

# Seat Sale

## Albano, Italy: Part I of I or II

by Thomas LLOYD

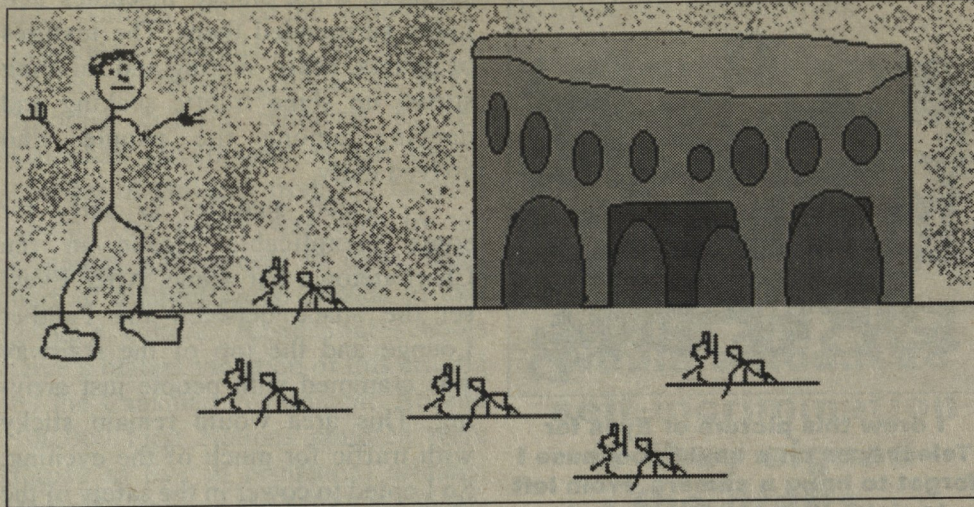
My name is Thomas Lloyd, and right now I'm in Italy visiting family. I'm close to Albano, in the province of Laziale. I've just been chillin' here for the past three weeks; well, more like freezing. Anyway, I've taken time out of my busy days to hastily throw this article together, so read on, and enjoy.

First - the Italian keyboard is not standard issue. Only the letters are in the same place. There are extra letters and extra keys, the likes of which I've never seen. And some keys do different things. Backspace moves between programs and when writing an E-mail some times erases it all. Italians just don't make mistakes I guess. Or if they make a mistake they erase everything.

The thing that infuriates me the most is the pollution. To start with well over 80 percent of their electricity comes from burning fossil fuels. Italians are strongly against nuclear power, claiming that its waste is around for 20,000 years. Talk about planning for the future. On top of the power plants, 65 percent of cars are diesel, and the rest burn leaded gasoline. With leaded gas and diesel you can't have catalytic converters, so one car here creates as much pollution a year as fifty cars back home. I think.

Then there's the freakin' vespas and motorinis. They're like big mopeds, but they're two-strokes, so they burn oiled gasoline with benzene as the catalyst. When traffic stops at a red light dozens of motorinis weave through traffic to the front, and when the light turns green they all race. When they scoot off, a huge blue cloud forms, and locals run out of its path, and tourist keel over.

And the next problem here is transportation. Italy has one of the highest car ownerships per capita on the planet. The city I'm in is only 10,000 people, yet it is honestly in gridlock 24 hours a day. Rome is five million. As my step-sister's father (Willy) puts it: "The congestion; it's



Gladiators fighting lions at the Coliseum.

impossible!" The smog from Rome extends fifty kilometers from city limits. So why don't people use public transport? Well, Willy believes that there is a man that stays up at night and conjures up ways to make the busses more confusing. There's no such thing as a bus schedule; you just get on a bus and find out where you end up.

The trains are the best, but only for getting to Rome. I use them a lot. They are never on time, and at the station the right train is never where it should be. Yet they look cool. Really cool graffiti, which is mostly in English, adorns many of the trains.

Now the metro system. The subway stations were designed by Mussolini, and look really cool. But getting on a train is weird. First thing I noticed was that there were military officers with machine guns who I thought made sure no one got pushed off the platform. But Willy told me their job is to actually help push people onto the trains. You have to wait one or two trains until you can find one that has room. It's common for one train to have more than 2,000 people on it. I don't mind being packed in that tight, but there's a lot of bum-grabbers. On one train we were packed in so tight that I looked over everyone and a pattern had emerged of interlocking people. It takes two minutes for the doors to close because somewhere along the train someone is hanging out, fighting

to get in. Did I mention they like to grab ass here?

So to sum up, there's a huge pollution problem caused by way too many cars, but people don't use mass transit because it's confusing, unreliable, and you're likely to get groped. You're likely thinking two cons versus one pro. But you're not actually getting groped. I'm pretty sure it's someone checking for your wallet. I had a snorag stolen from my pocket last week, but luckily I had two more hidden inside a secret pocket.

Moving on, another problem here is the telephone systems. My God! Okay, there are 62 million people living in Italy. There are 40 million cell phones here. My God! And according to 2001 statistics only 11.2 million people are hooked up to the internet. I finally found out how to call PEI a couple of days ago, and it takes forty-one digits. The phones here are all privately owned, and there are several companies. Every company has different telephone booths, and uses different coins, and that's all I've been able to figure out. The phone I use at home is a modern party-line, with half a block using it. So trying to use dial-up Internet is close to impossible, as I'm kicked off every minute. It is impossible.

Well, to speed things up a bit, they have conscription here. The unit you join is based on the month you

were born in. I met some guy who was born in March. He has to go into the light infantry. My brother-in-law was born in August, so he becomes a forest ranger. All males and females have to serve for one year between the age of 18 and 26. And I'm not sure if being enrolled in university can exempt somebody.

But university is cheap here. One year at a top private university costs 5,000,000 Lira. That equals \$3,500. Willy explained that it's so expensive so that only the rich kids can go. When I told him how much I paid he wasn't shocked. To get into a private school here requires an additional ten million Lira in bribes.

I'm not even going to start on Mafiosi. This country is so God-damned corrupt, it's really amazing. Italy claims to be a Republic, but it's sure the hell not a democracy. The police can detain you for three days without reason, and you always have to carry a National Identity Card or a passport. Everything here is just impossible.

They are door locking crazy here. They can't lock stuff enough. I realized after a week here that my windows had bars on them, and the only way out was the front door, which was double dead-bolted. If there's a fire here, there's no way I'm getting out.

But there won't be a fire (knock on wood) because there's no heat anywhere. And it is God-damned cold here. Well, compared to what I was expecting. Plus two is a far cry from the phallus freezing minus 21 on PEI, but I was expecting warmer; a lot warmer. I packed freakin' shorts and T-shirts. I hid them in my room; I'd be so embarrassed if my family found them. But it's plus two all the time, and I'm always cold. I'm bundled up as I write this, but now my toes are cold.

And everyone here is cold. Which leads to a suppressed immune system. Which promotes the spread of disease. Right now there is an epidemic of herpes here. Everywhere I go, all I