

Rob Wittig
wit@robwit.net
218.310.6390
1715 E. 6th Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55812-1212

Blue Company

a novel in e-mail

by

Rob Wittig

Illustrations 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
bleccch!

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-hooooooooo!

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 & fantastickal

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 graffitti** 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

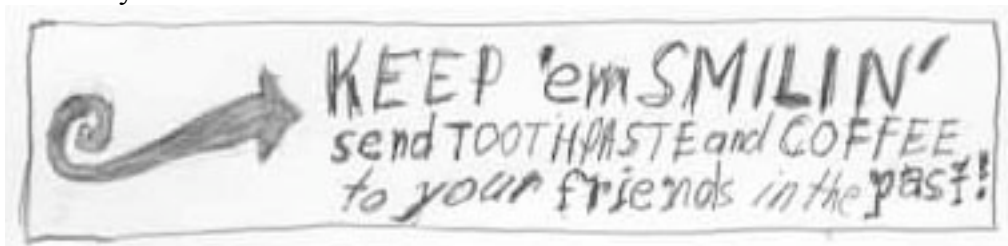
Lucky birds ---
high enough to see
the food-filled flatlands



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!

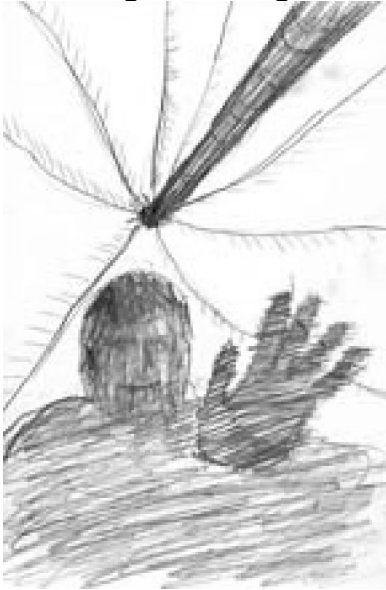
Lay of the Land

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 joustiers?
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 they 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 Provencal 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? hmmm . . .
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 bettter 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

luuuuuuuuv 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

Ssssssssnrk!
that is a heart-felt kiss

and
Smsmsmlarlarlaralarlurursmmmrnk!

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
stoopid, 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 drifted 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 scram

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 belligerant**

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!

spoooooky!

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

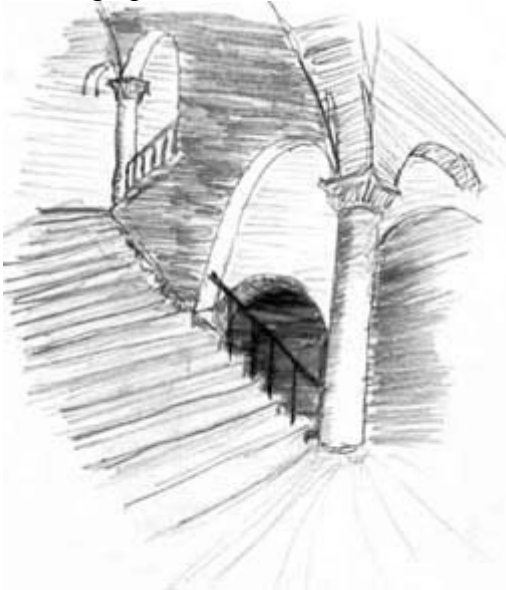
So we split off
from the main group
and Skip starts working his **charm**
on the **underground network**

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!

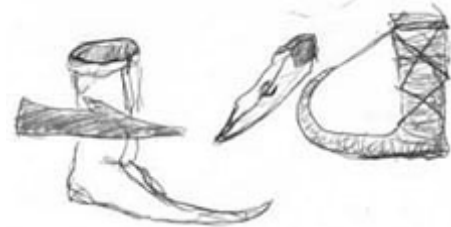
They know there's something really weird about us
They can't put their fingers on it
but it doesn't freak them out.

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!**

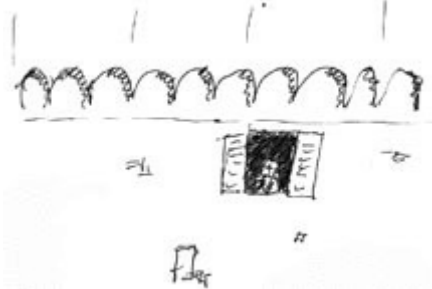
Hear a Milanese Doorbell

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 wiggleworm** for about 15 seconds
- (everyone all over Europe makes straw beds
in the exact same wiggleworm 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 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 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 sooooo 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 **bummed** out

mit der werlde krank
and the whole world **hurts**

Alle tage is min klage,
All day I am sad

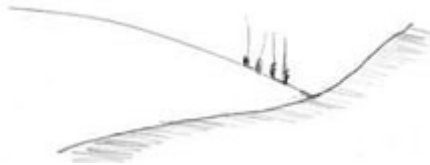
von der ich daz bestte sage
that **she** whom I like so much

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**

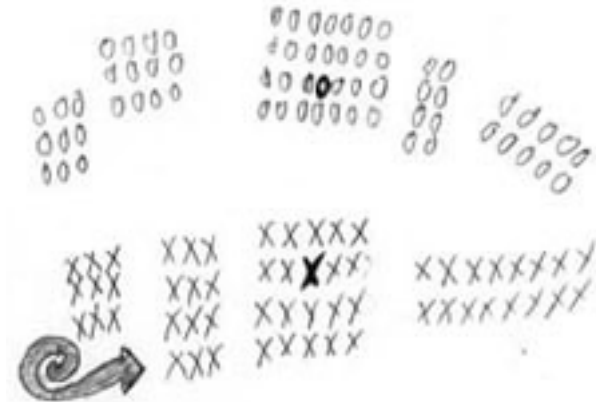
The Pope's Junior Varsity Army

... 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



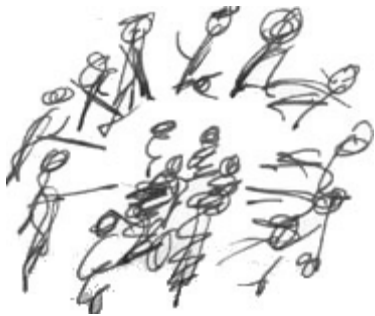
impale themselves on her



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



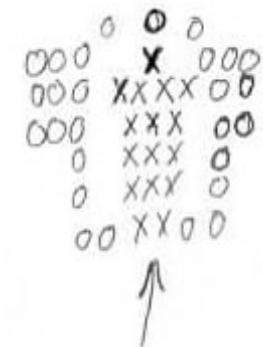
made this **raggedy-assed run**
down the hill

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 laaaaaa!

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-