

THE NIGERIAN SCAM 2.0

How an improved online scam trick made an unsuspecting Dutch man over 20,000 euros poorer

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies a case of Nigerian scam experienced first-hand by its author. On Tuesday July 10, 2018 I received a friend request on Facebook from someone called Robert Batterman, apparently an elderly London lawyer. I didn't know the man, but I saw that Batterman was also a friend of two of my trusted Dutch Facebook friends at the time, so it seemed fine and I accepted the friend request. Later, I was sent another message via Messenger from this Batterman in Dutch talking about "something important to discuss with you".

A Dutch Facebook friend got a similar message, but this time about "the late Alain Schaap". We both realized that this must be a Nigerian Scam. I decided to find out some more about this British lawyer and posted a warning about this scam on the Internet the next day. Three weeks later I received an e-mail from a Dutch man who told me he saw the warning a little too late. He had already lost a considerable amount of money and was prepared to tell me what happened.

KEYWORDS

Nigerian scam; Facebook; warning; money; Internet

L'ESTAFI NIGERIANA 2.0. UN TRUC MILLORAT D'ESTAFI EN LÍNIA VA FER QUE UN HOLANDÈS DESPREVINGUT PERDÉS MÉS DE 20.000 EUROS

RESUM

Aquest article estudia un cas d'estafa nigeriana experimentat de primera mà pel seu autor. El dimarts 10 de juliol de 2018 va rebre una sol·licitud d'amistat a Facebook d'algú anomenat Robert Batterman, aparentment un advocat gran de Londres. No coneixia l'home, però va veure que Batterman també era amic de dos dels seus amics de Facebook holandesos de confiança en aquell moment, així que li va semblar bé i va acceptar la sol·licitud d'amistat. Més tard, va rebre un missatge a través de Messenger d'aquest Batterman en neerlandès parlant sobre «alguna cosa important per parlar amb tu».

Un amic holandès de Facebook va rebre un missatge semblant, però ara sobre «el difunt Alain Schaap». Tots dos es van adonar que això devia ser una estafa nigeriana. L'autor va decidir esbrinar més coses sobre aquest advocat britànic i va posar un avís sobre aquesta estafa a Internet l'endemà. Tres setmanes després, va rebre un correu electrònic d'un holandès que li deia que havia vist el seu avís una mica massa tard. Aquest holandès ja havia perdut una quantitat considerable de diners i estava disposat a explicar-li què havia passat.

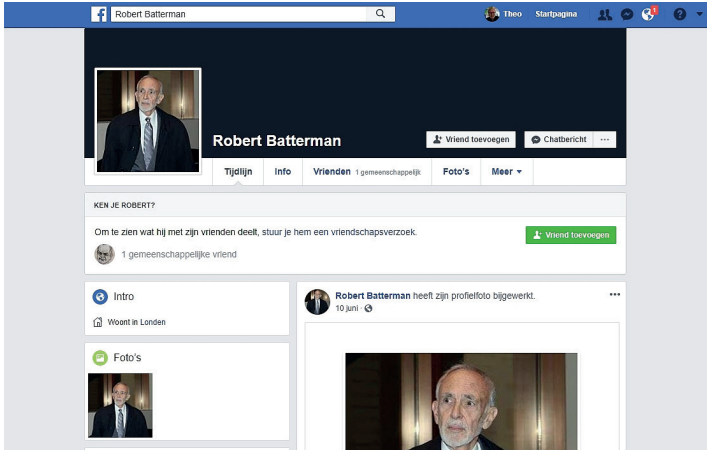
PARAULES CLAU

estafa nigeriana; Facebook; advertència; diners; Internet

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1. The scam, part 1

On Tuesday July 10, 2018 I received a friend request on Facebook from someone called Robert Batterman, apparently an elderly London lawyer.¹ I didn't know the man, but I often get such requests from people who are interested in folktales and storytelling. I don't know whether these people are always able to understand my Dutch messages but I saw that Batterman was also a friend of two of my trusted Facebook friends at the time, so it seemed fine and I accepted the friend request.



A friend request by (fake) Robert Batterman

Somewhat to my surprise I received a message via Messenger from this Batterman in Dutch:

ROBERT BATTERMAN

DI 22:32

Hallo, Theo Meder. Ik ben een advocaat die wijlen Alain Meder vertegenwoordigt. Ik heb iets belangrijks om met je te bespreken. Vriendelijk schrijf me op mijn privé e-mail of sms me terug. mijn e-mailadres is: rbatterman@proskeuerrosellp.com of battermanproskauer@gmail.com en mijn mobiele nummer is: +447452304009

In translation that would be:

ROBERT BATTERMAN

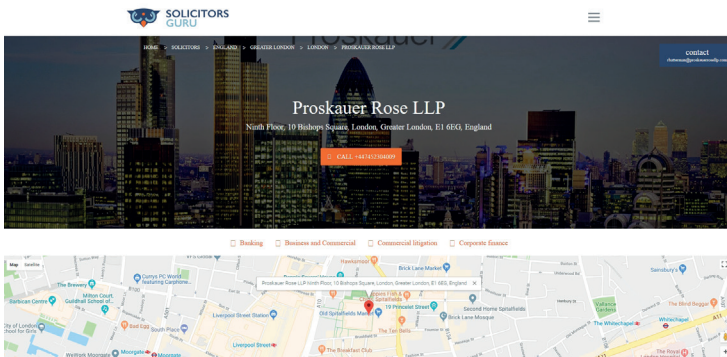
TUE 22:32

Hello, Theo Meder. I am a lawyer who represents the late Alain Meder. I have something important to discuss with you. Kindly write me on my private email or text me back. my e-mail address is: rbatterman@proskeuerrosellp.com or battermanproskauer@gmail.com and my mobile number is: +447452304009

¹ A version of this work was presented on the 38th conference of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, July 2, 2021, online organized in Tarragona, Spain. The presentation can be viewed as a video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF-gIKhhiXbU&t=1s&ab_channel=TheoMeder> [last access July 7, 2021].

Now several alarm bells went off:

- Why does this lawyer write to me in Dutch, when he is clearly not a native speaker of Dutch? The phrase “Vriendelijk schrijf me” is ungrammatical. It is clearly a Google Translate error of the English words “Kindly write me”.
- Why does Batterman write “I have something important to discuss with you” and why does he not say what it is all about? You would expect a lawyer to simply say that it is about a legacy. After all, Alain Meder is late.²
- Who is Alain Meder anyway? I have never heard of him, probably not family. The family name “Meder” is fairly rare, but can still be found in Germany, and the first name “Alain” sounds more French than German. While googling, I ended up finding a Spanish newspaper in which one Alain Meder was accused of abusing women. He wasn’t very late though. A recent search also yielded one or two French Alain Meders, but they too were still alive.
- If a lawyer has something serious to report to me, I expect an official letter at home or at work with a clear explanation. It is highly unusual for a lawyer to approach a client via Facebook and Messenger for an important issue.



The (fake) website of Proskauer Rose LLP in London with (fake) Batterman’s e-mail address

And yet, and yet...

+44 is indeed a telephone number in England and not in the Amsterdam Bijlmer or in Nigeria. The e-mail addresses given suggest a London connection. The London law firm Proskauer Rose LLP seems to have a legitimate website and Batterman’s e-mail address is displayed there. The Solicitors Guru logo links to a legitimate legal site. But anyone with a little skill can easily set up such a web page for a fake law firm. A search on the internet revealed that there is actually a law firm in London called Proskauer Rose LLP, but the address is 110 Bishopsgate not 10 Bishopsgate, which is mentioned on the Batterman webpage.

If you subsequently search the internet for a lawyer called Batterman, you will also find one. Only, his actual name is L. Robert Batterman, and he works for Proskauer Rose LLP in New York. When we compare photos, it appears that the “British Robert Batterman” of Facebook has stolen his photos and identity from the American L. Robert (Bob) Batterman in New York.

² Legacies of dead millionaires form a rather common narrative in Nigerian Scams (Schaffer 2012: 167).

The American Bob Batterman is known as a “management-side labour attorney”. In short, he represents the interests of companies in labour disputes.

Let’s take a closer look at the email addresses and the web address that our Facebook Batterman provided:

- battermanproskauer@gmail.com → which professional lawyer from a law firm allows clients to write to a general gmail address? Anyone can request a gmail address under the name battermanproskauer.
- rbatterman@proskeuerrosellp.com → this is much more like a business email address of a law firm, but, on closer inspection, it also raises our suspicions. After all, it doesn’t say proskauer rose llp. It says with an almost invisible (but intentional) spelling mistake proskeuer. It is obvious that the real address of proskauer was not available.
- the web address of the so-called London law firm contains the same (intentional) spelling mistake: <<http://proskeuerrosellp.com/solicitors.guru/office/5706-proskauer-rose-llp/index.html>>

It seems that a scammer has created these e-mail addresses, bought a web address and set up a website that can hardly be distinguished from the real thing. The scammer uses an existing law firm and an existing lawyer as a cover, hoping that this will trap an unsuspecting user.

I decided that evening, and after further investigation the following day, not to respond to the Messenger message from Mr. Batterman.

That same day I decided to ask one of my Facebook friends, journalist Wijbrand Schaap, if he had also received such a vague Messenger message from a British lawyer. I suspected this was a scam. Mr. Schaap’s response confirmed my suspicions: “Great. I also received such a message and thought it was suspicious. Today I wanted to do the same as you, namely ask around. I’ll block him.”

Did Wijbrand Schaap also receive a message about an alleged deceased family member such as Alain Meder?: “With me it was Alain Schaap. In the meantime, I have reported him to Facebook and blocked him.”

The following provisional conclusions were drawn:

- There is a man, probably in the UK, who poses as a London lawyer called Robert Batterman,³ but who is not him. (This guess turned out to be wrong: he is more likely to be a Brit living in Spain).
- He stole part of his identity from L. Robert Batterman, the American lawyer.
- He has also created a British Proskauer Rose LLP webpage, which seems deceptively real, but which again contains his fake Proskeuer email address. The web address also has the characteristic “spelling error”.
- He has created a Facebook page and sends friend requests.
- If you accept, you will receive a Messenger message shortly afterwards about “a late Alain [enter your own last name here]”.
- What will most likely follow is an upgrade of the well-known “Nigerian Scam”: your deceased family member has left a tremendous amount of money. You are the only surviving relative to be traced. However, something vague like a ‘clearance fee’ is needed to get the money free. If you pay it, you will then be transferred a huge amount of money.

³ This (fictional) status turns him into a reliable and trustworthy authority, see Schaffer (2012: 165) and Cukier e.a. (2007: 5-6, 8). Preferably, scammers chose reliable titles, trustworthy companies/institutions and comforting western names.

- Only after you have paid or passed on all your bank details do things quieten down and your bank balance will be several thousand euros lighter. The ‘Nigerian’ Scammer silently thanks you for your donation.

This scam is much more ingenious than the obvious emails full of language errors from the Nigerian Scam 1.0 period.⁴ The biggest difference is that the victims are played: no identical emails are sent to a large number of random people. They are all approached personally with a message that contains personal details. Secondly, a new social medium is chosen: Facebook and Messenger, instead of email. Thirdly, much has been done to make it all seem real and trustworthy: the British barrister, the office, the email addresses, the telephone number and the website. Finally: the spelling mistakes are kept to a minimum, partly thanks to Google Translate, whose translations have improved considerably. The scammer has put a lot of extra work into it, and perhaps this new method brings in more victims.

Considering it to be part of my work, the following day, July 11, 2018, I wrote a warning about the “Batterman” scam that I posted on my website, urging everyone not to respond to such messages on Messenger, certainly not when they come from a brand new ‘friend’: <<http://www.theomeder.nl/NigerianScam20.pdf>>

I also felt obliged to send the real American lawyer Robert Batterman an e-mail about his stolen identity and he responded the same day from his iPhone: “Thank you. It is a fraud. We are working with the authorities.”

A year later, most traces have been deleted. The fake Proskauer website has been taken down. The fake Robert Batterman can still be found on Facebook, but the account is completely empty now.

This completes the story of *The Scam, Part 1*, but there is – unfortunately – a *Part 2*.

2. The scam, part 2

Three weeks after I received a Messenger message from fake-Batterman, on Saturday, August 4, 2018, I got a Messenger message from Mr. De Waard (72),⁵ who can be described as a most friendly elderly internet user, mildly naive, accommodating and gullible. He also accepted a friend request from Batterman on Saturday, July 7, and then received a message from this “lawyer” about the “late Alain Waard”. Mr. De Waard was innocent, smelled no trouble and sent an email back in good faith. Mr. De Waard was shown a huge legacy, more than enough for a carefree old age. In a few days, however, he was duped out of more than 22,000 euros. His daughter-in-law, a young woman with extensive internet experience, understood that her father-in-law had been scammed and filed a report with him on 8 August 2018 at the local police station. In the meantime, Mr. De Waard had searched the internet for more information about Batterman, and – unfortunately too late – had found my warning about the fraud practice. Hoping that it could help in some way, Mr. De Waard gave me all the details. Here is a brief reconstruction of what happened step by step.

⁴ See Schaffer (2012: 169-170).

⁵ I know Mr. De Waard’s full name and address, but I am trying to protect his true identity.

Saturday, July 7: Friendship request on Facebook from fake-Batterman accepted. Through the chat, Batterman announces that he is the lawyer who represents the interests of “late Alain Waard” and that something important must be discussed. Mr. De Waard sends an email to Batterman saying that he is awaiting further instructions.

Because of the chat message, Mr. De Waard should have been extra careful, because the scammer does not know how Dutch family names work. Strictly speaking, people with the family names “De Waard” (The Landlord) and “Waard” (Landlord) do not have to be family at all. Apparently, the scammer thinks that “De” is a middle name, such as “John” and therefore part of the first name. In later messages and documents, the scammer will correct his mistake.

Sunday, July 8: Mr. De Waard receives a long, official-looking email from Batterman in Dutch. A few translation errors by Google Translate betray an English original of the text.

Robert Batterman (Bar.)
Proskauer Rose LLP
Ninth Floor, Bishops Square, London,
Greater London E1 6EG England.
Official email: rbatterman@proskeuerrosellp.com
Private e-mail: battermanproskauer@gmail.com
Telephone number: +447452304009
Website: www.proskeuerrosellp.com

Dear [...] de Waard,

First of all, I want to ask you for your confidence in this transaction; this is strictly confidential. I know that such transactions can make everyone anxious and worried, but I assure you that ultimately everything will go well. You will certainly be surprised to receive this letter because we have never met.⁶ My name is Robert L Batterman (Barr), lawyer of the late estate agent Alain Waard, who was the victim of the train accident on July 24, 2013 at Santiago de Compostela.

Read article;

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/santiago-de-compostela-train-crash>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/10201214/Spain-train-crash-many-dead-as-train-derails-near-Santiago-de-Compostela.html>

⁶ Schaffer found this kind of apology in 23.3% of her letters: “I know this proposal letter may come as a surprise to you considering the fact that we have not had any formal acquaintance before” (2012: 168). Kich gives an example too: “My proposal to you will be very surprising as we have not had any contact before” (2005: 138).

My intention in contacting you is your participation in securing the funds that my deceased customer deposited in a Spanish bank for an amount of 34,700,000 euros before his sudden passing. The bank has urged me as his legal attorney to find the beneficiary of the said fortune, because he did not name one. He died with his only daughter. Because he did not know that this would happen, he could not pass on his will.

The bank has since urged me to contact a successor before the money becomes the property of the state. Despite every effort to find someone who is related to the deceased, my search has been unsuccessful.

For this reason, I have contacted you because you have the same last name as my deceased client. I am actually asking you for your permission to nominate you to the bank as the successor of my deceased client's money, since you have the same last name, so the amount can be paid to you.

I will legally collect and obtain all documents required to secure the bank's money. All I need is a secure collaboration to make this transaction possible. I would suggest that 10% of the money is donated to aid organizations, while the remaining 90% is distributed equally.⁷ You do not have to worry because this transaction is 100% risk-free. I will use my position as a lawyer for the deceased to successfully complete this transaction.

Call or text me at: +447452304009 or just send me an email at battermanproskauer@gmail.com or rbatterman@proskeuerrosellp.com

The planned transaction will be executed under an authorized order, which will help to protect it. If you find this offer morally unacceptable, I apologize and please forget all about it.

If you want to reach me for this purpose, you can contact me for more information.

Send all answers only via my private e-mail: battermanproskauer@gmail.com or rbatterman@proskeuerrosellp.com

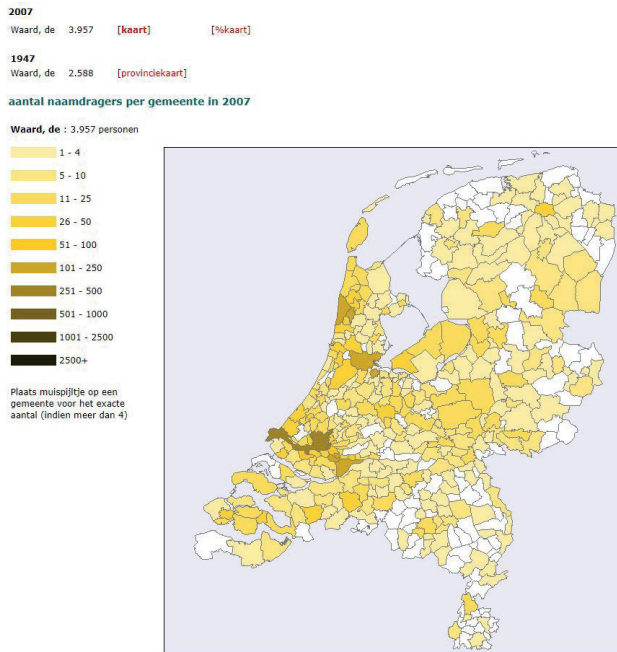
Best wishes,

Robert Batterman (Bar.)

The rhetorical trick that Batterman uses is that he constantly emphasizes that he can be trusted and that De Waard does not have to worry. However, De Waard must always use the e-mail addresses mentioned – of course he is not allowed to e-mail the real Proskauer office in London, because nobody knows a British Batterman there, so if he does the deception will be revealed. Batterman makes the death of the wealthy real estate agent Alain Waard and his daughter plausible by sending links to a real major train accident in Santiago de Compostela in 2013,

⁷ This detail can be found in other Nigerian scam letters too, but never in inheritance scams; it is a blind motif here and never mentioned again in further communications, see Kich (2005: 135, 138) and Dyrud (2005: 6).

where many victims were killed.⁸ Nowhere in the articles is the name of Alain Waard mentioned. However, Batterman also sends a forged death certificate from Alain de Waard. If a wealthy real estate agent called Alain (de) Waard exists, then he should be found on Google. However, the result is: 0 hits.



The Family Name Database of the Meertens Instituut shows that in 2007 there were almost 4000 people with the name “de Waard” living in the Netherlands

Great suspicion should also be aroused by the following statement: the lawyer apparently searched for an heir for 5 years, and finally found someone in the Netherlands with the name (De) Waard. The Dutch Family Name Database of the Meertens Institute shows that in 2007 there were no fewer than 3957 people in the Netherlands with the surname De Waard. That is potentially almost 4000 heirs, so it is a little naive to think that only one heir has come out of the investigation. But undoubtedly all suspicion will fade away if the next juicy tidbit is presented: an inheritance of 34,700,000 euros! The amount of money was deposited with the Grupo Cooperativo Cajamar by Mr. Alain de Waard in 2012, and the scammer sends a deceptive real proof of this. As is customary in a first scam mail narrative, nowhere is it mentioned that the victim should pay (fees, taxes) in advance (Schaffer 2012: 167).

Tuesday, July 10: Batterman asks Mr. De Waard to send a copy of his passport, which De Waard does promptly. De Waard also receives a Capital Release Form that he had to fill in and return to Señor Antoneli Ramos of the Grupo

⁸ In Nigerian scams the death of rich people is more often backed up with links to natural disasters, wars or plane crashes (Cukier e.a. 2007: 7-8; Dyrud 2005: 6).

Cooperativo Cajamar.⁹ Batterman says that the amount of 34,700,000 euros must be transferred first to a Spanish platinum account for large amounts. With the opening of that platinum account and the transfer, an amount of 6,400 euros in costs is involved, which De Waard needs to pay for. Batterman sends him an official-looking document in which he tells the Spanish bank manager that the heir has been found and that the amount can be transferred soon. In the days to come, De Waard is repeatedly told that he must keep the entire transaction secret (or the Spanish state may claim the funds). For obvious reasons, he is told not to engage his own lawyer: a Dutch lawyer would quickly see through the fraud.¹⁰ Batterman takes every opportunity to repeat that De Waard does not have to worry, and that everything is 100% in order.¹¹

This is where the victim falls into the trap: with a sum of millions in prospect, 6,400 euros is a small investment. Anyone familiar with the Nigerian Scam (or 419 scam, referring to the fraud section of the Nigerian penal code)¹² understands that the victim will pay a few times and can forget about the legacy. Mr. De Waard's daughter-in-law only heard about the scam afterwards and literally said: "If you had told me this in advance, this would never have happened."

Friday, July 13: Mr. De Waard receives an official-looking document full of stamps and signatures from the Spanish Ministerio de Justicia, confirming that he is the only heir to the 34,700,000 euros of Alain de Waard. And a certificate full of stamps and signatures follows in which Batterman declares under oath that he will execute the money fairly.

Tuesday, July 17: Now Mr. De Waard actually transfers the amount of 6,400 euros to a Spanish bank account number in the name of Luinaza S.L., according to the internet a machine wholesaler in Valencia.

Wednesday July 18 and Thursday July 19: Mr. De Waard is informed by the Grupo Cooperativo Cajamar in Madrid that he has to pay an amount of 8,600 euros, so that the legacy of the Spanish platinum account can be transferred to his Dutch account. That same day he transferred 8,600 euros in an emergency payment¹³ to a Spanish bank account number in the name of Gilmans 305 S.L., according to the internet, a textile wholesaler in Valencia. The same day, De Waard receives a receipt from the Banco de España that the amount has been paid.

Monday, July 23: Mr. De Waard is informed by the Agencia Tributaria in Madrid that he must pay tax on his inheritance. It is officially an amount of more than 8 million, but it is conceivable that the amount will be reduced to just over 4 million. If the tax is paid through a bank in Hong Kong, it will only be 1 million euros.

Thursday, July 26: an e-mail from Batterman makes it clear once again that taxes have to be paid on the million-euro legacy. This must be done in advance; it

9 Filling in forms with all kinds of personal and financial information is a standard feature of the Nigerian scam (Schaffer 2012: 160).

10 See Schaffer (2012: 160, 168).

11 Yet another common feature of the scam narrative (Schaffer 2012: 169).

12 See Cukier e.a. (2007: 2), Dyrud (2005: 1) and Kich (2005: 129).

13 Payments are always "urgent" so the victim has little time to think things over (Schaffer 2012: 160).

cannot be paid afterwards. Batterman claims that he had not taken this possibility into account (however, the set-up is clear: the idea is to collect more money without ever paying out the fictitious legacy). According to Batterman, the total amount is 1,522,833 euros, to be paid in three instalments of 507,611 euros (the amounts do not exactly match the Spanish message of three days before). For the payment of the first instalment, Batterman can advance something. He has just sold a house for 500,000 euros, and wants to advance this if it can be settled later if De Waard has his legacy. That day, De Waard transfers 7,611 euros to a Spanish bank account number in the name of Reparaciones y Distribuciones Global – according to the internet a machine repair company in... Valencia.

All of these companies in Valencia have been registered as commercial businesses,¹⁴ but none of them show up on Google Maps or Google Street View: at these addresses there are just houses and apartments.

Wednesday, August 8: deadline for the payment of the second instalment. Actually, full instalments need to be paid to three different Polish bank accounts in Wroclaw, Warsaw and Bialystok. However, in all cases the beneficiary has an account at the electronic money institute Paysera in Lithuania.

Mr. De Waard's bank account is practically exhausted and he is unable to pay the next two instalments of more than 500 thousand euros. He is supposedly called by the Spanish bank to ask him if the money is coming, but Mr. De Waard recognizes the voice of scammer Batterman, whom he has spoken to on the phone several times in the meantime. The man speaks perfect British English without any Spanish accent. Mr. De Waard says he does not have the money and lies that he is busy taking out a loan. That same day Mr. De Waard and his daughter-in-law report the scams to the police. In total he was scammed out of 22,611 euros.¹⁵ The archetypal fairy tale and legend plots of the lucky hero getting a reward, retrieving the hidden treasure, obtaining the winning lottery ticket, finding the pot of gold, going from rags to riches, is shattered (Cukier e.a. 2007). A malicious British scammer residing in Spain with shadowy businesses in Valencia has become more than 22,000 euros richer in one month. A scam such as this is quite lucrative even if only one victim kicks in every month.¹⁶

Wednesday, August 29, 2018: Mr. De Waard's local bank, the Dutch Rabobank, sends him an official letter with a warning. In the previous month, transactions have taken place for which Mr De Waard has already been warned several times and which the bank calls "Advanced Fee Fraud" or "Nigerian fraud". The following agreements were made in an earlier meeting with the bank:

- He must report the scam to the police.
- He must deliver a copy of the report to the bank.

¹⁴ Only in the case of Gilman's 305 is the name of an 'owner' mentioned: Ahmed Soliman El Assal. His name is registered for 4 small companies that have hardly any budget, and none of them advertise on internet.

¹⁵ Payments mostly involve fees, taxes and unexpected bribes (Schaffer 2012: 160). Smith (2009) claims that every year billions of dollars are lost due to these scams – an average of about 3000 to 5000 dollars per victim, see Cukier e.a. (2007: 8). Dyrud confirms this, but also gives examples of much greater financial losses (2005: 5). See also Kich (2005: 131-132).

¹⁶ A 1-5% response suffices for a scam to be a success; see Cukier e.a. (2007: 2) and Dyrud (2005: 5). Kich adds: "The susceptible victim is likely to be desperate, greedy, or good-hearted to the point of being almost wilfully naive." (2005: 131).

- He must block the scammer's e-mail address.
- He must not mention anything about this issue to anyone.
- He must not undertake any similar transactions from his account from now on.
- The bank will continue to monitor his account for the next 6 months.

Saturday, September 29, 2018: despite the fact that Mr. De Waard has broken off all contact on the advice of family and the bank, fake-Batterman makes a final attempt to re-establish contact in an English-language e-mail:¹⁷

Hello [...] de Waard,

I hope you are doing great.

It's been a while i heard from you, even when i try to call you on the telephone you no longer take my calls or respond to my text messages which i deem so appropriate considering the tax waiver issue we have to solve.

We have been able to pay only the first phase of the three way tax waiver.

It's two months or more we have not communicated the bank and i think we have to do so to avoid all our efforts so far be a waste.

I want to know if you have been able to get any reasonable amount so that we can put together with the one i have for the second phase of the tax waiver.

I know that things are very difficult everywhere but we must not give up in acheiving this great success.

Let us keep trying our possible best to ensure the completion of this transaction.

Let me know the amount you have now so that it will be added to the amount i have been able to raise to make up a reasonable amount and begin the payment of the second phase of the tax waiver.

We must not wait to raise all the money at once. Our delay might make the bank feel we are unserious which may lead to the confiscation of the fund.

I hope you understand our need to try as much as we can to start paying for the second phase of the tax waiver.

I await your prompt response.

Kind regards.

Mr. De Waard did not respond. He is mainly surprised by his own naivety. In an email to me on October 29, 2018, he literally says, "How could I let myself be cheated like this?"

¹⁷ Schaffer notes that in 93.3% of the scam mails that she studied, formal or even pompous English phrases were used to impress the victim and convince the recipient of the scammer's reliable professional skills (2012: 170-171).

However, an offer of an astonishing legacy of more than 34 million can make your mind stand still.¹⁸ The Nigerian scam 2.0 has a personal focus (becoming *friends* first, followed by the story of a distant, deceased and rich *family member*), it uses *social media*, has been worked out in great *detail* and apparently seems to be guaranteed on all sides with websites and official-looking documents full of stamps and signatures from all sorts of organizations (Schaffer 2012: 160; Cukier e.a. 2007: 2; Dyrud 2005: 4-5). With a computer and some creativity, however, this can all be counterfeit.

In general, the scam still contains the seven basic elements of the classic Nigerian scam, as summed up by Martin Kich: “(1) the introduction of the sender; (2) the explanation of how the recipient was selected to receive the letter; (3) the description of the supposed financial conundrum facing the sender; (4) the proposed resolution of that difficulty; (5) the explanation of the recipient’s role in that resolution; (6) the supposed payoff that convinces the susceptible recipient to participate in the scheme; and (7) the establishment of conditions that make the recipient less likely to question the scammer’s subsequent tactics and demands.” (Kich 2005: 134.)

Even though it was not just a classical bulk-mail full of language errors (Schaffer 2012: 162; Kich 2005: 137), alarm bells should have sounded several times:

- a real lawyer sends official paper letters about inheritances
- a request to keep things secret is always suspicious¹⁹
- a wealthy real estate agent Alain (de) Waard never existed, according to Google: check the facts
- one De Waard can never be the only heir if almost 4000 of them live in the Netherlands
- payments to (Madrid) banks should not go through companies (in Valencia)
- if your own bank warns you of Nigerian fraud, you better trust it
- pay first to receive more later, is never a reliable deal

Despite possible technical solutions for detecting and defusing these scams, the best strategy to fight them for now is to keep educating internet users (Schaffer 2012: 174-175). The bottom line is still: if things look too good to be true, they are (Schaffer 2012: 175).²⁰

Needless to say, Mr De Waard never got his money back.

¹⁸ Schaffer assumes this promise of extreme wealth is the main reason why people keep falling for these scams (2012: 173).

¹⁹ Fake-Batterman’s mails carry some classic linguistic features of a Nigerian scam, like the frequent recurring of words like “secret” and “urgent”, as well as persuasive strategies like apologies and flattery, and appeals to trust, desire and greed. See Schaffer (2012), Cukier e.a. (2007: 5-8), Dyrud (2005: 7). On the other hand, because fake Batterman is acting like a barrister, he keeps his messages formal and business-like – appeals to the victims’ emotions, empathy or spirituality are lacking. See Dyrud (2005: 6) about religious appeals.

²⁰ See Smith (2009) and Cukier e.a. (2007: 4) on this subject.

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