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GULLIBLE HOTELIERS

Here is a true story how crime pays off and how a five star de Luxe hotel managed to loose thousands of dollars. After having stayed for over one year at the luxury Intercontinental Hotel in Dubai followed by a short spell at the Intercontinental in London, Mr X arranged a booking at the Forum Hotel in Geneva, also managed by Intercontinental, for two suites plus two double rooms for an initial period of 14 nights. Mr X arrived at the hotel as planned on September 2, 1994.

Small problem: The Mastercard Mr X presented as a sort of guarantee was issued in someone else's name, a Mr Z. Vexing problem: Any debit the hotel tried to make against this card was systematically declined by the Eurocard service in Zurich.

First crisis averted: An urgent phone call to the Intercontinental Hotel in Dubai revealed that the huge bill accumulated

at that hotel by Mr X had actually been settled without any problem with that same Mastercard. At this news, the Forum Hotel started to relax a bit.

After two weeks, Mr X, who spent most of his time in the lobby of the hotel phoning around the world and talking big money, paid his bill which by then amounted to a sizeable SFR 19,000.- not only with Mr Z's Mastercard, but also with the full written approval from the same Mr Z. The hotel was then totally relaxed and no longer had any doubts whatsoever about Mr X's ability to pay his future bills when he announced that he was going to stay on.


Incident: A few days later, Eurocard Zurich advised the hotel that there was no more credit available on Mr Z's card. Questioned, Mr X's response was: "A slight momentary hiccup". That "momentary hiccup" ended up lasting over one year during which time Mr X made numerous promises of payment to the hotel, advising them time and time again that large sums of money would be transferred onto his account "very shortly". Eventually, the hotel management, who should have known better, realised that they had fallen for one of the oldest tricks in the trade. But by that time, the unpaid bill had reached a staggering SFR 54,000.-. The hotel management was in a quandary: should they kick Mr X out and risk losing SFR 54,000.- or should they keep him in the hotel with the hope that he would eventually find the money and pay up.

Fateful mistake: The management opted for the second solution but moved Mr X into some cheaper accommodation within the hotel: a room for "only" SFR 300.- per night which, ironically, they let him have for SFR 200.- since he was staying so long and was such a valuable guest (sic).

By April 1995 the unpaid bill stood at SFR 57,000.- and by September 1995 at SFR 85,000.-.

On September 25 the hotel management learnt that Mr X planned a trip overseas and at last decided to call in the police with the instruction to secure Mr X's passport. Mr X countered by first claiming that his passport was at the Australian embassy, then, correcting himself, he named the French embassy. The next morning, Mr X had disappeared, his room was empty. Too late for their own good, the hotel management realised that they had been properly led up the garden path. They also realised that starting legal procedures against Mr X would only land them with more heavy costs with very little hope of getting any money back.

To add insult to injury, a phone call arrived at the hotel from a local car dealer a few days after Mr X's disappearance to advise him that the brand new Mercedes he had ordered had just



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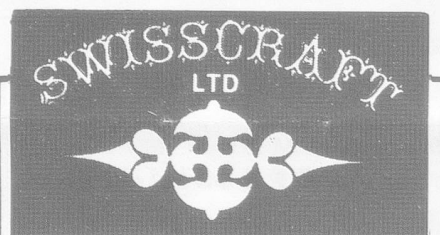
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arrived.

This true story just goes to show that if you want to be a successful crook, you have to hit high, be brazen, give the impression that you handle big money, be a good talker and socialise with the upper-crust of the high society. People will be impressed and will invariably fall for you in a very big way. And even very sophisticated and wily directors of five star hotels are not immune against such clever spiels. On the other hand, you must admit that managing to stay for over a year in a five star hotel without paying a cent needs an unusual amount of sheer guts.

So all you Swiss hoteliers and moteliars in New Zealand, be on the alert. Mr X might have come here to this country to play his big tricks. But then he might more likely be patronising one of the de Luxe hotels rather than a bed and breakfast place. But nevertheless, you have been warned...



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