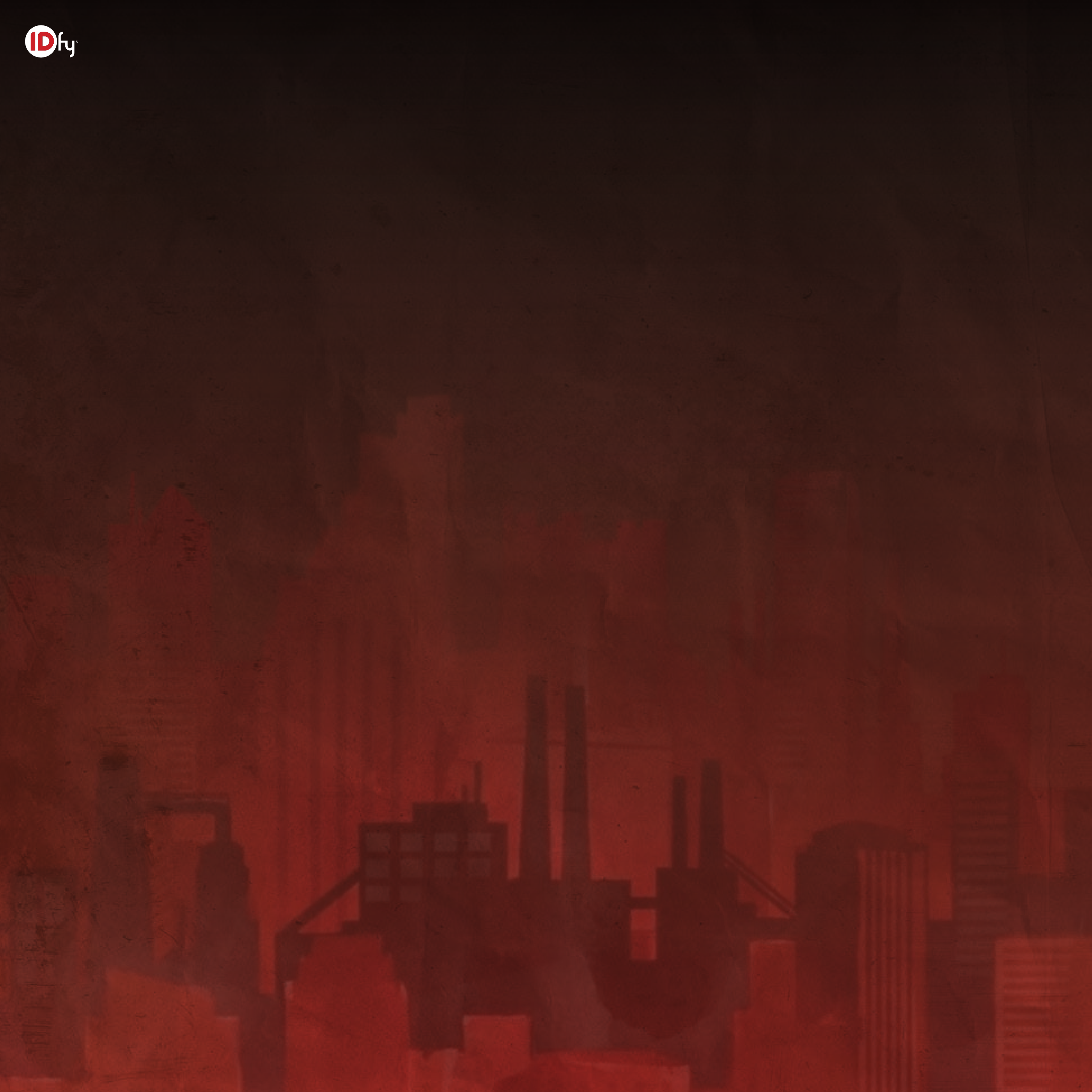

IDfy
MAYHEM
IN MAKATI



Foreword

In the Philippines, a name is more than a label on a birth certificate.

It is the quiet pride of a father walking his child to school. It is the nod of respect from a neighbour. It is the invisible currency of delikadeza - that deep sense of honour and propriety that holds our society together.

But what happens when that currency is counterfeited?

We live in an era where our identities are digitised, fragmented, and scattered across servers we cannot see. We trust screens more than faces. We prize speed over security. And in the gap between the physical and the digital, a new kind of phantom has emerged.

This book is not just a story about financial fraud. Calling it that would be a disservice to the millions who have woken up to find their lives signed away by strangers.

Through the harrowing journey of Miguel Santiago, we witness the terrifying fragility of modern life, how a lifetime of dignity can be dismantled with a single click, leaving a man “ghosted” by his own community.

Through Cal’s eyes, we see the machinery of the system: the cold, industrial pipeline that turns human lives into tradable data.

This narrative is a mirror held up to a reality we often ignore. It reminds us that behind every “fraud statistic” is a broken family dinner table, a daughter’s taped-up shoes, and a person fighting to reclaim the one thing that truly belongs to them: their name.

We created this book because we believe trust is the foundation of progress. When trust erodes, society fractures. Yet as you turn these pages, remember: this is also a story of resilience. It is proof that while a system can be hacked, the truth cannot be silenced.

Here’s to the Miguels who refuse to fade away, and the Cals who refuse to stop looking.

Welcome to the fight for our identity.

Wriju Ray
Chief Business Officer
IDfy
TrustMatters.

THE INVISIBLE CURRENCY

Ten-year-old Cal isn't just losing his father; he is losing his **delikadeza.**

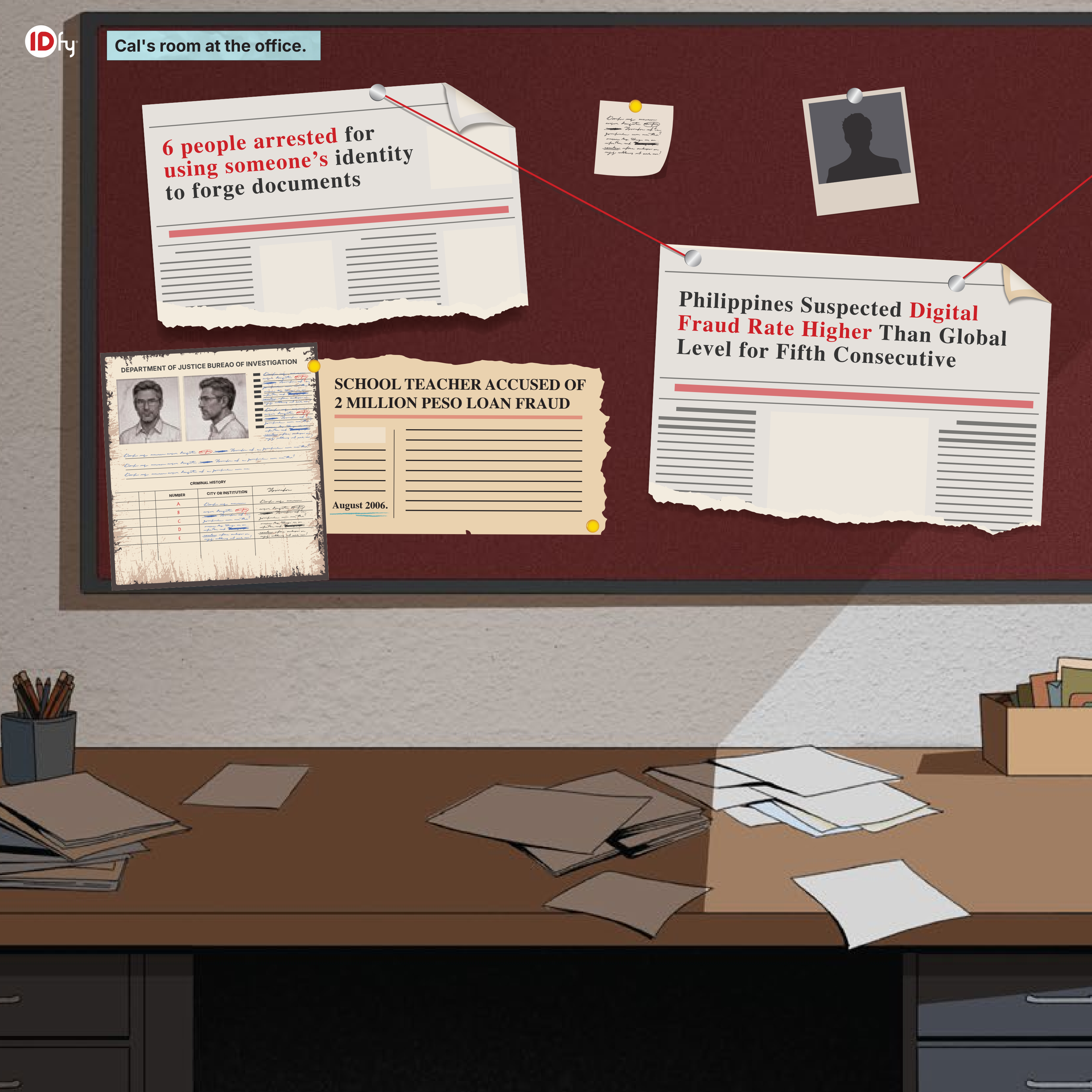
Will he be able to protect his family name?

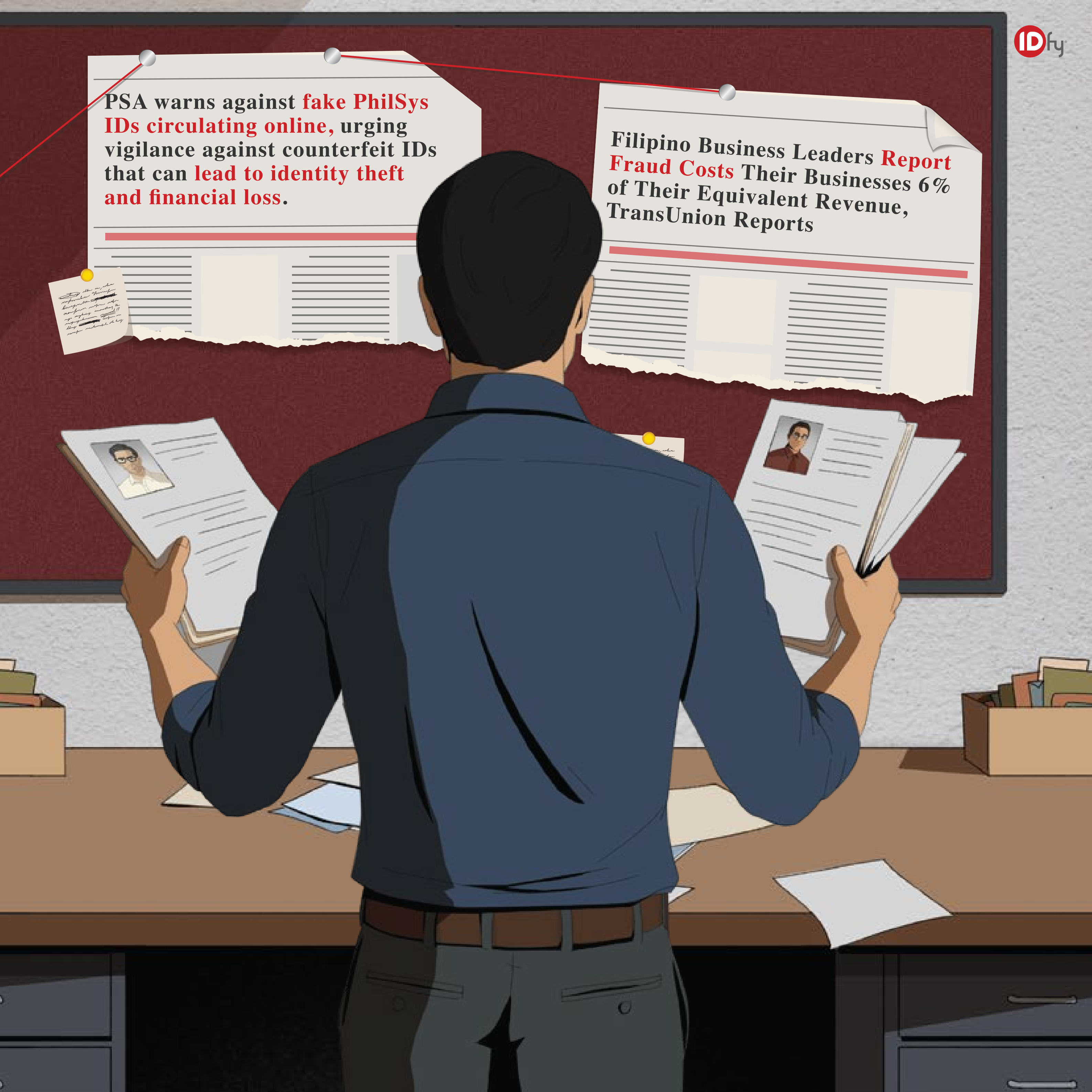

Tondo, 2006.
Rafael Ilagan!! You are under arrest for a two-million-peso loan fraud.
SLAM!!
?!
Sir, please step away from the child.
Two million? I am an **honest teacher.** I don't even have a proper roof over my head, where could I possibly get two million pesos?!
I want my Pa!


Don't cry, Cali, your father didn't do anything wrong. They may have taken our **delikadeza (honour)**, but they can't take away our invisible currency, our family name.
KRAKK!
Protect it, Cali!
SLAM!
Please don't take my Pa!


Makati, 2026. 3:00 AM.
HUGH!!
UGHH
Sisig at 2 AM is a rookie mistake. *My subconscious is a terrible writer.*
Rest easy, Pa. I will not let them stain our family name.
Teacher Arrested in Fraud Scam
PRESS


The Newsroom. 10:30 AM.
Morning, boss. I come bearing bribes.
Cal, talk to me. Where are we on the exposé? You got anything solid?
Yes, **Miguel Santiago, 45,** has a daughter, **Bea, 9; Teacher of the Year** honoree, suspended, implicated in a loan fraud.
One story is a tragedy, not an exposé. If you want the real story, find **Regina Cruz.** She's the CRO at Manila City Bank.
She can tell you exactly what we're up against.
You got it, chief. I'll interview Miguel first, then get Regina on the record.


Cal's room at the office.
6 people arrested for using someone's identity to forge documents
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE BUREAO OF INVESTIGATION
CRIMINAL HISTORY
NUMBER
CITY OR INSTITUTION
A
B
C
D
E
SCHOOL TEACHER ACCUSED OF 2 MILLION PESO LOAN FRAUD
August 2006.
Philippines Suspected Digital Fraud Rate Higher Than Global Level for Fifth Consecutive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PSA warns against fake PhilSys IDs circulating online, urging vigilance against counterfeit IDs that can lead to identity theft and financial loss.
Filipino Business Leaders Report Fraud Costs Their Businesses 6% of Their Equivalent Revenue, TransUnion Reports

THE SNOWBALL EFFECT

It took a lifetime to build his honour and a single click to dismantle it.

Miguel is now a stranger in his own life. Will he be able to fight back?

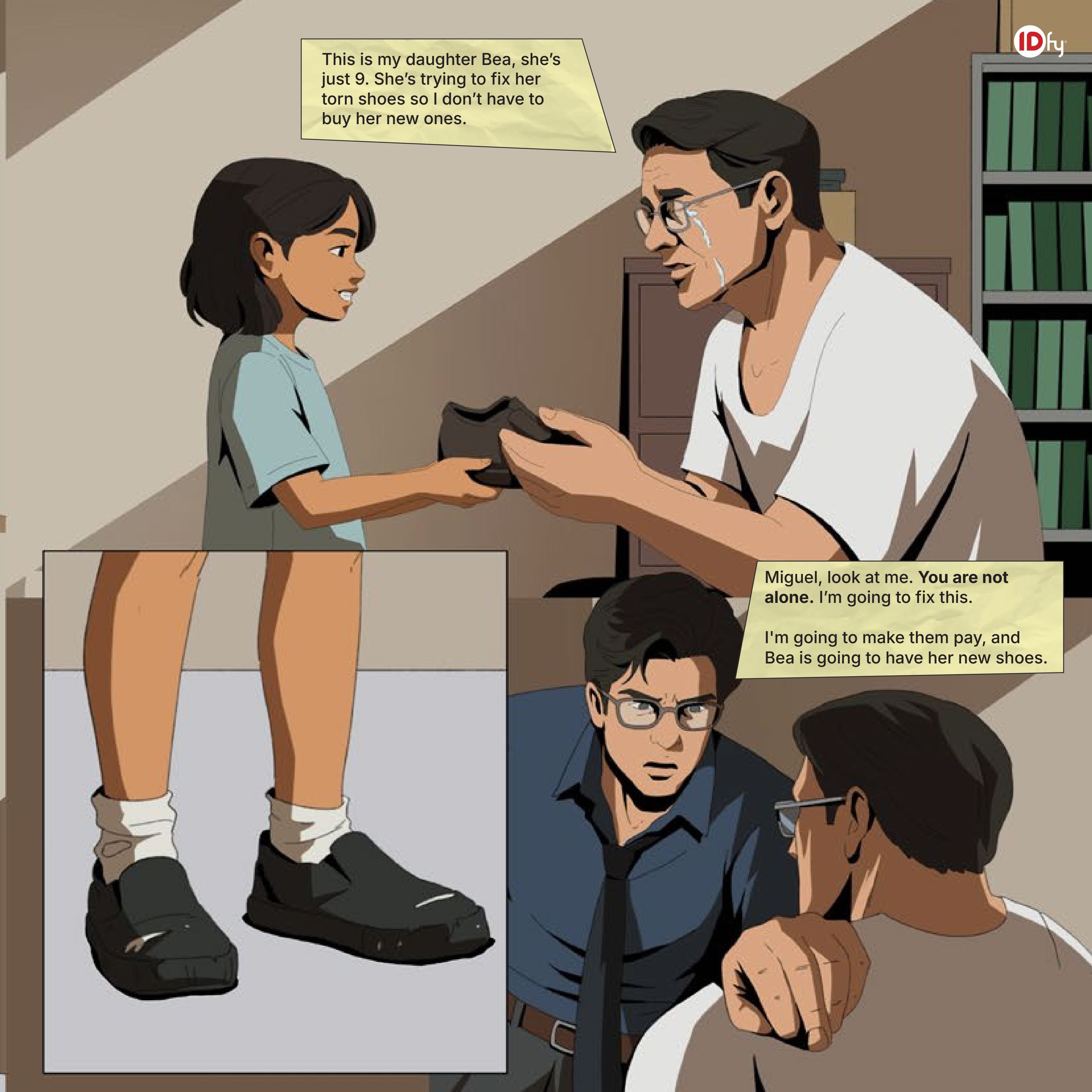
I told them I'll have something next week. Please, just..
CLANK!
PRESS
I'm not a debt collector.
I'm a journalist.
I know you didn't borrow that money. Tell me what happened.

I wanted to make some extra cash by teaching online.
In the process, I clicked on a link and uploaded my PhilSys ID for a *'background check.'*
It felt standard. It wasn't. That one upload changed everything.
Now they're buying things I could never afford.
Car loans. Gadgets. I don't even own a car.
It's a synthetic identity. They used your real data to build a fake identity.


My financial identity vanished in a single heartbeat. **Frozen accounts** and **declined cards** turned his future into a dead end.
DECLINED
I was accused of fraud. I was a liability. It didn't matter that I had been *"Teacher of the Year."*
Reputation is glass; once it cracks, it is broken forever.


Ben (College)
Hey, Miggy. Heard about what happened. Probably best we cancel the reunion trip this weekend, you must have a financial crunch. Let's catch up when the dust settles.
slide tab to unlock
My friends started to realise the dust may never settle. To them, I wasn't a victim anymore; *I was a bad investment.*
The lie was perfect. The only imperfection left was **me.** *The doubt didn't creep in; it swallowed me whole.*
I was crestfallen and shattered.
They didn't call to check in, but to check out, terrified I might ask for a loan.
CREAKKKK


CREAKK
Pa? Is it the bank again?
No, anak. Go, play in your room.
Pa, I fixed my shoes. We don't need to buy new ones yet.
GLUE

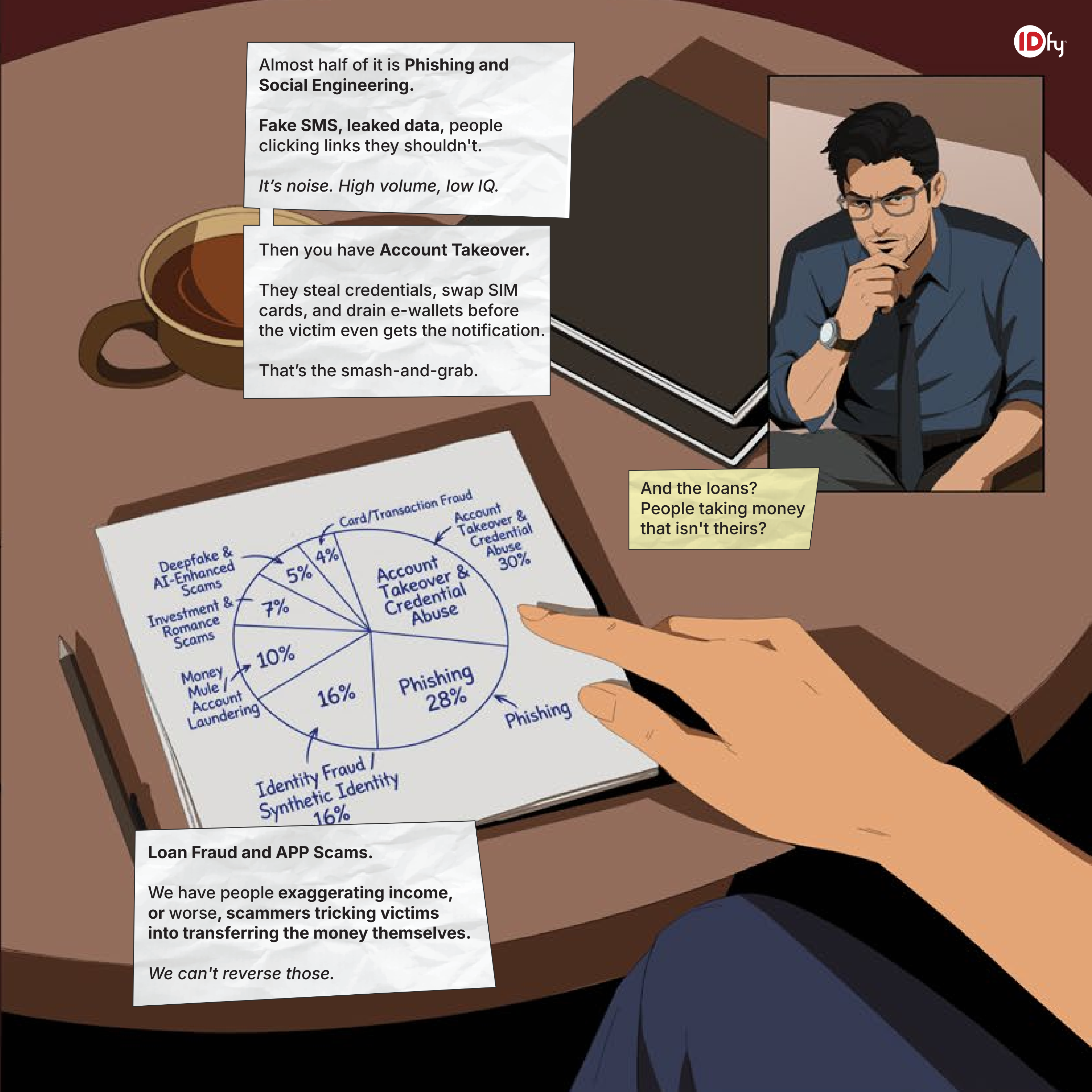

This is my daughter Bea, she's just 9. She's trying to fix her torn shoes so I don't have to buy her new ones.
Miguel, look at me. **You are not alone.** I'm going to fix this.
I'm going to make them pay, and Bea is going to have her new shoes.

THE WOLF OF FRAUDSTREET

The investigation moves from the newsroom to the street.

Cal is set to uncover the frightening simplicity of the crime, and much can change in just 15 minutes.


The air here was heavy, smothered by smoke and low light. Regina Cruz was the key to the system, and Cal was here to unlock the door.
Hi, Regina?
So you are the journalist Sarah warned me about!
Yes, Sarah told me you have a lot of insights to share.
I do, yes, but most people don't want to see how the sausage is made.
I do. So give me the breakdown. How often do they strike? How do they get in so easily?
What are the different types of fraud involved?
I manage risk for a living. But this isn't just 'risk' anymore. It's a massive and constant haemorrhage of money and trust.


Almost half of it is **Phishing and Social Engineering.**
Fake SMS, leaked data, people clicking links they shouldn't.
It's noise. High volume, low IQ.
Then you have **Account Takeover.**
They steal credentials, swap SIM cards, and drain e-wallets before the victim even gets the notification.
That's the smash-and-grab.
And the loans? People taking money that isn't theirs?
Card/Transaction Fraud
4%
Account Takeover & Credential Abuse 30%
Account Takeover & Credential Abuse
Deepfake & AI-Enhanced Scams
5%
Investment & Romance Scams
7%
10%
Money Mule / Account Laundering
16%
Phishing 28%
Phishing
Identity Fraud / Synthetic Identity 16%
Loan Fraud and APP Scams.
We have people **exaggerating income, or** worse, **scammers tricking victims into transferring the money themselves.**
We can't reverse those.


Synthetic?
But the one that scares me the most is Synthetic Identity.
It's a ghost. Think of it as the evolution of **Recto Avenue.** We call them the **Ghost Makers.**
RECTO AVENUE
They take real data, like Miguel's name, and pair it with a fake face.
They build a person who does not exist, but looks real enough on paper to pass our checks.


But you're a bank, Regina. You have billions in assets. You have armies of people.
Is there no way you can fix this?
Armies?
We're drowning, Cal.
Do you know how many calls I got this morning? Not from customers.
From the BSP. From the Data Privacy Commission.
We are working eighteen-hour days trying to plug leaks in a dam that's breaking everywhere.
We can't do this manually anymore.
Then automate it. Use AI. It's 2026.
It's not that simple.
We need to.
We want to digitise.
But no one will use the app if the process is harder than walking into a branch.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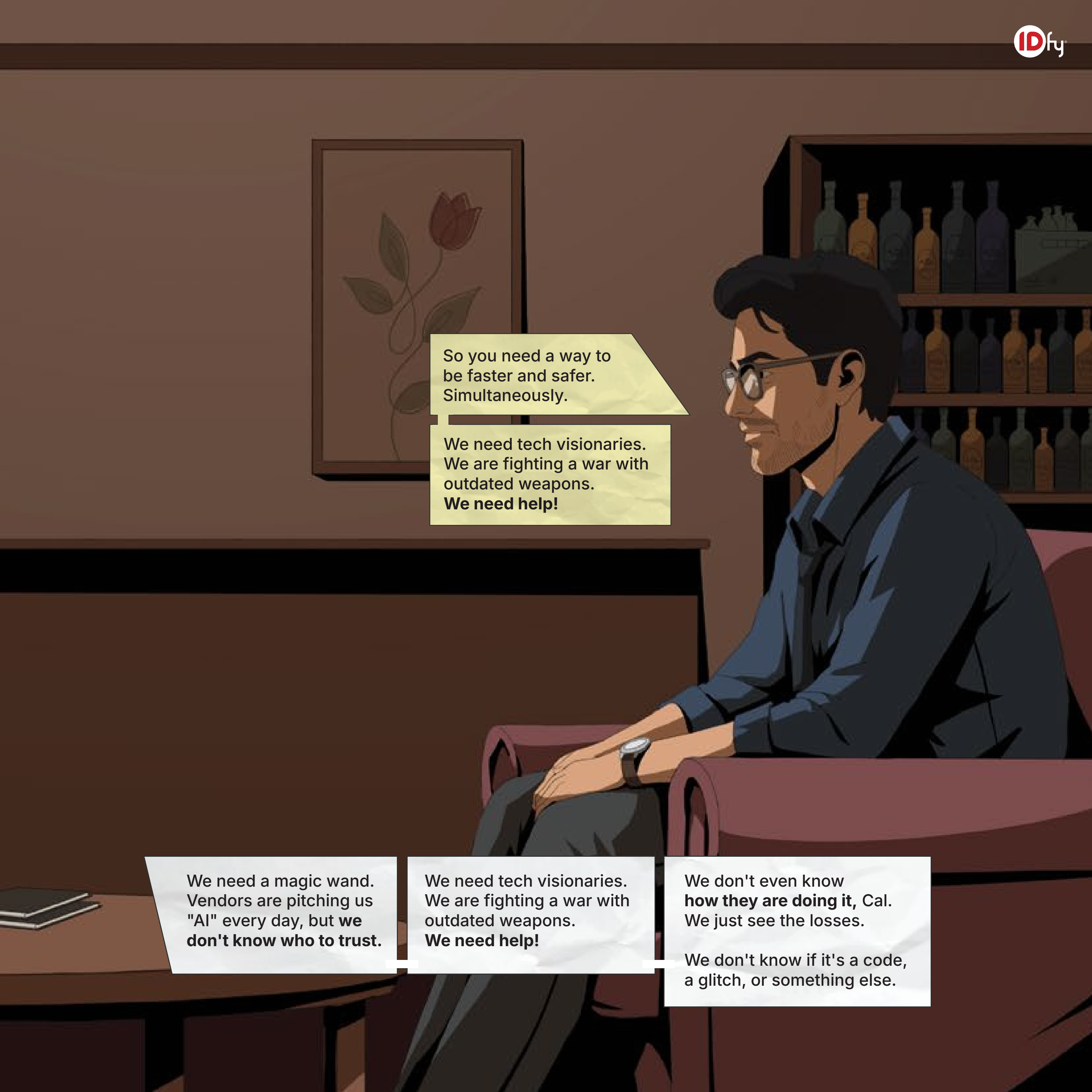
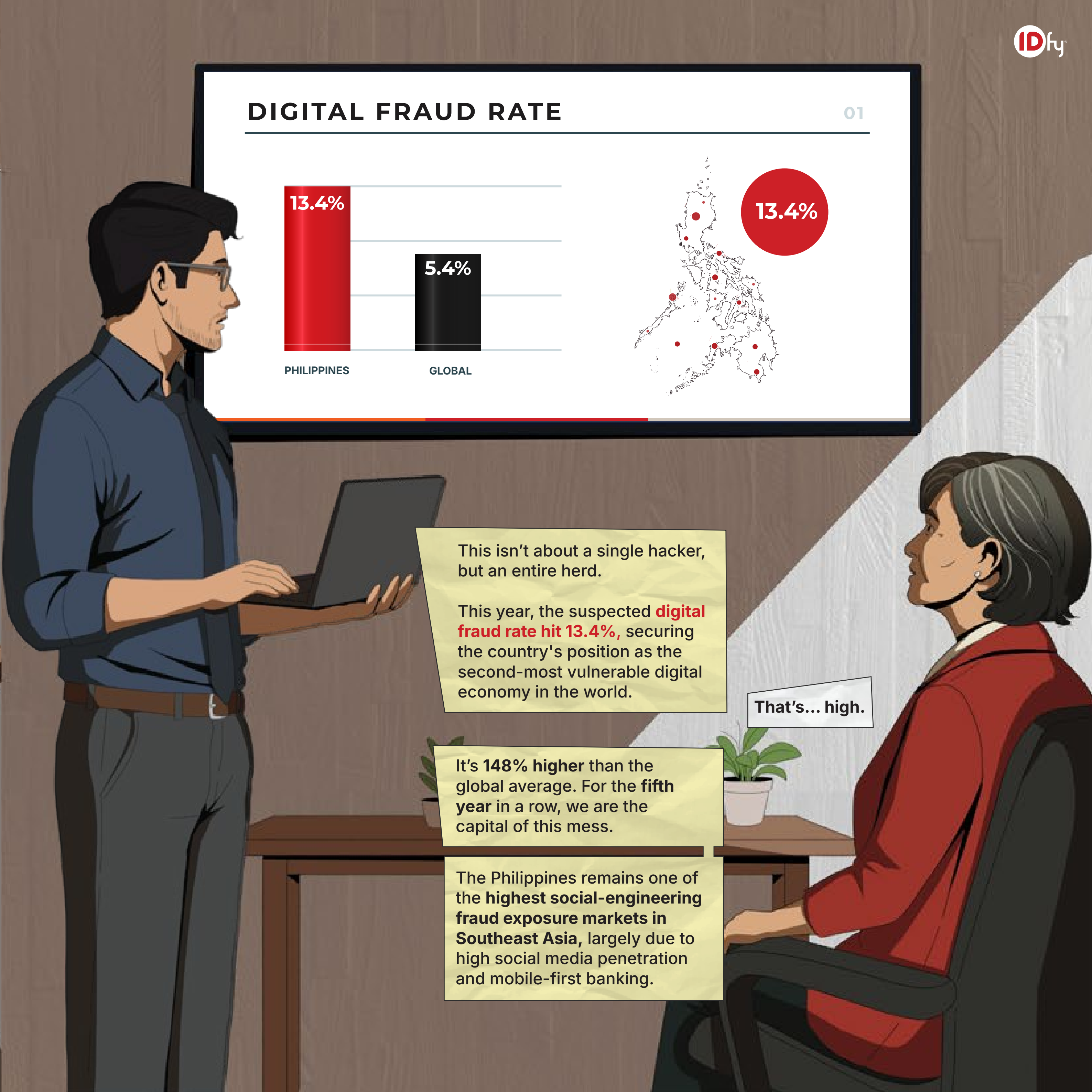
Here is the trap: If I add more security layers, **55% of legitimate customers quit.**
They abandon the app because it's too complicated.
But if I make it simpler? If I make it fast?
The fraudsters walk right in.
We are stuck between losing customers and losing money.



So you need a way to be faster and safer. Simultaneously.
We need tech visionaries. We are fighting a war with outdated weapons. **We need help!**
We need a magic wand. Vendors are pitching us "AI" every day, but **we don't know who to trust.**
We need tech visionaries. We are fighting a war with outdated weapons. **We need help!**
We don't even know **how they are doing it,** Cal. We just see the losses.
We don't know if it's a code, a glitch, or something else.


The Newsroom. Morning.
When was the last time you got some sleep, Cal? Drink this before you collapse.
I spoke with Regina, and I was going over some more data.
This is much bigger than it looks; **the banks are just as overwhelmed as victims like Miguel.**



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DIGITAL FRAUD RATE
01
13.4%
5.4%
PHILIPPINES
GLOBAL
13.4%
This isn't about a single hacker, but an entire herd.
This year, the suspected digital fraud rate hit 13.4%, securing the country's position as the second-most vulnerable digital economy in the world.
That's... high.
It's 148% higher than the global average. For the fifth year in a row, we are the capital of this mess.
The Philippines remains one of the highest social-engineering fraud exposure markets in Southeast Asia, largely due to high social media penetration and mobile-first banking.


TARGETED
RECENTLY
74%
Seven out of ten people you pass on the street have been targeted recently.
Email, text, calls, it's a constant bombardment. **Miguel isn't the only one. There are thousands just like him.**
Around **48–52% of Filipinos reported being targeted by fraud attempts** in recent surveys across digital channels.
Digital fraud exposure increased significantly with e-wallet and fintech adoption post-pandemic. The average loss is over **forty-four thousand pesos.**
That's not just data, that's a family's rent money.
That's a semester of tuition.
For someone like Miguel, *it's a life sentence.*
AVG LOSS: PHP 44,700.
40,000
30,000
20,000
10,000
0
Loss Amount (PHP)
Time Period (Post-Pandemic)


Regina Cruz doesn't talk to journalists.
You did well, Cal. Did she give you a name?
She gave me a diagnosis. *The banks are overwhelmed*, Sarah. They're bleeding out.
So, what's the next move?
I need to understand **the scale** of it.
I'm meeting a **senior consultant at PCG, Antonio Reyes.** He can tell me how the *industry is trying to survive.*
Sounds like a lot of corporate talk.
Exactly. Reyes can tell me how the banks are fighting back. But I need to see **who** they are fighting against.
Every ghost has a birthplace, Sarah. A dark corner where the lie is first told.
Before I sit down with another suit, I'm heading to **Recto.**
It's time I paid a visit to the **Ghost Makers.**


C.M. Recto Avenue.
How much for a PhilSys ID?
Five hundred. **Fifteen minutes.**
That fast?
Boss, send the data on Telegram. I snap the photo, and I print. Simple. **No originals needed.**
CELL PHONE
Check


Heard someone scammed him big time? I am looking for a similar job, big scale.
Know someone who can help?
I print a hundred faces a day, boss. They all look the same to me.
Look, I just work the laminate. No questions. Wanna find someone who knows the *business*?
Here's Jerry for you. Cocky kid. Thinks he's the *Wolf of Recto*.
Jerry? Thanks, boss.


Cal's office. Night.
TRING
TRING
Unknown
Incoming call
Accept
Decline


The guy at the printing stall gave me your number.
Said you handle... bulk orders.
Ah, a *referral*. I'm listening.
What do you need? Verified accounts? Clean names? I have a menu.
I hear the banks are tightening up. Facial recognition. AI.
I don't want to buy a dead account.
Don't worry about the banks.
They build a ten-foot fence, and I bring an eleven-foot ladder.
It's just a **game**, bro.
It's not a game for people losing money. Aren't you worried they'll find you?


Find me? I’m in a high-rise in Makati. Top floor. Great view. I’m untouchable.
You ask too many questions. You aren't buying. You’re fishing. Stop wasting my time.
Amateur.


He acts like he's untouchable because he thinks that the system is blind.
I need to find a way to make it see.
Taguig
Makati
Mandaluyong
Pasay

THE UNBREAKABLE LOCK

It’s one thing to be outsmarted by a thief in the dark.

It’s a completely different tragedy to leave the vault unlocked when the key is readily available.


GLUG GLUG
Finally, we meet, sir!
Sorry, I was busy with Recto all day yesterday.
And see this, I found a guy who was completely confident that the system can't touch him.
He basically dared me to try.
He's arrogant, Cal, but he isn't wrong.
The banks are trying to solve a high-tech problem with manual reviews.
It's just not possible anymore. They need to go digital.

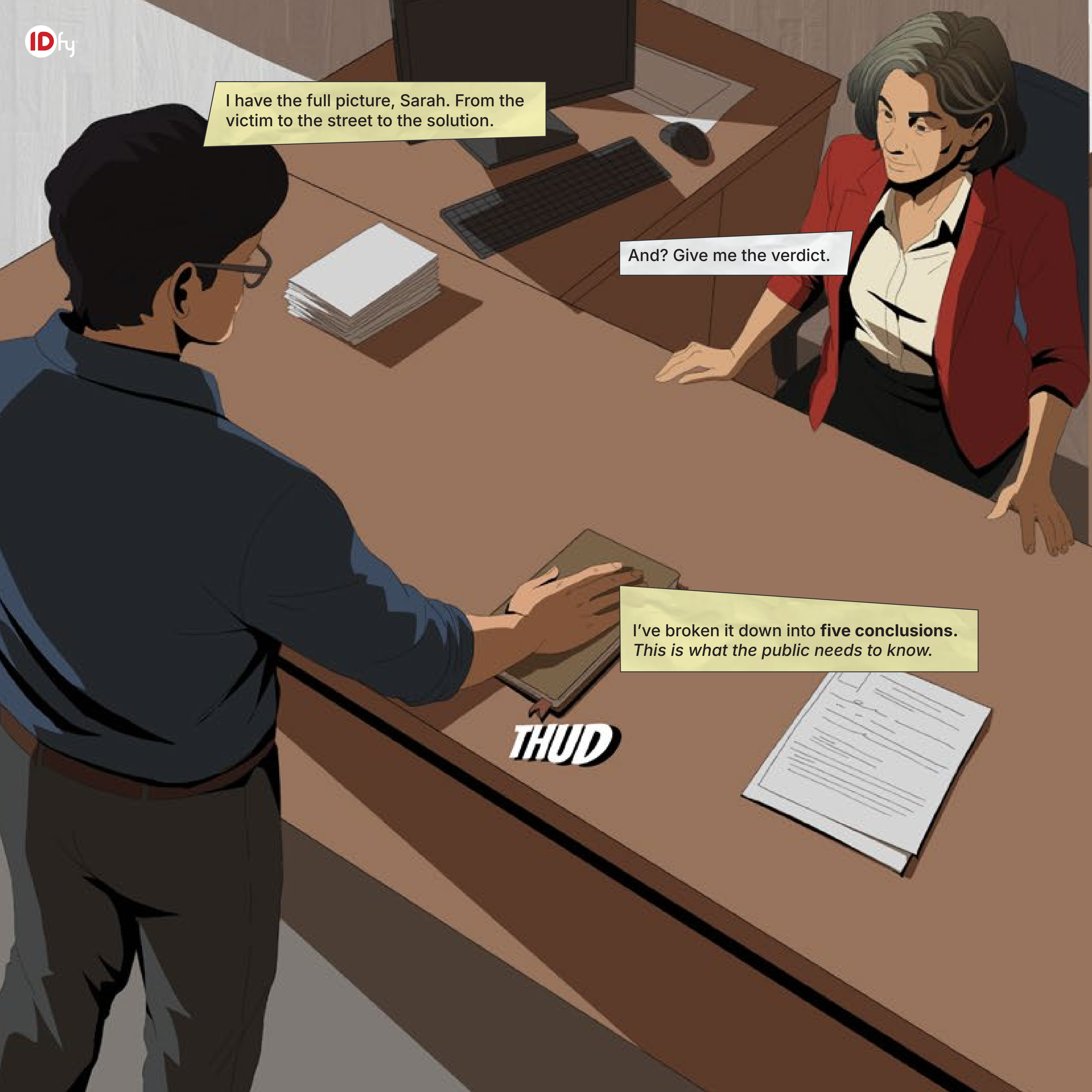

Regina Cruz, CRO of Manila City Bank, told me the same thing.
She said they are overwhelmed.
They know they need technology, they know they need AI... but they don't know *whom to trust.*
Exactly. It’s a crisis of trust.
They don’t know which tech to trust, and they don’t know which customer to trust, either.

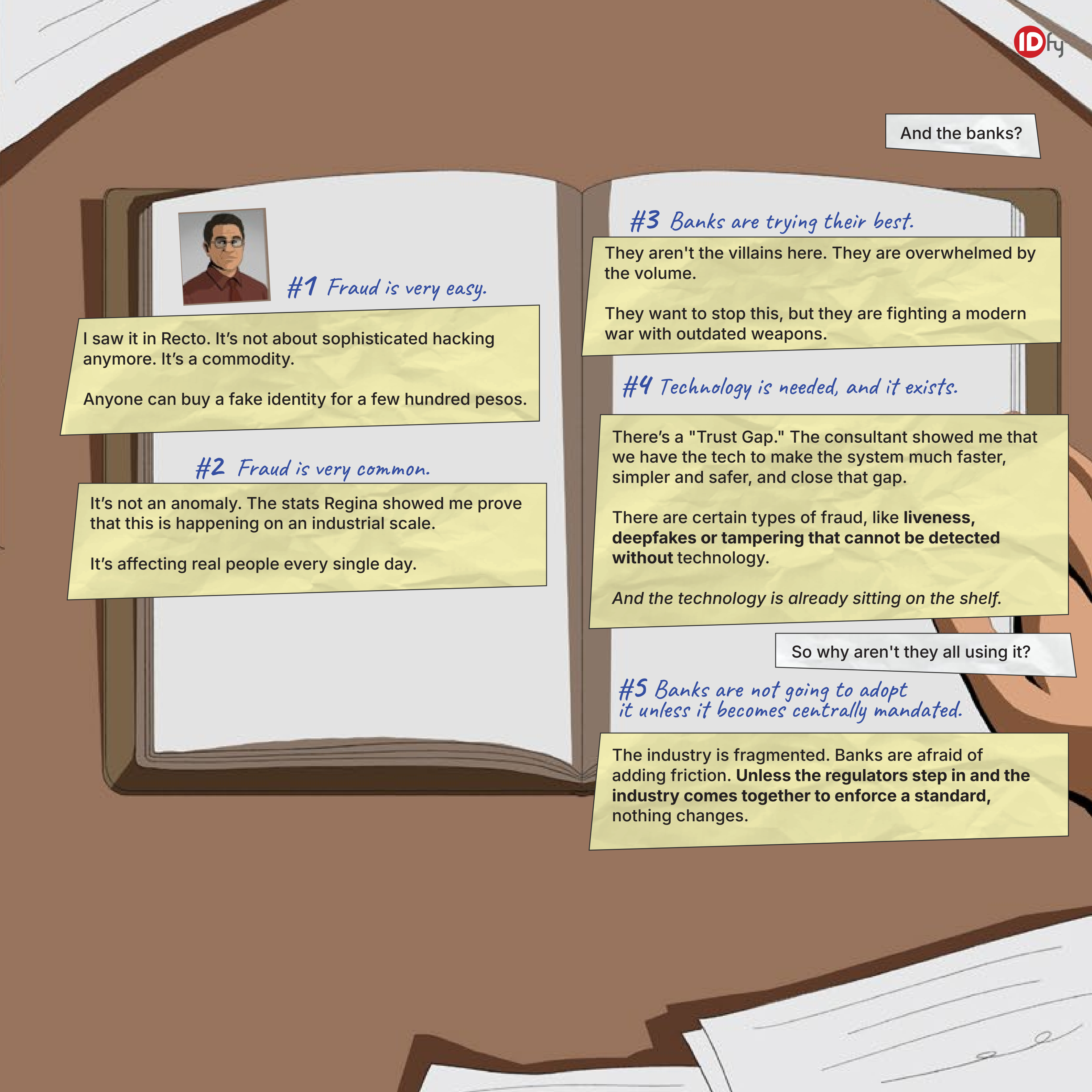

They think the answer is to build a massive internal fortress. But that takes years.
By the time they build it, the guys like Jerry have already changed their methods.
So if building it is too slow, and manual checks are impossible... Where do they find the answer?


You don't build it. You *partner.*
You need a *specialist.*
A specialised platform that **eliminates the trust gap.** Someone who gives you the speed and the **security** *that customers and banks want.*
And how is that different from what they have now?
The modern solution simplifies everything into two questions.
Does the person exist? And is the same person transacting?
I will need you to explain a little more.

Consider the **face**, not just the text. You can verify the data, but forgers can easily swap the photo while keeping valid details.
So the government database matches, but the card is fake.
The only way to catch that is **technology.**
Look at these two IDs. Which one's real and which one's forged?
Can you tell with your eyes, Cal?
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
Multi-Purpose - Purpose ID
ID SAMPLE ADDRESS
SIRTHAM CITY, PHILIPPINES
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
Multi-Purpose - Purpose ID
ID SAMPLE ADDRESS
SIRTHAM CITY, PHILIPPINES
No way! They are uncanny!
Exactly. Now, imagine if I had your ID, I could fake the selfie by pointing the camera at your LinkedIn profile on a screen.
Most systems are fooled because the faces match. **'Photo liveness'** prevents this.
It's **AI software that detects if the selfie is truly live or just a picture of a picture.**


I have heard a lot about **deepfakes.** What if you use something like a **virtual camera** or some sort of **simulation to inject an image** or video of me?
Great question. This is where **deep fake detection** comes in.
These days, **we can use technology to detect if an image is being streamed in or injected.** This stuff again is impossible to detect with our eyes.
So this is what happened to Miguel?
Exactly! Someone stole his ID card to impersonate him.
So it solves people like Regina's and Miguel's problems.
It makes the system secure and fast at the same time.


I have the full picture, Sarah. From the victim to the street to the solution.
And? Give me the verdict.
I've broken it down into **five conclusions.** *This is what the public needs to know.*
THUD


And the banks?
#1 Fraud is very easy.
I saw it in Recto. It's not about sophisticated hacking anymore. It's a commodity.
Anyone can buy a fake identity for a few hundred pesos.
#2 Fraud is very common.
It's not an anomaly. The stats Regina showed me prove that this is happening on an industrial scale.
It's affecting real people every single day.
#3 Banks are trying their best.
They aren't the villains here. They are overwhelmed by the volume.
They want to stop this, but they are fighting a modern war with outdated weapons.
#4 Technology is needed, and it exists.
There's a "Trust Gap." The consultant showed me that we have the tech to make the system much faster, simpler and safer, and close that gap.
There are certain types of fraud, like liveness, deepfakes or tampering that cannot be detected without technology.
And the technology is already sitting on the shelf.
So why aren't they all using it?
#5 Banks are not going to adopt it unless it becomes centrally mandated.
The industry is fragmented. Banks are afraid of adding friction. Unless the regulators step in and the industry comes together to enforce a standard, nothing changes.


That's great insight, Cal. Really.
It connects all the dots.
Let's publish it.
But what about Miguel? Does any of this actually help him get his life back?


I will make sure the exposé clears his delikadeza, his name.
And after reading his story, I hope more victims like him come forward, abandoning their shame, fear of embarrassment and reputation being damaged, and just speak up their truth.
I want to help all the Miguels in the world so my dad can rest in peace.

EXPOSÉ

The Ghost in the Vault

By Cal

For forty years, Miguel Santiago traded in a currency more volatile than the Peso: ***delikadeza.***

As a public school teacher and **"Teacher of the Year,"** he took his name as his honour. It took four decades to build that reputation, and fifteen minutes on Recto Avenue to burn it to the ground.

When Miguel's identity was stolen,

he wasn't just a victim of theft; he was "ghosted" by his own community and branded a fraudster by the very institutions he trusted. But Miguel is not a criminal. He is a casualty of a silent war occurring within the invisible wires of our digital economy, a war the Philippines' top banks are currently losing.

The 500-Peso Commodity

My investigation led me from elite boardrooms to the humid back alleys of Recto. There, for 500 pesos, I watched a "Ghost Maker", Jerry, create synthetic identities with assembly-line-like efficiency. To him, stealing a life is just a transaction; low-risk with high reward. To the banks, these ghosts look real enough to pass every manual check.

A Gunfight with a Garden Hose

The reality inside our financial institutions is one of desperation. With digital fraud rates in the Philippines hitting 13.4%, which is 148% higher than the global average, CROs like Regina Cruz are overwhelmed, says

"We stop a thousand attempts, and they send two thousand more. It's like a gunfight with a garden hose."

Banks are trapped in a "Trust Gap": tighten security and lose 55% of legitimate customers to friction, or loosen it and open the floodgates to predators.

The Verdict for the C-Suite

01

Fraud is a commodity.

It is cheap and accessible to anyone.

02

The scale is industrial.

Miguel is just a statistical number in a national epidemic.

03

Banks are fighting blind.

Manual reviews cannot catch deepfakes or "photo liveness" bypasses.

04

The technology exists.

AI-driven liveness detection is already available, ready to verify the person, not just the paperwork.

05

Inertia is the enemy.

Without a centrally mandated standard from regulators like the BSP, the industry remains fragmented and vulnerable.

We cannot wait for fraudsters to develop a conscience.

We need a Unified Trust Infrastructure that prioritises real human liveness over static data.

We must build a system where a stolen ID is useless because the owner's life is the one thing a fraudster can never forge.

Today, Miguel Santiago gets his name back.

But until we fix the lock on the front door, **every Filipino's delikadeza remains up for sale.**

Data can be bought. IDs can be forged. But a person's liveness is non-negotiable. It's time our systems started treating human identity as a right, not a vulnerability.


Few days later....
TEACHER OF THE YEAR
And we are thrilled to announce Mr Miguel Santiago is officially our Teacher of the Year!
Thank you for having me back!
Welcome back, Sir.

Cal. You came.
I wouldn't miss it. Congratulations, Miguel. You deserve this.
The bank called this morning. They said that they are opening a formal investigation to track the funds.
It might take time to get the money back, Miguel. But they are moving.
Money is important, yes. But I managed to scrape enough together for these.
Bea starts class tomorrow.
But Cal...You cleared my name. You gave me back my *delikadeza*.
My father used to say a man without his honour is a dead man. You brought me back to life. Thank you.
You never lost it, Miguel. The world just needed to clean its glasses. Go be with your daughter.


THUMP!
What is this? Fan mail?
You might want to get some coffee.
Victims. Hundreds of them. People are still reaching out because of the exposé.
They saw Miguel’s story and realised they weren't alone. They’re abandoning the shame, Cal.
They’re speaking up.
This is good, we’re building a movement.
It’s good. But this one... this one is different.


He’s on line one.
This is Cal. Talk to me.

Trust Matters.