New Scotland Yard raided a warehouse in the Soho District today in search of a group of thieves running a worldwide fraud operation.

Instead they found parts of the warehouse ablaze, with the evidence destroyed and the criminals long gone.

In other news…

My journey to England began with a phone call from a soccer mom in Glendale. Her name was Alice Keys, and her identity had been stolen.

They hooked Alice with a type of internet fraud called “phishing.” She got an e-mail from her bank telling her that there was a problem with her account. It contained a link to the bank’s web site that would allow her to fix the problem by reentering her personal data.

Trouble was ... it only looked like her bank. She figured that out when her credit card bill came in the mail two weeks later with $4,000.00 in charges she couldn't explain.

Turns out her so-called bank was actually a slick-looking website created by a guy named Charles Napier. The problem was he was 5,000 miles away.

Niece
Hey!
Hey, how'd the search go?

It didn't. Somehow they got tipped off. It looked like they left in a hurry though.

Did Scotland Yard have anything on Napier?
A lot. This guy is a real piece of work. He's running all kinds of scams...all of them on the Internet. Advance payment, auction fraud, software piracy, phishing. You name it, he's doing it! Got victims all over the U.S.

Really?
Yeah... we met with the Office of Fair Trading in London. They've been receiving complaints as well.
Any luck tracing the stolen merchandise?

No. All the stuff was mailed to some college kids in Florida. They forwarded everything to a mail drop in Edinburgh.
He recruited them on the net, paid them wire transfers…
they thought the whole thing was legit.

What about the number he posted for the bank?
That turns out to be a prepaid cell phone that he purchased with another stolen card. He used them for a couple weeks, then he dumped them.
Great! Well at least the trip wasn't a total waste. I did pick you up a present.

I bring you greetings from London.
Sorry I didn't have time to wrap it.
Ah... You shouldn't have. Think we'll be able to pull anything off this?
I don't know. Greg tried the mobile forensics kit at the search, but it was too far gone. I was hoping the lab could do something with it.
Can you do me a favor? Can you drop it by there for me?
I could use some sleep.
Coffee!
Yeah... after I sleep. I'll see you later.

Napier had covered his tracks pretty well, but the crime lab was about to make a wake-up call.

Goddard.
Alan, Steve.
Hey Steve...were you able to salvage anything from that laptop?
This guy was pretty careful Alan. He formatted the drive to erase everything. The fire took out a couple of the platters but I was able to salvage the rest. Alan, we've got thousands of victims here. There must be 40,000 credit card numbers alone. Stolen goods being moved all over the world.
That's good stuff, Steve. I'll need to get that to the Assistant U.S. Attorney. Did you recover anything that might help us find the guy?
I mean he's into the wind, man
Well, as a matter of fact, a week ago he booked a vacation in Thailand. According to his itinerary, he is scheduled to take a tour of the Pa Sak river tomorrow but then return to his hotel in Bangkok on Thursday.
I really appreciate that. I owe you one, Steve. Listen, I need you to get me a disc with everything you've get right away.
You bet.

The Inspection Service and Scotland Yard requested assistance from the Thai police and arranged for them to arrest Napier at his hotel.
I flew in to be an observer and to help with the interviews.

What's all this?
That's Alice Keys. She's one of the people whose lives you stole.
Oh, come on now. Some bird gets pinched for a few quid, and you're treating me like a terrorist. The credit card company will handle the loss anyway.
It took her six months to straighten out her bank account, and she almost lost her home. But you wouldn't care about that.

Yeah, yeah, life's tough all over. We all have to survive as best we can. You know, you are absolutely right. And you are gonna need every one of your survival skills in Federal Prison.

Federal Prison? That's where you're wrong mate. I'm on the next plane back to Merry Old England.

No, not this time, Napier. See we've already spoken to Scotland Yard and the British prosecutors about your extradition. It looks like you're a man without a country…

Okay, now make sure you take a close look at anything that looks like it's going to England. Charles Napier is awaiting trial in federal court for over 100 counts of mail fraud, and his victims are slowly rebuilding their financial lives. The Internet can be a safe place to do business, but you should be aware that there are those who target unsuspecting consumers. There are steps that you can take to protect yourself.

Number one: Be suspicious of e-mails that appear to be from banks, online auction sites, or other retailers.

Usually they will ask you to correct mistakes in your account information or provide other personal information. Never use a link in an email to visit any website. Type in the address that you normally use to log into those sites.

If you have doubts, call the business on the telephone. You should always be able to resolve the complaint with a customer service representative, if the company is legitimate.

Number two: Only purchase goods and services from sites that you trust.

Software makes it easy for criminals to create websites and emails that look exactly like the real ones. Examine all offers carefully before purchasing.

Lastly, when you're online, be on guard. For Postal Inspectors internet scams are like old wine in a new bottle. The mail fraud and telemarketing scams that we've seen in the past are now coming at you through cyberspace. Whether auction fraud or identity theft, reshipping scams or foreign lotteries, be cautious and be smart.

For more tips on how to avoid internet fraud or to report the crime if you've been a victim, visit our website at USPS.COM/POSTALINSPECTORS or LOOKSTOGOODTOBETRUE.COM.

These simple steps can help protect you from crooks thousands miles away or just across the street, and will give them a world of trouble.