

New York Times, Feb. 10, 2003 (Business section)

E-MAIL SPAM SCAM IS SENT IN BUSH'S NAME

By Matthew Mirapaul

At first, the e-mail message reads like all the others: There's the need for confidentiality. An assurance that the transaction is completely legal. And the inevitable appeal, in awkwardly formal language, for help in procuring a large amount of money.

This may come to you as a surprise (to borrow the language of such e-mail notes), but the message was not sent by someone claiming to be an African potentate's heir. Instead, it says, it was written by President Bush, the son of a former president, who seeks your urgent assistance in financing the removal of Iraq's leader. His "trusted intermediary" for the transaction: the Internal Revenue Service.

The spoof was written by Zoltan Grossman, a geography professor at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire. Like most people in the wired world, Professor Grossman, 41, has been swamped with e-mail messages from Nigeria and other foreign lands, seemingly sincere solicitations that are really schemes designed to defraud gullible recipients with promises of quick riches.

Although Professor Grossman routinely deletes such messages, he was prompted to write his parody after Mr. Bush's efforts to raise economic and political support for a war on Iraq began to remind him of the messages from Nigerian spammers.

"They're all from the son or daughter of a former ruler," he said. "A lot of them talk about oil money. And they need huge sums of cash very quickly. I thought, Why does this sound so familiar?"

Professor Grossman sent his spoof to two Web sites on Jan. 21, and it has spread rapidly from there. The full message can be read at scamorama.com/gwb.html. The parody is a witty variation on a vintage scam. Its victims are promised a big payoff if they supply money to gain access to, say, a bank account. Of course, the payoff never materializes.

The Nigerian Fraud E-Mail Gallery, at potifos.com/fraud, holds 420 different examples. Lawrence Kestenbaum, a researcher at the University of Michigan who is the site's operator, said he had 1,000 more entries to add.

A White House spokesman said he had not seen Professor Grossman's sham spam. Nor are unsuspecting readers likely to be duped by the spoof, in part because its stilted prose differs from Mr. Bush's colloquial style.

Still, Professor Grossman said, "Let's hope no one takes it seriously and actually donates," as the e-mail requests, 10 to 25 percent of one's annual income.

Original *New York Times* article: www.nytimes.com/2003/02/10/technology/10SPAM.html

New York Times, May 11, 2003 (Week in Review section)

YOU'VE GOT JUNK MAIL :

RE: WHAT PEOPLE LOVE TO HATE

By Amy Harmon

No slur on the anti-spam crusaders, with their punitive new laws, their fancy filter technology, their pursuit of the Internet archvillains who clog e-mail in-boxes with offers that range from the utterly offensive to the too good to be true.

Wish them Godspeed, for it is an axiom of online life that everyone hates spam.

But as the determination to crack down on unsolicited e-mail surges along with its volume, it may be time to acknowledge an online heresy: it's kind of fun to hate spam. Hating spam has, in fact, become something of an international pastime.

Spamradio.com, created by a group of computer hackers in London, converts spam into an audio broadcast set to music. Thousands of visitors a week tune in for an average of 11 minutes to listen to cutting-edge spam ("New in USA!! nonsurgical liposuction with overnight results) and old favorites ("Become a Legally Ordained Priest").

At spamletters .com, Jonathan Land of Kingston, N.Y., publishes the e-mail he sends to spammers asking about their products, and their often surreal replies.

"It's a coping mechanism," he said. Allen Hutchison of Sunnyvale, Calif., generates haiku from newly arrived spam every 15 minutes at his site, www.hutchison.org/allen/spamku/.

Others content themselves with listing personal favorites. "Dimensional Warp Generator Needed WWYG" wins points for weirdness among the Web log crowd, perhaps surpassed only by "re: Your Large Intestine 2691BtqK9-801rKXR5527-20."

One frequent spam recipient admits that multiple copies of "FREE Mother's Day Cards" reminded him the holiday was approaching.

Once a mere nuisance, spam's ubiquity has made it an unlikely tool for social bonding. In an age when no one watches the same television shows, virtually everyone with an e-mail address has received 42 spams advertising a herbal Viagra, and is ready to complain about them.

John Mozena, who has made a lifetime hobby out of fighting unsolicited e-mail, was taken aback recently to hear his retirement-age parents discussing their pornography spam. "The topic comes up in the strangest groups," Mr. Mozena said.

The Nigerian money-laundering scam, perhaps the most iconic of spams, has inspired retribution schemes far more ingenious than the variations of the scam itself, in which the relative of a deposed third-world leader promises riches if the recipient will help him spirit money out of [fill in the country].

So universal is the cultural aversion to the Nigerian spam that Zoltán Grossman, an assistant professor of geography at the University of Wisconsin, decided a spoof on it was the best vehicle to criticize the war in Iraq earlier this year. In his version, President Bush, "the son of a former president," seeks "YOUR ASSISTANCE IN ACQUIRING OIL FUNDS THAT ARE PRESENTLY TRAPPED IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ."

"I was trying to make a serious point about how much this war would cost us," Mr. Grossman said. "But it was also a way to get back at spam."

Other forms of vengeance are more tangible. At least one notorious spammer recently found himself a subscriber to most of the world's magazines, when people who had received his spam organized a campaign to return the favor.

Indeed, the nice thing about spam, some sociologists say, is that everyone can hate it. Spam is bipartisan. Not all may agree on how to get rid of it - some prefer bounties, others Bayesian algorithms - but that it must be excoriated is beyond dispute. Even the Direct Marketing Association recently joined the anti-spam wagon.

"Some countries have to invent scapegoats to bring people together," said Barry Wellman, a sociologist at the University of Toronto. "But we all despise spam."

Yet even as they curse its existence, many spam recipients marvel at the ever-changing subject lines spammers devise to evade screening software and tantalize readers into opening it. Particularly cunning, stupid or mystifying ones are commonly read aloud or forwarded (unsolicited) to colleagues and family members.

"The game theorist in me loves the arms race," said Harrison Rainie, director of the Pew Internet Project. " 'How many clever things can I do to get some idiot to open this e-mail?' It's sort of an amazing parade to behold."

An Internet veteran who regularly deletes his spam without opening it, Mr. Rainie admits to having fallen for a recent spammer inspiration: disguising spam with subject lines for anti-spam software. But he says he can usually turn spam into schadenfreude by imagining the other people who have fallen for it: "You can sort of pat yourself on the back and say, 'At least I'm not that stupid.' "

Spam's entertainment value varies depending on the recipient. Some men who know perfectly well that spam is sent blindly to long lists of e-mail addresses nonetheless have become enraged by penis-enlargement solicitations. Both men and women express particular annoyance at spam that offers enhancements to body parts they don't possess.

Others lost any sense of humor about spam a long time ago.

"I don't think we can just laugh and hit the delete key and go on," said Julian Haight, the creator of Spam Cop, a blocking tool. "Once you've done that 10,000 times it's not funny anymore."

This summer, unless something changes, the volume of spam messages will for the first time surpass that of e-mail from people who actually know one another. The prospect has inspired a flurry of lawsuits against spammers by Internet service providers and the first state law, in Virginia, that makes sending misleading messages a felony.

Representative Zoe Lofgren, a California Democrat, recently proposed legislation that would put a bounty on spammers who fail to identify their e-mail as advertising, as an incentive to citizens and service providers to track down the often elusive origin of the messages.

But since so much spam comes from overseas, some Internet experts warn that American laws will never entirely contain it. Some favor technological retaliation. Others suggest lightening up.

"There are elements about spam that are very entertaining whether we like to admit it or not," said David Silver, director of the Resource Center for Cyberculture Studies at the University of Washington. "I don't think people would spend so much time talking about it if they didn't find some kind of strange curiosity in it."

Spam's humorous quality, Mr. Silver says, often stems from an effort to introduce a human element into mass mailings. Because of crude database technology and general incompetence, attempts to add a more personal touch to subject lines typically result in messages like: "I agree with you, amy@nytimes.com."

Original *New York Times* article: www.nytimes.com/2003/05/11/weekinreview/11HARM.html

URGENT ASSISTANCE - NEEDED BY USA

by GEORGE WALKER BUSH

21 January 2003

Email: zoltan@igc.org (By Z. Grossman, please circulate for fun)

A spoof using the familiar form of "Nigerian Scam" e-mails

IMMEDIATE ATTENTION NEEDED :

HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL

FROM: GEORGE WALKER BUSH

202.456.1414 / 202.456.1111

FAX: 202.456.2461

DEAR SIR / MADAM,

I AM GEORGE WALKER BUSH, SON OF THE FORMER
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
GEORGE HERBERT WALKER BUSH, AND CURRENTLY
SERVING AS PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA. THIS LETTER MIGHT SURPRISE YOU
BECAUSE WE HAVE NOT MET NEITHER IN PERSON
NOR BY CORRESPONDENCE. I CAME TO KNOW OF
YOU IN MY SEARCH FOR A RELIABLE AND REPUTABLE
PERSON TO HANDLE A VERY CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS
TRANSACTION, WHICH INVOLVES THE TRANSFER OF A
HUGE SUM OF MONEY TO AN ACCOUNT REQUIRING
MAXIMUM CONFIDENCE.

I AM WRITING YOU IN ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE

PRIMARILY TO SEEK YOUR ASSISTANCE IN
ACQUIRING OIL FUNDS THAT ARE PRESENTLY
TRAPPED IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ. MY PARTNERS
AND I SOLICIT YOUR ASSISTANCE IN COMPLETING A
TRANSACTION BEGUN BY MY FATHER, WHO HAS LONG BEEN
ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN THE EXTRACTION OF PETROLEUM IN
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND BRAVELY SERVED HIS
COUNTRY AS DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED STATES
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.

IN THE DECADE OF THE NINETEEN-EIGHTIES,
MY FATHER, THEN VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, SOUGHT TO WORK
WITH THE GOOD OFFICES OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF IRAQ TO REGAIN LOST OIL REVENUE
SOURCES IN THE NEIGHBORING ISLAMIC REPUBLIC
OF IRAN. THIS UNSUCCESSFUL VENTURE WAS SOON
FOLLOWED BY A FALLING OUT WITH HIS IRAQI
PARTNER, WHO SOUGHT TO ACQUIRE ADDITIONAL OIL
REVENUE SOURCES IN THE NEIGHBORING EMIRATE
OF KUWAIT, A WHOLLY-OWNED U.S.-BRITISH
SUBSIDIARY.

MY FATHER RE-SECURED THE PETROLEUM ASSETS OF KUWAIT IN 1991 AT A COST OF SIXTY-ONE BILLION U.S. DOLLARS (\$61,000,000,000). OUT OF THAT COST, THIRTY-SIX BILLION DOLLARS (\$36,000,000,000) WERE SUPPLIED BY HIS PARTNERS IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA AND OTHER PERSIAN GULF MONARCHIES, AND SIXTEEN BILLION DOLLARS (\$16,000,000,000) BY GERMAN AND JAPANESE PARTNERS. BUT MY FATHER'S FORMER IRAQI BUSINESS PARTNER REMAINED IN CONTROL OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ AND ITS PETROLEUM RESERVES.

MY FAMILY IS CALLING FOR YOUR URGENT ASSISTANCE IN FUNDING THE REMOVAL OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ AND ACQUIRING THE PETROLEUM ASSETS OF HIS COUNTRY, AS COMPENSATION FOR THE COSTS OF REMOVING HIM FROM POWER. UNFORTUNATELY, OUR PARTNERS FROM 1991 ARE NOT WILLING TO SHOULDER THE BURDEN OF THIS NEW VENTURE, WHICH IN ITS UPCOMING PHASE MAY COST THE SUM OF 100 BILLION TO 200 BILLION DOLLARS (\$100,000,000,000 - \$200,000,000,000), BOTH IN THE INITIAL ACQUISITION AND IN LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT.

WITHOUT THE FUNDS FROM OUR 1991
PARTNERS, WE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO
ACQUIRE THE OIL REVENUE TRAPPED WITHIN IRAQ.
THAT IS WHY MY FAMILY AND OUR COLLEAGUES
ARE URGENTLY SEEKING YOUR GRACIOUS ASSISTANCE.
OUR DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES IN THIS
BUSINESS TRANSACTION INCLUDE THE SITTING
VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA, RICHARD CHENEY, WHO IS
AN ORIGINAL PARTNER IN THE IRAQ VENTURE
AND FORMER HEAD OF THE HALLIBURTON OIL
COMPANY, AND CONDOLEEZA RICE, WHOSE
PROFESSIONAL DEDICATION TO THE
VENTURE WAS DEMONSTRATED IN THE NAMING
OF A CHEVRON OIL TANKER AFTER HER.

I WOULD BESEECH YOU TO TRANSFER A SUM
EQUALING TEN TO TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT
(10-25 %) OF YOUR YEARLY INCOME TO OUR
ACCOUNT TO AID IN THIS IMPORTANT VENTURE.
THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA WILL FUNCTION

AS OUR TRUSTED INTERMEDIARY. I PROPOSE
THAT YOU MAKE THIS TRANSFER BEFORE
THE FIFTEENTH (15TH) OF THE MONTH OF
APRIL.

I KNOW THAT A TRANSACTION OF THIS MAGNITUDE
WOULD MAKE ANYONE APPREHENSIVE AND
WORRIED. BUT I AM ASSURING YOU THAT ALL
WILL BE WELL AT THE END OF THE DAY. A BOLD
STEP TAKEN SHALL NOT BE REGRETTEED,
I ASSURE YOU. PLEASE DO BE INFORMED THAT
THIS BUSINESS TRANSACTION IS 100% LEGAL.
IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO CO-OPERATE
IN THIS TRANSACTION, PLEASE CONTACT OUR
INTERMEDIARY REPRESENTATIVES TO FURTHER
DISCUSS THE MATTER.

I PRAY THAT YOU UNDERSTAND OUR PLIGHT.
MY FAMILY AND OUR COLLEAGUES WILL BE
FOREVER GRATEFUL. PLEASE REPLY
IN STRICT CONFIDENCE TO
THE CONTACT NUMBERS BELOW.

SINCERELY WITH WARM REGARDS,

GEORGE WALKER BUSH

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Email: president@whitehouse.gov