

# SCAMBAITERS by PJ Hruschak grab online con artists

Apparently, everyone with an email address has either just won an international lottery or has a rich Nigerian uncle who left him or her a lot of money. For a few thousand dollars – a paltry sum compared to the vast fortune you’re promised – you can help bribe officials or pay to process paperwork to expedite an amazing windfall. Even though it is all baloney, these scammers empty bank accounts, taking millions from unsuspecting victims across the globe.

According to the urban legend debunking website, [snopes.com](http://snopes.com), this scam dates back to the 1920s, when businessmen were conned into believing they were providing money to help smuggle a rich Spanish diplomat out of the country, who would later shower them with gold.

The modern version of this advance fee fraud is called the Nigerian or the 419 Nigerian Scam (named after section 4-1-9 of the country’s penal code that addresses fraud schemes) since many of the scammers claim to be working with the Central Bank of Nigeria, though many distant countries are named and the scam can take many forms.

A few people, however, have decided to retaliate and flip the scams back onto the scammers. In hopes of preventing the scammers from fleecing more victims, they try to clog up the scammer’s bandwidth or keep them busy answering emails. “I got tired of getting so many daily emails from the scammers,” says Tracy Dopko, who has been flipping email scams back on scammers since 2003. “Nearly every single email was one pathetic and stupid scenario and/or excuse after another and I decided to waste as much of their time as possible. If they were too busy with me, they wouldn’t be able to scam other naïve victims.”

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Scambaiters such as Dopko pretend to fall for the seemingly obvious email scam, promising to send funds and dragging the scammers along to see just how far they will go to earn the scambaiter’s trust.

Often, scambaiters request the scammer to send them checks or a photo of them with that day’s newspaper or a silly phrase written on a large piece of paper. The checks are always fake, but along with the photos, make nice trophies. (On web sites such as [419eater.com](http://419eater.com) and [thescambaiter.com](http://thescambaiter.com), scambaiters can share their stories and tactics and trophies with others who have turned the tables on the scammers.)

Advanced fee frauds aren’t the only scams popular in Nigeria. Anthony, aka the Failure, is the owner of [TheScamBaiter.com](http://TheScamBaiter.com) and he has created a fake laptop business to bait scammers. He’ll get orders for 30 laptops to be shipped to Nigeria, which, of course, are paid for with bogus checks. They never get the laptops, but they do receive a shipment – on their own dime.

“I can’t remember everything, but I did send a washer, a dryer, a refrigerator and some cinder blocks,” Anthony says about all the stuff he’s sent Cole, one of the scammers he’s baiting. Cole has been on Anthony’s hook for two and a half years and has paid over \$50,000 in freight charges (a measure of how successful some scammers are) trying to get laptops sent to Africa.

It takes a lot of trust to keep paying for more shipments when you’ve been receiving large appliances and bricks instead of laptops. Anthony convinces Cole someone in the office screwed up and instead of 30 laptops, he’s going to send 50 as a good-will gesture. To keep the trust, he’s even gone as far as to tell Cole he’s going to kill the employee for screwing up (There’s an underworld element to scam baiting). “I sent him a fake photo of one of my employees dead on the ground.” It’s hard to believe someone would fall for it, but in Nigeria, killing an employee is something they understand.

It may sound like the scambaiters are just as shameless as those they’re scamming, but none of them ever profit from it and it’s important to remember the scammers are criminals.

“I’m making them pay for all the money they took from their victims,” says Anthony. If he finds out the scammer is a kid who is most likely just working for someone, Anthony doesn’t pursue it. But if it’s an adult trying to scam him, it’s all systems go.

Aside from the illegality of the practice and the money scammers have bilked from their victims, a high percentage of which are elderly, there is a human element. On his website, Anthony has posted a phone conversation he had with one of the scammers in Nigeria. When asked why he does it, the scammer says, “There are no jobs here. There’s nothing to do.”

“You have to give the guys credit for thinking up ingenious but pathetic ideas,” says Dopko. “My only thought over the years is that I could have come up with a much better scenario or excuse. Some of the stories they come up with are just hilarious (see sidebar). The sad part about it all is that so many people still fall for them.” ▼

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# by the gills

Although scambaiters don't profit from their schemes, the rest of us do. Some of the emails sent back and forth make marvelous entertainment. The following is a portion of Dopko's correspondences with a scammer called Major Dave Wilson. For her part, Dopko assumed the persona of Sister Rosetta, a Canadian nun. A third player is Koffi Mensa, a fake African attorney. Major Dave and Koffi's grammar and usage, which haven't been edited, should be enough to tip off potential victims.

Dear Friend,  
I am seeking your assistance to evacuate the sum of (\$35M USD) to your country. Some money in various currencies was discovered concealed in barrels with piles of weapons and ammunitions at a location near one of Saddam's old palaces.  
Major Dave Wilson.  
US ARMY

Dear Major Dave,  
I would be more than willing to help you out. My God, it truly sounds like hell over there and sounds like you more than deserve the compensation for it.  
Sister Rosetta

My Dearest Sister Rosetta,  
It is my wife that supposes to take the responsibility of this package but I lost her to cancer about three years ago and my only brother who I would have entrusted this on, has given him self to drugs and he is now in a rehabilitation center. This are the information's I need from you to keep the trust: Your full name, home and office address, sex/age/occupation, cell phone number, scanned I.D Card for identification Purpose only.

Dear Major Dave,  
You stated "I want to have a very peaceful retirement, maybe marry again if it is God's wish." Are you asking me to be your wife? If you are, unfortunately, I must decline as I am a nun.

My dearest Sister Rosetta,  
I have arranged to move the fund into a small peaceful west african country as our team of soldiers has been drafted to chase an alqaida terrorist group that is suspected to be hiding the deadly Osama Bin Laden who perpetrated the september 11th attacks on the world trade centre and pentagon. Give me your bank account details.

Good afternoon Major Dave,  
Is there a chance that Osama Bin Laden may come after you to retrieve the money? I would be very afraid for your life if that does occur. Do you have disguises that you can use?

Attn: Sister Rosetta,  
You are required to send issuance fees  
1) Anti Terrorist/ Drug Free Clearance  
Cost \$1,200  
2) Fund on Transit Insurance Certificate  
Cost \$2,000  
Barrister Koffi Mensah



Dearest Major Dave,  
The other Sisters are very excited that a rehabilitation center and orphanage are in the works. I took a photo of some of the sisters outside in our Canadian winter snow yesterday so that you can see how excited they are.

My Dearest Sister Rosetta,  
I return back with our Us Army Battalion Troop to sign off back in Washington at the White House Pentagon, we shall be welcomed back with a ceremony where we shall rise to our next rank for a successful Military Operations. ▼

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