

## 'MSLED BY HIS LIES

Divorcee loses \$580k in romance scam involving criminal posing as US oil worker

**Don't get scammed** 

Watch for people who always

have excuses about why they

can't meet you in person or

For those who are often in a

hard-to-reach place (eg

working on oil rigs, in the

military, working overseas).

Watch for people who seem to

always have a sob story (eg a

child or family member is sick)

and there's always a degree of

If looking for love online, be

Be careful what you post and

make public on the internet.

Scammers can use details

shared on social media and

wary about who you're

even video call

Watch out for the following red flags:

An overseas scammer posing as an eligible oil rig worker looking for "longterm" love tricked a vulnerable Whanganui divorcee into falling for his online affections before convincing her to send \$580,000 over a period of 14 months so they could be

She thought she was funding a Northern Hemisphere oil project until her new boyfriend's temporary cash flow problems were resolved and he could travel to New Zealand.

She believed he would pay her back once he regained access to a \$3 million fortune sitting in a hacked UK bank account.

But the man was a criminal preying on her trust and naivety, and

the money was lost overseas. The elaborate romance scam was

only revealed when a friend noticed an open email on the woman's computer and alerted family to the cruel deception.

The victim has now recovered, rekindled marriage and says she wishes she could "turn back the clock".

Documents obtained by the Weekend Herald show the woman only spoke to her supposed boyfriend on the phone once, but communicated encrypted online Viber app, exchang-

ing thousands of

could not video call because of safety issues on the oil rig but asked her to her marry him and promised to come to New Zealand so they could be

using the name

The scammer called himself Scott Thomas and sent numerous photos. However, the victim's family believe he stole someone's identity and the smiling selfies and elaborate back

story were likely faked. An online profile describes him as an "active, purposeful hard-working man" from Texas who is divorced with two daughters. He was looking for a long-term relationship, "not a hook up", and enjoyed outdoor activities and "cruising my jeep into the

He claimed to be a US petroleum engineer and concocted a compli-He claimed he cated narrative about his personal duped in early 2021.

mountains".

dating sites to better understand and target you. and professional life as he sucked the

lonely woman in to believing she was

in a genuine romantic relationship in

speaking to.

order to steal her family's life savings. Investigations would later discover she made 21 international money transfers to the man between November 2019 and December 2020 from her Whanganui ASB account to

seven banks in the US and Canada. Most of the money was sourced from her elderly father's ASB account for which she held power of attorney.

She later admitted meeting the man on Tinder after her own marriage ended, and that she became 'very dependent" on the digital relationship, chatting online every day.

"However, unfortunately, I was misled by his lies," she wrote in a letter to ASB after realising she'd been

"He claimed to be based in the United States and promised to come to New Zealand to start a new life with me. Unbeknown to the rest of my family, I was being coerced into funding a fake oil rig project for my supposed

Research the person's photo

searches to see if the image,

name, or details have been

Beware if the individual seems

Note if the individual attempts

to isolate you from friends and

to leave a dating service or

too perfect or quickly asks you

and profile using online

used elsewhere.

social media site to

family or requests

extort vou

via 105.

Source: NZ Police

communicate directly.

inappropriate photos or

financial information that

Anyone who has been the

victim of a scam can contact

Police and report the matter

could later be used to

boyfriend Scott Thomas.' It later emerged the woman had been sent login details to a fake Sainsbury's Bank account under the man's name, supposedly showing he had an available balance of US\$3m "in

order to gain my trust" However, the man claimed the UK

account had been hacked and he couldn't access the funds. The victim was promised "all of my investments would be repaid" at the completion of the project once he regained access to

She planned to reimburse her

came through but the money never

"My family have recently discovered what has happened, and are helping me to come to terms with the reality that I have been a victim of severe online romance fraud," the

victim wrote. "I deeply regret everything that has happened and wish beyond anything else I could turn back the clock. The woman's husband said the

scam was detailed and prolonged. It occurred while the couple had been divorced in 2019 and 2020, and before they rekindled their relation-

ship in 2021 and remarried last year. "If I'd known the details I would have spotted it straight away," he told the Weekend Herald. "I guess she's more vulnerable."

mileage

Dark

matters

'Unpredecented'

space telescope

images from

**World A18** 

Who are the Govt's

biggest spenders? A11

He said his wife met the scammer online in September 2019. The man told her he had worked for New Zealand Oil Services but was on contract with Suncor Energy on an oil rig off the Canadian coast.

'The relationship developed, money started being sent and it amounted to over half a million."

While the scammer's story seemed far-fetched, the wife was completely convinced the relationship was real.

"Apparently the guy was immigrating to New Zealand but in fact he's stolen some guy's identity. [The wife] can see the guy's picture but that wasn't actually the guy.
"He was in the oil industry. He was

running a team and his funds were tied up and he needed to pay his team. The guy was saying he's coming to New Zealand to be with [the wife] but this was holding him up.'

After being confronted by relatives about the scam, the victim was initially "in denial", the husband said.

father's account when the proceeds > Continued on A2

