BECAUSE CROWDFUNDING is built on trust, it’s ripe for fraud. We’re talking about the misuse of online forums such as GoFundMe, Indiegogo, and Kickstarter, which people use to solicit funds for their inventions, documentaries, and other projects. In exchange for money, they may offer a sample of their product or a digital download, for example. But those making the requests aren’t always sincere.

CROWDFRAUDING?

The Federal Trade Commission recently settled its first crowdfunding case against a man it claimed had scammed contributors out of more than $122,000. Erik Chevalier, using the business name The Forking Path Co., asked for funding for a board game called “The Doom That Came to Atlantic City.” Almost 1,250 backers pledged $50 or more, hoping to get a game or one of its figurines. Instead, according to the FTC’s complaint, Chevalier kept the money, using it for rent, moving expenses, and equipment for another project. The settlement prohibits him from misrepresentations in future projects. He was also fined almost $112,000, although that was suspended because he was unable to pay.

Similar scam crowdfunding have been outed by dismayed funders on such websites as AndroidPolice and Kickstarter, and on the GoFundMe page on Facebook. Crowdfunding has brought promising ideas to life, but watch out for signs that you should do some more checking before you fork over any money.

BRACE YOURSELF FOR A SUGAR SHOCK

IF CUTTING DOWN ON SUGAR is one of your New Year’s Resolutions, don’t think that swilling reduced-calorie sodas such as Coca-Cola Life or Pepsi True will do much for your strategy. Sure, they might be lower in sugar than regular soda, which packs about 10 teaspoons into a 12-ounce can—but they still contain about 6 teaspoons. That’s the daily limit for women, according to the American Heart Association; for men, it’s 9 teaspoons.

But those making the requests are only as reliable as their promises—and those promises aren’t always sincere.

Beware of these signs to avoid becoming a potential victim of online theft.

There’s no track record. Ideally, you want to support people who have done other successful projects. Solicitations appear on multiple crowdfunding sites. That may indicate a money grab. If you think you’ve been the victim of a scam, file a complaint with the website, then at ftc.gov or with your state’s attorney general.

And there’s no escaping dirty laundry. The average family does around 300 loads per year. Manufacturers get that your life is hectic and offer ways to take the pain out of the laundry routine, for a price. A large-capacity washer and dryer let you do more laundry at once. The biggest we’ve tested hold about 28 pounds of laundry, or about 20 full-sized bath towels, and the smallest hold only about 12 pounds, or nine towels. Options that trim wash time by 15 to 20 minutes without sacrificing cleaning ability also prevent pileups. And a dryer with a moisture sensor rather than a thermostat will sense when clothes are dry, allowing you to get back to your life outside the laundry room.