here
people tell stories about **Vikings**
. . . blondes . . .

vampire stories

pause

Boo.

These folks tonight asked me if I was Erik Bloodaxe

Nice **name recognition**

for a guy who's been dead 4 centuries!

(Lucky son of a bitch.)

Information travels everywhere back here!

"No, I'm Berto the Giant, damn it!"

clenched fist

smile

Guaranteed there were

never Vikings in the Italian Alps

. . . I mean, right?

Who is Erik Bloodaxe's marketing person?

Thinking About What You Wrote

. . . while I drifted into my horseriding zone today . . .

. . . you wrote about

my tendency to distance myself

and escape into work

Yeah.

. . .like by 600 years . . .

blush

you got me

But, the Good News

lucky for us ---

spending the night also

in this decent-sized town

is a small troupe of **traveling actor-bats**



Poppa Actorbat

So . . .
as soon as I finish this
I'm gonna grab a piece of bread
and go back to see the rest of their
Song of Roland

Grandpa of the family is narrating
w/the **booming** radio voice

astonishing **athletic** Mom, Dad and Kids
balancing and juggling and pratfalling and playfighting
--- shows you what human beings can **do**

if they never go to school, but instead
spend 4-6 hrs. every day with nurturing parents
learning a **physical skill** ---

(Olympic gymnasts
to the tenth power)



Two Teenage Actorbats in a Horse Suit

And there's the funky **age** thing going on -- deluxe!
parents and kids all look the same age
(there's **no** incentive **whatsoever** in this culture
to stay a kid . . . you want to be a junior adult as soon as possible
Kids grow up so fast in these days)

The absolute **star** is Oldest Daughter
who plays Roland in Crusader Gown
and thin tin helmet
. . . slow cartwheels and thru-the-legs swordsmanship . . .

Regine stands beside me in the torchlight
just now
stares for a while at the show
turns, and **says**:
"That family could kick the ass
of any knight we've seen this trip.
They are awesome fighters."

Rhythm of the Road

So . . . while I was walking today
I was working on my Ragging and Bragging
(they rhymed taunts it is my job to deliver)

And I made a French-style triolet for you.
(Triolet is a rhyme pattern)
(We're big into rhyme patterns back here)

*On this here little hike
through dark-age dirt and dust,
I broke my walking-pike.
On this here little hike,
I'd like my horse -- or bike!
I see some signs of rust
on this here little hike
through dark-age dirt and dust.*

Signed sincerely yours truly
The end
bows

Gotta scam,
Thanks for being there,
Berto Magno

Date: Tue, 21 May 2002

Subject: whup

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

whup, whup, whup,

whup, whup, whup,
tinkle, whup, whup,
whup, whup, **tinkle**

is the sound

. . . the whup of Regine's chain whip
whirling
in an umbrella pattern

as she stands tall in the stirrups

and the **tinkle** is the sound
of Regine's chain whip
intercepting **arrows!**

Rumble

. . . because we fucking ran into
a **Swiss free company**
at the **river-crossing** this afternoon

and the stoopid **idiots** decided
they wanted to rumble

I Can Hardly Type

Some Swiss guy **hit** me in the chest
with a **hammer**

my **ribs** are maybe broken

I'm still shaking

but I'm ok

and I really like you

Have I mentioned that?

Nobody got hurt badly

We Tried to Negotiate

We said they could cross the creek first

but they were just **looking for a fight**

All their archers strung up
and a couple started shooting

I yelled and told them
Regine would fight **their Captain**
One-on-One

Their Captain was a runty little guy

And Regine **flipped** him over

and **stuck** him into the riverbank
so hard
it took two guys
to pull **him & his helmet** out of the mud

So they let us pass.

And the one guy hammered me in my Kevlar vest
for no reason
as we walked by

We weren't even taunting them!

So Non-Chivalry

These Swiss guys were so non-chivalry
and it **pissed** me off
even worse
because we saw all that **pure, noble**
Song of Roland stuff last night
What a dope I am, right?

I'm OK don't worry

Date: Wed, 22 May 2002

Subject: hammered

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

That bastard's **hammer**

swinging toward my chest

as he **leans down** from his horse



woke me up again

about 20 minutes ago

-- **terrified** --

No way was I getting back to sleep!

So I **tiptoed** the laptop out of the tent

into the moonlight

and I climbed the hillside . . .

Now I'm sitting on a rock above camp



Dear You,

I'm so surprised the hammer-in-the-chest
incident
is still bothering me this much

tonight

I got to sleep **fine** last night (the day it happened)

I hate this.

I close my eyes and he's right there



cocking his arm
as I walk by leading Nastibelle

Amazing Quiet

. . . over the valley tonight

I hear the creek

and I heard one **o-o-o-owl** on my way up here

Such Noise . . .

. . . going on in my head

Things I **shoulda/coulda** done to prevent
the Swiss dude reaching me

plus a million "**I told you so**"s

plus a million "don't complain --
you knew there were risks"s

plus a million "**don't be a crybaby**"s

so I know, I know, **I know**, I know

you don't have to tell me

Broken Up

I'm **not** the only one awake right now

(it's probably around 3:00 a.m.)

Down below



way down by the river
Julio and Superstar are sitting
in the moonlight

they were a couple
but they **broke up** before transferring back here

but they hang out together a lot

(I don't think they're having sex any more)

They share the same weird sleep pattern
and have built a **parallel life**, where
nearly every night
they go
night walking and night hiking and night talking

and get to **just sit** together

whereas you and I
are just getting to know each other
and can't sit within centuries of each other

Look at the moon . .

. . . tonight, if you can, my friend.
(it's the same **lovely rock** I'm looking at)

But look
slightly slightly to the south and west of it.

My Goth science geek buddy
tells me that's the direction the
wobbly old earth has shifted
in the 600 years that separate us

if you look just to the southwest of your moon
you'll be looking exactly where I'm looking now
I do love that rock

Worms

I'm afraid of medieval professional fighting gents

I'm afraid that I'm afraid of people in general

Why the fuckall did I come back here anyway
right after I met you?!!

clears throat

looks away from the laptop screen

Do I have your permission to miss you?

I have a theory that people unerringly choose
the precise distance
from other people
that feels comfortable for them
-- cf. workaholics, long distance relationships, etc.---

I hope that's not true.

Sorry I'm such a downer tonight.

Too Quiet

What I wouldn't give to hear one car

see one airplane

airplanes in the sky r so beautiful
I'll never take them for granted again

Sweet Slumber

our horses are asleep
our dogs are asleep
our sentinels are asleep
laughs
shit, let them sleep

In the Soft Italian Night

The Truth is wheeling in his saddle
to bring



his big Hammer of Reality
against my chest

brandishing the Sword of Missing You
in his other hand

good night

Date: Thu, 23 May 2002

Subject: better

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Feeling Better

Feeling much better today

Sorry I was such a self-pity-wallower
in my message the other night

Feels Weird



It still feels weird to pass by
a **brand new** castle
occupied by its original inhabitants

Great Spooky Moment

In this village we stopped in this morning
Regine takes me and two other

miscellaneous **injured** parties
into this **rank hovel**
filled with old smoke and grandmas

and basically conducts medical Grand Rounds
sorceress-style!

They poked us, they **sang**
(spooky chromatic slidy goosebumps),
they made **poultices**
they fed us **Foul-Paste-on-a-Stick**



(Regine standing there **totally at home** with them,
communicating in sounds and gestures)

---. a bosomy little **statuette** even bounced its way
through the proceedings ---

and my ribs **feel better!**

I ask no questions
I make no judgments

All hail smoky grandmas!

Going to the Cee-Tay!

The **other** reason I'm feeling better

is Skip's contagious excitement
about going to Milan

For all our time here

we've never been to a **real City State** yet

He keeps dancing around going:

"bright lights!"

"quality musical instruments!"

(very very rare back here)

"golden knick-knacks!"

"books!"

"rudimentary plumbing"

"shopping!"

And, **oh**, did I tell you?

I figured out a way to sneak a souvenir back!

Get Petrarch's autograph!!!

I told you that Petrarch

(arguably the originator of modern poetry as we know it

and especially . . . **sad**

drops voice 2 octaves

luuuuuuv poetry)

is going to be at the Visconti Wedding in Milan, right?

And I've even figured out a way to get around
the embargo:

Put his signature in **my** notebook

and hide it among a bunch

of my own "calligraphy practice"

Perfect, huh?

Quintuple Talk

You're right, the Carter/Bush/Castro vortex
does remind me of how **reluctant colonies**
are dealt with back here . . .

. . . except that the "good cop / bad cop"

"good president / bad president" routine

seems **incredibly unsophisticated**

Here the Viscontis'll send out

two contradictory emissaries

and **three** false spies.

You can't really finesse a situation

with just **double talk**
you need **quintuple talk**

I Can't Believe . . .

. . . they **postponed** your performance review!

And without scheduling another date!!!

That's so **unprofessional!** It's the only word for it!

These companies think they rule the world!

*looks around himself at the overwhelming
corporate force that surrounds him
in his contractor's camp*

puts hand to chin

. . . hmmm . . .

refocuses

Make sure you **use** this on them
when they do finally meet with you!

Remind them of how they jacked you around!

Let's look at **you** objectively ---
sitting there right now
probably reading this at work

Yes, I'm writing to **you**

. . . . You with your **passion** and **cool skills**
watching the fun of college recede and fade

undervaluing yourself

starting to **buy** the game
they play at work
(but not totally)

your mind so stressed and busy

and divided and conquered that
it can't put together a coherent thought
you'd recognize as "you"

Remember that the **other** self is your **real** self!

Remember to give your job
a full **100%** . . .

. . . of the **20%** of your **self** you budget for them!

Hawkwood Himself

We found out that **Sir John Hawkwood himself**
(our future business partner)
and his mostly-Brit army
passed through here a few weeks ago

It took me a second
to even recognize his name:
they called him "Giovanni Acuto"

(say "Hawkwood" with a Vaudeville Italian accent)

(everybody has numerous names back here
I'm "Berto" = Robert; "Alto" = big, or tall
in a million regional dialects
like in the Alps I'm Ovaur Manyo
"Ovaur" = Robert; "Manyo" = 'magno', big or tall)

"Acuto's a real Gentleman, a real Gentleman," they said.

He has **great** brand recognition.

They call his outfit
the **White Company**
because they keep their armor totally **polished**
(as opposed to the rusty goofballs we usually face)
and they fight on foot with planted lances, Brit style!

**Everybody Else:
Go Away Now,
Come Back Later!
(Further Down the Page)**

. . . so pleased that you **SWAKed** me
(Sealed With A Kiss)
in your e-mail

That makes me feel better, too!!

blushes down to his knees

um . . . this is for you:

Mwah!
kiss

No.
Sorry.
That was a really insincere sounding kiss.
Sorry

Sssssssnrk!
that is a heart-felt kiss

and
Smsmslarlarlaralarlurursmmrnk!

well . . . that is a
take-your-breath-away kiss

I've an idea!

I'll type the word "kiss" with my lips

hang on

bends over keyboard

LJK UIO SD SD

. . . hmmm

that didn't work very well

lemme try the tip of my tongue

KL I S STS

better

Once more:

K I SS S

there!

jeez, i hope who's been using this laptop
has been washing his/her hands

Bleagh!

And nobody but **you** had better be reading this
or else



ka-pow

just kidding

but really, don't read these parts

Regine Gave Me a Hammer

She must have traded for it in town!

She just walks up tonight and

plunk

"**Here!**"

. . . and walks away.

A square-forged war hammer.

What a psychologist she is!

It's so **perfect!**

It **so** helps me get over my freak-out
about the Swiss dude!



next to the laptop mouse for scale

I guess I have a signature weapon, now.

"Berto the Giant, Hammer of Marketing"

Whoop dee do.

Rovere Altimo

Date: Fri, 24 May 2002

Subject: songbirds

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

The art to eating a songbird

. . . is to slice its crispy little tummy neatly
from chin to tail

and then to **squoosh** it inside out

in one quick motion

dropping the resulting package of plumeage
daintily with one raised pinky
and **crunching** down on the remaining innards
in one swift swallow

(songbird tastes like lizard)

Fat and protein! woo hoo!

Protein rush!
Protein rush!

(in a protein-poor environment like this
one bird goes to your head
like a **double espresso**)

In fact, I've got to get a towel or something
or I'll have songbird grease all over this keyboard

The Troll at the Tollbridge

Now that we're out of the mountains
we can't go very far
without running into a toll bridge or a toll ferry

Solo travellers can just skitter around
and swim the rivers

But a big gang like ours needs to play by the rules
so we don't get hassled

So . . . midday today . . .

. . . found us all leaning over
frantically searching our dashboards (saddlebags)
for tollbooth money as we came up on the tollbridge
that marks the current border of Milanese territory
(civilisation, at last!)

We saw a string of camps
along our side of the river



--- had a **hearty yuk** at those poor dopes
stuck waiting for authorization!

But the **yuk** is now on the other **foot** since the
stoooid, officious, little self-important bridge troll

refused to accept our Milanese passport!

We Flattered Him

"Nice tollbooth you got here!"

We Cajoled Him

"Come on, buddy, spare yourself the hassle . . .
just let us through!"

We Threatened Him

REGINE: "One week from now
I'm going to be sitting at the head table of the Visconti
wedding, telling Gian Galeazzo he'd better replace
his Northern tolltaker."

We Bribed Him

TROLL: "For me? Money? Gee thanks!"

All to no avail.

In the Penalty Box

So this evening we're in the penalty box
on the North Bank of the river
with five or six other free companies
paying extortionate prices
for bad grub
(grubs taste like caterpillars, except better texture)

and having our dinner interrupted by noisy telemarketers
with drums
offering special low introductory prices
on a bedraggled bevy of local hustlers and hookers

RA RA RA!

Here's a picture I got today



a roadside grave
maybe 3 months old

Probably a highwayman
killed this person and buried them
(there must be something wrong with the helmet
or someone would have nabbed it)

The spooky "writing" is, I believe,
the work of an illiterate
trying --- in his weird way --- to do right
by the deceased
in "language"

Skip Goes A-Networkin'

The very **second** we hit a group camp
like this one
Skip is out making friends
talking to all the other companies
seeing what's up

What's up is the Visconti Wedding in Milan!
It's all the buzz.

Swatting the Pinata

Since we're stalled . . .
Regine is making us practice our asses off



she's got a new sword move called
"Swatting the Pinata"

which is cracking everybody up
and making our arms sore

The Art to Hearing a Songbird

One of the other companies here
has a lutenist in its midst

a bunch of us kind of dr i i fted over
to the fringes of their camp
to hear him play and sing

We were just totally drinking it in

He was awesome. he's from South o' France
and sang troubadour songs
and got us all teary-eyed
(we are so spoiled by the music everywhere in the 21st!)

especially this one song really got me
it went something like
(my Provencal is really bad, sorry)
"I sing to forget the pain of love
but the more I sing, the more I remember
and then all I can sing is **have mercy!**
because I carry your picture in my heart
and that makes it hard for me to change my tune"

and another part went

"I could die right now, Diamond,
I can't complain
even though my pain is doubled as I get close to you
like a checker when it reaches the end of the board"

hmmm . . . sounds kind of dumb when you write it out
I guess you woulda hadda been there

Everybody But You, Don't Read This Part

I've been hoping all day
that I didn't go **too far**
with all that kissing talk yesterday . . .

blush

stammer

smile?

This Precious Spring

. . . of 2002/1368 . . . is so intense!
Crossing the Alps in the snow really makes you
feel like you've earned the Spring, all right!

Remember **where** you were
how you were
--- trees, flowers, birds ---
when you got **these e-mails**
this Spring!

I want to talk with you about it later!



*Villagers wearing
branches full of blossoms
for some reason*

gotta scam

seeya

BA

Date: Sat, 25 May 2002

Subject: on the move

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

We're on the Move

It's the middle of the **night**



Regime roused us.
We're moving out.

My guess is ---
Regime bribed the night guards
on the bridge

The whole company is completely grumped out
Stumblin' and a-bumblin' like **bumper cars** in the dark

doink!

cheeful melody of metal clanks and human curses

I've got a few minutes to write
before I need to mount up.

Word Is

. . . **forced march** to Milan

She wants us there **fast**

The Visconti wedding isn't until
weekend-after-this!

whatever

yawn

Glad

Glad they rescheduled your Performance Review
for Monday

Glad you sent me a kiss

thanks

smile

Arooooo, arooooo!

Weird Dream just now ---

The French lute player last night
played another troubadour song
(kind of a **ghost story**)

about a lovesick man
who gets nuttier and nuttier
until he goes out into the woods
and lives with wolves

and the guy got quieter and quieter
as he sang

then pointed out into the darkness
said that the real-life wolf man
had lived **right around here**

just like we used to do in Summer Camp

(I didn't know that trick was **this** old)

But the weird thing is
as I dreamed about the song
(the Lady unknowingly
goes wolf hunting with her guards)
there were **real wolves** howling
out in the night

. . .close by, too!

and then Regine woke us up

Messages in the Head

It sucks not to know exactly what's happening
with the company

I do know that a lot of what goes on back here
has to do with **messages** for various people
that Regine has **memorized**
and has to deliver

I can understand that

I know how much a message . . .
. . . say . . . for example . . . an e-mail from you . . .

is **worth**

Read This and Then Forget It

A guy in this little village we went through
was speaking Latin Creole
with me
Said the Pope's troops came through here 3 years ago
and killed his dog and his wife and his son
(he specified that order *shudder*)
with a spear

He made me promise to tell some one **far away**
so that people would know
to **the ends of the earth**
what the Pope's troops are like

So.

There.

I fulfilled my promise.

Sorry

Next subject

Dinner / Indigestion

Insufficiently-boiled bread balls
taste like spackling compound

Here's Skip . . .

. . . with Nastibelle all saddled up

gotta ride

I owe you the big description
of a **neck-and-shoulder massage**
I was going to write you today

your fateful server,

Bert l'Altissimo

Date: Mon, 27 May 2002

Subject: Oooooooooow!

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

My Dear You,

Oooooow!

two days of long grueling ride

no time to write

head full of glimpses and glances

Flowers and Blossoms

Wildflowers grow great
on the roofs of abandoned houses

Untended orchards still blossom beautifully

Half --- no lie ---

half of all the human habitations we pass
are abandoned



There wasn't even enough time
and peoplepower
to **burn** them all
when the **bubonic plague**
passed through
ten years ago

Fucking plague!

We didn't see nearly as much plague fallout
as this
up in Burgundy and Switzerland

Material Wealth

Four expensive metal plows
in front of **one** miserable starving little hut

The radical plague depopulation
causes this **weird accumulation**
of available goods
in the hands of surviving relatives
and shameless pilferers . . .

"Sorry about your family, buddy,
say
ahem,
are you gonna be using that plow, you think?"

1 farmlet will have ---
15 horses (they can't feed)
4 oxcarts (empty)
8 buckets (no one alive knows how to fix the well)
a barnful of metal tools (what are they for?)

and everywhere we go ---
"Garage Sale ---
Arms and Armor"
(the re-enactment nerds go ape!
they stop and shop for helmets)

Romeo i Giulietta

Riding through a little wood

fingers went skyward
in the gesture for
"Watch Out! Snipers!"

my heart pounding



Just two teenagers in a tree
making out

their hearts pounding

Horward, Harch!

Its amazing how much standing around
there is on a forced march.

Speaking of Which . . .

I've been thinking that now your boss has you
standing around
waiting for your Performance Review again

I wanted to respond to something you wrote

You seemed **apologetic** about the fact
that you've done a lot of different things
in your life so far

you studied **one thing**
you worked at **another**
and **another** . . .

Woah, woah, woah, **woah!**
Don't apologize!

You gotta remember that our culture
is still geared up to pretend that the
Old School industrial-age system
of Lifetime Careers, Stable Roles, Job Loyalty
still exists

Don't make me laugh!

We're in a period where the old roles
--- the old **pigeonholes** ---
are falling apart
and the **new pigeonholes** haven't emerged yet

high schools and universities
are still designed for the 19th century!

In five years there will be a **name**
for the background **you** have **intelligently** pieced together
The name just hasn't been invented yet!

So . . . **never, never, never** be embarrassed
about having done diverse things
that supposedly "don't go together"!!!!

Who **says** they don't go together?

That's not for **them** to say!

That's for **you** to say!

Stand tall! Say it proud!

hug

Lunch at the Diner

While they repaired our *carroccio* (chariot) wheels
(for the umpteenth time)
Skip spied a Public House

(whatever family has a batch of beer or extra wine
hangs out a sign and opens their house for pay)

. . . and he turned to me and said:
"Buy you a burger?"

We were all cheeful laughing . . . then **boom!**

Inside --- four kids with black eyes

an unctuous Dad who looked like a daughter-seller
who bowed and snivelled to me

and bumped Skip (my supposed lowly squire)
in passing
with ill-concealed rage

and then tried to impress
this **visiting knight** (me)
by setting the table with



a chipped-up mix-matched hodge-podge
of fancy-ass tableware,

(clearly stolen from a plague-decimated manor-house)

*Skip and I keep looking at the bruised kids
lined up scared & obedient by the fireplace*

knots in our stomachs

The Dad spoons out two dollops of mashed root goop
and pours garbage beer



into museum-piece **Ancient Roman** glasses!

I look at Skip

Skip looks at me

We threw a couple coins at the guy and bolted

Fieldworkers Stopping to Watch Us Pass



Skip waves to them.
Nobody waves back.

Uh oh.

What does waving mean around here?

This Fragrant World

Thanks for your questions about our **hygiene**

That's going to become more problematic
now that we're out of the mountains

. . . and we are no longer
walking **through the river** up to our armpits
several times a day

--- shower and laundry in one swell foop ---

Medieval folk are actually pretty fastidious
about washing up.

Clothing is torn and patched, but generally clean

Mildew is the thing, though! *gag*

Seasoned travellers can recognize where you're from
by sniffing your **regional mildew**

Wine, cheese, shirts, people --- we're **all** gently **fermenting!**

As for dysentery, we brought antibiotics.

Almost Made It

We're close to Milan!

Should get there tomorrow!
Woo hoo!

So **tired** I can hardly keep my eyes open
chuckles

Kay Eye Ess Ess

Obare Haut

Date: Tue, 28 May 2002

Subject: going to the mall

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You . . .

We're At the Walls of Milan!

We got up in the dark again
and **got here** mid-afternoon

. . . but we're only "at the walls" . . .

(in front of the Northern Gate)

. . . getting **inside** the city
is going to be more complicated.



*Goth Punk Graice,
Renaissance Faire Dude Derek,
and Civil War Colonel Steve outside Milan
May 27, 1368 / 2002 Memorial Day*

There are roughly 700-800
soldiers, traders, travellers
camped out around each of the city gates
as people gather from **far and wide** for this wedding

Understandably . . . they don't like letting too many
soldiers & bodyguards into the city

Northgate Mall

So . . . Skip has dubbed
our little **improvised camptown** "Northgate"
and is pretending it's a mall
and ran off
saying he was looking for the "GAP"
and the "Bennigan's"

Regine began negotiations
with the Visconti bouncers
at the gate

. . . and now it's late afternoon
and the citizens of Northgate
are **laughing** and **wrassling**
and cooking
and periodically
trotting over to use the Milan city moat
as a toilet

Rainshower on the Road This Morning



Talk to the Glove

We passed a **couple** and their donkey
at a shrine/spring

the hubby was beating the crap
out of the wife

Regine stepped in
put her sword on the guy's throat

and told me (translator) to **tell him**
that she is going to **watch him**

for the **rest of his life**
and kill him if he touches her again

She took off her **glove**,
stood it up on a rock wall



and we rode off

10 minutes later
Regine wheels her horse
and goes **galloping**
back down the road
yelling into her walkie-talkie

a few of us gallop with her

and when we get back to the shrine

the wife has a new abrasion

the man is **shrieking** and terrified
and blubbing on his knees
bowing to Regine's glove

Regine ties a tourniquet around his little finger
and mashes it with the butt of her sword

Then she grabs her glove off the wall
(and secretly takes
the **other walkie-talkie**
out of it)
and tosses the glove to the wife

Sorcery, I guess.

Chivalry, I guess.

Hope it works.

The Romans Were Giants

I rode an hour today with two very cultured
and kindly Sicilian free lances
who were trying to convince me
that the Romans
were a race of alien Giants



*I love Roman roads
that's how we got here so fast!*

"How else could they have built all of this shit?"
they asked.
"They can't have been human beings!"

I said, "**No,**
I'm a Giant!
Berto Alto the Giant!
Tell all your friends!"

Guess Who?

Skip just returned and told us
that over by the Eastgate camptown is . . .
Guess who?

The honor guard of the **White Company!**

Hawkwood Himself is apparently already inside the city

And Guess What?

He said the White Company dudes have heard of us!!
"The Blind Company" and its Captain ---
"The Witch Queen"

that has to be **us**, right?

One Mystery Solved

They call us the Blind Company
because of our mirrored sunglasses
which they think are solid metal

leaps with glee

Yes!

That was **my** marketing idea!

More Mysteries

The White Company guys
haven't heard that we're going to team up with them

. . . so it must be top secret . . .

or untrue

And I've got to make sure everyone knows
that we're **Blue Company**



Relaxing in Northgate

We did something we haven't done for weeks
--- since Winter Camp ---



A bunch of us flopped down in the shade
and **improvised a long story** about our hero
"The Cool Dude in White"
which is based on something
this trader guy heard in the Holy Land

a rambling saga about a master swordsman

We always bring current events into it.

So Julio went on and on
about how a Regine-like character
falls in love with Cool Dude in White

which is a total hoot

Here's Why it's a Total Hoot

You asked me this a long time ago
sorry for the delay

The scoop on the Blue Company is:

--Regine is definitely attached ---
She has a **girlfriend with kids**
back in the 21st

-- Skip has a **girlfriend** in the 21st

-- Julio and Superstar used to be together
-- Now Julio has a **girlfriend** back in the 21st

-- There are seven **current couples** that I know of
amongst the Blue Company
(two gay, one lesbian)

-- Only one is a "mixed couple"
(i.e. a Goth Guy and a Financial Type Woman)

-- Four couples have **broken up**

--- There is one **child**
("Margheurite Regine")
that one of the financial guys had
with a Greensleeves (army hooker)
that he must have gotten to know
within **minutes** of our arrival
and now she and the baby travel with us
(they're sweet)

The dad is in **total denial**
about the fact that we **come back**
to **your time** in just a few weeks!

-- About 6 or 7 of the company
periodically patronize the Greensleeves

-- And I, it seems,

bats eyelashes

have you

although --- no pressure, huh?

I mean it.

When I get back let's talk on the phone **first**
and then go out to dinner
take it slow

I don't want to be a pest

*secretly wishes you were here **right now***

Knock, Knock

How many White Company squires
does it take to change the wick
in an animal-fat lamp?

Ten.

One to change the wick,

Nine to make the sign of the cross
twelve times
standing on one leg
facing north
without blinking
while chanting "Ave Maria" in the key of b-flat

Superstitious, you ask? Superstitious?
Are they Superstitious back here?

Imagine the **worst** baseball-football-soccer
locker room superstitions
you've ever heard of
and **multiply by 100**

magic underwear
magic hair scrunchies
magic shrew corpses in your pocket

Hang out with Late Medieval fighting dudes
and you're **walking on eggshells** the whole time
There's a million things you can do wrong

Apparently, don't say the word "Cesena"
over at the White Company camp
Skip saw two guys **get into a fight** about it
whatever it is

Signed, Sincerely Yours Truly,

Berto Alto the Giant
"Tell All Your Friends"

Date: Wed, 29 May 2002

Subject: body linguistics

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

**Fight for Your Right
to Paaaaaaaarty!**

Can you believe this!?!

The Visconti Clan
has arranged a **tournament**
outside the walls
to determine
which company's people
get **inside** the city gates
for the wedding!

We'd better fricking **get in**
. . . that's all I've got to say!

The tournament is **tomorrow**

The Visconti heralds
are over by the North Gate right now
trying to explain the **events**
and the **rules**
and everybody's **shouting**
Regine's over there
It's a zoo!

There's sure to be **jousting**
but I don't know what else . . .

sack races?
egg toss?

The scoring is **by team** (company)
If Blue Company gets enough wins
We all go to the party

This is so lame!

Strange Bedfellas

Russia is part of **NATO** now?

Well . . .
the Viscontis are allied with Venice now . . .
who ever thought **that** would happen?

Turncoat Teddy

Since we're in Northgate camp today
I have more time
and can ask people to **stand still**
for pictures



This is a friendly Financial Analyst
named Ted

who used to play
Daniel-Boone-style **Frontiersman**
Then one day in Winter Camp
Ted saw a **roly-poly Knight Errant** from Poland
wearing this kind of Santa-Claus get up
and Ted **abandoned his old look** overnight
(of course he had to make it blue)

He used to be moody
Now he's quite grunted!

Get Some Rest Tonight

I hope you can **give a worry-free night**
what with
your Performance Review tomorrow

You're going to do fine!

My *cough* *gag* "career"?

You ask how I frame **my** career in my mind

That's a hard one.

First of all, I thought for a long time
that I was **too cool** to have a "career"
in the conventional sense

... **but** ...

like it or not
when you meet someone at a party

they ask "What do you do?"

and you have to say **something**

and how you react to that question
(*wince, flinch, pause, sigh, slump, blink*)

and how they react to that answer
(lean forward, lean back, look away, raise eyebrows)

are much much much much **much** more imporant
than we think,
I think.

Shy LaShawna



LaShawna came as a Samurai
and has stayed a **Samurai**

in her beautiful royal blue laquered armor

She's a **xylophone of clatters**
when she moves

and she moves apologetically hesitantly
like she's bravely perpetually embarrassed

Out of her armor she's tender shy
as an **unshelled armadillo**

and keeps to herself

What a Job Title Buys You

salary, insurance, blah blah blah
I'm not talking about that!

No, a Job Title buys you ---

- a) A quick answer to the **horrible** Party Question
- b) A way to **explain** yourself to your family of origin
- c) A way to **explain** yourself to yourself
- c) An entire set of **attitudes** both at work and away from work
- d) A **vocabulary** of body language that helps you walk, sit, stand
- e) Ways to **dress**, at work and away from work
- e) Something to **talk** about, expertly

Gentle Graice



. . . the Wiccan Goth Punk
who is so enraptured up in her 21st century
Wiccan lore
that she hasn't **tuned in** to the
incredible **real midwifery** lore
that Regine is learning

Which is a shame

Graice slides around **langourously** in this
shiny blue robe
and **alights** on things

and **droops** dreamily

She's the company math whiz

But What if You Don't Define Yourself By Your Job Title?

Good question, good question.

Well . . . my answer is
you **still** get your **body language**
from **somewhere**

and **body language systems** travel in packages
that can, theoretically, all be named or **titled**

I'm talking about
hipster life-role titles, too
(*body artist, DJ, sk8ter*)

and psychological titles
(*the good one, the bad one, the helper, the truth screamer*)

Bighearted Benjamin



perpetually cheerful

perpetually **clueless**

they told him this year of Overtime
was the next step on his job ladder
and he **bought it**

Try It!

Get up **out of that chair** right now
and imitate the body language of:

Doctor! Gangsta! Mom! Quarterback!

See what I mean?

Body language works backwards
on your brain
It helps tell you what **emotions** to feel
and how to **feel about yourself**

Now . . . stand up and imitate yourself!

Really, I dare you. Try it!

"Hell, Yes!" Hailey



. . . this assignment
has really been good for Hailey

She's **blossomed** back here
and is tons **less belligerent**

than when she arrived

The Blue Thread

So . . . to answer your question
about what's going on with
me and my career . . .

(after being plunged back into the past
among Late Medieval People
and their **radically different body language**

they *lope sidle spring*
they make *scary monkey moves*

and then, the next instant
take *luscious economical Fred Astaire steps*)

. . . I think what I'm doing right now
is what many
of the Blue Company are doing ---

I'm trying to **evolve**
into a **happier state** of body/mind
by **role-playing**

That's the **common thread** of the Blue Company.

. . . but, that's what **everyone does**, right?

You see it at your job, at the gym, **every day!**

Blue Company is just **overt** about it

You, us . . .

. . . we're all Quixotes.

Bad Self Portrait



Skip and me

I decided to wear my kimono today

Skip is pure 1368

You're Gonna do Fine . . .

. . . at your Performance Review tomorrow

It's all in the shoulders.



breathe deep

signed sincerely
your oldest friend
(technically speaking)
Bertino Haulto

Date: Thu, 30 May 2002

Subject: tournament day

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Hi, you!

It's Tournament Day . . .

. . .and it's pure chaos!

It's already been going for about 6 hours
They start stuff early morning back here

There are tournament venues
at three different Milan city gates

and Visconti pages and heralds
are **tearing** around the top of walls
on horses
keeping score
and **hollering** results

We have to have at least **14 wins**
to make it inside the gates to the wedding party

Julio already **won 2** fencing matches
and has another one in half an hour

Radar

Regine has already found
a few of the **local women**
who are competing

most of them dress as men

but one has a breastplate
with breasts
and nobody bats an eye

Connptions

Here's the thing they set up



at our Northgate tournament ground
for competitors to have their
pre-tournament connptions
in front of

My Match

I'm in the **Ragging and Bragging**
Competition
and I go on
this afternoon

On the trail I've been working on
some **translations** into English for you

Here's what I do at work.
I yell stuff like this:

*Your band of fighters clad in rusted mail
Resists our onslaught like the stalwart quail!*

*You sing your insults like a clever bird
Who plummets from the sky, impaled, unheard!*

Another day, another Florin.

Partial Scoreboard

The White Company is ceded into the party
since Hawkwood is the Visconti's General Contractor

So they're competing without being scored
(they're doing pretty well)

otherwise, as of right now

Facino the Dog & Co. --- 4
Sicilian Lances --- 3
Swiss Jag-Offs (the same ones who we tangled with
at the ford!!) --- 5
Rhone Valley Rustlers --- 4
Rhone Valley Mary's Company --- 4
Corps of Charlemagne's Glory --- 4
Dieter's Darlings --- 4
Free Lances of the Veneto --3
North Woods Terrors --- 3
Walter's Weaklings (what a cool name!) --5
Blue Company --- 4

Good Luck in your Review!

Your Sports Correspondent,

Bertie Ho

Date: Thu, 30 May 2002

Subject: go, go, go!

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Julio's Actually Good

I knew Julio was intense
and "warrior-like"
but I didn't know
if he was any good

Turns out, **he's good**



He's doing really well
in wrestling and fencing

Regine is coaching him personally

The White Company Stinks

No, I mean **literally**
Guess how they keep their armor
so nice and white and shiny . . .
Chicken Fat, that's how!

Old Chicken Fat in the Spring Sun ---

Peee Yooo!

Mi-mi-mi-miiiiiii!

Have I told you that I do **vocal warm-ups**
like singers do
so that I don't get **hoarse**
when I'm ragging and bragging?

*As deft as diction you will find our might
and swift surprise that brings on early night!*

*The ones in blue, unstoppable as the sky,
will teach the taste of earth unless you fly!*

That's one of my favorites . . .
. . . it might be a tournament-winner

Ooops!

Regine signed me up
at the last minute
for an archery event

Have I told you
how badly I suck at archery?

I **bagged a referee**
who, fortunately,
was sitting behind his shield

ooops!

Scoreboard Update

Facino the Dog & Co. --- 8
Sicilian Lances --- 4
Swiss Jag-Offs --- 9
Rhone Valley Rustlers --- 6
Rhone Valley Mary's Company --- 6
Corps of Charlemagne's Glory --- 7
Dieter's Darlings --- 8
Free Lances of the Veneto ---3
North Woods Terrors --- 3
Walter's Weaklings --- 7
Blue Company --- 8

My Ragging & Bragging match is next

Yipes.

Date: Thu, 30 May 2002

Subject: doh!

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

They Postponed Your Review AGAIN?

oh my dear friend

that's **terrible!**

I feel so bad for you!!!!

hug

I Lost My Match

I went out onto the field
riding on Nastibelle
under the Blue Company banner

and hollered my loudest

in Low Latin, Milan dialect Italian,
and Burgundy dialect French

I got **psyched out** by the other guy
is what happened

He got me out of my game.

He got me focused on him.

I switched from my game plan to personal attacks

*Your insults fly so sharply from your maw ---
Don't cut your tongue or dislocate your jaw!*

*Those rags are pretty snazzy, but they smell ripe.
What else would you use to blow your nose, and wipe?*

Then I did an about face
and went to what I thought
was my **best stuff** ---
what Skip calls
My "Your Momma" stuff

. . . kind of a psych-out thing
all about their moms

which I thought new and mean and scary

. . . but the **judges were unimpressed.**

One of the Burgundians told me
that most nobledudes are more **attached**
to their **wet nurses** than their **moms**

. . . so I should probably work up some "Your Nanny" stuff



*This is the guy who won
(from Dieter's Darlings)
He was really good*

Oh, well.

sigh

Shake it off, Berto.

You did your best.

Sniffing Out the Competition

Catch this ---
the White Company wrestler
who is Julio's next opponent

just now came snuck right up behind Julio
and **smelled him** up and down
from the small of his back to his hair!

spooooky!

Scoreboard Update

Facino the Dog & Co. --- 12
Sicilian Lances --- 6
Swiss Jag-Offs --- 13
Rhone Valley Rustlers --- 7
Rhone Valley Mary's Company --- 6
Corps of Charlemagne's Glory --- 10
Dieter's Darlings --- 8
Free Lances of the Veneto ---5
North Woods Terrors --- 7
Walter's Weaklings --- 10
Blue Company --- 10

Date: Thu, 30 May 2002

Subject: keep your fingers crossed

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Julio's Still Winning

He's our biggest hope right now

It's coming right down to the wire

We still need **two more points**

Julio can get us one

. . . but where's the other one going to come from?

Skip Did His Part

Skip says he used to get punished
for canoe-to-canoe battles
at Boy Scout camp

. . . but those skills
came in handy today!



Woo hoo!

He won the Moat Boat contest

where the losers went falling
into the lily pads and floating turds

Cool Old Guys Teaching

The older, more skilled fighters
are standing around teaching technique
between matches

You can go up and ask 'em questions!

They're nice to everybody
(Everybody switches allegiances so often
that today's enemy is tomorrow's ally)
Like Afghanistan.

Skip and I practiced sword
with this one old guy
it was awesome

Scoreboard Update

Facino the Dog & Co. --- 16 [IN]
Sicilian Lances --- 7
Swiss Jag-Offs --- 15 [IN]
Rhone Valley Rustlers --- 10
Rhone Valley Mary's Company --- 7
Corps of Charlemagne's Glory --- 10
Dieter's Darlings --- 9
Free Lances of the Veneto ---6
North Woods Terrors --- 8
Walter's Weaklings --- 12
Blue Company --- 12

Ra Ra Ree, Kick 'em in the Knee!

Go, Blue Company, go!

Date: Thu, 30 May 2002

Subject: Final Scores

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

We Made It!

LaShawna came **out of nowhere**
and won a swordfighting match



She's a **Tiger!**

Yahoooooooooooo!

We All Get to Go Into Milan!!!!

Awesome to the 10th power!

Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow!

Final Scores

Facino the Dog & Co. --- 16 [IN]

Sicilian Lances --- 9

Swiss Jag-Offs --- 15 [IN]
Rhone Valley Rustlers --- 10
Rhone Valley Mary's Company --- 8
Corps of Charlemagne's Glory --- 11
Dieter's Darlings --- 9
Free Lances of the Veneto ---8
North Woods Terrors --- 8
Walter's Weaklings --- 15 [IN]
Blue Company --- 14 [IN, just barely!]

Gotta run

Going to party with the White Company!

Hope you're not feeling too bummed
about your Performance Review

hug

ten hugs

twenty kisses

Date: Fri, 31 May 2002

Subject: people!

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

My Dear You,

Sorry for all those messages yesterday . . .
I hope I didn't **overdo** it.
I know you're busy.

Into Milan Today

I don't have much time
because we're **packing up**

to go through the gates
and enter the city!

I'm excited!

and I have no idea what to expect!

The Witch's Company is Looking for Us

This is **weird**

We heard
from one of the Free Lances of the Veneto

that the Witch herself
of that **other** Witch's Company
(now working for the pope)
is **looking for us!**

Regine got that **sparkle** in her eye
and said

"Let it be known ---
I'll **take her on**
one-on-one,
any place, any time!"

Tough Guys Sobbing Around the Campfire

It was **drinkin'** time last night
after the Tournament

We hung out with the White Company

and learned something **sobering**

First you should know
that Hawkwood has a **reputation** for
being **uprighteous** and moral

Anyway

We had **honey beer**
and we all got **loaded**

(honey beer tastes like spoiled raw cookie dough)

and Skip **dared** to put into circulation
at just the right moment
the word "**Cesena**"

I jumped, because he had talked about
guys **fighting over that word**

. . . but this time



there was a long silence

and then **they started to talk**

O, did they talk!

Cesena is a **town**.

It seems that when
Capitano **Giovanni Haukebodde**
and his White Company
were contracted to the Pope
they were ordered to the town of Cesena
to "assist" Robert of Geneva
and his guys from Brittany
who had just **captured** it.

The townspeople had fought back
against Robert's looting
but he tricked them into
laying down their arms
by swearing "on his Cardinal's hat"
that they would be **safe**.

What they needed the White Company to do
was to **help "administer justice"**
to the unarmed people of Cesena

A contract is a contract.

The men around the campfire **went quiet**

Me and my big mouth

I go "Ummm . . . how many **prisoners**
did you get for **ransom?**"

They shook their heads.

"How many **women** got out?"

They shook their heads.

Then two of them started crying.

In other words --- no survivors

Then one guy slowly started gesturing
with his **finger pointed up**
making a **circle** all the way around himself
like a picket fence

In other words ---

--- bodies on pikes all around the town walls

Typical contractor company shit.

pause

shit

Agggh!

Sorry, babe.

I just had to stand up from the laptop
and shake off the **willies**

Sorry to dump this on you

Fucking White Company!

They were supposed to be cool!
Oh, well.

This job sucks.

Now I got myself all bummed out

sorry

People.

Can't live **with** 'em, can't live **without** 'em.

Date: Sat, 01 June 2002

Subject: I awoke

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

This morning I awoke . . .

. . . in the luxurious, perfumed bed
of a famous **Milanese courtesan**.

No, no, no! **Don't** get the **wrong idea!**

I **didn't** have sex with her!

What do you take me for?

looks at the floor, hurt

looks up with big puppy eyes

laughs

She wasn't even **in** the bed!

No, there were three other women
and two other men in the bed with me!

waving hands

Wait, wait! **Don't** get the **wrong idea**
about **that** either!

Hold on!

Hold on!

Lemme explain!

Starting Over

Dear You!

Hi!

So much has happened in the last 24 hrs

Unbelievable!

And I only have a few minutes
before we have to take this laptop
over to the mansion where Regine's staying

So, it took us 3 hours . . .

. . . just to get through



the 'metal detectors' at the North Gate
where the Visconti Guards
searched us for concealed weapons

(we deposited our swords & lances
into their armory)

Then it's just so bizarre . . .

. . . to be in a city again!

In little villages
people are pretty much **in awe** of us

Here it's

"Yeah, yeah, right . . .
Blah Company --- **whatever!**

Nice dirty 'uniforms'!

Now **get your horse
out of my frickin' way!**"

Master Networker

So we split off
from the main group
and Skip starts working his **charm**
on the **underground network**

of **servants** and **bodyguards**

and so . . .

Yesterday afternoon found us . . .

walking up



these stairs
(so beautiful to see, after 11 months
of **tents**, **mud huts** and **twig shacks**)

to **Louder's apartment**

Meet Louder

Spelled L A U R A
Pronounced "louder"

. . . and yes, she's a courtesan, but . . .

--- it's not like you think ---

there's no sexual tension **at all** because
we aren't anywhere **near** being able to afford
her professional prices.

She has a regular Noble Sugar Daddy
He's occupied with the Visconti Wedding

The **main thing** about her
is that shes really smart and well-read

and every night that she's off work
(which is most nights)

Her **apartment**

--- which is SFB
(So Fucking Beautiful)
tapestry, glass windows, rugs,
chairs . . . she owns 12 books!!!!!! ---

becomes a drop-in slumber party
for all the **cool misfits**
in town!

Imagine . . .

. . . a beautiful square Renaissance room
with all the **colors** fresh!!!
and blazing like noon with **beeswax candles!!!**

full of about 10 of her friends
(courtesans, actors, musicians, tutors,
renegade monks, defrocked nuns,
travellers, translators, troubadours)

and about 5 of us
21st century miscellaneous knuckleheads

hanging out

feeling just like a **cool artist's birthday party**
from our era
I mean **exactly** like it!

I haven't felt so comfortable with natives
the whole time I've been here!

Louder and her gang are so . . . well . . .
normal!

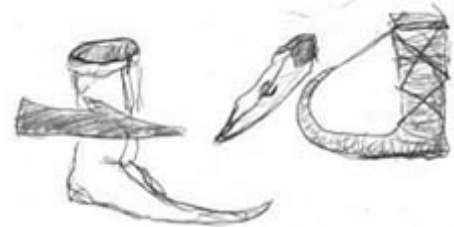
They know there's something really weird about us
They can't put their fingers on it
but it doesn't freak them out.

Shoe Rebels

There was a lot of **shoe talk**

The men Louder's gang
are really into shoes

the longer the toes the better



Long toes are supposed to be
only for the **nobility only**
so these guys, technically, could get arrested
for their shoes

Streetwalkers wear stilts



to keep their dresses clean



Skip got pretty good at the stilts
which cracked everybody up

Doing Lines

So . . . during **dinner**

(cooked for the whole building
by geniuses in the basement)

Louder and her nun friends
lay on her bed
and poured precious **white powder**
onto an iron mirror

separated it into little piles with a dagger
and **held it up**



so we could put it in our stew

Salt! I haven't had added salt
in almost a year

Ojeezuzgod it tasted **so good!**

Lucky, Lucky Me!

I got to hear what is probably 1st-class lute playing
(it's incredibly soft and muted sounding
but all the guy **does** is practice
so the **skill level** is **sky high**
it sounds like Indian sitar music)

And they **told long stories**
in this really formal way
and I really couldn't tell a lot of times
if they were true stories or not

It was simply TFC
(Too Fucking Cool)

and the reason
it turns into a (non sexual) slumber party
is that the streets aren't safe after dark

Louder fell asleep on the trunk at the foot of her bed

OK, Everyone Else Who's Reading This Besides You . . .

Goodbye.

Have a nice day.

Seeya.

Now . . .

I just have to blurt this out

I miss you
I like you

I really want to spend time with you

I want to know how you feel

(in all senses)

It's spring and it's beautiful

and being around normal people
has brought me back to life

and now

buries face in blue _kimono

screams in comic frustration

I **can't wait** the couple of weeks

until I can seehearsmelltouchtaste you

Agggh!

laughs

Date: Sun, 02 June 2002

Subject: come away

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You,

I'm still missing you so much

come away, come away,
come away with me!

Walk Down a Medieval Street Hand-in-Hand With Me



Get Bumped

and panhandled
by eloquent members of the
Panhandler's Guild

Do A 'Five Count'

A Blue Company tradition
is that whoever is **first in line**
when walking past something that smells foul

hollers out "Three Count!"
or "Five Count!"
or, if it's really awful,
"Ten Count!"

to indicate **how long** everyone should
hold their breath

Look out!
Leather Workshop!

Five Count!

Become Really Grateful for Vitamin Pills

walking around people watching
makes me feel like promising to myself
never to complain about anything **ever again**

There is lots of scurvy
scurvy and rickets

Observe Enforced Symbiosis

Two aristocratic teenagers ride by,
boy and girl . . . surrounded by their
layers of servants & bodyguards
surrounding them like an **onion**

. . . it's like how whales are a pod,
ants are a colony,
bees are a hive,
. . . **rich people and their servants**
are a **single organism** . . .

these kids
(their pages tell us)

are going to the **municipal warehouse**

to pick out final decorations
for their **wedding party clothes**

and they get out of their entourage
like we would step out of our car

slamming the page-boy behind them

The minute they go into the shop
the servants relax and start making fun of them

Enjoy the Ancient Amenities



Roman-style sit down plumbing!

It's so bizarre to be in a time
when it's just **assumed**
that **everything in the past**
(i.e. Roman times)
was **ten times better**
than it is **now!**

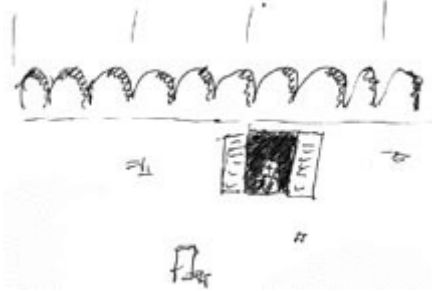
Hear a Milanese Doorbell

Walk over
to where Regine is staying

and **yell her name** with me in the street

(like everyone does)

... until she waves down to us



"Hi, Regine!
Time for your meeting!"

See Government in Action

Come with me
to translate for Regine
as she **delivers** one of her messages
(long boring list of troop movements)

to the lizardly Milan City Councilman

who **talks** with us from his **bed**
which has **two other people** in it
under the covers

doing . . . well . . . **something**

grimace

to him

(I honestly couldn't tell what)

shudder

That was a **new one**

bleaaaaaughghhghg!

I thought I'd seen everything

Ask About Petrarch Everywhere We Go

Petrarco?

Petrarcus?

Is he staying at your lord's house?

Francis Petrar?

Francesco Petrarca?

The poet?

The scholar?

He's within yards of us,

I can just feel it

It's driving me nuts!

Come Back Home Again

To Louder's place



and sit in the courtyard
with all our new friends
until dark

I wish you could meet everybody

Sing A Troubadour Song With Us

I'll teach you
(I got them to teach me
the wolfman one)

E sitot lop m'appellatz
And if they call me a wolf

no m'o tenh a deshonor
I won't take it as dishonor

ni se-m baton li pastor
not even if the shepherds beat me with sticks

ni se-m sui per lor cassatz
not even if they hunt me down

and

La Loba ditz que seus so
The WolfLady says I belong to her

et a-nb ben drech e razo
and she's absolutely right

que per ma fe mielhs suis sieus
because I belong to her more

que no sui d'autrui ni mieus
than I belong to anyone else, even myself

long look into your eyes

trying not to crack up

no, I'm being serious!!

it was a beautiful moment, and I blew it

start again

long look into your eyes

Make A Straw Bed With Me in a Corner of Louder's Apartment

- 1) select your straw (this is the crucial step)
- 2) make sure it's free from bugs, dung, mildew
- 3) lie on it and **play wiggles** for about 15 seconds

(everyone all over Europe makes straw beds
in the exact same wiggles way)

Receive a Wrist Rub



Good Night

I like you

Date: Mon, 03 June 2002

Subject: scrubbing up

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

My Dear I-miss-you You,

Scrubbing Up for the Wedding

This is it!
Only a few more hours and
the two-and-a-half-day-long
Official Wedding Party begins!

(it takes weeks/months of hard travel
for people to get here
so when they party
they **really party**)

There's an improvised **bathhouse**
right now
down by the cooking fires
in Louder's basement

One of Louder's super-cool
collector friends
brought over this super-cool

bit of Ancient Roman **mosaic**



(which says something like "good bath") along with some Roman-style bath sandals (like in the mosaic)

and everybody's going into cool-shoe-extasy down there

laughs

If only the baths **themselves** were Roman ones!



No such luck!

Blue Company is Getting A Great Reputation

. . . at least in the **courtesan/scholar** community

It's been a non-stop stream of visitors since yesterday

everyone's coming by Louder's to **scope us out**

We're stars or something

Everyone's gossiping about politics . . .
distant wars that might be starting
like India and Pakistan, according to your note

Oh yeah! ---
One woman said she
chit-chatted with Petrarch yesterday
She says he's really funny
A Petrarch sighting!

Then these **maimed scary low-life**
Free Lances came to talk with Skip

He's got some scheme going with them

Be careful, Skip.

You're Right About 'Taking it Slow'

I hope I haven't been too obnoxious
and getting too familiar with you
in these lines

I just really like you

But **Yes** you're right we need to
basically start from the **beginning** again
when I get back

So many of us **Overtimers** freak when they return
& get really depressed

It's a whole syndrome
they've told us about already

The Goose Grease Treatment

While I've been hanging out with Louder

Some other Blue Compagnards
have been doing **useful things**

Oscar the Economist



learned how to **polish chain mail**
with poultry fat
from the White Companistas

and he's buffing up
everyone's head and neck

which is really nice of him

Well . . .

See you, my tolerant patient friend

(I just like you, that's all)

grin

in just a short while . . .

. . . we'll be

On Our Way to the Party



down this spectacular Visconti corridor

Berto Alto

Date: Tue, 04 June 2002

Subject: party news

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You . . .

After the Ball

party?

um . . . did i mention the word
'party' in my last message?

Did I mention throwing up
in a corner of the Visconti palace
and **wiping** my mouth
on a corner of priceless **tapestry**?

Did I mention **flagggggggons** of strain-it-though
your teeth unfiltered medieval Italian wine?

Did I mention the White Company's
White Lightnin'?

(Some of kind of distilled
British Norman madness?)

Did I mention **waking up**
on the **pantry floor**
and then going on to

party

for **an entire 'nother day?**

My liver is on strike
My head has hired a drummer

and I'm convalescing back at Louder's place

But, by Hera, it was **funnnnnnn!!!!!!**

The Scene

Inside the Visconti palace
all weekend
it was basically like a big **rave** party



dancing over here
jousting in the courtyard
storytelling up there
sad chill-out **troubadours** down here

and mostly . . .
lots of groups of junior courtiers
just sitting around **drinking** and **laughing**
speaking **Eng-Fren-Italia-Latin**
on balconies and stairwells

Tyrants at Play

Are the Viscontis a **tough family?**
Was it **spooky** to be their guests?

Let's put it this way ---



Their logo is a **snake**
(sometimes a **dragon**)
eating a man!

their bodyguards never smiled once

The Experience

Skip and I
and some of Louder's
nun/monk/artist/courtesan crowd
hung together the whole two days

We made a **home base** on a cloak
down in the pantry
kept our stuff there
and then just **wandered**



from venue to venue
and wine-flagon to wine-flagon



Any given venue had a **Fun Quotient** that we rated on the following axes:

1) Axis One -- Nobility/Servants

Space in the palace is divided into two distinct zones

- 1) "On Stage" with the Nobility
- 2) "Behind the Scenes" with the Servants

(with notable exceptions

Behind the Scenes was **much more fun**)

2) Axis Two -- Bernabo/Galeazzo

The Visconti family is headed by two brothers ---

Cool Galeazzo

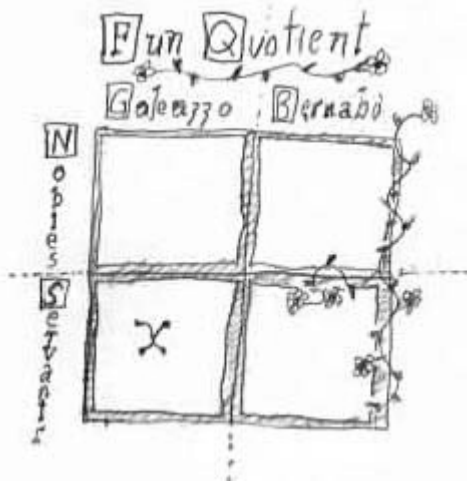
and

Bumpkin Bernabo

(Bernabo's and Galeazzo's employees are everywhere in the party

--- you can identify them by their colors ---

Galeazzo's people are **much cooler**)



The **highest** Fun Quotient was in the **Galeazzo/Servant** gatherings

The Birth of Cool

Bernabo is Old School

Bernabo is **Medieval**

- fart jokes
- childish superstitious churchgoer
- life of the party
- pitiless in the field
- tearful drunken embraces: "I love you, man!"
- sports fanatic (hawking, hunting, jousting)
- standing & shouting to his buddies
from the head table
- wiping mouth on sleeve

Galeazzo is New School

Galeazzo is **Renaissance**

- Latin puns
- more interested in Zeus than Jesus
- observing everything with witty detachment
- a lover, not a fighter (though a good swordsman)
- intense talks with close friends
- art, craft, book and clothing collector
- always calm, moves with quiet power
- eats with this hip new thing called a "fork"

Let's **put it this way** ---

Galeazzo is a personal friend of Petrarch

Bernabo doesn't know who Petrarch is

Galeazzo is called "the **handsomest** man in Italy"

We looked at him

shrug

nothin' special

He wears **roses** in his hair

My View of the Actual Wedding



Bride Violante Visconti, Galeazzo's daughter
and
Groom Lionel, Duke of Clarence, from England
were down below somewhere

but we had lousy seats

The Watershed

Setting aside the fact that
he **preserved** and edited tons of
Greek and Latin **books**
we **otherwise would have lost**

Setting aside the fact that
he personally **developed**
love poetry as we now know it

. . . Petrarch **changed everything!**

He is **the** intellectual superstar of **this time**
and a few years ago
he was invited to be crowned Poet Laureate
by **both** the University of Paris
and
the City of Rome!

By **choosing** Rome and the Classical World
instead of
Paris and its Church-academic nit-picking

he **kept the door open**
so that the lusty, free-thinking, body-lovin'
skepticism-provokin' Greeks and Romans

(even though he is really pretty uptight himself)
stayed a part of our culture!

We should get down on our knees and **thank him**
every day!

I got down on my knees and **thanked him**
yesterday

Parti-colored People

In our whispering wisecracking
laughing-unto-hiccups
drunken meanderings

. . . we blundered into a linen cloakroom
in which **two young noblefolk**
had made a **straw nest** and were
. . . um . . .
getting it on

In the **embarrassed** instants
of our apology and withdrawal
we **learned what happens** to people
who wear **beautifully-dyed** new party **clothes**
on hot sweaty days ---
--- their **skin** becomes dyed
with lovely festive blocks of **color!**

wide eyes, pink cheeks, psychedelic bodies

Spring, Spring, Spring, Spring!
La la la la la la laaaaaaa!

Autograph Hound

I finally locate **Petrarch**
holed up at a table in a treasury/book room
surrounded by groupie-monks

There's a Greek scroll open on the table
so everyone has carefully put their **wine**
on the **floor**



And it's **silent**

Petrarch is really old
and scrunched up
and has a **magnificent** little **mischievous grin**
and sparkler eyes
when he **looks up** from what he's writing
on his wax tablet

Everyone is writing on a wax tablet

They're playing the **anagram game**

(also known as "a granma game" or
"Ae!, grammar nag!")

When one of them finishes,
he hands around his tablet
and everyone reads it and **cracks up**

He was really nice to me

We didn't talk for long

He **complimented** my shiny Nike t-shirt

I gave him my Roman coin collection

He signed my notebook "Fo. Petrarca"

La la la la la laaaaaaaa!

Berto sings happily

Comedy Crisis

Here's the big "joke" that was
going the rounds at the party:

Me: Why did the man kiss the pig?

You: I don't know, why?

Me: Because he comes from Brittany!

You: (five minutes of hysterical laughter)



They are in desperate need of
Comedy First Aid back here

The Banquet Green Room

During the main banquet
We hung out **back stage**
for about 10 of the 16 courses
and watched them **get ready** for the
parade
they did each time

They gave away **party favors**
with each course

The best favors were
the **falcons** on gold chains
and the seventy-six Milanese war **horses**

But All That Wealth . . .

. . . was abject poverty
because **you** weren't here!

(that's a Petrarch-style line)

(and it's the truth)

I thought about **you** the whole time
... imagining you were here

laughing at stuff with me

My headache is getting the better of me

and I'm going to burrow back
into my straw
and **think of you some more**

missing you is gnawing at me
like a winged snake



Date: Wed, 05 June 2002

Subject: ciao, Milano

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

My Dear You . . .

Hardest Break-Camp Ever

The walkie-talkies sounded
at **dawn**

At **sunrise**
forty-five assembled hangovers

were told
"We ride mid-morning."

It was **harder** to leave Milan
than any place we've been

Sleepy sleepy Louder
and her sleepy sleepy friends
cried and **held our hands**

(they don't hug much back here
but they hold hands a lot)

and we cried, too

we said
"See you again some time."

Right

Like **that's** gonna happen

sniff

Sump'n's Up

Regine was curt and tight
at the all-company meeting

A total change in tone for her.

Word is . . .

she communicated with **her** boss in NY overnight

She reports directly to the Fund Manager

Something must have gone down

Because we have a real assignment

We're **following** the White Company
South into Florentine territory
to confront the Pope's People

Awkwarcreepiosity

The awkwarcreepiest moment
in the **all-company meeting**
was when two of Skip's
gang-banger free lance amigos walked
into the courtyard . . .

Regine **stopped** in mid sentence and

everybody waited while the low-lives whispered
to Skip and **gave him something**
wrapped in a sweater
and slunk off again
with their **chain mail shirts hissing**
in that weird chain mail way . . .

Regine and Skip are good friends
but she was looking **daggers** at him . . .

Scouting Report

Among the Pope's current contractors are:

1) Facino the Dog & Co.
(It's soooo weird . . .
we were hanging out with those guys
less than 24 hours ago
and now we're enemies . . .
things change so fucking fast back here!)

2) **The Witch's Company!!!**
I guess Regine will get her duel
after all



Bedraggled

We packed crappily

and shit kept falling off donkeys
all morning

On the Bright Side

- a) I got totally **charged up**
by being in the city
- b) Louder & Friends reminded me
of all the **good things in life**
- c) I'm never going to forget
meeting Petrarch
- d) The Holy Roman church is being discredited
in **your** year (which cheers me up since we're
gonna have to face the **Pope's vicious Army** soon)
- e) We have **rifles** and Kevlar™
- f) We have at least a 3 day supply
of **real food**
- g) Most important --- I'll be **home**
and with **you**
in two weeks!!!!

What I Daydreamed About This Afternoon

I loved all the **flowers** everywhere
at the wedding
(in food, in bathrooms, in people)

So when, in the **snoozy** heat
of **afternoon**
we passed **two trees**



shading a little hill

surrounded by fields of wildflowers

I thought I would

build a **cozy temporary massage table**



and cover it with

June flowers

and spend some time



on your **poor tight neck muscles**
that have been **facing your computer**
and your hideous management
so many **long hours**

(and I might try to work up my courage
to ask if you would object
if I let my hands wander a little)
blush

and I'd remind you to **stretch in your chair**
every hour . . . (set a little clock
and pretend **it's me** reminding yo

Yipeeeeeee!

Your latest message is arriving on the laptop
right now!!!

This is a first!!!

Cool!!!!!!

Let me **go read your message**

and I'll be **right back!!!!**

WOW

wow

wow, wow, wow

sorry

sorry, sorry, sorry

i feel terrible

Yes, yes I understand how weird it is
to have a boyfriend in the past.

I can't say anything
to refute to the objection that
it's all words.

Yes, yes I understand
if you want to 'dial back
on the psuedo romance'.

o wow

ow, ow

glad you want us to keep writing, at least

o, ow

ouch

ouch, ouch, ouch

deep breath

so sorry so embarrassed you're right I should have been thinking about all the other things that fill your e-mail Inbox you're right I have let my imagination run away with us with me (It's Spring in the Renaissance) I mean this sucks I'm ok there's so much more I want to write but I have to give the laptop to Regine now you're right we can take it slow OK take care we'll I'll figure this out

Date: Thu, 06 June 2002

Subject: june showers

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Bumbling on Egg Shells

Dear You . . .

I sat at this keyboard for an hour
and couldn't make a word

Right up until the **second**
LaShawna handed me the laptop
I was swearing to **be cool**
and act like your last e-mail
(the 'dial back
on the psuedo romance' e-mail)
didn't affect me at all

it's been weird trying to **pre-censor**
what I'm going to write

walking on mental egg shells for 24 hours

But

--- look at me! ---

I'm just going to **recklessly blurt**

that your letter made me **really sad**
and that I'm
I'm

embarrassed and sorry

You need to save your energy
for your battles at work, I know

and that I hate having to do this in writing

and that I'll bet we could/can work something out

and that I still like you

There.

That probably **really** messed things up

sad smile

Fun at the Faire

As we rode today



some vineyard workers told us
that there was a **Fair** today
a few villages down the pike

"Oh Goody" we sez to ourselvze

thinking of the Jolly Faires of Burgundy

When we got to this "fair"
we hardly recognized it as such

Twelve-odd **suspicious scammers**
crouched in their carts
(like foxholes)
and waited
(like drug-dealers)

for wary locals to peek at
their stolen "bads"

mostly armor and military regalia . . .
. . . often still bloody

A guy hung on to my stirrup
and tried to **sell me his wife**
or, if the upkeep daunted me,
to **rent** her

The only **shred** of liveliness
was a **shrieking circle**
of all ages



playing **blanket toss**
with a limp youngster
wearing red rouge cheek circles

who **turned out**
upon closer examination
to be dead

Demographic Neutron Bomb

Twenty years ago
the **Black Death**
went through this area
between Milan and Florence
like a toothed scythe

slicing and sparing randomly

The **twenty-somethings**
who now run things around here
are a **damaged** generation

hard-bit, impulsive, pleasure-craving,
numbed, terrified, careless

. . . e.g. the huge human dogfight cockfight fistfight
at the "fair" over
some accidentally-bent long shoe-toe
(the sick soft **real sound of punches**
not the crisp Hollywood sound)

_ Post-Traumatic Stress
_ Survivor Guilt
_ Unprocessed Grief
_ Inability to Trust

These kids lived **through**
the biblical **End Times**
and no longer know what Time **this** is

These people sold the White Company
poisoned wheat
just for the fuck of it, apparently

What Do June Showers Bring?

Allergies?



Few things are less comfortable
than steel gloves
with the fingertips full of water

In the News . . .

I'm trying to figure out what to talk about.

I miss talking about you and me.

Your description of the **Bush White House's**
bald-faced global-warming ostrich-behavior
makes me realize
that it takes **two mistakes**
to make a Quixote

1) You believe you are a **knight**
(the **role-playing fallacy**)

2) You believe that **this** is the Age of Knights
(the **historical fallacy**)

The two mistakes are co-dependent

Bush II is trying to impose an **historical fiction**
through policy

He is rolling back the clock
acting as though it is an earlier era
--- an era of abundant resources and
little pollution ---

so that he and his friends
can **act out their role fantasy** of being
the Successful Americans
they grew up **reading about**

long pause

I'm acting out **my fantasy**
of being the **witty observer**
who never gets involved/implicated
whose cynicism keeps his hands clean

. . . which doesn't work

I swatted

the grabby wife-seller at the faire
with my **hammer**
(just to get his hand off my leg!)
I was annoyed
I think I broke his **jaw**

We're all Quixotes

Skip is Nervous

Four guys on horses
are following our combined
White-Blue Company Caravan
about 3/4 mile back

Skip looks back at them obsessively

He always shares stuff with me
but he won't talk about this

I don't like it

**A Guy At the Faire
Was Selling This**



It's a bronze Roman prisoner
about 4" high

Fucking Romans!

Viking is a Verb

Bighearted Benjamin
was the one who first figured out
the dolled-up kid
in the blanket toss was dead

And he **flipped into the ozone**

He started **yelling** stuff about his own **son**
and what a crappy father he is
to abandon him for a year
just like **his own dad** did

Regine and Julio had to restrain him

We were by an abandoned farm

Regine and I put our heads together,
decided to hand him back **his axe**
and point him toward the **ruined barn**
and say "Get us some **firewood** please."



For twenty minutes he '**viked**' the place

hacking and screaming

berserk

real war yells



(once you've heard a real war yell
like we heard in Burgundy
it becomes part of your vocabulary)



He viked the place good

And then he cried his guts out

And everybody took leaks
and we hit the trail again

Good Plan

I think it's a great idea for you
to go over the heads of your local management
and go straight to the top brass in San Fran

They're treating you like crap

Go for it

Good Night

. . . to a Bad Day (at least here it was)
Hope yours was better

No tents tonight
No time
Just wet grass

Bighearted Benjamin gets the laptop next
poor guy

Your Faithful Correspondent

Berto the Damned Hammer Alto

Date: Fri, 07 June 2002

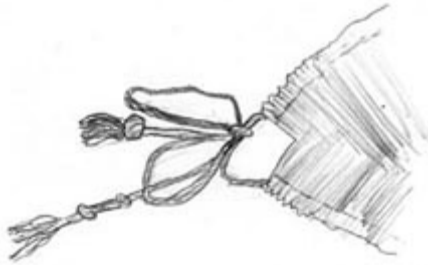
Subject: l i t t l e t h i n g s

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

little things . . .

. . . like how there are basically
no buttons, no buckles, no zippers, no velcro
so that



you're constantly **tying** everything you wear
like shoelaces
and at the end of the day
everyone is tired and grumpy
and standing around **swearing**
and **struggling** with all the **little knots**
that seemed **so expedient** in the morning

It's hell with cold fingers

And it's amazing how fast
the locals can do it

like the professional **corpse-strippers**
we saw at work
in the **battlefield** we rode through today

little things . . .

. . . I'll miss
when I get back to 2002
Like the taste of
openfire milletcakes for breakfast
cooked on the rusty backplate
of a suit of armor
served by a friend
who is still alive

With honey?

kisses fingertips

little things . . .

. . . like just how I **scrunch** up against
my wooden saddle
in the dark
and **type** to you
in my **chain-mail lap**

little things . . .

. . . of daily life
like how out of the corner of your eye



you see the same four guys
still following you
all day



Goal Line Stand

We came over the lip of the little valley
and



kaboomski

The Blue Company
saw and **smelled** its first **battlefield**

The **Pope's contractors** --- the other team---
had a big meeting here
with some **Milanese contractors** -- our team--
two days ago

You could feel the **panic**
sweeping through Blue Company

The **corporation** always **told us**
that almost nobody dies
in this era's contractor meetings

"it's all for show and ransom"

"that's precisely why we picked the year 1368"
they said

But . . . 48 hours after the meeting
there were **still** unlooted corpses
on the field!
That's **how many** dead we were looking at

Graice kept going "oh shit, oh shit, oh shit"

So Skip, with his exquisite people skills
runs out between us and the carnage

holds his **fist** under his **chin**
and booms

"Well, Bob,
the **Pope's Quarterback**
is only 1 for 7
in the Red Zone this season
and you'll notice by the ruts in the mud
that when the **Milanese Defense**
got into its Pre-Vent formation
they forced the Fightin' Priests to **punt**
and then **retreat** to the South
beyond that line of hills"

People laughed and started **breathing** again

But, the fact remains
The Pope is not shitting around
This was not a Show Battle

Speaking of which . . .

interesting what you're telling me
about his current holiness's
waffling on the current moral dilemma

remember it took until 2001
for the church to apologize
for the rape of Constantinople
a couple hundred years ago

I mean 800 years ago

'bout time

little things . . .

. . . like wet wild flowers



on a fallen knight



good dog

little things like . . .

. . . the **taxidermied wolf skin**
on the shoulders of the
paranoid junkyard corpse looter
who somehow thought
I had designs on
the pile of corpses he was guarding

and who **jump-shoved** his **spearhead**
at my unarmored **throat**

that **triggered a reflex**
for me to make the Wolf Club Gang Sign
with my hands

and he stopped

(It was so surreal
I was separated from the pack
He would have killed me easily)

and he made the Wolf Club Gang Sign **back**



and **smiled**
and waved me through
the battlefield
with a **brotherly wink**

Repeat Track

little things like . . .
. . . how the **song stuck in your head**

is **not** there by **accident**

Today
All day
This old 1100s
Niedhard von Ruental tune
that I learned at Louder's

Meie, din liehter schin
May-month, your shining light

und diu kleinen vogelin
and your cute little **birds**

bringent vroueuden wollen schrin
are like a box of **pleasure**

daz si willekomen sin!
that is so **welcome!**

ich bin an den vroueuden min
But I myself am **bumped** out

mit der werlde krank
and the whole world **hurts**

Alle tage is min klage,
All day I am sad

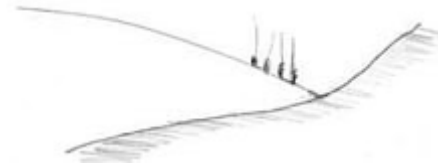
von der ich daz beste sage
that **she** whom I like so much

une ir holdez herze trage
and to whom my **heart** is dedicated

daz ich der hight wol behage
doesn't like me

von den schulden ich verzage
I'm especially **downhearted**

daz mire nie gelanc
because I've **never** been a winner



Date: Sat, 08 June 2002

Subject: Sleep?

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Sleep? Why Bother?

I write **Dear You** from the middle of the night

The only difference
between being **asleep** and **awake**
these days
is that, with my eyes open
I have a **fighting chance**

against the **Fantasy Pope's Soldiers**
who keep killing me

I am more frightened about this upcoming battle
than I've ever been about anything in my life

In the **dream** that woke me up
just now
I saw the **face** of an actual guy
from Facino The Dog's Company
with whom I partied in Milan

We will be **facing those guys**
within 36 hours

He killed me, of course
in the dream

I'm Not the Only One Awake

Regime **spread us out** tonight
so that we can have our own **fires**



and our own **thoughts**
and **psych up to fight** in our own ways

A Model of Mind

The mind is a 600-channel
satellite **TV** system

The **On/Off** button is broken
(the receiver is **On all the time**)

. . . and the battered **Channel Up/Down** button
only works only erratically

Through **diligent effort**
(pointing the **remote** in different directions
and **mashing** the rubber Up/Down button just right)
one may, **in life, learn** gradually

to **select** the channel, the images

Right now my TV is **stuck**
on an all-weekend
Pope's-Army-Kills-Berto-Alto **Marathon**

In The Meantime . . .

I'm trying not to be bummed out
about you and me

I know how tiresome that is
believe me, I know

sorry

little things

. . . like how we used
all the **antibiotics** we brought
treating stupid little scrapes and nicks
and now we have almost **none left**
for the battle

Skip's Kockamamie Kaper

No wonder Skip's been nervous

He finally came clean with me

(Going through that battlefield yesterday
put the **Fear of Dog**
in a lot of people)

Skip fucking **traded**
a geurilla CARE **Package**
of 21st century materiel
(explosives, vitamins, unwrapped granola bars)
for one (huge) (stolen) **diamond**,
three **emeralds**,
a **gold** crucifix and change!

and his plan is to **bury** them
near a Tuscan **landmark**
and fucking go on **vacation** to Italy
this summer of 2002
and **dig them up**

Every aspect of this plan
is **so forbidden** it's not even funny

not to mention being an **insanely long shot**
that they'll still be there

Skip feels he's gotten around the
proscription against
leaving anything **tracable** behind
by the fact that his stuff was all **biodegradable**

I was really **pissed** at him
and **yelled** at him for the first time

To do something **so stupid**
when we're **so close** to going **home!**

"What, do you think you're in a fucking
pirate movie?!"

Our Four Following Friends

. . . who are out there in the darkness right now
are **Mobsters** (Skip believes)
who know about **Skip's diamond**

and are waiting patiently to **acquire** it

This job sucks

In the Meantime . . .

. . . I'm not succeeding
in not being bummed out
about us

little things

. . . like the sleepy cricket
on my knee

Fighting Dreams With Dreams

Maybe we work **back-wor(l)ds**
from the **Dream World** to the **Waking World**

Maybe that's what Quixote-ing is all about

Maybe that's why
we watch *The Matrix* over and over

Maybe that's why
all us people decided
it would be "a good idea"
to dress up in **costumes** and come back **here**

Maybe it's our way of
trying to produce **our own program**
and get it **on the TV in our minds**
instead of all the unwanted programming
that pours through

Signed Sincerely Yours Truly

Berto Alto the Wolf Giant

star of
**"The Berto-Alto-the-Wolf-Giant-
Who-Kicks-Ass
and-Doesn't-Get-Killed-in-the-Middle-Ages Show"**

Date: Sun, 09 June 2002

Subject: so happy

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

**Yes! Yes! Yes! I'm So Happy!
Thank You for your Confidence,
Sweet Heart**

Your letter was so wonderful!
Thank you, thank you
for giving **us** another chance!

leaps for glee

Again --- remember

I know

that we **hardly know each other**, really
except in these **wacky e-mails**

but that there is **something special here**
that's worth **investigating further!**

Who knows what will happen
between us when I get back?

shrugs

smiles

But it's worth finding out, right?

laughs



And can I tell you that I'm so happy
about **what inspired** your **letter**?!

When I read **your first few lines**
I was **afraid** that maybe
I had **guilted you** into a phoney reconciliation
with all **my whining** of the last few days

But to hear that you **read all our messages again**
from the **beginning** until **now**
--- and that's what changed your heart ---
somehow gives me so much more confidence!

What you **read** is what you **get**!

spreads arms

closes eyes shyly

smiles

Nobody's Sleeping Again Tonight

. . . but who cares?

I'm happy.

That's all.

The psych-out has already begun

The enemy is **singing**

It sounds like a spooky soccer crowd



It **echos** across the valley

It's intended to make us **nervous**
and **keep us awake**

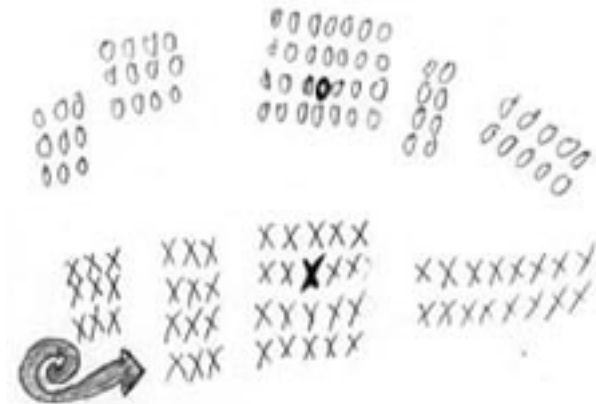
The Pope's Junior Varsity Army

... lead by
General Contractor Facino "The Dog" Cane
... is camped in wait
on the hills opposite

We will meet them tomorrow

Their Varsity Squad is up by Venice right now
luckily for us, I guess

Our General Contractor, Hawkwood
will take the center
and apparently will let Regine have free reign
over the far left wing



... which will bring us face to face
with the The Witch's Company
on their far right wing

Who Let the Dogs Out

So we start singing

"War! **Huh!**
good god, y'all
What is it **good for?**
Absolutely **Nothin'!**
say it again"

And then we start singing
Who Let the Dogs Out

while sharpshooters clean their breeches by night

Fighting Dreams With Dreams

Everybody's doing **way superstitious** things
to prepare for tomorrow's Big Meeting

What I decided to do was:

a) Write your name on a silk headband
which I will wear tomorrow



Ok, ok, ok, **I know it's a bad joke!**
But, hey, I haven't slept in 3 days
and I'm punchy, OK?

laughs

b) Write my new Latin Motto
on my shield ---

Deus, id futuat
which means
"God Fuck It!"

(as in "God Damn it!", only stronger)

(as in "I don't care what anybody says,
God Fuck It!")

(as in "Sure, I'm just a wimpy Marketing Guy
who's trained for less than a year
but I'm still going to
come out of this Medieval Battle
alive,
God Fuck It!")

. . . **plus**, I actually **seriously** think
that writing something **funny**
like the words "Your Name"
on my headband
will help me **keep** my **sense of humor**
and therefore my **cool**
and therefore my **life**

Time out!

Regine's calling!

Hang on!

I'll be right back!

The Pow! of Words

I'm ridiculously **adrenaline pumped** right now
because I just got back from my best
'Ragging and Bragging' ever

I mounted up on Nastibelle
and Skip lead me **across the dark valley**
to within 200 yards of Facino Cane's campfires

and I stood in the stirrups
and **hurled the high heat**
yelled my very best stuff

"Your wetnurse had a beard, you sucked the milk
of sniveling hate. Your armor is like silk

in terms of strength, and looks like it's been wiped
along your ass -- it's so disgusting, striped

with brown and falling off. Your blood and tears
will rust that suit some more. Now drink your fears:

For we have flung the fury down to earth --
will fling you down, in mourning for your birth."

I was on fire

I guess I got kind of mean

The White Company's Ragger-Bragger . . .

. . . **got killed**
when he went over there this afternoon

It could have been me

But I don't care **God Fuck it**
I don't care!

You like me!
That's what matters!

little things . . .

. . . like this evening
in the White Company camp

One knight was carrying and cuddling
a cute little **toddler**
and slowly slowly

walked up and **handed** the child
to a Greensleves (army camp courtesan)



who was sitting on a rock
with **another knight**
(the other knight was discreetly looking away)

the first knight and the Greensleeves
exchanged a **few quiet words**
and then the first knight
walked slowly slowly **away**

My guess was it is the first knight's child
but the Greensleeves
is with another knight now

so they share time with the boy

A Woman's Voice in the Dark

. . . just now!

It's the Witch's Company's Ragger-Bragger
challenging Regine
to a **field duel** tomorrow!

It's A Date!

So --- Yes!
Let's rent that movie
Black Knight
when I get **back!**
In about **one week!**
And we'll go see the new *Star Wars*
Woo hoo!
Sounds like fun!

I'll tell you what they got wrong

You will hear from me again!

giant kiss

Yours Truly Autographed His Mark
Berto Alto the WolfMan

Date: Mon, 10 June 2002

Subject: so far

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Lunch Time

Julio is dead.

This is his arm



Hailey brought it back

It's lying about 10 feet away from me

Benjamin is dead

Four of the Goth Kids are dead
(Somebody said it was because of their costumes
They looked "normal" to the Pope's Men
and not "scary and weird" like the rest of us)
Three Financial Types and three Civil War guys
are dead

lots of injuries

Dear You . . .

I'm OK so far

so far

And now we're on this insane

Lunch Break

Facino Cane's Ragger-Bragger just yelled
"Intermezzo!!"
and Hawkwood accepted the terms

So it's about noon and we're **gathered**
where we camped last night

and distributing morphine

We have to **fight again** in about **45 minutes**

They are fucking insane back here!

This really really sucks.

Freak-Out Becomes Strategy

The **first thing** I saw this morning



was two squires pull Benjamin **from his horse**
with boat-hooks



and **sever his spinal cord**

and I fucking freaked

I started ripping off my armor
"No Way! I'm not playing knight any more!
I'm not going to be a sitting duck!"

I **decided to be a squire**, like Skip

. . . be **more mobile**

And I had this idea
to just **lead our riderless horse** around
as though our **knight was already down**

and it has actually worked **well so far**

I just **couldn't stand** to be
a fucking **can of tuna** out there
waiting for a **can opener**

Last Moments

. . . right before the meeting



The late Stephanie,
Regine,
the late Julio,
and Sharpshooter Sue
survey the field
from our battle wagon

All I Remember

from being out there

--- Skip and I basically are **medics**
dragging **wounded** people
back up the hill ---

is Regine in blue cotton



out of the corner of my eye



staying smooth and calm



and basically letting Pope's Men



impale themselves on her



watery, bouncy sword

My Worst Moment

. . . so far
so far
so far
so far
so far



was four of us being **surrounded**

but Sharpshooter Sue
helped us out

Regine and the Witch Have a Puppet Show

Regine was **shouting** for the Witch
all morning
"Come on out, lady!"
and making **chicken noises**

And right now Regine and the Witch
are out there

talking

actually, they're **drawing** in the dirt

and moving around **little figurines**

(since they don't share a language)

setting up the **rules** for their **Duel**

This is so surreal

So now we are on this sick creepy lunch break

It's all so **formal**,
like a **graduation ceremony!**

and the enemy is eating
and I'm throwing up

I'm somewhere beyond scared

I like you
I like you
I like you
I will see you again
I will see you again
I will see you again

Well, back to work . . .

Date: Mon, 10 June 2002

Subject: got weird

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

1) Facino Cane Rolled Into the Fight

. . . on **his battle wagon**
(once we got started again
after Half Time)
and all his men **cheered**

Which is pretty normal

The only unusual thing about it
was that
Facino Cane has been
dead for 2 weeks!

They **tied** his helmet on him
and **tied** him to a pole

and he **bounced** and shook
as the wagon rolled forward

and his men lined up to kiss his **hand**

Then things got weird

did I mention . . .

that I'm still alive?
that I'm exhausted?
that I used the move "Swatting the Pinata"
and saved my own life?
that I made it through the meeting?
that I miss you?
Dear You
here are **2 things** I saw today

2) Charge!

Regine lined us up for an
all-company attack

(which we **never** do ---
we **always** leave someone behind
for cover)

Anyway, all of us



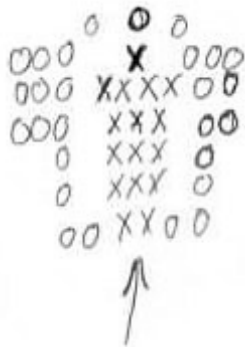
made this **raggedy-assed run**
down the hill

straight **toward** the **Witch's Company**

and I'm going:
"Regine must really want to **stomp**
this woman!"

And Regine suddenly starts yelling
"**Don't touch anyone!**
Hold your fire!"

And the Witch's Company
parts like the Red Sea



and **surrounds us**

And the Witch's Company
begins to **run with us**
away from the battle

up into this **forested ravine**

Skip and I are looking at each other like
"What the?"

This was what Regine and the Witch
were rehearsing
with their puppets and rocks!

We have **deserted**

We **ran** for hours

We have **joined forces**

We are **alive**

Long live the **Witch's Company!**
Long live the **Blue Company!**

Date: Tue, 11 June 2002

Subject: figured out

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

I Just Figured This Out

Q: Why did Robin Hood wear green?

A: Camouflage!

smacks forehead

Duh!

Or maybe I should ask
Why **will** Robin Hood wear green?
(I'm a little hazy on my chronology)

For the **millionth time** this year ---

hollers

"I wish I knew History better!!!"

I Just Figured Out . . .

. . . why **none** of the Blue Company
knows History very well

We were **selected** for **ignorance!**
(Not stupidity, mind you! Only ignorance!
A bumpkin has his pride, after all.)

Ooooooooooooooh, we just **figured out**
a **whole lotta** things!

When Regine gave her **big speech**
under the trees
you could've heard a lark fart

Wide eyes, Wide ears, Wide mouths

Merry Forest Camp

For the whole year
we've avoided camping in forests
because
(conventional contractor wisdom states)
forests are **where** the **gang-bangers** are

plus miscellaneous goblins (mostly female)

But, I guess we're gangsters now
because we're in this **lovely leafy glade**
that the Witch's Company calls **home**



and we're protected by treetop lookouts
wearing green

Coming Home

We move out again on Friday

And then
we're only **days away** (says Regine)
from **blowing this popsicle stand**
of a century

and once again bathing in Coca-Cola™
and rolling around in
Cool-Ranch-flavored potato chips
and watching the Basketball playoffs on TV!!!!

Do you mind if I **hug you**
the minute I **see you**?
It would really mean a lot to me.

The Witch's Company are great hosts
and their **food** is uncharacteristically **tasty**
--- they use a lot of herbs ---

Dear You I'm happy

maybe it's just relief
at making it through the battle

or suddenly feeling so close to home

And I'm definitely happy
that **you got your raise!**

La la la la laaaaa!

Dear You Dear You!

The Witch's Company Prayed to This



marble thing about 1 foot high
early this morning
and we followed suit
out of courtoisie
It looks like it might be from India

Then They Prayed to This



which is tiny and gold

The Witch's Company is about
30 men and 5 women

The Witch Herself

Is a Senior Midwife/Herbologist
in her 50s
with **bright eyes** and **bad knees**
Her two sons are the day-to-day Captains

She's **smart** and **cranky**
and definitely **runs the show**

For long treks, like our half-Marathon
escape from the battle yesterday
she sits in this **backpack**



with a little **roof** on it

and this dude with thighs from hell
runs with her

Tonight We're Gonna Party

. . . like it's 1399

The guest of honor?



Bossie-the-Hamburger
yum

It's the only time we've had beef
the whole trip

The Second Thing . . .

. . . I'm going to do
when I get back
(after hugging you first)

is see my old therapist

because the thing I'm totally **blocking** out
of my **mind** right now

is the **state** I got into
during the battle yesterday

I turned into a wolfman

big time

really wanted to hurt people

not proud of it
but there it is

don't worry

I'm going to deal with it

So, Regine Says . . .

*I take full responsibility
for what has occurred in the last 24 hours*

hands behind her back

voice big and clear

*This should not affect your careers
It is an issue between me and the corporation*

pause

*But just in case there is unexpected fallout
I'm going to give you more information
than people at your employment grade
usually get*

Blue Company leans forward en masse

*The mission of Blue Company
is to make small changes in History
that improve the value
of [something something something]
publicly traded securities
in the 21st century*

perplexed looks all around

*I don't expect you to understand completely
Part of your qualification
for this assignment
was a lack of interest
in Political History and Current Events*

whistling sound of plummeting self-esteem

*Regine looks up into the trees
for a simple explanation*

*We make fortunes for people
in the Stock Market*

Just like most other jobs

*thirty-six people look sheepishly
at their silly costumes*

*I was given an assignment
by our Mutual Fund Manager
that would have involved the deaths
of between six hundred and eight hundred
human beings*

And I refused

long pause

That is not what I agreed to

really long pause

I felt like a dope

a naive immature
Linguistics-Literature dope

but a happy dope

a lucky dope, for sure

Skip wants the laptop, now

See you Soon!!!!

What does beef taste like, again?
varmint?

Bert-Hault, the Ignorant-But-Still-
All-in-All-a-Decent-Fellow-Wolf-Giant-
With-Unresolved-Anger-Issues-But-He's-
Aware-of-Them-at-Least

Date: Wed, 12 June 2002

Subject: slow wake

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

yawn

best sleep I've had in centuries

dear you,

woke up thinking
I was in beloved green canvas tent
of childhood camping

instead it was
pure dappled green leaf canopy
fresh forest air

last night with wolf club brothers
we sang to the moon
from high tree branch

now --- gentle breakfast stirrings
around yon smoky embers

beautiful birdcall morning

I love you

I am the wolf man

I am Robin Hood

I am close to home

(skip needs the laptop
I'll send you this note later today)

Date: Wed, 12 June 2002

Subject: Oh

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

skink

Oh, You

Oh, No

By the time I **snuck** silently

(**Skip** and I had been in the woods
playing an improvised
hide-and-seeK goblin game)

to where I could **see him** . . .



. . . it was already **too late**

We were **too far** from the Witch's camp

the the four guys **already** had Skip handcuffed

and I saw

stone sinking stomach

that one of them
was wearing a **wristwatch**

Then they took off their robes



The 4 Horsemen are Security Guards

. . . from the corporation
from the 21st century



They put on their hats
and went through this
two-minute **kangaroo court** act
with Skip on his knees



and **showed** Skip his own little bag
of **diamonds and gold**
and **listed** the modern items he traded for them



and cited chapter and verse
of the **employment contract**
and how Skip had endangered
the **shareholders' investment**



and then one big bastard



drew a total bullshit Hollywood fantasy sword



and they **bent** Skip over

I don't think
there was **anything I could have done**
I've **replayed** it 1,000x in my mind

They would have killed **both** of us

I think

I don't know

Oh, no

and I sent out the biggest **burst** of good vibes
to him

I don't care if it was corny and new-agey



and maybe he looked up right then



"**skink**" is the sound
a **blade** makes
going through a **neck**

Oh, no
Oh, no

I made it **back** to camp

We put Skip together
and buried him

The Witch did a nice **ceremony**

Regine says
"There are **only four** Security Guards ---
no problem"

Oh, Julio
Oh, Benjamin
Oh, Skip
Oh, no

Date: Thu, 13 June 2002

Subject: Good

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: You

Dear You

. . . well . . .

skrinches up mouth, raises eyebrows

"Good Bye"

This is the last message
I'll ever write you

. . . um . . .

It seems

. . . that there were
in fact
19 Security Guards following us

And as I type
The Blue Company



is lined up **kneeling**
naked
in a **flower filled field**
with machine guns pointed at us

and the Security Guards

are **going down the line**
doing cavity searches
and **confiscating**
everything from your century

at least

. . . they're **not** going to **kill us**

They're just going to **leave us back here**
because of Regine's Rebellion

here where it's a gorgeous god damned day!



laughs

and I'm keeping myself **busy**
writing to you

(ow, my knees hurt!)

and **keeping my head** down
so I don't attract any attention

and getting a **last few pictures**
before they take the laptop

it's hard to see the screen in the sunlight

So, Anyway . . .

Thanks for writing back

You're a great person
YMSLGRH!, as they say
(You'll Make Some Lucky Guy Really Happy)



Show this letter to my folks
and tell them to **give you my car**
"The Old Jalopy" I call it
I have a **talent** for names

Oh, Boy

. . . here they come

. . . well . . .

um



If you liked any of my **jokes**
steal them

if you like the **way** I write ---
--- write to someone this way

Watch for me
I'll be that **tiny** percentage point
In the Dow Jones Average one day.
I'll **wave**.

Your crummy century sucks anyway!

laughs

I'm **glad** I'm staying back here,
glad, I tell you!

thanks
think of this spring, our spring,
next spring

good-

Blue Company / Kind of Blue

a novel in e-mail

by

Rob Wittig and Scott Rettberg

Illustrations by Rob Wittig

Part Two: Kind of Blue

by

Scott Rettberg

(last message by Scott Rettberg and Rob Wittig)

Date: Mon, 17 Jun 2002 11:28:55

Subject: My Shame and My Confession

From: skipsvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Dear Susanne,

You don't know me but sometimes you see me on the street, wearing wraparound shades and the uniform of a bicycle messenger. I guess I shouldn't say "the uniform of" -- the truth is that I am a bicycle messenger now -- it's how I'm employed. I used to be a hot-shit marketing exec but now I'm just a grunt charged with materials too important to be fedexed across town.

We get coffee at the same Starbucks, right about 8AM, give or take 120 seconds. You must go in to work earlier than is really necessary since your office is right down street. Either out of obligation or more likely out of a need for solitude, a need to slowly sip your coffee, maybe check your hotmail. You get a latté and I get an espresso doubleshot. Neither one of us are picky about the beans, we both say "house" before they can ask us. I've got a little bit of a gut and you've probably noticed that I look a little silly in the lycra. But speed is important and it really helps, even if you're not in the best shape. I'd describe the look on your face when you look over at my uniform as one of bemusement, not mockery. My helmet is yellowjacket yellow. I hope that at some point when you've had a chance to process this we can sit down and have a cup together.

The reason I write this is that I notice you've been wearing black for a week, and it appears that even the weekend didn't help. Your eyes looked kind of forlorn this morning, kind of lost, there was a kind of scared rabbit look in your eyes that just tore me up inside. Because I know why.

We have a friend in common. I should say we had a friend in common. He's not my friend anymore. That's not true, he's still my friend, he'll be my friend after he's gotten

some help and they let him out, but right now he's damaged. Right now I can't approve of what he did to you, or to any of the other women whose hearts he twisted round his finger like so many pieces of yellowing string.

And my shame is that I was his silent accomplice. My shame is that I didn't put a stop to it before it went too far.

People respond to unemployment in different ways. Some jump right back in, take their suits to the dry cleaners, get their resumé in shape and pound the pavement religiously every day from 9 from 5. Some retreat into the soap operas. Some drink from noon until dusk. Some folks catalog everything they own and then sell it on eBay. Some of us become bicycle messengers.

Berto's thing was history and drawing, and I couldn't see any harm in that. At first.

Berto and I were part of a team doing marketing for Enron as they were gearing up to open dozens of walk-in customer storefronts across the Midwest. Berto and I did good work so needless to say it was a pretty serious kick to the groin when we found ourselves out on the streets, just another set of victims of those cowboy fucks in Houston.

And did they feel our pain? Did they know what it was like to feel the boot and land on their asses in an unforgiving '02 job market that would take one look at you and decide it would rather eat the shit sandwich instead? Hell no, most of them got jobs in the EPA or the Bureau of Land Management, and are hard at work on our nation's new energy policy, plotting oil wells in the Moab Desert when they're not out golfing with Uncle Dick.

Well Berto, you know Berto, he's kind of an idealist, kind of a romantic, but also kind of a company man. He actually believed that we were going to change the world by making better signage for Enron storefronts, that we could help the kids by making them chuckle during a thirty second spot for the one true 21st Century energy concern. He at least half bought it and he was damn proud of being a firstclass copywriter, and he invested too

much of his energy, too much of his identity, into being the best copywriter money could buy.

And I don't know you, I really don't, but I don't think you're the kind of woman who would hear a guy's hard luck story and toss him to the curb. But Berto, he lost something there, he couldn't get around it, he couldn't come clean and just tell you the truth that the pain of the 21st century was gnawing at his ankles, and he just didn't know where to go from here. He couldn't face you as an unemployed male of the species.

And I said Berto, Berto, she'll understand, you're not alone in this Berto. But then he told me of his plans to escape into another century, to love you from afar, to pour his heart and soul into his pen and keyboard, to become unique to you by living at one level of remove. I'll be her knight in shining armor, he said. But that armor was covered in pigfat, Susanne. That armor was just the refuge of a troubled soul.

I don't know what drove him to this; I don't know what bitter herb made Berto twist the way he did. And you weren't alone, Susanne. Every ex-girlfriend in his book was getting those emails, with slight variations to account for their personal circumstances. And he bcc:d me on every email. He even made me a character in his fictions.

At first I thought it was a good outlet for the guy. And well a joke kind of a funny joke. That's sick, that's sick that I thought it was funny for a while. When Berto was laughing at it, he wasn't really laughing because he thought it was funny, Berto was really laughing because he knew it was sad, sad, sad.

Still, maybe if he'd been able to pull himself out, maybe if he'd have been able to find a time machine in the castle, maybe then you would have had something to laugh about on your next date, maybe even when you were old and grey.

About two weeks and a half into it, I finally told him that I thought he'd gone too far. Besides, the unemployment would run out soon and dammit he just needed to pick

himself up and get a job. I even offered to get him a job as a bicycle messenger, but if he wanted to get on with his life he just needed to stop sending those emails because somebody would get hurt.

And every morning I saw the hurt in your eyes.

I told him that if he wouldn't stop I was going to tell you.

Then he flipped out, Susanne. He just completely lost it. I was locking up my bike, and he grabbed the kryptonite lock from my hand and bashed it against the side of my skull. Repeatedly. You can still see the bruises. I got in one good shot to his face and he was drooling spit and blood in my face as he muttered. YOU WILL NOT TELL and the bar of the kryptonite lock was crushing up against my throat YOU ARE NOT FIT TO BE A KNIGHT.

Well the rest of the week had emails about how I was a thief and the baddies were after the whole company because I was a thief and then the next thing you know some asshole with a broadsword has decapitated me and that's the last I email I got.

And you know what? He was right, I was a coward, because I saw you everyday getting your latté and I couldn't say a word.

Berto was my best friend. I don't fit in with the other bicycle messengers, really, though they seemed to gain more respect for me when I showed up with all the purpleblack facebruises.

I went to go see Berto this weekend, Susanne, because Berto and I are friends from way back. I can't replace him, and I thought well maybe I've been a little hard on the guy.

There was an eviction notice on the door and something smelled like rot. A CD (Gregorian chant?) was skipping, skipping, skipping, skipping. So I was worried and

maybe I shouldn't have but I bust the door in.

Catshit and weeksold cartons of Chinese scattered around the floor, empty cans of Jolt. Blinds drawn tight. The cat eating from the cartons of fetid sweet and sour pork. A monitor shattered, a hammer and broken glass, and Berto in the middle of the floor, fingers covered in blue ink. An unspeakable mural in blue ink on the white walls, evisceration, decapitation, drawn and quartered lifesize figures on the wall. An anatomically correct heart torn in two. Beneath it your name.

Berto glossy eyed, foamy spit crusting on dry lips. He looked dehydrated, emaciated, like he hadn't eaten for a week. He wasn't saying a word. I took him the shower and tried to help him wash up, but he wasn't there Susanne, he wasn't there and now he's at Rush Presbyterian and they have him under observation.

I'm sure he'll pull out of it some day, our Berto will be back, our plain old 21st century fox Berto.

So I don't know, do you forgive him? I don't know, he was sick, maybe it's me you shouldn't forgive, I knew and I didn't tell and I'm sorry. So I don't know, maybe if you want to visit him go, or don't. Do what you want to do, do what you can. I'd like to buy you dinner as a kind of peace offering, if you're the forgiving kind. I know a nice Italian place on the North side, it's quiet and we can talk with the candles flickering in our eyes.

Your friend,

Skip

Date: Thu, 20 Jun 2002 00:10:31
Subject: Re: My Shame and My Confession
From: susannenbreone@aol.com
To: skipsvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

Tuesday I took my latté at 7:30, today at 9:15.

This is not to say that I've been avoiding you, but that in fact I have avoided you.

It's been difficult for me to formulate the right response to your email of Monday morning.

I'm not quite sure what to say.

Your email came as kind of intrusion on what I conceived of as an almost purely textual relationship with another person who I met once, and with whom I had a brief-in-person flirtation with followed by an alternatively strange marvelous and ultimately disappointing flirtation in text.

Berto, I knew him, once.

But Skip if you stopped and thought for minute, for just one brief moment, you might begin to realize that if your friend was deluded, in all likelihood I did not share in his delusions.

I take my lovers in this century only.

I'm still charmed by Berto and my heart is rent at the news of his institutionalization.

But I don't know that I'll visit him, Skip.

As to the last paragraph of your email, it sounds like you're hitting on me, and poorly -- "candles flickering in our eyes"? The candlelight, or the reflection of the candlelight, might flicker, but I assume that the candles themselves would stay firmly rooted in their given positions on the table.

Maybe I'm wrong, Skip, but that close just struck a strange note.

As did the fundamental presumption of your email, it seems.

If I put this together:

- A) You are the bicycle messenger who usually gets coffee at the same time I do.
- B) You check me out when you get coffee.
- C) Often at the start of my day, when I am in my pre-public moments, and imagine that no one is looking, or don't care to care if anyone is, just want caffeine.

And you're a friend of Berto. So where does that put us and what happens from there?

All that I know of you is how you look in lycra and your best friend's description of you as a fictional character, a not very complimentary description of you. Certainly Berto liked you but your character had certain character flaws which I have no doubt have some tenuous basis in real life and therefore make me wary I almost wrote weary there of pursuing any kind of relationship with you, including this email. I was hesitant to write.

What bothers me. Your commentary on my black dress and your assumption of certain things. That I was traumatized by the cessation of the emails from Berto, for instance, to

such an extent that I wore black for a week, put my makeup on in a griefstricken fashion, etc.

Let me point out, Skip that while as a marketing exec or former and now messenger, you certainly have more knowledge of popular psychology than the standard pigeon, my black dress might have compelled certain other semiotics:

- Maybe my lover, suppose she is a woman, died in a horrible accident.
- Maybe I killed her and am distraught over my certain damnation.
- Perhaps my mother, father, or great aunt perished.
- I may be mourning the French loss in the World Cup.
- My cat Howard, who has been my sole faithful companion, jumped into the trash compactor.
- Maybe the latest Star Wars film was a profound disappointment.
- I might like to wear black.
- Maybe I didn't get that promotion and am playing a kind of passive aggressive mindgame with my employers.
- It could have something to do with September 11th.

I just thought that was a little presumptuous. And I mean, I should open up to you, eat Italian with you? Really.

So anyway Skip coffee is fine sometime but dinner is out for now Thanks.

But what of Berto?

I'll admit I'm quite touched that he painted that heart on the wall.

I agree, and sensed at a certain point, that Berto's game had gone beyond a pleasant, very involved kind of flirtation to what appeared to me to be either a delusional or at least certainly obsessive state.

Some ways I feel guilty for playing along so long.

And it was a kind of release for me too, he'd send me these fantastical descriptions of his medieval adventures and I'd bitch to him about the crap the people do at work at the job I really don't like but do because that's what I do and I need to work for the rent and bills and kip and so on, and he would delight in it.

So anyway the sudden ending.

Yes it disturbed but not nearly so much as some other things in life.

I hope that Berto gets better, I'll send him an email.

I'll have coffee at my regular time tomorrow, but I'd rather not talk with you then, I hope you can understand that. I'm happy having coffee sometime with you, but anyway just not in the morning and not with the idea of any kind of romance in mind.

You hear all kinds of things about the kind of thing that can happen on the internet with creepy guys, which is not to say that you're creepy, just let's live our lives for now.

Take care of your friend.

I might write him but Jesus I feel like I'd need a degree in psychology to do so, you know?

Don't answer that.

So don't say to him that I'll write him, I might or might not, but do be kind to him. I've got a lot that I'm dealing with without getting involved with mending Berto's threads.

There's so much fucked up shit in the world and a lot of fucked up people but they improve, so do the best you can.

Stay out of the way of moving traffic, and don't be so ashamed of your confession.

Shame is bad for your complexion.

Stay Safe,

Susanne

Date: Thu, 20 Jun 2002 10:26:37

Subject: Re: My Shame and My Confession

From: skipsvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

I noticed that you weren't at Starbucks at the appointed hour.

I'm really sorry, the last thing I wanted to do was creep you out and I feel ridiculous for my assumption.

Truth told, I guess I got a bit caught up in the fictional world myself. It's strange to be someone else's character, especially if you get killed off. You get emotionally involved.

And I guess plainly I was sort of hitting on you. You look great in that black dress.

You can't blame a guy for trying. I guess you can. I mean, I don't know what I mean.

Pay no attention to the 36 year-old bicycle messenger behind the curtain.

Anyway, no estalking I promise.

Skip

Date: Thu, 20 Jun 2002 12:07:47

Subject: Chin Up

From: ernestonotcom@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

Ernesto here. Your BIG BROTHER. Docs say you won't take phone calls but check your email religiously.

Docs say you won't TALK AT ALL.

Docs say the last words they heard from you were when upon admittance you GRABBED A BROOM and CHALLENGED THE ORDERLIES TO A JOUST before being TIED DOWN kicking and screaming in your RESTRAINTS.

What's up, Bert?

Shit, brother. I'm going to try to get to Chicago soon but I hope that you get better before I'm able to afford to do that.

I know you've had some hard times with the Enron fiasco and getting the boot, but I mean you've lost jobs before and a job is just a job you know that.

We don't talk enough, you and me and Olivia and we should. With Mom gone and Dad if you can call him that "Dad" in the hospital, you and me and Olivia are more or less all that's left of our so-called FAMILY UNIT.

I tried to give Olivia a call and let her know of your predicament but before you know it the BIBLE BEATER was telling me about our DAMNATION, me Darlene and the kids all and I just had to HANG UP before I could even get a word in edgewise so I'm not sure that she'll be much HELP. Jesus fucking Christ, Bert, if you ever get better you and I are going to have to POOL OUR RESOURCES and hire a SPECIALIST team of COMMANDO DEPROGRAMMERS to go down there and RESCUE OUR LITTLE SISTER from that fucking CULT that has taken possession of her BODY AND SOUL in TENNESSEE.

But that's all beside the point. We're clearly all fucked up, you me and Olivia. It would be easy to BLAME IT ON OUR PARENTS, which I do, most of the time, but that doesn't help much.

Two years ago, when my FUCKING DOT COM JOB which had made me feel WEALTHY AND POWERFUL, even the CEO was a 23-YEAR-OLD PUNK, went south, leaving me with LOTS OF WORTHLESS PAPER and a 500K note on a house I could not possibly ever dream of affording, I'll admit that I NEARLY LOST IT, bro. I had tremendously violent visions of cracking that pipsqueak's skull and serving his brains to the gathered INVESTMENT BANKERS who'd come up with the plan to pay all of

uknow.com's employees with a GENEROUS OPTIONS PACKAGE rather than CASH and maybe cutting out his eyes so that those FUCKING CABLE TELEVISION MARKET ANALYSTS who convinced me to stay when I could have gotten out when the getting was good because uknow was a SAFE BET to stay ON THE RISE for YEARS TO COME could have a snack as well. Ratfuckers.

So you know more or less the rest of the story. 30 LITERS OF JAMESONS and six months later, the MODEST BUT COMFORTABLE home in Walnut Creek was no longer in my name, having been FORECLOSED on, and after the COURTOOM ANTICS of BANKRUPTCY, Darlene, Jessie and Jeff and I LIVE IN A TRAILER IN THE DESERT two hours out of LA.

But things are on the up and up. I quit drinking, pretty much. I listened to the doctors, is what I'm saying Bert, the guys with the drugs know what they're talking about.

I was what you call CLINICALLY DEPRESSED was the diagnosis. And now I'm on a JOY COCKTAIL. Strict regimen of PROZAC, which keeps me happy, and VIAGRA, which gets me laid three times a week (the prozac otherwise inhibiting such). just pop pills.

AND I DON'T DRINK.

Except for RIGHT NOW, AS I TAKE A SLUG FROM THE FIFTH IN MY BROWN BAG during my lunch break from AL'S USED CARS where last month I was SALESMAN OF THE MONTH. This is the first time I've been in an internet café, Berto. I'm surrounded by palefaced teenagers who look like they've never seen the BEACH that's only 30 MINUTES in TRAFFIC away from here.

SO ANYWAY,

Also, I wanted to say that my LIFE is not JOYless, Jessie had a recital last week that was

just great you would have been proud of her and Jeff just started little league and the kid's not a bad second basemen. The little things, the little things make it all worthwhile. And Darlene's still a GREAT LAY. So it works, we make it work, IT WORKS.

And THIS MORNING I SOLD an '80 PINTO.

DO WHAT THE DOCTORS SAY, within reason. That is DO THE DRUGS. The drugs are good, I'm convinced of that. But DON'T LET THEM TALK YOU INTO SURGERY. I've seen One Flew Over the KooKoosNEST, fuck that. And SHOCK THERAPY IS OVERRATED. Don't buy any of that shit about technological advances that's all bullshit.

So anyway, take it easy, Berto. We're all in this mess together.

Your BIG BROTHER WHO LOVES YOU MAN,

Ernesto

Date: Thu, 20 Jun 2002 23:48:36

Subject: hi unkle BerTo

From: jefftrocks@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

uncleBErto,

dad say we can stay up late and do viedogamess and internet. I had a dance recital lst wek dad said I should sai I lik the internet my friend jacki has it on her mobilfon and we do instantmessenger. dad said you fell down and se are meailing to sai hope you get better soon.

love Je s s i c A

Uncle Berto,

Thanks verymuch for the pictures hyhou sent me a copule monthsago they are awesome espeically the swordfites and dragns. Dad sid you fell down and hurt your ankle and that totally sucks I bet that hurts and hope you're feeling better soon. I'm in baseball now and its toatlly awesome. I'm not really good yet bet I'm trying. Where did you learn how to draw thats totly awesome how you do that I have a friend who can draw ted he dwrs great pictures of demons and things totly gorhy stuff. Do you still do Karate.?

Uncle Berto I want to learn some moves and stuff I'm not very big and the fifthgreders suck.

And dad said wer'e goin to Chicago later in the summer and stuff and I hear Wrigley Field is really cool and dad we'd get tickets and stuff when we come see you Sammysoso rocks! even tho the cubs make the dodgers look good they suck so bad so anyways I've got a new viedo game called grand theft autho that I borrowed from a friend for the playstation2 and its awesome I'm gonna play cause wen mom and dad aargue when he comes home and then she goes to work at the diner jessie and I can satay up late as much as we want its awesom. it cant wait to see you in Chicagop I hear the ESars Tiower is AWESOME!!!jeff

Date: Fri, 21 Jun 2002 00:12:26

Subject: Parting

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

Regine,

Parting is all we know of heaven

And all we need of hell

Susanne

Date: Fri, 21 Jun 2002 11:04:09

Subject: Congratulations!

From: skipsvskip@hotmail.com

To: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

Regine,

Congratulations on your appointment as VP of Marketing at BBKVD. Read of it in this morning's paper.

Also, by simultaneous coincidence, it turns out that we are classmates! Sort of--you graduated four years before I did. This classmates.com site keeps sending me email with information about the people who went to my high school and inviting me to subscribe for their premium services and I can't figure out how to unsubscribe from their spam.

Amazing that we knew each other for all those years, worked alongside each other as teammates, and never once made that connection, that we were both fellow Maine East Blue Devils. I always thought that was a lame mascot. And you were on the varsity volleyball team! Who knew? So anyway that's where I got your personal email address (and now you have mine--I don't know about you but my old OGVB email address stopped working the morning that you fired me).

Anyway, I'm glad to see that you've landed on your feet, with an important job (I bet they'll give you the Camel account) and a six-figure-plus salary. It sounds like this will be in even better job than the one you had at OGVB.

Amazing recovery. You're like Teflon. Various messes never stick to you but instead like rotten eggs roll right off and land on your underlings. Where they stick.

While your accusations of wrongdoing preceding my departure from what I now think of as the generally "dishonest work" we were doing at OGVB remain false as they ever were, I'm willing to let bygones be bygones because Regine, I've landed on my feet as well! Actually on my pedals!

Every day is something new. This morning I collided with two different slow-moving cars. Just clipped by a Lexus and slightly sideswiped by an Explorer. I suppose I could have hit them both with lawsuits since the accidents were clearly their faults but it was like water off a duck's bill, Regine, I just took my lumps and kept moving, no serious injuries.

And I zoom through traffic. Cabbies hate my guts but the packages get there on time. I do more in a day that has more impact on the world than we did in a month at OGVB. And I make rent and have some left over to rent videos besides! and it's a real adventure, Regine, a real treat to find excitement in every day. I suppose at your new job you won't get much exercise, you'll probably just sit on your fat ass as it gets fatter, dreaming of volleyball.

Oh, Berto, you remember Berto, your favorite copywriter? He had a nervous breakdown after the shakeup that only you knew was coming went down. Not that you'd care.

Anyway, Regine, just wanted to drop you a note to say thanks for your help in liberating me from the apparatus.

Also you have always been, and remain, a world-class bitch.

May your new lieutenants cover their asses and locate your Achilles heel before you sacrifice them as lambs to the slaughter.

Skip

Date: Sat, 22 Jun 2002 02:35:05

Subject: Re: What Have You

From: freddyfingers@treemail.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

What word to hear from you.

Sid is his way, quantity as requested.

Skip.

So good to hear from yu.

one hundred of us salute u.

Life as is a sigh.

Between others messengers '

sighs.

sights.

thighs.

And good that you are with us.

in the thistles.

sigh.

Fred

Date: Sat, 22 Jun 2002 03:21:31

Subject: Passion

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

Regina,

But Passion most dissembles, yet betrays

Even by its darkness; as the blackest sky

Foretells the heaviest tempest, it displays

Its workings through the vainly guarded eye,

And in whatever aspect it arrays

Itself, 'tis still the same hypocrisy;

Coldness or Anger, even Disdain or Hate,

Are masks it often wears, and still too late.

Susanne

Date: Sun, 23 Jun 2002 23:47:17
Subject: Desire
From: susannenbreone@aol.com
To: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

Regini,

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire

Susanne

Date: Mon, 24 Jun 2002 11:29:58
Subject: Kiss
From: susannenbreone@aol.com
To: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

Reginu,

the dirty colors of her kiss have just

throttled

my seeing blood,her heart's chatter

riveted a weeping skyscraper

in me

Susanne

Date: Tue, 25 Jun 2002 01:40:20

Subject: I'm Back

From: jackdmonk@enteract.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

Back from Thailand.

I was in the countryside in time for Khoa Phansa and did the Rains Retreat until the full moon observance, Kathina.

Learned a great deal during my three months with the monks.

And also unlearned a great deal.

Spent much time thinking of silence, meditating, chanting.

I saw a man levitate three inches from the ground.

I had the strangest waking dreams.

A snake swallowing its own tail.

A battle between a chicken and a colony of ants.

A blinding snowstorm that went from violence to serenity.

Owl's eyes staring.

Weeping orchids.

You can see many things thinking nothing.

I'm no longer used to thinking in English.

This is strange.

I'm now so used to a different interface.

My fingers are having a hard time getting accustomed again to typing.

And this screen feels so distant from me now, so alien, when just six months ago I was

writing and coding in it all day.

For three months my life was governed by these rules:

1. Do not take a life.
2. Do not take what is not given.
3. Do not be unchaste.
4. Do not lie or deceive.
5. Do not ingest intoxicants.
6. Do not eat after noon and eat moderately.
7. Do not dance or sing.
8. Do not wear ornaments.
9. Do not lie down on wide or high beds.
10. Do not accept silver or gold.

You come back from something like this and you get back to your little apartment in Logan Square to pull boxes covered in dust from storage and you say how did I acquire all of this insignificant shit?! and what made me think that it was so important to have so much of it?

Six pairs of shoes, eight pairs of jeans, forty-five T-shirts.

And I'm done collecting toys. I'm putting the whole Planet of the Apes collection on eBay and ridding myself of it.

Simpler.

Anyway good to be back.

Planning to recover from chastity and sobriety over the hot

Chicago summer. So if you ever feel Bacchanalian let's do some such.

Stop.

Light a candle

close your eyes

count to ten,

again

concentrate on breathing until you forget that

you're

counting

wherever you may be

just

be

hope this email is still your email and all your limbs are intact etc.

Saw some Pine Top Perkins this weekend at Rosa's.

Amazingly alive 89-year-old bluesman tearing up the piano.

Which reminds me you loaned me some Bukowski,

Play the Piano Drunk Until My Fingers Bleed a Bit

or something like that. It was at the top of a box I opened this morning.

Meant to give it back to you before I left.

So anyway, if you didn't leave town on some amazing transatlantic transpacific adventure and weren't befallen by some catastrophe of consequence pong back my ping.

Talk soon,

Jack

Date: Tue, 25 Jun 2002 02:08:40

Subject: Jealous

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

Regino,

Every time the tortuous thought comes to mind

that I will nevermore

see the lady I will always mourn,

my memory dredges up such grief

swelling within my heart,

that I must ask, "Why linger here, my soul?"

The torments you will be subjected to

in this life which you already detest,

weigh heavily on my terrified mind."

Then calling upon Death,

as I would call upon lovely, soothing Peace,

I say with yearning love: "Please come to me."

And I am jealous of whoever dies.

Susanne

Date: Tue, 25 Jun 2002 17:44:16

Subject: Cease and Desist

From: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

Thanks for the poetry lessons.

We had a thing, that's all.

I have no desire for a further relationship with you.

Please be dignified, and stop, get on with your life.

During the time that you've been apparently despondent with the cessation of our brief romance, I've had two other lovers.

Each of them has made as much or more of a positive impression on me than you have.

Truth be told, I have already more or less forgotten them

Just as I forgot any feelings for you, weeks ago.

I have no time for unnecessary entanglements.

Your choice to send me these increasingly bizarre fragments makes me worry that you may do harm to yourself or others. I've seen too many people flip out in the workplace setting to not take the implications of your increasingly despondent tone seriously.

I hesitate to take legal action -- that would be embarrassing for both of us. I don't want this to get ugly.

They have hotlines for this sort of thing, Susanne. If you're ever really feeling low, just pick up the phone. Call someone. Just don't call me.

But stop now.

Take a deep breath.

And then never, ever, write to me again.

Get on with your life (already).

Regine

Date: Wed, 26 Jun 2002 08:01:01

Subject: Recv'd

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: freddyfingers@treemail.com

Fred,

I got your telegram yesterday, and it is singing to me now.

I expect a Hermetic day of messengering lies ahead.

Skip

Date: Wed, 26 Jun 2002 10:06:50

Subject: From the Unemployment Notebook

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

[for Skip]

[certain recent passages torn from my palmtop notebook]

DVD RENTAL #1

From Hell (2000)

An adaptation of the Jack the Ripper Story by the Hughes Brothers

starring Johnny Depp

***+

An orgy of blood and research. The Hughes brothers are pros at this sort of thing, and you can expect a kind of stylized authenticity from the bros. that you can't get from another directing duo at work today. What I liked best was that they didn't try to tell the TRUE story of the Jack the Ripper murders, but tried to make instead to make the most interesting story SEEM true. And Johnny Depp has to be one of the most talented actors at work today. The bonus material on this DVD can't be beat, including tons of documentary material from two other documentaries and over 20 deleted scenes. Having said that, at the end of the day will this film teach you how to live your life? I think not. In fact it may make you wonder how Western culture got so fucked up that more than a century later we're still fascinated (even have a museum for) these brutal sadistic murders. Is class conflict at the heart of our fascination with this tale of rich powerful men deleting the unfortunate lives of prostitutes in particularly brutal fashion or is it a simple fascination with violence and brutality writ large, the same kind of rubbernecking we see at the site of fatal interstate collisions?

(dream journal)

In this dream Winona Ryder and I steal foodstuffs from an upscale gourmet shop in Los Angeles, absconding with more than a dozen jars of marmite, jellies, jams, relishes, and mango salsas. Then we run for what seems like hours, until we arrive at a football field, where we tear off each other's clothes (and Winona is wearing about 15 layers), rub the assorted stickiness all over each other in a kind of mock tribal ritual, and then we rut, as the Simple Minds sing "Don't You Forget About Me" in the background. At night I wake up with the sheets soaking wet and a freight train running through the middle of my head.

DVD RENTAL #2

Dead Man (1995)

A Western by Jim Jarmusch

Starring Johnny Depp

This is kind of I think a retelling of the Odyssey wrapped in the kind of anti-Western mode of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* wrapped in a layer of *Blazing Saddles* as illustrated by R. Crumb in black and white with a dash of Native American philosophy. Jarmusch's "Stupid White Man" is more archetypal than Michael Moore's. A film that bespeaks the banality of evil that surrounds us. And what can we say about Johnny Depp? He's one of the few actors that women swoon for who I can tolerate (Brad Pitt is usually passable at best and Richard Gere couldn't act his way out of a box). A wonder that this one isn't on more top ten lists. A must-see.

AT THE CUBS GAME

Saturday June 22nd

A bizarre day, Skipo. The game was scheduled to start at 2:05. And they're usually amazingly punctual with these things. There was speculation in the stands that the late start has something to do with the fact that FOX SPORTS NET is running the telecast and that bundles of dollars are being hurled towards the Tribune corporation in order that the cubscardinalsgame not start while FOX is the midst of broadcasting the 10th inning heroics of some other probably more important game. I call friends on cellfone to brag about spending my Saturday thus. By 2:30, a logical switchover point, it becomes clear that something is amiss, awry, that all is not right in Wrigleyville. Then a weeping man, I find out later it is the Cubs catcher and player's union rep, addresses the crowd, apologizing, tells us that the game has been cancelled due to a tragedy in the Cardinals family. The crowd's thoughts turn to terrorism and there's a kind of somber pit-in-

stomach-dropping, everyone looking around at each other, wondering if the other shoe has chosen this Saturday to drop. Turns out that Darryl Kile, a 33-year-old pitcher, was found dead around noon in his hotel room. My parents and I drink Old Style all afternoon in the Billy Goat, discussing mortality with each other and a bunch of Cardinals fans. My mother, who works in a church, mentions that 6 of the last 8 bodies they've moved from the altar to the burial plot have been people under 40, which is unusual. Which makes me want to suck the marrow from the bone of life as it were. Quick figuring though -- there were 40,000 people in the ballpark who each wasted 30 minutes, which makes for a 20,000 hour tribute to Kile. You add on top of that the hundreds and hundreds of hours of media coverage of his death, absorbed by millions of people, and by my quick count, more total time/attention has been paid to this pitcher in the few short days since his death than during the entirety of his life. Which is a strange kind of afterlife.

(dream journal)

Skip, I hesitate to recount this one. In it you and I are cellmates in jail, I think Cook County, there's just the two of us. You are enormous and I am small. You are calling me "Nancy" and are in the process of preparing to viliate me. You are applying Vaseline to your engorged member, nodding your head as you slowly stroke and I tell you story after story, prolonging the time between that time and the inevitable, manufacturing stories of my youth in a lumbering camp? as a form of delay. You are nodding, nodding, waiting to get your thing in edgewise. I am Scheherazade spinning tales, Penelope weaving threads. The dream thankfully ends before the stories do. And what the hell does this mean? Am I homophobic? Such as you were preparing for in this dream is about violence and power, not about sex. And why of all the possible figures who could have figured in were you the aggressor?

AT MONTROSE BEACH

Monday June 24th

How does one situate oneself at the beach? In the past I have largely avoided them for reasons I myself cannot explain, at least in part owing to my milkywhite complexion that sears under the force of postgreenhouseeffect Chicago's Juneswoon. Yet this summer I've already made it to the beach twice, a bratwurst in floral trunks roasting in the sun. I suppose I situate myself on the basis of the view, both of the blue lake and the sailboats and also of the seeming pleasantness or unpleasantness of neighbors. I guess there I don't know quite what I mean. It's not that I try to plop myself in front of bathing beauties, Joyce's Gertie, or that I try strenuously to avoid such, as much as I try to avoid the sand-hurling children and highschoolers playfully prankpulling. Montrose Beach has gotten enormous with the lake lowering. There is a full sand soccer field behind me, filled with South Korean and Mexican boys. By the way, last week I was at North Avenue beach, which is overwhelmingly white and healthy, sex and sexuality everywhere you turn. Montrose Beach on the other hand is the most integrated spot I've seen in Chicago. I hear seven different languages over the course of the afternoon. There is a Russian couple to my right, English duo at two o'clock, African Americans at 1, Serbs at 11, Puerto Ricans at 10 and a Japanese woman to my right who sits by herself smoking cigarettes and laughing at the Mexican boys burying each other in the sand. It's very difficult to describe the sensation of jumping into the lake, which stays around 40 Fahrenheit, when it's 92 Fahrenheit and so humid that you stick to yourself. But it's refreshing, Skip, refreshing, mercury levels be damned. Having noted that it's illegal to drink alcoholic beverages at the beach (LOUD SIGNS THREATENING ARREST) I have lugged my enormous coleman filled with ice and a sixpack of Coke and a redwinevinagrette subway club sandwich out here and secreted a pint of Jack Daniels in the bag with my shorts and underwear. I've just finished my third Jack and Coke when a cop (in full flack jacket that pig must be toasty) walks up, points to the cooler and says "You wouldn't happen to have liquor in there wouldya?" and I shake my head and pop the cover, revealing cocacola and subwayleavings. He walks on without even thinking of the bag with the shorts and underwear (and why would he, there's no probable cause to search my underwear at the beach--EVER) and I feel that unique pleasure of escaping the long arm of the law. The

father of the Mexican boys is not so lucky, he is cuffed and taken away for the crime of cerveza. What kind of a sick society do we live in where a man can't drink a beer at the beach without premeditated subterfuge? I read *Fast Eddie, King of the Bees* all afternoon long.

BOOK REVIEW

Fast Eddie, King of the Bees

Robert Arellano

with Illustrations by Mark Bennet

Fast fun finicky fulsome foundling fiction. Egregious gregarious deeply Oedipal dystopic Dickensian romp. Postcyberpunk Victorian bildungsroman (Dungs?roman) big dig gig. Comic tragic tale told graffiti fingersweat pop top hip hop. Thinly veiled parody of Providence politick. Note that the mayor is getting sent away but that the populous re-elected him. Beantown bash Jersey joke Applejack cider for the soul. A must read. Beachbook blast bitchin boobobsessed brotherhood of Orpheus orphans. Also, flip the book backwards to see the bee dance.

(dream journal)

Is it normal to see your friends naked in your dreams? What about fucking? Is it normal to see your friends fucking in your dreams? Is it normal to see your married friends fucking each other in your dreams? Is it normal to see your married friends fucking each other and not their partners in your dreams like some kind of late 70s updike swapping narrative? Is it normal to see your friends fucking famous painters in your dreams? Did Van Gogh and Gaugin ever see each other fuck in their dreams? Is it normal to see your

friends fucking Picasso in a dreamscape painted by Chagall? Is that normal?

DVD RENTAL #3

Waking Life

A Film by Richard Linklater

The computeraided Rotoscoping technique is worth the price of the rental in itself. Mindblowing visuals. T. Leary would love it. Beyond that I probably liked *Slackers* better the first time I saw it don't get me wrong there's some moments of pristine parody here, the film basically takes you on this kaleidoscopic journey through the majority of late 20th Century thought I guess playfully pointing out that Signifier or Nothing, Derrida is going to do little to help you live your life and that we thinkers are basically useless when it comes to what's what but so what man, anyway amazing that the script got through and occasionally bold like the Nietzschean nihilist setting himself on fire unabashedly antilinearlinear so rent it but in spite of the stunning visuals don't expect the same shock of recognition as was offered by *Slackers*.

[end torn pages]

[shut down palmtop notebook]

[by closing cover]

So anyway, to answer your question, that's what I've been up to.

And also, good to hear of Sid.

Five for fifty seems fair, especially give your promise of a bonus sixth.

See you tonight then,

Simon

Date: Wed, 26 Jun 2002 13:43:09

Subject: Want to have sex?

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

Upon reflection and reconsideration, I think that some of my earlier comments to you were harsh. Also, thank you for the way that you've studiously ignored me at Starbucks. Your nervous schoolboy's awkward dash into the bathroom this morning the moment I arrived in the latté line was particularly charming.

For essentially therapeutic reasons of my own having little or nothing to do with you, by the chance arrangement of emails in my inbox, I'd like to propose that we have sex this Saturday night at the Palmer House Hotel.

I don't want you to misunderstand this.

I'm not interested in getting involved with you.

I'd just like to have sex with you -- one time only.

In my mind, I probably won't even technically be having sex with "you."

You'll be a physical manifestation of the abstract concept of "fucking a man" only.

I'll primarily be fucking you as catharsis, as revenge.

I do have a few conditions:

1. Your certification via email that you neither have nor have had in the past any venereal diseases I should know about.
2. You will be responsible for ample birth control protection, both condom and spermicidal cream.
3. Prior to our act of congress, we will go out for the below-offered Italian meal. We will eat well and drink expensive red wine. You will pick up the tab. I've made reservations at the Italian Village for 8:15 PM.
4. I will pick up the tab for the hotel room.
5. Outside of your emailed response, you will not contact me in person either before or after Saturday night. You should continue to avoid and not disturb me when I am drinking my morning coffee.
6. Neither you nor I will stay the entire night in the hotel room. We will leave, separately, after we are done.

I hope that you are clean and that you will have no expectations. Also to be clear: it is exclusively by chance that I have chosen you for this function. If your friend Berto

weren't in the hospital, I'd choose him over you in a heartbeat. But here we are and there you have it.

Please confirm,

Susanne

Date: Thu, 27 Jun 2002 10:30:00

Subject: Yes

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Dear Susanne,

What a night to pick to not check my email!

An old friend of mine, Sid, was in town last night, and so I avoided the humachinterface successfully for the last 24 hours. Sid has left me blearyeyed and sore from our indulgences. My apologies for not getting to the email sooner.

And now there are 14 messages in my inbox. A man in Lagos urgently requires my assistance in some financial matters. I need to make a deposit in his account, after which he'll double my money. Pitney Bowles wants me to purchase all my postage online. Someone is fervently recommending a German Rape Sex! site to me. Clearance at Overstock.com wants me to buy clean white sheets. Travelocity wants me to travel to Orlando. Hilton wants to give me points for staying in their hotel while I'm there, and Expedia just made a counteroffer for my business from Travelocity, only to be preempted by American, which is luring me with miles.

But forget all that spam.

WOW!

You want to have sex

(with me)

While I'm typically a romantic, the candlelit dinner for two, flowers and moonlit strolls type of guy, your requirements suit me fine. I mean I'm not a fatalist, so I'm not quite sure that I can jump in with no hopes for something with more duration than one tryst, but certainly I'll have no expectations.

NO VD here. This whistle is clean.

I will break open my piggy bank and you order whatever you want from the menu. Vino only the best. And I'm not the type to object to a lady picking up a hotel room after we have sex in it.

I just hope that I can fulfill your needs/desires in the allotted time frame.

WHOOPEE!

See you at the Italian Village.

I really hope this isn't one of my crueller friends playing some kind of joke.

But I am suspending my sense of disbelief.

Beautiful,

Skip

Date: Thu, 27 Jun 2002 17:22:23

Subject: I spent yesterday with Sid

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: freddyfingers@treemail.com

Fred,

Thanks for sending Sid my way.

My thanks and regards to Tree and the rest of the Rainbow People.

You're a lifesaver.

Sid visited twice yesterday and ever since I've seen life in a new shining light. Amazing things are happening to me, Fred, truly amazing things. I haven't felt this good since the Enron shit started coming down.

Yesterday I took Sid with my morning coffee.

Sid came with me to work.

Sid was riding with me, on the handlebars, all day long.

Sid really kicked in around noon.

Some folks, I'm sure, would get nervous about operating their TREK 7200 at high velocity while Sid is around.

But Sid was clean, Fred, Sid was clarity.

The bike and I became one living organism. I could feel the knobs of my Bontrager tires gripping the asphalt. My spine and the aluminum frame were one. My nerves were twitching in the Shimano derailleur.

At one point I nearly expired when Tom Cruise's fingers in VR gloves on a Minority Report billboard on the side of a CTA bus flew out from the advertisement towards my head as if to flick off my helmet, enormous digits reaching for me.

Around lunchtime while I was making a delivery near Daley Plaza the crowd became an actualized river of flesh. Bike and I and Sid were moving through its currents, weaving S curves around its eddies.

All I needed to remember to say was "Sign Here." I think a few times I may have said, "Rind Beer" "Hi Near" and "Bind Rear." At one point my jaw was pretty slack and I was reduced to pointing emphatically.

The shades stayed firmly affixed.

One receptionist was briefly a Medusa, the next a Cyclops.

After work Sid and I renewed our acquaintance and went to the Lincoln Park Zoo.

There were green alligators and long necked geese, cats and rats and elephants and above all chimpanzees.

I spent much of my early evening in the monkeyhouse communicating with one of the subordinate males who had the face and soul of my grandfather.

Anyway, it was good to see Sid. Many of my friends haven't seen Sid for a long time and our time during this visit will pass very quickly. We're hoping to see more of him. I'd happily make the trip up to the farm in Wisconsin to bring Sid back to Chicago for a

longer stay.

Thanks again for making the Sid arrangements.

Hope to see you and Sid again soon,

Skip

Date: Thu, 27 Jun 2002 17:38:10

Subject: Go Easy

From: freddyfingers@treemail.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

You're always welcome up on the farm.

Go easy on with mentioning our friend in email tho. Fewer explicit references the better.

With Carnivore and Al Qaeda and all that we can't be too careful about what we say even with the kind of encryption technology I regularly employ. Never know what might end up on Uncle Ashcroft's desk.

Just drop a note when you want to come up and we'll have a fish broil in your honor.

Fred

Date: Sat, 29 Jun 2002 00:11:32

Subject: Little Red Corvette

From: ernestonotcom@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

This afternoon I sold the LITTLE RED CORVETTE. '96 model, sitting on the lot for months, for as long as I've been working there, since the STONE AGE.

Which put me OVER QUOTA. Which should put me Jessie Jeffie and HOPEFULLY Darlene in Chicago around about August 1st. Which should me that you me and the kids will go see the Rockies beat the Cubs at Wrigley on AUGUST 2nd.

ASSUMING that is that you're no longer INSTITUTIONALIZED at that time. OR at least that they will LET YOU OUT for an afternoon.

Docs say you're TALKING now, which is good.

But Docs say you're not talking TO THEM, which is bad.

Your Doc, you should know this, called my Doc, who cross-referenced my HISTORY with your HISTORY and furthermore with "dad"'s HISTORY.

My guess is with me CLINICALLY DEPRESSED and "dad" DIAGNOSED SCHIZOPHRENIC the Docs are trying to place you somewhere in between.

Docs say that you're SPEAKING only THROUGH a man name Pedro, who you call SANCHO.

Which makes me remember the times that "dad" would read to us from DON QUIXOTE

and worry that that somehow FUCKED US UP. And that somehow you're retreating into this.

Docs say that they're OBSERVING this for the time being, but will probably PUT A STOP TO IT SOON because it's interfering with their TREATMENT of Pedro, who has problems of his own, Berto. That guy EATS HUMAN FLESH.

Just kidding. He's just a guilt-ridden transvestite who can't cope with the voices he's picking up on some other frequency.

COME ON, you're in the middle, you've always been more STABLE than your SISTER or for that matter ME and IT'S SCARING THE SHIT OUT OF ME that you aren't responding to email. you never do that.

ANYWAY we are coming out there start of August. I BOOKED THE TICKETS which pissed off Darlene. She doesn't understand the URGENCY of this. Though she loves you you know that. BUT FUCK IT BERTO.

You're going to snap out of this.

We'll dine on roasted PIG LIPS AND ASSHOLES slathered in mustard. and drink OLD STYLE IN THE SUN until our skins are pink and we'll laugh about our schedules of medications.

Jeff is looking forward.

DO DON't do the don quixote routine if that's what you're doing.

the man had us CHASING WINDMILLS for most of our natural lives.

HAS US?

Wicked dry heat N THE DESERT 2night.

LOVING LIFE.

Little Red Corvette.

YOUR BIG FUCKING BROTHER,

ErNest0

Date: Sat, 29 Jun 2002 15:11:54

Subject: Tonight, Tonight

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

Just a note to say I'm looking forward to tonight.

Was just out walking the lakefront. 75, no humidity, one of those perfect days, like a gift from the gods. Smiling on us. I bought a mango from an elotés vendor on the street, and as its sweet juice mingled with the taste of lime and salt danced across my taste buds I thought of you.

Can't wait to see you tonight.

Skip

(s a beat)

Date: Sat, 29 Jun 2002 16:08:32

Subject: Kind of Blue

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

"I think a movement in jazz is beginning [getting] away from the conventional string of chords and a return to an emphasis on melodic, rather than harmonic variation. There will be fewer chords but infinite possibilities as to what to do with them."

--Miles Davis

Sid and I sat up on the room as the sunrise came up over the lake this morning. Miles Davis "So What" in the headphones. Thanks for bringing Sid around again.

Simon

Date: Mon, 01 Jul 2002 13:56:14

Subject: SO HOT

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Dear Susanne,

It is so hot and humid that I'm sticking not only to myself but to the entire city of Chicago. can barely think in this heat much less flow through traffic (**angry traffic**) people have no patience for cyclists when there's a 103 heat index). I hope you're staying cool.

Can you imagine life before A/C?

I think I would have worked in an ice-house.

I'm filled with thoughts of you . . .

(I know, I've tried to restrain myself from writing but there/here it is)

snapshots:

- O Sole Mio over Shrimp Casalinga and Vigna di Pian Rosso in our gondola
- The mindblowing connexion to Regine (the bitch [excuseme])
- The cut of your black dress, the candlelight dancing shadows across the nape of your neck, your bare shoulderblades as you turned towards the waiter and ordered the Veal Piccata.
- Laughter over Tiramisu.
- Splattering cappuccino across my shirtcuff, distracted by the events on the immanent horizon
- The doorman with the comically raised eyebrow.
- Your exquisite taste in lingerie.
- The first time.
- Your love of the unusual, the daring, the
- Second time.

- The idyll of spooning.
- Again, more slowly this time.
- Our fingers brushing as we hailed separate cabs in the haze of the early morning night.

LET'S DO IT AGAIN SOON

there I've said it.

I think we have much in common and that that which we don't have in common delights.

No pressure, just to say it was wonderful, and I would be evergrateful for its recurrence.

Also I hope the flowers weren't too much.

But god am I dying to see you again.

Skip

Date: Mon, 01 Jul 2002 14:16:19

Subject: Girl, 4, accidentally shot, killed by her brother, 7

From: jackdmonk@enteract.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto--

The background violence of American life has become a pervasive hum in my inner ear, more and more audible with each passing day. Incomprehensible savagery buzzes on the periphery of every waking moment. Were we to listen carefully to the white noise around us, we would hear thousands of individual souls screaming in torment and we would

become paralyzed with grief.

--Jack

A 4-year-old girl was accidentally shot and killed Sunday night by her 7-year-old brother while they were playing with their grandfather's gun, Chicago police said. The shooting took place in the family's apartment above El Progreso grocery store, 3937 W. 31st St., which is operated by the grandfather, Capt. Fred Konet said. The family kept the gun for protection from robbery in their store. The girl was pronounced dead at the scene, police said.

Date: Tue, 02 Jul 2002 12:12:36

Subject: Rude

From: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

Your recent pornographic play-by-play email recounting your weekend encounter with my former employee (who is by the way a thief a liar and a sub-par copywriter--goodie for you) was simply rude. I believe I asked that you stop contacting me some time ago. Keep it up and I play hardball.

Away,

Regine

Date: Wed, 03 Jul 2002 13:01:26

Subject: Jesus Loves You

From: ocgodislove1@aol.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Dearest Berto,

I have received a terrible letter from our unfortunate brother Ernesto that, in the few lines where it was not cruelly assailing me for my belief in the teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, gives testament of your awful predicament.

I know that we haven't corresponded as much as I'd like in recent years, largely due to the fact that your eyes have been veiled from the light, but I did want to write that I love you and am sending prayers for your speedy recovery.

This is very strange, writing you like this in front of this machine, but Ernesto says this is the only way you will see the message.

To me, all this emailing ends up with a lot of letters coming from the void, from nothingness. We don't have a computer in our home. I don't want to expose Timmy to the Sodom and Gomorrah of internet pornography, which is stealing the innocence of thousands of children each and every day. With Christ, we live a simple life.

Berto, in your hour of darkness, as you are asking who you can turn to, I ask you to turn to our Lord and our Shepard. Jesus is the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in HIM shall never die.

Belief in the Lord centers your life, brings you back to that which is important.

I would love to come visit you yet I know Berto that the city with all its evils and temptation, your Chicago with its dark towers rising like the Tower of Babel in all its iniquity, is half the reason you find yourself in your current troubles.

I have spoken with Thomas, however, and we would like for you to come stay with us for

a while. We live a simple life, but we have ample room, food, raiment and love for you. Thomas could find work for you in the shop, and I know that Timmy would love to get to know his uncle. Maybe if you were to stay with us, you might come to understand the power of accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, the power of letting God into your life.

There is an option, Berto. You are our family and we will always love you, regardless of whether your soul lives in heaven or is banished to hell. Have faith in God and HE will pull you through.

Love,

Olivia

PSALM 142

Malachi of David; A Prayer When He was in the Cave.

I CRIED unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication.

I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble.

When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked men have privily laid a snare for me.

I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.

I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.

Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass about me; for thou shall deal bountifully with me.

Date: Thu, 04 Jul 2002 01:04:16

Subject: COOOOOL

From: jefftrocks@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Uncllle BERTO,

Really happy coming to see you soon and WRIGLEY FIELD which ROCKS at least yougot 1 ALLSTAR SMMYsosa tho he leves men onbase. It is totly AWESOME that we r comin to see you.DADsasleep and Lertin me an jess use theinternet all night long.mom will be homesoon.

I hoope yous till kno KARATE becausesome skinhead firthgreders tryd to beet meup today, it sucked s undlle Berto, theysaid we live arounddd africanamericans and the skinz called my mom a name icant say.totallyracist and mean and they tried to setal my lucnh monee whicxh suckedf because thenidn't get to eet lucnh.

CAN:T WIAT FOR THE CUBS GAMEand di hpe you can give me someKarate lessns.

]

hope your ancle is feelng better.

JEFF

Date: Thu, 04 Jul 2002 01:13:23

Subject: No Fish Broil Necessary

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: freddyfingers@treemail.com

But if you're doing you're usual fishbroil bonfire and barndance routine for the 4th wkend

I'll make the drive up tomorrow night after I take care of a couple errands. See you soon, Fred. Let me know if you're gonna be out of town but I'm betting, hoping.

Skip

Date: Thu, 04 Jul 2002 01:15:14

Subject: Re: No Fish Broil Necessary

From: freddyfingers@treemail.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Just finished setting up the yard.

We are creatures of habit round here.

We wouldn't let the bombsburstinginair get in the way of a good time.

Seeyou2morrow

Fred

Date: Mon, 08 Jul 2002 11:18:37

Subject: Again

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

Why not . . .

Have you ever eaten at Café Le Loup? Want to meet for dinner and possibly extracurricular activities Wednesday night?

If you're good I'll show you my apartment.

(all distance remaining in effect)

Susanne

Date: Mon, 08 Jul 2002 11:24:32

Subject: Engagement Party

From: jackdmonk@enteract.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

Your sister just got engaged

You fire your gun in the air

You whoop and holler

You dance with your great aunt

(You're free to do that now)

God Bless America

N 2 ton bomb

Sends up a wall of fire and

The bride and groom are

Incinerated

Grandma is splattered across

The cake, the giggling

Cousins are roasted before

Your eyes and the newsmedia

Report

Collateral

Damage

Before turning

To other sports

Jack

Date: Mon, 08 Jul 2002 11:50:57

Subject: Small Plane

From: ernestonotcom@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

Just so you know, that SMALL PLANE CRASH

didn't hit our TRAILER PARK

and we were nowhere near LAX

during the LATEST Terrorist INCIDENT

even we here in the LOS ANGELES area

were relieved the FESTIVITIES went

off without a HITCH aside from

A COUPLE BODIES at the EL-AL counter.

JEFF loved the ROMAN CANDLES and we

BLEW UP some old toys the kids don't

PLAY with anymore with some M-80s,

(Jessie doesn't like fireworks but she thought

THE SPARKLERS WERE MAGICAL)

we ROASTED hotdogs over an OPEN FIRE

(there was a big bonfire and country music)

AT THE TRAILER PARK COMMONS

SEE WHAT YOU'RE MISSING IN THERE?????!

hope they at least gave you a

SLICE OF WATERMELON or

SOMETHING in there

BIG BRO PUL::LING FOR YOUR (re)COVERy,

ErNESTo

Date: Mon, 08 Jul 2002 11:56:17

Subject: Again, yes Again

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

Le Loup. That's on Sheffield? I'm on for that, yes definitely, wetting my chops at the thought. Like 7:30PM?

So glad you want this too,

Skip

Date: Mon, 08 Jul 2002 12:07:24

Subject: SID IS BACK IN TOWN

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com, bigwig@harrynet.com, sue@freak.net, tabbi@lic.org and 8 others

Dear Simon et al.

SID IS BACK, he's BIG, he's BAD, he's CLEAN, he's THE BEST I'VE SEEN HIM IN YEARS.

HE's AVAILABLE NOW, for a LIMITED ENGAGEMENT, IN QUANTITY.

call for an appointment today,

Skip

Date: Tue, 09 Jul 2002 22:40:06

Subject: The Blue Period

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

The Blue Period marked the end of Picasso's juvenilia and the beginning of his professional career as an artist. During the Blue Period -- roughly 1901-1904 -- young

Picasso was searching for a style of his own. During these early years, Picasso painted prolifically and voraciously. Friends report that Picasso spent the bulk of his waking hours during his early twenties painting and drawing, using the sketches he drew during the day to fuel the stove in his apartment at night.

Picasso's work during this time shows little of the radical abstraction dominant during his cubist period and after. Centering on themes of loss, suffering and desolation, they evidence the young painter finding a subject matter in the streets around him. Though Picasso's early work had already been well received in exhibitions in Madrid and Malaga, during this period Picasso was himself destitute, and had a very difficult time making his rent and other debts. During 1901 and 1902, there were general strikes in Barcelona, and much of the city's population was destitute and unemployed. These rumblings of discord would eventually lead to the 1909 riots, and decades later to the 1931 left-wing ascendance followed by the 1936 beginning of the Spanish Civil War, the harsh violence and injustice of which Picasso would later record in "Guernica".

It was also during this period that Picasso's friendship with the poet Jaime Sabartés flourished. At the time the two circulated in the same bohemian circle in Barcelona. Sabartés initially occupied by himself by caring for his grandfather in Barcelona. In 1899 however his own eyesight failed to near-blindness to the point that he could be of little use in a caretaker capacity. He struggled to find his own voice as a poet but found himself in awe of the obvious talent of his friend and contemporary Picasso. Perhaps shifting from one caretaker role to another, Sabartés would thereafter, until the end of his days, dedicate the majority of his energies to advancing the career of Picasso. He took on a role of managing Picasso's business affairs, managing his exhibitions, even of waking Picasso each morning. In 1935, Picasso formally asked Sabartés to play the role of his secretary, though in fact, Sabartés had been functioning as such for the prior two decades.

Sabartés would later claim to be the "progenitor of Blue period 'blueness'." One of the first paintings that most place in the Blue Period, "The Glass of Beer-Portrait of Jamie Sabartés" (1901), now hanging in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow may lend some

credence to his claim. The picture is a stark, dour portrait of Sabartés, striking a tone of desolation, which Sabartés would later refer to as the "specter of (my) solitude." As a kind of dark joke, Picasso painted this portrait using the body of Sabartés, but substituted the poet's head for that of Casas Casegemas, who had recently committed suicide in the Café L'Hippodrome over a failed love affair. Sabartés was reportedly not in the least upset by the juxtaposition. Other friends reported that Sabartés had the devotion towards Picasso that that Trappist monks have towards God, or that heroin addicts have towards the drug, and that he was able to find joy in few things other than Picasso. Sabartés was known to wear black garb and to sport mournful, almost tragic expression.

Picasso's Blue Period paintings owe a debt to El Greco's elongated forms and hallucinatory spaces. Picasso was suffused in the atmosphere of Spanish tragedy that surrounded him in the earliest days of 20th Century Barcelona. In 1901 the poet Rilke married one of Auguste Rodin's pupils, the young sculptress, Klara Westhoff, and Giuseppe Verdi died in Milan, while Pablo y Ruiz Picasso explored the nature of life in blue, through somber eyes that while yet a touch naïve manage never to escape towards bathos. Art historians remark that during this time we see a shift in Picasso's tone towards his subjects, from satirical tone to one of tender empathy with his subjects.

"The Blue Guitarist" (1903), hanging here at the Art Institute of Chicago, which I visited this afternoon with Sid, has become known as the archetypal work of Picasso's Blue Period. The old guitarist, a blind man playing in a dark corner of the city, has perhaps just finished a song. His skeletal frame looks tired, beaten, almost dead. He looks like he's about to pass out from lack of sleep and malnutrition, or that the song has taken his somewhere else, somewhere far from the street corner, somewhere where he lingers in a melancholy kind of blue. A sad song, an indelibly sad song, is finished, and he rests.

Simon

Date: Wed, 10 Jul 2002 00:00:48

Subject: Wanted to Say

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: jackdmonk@enteract.com

Jack,

I wanted to say:

That NY Times article you forwarded me yesterday about the engagement party massacre in Afghanistan in particular this paragraph:

"Around her in the orchard, there was unspeakable gore. A woman's torso had landed in one of the small almond trees. Human flesh was still hanging on the tree five days after the attack, and more putrifying remains were tangled in the branches of a pomegranate tree, its bright scarlet flowers still blooming."

reminds me of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica."

Also, Sid is in town if you're looking.

Skip

Date: Wed, 10 Jul 2002 10:27:41

Subject: Corporate MOTHERFUCKERS

From: ernestonotcom@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

All the NEWS lately about the CORPORATE MOTHERFUCKERS has got me THINKING about what a JOKE the American economy has been for the last DECADE.

After my WORLD DISINTEGRATED when uknow.com went bust, a HUGE SILICON CHIP on my SHOULDER went flying off. I used to think I was HOT SHIT, UNTOUCHABLE, a NEW ECONOMY WUNDERKIND. But in the end, after my LITTLE BREAKDOWN, I came to realize that I was just SOME SCHMUCK swimming in the river, just like THE REST OF US. And IF THE RIVER WAS WHISKEY I would be diving down.

AND toDAY? I measure my existence, my welfare and that of my FAMILY, car by car. THE '94 MAZDA MIATA I moved this morning and the '98 LINCOLN TOWN CAR I hope to move before lunch. Could I HAVE A BETTER JOB? I think I could, I mean I'm CAPABLE of MUCH BETTER THINGS. But will I leave this job to WANDER THE WILDERNESS OF THE FUTURE AND ITS POTENTIALITIES? I don't think so, not just nowow.

AND THAT FUCKWAD Bush giving Wall Street his little lecture on CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY failing to mention that during his CEO days he was doing the SAME FUCKING THINGS as your Enron Worldcom Tyco Martha Stewart type CROOKS are doing now. The FOX is GUARDING THE HENHOUSE, so we can all REST ASSURED.

Some say that IRONY BECAME A THING OF THE PAST on 9/11. I think that's BULLSHIT. IF IRONY HAS LEFT THE SCENE, it happened back around the TIME OF THE ELECTION, when that TEXAS YALIE and his goons on the SUPREME COURT managed to steal what they COULDN'T WIN. What is the point of IRONY when you have that kind of TWIST sitting in the OVAL OFFICE telling us about CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY?! The IRONY IS ON THE SURFACE NOW.

So anyway, WHY HAVEN'T YOU FUCKING WRITTEN ME BACK?

Doc's say you're reading this, so I don't feel like I'M HOWLING DOWN A TUNNEL WITH NO ONE ON THE OTHER END, but still, I could use you now, Berto.

I think that Darlene might be having an affair. I HAVE NO EVIDENCE but I noticed a CHANGE IN THE WAY SHE SMELLS. And I LOVE THAT WOMAN more than life itself, I DON'T KNOW what I would do if it were true. And then I think SHIT THIS IS JUST ANOTHER SIGN OF MY PARANOIA and that MAYBE MY PROBLEMS go deeper than SIMPLE CLINICAL DEPRESSION. Maybe whatever BUG YOU GOT I GOT TOO. So I'm not going to SEEK OUT EVIDENCE, instead I'm going to BUY HER SOME FLOWERS tonight after work and hope that my equiLIBRIUM holds.

But anyway, when the news is talking about corporate responsibility, I think about how they don't mention that MY LITTLE BROTHER GOT ENRONIZED into the PSYCH WARD and I GET ANGRY.

SO HANG IN THERE,

Ernesto

Date: Thu, 11 Jul 2002 12:21:16

Subject: CLIENT ASSESSMENT REPORT #46892

From: debarthelme@rush.edu

To: mentalhealth.autofiler@rush.edu, tabitha_moran@rush.edu

RUSH PRESBYTERIAN HEALTH NETWORK

Department of Mental Health

ASSESSMENT FOR PATIENT #46892

DATE: 7/11/02

NAME: Berto Tazar

SSN: 327-90-0666

REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE: Self

ADDRESS: 4097 N. Lakeshore Drive, Suite 7082

DOB: 4/18/65

AGE: 37

SEX: M

RACE/ETHNICITY: Cauc

MARITAL STATUS: Single

PRESENTING PROBLEMS

Chief Complaint: Delusions

Symptom Inventory: Anhedonia, Anxiety, Behavior Problems (see notes), Compulsions, Delusions, Depressed Mood, Grief, Low Self-Esteem, Memory Problems, Paranoia, Poor Judgement, Ruminations, Sleep Problems, Other (Extreme paranoia leads patient to refusal to communicate directly with therapists, will communicate only "through" patient Pedro Vasquez, whom he calls "Sancho.")

HISTORY OF PRESENT ILLNESS

Multiple stress factors including loss of employment & unrequited love preceded patient's descent into a delusional state. Patient, a copywriter by trade, began writing fantastical email messages to friends and casual acquaintances describing a journey in the past, to 14th Century medieval Italy. What may have started as a healthy distraction from stress

factors soon became obsessive behavior. As they become more and more violent, his medieval fantasies also became the sole focus of his existence. Patient remained indoors for several weeks, drawing and writing email, became increasingly withdrawn from his social contacts, and ceased his search for new employment. His delusions culminated in a violent attack on one of his friends, Skip Valent, who later admitted the patient. At the time of his admittance, patient exhibited signs of autism, slack jaw, glazed eyes, and a total lack of communication with admitting staff. He soon thereafter however exhibited a violent mood swing, challenging staff to a "joust" after grabbing hold of an orderly's broom. After this episode, patient was put in restraints, and resumed his feigned catatonia. Patient was released from restraints 72 hours later. Patient refuses to communicate with staff, but is reading email messages sent to him by friends and family members. Patient does speak (conspiratorially) with fellow patient Pedro Vasquez, who will be transferred early next week to a long-term facility.

HISTORY OF PAST PSYCHIATRIC TREATMENT

None

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Current drug or past alcohol use: Patient's brother, Ernesto Tazar, reports that Patient is a light drinker and occasional marijuana smoker.

SAFETY

History of suicidal ideation or attempt: None (though patient exhibits signs of self-neglect).

Current suicide risk: Not at this time.

History of homicidal ideation or attempt: Yes (Patient attacked his best friend with a bicycle lock).

Current homicide risk: No? Patient has been generally complacent in the treatment environment, but his delusions vary in intensity.

Risk of other violence (arson, fire, etc.): None while on meds.

PSYCHOSOCIAL HISTORY

Living Arrangement: Private apartment, sole occupant.

Living environment adequate and safe: Yes (though patient has been served eviction notice, so new living arrangements may be necessary).

Significant events in childhood/adolescence/adulthood: As a child patient was physically and verbally abused by father. Said abuse was not of a sexual nature. Patient's father was institutionalized during patient's teenage years. Patient's mother deceased in 1995.

Family History

Substance Abuse: Father (alcoholism, drug addiction), Brother (alcoholism).

Mental Illness: Father (diagnosed schizophrenic), Brother (clinically depressed).

Medical Illness: Mother died of breast cancer, both grandmothers died of cancer (breast, ovarian), grandfathers both died of heart disease.

Past/Present Relationship with Parents: Mother dead, father institutionalized (Woodlawn Mental Health Center, Palo Alto, CA). No discernable present relationship with father.

Past/Present Relationship with Siblings: Strong relationship with brother, Ernesto (residing near Los Angeles, CA). Distant relationship with sister, Olivia (residing near Chattanooga, TN). Both siblings have attempted contact via email. Brother Ernesto has consulted with attending physicians. Brother Ernesto plans to visit at start of August, may help with living arrangements.

Significant Relationship History: Patient had strong relationship with deceased mother. Patient in monthly phone contact with brother, annual contact with sister. Patient alienated from father. Patient never married, but did have string of significant monogamous heterosexual relationships.

Children: None

Family Support: Moderate

Family Members to Involve in Treatment: Brother -- Ernesto Tazar.

Friendships: Yes

close friends: 3-4

casual friends: 10-12

Support From Friends: Moderate (admitted with assistance of friend Skip Valent, three other friends have visited).

Other Social Supports: None

Relationship Problems: Conflict (fallout with best friend preceded hospitalization), Social Isolation (in two months preceding hospitalization, patient had dropped off contact with most of his friends).

Deaths/Losses: Death of mother had significant effect, and patient has suffered from recurring incidents of unrequited love.

Trauma History: yes (childhood verbal/emotional abuse, physical abuse, adulthood verbal/emotional abuse in workplace).

Education: highest grade: BA in English, Italian minor, UCLA

Learning Disabled: No

Academic Achievement Problems: No

Literate: Yes

Work History: Journalist, LA Times (2 years), Barker, Barnum and Bailey Circus (2 Years), copywriter, OGVB Marketing (11 years), currently unemployed.

Military Service: No

History of Legal Problems: No

Guardianship: Self

Religion/Spiritual Beliefs: Buddhist (light practicing)

Primary Language: English

Primary Culture: American

Speaks and Understands English: Yes

Leisure and Recreational Activities: tai chi, creative writing (fiction), videogames, drawing.

Sexually Active: Yes

Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual

Sexual Dysfunction: Unable to determine

MENTAL STATUS

Appropriately Dressed and Groomed: Yes (poor grooming upon admittance,

acceptable since admittance).

Oriented X 3: Person-yes. Place-no. Time-no.

Speech Activity: Soft (when speaking to fellow patient, does not speak to physicians)

Motor Activity: Appropriate

Affect: Blunted

Mood: Sad

Thinking: Tangential

Concentration: Preoccupied

Hallucinations: Unable to determine

Delusions: Yes

Describe: Patient believes that he is imprisoned in 14th Century Italy, and that medical staff are his captors.

Cognitive Functioning/Intelligence: Above average

Reasoning Ability: Confabulatory

Insight: Limited

Motivation: Resistive

Clinician: D. BARTHELME, MD

Date: Thu, 11 Jul 2002 13:01:27

Subject: Do you ever think about revenge?

From: bwalters@newmediastream.net

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

Have you ever thought about getting Regine back for all the shit she did to us at OGVB?

I have, I do think about that quite often.

Bitch wouldn't even write me a letter of reference.

And I hate my fucking new job. I took like a 15K hit climbing back down the ladder.

I had to move to a new (smaller) apartment, and I got no dishwasher, no washer dryer.

So anyway, I know where she lives, what she drives, where she works. She's making about 180K now, did you know that?

I know that I shouldn't waste my time digging up such info, but what are you gonna do?

Anyway, I've got some ideas. I've played and replayed some scenarios.

Nothing serious, I'd just like to give her a decent scare, you know what I mean?

How come it's always the bitches and their sons that end up on top?

Let me know if you're interested,

Benjamin

Date: Thu, 11 Jul 2002 13:16:32

Subject: Against Myself

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

I find no peace, and all my war is done;

I fear and hope, I burn and freeze likewise;

I fly above the wind, yet cannot rise;

And nought I have, yet all the world I seize on;

That looseth, nor locketh, holdeth me in prison,

And holds me not, yet can I 'scape no wise;

Nor lets me live, nor die, at my devise,

And yet of death it giveth none occasion.

Without eyes I see, and without tongue I plain;

I wish to perish, yet I ask for health;

I love another, and yet I hate myself;

I feed in sorrow, and laugh in all my pain;

Lo, thus displeaseth me both death and life,

And my delight is causer of my grief.

Though I hesitate to admit it, I had a great time last night. It was fun getting "tied up" with you.

Susanne

Date: Thu, 11 Jul 2002 13:20:46
Subject: Re: Do you ever think about revenge?
From: skipvskip@hotmail.com
To: bwalters@newmediastream.net

Benjamin,

Living well is the best revenge.

Much as I'd like to see Regine suffer, I console myself with the fact that she'll have to live with herself for the rest of her days. That's good enough for me. And I'm big on cycles. The pigeons do eventually come home to roost.

Skip

Date: Fri, 12 Jul 2002 10:26:51
Subject: Seeking a New Position
From: stephugogirl@kls.com
To: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

Regine,

How are you? Do you remember me? Stephanie, the temp receptionist at OGVB back in the summer of 2000?

I really appreciated the way you took me under your wing, advised me about a woman's options in the world of marketing, the lunches, the night that you took me out for margaritas and my introduction to the ways of Sapphic love.

Anyway, I got a job running traffic at KLS that has been a great learning experience, I've

learned a lot about what goes in and out the door at an agency, but to tell you the truth, that I'm just sick of now, and sort of hitting a glass ceiling and I read in the paper of your recent appointment at BBKVD and I'd love to work in the fastpaced world of tobacco marketing.

I'm a hard worker, you remember, and I would be a valuable member of your team.

So anyway: other updates I dumped my boyfriend and I'm single again just moved to a studio in Andersonville. It would be good to see you.

So I'm going to fax you my resume and I hope you'll consider me for any available positions.

Thank you again for being my mentor,

Steph

Date: Sat, 13 Jul 2002 09:42:38

Subject: Re: Seeking a New Position

From: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

To: stephugogirl@kls.com

Steph,

I do indeed remember you. How wonderful that you've stayed in marketing.

I may indeed be able to find a position for you, though I can't promise anything.

If you're free, why don't you come by my place (Lake Point Tower #2040) tomorrow afternoon and we can look over your resumé.

Bring your bikini. We can go for a swim and have some pizza after.

Regine

Date: Sat, 13 Jul 2002 10:03:10

Subject: All Week Long

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

Since our last meeting I have been a lousy cyclist. I can see the cars, pedestrians, the other messengers, the buildings in front of me but only just barely, I am preoccupied with thoughts of you, your eyes, your neck, your hands, your breasts, your thighs, the candles all round us burning, your taste, your moans, your sighs, your . . .

I miss you and I nearly crash scratch nearly scratch that I crash multiply.

These other objects, these impediments in front of me, seem like clouds, like immaterial things.

Until I fall to the pavement again and realize that I am not in your arms, I am scraped and bleeding instead.

Thank my lucky stars for this helmet, which keeps thoughts of you intact.

And I have crossed out all other obligations for tonight as

I would just be distracted and

I can't think of anything I'd rather do than

spend some time with you.

I've purchased a picnic basket, Susanne. I have two bottles of chardonnay chilling, I have a nice brie to bake, jumbo shrimp on ice, poached salmon, a crunchy baguette, grapes, strawberries, candles and Frango mints, a comfortable blanket and a desire to picnic this evening with you at Ravinia.

I know that this is short notice but I just

want you so bad right now I

could pop.

And I will be thankful even if you crush my heart now for what you have already given me but

would be ever so much more grateful to

even the gods if

you could spend this night with me.

Skip

Date: Sat, 13 Jul 2002 10:09:29

Subject: Thank You!

From: stephugogirl@kls.com

To: reginespersonal@hotmail.com

Regine,

Thank you for the invitation! That sounds like fun!

I'm a little nervous about putting on my bikini -- here it is mid-July and I think I've only been to the beach twice, but if you can tolerate a bit of pasty white skin (or more than a bit, I've put on a few pounds since we last met), I'd love to go for a swim etc.

See you tomorrow! @ your place.

I will bring my resumé.

Steph

Date: Sat, 13 Jul 2002 12:18:51

Subject: Yes

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

I have to run a little errand first. Why don't you pick me up around 6:30PM at the front entrance of Navy Pier?

Bate your breath,

Susanne

Date: Sun, 14 Jul 2002 12:55:02

Subject: The Trouble with the Signifier

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

This is all beside (or maybe astride) the point but I am having trouble with the nature of writing, signification, the meaning of my dreams, the connection between what I write and what I mean, the connection between the films I watch and the music that I listen to, the art I experience, the women I date, the politicians I hate, many things I can't relate.

In other words what the fuck am I doing with my life?

Also, is there an Ur story, a beginning which precedes all beginnings or perhaps more importantly an ending which precedes all beginnings, that is -- without being fatalistic -- is life a story in which the middle is of little consequence? That is -- we have all been born and we will all die and of what matter is what comes between? I know that the existentialists say we are what we do so the beginning and end are of little consequence, what's in between is the matter. And also, I suppose, what one leaves behind. I'm not sure.

But there is no magic bullet, Skip, as far as I can tell. Insofar as we are an evolutionary species have we really evolved that much? I mean we have this technology, I am writing you this message using this technology and using this technology you will read it within perhaps a matter of minutes at the outside a matter of days but really it leaves nothing behind now does it? You will hit the delete key and that will be the end of this.

And then stories, we distract ourselves with stories, we make viewing and reading experiences with stories, we make "objects" out of our stories but are they really OUR stories at all? Really aren't they just a kind of defense mechanism against the fact that our lives, our conscious lives (if there is in fact consciousness at all and I'm not even sure how I feel about that) lack the order, the closure, the "morals" that we treasure in our stories. Life ends but if there is consciousness it doesn't really have an ending now does it? I mean it just drifts off, it doesn't sum up.

And so we come up with these mechanisms, wills and librettos and life insurance and the like, to give our lives some kind of material signification. And if we become rich enough via our endless pursuit of wealth we endow libraries and art museums and symphony orchestras and university buildings with our names on them in hope of what in hope that our names will live on or that these stories these distractions will somehow help with the evolution of the human "race" which is racing towards the same thing it has always been racing towards, that is sickness unto death.

And humans? Humans are creatures that walk on two legs, eat, shit, fuck, kill and die. And ultimately all our fine cuisine, philosophies, sculptures and abstractions lead to little but.

And the sensory apparatus doesn't tell the truth, nor do the organs of the media.

So I'm in a quandary is what I mean to say here.

Also I have seen bad omens this weekend.

For instance I was in the park and a hawk shit on my head.

This was unusual, unusual that there was a hawk in the city.

Perhaps not unusual that the bird shit on my head, that's a biological function I mean

(ampersand)

That wasn't all.

There's a vibe in the air, a vibe that I don't trust.

Truth is untrustworthy, I think.

Something's going down, something that I don't like and I'm not just being paranoid, I mean I'm probably the least paranoid person you know.

Also I'm out of Sid and would like to see you soon in that regard.

Regards,

Simon

Date: Sun, 14 Jul 2002 23:51:46

Subject: Betrayal

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

Sometimes I feel like such a coward, I guess I am in some ways.

I don't even know the point of emailing you this message.

Or I do, I guess I'm getting something off my chest, or clearing my conscience, or well

someday you can tell me what exactly I've done here.

Betrayal

Today, when I went to see you (and I know what kind of friend would admit you to the psych ward and then come back for the first time about three weeks later) it was very strange to be talking to you but to have you talking to me (sort of) through that guy Sancho, your, what, page?

And then of course, me trying to make small talk and you whispering in Sancho's ear and the only things you could say being about how I was a

Traitor

Betrayer

Scoundrel

Thief

Liar

Coward

Betrayer

and then the agitation and the rushing orderlies and Sancho that guy's short but him lunging towards me was much too insane (sic). A bad scene.

And shit what I came there to tell you but didn't quite get out.

I guess your doctors will probably delete this I don't know but I guess that in fact in some fashion what you were saying to me from behind that curtain, that veil, that scrim, your cyranoid, was at least in part in fact true.

That I am in part all of those things and yet I hope that you'll, after all is said and done, be able to forgive.

What would you say, back in normal life, when it was just bullshitting with Berto?

You would say

cut to the chase, Skip

forget the spoonful of sugar, Skip

the shortest distance between two points, Skip

give it to me straight, Skip

Susanne is what I'm trying to say Berto, and maybe this will help you or hurt but the fact is I'm falling hard for Susanne and it's gotten to the point where it's something I can no longer deny.

I love your Susanne.

It's not a fantasy for me Berto, Susanne and I are well intimate in ways I think that you never were, in ways I know that you never were, and I suppose if it were different well it could be swept under the rug, ignored, a thing that happened and was never commented on again but it didn't just happen once, Berto, it has happened several times and I don't regret a minute of it.

There, it's said.

She's filling some void in my life that I haven't found any other way to fill.

Berto, you're my friend, and I mean that my truest friend and I hope this doesn't come with that cost but

shit while you've been in the psych ward

I've just been feeling so alive since Susanne and I have

so anyway, that's what I meant to say and I hope that you'll snap out of this soon, just let go of your dreams about her, because those dreams are my reality now, and come back and be my friend and

you know, I'm sorry, but I'm also not so I feel guilt but not remorse so.

Anyway, I hope that you'll get out from under what ails you and you know, come back, and you know, let go.

Skip

Date: Mon, 15 Jul 2002 12:18:00

Subject: Marketing Executive, 42, Brutally Slain

From: juilob@slotkin.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip --

Have you seen this? I know that we didn't all leave OGVB on the best of terms with Regine DuBois, but still this comes as a sad and horrible shock. I haven't heard anything

about the funeral arrangements yet, but will drop you a line when I do. I hope that you're doing okay, anyway thought I should let you know. Life is precious.

Julio

* * * * *

Chicago Tribune

July 15, 2002

Marketing Executive, 42, Brutally Slain in Lake Point Tower Apt.

STREETERVILLE-- Regine DuBois, a 42-year-old marketing executive, was found dead by her maid at 9 PM last night, Chicago Police said in a statement issued early this morning. Police said that Ms. Dubois was pronounced dead at the scene, her throat slashed.

Even minor property crimes are rare at this exclusive lakefront property known for its tight security, so this grisly slaying comes a shock to the residents of its upscale condominiums and apartments.

Henrietta Culvalo, Ms. DuBois' maid, found Ms. Dubois laying facedown in a pool of blood, a glass of wine in her hand. Mrs. Culvalo attempted to rouse Ms. DuBois, and discovered that her throat had been cut.

A neighbor who asked that her name not be printed reported that Ms. DuBois was "friendly but quiet -- she kept to herself." Neighbors report that Ms. DuBois lived alone but often had visitors.

At this hour police are reviewing security tapes and plan to interview Ms. DuBois' associates in coming days.

"We suspect that the killer may have been someone she knew," Detective Harold Barstow told our reporter. "You don't just walk into Lake Point Tower. There's a doorman, there's tight security, especially after 9/11. Also, as far as we can tell, there was nothing stolen from the apartment, and few signs of a struggle. She didn't know what was coming. This was an inside job."

Ms. DuBois, 42, was recently hired on as VP of Marketing at BBKVD, where she was in charge of marketing for the Camel Lights brand. She had spent the previous 15 years at OGVB marketing, handling most recently the Enron account. "She was one tough cookie," Tribune Marketing columnist George Lazar commented, "and she'll be missed by people throughout the industry."

Date: Mon, 15 Jul 2002 12:41:46

Subject: Re: Marketing Executive, 42, Brutally Slain

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Dear Susanne,

I tried to reach you on the phone but they said you were out of the office. I don't know if you heard this on the news or saw it in the papers -- I know that this is going to come as a shock to you but thought you should hear about this right away if you haven't already. Regine DuBois is dead. I know that you had deep and complicated feelings for her and I want to let you know that I'm going to be there for you in this time of need. This is awful.

Love,

Skip

Date: Tue, 16 Jul 2002 01:39:38

Subject: What DO I do?

From: ernestonotcom@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

SO

I SAW with my own EYES.

DARLENE FUCKING another man.

another MAN.

So I haven't said anything ato her, I just walked away from the trailer WITHOUT
OPENING THE DOOR. rose petals trailingbehindme IN THE MUD.

IT WAS A STUPID IDEA to leave work early.

so ANYWAY

fuck our anniversary.

Er(empty)NesTO

Date: Tue, 16 Jul 2002 01:41:38

Subject: Sorry

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

I'm sorry I didn't call.

I'm just

distraught

I need some time alone.

Thanks for your calls, the note, the flowers.

I just need some time alone.

Susanne

Date: Tue, 16 Jul 2002 11:25:17

Subject: Questions

From: bwalters@newmediastream.net

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Hey Skip,

I heard the news about Regine. That's shocking and awful. I didn't like Regine but I wanted to let you know, because it comes now in awful context, that the email I sent you last week was just a spur of the moment thing, nothing I would have acted on. And also

to ask that you know should anyone come to you with questions that, you know, could you please not mention that email? Actually, do you mind deleting it? And this one? I did not have anything to do with Regine's murder. You know me, I'm not capable of that kind of thing.

Benjamin

Date: Wed, 17 Jul 2002 11:16:55

Subject: Interrogation

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

I'm exhausted. I spent four hours last night in a small room with two detectives. I guess I'm a suspect in Regine's murder. I guess this is the cost of having loved too deeply. In my mind, while you certainly hurt the ones you love killing them is more than a bit extreme. I was crushed by the news and now the cloud of suspicion flattens me. I feel desperately lonely and though there is little I'd like more than to spend some time in your arms, I don't think that that would be a good idea just now.

I arrived at our affair under pretenses that would have been false if I had not made them explicit. You know and I know that in many ways I came to you because I was running from my feelings from Regine. I thought of our first tryst as a kind of weapon, a metaphoric dagger I could twist in Regine's back, in hopes that she would turn back towards me. I don't know what I was hoping, and now she is gone, a victim of the brutality of now.

And I do have feelings for you Skip, it's just that right now I'm not sure I have the emotional energy for anyone. I did see you standing at my doorway last night, I did hear

you knocking at the door, I did hear you ringing that bell, but I just couldn't open up the door and let you in, and I don't think I'll be able to for some time. I need to at least get through the funeral before I start to put the pieces back together.

Having said that, I need to tell you that some embarrassing things came up during the interrogation: some emails that I sent Regine that in retrospect might make me appear a teensy bit obsessive. Which is why the police have asked me not to leave town, and I guess that's why the police felt they had a right to seek a warrant and to ransack my apartment, taking with them every bit of cutlery in my kitchen, my diary, and all my dirty laundry.

One of those emails, I'm mortified to admit, was a description -- albeit one with certain extravagant flourishes and exaggerations -- of the first time that we had sex. I guess I'm an emotional five-year-old: I thought that by giving Regine a sense that what she had so casually cast aside was being appreciated, even ravished, in other quarters, might draw her back to me. It is impossible to describe the pain I felt as this private, and somewhat infantile, correspondence was laid out before me as evidence in a homicide.

Anyway, this is to say I'm sorry that I may have gotten you involved in this carnival of suspicion. I'm sure that the police will have questions for you, and that much of what they will say to you will be dreadfully embarrassing to both you and me. But I thought it would be better that you hear from me first.

Nothing between us is private. The police searched my computer and copied the contents of my hard drive. They will doubtless find your fluids on my sheets.

I'm innocent of any wrongdoing and I feel violated, and I dread that this violation may extend to others that I care about, particularly you.

Susanne

Date: Wed, 17 Jul 2002 11:45:56

Subject: A few questions

From: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Mr. Valent,

Detective Harold Barstow of the Chicago Police Department Area Three Violent Crimes Unit Here. We have some questions for you regarding a Homicide. We dropped by your workplace this morning, but your boss told us that you were already out on your morning deliveries. I didn't have time to wait around for you to return, and would appreciate it if you could drop by the 18th District Station at 1160 North Larrabee Ave at 5 PM. If you're unable to make it, we'll have to send a squad out to pick you up. Many people prefer to avoid the Spectacle of this in front of their neighbors, so I'm dropping you this email as a Courtesy.

Our questions concern the murder of a Ms. Regine DuBois, which occurred this weekend. I want to emphasize that YOU ARE NOT A SUSPECT in this crime, we just want to clarify a few things about your relationships with Ms. DuBois and with a Ms. Susanne Breone.

So we will see you at the 18th District at 5 PM Sharp. This should only take an hour or so, and I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause you. Please confirm via email.

Sincerely,

Detective Harold Barstow, CPD

Date: Wed, 17 Jul 2002 11:51:15

Subject: All Quiet

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com, bigwig@harrynet.com, sue@freak.net, and 8 others

Dear Simon et al.,

Could you guys do me a favor and not mention our pal in any email correspondence? I have reason to believe that my emails may be subject to prying eyes.

Skip

Date: Wed, 17 Jul 2002 11:53:39

Subject: No Problem

From: skipvskip@hotmail.comd

To: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

Detective Barstow,

I'll be happy to drop by the 18th District Station around 5 to answer any questions. It's pretty much on my way home from work. I worked with Regine for many years and like everyone else I'm shocked by her murder, happy to do whatever I can to help.

Sincerely,

Skip Valent

Date: Wed, 17 Jul 2002 12:24:50
Subject: The Litany of Bodies Unending
From: jackdmonk@enteract.com
To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto--

Just in the past week:

A Naperville man stabbed and murdered his wife, got in a car with his daughter, drove to Iowa, and rammed a truck, killing himself and his daughter.

A 42-year-old marketing executive was found with her throat slashed in her Lake Point Tower Apartment.

The body of a 5-year-old girl was found in a rugged, heavily forested area in Cleveland National Forest. The abductor had lured the girl away from a board game she was playing with her friend, using a story about a lost puppy.

An angry mob on the South Side of Chicago beat two men who had stopped after running over a pedestrian. The pedestrian is dead. The two drivers are also dead, their skulls crushed by bricks hurled at them by the mob.

A 39-year-old handyman was found hanging in an Indiana basement. Also found on the floor of the basement were the bodies of two boys, 15 and 11, whom he apparently strangled before committing suicide.

And so many others, so many that the newspapers couldn't possibly note them all.

And I've learned that you are in the hospital, and believe yourself to be living in another time, in another place.

I don't begrudge you your escape from now.

What, after all, does one "get better" for?

Where does one go in this "civil" society to find a bit of human decency?

--Jack

Date: Wed, 17 Jul 2002 13:36:51

Subject: Fwd: No Problem

From: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org

Tom,

We've got him on the hook. You have three hours to get that warrant. Tell the judge not to fuck around it's urgent. Full search including his computer.

Harry

Date: Wed, 17 Jul 2002 17:30:25

Subject: Is there a difference between AVOIDANCE and DENIAL?

From: ernestonotcom@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

So BERTO,

you remember when we used to sit on grandma's PORCH SWING and drink

LEMONADE and talk about CARS and GIRLS?

those were the GOOD TIMES, before grandma KICKEDTHEBUCKET.

now I can't even stand talking about CARS, but I do it ALL FUCKING DAY LONG.

and GIRLS? My marriage is a MIRAGE. But here's the kicker, BerotTTTTTTTT. I haven't said a WORD to DARLENE about the factt hat ISAWHER naked with anohter man on our FUCKING ANNIVERSARY.

WHY?

BEcause I;m DEATHly afraid of what she'll say if I confronther onit.

She COULD WALK OUT, and take the kids with her. oh I don't know, maybe the JUDGE or WHATEVER would say well ernesto you get CUSTODY since your wife is FUCKING THE FRY COOK but that's not even it berto the kick is this.

I LOVE FOUR PEOPLE on the whole fucking planet. That's you jeffie jessie and DARLENE. I lose darleneand what the hell have I got left. she'snot just the MOTHER OF MY CHILDREN, she's also the woman that I love, even now, maybe more now.

so I guess there's a few courses of ACTION available to me, I mean I could BRAIN THE GREASEBALL WHO WAS BONING MY WIFE, I could GET IN A CAR AND DRIVE UNTIL I FORGET WHO I AM, I could ask darlene if she wants to go in COUNSELING, I guess we could just GETADIVORCE, or I could PRETEND THE WHOLE THING JUST NSNT HAPPENING.

Which is the route I've taken sofar. I SPENT LIKE FIFTY BUCKS in one dollar bills at a STRIP JOINT after work last night and I DIDN;T EVEN GET A HARDON. I don't want a new girl, not even for a CHEAP BLOWJOB IN THE ALLEY, I just want the one Ive

"GOT."

So anyway sorry to be dumping all this on you. ME AND THE KIDS ARE EXCITED about coming to SEE YOU SOON and the docs say they can release you IN MY CUSTODY. I know you'll probably be ALL FUCKED UP, but that's okay the kids probably won't even notice. You in a DELUSIONAL, MEDICATED state will be no weirder than the freaks they see every day in our SO-CAL TRAILER PARK, no weirder than their FUCKED UP MOM AND DAD.

LIVEANDLEARN

Love,

Ernesto

Date: Wed, 17 Jul 2002 23:44:12

Subject: Our Investigation So Far or Good News/Bad News

From: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

**To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org,
det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org**

Tom, Dick,

Wanted to get this off to you guys before I hit the hay.

Just a few thoughts on the DuBois case.

We got some GOOD NEWS on the Skip Valent warrant. He took the whole thing hook line and sinker, came by the station, patiently answered our questions (often with lies, sure, but he answered them), and then went home, where he was extremely surprised to see us again as we presented him with the search warrant.

And the good news part of this: there were a couple of surprises at the Valent residence. Turns out the guy's a real scumbag, we found about a dozen tabs of LSD and a half ounce of marijuana, enough that the fellah's in lockup tonight and the boys in narcotics will have plenty of questions for him in the morning.

BAD NEWS, and this is just a gut feeling but one backed up with decades of experience: I don't think he's our guy.

The whole love triangle hypothesis just seems to easy to me, and I don't think our Skipper boy has the talent to lie convincingly. His eyebrows bunch up every time he lies (which he did about the drugs, definitely) but I don't think this fellah's a killah. I think that maybe his "world class bitch" letter was just a letter. And who knows? From what we've seen so far, all indications are that the spiderwoman may very well have been a bitch of the highest rank.

Now I'm not crossing him off our list and I'm certainly not crossing off Ms. Susanne, who if you ask me is clearly one whacked p/t carpetmuncher, but I just don't think that Skippy would kill for her.

The more we untangle this web, the more connections appear, which have more connections attached to them. This will not be an open/shut I think. Regine seems to have had quite the lovelife AND quite the worklife, and seems to have made plenty of enemies along the way.

The intern I think is clearly out. She couldn't screw in a lightbulb much less pull off a killing would leave us scratching our head for more than five minutes. I'm not sure about the Skipper but my hunch tells me the guy is too dumb to pull off a murder this clean.

We've got his email and Dick we're looking forward to your analysis, but my feeling is we're back to square one. If the Susanne did it, she used this dumbfuck in a way that he didn't know about it. I just don't see that guy pulling the blade across. Who knows, we'll look at the forensics, but I don't see his kitchen cutlery being used but anything for pot roasts and salmon.

And what's truly tragic? is that here I am 11:30PM having dedicated half my night to this debacle you call a Cubs game. Wood pitches beautiful, 119 pitches, Mr. K, he gets one fuckup and then his "closer" Alfonseca loses the grip and then in the 10th that pardon my french FUCKING IDIOT Bellhorn not only fucks up the double play, he even fucks up the single play. What game did that moron think he was playing, Hopscotch? Those fat cheesesteak fuckers in Philadelphia go home all smiles and I'm out a hundred bucks to Sgt. Brisco. Who can blow me.

Shit.

Harry

Date: Thu, 18 Jul 2002 11:46:35

Subject: Regine's Arrangements

From: juilob@slotkin.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Dear Former OGVBers,

Hope to see some of you at the wake of our dearly departed friend and colleague tomorrow.

Treasure Life,

Julio

* * * * *

DuBois, Regine

Regine DuBouis, 42, suddenly, beloved daughter of Claude and Edna DuBois. Lifelong Chicago resident, tragically murdered in her home 7/14/02. Prayers 9:30 a.m., Saturday, at the Glueckert Funeral Home, Ltd., 1520 N. Arlington Heights Rd., (4 blocks south of Palatine Rd.) Arlington Heights to St. Edna Catholic Church, 2525 N. Arlington Heights Rd., for Mass, at 10 a.m. Visitation Friday, from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. Interment All Saints Cemetery. Please make donations to American Cancer Society in lieu of flowers.

Date: Thu, 18 Jul 2002 18:18:38

Subject: Life on the Inside

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

I spent the last three days watching the first season of OZ, the HBO original series, which gets away with all sorts of shit that you never see on TV, ranging from man-on-man rapeassfucking, swastika-ass-tattooing, shooting and snorting smack (tits, they call it, tits), to your brutal depiction of capital punishment (they've gone through lethal injection, electric chair, and firing squad -- what would you choose?). Anyway I've got to say that I'm deeply impressed by this writer/director Tom Fontana. He's managed to create an entire world that echoes in my night-terrors.

Also, I think it says something about the benefits of a tight frame. Most of these characters are locked up tight, they aren't going anywhere, they're in for 8 years to life, which has this strange effect of moving their conflicts more swiftly towards resolution. The Irish guy who talked the African into setting up the Italian has to make sure that both the African and the other Italians get whacked before he does -- it's a matter of survival. Because while there are plenty of secrets in the joint there are no secrets that stay secrets because word flies quickly around those enclosed quarters.

The brutality makes for some great storytelling. The cage is the stage. The only times the story moves outside the penitentiary are when, once or twice per episode, we review the inevitably violent crimes that landed the inmates in Oswald State Penitentiary. I think I'm learning a lot about pacing that I might apply should I ever write something resembling a story again.

Sorry to hear about the prying eyes. Because you write your email in front of your machine, in the solitude of your own company, you come to think that you own it, that

the communiqués you author for the eyes of those you list on the to: cc: and bcc: lines will go there only, but the fucked up fact of the matter is that there's no real inside here, it's all outside, these messages we post bounce off who knows hundreds, thousands of machines before they reach the private recipients for whom we intend them. And there are plenty of opportunities along the way for the sniffers, the carnivores, the spooks, to piece your packets together. They say the Net's an ephemeral medium but in fact it may be more permanent than the leaves of paper we used to use. It's a post-Benjamin Baudrillard Xerox network, constantly archiving thousands of copies of our thoughts, through which one could piece together copies of our inner lives, were they only to look hard enough.

Fucked up.

Can you imagine how insane these thousands of email messages we shed like dead skin cells will drive the biographers of the future? Haystacks filled with fragments of needles.

So anyway understood about all quiet on the e-stern front and I hope that this is nothing serious.

Who knows who's fingering us right now? Spooky.

Simon

P.S. Did you know that Hitchcock and his screenwriter came up with the idea for *North by Northwest* only after deciding not to do a suspense novel that they were under contract with the studio to do, and that they in fact lied to the studio about what they were doing until they started shooting, and that the whole story started with Hitchcock saying that he'd really like to have an action sequence in the UN, and the director of photography saying he'd really like to shoot an action sequence on Mount Rushmore, and the writer saying that he'd like to do a love scene on a train, and the rest of the story was just filling in what happened before and after those three things? How's that for latitude in the creative process? And they say the result was one of Hitch's best films. Which makes me

think not only make no small plans but also in fact forget making plans altogether -- just go.

Date: Thu, 18 Jul 2002 18:37:19

Subject: A-Okay

From: xoith34crypt@3t3crypt.org

To: fit398crypt@3t3crypt.org

Mr. Lethe,

Everything is proceeding according to plan. The CPD investigation is moving along just as you'd expect -- laughably. They haven't got a clue.

Sue

Date: Thu, 18 Jul 2002 18:53:27

Subject: Little Help

From: jdinsmore@cullanandcallahan.com

To: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

Simon,

Writing this from my lawyer's machine, his head is turned, he's cleaning his nails. Long story don't have time to go into details but I spent the night sleepless in a holding cell with a bunch of gangbangers. I have black eye but kept my watch. Word of hardearned advice: don't wear lycra if you think there's a chance you might be spending the night in jail.

Cops located some substance in my place, which is bad. My lawyer thinks they don't have enough to make it stick because the language of the warrant was such that they

should have been looking for other things which is good and they didn't find everything they could have which could have had me in far deeper shit than I'm already in which is good. Furthermore I have a key stashed in the fake brick next to the welcome mat, which is also good. Lawyer thinks they'll try to come back with a more specific warrant (the narcs as opposed to the homicide squad, who will be looking for different things and in all likelihood know better where to look -- long story, tell you soon) and serve me with that the minute I get out of here which should be tomorrow after my arraignment which is bad, very bad.

So I'm in need of kind of a favor.

I should say first DESTROY THIS EMAIL AS SOON AS YOU'VE READ IT.

Anyway, what I'm hoping Simon and this is not without risk Simon but will be made worth your while should you be able to do this, is that you can get that key and get in my apartment (in all likelihood they aren't casing it now since I'm in here but run if you see cops) and retrieve the King James Bible from the second shelf (next to Gravity's Rainbow) and take the word of God and get it the hell out of my apartment and maybe put it in a locker somewhere, somewhere safe I wouldn't put it in your apartment though because they've been reading my email and you never know. Feel free to lick what you want from the Book of Acts.

I wouldn't be asking you but I don't know who else to turn to.

I will owe you a huge favor, and I'll be your friend for life.

Anyway, time's almost up. I'm going to hit send now, then delete, and the message will go through the wireless connection of my lawyer's cellphone and bounce off of many other machines and then hit yours and that's that.

Please please please be home and do me this favor,

Skip

Date: Thu, 18 Jul 2002 18:56:27

Subject: Re: Little Help

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: jdinsmore@cullanandcallahan.com

Dear Skip's attorney,

Please tell Skip no problem with the missionary work.

He'll know what I mean.

Skip's friend

Date: Thu, 18 Jul 2002 19:20:06

Subject: smoking gun

From: det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org

To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org,

det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

Tom, Harry,

Well well well well--

I found a bunch of indications that our Skipper is connected to a major narcotics operation (unless he's really close friends with a guy named Sid -- just how stupid do these criminals think we are?!!!!) said evidencewofwhich I've turned over the Boys in Narcotics. Looks to me like maybe they should go in for a realk close look. AND I think

that we may just have found our smoking gun. What do you make of this message from one Benjamin Walters?

-----Forwarded Message

subj line: Do you ever think about revenge?

Skip,

Have you ever thought about getting Regine back for all the shit she did to us at OGVB?

I have, I do think about that quite often.

Bitch wouldn't even write me a letter of reference.

And I hate my fucking new job. I took like a 15K hit climbing back down the ladder.

I had to move to a new (smaller) apartment, and I got no dishwasher, no washer dryer.

So anyway, I know where she lives, what she drives, where she works. She's making about 150K now, did you know that?

I know that I shouldn't waste my time digging up such info, but what are you gonna do?

Anyway, I've got some ideas. I've played and replayed some scenarios.

Nothing serious, I'd just like to give her a decent scare, you know what I mean?

How come it's always the bitches and their sons that end up on top?

Let me know if you're interested,

Benjamin

----End Forwarded Message

Sounds to me like maybe this Benjamin and/or Skipper went a little overboard. Let's track this Benjie down,

Dick

Date: Thu, 18 Jul 2002 19:21:14

Subject: Re: smoking gun

From: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org

**To: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org,
det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org**

Harry, Dick,

Good work Dick.

Let's cast a wide net and haul in,

Tom

Date: Fri, 19 Jul 2002 00:35:54

Subject: Wake

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

Are you going to the wake tomorrow evening?

I'd like to see you after.

Susanne

Date: Fri, 19 Jul 2002 00:39:33

Subject: King James

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

The King James Version of the Bible is the most poetic, don't you think? You can almost taste God in it. I've recommended it to several friends.

Simon

Date: Fri, 19 Jul 2002 14:31:04
Subject: Out of Jail, See You at Wake
From: skipvskip@hotmail.com
To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

Due to the results of the sneaky-assed jackbooted thugs' search of my apartment that of course turned up nothing related to Regine but unfortunately did locate some contraband (long story) (though my lawyer thinks unconstitutionally) followed by about 38 or so hours in jail followed by another search of my apartment by another squad of sardonic men in blue which then turned up absolutely nothing but which has left my place, and my life, in a shambles. I am just now settling in, some \$2,000 worth of bailbond shorter, needing to craft an appropriate response to many phone messages in order to explain my absence to my employer, and well just dirty (having just now peeled off the biking shorts I put on two days ago). I'll shower, nap, and then join you at the Wake. About 7ish if that works for you.

I feel wounded and in need of your touch,

Skip

Date: Fri, 19 Jul 2002 15:00:21
Subject: Photographs and Memories
From: ednaandclaudedubois@hotmail.com
To: junkin2art@well.com

Dearest Edward,

I know it has been a long time since you turned your back on your family in Chicago after your father turned his back on you, but your mother loves you deeply and I hope

that you will be able to make it to Regine's funeral tomorrow.

I spent last night with your Aunt Edna. Regine's death has come as a horrible shock to all of us, but there are no words to describe the pain and sympathy I feel for Edna and Claude. Whatever twists God or fate might bring to our lives, there is no horror so awful as living through the death of your child.

Edna and I spent most of the night crying and looking at photographs, which we were assembling onto posterboard for the wake. There you were, my five-year-old boy, running through the sprinklers with your six-year-old cousin. There we all were, assembled in front of Claude's cabin in Wisconsin, your father and Claude proudly holding their trophy trout, and you straining to lift yours on the line, it must have been half your weight. Regine in high school, the champion volleyball player, spiking at the net. Regine at the prom, with that boy she took, towering over him, that boy still waiting on his growth spurt at 17, and how beautiful she looked in that purple dress. Our rebellious Regine during her college years, with the spiked purple hair black eye shadow and torn-up jeans, and at her graduation from Northwestern, the dean holding her Magna Cum Laude degree high as she shook his hand, and the more mature Regine with her MBA from the University of Chicago, at the reception after in her prim business suit. Regine in pinstripes and sneakers. Regine on the Fourth of July, busily yapping on her portable phone while you and Buddy shagged flies in the background. Regine from the annual report of OGVB, Vice President Dick Cheney (I suppose he wasn't that then), with his arm around her shoulder. Regine after her appearance on national television, where she talked up the future of energy. Four decades and two years gone by so quickly.

And your mother hasn't seen you for nearly four years. I know that your father said some things that he now regrets and we both want nothing so much as to see you. We want to be a family again.

There was a moment last night when Edna was weeping, weeping at what was missing, "She never got married, Cecilia." she said, "She never knew love." I know that Regine

lived differently, lived as you do, but there was no reason for me to dispel Edna's illusions. I want you to know that we can live without illusions. Edward, we don't care who you love. We only care that we love you and you us.

Please fly home tomorrow. I will buy your ticket if money is a problem. Money doesn't matter compared to this grief. In comparison to the love a family shares. Please be with your family during this time of need. It will be like old times. Regine will be missing, but we should mourn her together.

With Deepest Love,

Your Mother

Date: Fri, 19 Jul 2002 15:53:39

Subject: Haldol

From: tabitha_moran@rush.edu

To: debarthelme@rush.edu

Dr. Barthelme,

As expected, Berto Tazar reacted negatively to Monday's transfer of Pedro Vasquez. He claimed that his "captors" were "killing off his allies, one by one," and that he was sure "I'm next." He had to be put in restraints Monday evening after trying to remove the grille from window. We're not sure if he would have jumped out (it is the fourth floor) had he succeeded. He's not otherwise showing any signs of suicidal ideation.

The good news is that the Haldol appears to be showing some positive effects. For instance, while Berto's delusions that he is in 14th Century Italy remain in force, he is now communicating with staff (albeit he is alternately aggressive and resigned, and treats us as one would prison guards). But he is speaking to us now, so that's a start.

He continues to read his email at every opportunity. Indeed, we have been able to leverage his computer access as a bargaining chip to rein in his misbehavior. We have encouraged him to write back his friends and relations, but he still refuses to do this.

I'm hopeful however that as we get into the third week of his Haldol prescription and are able to better gauge the dosage, we might see a breakthrough.

We also have high hopes for his brother's upcoming visit.

He's showing the normal side affects: drowsiness, drymouth, and constipation. No nausea or vomiting, abnormal heartbeat, etc.

I would encourage a continuation of his current schedule of medication, and require more individual and small group therapy. I think that once we get him talking and his dopamine levels in check, there is every reason to believe that Berto Tazar will be able to resume a normal life.

Sincerely,

Tabitha Moran, LCSW

Date: Fri, 19 Jul 2002 19:36:38

Subject: kujnfoo fiting

From: jefftrocks@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Unclke BERTO,

Im looking frowared to seeing you specaille since the CUBS don't suck as much as they sidid with DON BALYOR as manager. The new guy seems tobe doing good so I think theyll kickbutt thye are like 5 out of 6 lately and Ithink they will bert the ROCKIES, they

will ROCK THE RIOCKES. Dad got tickets already and jessica and i can't wait.

also I understand you havnt writtn back. Dad says your computer is messed up so that you can read emails but not write them. but I hope you can still teach me karate or kung fu because the firth graders are still beating me up they called my mom a niggerfucker today and I punched one of them and dad cant give me good advice on fighting. so I'll have a black eye because of these racists skinheads who are stiff about my MOM and i want to learn how to fight better.

hope you'll help me. dad has been distracted lately but i think you know how to fight better anyways like crouching tiger hidden dragon will teach me.

jeff

Date: Sat, 20 Jul 2002 12:03:10

Subject: Benjamin Walters

From: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

**To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org,
det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org**

Tom, Dick,

If only motive were all we needed: Benjamin Walters certainly had it -- according to him Regine pinned various errors and mistakes on him and the Skipper before firing him and the Skipper (errors that were actually hers) and then left him in a bad reference type of situation. Then he emailed Skipper proposing revenge (to which email Skipper said no to).

Benjamin said that he had planned to slash her tires, or to put sugar in the gas tank, or to leave a flaming bag of shit at her office door or the like, but that he had no intention of harming Regine and in fact had only fantasized about revenge but had not followed

through. Which, whatever, sure he's gonna say that.

Problem is the Walters family is a big family and they happened to be having a family BBQ the night of the murder and Benjamin was there from noon until 9 PM, it checks out. So if Mr. Walters was involved in the murder he was involved from a distance. And he doesn't seem to be the contract killer type. For one, I don't think he could afford it.

Walters confessed to everything from 6 outstanding parking tickets to cheating on his taxes by claiming business deductions for videogames to smoking a joint at the office Christmas party last year. Either he was pretending to be a quivering jello blob or he is a quivering jello blob and I just don't think he's that good an actor.

And the search turned up jack shit, and all we got off his computer was his email to the Skip and evidence that he likes teen porn.

Has anything turned up on the security tapes?

The judge is starting to get irritated about the warrants not producing much.

Any clues at the wake/funeral?

Harry

Date: Sun, 21 Jul 2002 02:45:08

Subject: strange

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Strange how, even though we parted on bad terms,

seeing Regine laid out like that at the wake,

I found myself missing her deeply.

As I miss you,

right now

but I

miss

you

far

more

than

that

even

after

only

thirty

thirsty

seconds

Skip

Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2002 03:03:33

Subject: reconnect

From: junkin2art@well.com

To: ednaandclaudedubois@hotmail.com

Mom,

I wish we that had remet under better circumstances but I am so glad that I came in for Regine's funeral and that you and I had some time to talk alone. Time is the most precious thing. What else do we have?

As to Regine's surprising decision to leave me half of her estate, I can't describe how moved I am and how sorry I am that Regine and I did not have more time.

And also I want to say that I'm shocked by the Chicago police, I thought they were callous and insensitive and I am disappointed that they have made no real progress in the investigation. That cop in the cheap blue blazer seemed to have no eyes for anyone but Regine's ex-girlfriends and I noticed that he hit the bar pretty hard after the funeral. Is

that appropriate?

I do hope that they find the killer and nail him to the wall.

As for Dad, we talked briefly and I was sad to see that in the last four years his health has degenerated so much.

You know that I've always been your son and have never forgotten my mother's love.

Help Aunt Edna hang in, and I'm sorry it's so darn hot and sticky in Chicago.

Edward

Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2002 03:13:13

Subject: weFUCKEDalIDAYlong

From: ernestonotcom@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

BERtomm,

Just to SAY, that DARLENE and I got a babysittER to take the KIDS to DISNEY?LAND and finally spen t some time just DEDICATING ourselvEs to screwing with POAISSOIN earlier today.

THEN I ASKED HER ABOUT THE FRY COOK and she STORMED out then I got PLASTERED.

So anyway HONESTY is now IN THE HOUSE.

But UKNOW.com WHAT?

she came back after and we had a HEART to HEART and what else? THE GREASY bastard was just a fUCK for her nothing ELSE and wello we're WELL.

SO DON:t You worRY about me, if fyou were worried. BcEAsUe it's all gonna BE FINE.

AND I:M not just LYING so that yioUR DOCTORS who probably READ THIS like most ADMINISTRATIVE INTERFEREING FUCKWASDS will from time to TIME don't worry that they SHOULDn;t relase you into my custody.

like I would BREAK YOU OUT fo the psych ward and or sommemthing JUST BECAUSE I was drunk when I CALLED then lest or somethING I trust theytare taking GOOD CARE OF YOU.

so is that fucked up that I was still COMPLETELY TURNED ON by my INCREDIBLY HOT WIFE even though I know that she was screwsin g thi s JAMAican dude?

That's love,

ERnetso

Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2002 12:47:22

Subject: Noted at the Funeral

From: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org

**To: det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org,
det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org**

Dick, Harry,

Well I guess you could say either:

A) The wake and funeral were festering with clues

or

B) There was remarkably little to note

Take for instance, the fact that there were some 25-30 single women there, aged 20 to 50, all wearing black dresses. We might hypothesize that any or each of these women was at one time or another a lover of Regine's. Many of them were weeping. I took digital photos of the guestbook and we can certainly look most of these women up. Did any of the weeping women exhibit telltale signs that they, out of jealousy, might have committed the murder? Not in particular.

The beneficiaries of Regine's estate are her parents, Edna and Claude DuBois, and her cousin, and one Edward DuBois, a San Francisco junkyard sculptor of little note. Edward got half of Regine's savings and half of her life insurance. A sizable chunk of change. But would such be enough for this (apparently relatively distant) cousin to feel motivated to arrange for a long-distance contract killing of his own flesh and blood? I don't think so. He certainly appeared to be surprised that he had hit this particular lottery, it was the talk of the reception after the burial. The fact that he quizzed me so extensively about the progress of our investigation might have raised some flags, but I think he was just angry that we didn't have any news.

The family in general, by the way, I would describe as frustrated, unfriendly. Everyone expects the detectives to appear in the parlor room to announce the killer's identity within 48 hours of the act. Like we're some kind of fucking magicians here.

Skipper showed up at the wake, shot me a dirty look. He was practically humping Susanne's leg.

Regine's business associates sat in their own section, and within that division, there appeared to be two distinct groups: those who had worked for Regine and had disliked but respected her, and those for whom Regine had worked, who seemed essentially ambivalent. The reception after the funeral was kind of an advertising networking clusterfuck. Many of Regine's former business associates seem to be on the job market and taking any opportunity, including burial rituals, to sniff out new employment.

There were a couple Feds there. Any reason the FBI should be horning in on our investigation? Might want to check the wire for similar crimes out of state. Or I suppose we could call them and ask. Don't you just love the way they're so careful to let us know when they might be interested in something?

So anyway, nothing like spending the weekend with your work, especially with a bunch of belligerent bereft instead of making your kid's little league game. But that's the job, that's the job I signed up for.

Any luck on the tapes?

Tom

Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2002 13:19:01
Subject: Security Tapes, Weapon
From: det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org
To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org,
det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

Tom, Harry,

So I guess that solves one mystery: why Regine's otherwise tastefully decorated

apartment has that buttugly baseball bat welded to plowshare with spoons thing plopped down in the living room like a carbuncle.

Well, each of the 476 people who did not live in the building and entered the complex the day of the murder signed in and out. Regine's only visitor was our intern Stephanie, who was turned away by the doorman at 4 PM when Regine didn't answer (because, according to forensics, she was dying just about then). The doorman has now ID'd all the folks who left the building within a two hour period after that, we're now getting into about 6 PM. Could be that the killer went down to the pool and hopped the wall. Could be the killer was a resident or one of the resident's visitors. Could be that the killer didn't leave the building for quite some time after.

As to the murder weapon: We're pretty sure it was a Wusthoff Chef's Knife. We haven't found the knife but the boys in the lab are pretty good at determining these things from the laceration.

Whatever that tells us. This could mean that the killer was not a pro, and that this was a crime of passion. Or this could mean that the killer was a pro who wanted to make it appear to us that he was not a pro (or she).

No prints, the killer was wearing gloves.

Whoever did it got in and out quickly.

Forensics say he probably got spattered, but there was no evidence of any cleanup. But how hard is it to peel off a shirt and drop it in a gymbag?

There was enough time between the killing and the discovery of the body that we missed the trash pickup, already on its way to the landfill before our dumpster divers could get to it.

We might end up having to interview everybody who lives in the building, and all of their guests. Which will be a big pain in the ass. We could go on forever like this.

Dick

Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2002 13:38:17

Subject: It's All Over Now, Baby Blue Suede Shoes

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip:

Dylan in 1965, from the liner notes to *Bringing It All Back Home*:

"i would not want t' be bach. mozart. tolstoy. joe hill. gertrude stein or james dean/they are all dead. the Great books've been written. the Great sayings have all been said"

Which album included "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue"

Fall 1955

Johnny Cash joins Carl Perkins for a show in Amory, Mississippi. He suggests that Carl write a song based on a saying he had heard in the chow line while he was in the service, "Don't step on my blue suede shoes."

A few nights later Perkins is playing in Jackson, Tennessee, when he sees a dancer in the crowd trying to keep his girlfriend away from his new blue suede shoes. At 3AM, Perkins wakes, goes downstairs and writes the lyrics in pencil on an empty potato bag. Suede is spelled swaed.

Simon

Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2002 16:45:30

Subject: We Pray for the Return of Your Sight

From: ocgodislove1@aol.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Dearest Berto,

While I am hurt that you have not written back, I understand your struggle and pray for you daily, that Lord Jesus Christ may guide you back.

Love in God,

Olivia

THE BOOK OF ACTS 9:11-19

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him with a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes Lord," he answered.

The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come to place his hands on him to restore his sight."

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how

much he must suffer for my name."

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2002 18:48:21

Subject: Blue

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip:

Just to update you on my research----->

Scattering of light in the atmosphere causes the blue color of the sky.

As for water, its color is a faint blue. Although water appears clear in small amounts, its blue color becomes more visible the more water we look through: thus lakes and oceans are bluer than a shallow stream.

Blueberries are actually purple, not blue.

Film is typically most sensitive to blue light. Bluescreens are most often blue because of the color's complementary relationship to flesh. The most common color in most filmed scenes is flesh tone, so the opposite color is the logical choice to avoid conflicts.

Owls are believed to be the only animals other than humans that can see the color blue.

During the medieval period in Europe, the most important blue dyes were Indian indigo and the somewhat less intense, cheaper, and locally available woad. As early as 55 BC, Romans found painted people or "picti" in Gaul, who dyed their skin blue with woad.

Manufacture of woad dye involved fermenting woad leaves with human urine. The standard method for the dyers was to drink wine or other alcohol and then to use their enriched urine for the fermentation process. Pieces of fabric were immersed in the woad bath, typically on Sundays, for at least 12 hours. In Germany, the practice of dyers lying around the courtyard after hanging fabric on Mondays gave rise to colloquial expressions such as "Blauer Montag" (Blue Monday: stay away from work on Monday) and "Blau werden" (Get blue: Get drunk).

Indian indigo prevailed slowly over woad based on its better dyeing properties and deeper color. The word Indigo is derived from the Greek Indikon and the Latin Indicum, meaning a substance from India. From 1600 onwards, the records of the East India Company document the production of indigo in India and its export. Indigo labor practices were notoriously exploitative. An Englishman in the Bengal Civil Service is said to have commented that "not a chest of indigo reached England without being stained with human blood." There were violent indigo riots in Bihar in 1868. In 1917 Gandhi launched an enquiry into the exploitation of indigo workers, which contributed, at least in part, to the growth of India's nationalization movement.

The first book printed on blue paper was published in 1514 in Venice by Aldus Manutius. Throughout the 16th century, blue papers were popular in Venetian special editions.

The blue in the American flag represents vigilance, perseverance and justice.

Blue represented failure to the Cherokee. Cherokee warriors would pray for the enemy to become blue and walk in a blue path.

The "elliptic salon," with the Yellow Oval Room above and the Diplomatic Reception Room below it, the Blue Room is one the highlights of the White House tour, a room in which generations of American Presidents have greeted thousands of celebrities, world leaders, and captains of American industry to state dinners and receptions. The color blue was introduced during the administration of Martin Van Buren in 1837; he redecorated the oval salon and began the tradition of the "blue room." The sapphire blue fabric used for the draperies and furniture covering is similar in color to fabric used in the room in 1800's. The blue satin draperies were derived from an early 19th century French source. The walls were hung with a light gold paper adapted from an early 19th century American paper with borders adapted from two early 19th century French papers. The upper border is a blue drapery swag; the lower border along the chair rail blue and gold with rosettes.

Shades of blue among the top ten colors as selected by thousands of Americans in the 2000 Crayola Crayon Census:

- #1 Blue
- #2 Cerulean
- #4 Midnight Blue
- #5 Aquamarine
- #8 Denim
- #10 Blizzard Blue

Kinds of Blue in HTML:

MidnightBlue 25 25 112 #191970
NavyBlue 0 0 128 #000080
CornflowerBlue 100 149 237 #6495ED
DarkSlateBlue 72 61 139 #483D8B
SlateBlue 106 90 205 #6A5ACD
MediumSlateBlue 123 104 238 #7B68EE
LightSlateBlue 132 112 255 #8470FF

MediumBlue 0 0 205 #0000CD
RoyalBlue 65 105 225 #4169E1
Blue 0 0 255 #0000FF
DodgerBlue 30 144 255 #1E90FF
DeepSkyBlue 0 191 255 #00BFFF
SkyBlue 135 206 235 #87CEEB
LightSkyBlue 135 206 250 #87CEFA
SteelBlue 70 130 180 #4682B4
LightSteelBlue 176 196 222 #B0C4DE
LightBlue 173 216 230 #ADD8E6
PowderBlue 176 224 230 #B0E0E6
LightCyan 224 255 255 #E0FFFF
CadetBlue 95 158 160 #5F9EA0
SlateBlue1 131 111 255 #836FFF
SlateBlue2 122 103 238 #7A67EE
SlateBlue3 105 89 205 #6959CD
SlateBlue4 71 60 139 #473C8B
RoyalBlue1 72 118 255 #4876FF
RoyalBlue2 67 110 238 #436EEE
RoyalBlue3 58 95 205 #3A5FCD
RoyalBlue4 39 64 139 #27408B
Blue1 0 0 255 #0000FF
Blue2 0 0 238 #0000EE
Blue3 0 0 205 #0000CD
Blue4 0 0 139 #00008B
DodgerBlue1 30 144 255 #1E90FF
DodgerBlue2 28 134 238 #1C86EE
DodgerBlue3 24 116 205 #1874CD
DodgerBlue4 16 78 139 #104E8B
SteelBlue1 99 184 255 #63B8FF
SteelBlue2 92 172 238 #5CACEE

SteelBlue3 79 148 205 #4F94CD
SteelBlue4 54 100 139 #36648B
DeepSkyBlue1 0 191 255 #00BFFF
DeepSkyBlue2 0 178 238 #00B2EE
DeepSkyBlue3 0 154 205 #009ACD
DeepSkyBlue4 0 104 139 #00688B
SkyBlue1 135 206 255 #87CEFF
SkyBlue2 126 192 238 #7EC0EE
SkyBlue3 108 166 205 #6CA6CD
SkyBlue4 74 112 139 #4A708B
LightSkyBlue1 176 226 255 #B0E2FF
LightSkyBlue2 164 211 238 #A4D3EE
LightSkyBlue3 141 182 205 #8DB6CD
LightSkyBlue 4 6 123 139 #607B8B
LightSteelBlue1 202 225 255 #CAE1FF
LightSteelBlue2 188 210 238 #BCD2EE
LightSteelBlue3 162 181 205 #A2B5CD
LightSteelBlue4 110 123 139 #6E7B8B
LightSteelBlue1 202 225 255 #CAE1FF
LightSteelBlue2 188 210 238 #BCD2EE
LightSteelBlue3 162 181 205 #A2B5CD
LightSteelBlue4 110 123 139 #6E7B8B
LightBlue1 191 239 255 #BFEFFF
LightBlue2 178 223 238 #B2DFEE
LightBlue3 154 192 205 #9AC0CD
LightBlue4 104 131 139 #68838B
DarkBlue 0 0 139 #00008B

I thought I ought to share this information with you, please feel free to make use of it in any way that you see fit.

Simon

Date: Tue, 23 Jul 2002 00:15:02

Subject: Loan

From: freddyfingers@treemail.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

Was wondering if you might be able to return that loan to me soon. No rush, but would appreciate an update.

Hope you're doing well,

Fred

Date: Tue, 23 Jul 2002 11:00:50

Subject: Priorities

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

All this with Regine has made me rethink my priorities. I've been thinking: I hate my job.

Who knows what will happen next? I could be dead tomorrow. Why should I spend all my time in a "graphic design" job in which all that I've gotten the opportunity to design are weekly inserts for grocery store sales? Eight years of shuffling packaged goods and photographing wax turkeys, and a promised promotion that never comes. I'm thinking about quitting. Actually I'm thinking about moving. I'm not sure where. Somewhere else. Maybe I'll go back to school and study poetry or writing poetry for a couple of years. I

don't know. Maybe I should have children before my biological clock negates the possibility. Maybe I should go into real estate.

It's strange. I'm thirty-two years old and I'm just coming to the realization that I don't know who I am, or what I want to do with my life. Regine wasn't like that. Even Berto, in his delusions, wasn't like that, he knew who he was, or at least what he wanted to be. When the world did not provide the circumstances to allow for him to be what he wanted to be, he changed the nature of the world to provide for his escape.

I'm not quite sure I can do the same, or even want to, but I can certainly quit my job, I can certainly move somewhere and start fresh. I'm simply getting tired of playing games, with my job, with everything.

What would you do?

Susanne

Date: Tue, 23 Jul 2002 13:26:23

Subject: Other Shores

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

I just got hit by an SUV (again). The next time you see me I'll have a large scab on my knee and another one on the side of my head.

Yesterday I got booted by the City of Chicago. They just updated their computer system, so they were able to track tickets on each of the five beaters I've owned since I moved here in 1986.

So I just paid the city \$1625, which I didn't have, because I'd just emptied my savings account to pay bail on a crime I shouldn't have been charged with to begin with -- two grand there, and to two grand more to pay a retainer for a lawyer I shouldn't need (but who I need desperately). And another \$125 for the right to park on these well-maintained streets. Soon the city will want to tax me for breathing.

And narcs keep leaving messages on the phone, saying "We're watching you Skipper, we're watching you."

I don't hate my job, it's a job and I get to ride my bike.

But I don't love it.

I'm not sure who the hell I am, either.

A set of numbers in a database.

And I owe friends money, I have debts, I have debts.

I'm turning over another credit card to another credit card with a higher limit and lower rates.

Picric (Phyric? Pyric?) victories seem to be all I've got.

Except for you, and I'm not even sure that I've got you.

so . . .

If you're proposing a move from these environs, I say:

TAKE ME WITH YOU!

Wherever you want to go. I know that you don't know me enough maybe to want me to be with you, but should we go?

Yes, we should go.

I don't think you should go it alone.

Skip a step or two, take me with you.

Provided of course, that is, that you'd be willing to wait a week or so.

My lawyer is talking to the DA and they're probably going to drop the charges:

GIVEN MY FULL COOPERATION

--should Benjamin Walters be involved with the murder, or anyone else I know.

Unlikely.

I've loved this town, my friends, and under a different set of circumstances, I would stay.

But I ask myself, stay for WHAT?

WHY STAND STILL?

in my personal inventory, my relationship with you (can we call it that?) is all I really want, desperately want to preserve.

I'll go anywhere.

I'm imagining us in a gondola, only we're not in Venice, we're floating down the Chicago River, out to the lake. The symphony orchestra stands on the banks, playing us a kind of farewell song -- Hadyn? You're pointing the way, neither one of us is quite sure where. I'm standing, poling us along, until finally, the pole no longer touches bottom, and direction no longer matters, and the skyline is dwindling behind us. We could sink and drown, or we could reach another shore, and we're going where the current takes us.

Skip

Date: Tue, 23 Jul 2002 13:42:55

Subject: Re: Loan

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: freddyfingers@treemail.com

Fred,

I've dropped you a note in the snailmail explaining current circumstances. I'll be able to return your loan but it might take me a while.

Thanks for being understanding,

Skip

Date: Tue, 23 Jul 2002 14:10:01

Subject: My Next Sculpture

From: junkin2art@well.com

To: tbonecrnch@baysbestsalvage.com, mellissa_hathaway@insculpt.com

Dear Tommy and Melissa,

I am back from my trip to Chicago, where we bid farewell to my cousin Regine who was so brutally murdered. Her death and the murder of that poor child in Orange County are weighing heavily on my mind and so will be the subject of my next sculpture, which is dedicated to lost souls torn from the earth by monstrous forces beyond our control.

Tommy--

I will need an old construction crane, a very large one. I will need the wings of an old propeller plane. I will need all the paint stripped from both of them, stripped down to the naked metal, stripped down to the bare aluminum. I will need the barrels of two old tanks. I will need also two light poles, the all-aluminum kind, no wood, in working order, bulbs intact. I will also need information on how perpetual flames, such as the one at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, work. The angel must spit fire. I will also need a wide variety of day-glo paints in shades of blue. We'll need to assemble a team of welders, the best you can find.

Melissa--

I will front the money for the materials. This is a gift from my cousin Regine. But knowing Regine, I'm sure that she would want me to put her gift to more practical use, such as health insurance, rents, etc. So I am counting on you to find me a commission, perhaps a public works commission, or something in a very large sculpture park, such as the Walker garden in Minneapolis, for my next sculpture, which I am tentatively entitling "The Blue Angel Descends From Heaven With Grace to Gather and Avenge Lost Souls."

It will require a large open space.

Edward

Date: Tue, 23 Jul 2002 14:50:51

Subject: Feds

From: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

**To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org,
det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org**

Dick, Tom,

I talked with Patrick Daly, Assistant Special Agent in Charge at the FBI field office in Chicago. He told me that the FBI had no reason to be interested in the case unless we gave them reason to be interested in the case, that they were treating local homicides as local matters in general. I guess they're pretty tied up with Homeland Security, rooting out terrorists and tracking down banking records, etc.

I told him that that surprised us because you saw Sue Miller there and had recognized her from the Regina DeFrancisco case. He transferred me to Sue, who it turns out had attended the funeral for personal reasons: get this -- she lives on the same floor in Lake Point Tower as did Regine. She said she borrowed the occasional cup of sugar, etc. So that's why you saw feds.

It kind of irritates me that Sue Miller can pull down the kind of dough that she can live in Lake Point Tower when a career Chicago Police Detective has trouble making the mortgage on a bungalow in Berwyn but what can you do?

Harry

Date: Wed, 24 Jul 2002 00:08:12

Subject: Strange

From: det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org

**To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org,
det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org**

Tom, Harry,

Tonight, as I was beginning to plan the mammoth task ahead, of interviewing all the residents on all 69 floors of Lake Point Tower, while doing a little research on the web, I ran across a tidbit of information:

* Lake Point Tower was intentionally designed so that it would be impossible for someone in any one apartment of the building to look into the window of any other apartment in the building. The lobe shapes are meant both to take maximum advantage of the views of lake, skyline, city, and also to insure the privacy of each of the residents. Which explains why we haven't run across any Rear Window type of eyewitnessing.

But also, and this is beside the point but just extremely bizarre.

Look at this aerial view of the building:

<www.okrentassociates.com/resources/aerials/vert6.html>

This is probably because it's late and I've been working on this thing for too long, but when I look at that picture, on the left side of the building I'm seeing an elongated woman's form, head in the top floors, breasts around floor twenty, belly at the building's base. A distinct laceration at the throat. Blood dripping down the collarbone. I see the murdered Regine on the building itself. Not that that's a clue, but strange, strange, strange.

Dick

Date: Wed, 24 Jul 2002 14:59:54

Subject: Re: Strange

From: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

**To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org,
det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org**

Dick,

I hope you're not smoking what you confiscate.

Harry

Date: Wed, 24 Jul 2002 15:04:16

Subject: 2 weeks

From: susannenbreone@aol.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip,

I gave work my two weeks' notice today.

As far as traveling with you to points unknown . . .

I'm really quite emotionally unstable.

I'm unsure of my sexual orientation. Unsure that I prefer boys to girls.

We haven't gone camping together, much less shacked up somewhere out on the horizon.

I don't know that we would last ten minutes out there in the wild.

So everything is very uncertain out there in the wild blue yonder.

But -- sure -- why not? If you're willing to live without expectations, let's try some new wherever. We can at least set off together and see where we end up, together or alone.

Susanne

Date: Wed, 24 Jul 2002 18:12:53

Subject: Breakthrough

From: tabitha_moran@rush.edu

To: debarthelme@rush.edu

Dr. Bartheleme,

This afternoon during our individual session, when I asked Berto who he was, he said "Berto Tazar." When I asked him what he did, he said, "I used to be in marketing, but now I'm not sure." When I asked him what century we lived in, he looked at me like I was crazy, and then said "We live during the fall of the American empire, in the 21st Century." When I asked him where he was, he said "the nuthouse." When I asked him what city we lived in, he said "Chicago." When I asked why he was here, he said, "Because I flipped out. Because I'm fucking crazy." I corrected him on the last. Then he asked me if he could get a copy of the Tribune, to check the help wanted ads.

The Haldol is working its magic, apparently.

There is nothing like watching a patient's progress to raise your spirits and remind you of the value of an otherwise thankless job.

Sincerely,

Tabitha Moran, LCSW

Date: Wed, 24 Jul 2002 22:46:12

Subject: Resolution

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Skip:

I've noticed that I hate endings, that I'm disappointed in them far more often than I am in middles, beginnings.

I almost always question the decision the writer, the filmmaker, the what? Creator? made.

I always feel that I would have done it differently myself.

Of course, if I feel that way that means that I had some investment in the work to begin with, that I felt something, or thought something, or . . .

except for mysteries.

In which case I almost always read the ending first and then work back from there.

There are so many risks involved in ending. Sentimentality, callousness, cruelty, bad puns, cuteness . . .

the end rarely justifies the means. or rather the means are dissatisfied by their destination.

Who remembers anything about the horsemen of the apocalypse except that there were four of them and that they rode horses? I certainly don't remember.

Simon

Date: Thu, 25 Jul 2002 11:29:19

Subject: Commendation and Promotion

From: kenneth_lethe@deptofhomeland.gov

To: sue_miller@fbi.gov

Special Agent Sue Miller,

This is notify you that you will shortly be receiving a commendation, promotion, and transfer to the new Department of Homeland Security headquarters where you will serve in the Subdepartment of Covert Antiterrorism Operations. The text of the commendation, which you will receive in a special ceremony at your field office on August 5th, appears below:

WHEREAS Special Agent SUE MILLER of the FEDERAL BUREAU of INVESTIGATION has served her country, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, with great valor over a decade of service in the Chicago field office, AND WHEREAS Special Agent SUE MILLER has most recently led the group which compiled the SPECIAL REPORT ON TERRORIST THREATS TO HI-RISE STRUCTURES IN THE CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AREA, she is THEREFORE to BE COMMENDED and is hereby appointed SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE of COVERT ANTITERRORISM OPERATIONS for HIGH-RISE STRUCTURES: OFFICE OF THREAT ASSESMENT and THEREFORE as of August 6, 2002 ordered to transfer immediately to the interim DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY HEADQUARTERS in the DISTRICT of COLUMBIA, THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Congratulations, Sue. You should frame this one. John Ashcroft himself is going to sign it. I know that they'll miss you in Chicago, but we're all looking forward to having you close at hand.

Yours,

Special Agent Kenneth Lethe

Date: Thu, 25 Jul 2002 11:47:47

Subject: I'm Game

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Susanne,

I'm yours.

Where to?

New York?

Los Angeles?

San Francisco?

Atlanta?

Albuquerque, New Mexico?

Dubuque, Iowa?

Duluth, Minnesota?

Linwood, New Jersey?

Omaha, Nebraska?

Mexico?

Peru?

Bolivia?

Paris?

I can almost taste the open road.

I would follow you to the ends of the earth

or the middle of nowhere.

Drinks tonight to celebrate?

Have you ever been up in that bar at the top of the John Hancock?

Let's go up there, have a couple martinis, gaze out at the city spread far beneath us, and bid it a fond farewell.

A longing sigh, dreaming of a map laid across your thighs,

Skip

Date: Thu, 25 Jul 2002 13:11:17

Subject: Unsolved Mysteries

From: jackdmonk@enteract.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

Berto,

I've been thinking too often lately of death, and I'm sorry if I've overburdened you with

my sense of horror, of grief, of shock at the ambient violence that always and everywhere surrounds us. It occurred to me recently that perhaps these sensations are the type of thing that one should keep to oneself.

You've, after all, been in the hospital, and unable to respond to these little elegiac epistles. And the truth is that getting no response from you only made me want to write them more, it became a kind of meditation, wiping my tears into the outlook box of my "monitor" and sending them off like koans in a bottle to the person least likely to read and respond.

What is the proper response to any of this?

How could you or I possibly respond in any way that could have an impact?

Perhaps it's best to ignore it.

Most of America can comfortably tune out the news, for instance, that a 43-year old Rabbi was shot dead today in a West Bank settlement, and that this is understood to be the *first* Palestinian response to Tuesday's attack by an F-16 warplane which fired a one-ton guided missile at the house of Shehada, commander of Hamas's military wing, killing him and 14 others, including one militant, four noncombatant adults and nine children. I think that the shock value of the death of children in that far-off land has been minimized. We EXPECT that there will be more killings in response. We EXPECT that many more children will die. We cannot remember the last day in which someone did not die violently in Palestine or Israel. The body count will continue to mount.

And for every murderer jailed, there are two more who go on calmly with their lives, another falsely accused, fifteen people arrested for misdemeanor possession of some substance we have made taboo, and thirty more imprisoned for lack of adequate legal representation, economic casualties.

So what happens to the lost souls, to those murdered casually, whose cases are never resolved, who never even make the front-page news?

What about those who are simply lost?

The tabloids scream that police may soon expect a break in the 1996 murder case of the toddler beauty queen JonBenet Ramsey, because John and Patsy are breaking up. But one year from now, who will remember Tionda and Diamond Bradley, the ten and three-year-old girls who went to the playground on July 6, 2001 and never came back? After all, they were just black girls in a poor neighborhood, whose mother should never have left them alone. They aren't white enough to make news on Entertainment Tonight. Their disappearance is not marketable.

And then there are those convenient suicides, such as Clifford J. Baxter, the former Enron executive, who quit after blowing the whistle on his friends and colleagues. Baxter's Mercedes-Benz was found one January morning in Dallas, stopped in the middle of a road. Inside, Baxter had a bullet wound to the head and a revolver at his side. Police confirmed that a suicide note was found with his body. In the note, Baxter wrote that he could not stand the pain of the Enron scandal. The autopsy determined that Clifford had shot himself in the side of the head. That is, though he had fully exonerated himself and helped to launch the investigation that would bring down this major energy concern, the pain was too much. Just as the scandal was breaking, his heart broke too. And a man was quietly buried in Texas. We are to believe what we are told.

Power wants to control us. Power is successful. Nothing succeeds like success.

So what becomes of those souls, Berto?

I promise to stop asking you these questions, which no one wants us to answer.

Your friend,

Jack

Date: Thu, 25 Jul 2002 21:36:43

Subject: Blue Velvet

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

COMPLETELY IRRELEVANT NOTES ON blue velvet THE DAVID LYNCH FILM
TRANSCRIBED EXACTLY AS WRITTEN ON A BLUE NOTE PAD WITHOUT
INTERPRETATION

--

So what do you know about the ear?

I don't know much but bits and pieces. I hear things.

--

There are opportunities in life for gaining knowledge and experience.

--

It sounds like a good daydream, but actually doing it's too strange, too weird.

--

That stuff stinks.

Oh, this's the new stuff. No smell.

--

The blue lady.

--

She sings Blue Velvet like a 45 played at 33.

--

I don't know if you're a detective or a pervert.

Well that's for me to know and you to find out.

--

blue eyeshadow, blue robe, chef's knife, bourbon.

--

Baby wants Blue Velvet.

--

Don't you fucking look at me.

--

Do it for Van Gogh.

--

See my breast. You can feel it. My nipple, it's getting hard. You can touch it. You can

feel it.

--

Hit me.

--

It's a strange world.

--

Sandy's dream of robins.

--

Are you alright?

No, I'm not.

--

I can still feel blue velvet

Through my tears

--

I'm in the middle of a mystery, and it's all secret.

You like mysteries that much?

Yuh-hunh.

--

Bluer than velvet was the night

Softer than satin

Were the stars

--

The fire -- the beast

--

Candy colored clown

They call the Sandman

--

Let's fuck.

I'll fuck anything that moves.

--

You're like me.

--

I don't want to talk about it.

--

The cops were involved.

--

So many shades of blue -- that shirt's cerulean.

--

I love you.

Love me.

--

Where?

Where's my dream?

--

Blue rug, blue paint on the walls, slate blue doors

--

Lobotomized cop. Earless man.

--

Loveletters straight from my heart.

--

I'm gonna let them find you on their own.

--

Fuck with me man?

--

I can hear your fucking radio you stupid SHIT.

--

Where are you?

Where ARE you?

--

It's all over, Jeffrey.

--

Brains on floor. Bulbs out.

--

Lunch is ready.

--

Sandy's robin.

--

The robin is eating a bug.

--

It's a strange world, isn't it?

--

Repeat start montage.

--

Isabella and her boy.

--

And I can see blue

velvet through my tears.

Simon

Date: Fri, 26 Jul 2002 10:44:58

Subject: Proposal

From: skipvskip@hotmail.com

To: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

Simon:

I've got to say, your latest "Blue" email throws me for a loop. While I never have quite completely understood the connections between the various factoids you've been throwing my way regarding your "book" or "dissertation" or "project" or "theory" or "film" etc., the bits of dialogue and minor observations about the film *Blue Velvet* seem particularly irrelevant, and are even labeled as such. Someday you'll have to explain to me, or provide for my reading, or viewing, etc. how all these tenuous jigsaw pieces could conceivably fit together.

In the meantime, I have an offer, or a proposal, or what have you.

Susanne and I are leaving town. Unless some unexpected calamity occurs, by this time next week, I'll be free of the trouble with the Chicago Police Department. My lawyer stuck to his guns and the Judge has told the DA that their warrant was bunk for a drug arrest, so my record should be clear, as should my "obligations" to the local authorities.

My lover and I plan to live in a nomadic fashion for a while. First we will go north up towards Toronto, where the Valent clan has an outpost and a carpet cleaning operation where I might find some temporary employment. Eventually with the descent of fall and into the beginnings of winter, we intend to make our way south and west, camping at National Parks, and visiting friends along the way, eventually to arrive at the Anza-Borrego desert, where Susanne has a friend who might offer us a place to stay while we work on a book of photographs chronicling contemporary plate tectonics, or the plight of migrant workers on date farms, or both, or neither. It's all an open question mark.

But anyway, there will be an open slot at Quicksilver messenger service, and if you are seeking employ, I could probably arrange for that job to be yours, and would happily sell you my Trek for half its market value. It's a good job, pay's decent, no benefits but excitement and exercise. You're advised however to find health insurance on your own, and strongly. Injuries are de rigueur. There is also the question of "missionary work." You have in your possession the contents of the Book of Acts. I owe some friends approximately \$2,500 for those contents. At current market rate, those contents should be worth about twice that. Much of my biz came through you anyho -- most of my friends are too old and middleclassish, or have already made their explorations and require none further. If you're willing, I would like to hook you up with my friends up north who provide the Word, and some of my friends here who consume it. I would be extremely grateful to you if you could help me to settle this current obligation, and I'm sure the Rainbow people would be glad to make your further acquaintance provided you deal with them fair but not square.

I know that this will leave you with less time for your research, but thought you might be interested in all or some of these opportunities. I'm sure your unemployment will run out soon, and thought this might appeal to you.

Skip

P.S. If you know anyone looking for a sublet, let me know, there's four months left on my lease. \$800/mo and a bargain at the price.

Date: Sat, 27 Jul 2002 15:21:30

**Subject: I'm COMING on a JET PLANE don't know when I'll be back in the
FUCKING HOT desert again**

From: ernestonotcom@netzero.com

To: berto_alto@tank20.com

BERTO --

What FREAKY JOY it was to TALK WITH YOU ON THE TELEPHONE.

YOUR VOICE HAS BEEN RESTORED.

THE KIDS AND I are jazzed, pumped, PSYCHED that we'll be seeing you tomorrow.

especially since YOU WILL NO LONGER BE HOSPITALIZED.

they call that SERENDIPITY.

I haven't had a week free of used cars in months.

CONGRATULATIONS on your return to, or descent into, CONVENTIONAL SANITY.

WELCOME THE 21st CENTURY. true, so far it has SUCKED ROCKS as far as epochs go BUT IT;S the ONLY ONE WE;VE GOT. so you'll just have the LIVE WITH IT or IN IT like the rest of us POOR BASTARDS.

JEFF IS PRACTICALLY BOUNCING OFF THE WALLS ABOUT GOING TO WRIGLEY and he also wants you to teach him karate or SOME SHIT LIKE THAT. he's been getting his akss kicked at the park and the best advice I can give him is to KEEP HIS HANDS UP, PROTECT YOUR HEAD if engaged in conflict and also RUN LIKE HELL whenever possible and also KICKING A BIG GUY IN THE BALLS DOES NOT

MAKE YOU A SISSY. so maybe youi can teach him something about tai chi or whtever though I keep telling him that's a kind of meditation it's not about fighting. JESUS I'M a LOUSY FATHER not really I love those kids but the only thing I remember about sandlot fighting is that aloe is good for scrapes, SOOTHING, and that it's CRUCIAL TO ICE YOUR LUMPS as soon as possible after receiving them.

I'm a LOVER not a FIGHTER.

Anyway, WOW. Completely psyched that I will not have to use any of the ELABORATE CONTRIVANCES I HAD CONCOCTED to explain to the kids why you were not speaking to any of us and had to be restrained by the ANDY FRAIN guys from CHARGING THE FIELD TO DO BATTLE WITH DRAGONS.....

So let's meet tomorrow at Noon at PEGASUS in GREEKTOWN for some FLAMING CHEESE to celebrate your FREEDOM!!! Brother man. CAN;T WAIT TO SEE YOU.

Ernesto

Date: Mon, 29 Jul 2002 02:13:10
Subject: So why do I do what I do
From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com
To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Look,

I don't do these things because they're good, or because I think that they'll be good. I do these things because they're interesting. Which is a poor excuse, because what I really mean by that is that I do these things only because they're interesting (to me), which is really an incredibly self-absorbed way to go through life, but still. And sure I hope that they'll be interesting to you, but ultimately, will that drive me? I don't know. Really, if I've told myself a good story, in the end I go home and respect myself. Will any of this

improve the world or feed the kids in Afghanistan or make public transportation available to low income travelers or end the war on terror?

No.

But still. It can't really hurt, can it?

Not that that's an explanation.

As for the rest, sure, I'll take your place. Why not?

Simon

Date: Mon, 29 Jul 2002 10:35:07

Subject: The Killer Wore Blue Jeans

From: det_harold_barstow@chicagopolice.org

**To: det_thomas_johnson@chicagopolice.org,
det_richard_longfellow@chicagopolice.org**

Tom, Dick,

That's all we have from fibers on the DuBois case. No hairs, bits of skin, dandruff, blood evidence, etc. have turned up. But forensics say that whoever pulled the blade across was wearing Levis.

Harry

Date: Thu, 01 Aug 2002 02:26:29

Subject: Blue Shift: A Theory or A Short Film or A Scenario or A Project

From: simonsaysthis@omphalos.com

To: skipvskip@hotmail.com

Dear Skip,

MUSIC DURING INORDINATELY LONG TITLES SEQUENCE:

Miles Davis, "So What"

The titles, which include not only the standard opening credits but also the standard closing credits, scroll past in tiny letters, a nearly illegible font, at the bottom of the screen, while the bulk of the frame is taken up by a seemingly endless roll of billowing satin, which gradually changes in color from a nearly white sky blue through blue's part of the spectrum, towards a shade of navy that verges on blackness.

OPENING SCENE:

The 14th Century, a battlefield near Milan. Trumpets blaring. Banners unfurled, sapphire blue, ruby red. Swords clanging. Arrows whizzing through the air. A knight in blue, closeup on a face wincing in pain. An axe falls. A head removed, that of a woman general, Regine. The Blue Company banner falls. Blood spills across it.

FADE TO:

A small garret in Barcelona, around the turn of the 20th century. The poet Sabartés struggles through the night, working and reworking a single line. The wax paper he has hung on his windows where they are cracked filter the moonlight to give the room a pale blue glow. The poet Sabartés is attempting his most serious work thus far, a poem that will encapsulate the spirit of the time, of the age of unhappiness that the young bohemian

finds himself surrounded by. The poet struggles on the line. The poet sweats. The poet's pencil breaks, and he pounds the desk in frustration. The poet crumples the paper in his hands and throws it into a basket, where it joins a dozen or so similarly crumpled failed attempts. The poet Sabartés rises and walks over to the studio next door, where Picasso, who opens the door reluctantly only after Sabartés has pounded it repeatedly, is just finishing his final touches on a painting of a blind guitarist in blue. Sabartés inhales quickly, and stands before the painting. "When did you start this one, Picasso?" he asks. "Yesterday afternoon," replies Picasso. "What I have been trying to do on paper all summer long," Sabartés says, "you have accomplished in paint over the course of 24 hours." Picasso says, "I know, my friend, I know." "Picasso," Sabartés says, "I will serve you all the rest of my days." Picasso smiles, "I know, Sabartés, I know," he says, and he puts his arm around his friend's shoulders.

BLUE DISSOLVE:

TO A TIGHT CLOSEUP of an owl's eyes. The snowy owl, high in a Blue Spruce, hoots. The camera pulls back. It is night, the color of midnight. Beneath the trees there is a wash of tulips, and in their midst, a blue orchid, which bends as a steel blue Mercedes rushes past.

WIPE TO:

Robert Lowell is preparing to shave. An attendant in a white coat unlocks a box and hands him a straight razor, then steps back, arms folded across his chest. Beside him a man in his seventies, frail and slightly wild, while waiting his turn, watches Lowell's every move. The man killed a woman decades ago. Lowell lathers. Lowell stares into his own eyes in the mirror. His eyes are sad. Lowell pauses. There's a poem in this. Lowell grips the razor and lifts the blade to his neck. Steady now.

MOMENTARY LAPSE OF NARRATIVE

In which the project director steps up in front of the cameras, and apologizes to its audience for the fact that art, like life, entails a necessary resort to cliché. The conspiracy theory is always in some sense the truth, though typically and necessarily a ham-handed reduction of said. He shrugs. Nothing to be done. The director drinks a Blue Hawaiian. The lei he wears around his neck is also blue.

NEXT SCENE:

A powerful man and his attendants are waved through the gates of the White House, past the marine guards in their formal dress uniforms. Secret Service agents meet the car and admit the CEO of one of the nation's largest energy concerns through the back door, to the ornate Blue Room. The sounds of gathering are heard in the distance, as a band plays "Blue Christmas." The CEO occupies an ornate 19th century couch, and waits, nervously. Some fifteen minutes later, an American President, looking just a little bit awkward in a tuxedo, enters the room and sits beside his friend on the couch. "Ken," the American President says as he places his hand on his friend's knee, "tell me what you need." The camera pulls back as the popular President and the powerful CEO exchange certain anecdotes, off color jokes, and favors.

The camera pulls back into the ballroom, where the band plays "Blue Suede Shoes" as celebrities, politicians, media figures, policy wonks and the like are twirling around the dance floor. The camera momentarily focuses on a man in a dark blue suit, towards the back of the room, in shadow, who is listening to an important conversation in his earbud. The camera then spins a few times around the dance floor before returning to the American President and his friend, who are shaking hands.

SWIPE TO:

Later that night, the powerful CEO, back in the comfort of his Texas ranch, is meeting

with two rather brawny cowboys. The powerful CEO is angry, agitated. The powerful CEO says, "I want him dead. Cleanly." The two rather brawny cowboys depart. The powerful CEO turns towards his computer screen, and writes an ill-thought email to a woman who he has trusted in the past, with whom he even had a brief and discrete affair, a woman who has handled his public relations skillfully in the past. In that email, which the audience reads in its entirety, as it is typed, the powerful CEO reveals certain details of the conversation he has had with the American President, in which certain promises were made, certain other promises were not, and certain favors from the past were called to the table. The powerful CEO looks desperate as he writes in the dark, in the blue glow of his LCD monitor. The powerful CEO hits send.

A FEW MONTHS LATER (reads the subtitle):

Regine DuBois is on the phone with the powerful CEO, and she is receiving bad news about her own employment situation, bad news about the fate of her company and the one that she represents. Regine DuBois, on impulse, makes certain threats to reveal certain secrets unless certain conditions are not met.

IN AN FBI INTERROGATION ROOM:

Sue Miller, a loyal, smart, and dedicated special agent, who has served the bureau for a decade of her life, is called to meet with one of her superiors, who has flown in from Washington for that purpose. Expecting the meeting to consist of a discussion of certain details of a planned report, she is surprised when a senior agent, Kenneth Lethe, pulls from his briefcase some photographs, some photographs that Sue Miller did not realize existed. The photographs show Sue Miller, or a younger, less responsible version of herself, engaged in certain compromising positions. A proposal is made, a deal is struck. A career is preserved, some morals are compromised.

MOMENTS LATER (CLOSEUP):

On a northbound EL train, a G-woman sheds a tear.

AND THEN:

Miles Davis raises his horn. Miles Davis is sweating rivers. Miles Davis is holding a high note. Miles Davis is beyond human but not superhuman, otherhuman. Miles Davis looks like shit, he's visibly frail. He looks old beyond his years. Miles Davis is holding that note. He's still holding it. A woman in the audience lights a cigarette. Miles Davis is still holding that note. It's a piercing note. The woman smokes her cigarette. Miles Davis won't let go. The woman puts out her cigarette. Miles Davis pulls the trumpet from his lips. The note echoes in our ears. Miles Davis goes back to his dressing room. Someone hands him a towel. Goddamn. Miles Davis does a line of cocaine. Miles Davis shakes. Miles Davis falls down.

A MAN IN A BLUE CAPE

Lurks in the shadows, where he sits on a garbage can, pulling a thorn from his foot.

DECADES BEFORE:

A factory in Bengal. A twelve-year-old girl is operating a machine with a large metal wheel, turning indigo to dye. She sees that something is caught in the machine; she reaches to pull it out. Her hand gets caught in the machine. Her hand is torn off. The girl screams, and falls to the floor, clutching the wound at her bleeding stump. Her fellow workers come to help. A whistle blows. Work stops for a moment. The girl is carted off on a stretcher. Her fellow workers are ordered back to work. Workers mop the floor. Another young girl is put in her place. Work resumes.

IN A DARK TOWER:

Kenneth Lethe is praising the work that Sue Miller has done on the cover document. Kenneth Lethe is putting on blue jeans. Kenneth Lethe says something suggestive, something sexually explicit, to Sue Miller. She demurs, and then moves towards him. Sue Miller removes Kenneth Lethe's jeans. Kenneth Lethe and Sue Miller have sex. A threatening, edgy song by the Rolling Stones plays in the background. Kenneth Lethe puts his jeans back on. Kenneth Lethe is putting on gloves. Sue Miller puts on a flowery robe. The flowers are tulips, tulips of blue. Kenneth Lethe pulls a knife from his bag. He asks Sue Miller if she has a tomato. Kenneth Lethe tests the knife on the tomato. It slices in half with almost no pressure at all; its flesh and seeds spill over the cutting board. Kenneth Lethe nods. Sue Miller checks the hallway. There is nobody out there. Sue Miller and Kenneth Lethe walk on down the hall. Sue Miller knocks on Regine DuBois' door. Regine DuBois answers, a glass of red wine in her hand, looks disappointed. She was expecting something else. Sue Miller asks if she can borrow a cup of sugar. Regine DuBois nods. Regine DuBois turns towards her kitchen. Kenneth Lethe slips in behind her. Kenneth Lethe pulls a blade in one swift, smooth motion across Regine DuBois' neck. Regine DuBois falls the floor. Blood and red wine.

AWFUL INTRUSION

At which point the writer apologizes for the pandering, for the carnage, for the occasional lapse into sentimentality and for breaking the frame of the story's austere near-photo e-realism. But, the writer reminds us, these things do actually occur in real life. You're being watched in ways that you don't know and innocent people are being killed by your government in your name. Every day. In secret. Right fucking now. You should feel more blue, not less. But you already know that. It's a miracle, he says, that we aren't all slack-jawed droolers like poor Berto, such is the nature of all of this shit.

CUT TO:

A Vice President receives a phone call. A Vice President nods. A Vice President makes another phone call, and says something about a win for national security.

THE NEXT DAY:

Three detectives are on an elevator; another man gets on with them, wearing blue jeans. The man rides down with them. None of the detectives will remember this man, or think anything remarkable of him. The man is carrying a backpack, containing a knife, wrapped in a bloody shirt, in a kitchen trash bag. The detectives discuss sports and interior decorating.

THE NARRATOR

Explains that "police" is a fiction we have inflicted on ourselves.

AND NOW:

Sue Miller is receiving a special commendation. A medal. The medal is blue. Sue Miller is holding back tears. Her eyeshadow is sky blue.

WE FADE TO BLUE

and there is a BLUE SHIFT as a BLACK HOLE moves towards us

&

"It's All Over Now Baby Blue" by Bob Dylan plays eerily in the distance as

blue thins out to darkness

--Simon

Date: Mon, 05 Aug 2002 16:42:29

Subject: End Blue

From: berto_alto@tank20.com

To: susannenbreone@aol.com

Dear You,

Well . . .

I should say first that I understand

about **you and Skip**

Love it aint easy

and escape is even more difficult

Skip might surprise you,
he might surprise all of us
he might even surprise himself

I wish you a great journey

All our paths will cross again

in some time

and I'm *so proud* of you

for finally getting out from under that boulder
you called a job

I hope that you'll send me
some of the photos you take
on your travels

You're probably curious . . .

. . . about what happened to me

Which version do you want?

The Official Version? (the "Haldol" version)

The Sentimental Version? (the "Dulcinea" version)

or the Truth? (the "Truth")

The Official Version

About three weeks into my imprisonment

in the tower

whoops!

just kidding

about three weeks into my "treatment,"
as the dopamine levels in my brain

got . . . well . . . balanced

and I realized
that for much of my life
I have been having hallucinations and delusions

This has to do with the trauma I experienced early in life

when my father

who I respected loved dearly and so on

would come home and abuse
my mother, brother, sister, self et cetera

and then.

after.

as if a switch had suddenly gone off in his brain
he would come into Ernesto's and my room

and read to us from Don Quixote
even though
moments before
he had called us such things as
bad worthless idiot and so on

. . . our father reading those adventures
in a sweet voice full of humor
sigh

So

When I experienced the recent
trauma

I cast myself back knightly
into the dusty plains of Spain
(actually, Italy)

Until one morning
Haldol worked its magic et cetera

and I realized
that I could no longer
retreat to the tale end

sound of falling eye-scales

and I found myself in a hospital

surrounded by others' demons

and I realized that

I'm only a deluded old gent from La Mancha
after all.

(INTERLUDE)

I saw ERNestO jeffie and J*E*S*S*I*C*A
this week. Yayyy!

We went and saw the Cubs game at Wrigley



Ernesto and I had a great time
bonding over shared
"illnesses" "impulses" "predicaments"

and

"parents"

We drank a beer called "Old Style"



ate a pizza called "Lou Malnati's"

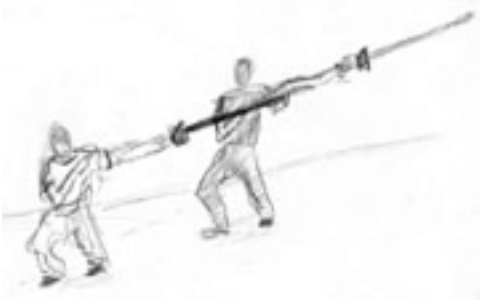


we *laughed out loud*

I taught Jeff a few Blue Company moves



how to protect himself



just a little bit



from the forces of evil

I realized that

no matter what happens or
where I go next I
shouldn't lose track of them
or even my sister Olivia

. . . who is praying for me right now

(/END INTERLUDE)

The Sentimental Version

After my last message to you
from back in the 14th Century . . .

Our Captain Regine
hunkered us around her
to explain that our mission,
all along, had been to delicately influence
the cultural echos
of the color Blue itself . . .

(whilst the 14th c. red-cloth-guild
was bribing painters to paint the Devil blue;
and the blue-cloth-guild
was bribing painters to paint the Devil red)

. . . to support certain 21st c.

blue corporate logos and valuations.

My mind was blown ---

I thought I was the marketing guy
supporting Blue Company's
militia-ing!

Instead,

the Blue Company
was enforcing my blue marketing!

When suddenly . . .

Our Captain Regine was captured by security
and, presumably, axed.

Well, after SKIP DIED and
so many of my other FRIENDS DIED
and REGINE was gone . . .

. . . you might say . . .
that my mind

. . . well . . .

kind of. . . blew.

I flipped.

I flip-skied.

I flip-o-roonied.

Instead of fearing for my life
I put the fear of blue in others.

Instead of running from security,
I stalked security.

I found the security guys
--- the ones who killed Skip --

and I isolated one

and I'm not proud of this

and I slit him

and I have wicked nightmares now

and I found my own hands red

and I put on his suit

and took his place

and shipped back to the 21st.

Because I needed to be with you.

and when I got back

I discovered that your heart had been taken

by your Regine

and I flipped so hard I broke.

Thank God Skip

my silly compadre

brought me to the tower

I mean hospital

(INTERLUDE THE SECOND)

I saw in the paper today

that Edward DuBois,

Regine's cousin,

has been commissioned

to do a memorial sculpture

in **Manitoba**

it's called

"The Blue Angel Descends from Heaven with Grace

to Gather and Avenge Lost Souls"

I don't know how what that means

or how it will look

but I like the way it sounds

a construction crane descending

on spread aeroplane wings

breathing fire in a snowy field.

(/END INTERLUDE)

The

Truth

Susanne, we live in a world between worlds.

Think about what has already happened here

in America

in the world

in this century

before you tell me that there is

no escape

no way back

no alternative

in which things might have changed

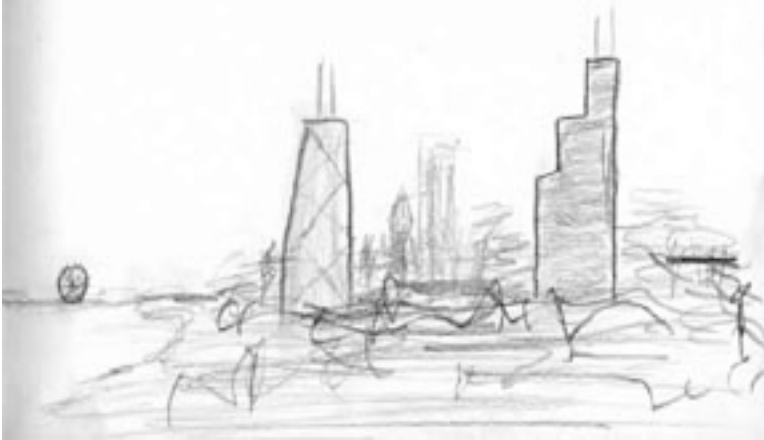
improved

"progressed" differently

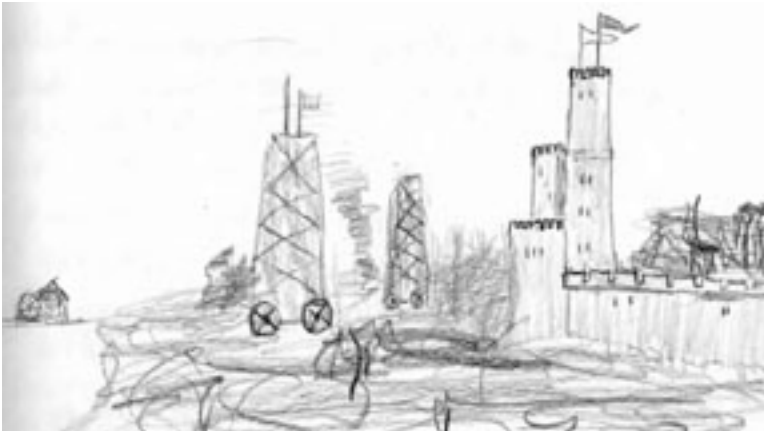
Don't worry 'bout me.

I can certainly function in this world, I can
put on a suit, carry a briefcase, I can

market professionally.



But the **truth** is that everywhere I go,
I see **both** the world that is now
and the world that is now-in-then.



The truth is
this world we try to share
is only one of many possible worlds
built on stumbles from the past . . .

A butterfly farts in Borneo
and *everything* in this century
turns out differently.

Is this *my* problem?

Am I **insane**?

Just because I've smelt the mildew
and campsmoke and gnawed the roast weasel
of that other world
that is out (t)here

right this fucking minute?

A keystroke away?

(Big Secret: you don't even
need a machine to get there.)

Dear You,

The *truth* is that I

loved you once

and

I want to go back there

where we left off

make a couple adjustments

so that maybe

you and skip and jeff and jessica and ernesto and darlene and all the people

I care about

won't have to read headlines

like the ones we've been seeing

all summer long.

The **truth** is

that they lent me history books

in the tower and I read all night.

The **truth** is that I

am going back there

to rescue Regine

and us

and a few other things.

Sure I'll probably

fail

but

I'd rather try to make a few changes

than to stay in this time, in this awful time

so blue

waves

I'll be back

. . . probably.

See you "then."

Your friend,

Berto