

McALARY FROM P. 5

One dealer, Roberto Torres — arrested last month but not convicted — is allegedly the biggest retail heroin operator in this city's history. A 250-page government affidavit charges that Torres controlled an empire of 350 workers with 20 outlets in Manhattan and the Bronx and makes the Gambinos look like paupers. At the time of his arrest, he was said to be making \$1 million a day in street sales. The government estimates his personal fortune at \$100 million. The millions made on the streets of New York was used to buy heavy equipment in Queens, which was shipped to Puerto Rico, and ultimately used to pave the island's streets.

The story starts with cars and a great idea.

In the mid 1980s, Jeffrey Cooper went into the leasing business. Cooper, the younger brother of an **extortionist** now serving a life sentence for **racketeering** with traditional organized crime figures, knew the government was seizing drug dealers' luxury cars. But leased cars had to be returned to the dealerships.

"The scheme was to lease dealers their cars," Angel said. "That way, when they are busted, they could get their cars back. Only we didn't really lease them cars. We took the full amount, in cash, up front, and then wrote up fake leasing agreements. We never reported the cash. We did the same thing with homes. The guys would pay in full up front, and then we'd give them fake mortgages."

Booming business

The offices of DEC Leasing were soon filled with the most dangerous drug dealers in the city. Cooper was making deals with everyone from Pappy Mason — who ordered rookie cop Edward Byrne's execution — to Michael **Franzese**, the flamboyant Colombo family capo.

"I didn't always know who these guys were," Cooper said this week. "Once I leased a Cadillac to **Franzese**. It was a real lease. But the guy stopped making payments. I sent the repo man after him. The repo man put a gun to **Franzese's** head and told him, 'Get out of the car.' We just took the car back. I could have been killed."

About this time, Angel came to work for Cooper. The slightly built, fast-talking son of a teacher grew up on the streets of downtown Brooklyn. One of his brothers was shot to death during an argument over a girl in a gang war. Angel attended college briefly in Boston before marrying his high school sweetheart and going into the car insurance business. Cooper hired him to handle his Spanish-speaking clients.

In 1987, Cooper began leasing limousines to heroin dealers. One, John Olmedo, the brother of an undercover New York City cop, put up \$45,000 on a 36-month lease. When Olmedo, who was also involved in an untaxed gas scam with the Russian mob, returned the limo three years later, the odometer had only logged 4,000 miles.

"He used the car to drive his daughter to school," Angel said. "Olmedo's family lived in Lawrence (Long Island). His daughter went to private school in South Williamsburg. The limo dropped her off and picked her up from school. That's all it was ever used for."

Another position

Olmedo, who met Angel at Cooper's office, inducted him into his heroin army. When Angel wasn't setting up leases for Olmedo's gang, he was setting up heroin deals between Olmedo and other DEC customers.

"DEC was a regular rogue's gallery," Angel said. "Guys were coming in with shotguns and Uzis all the time.

Guys would call up and say, 'Take my partner off the lease. He just got whacked.' People were always threatening to kill Cooper. It was crazy. We should have had a metal detector at the door."

Roberto Torres walked into Cooper's office in 1987. Like Olmedo, he wanted to lease a limousine. Torres, who was born in Guayama, Puerto Rico, did not speak English.

"How is he going to pay?" Cooper asked Torres' interpreter.

Torres opened up his wallet and produced a \$125,000 check from the Puerto Rican lottery.

"Sold," Cooper said.

Only later did Cooper learn that the \$125,000 check, drawn on the Banco de Ponce, had been purchased by Torres in Puerto Rico for \$150,000 from the real lottery winner.

"Torres was quite slick," Cooper said. "A lot of the guys, when they came in with all that jewelry, the gold teeth, you knew who you were dealing with. But Torres never went for that. He was calm, even polite. The guy was huge."

Branching out

Angel also began working for Torres. When one of Torres' heroin sources went dry in 1988, Angel set up three huge deals between Torres and Olmedo. Torres would pack the money, as much as \$1 million at a time, in U-Haul boxes. Once when Olmedo demanded that Torres pay upfront on a deal in 1990, Angel was entrusted with two duffel bags containing \$500,000. He brought the money into Cooper's office to show it off.

"I couldn't believe Torres trusted me with all that money," Angel said. "But once he did it, I was in."

For three years, Angel worked at DEC, laundering millions for Olmedo and Torres and helping them buy real estate in New York and Puerto Rico. Torres trusted Angel with everything from fixing parking tickets to buying \$7 million worth of heavy construction equipment — a middle-of-the-night cash transaction — from a trucking firm in College Point. Angel even opened up his own leasing business in 1990 — R&R Choices in Bushwick — with another heroin trafficker, Rozano Bailey, but maintained an office at DEC. Angel drove a blue Rolls-Royce Silver Spur, bought a \$750,000 home in Jamaica Estates that Olmedo had been given by a Russian mobster for payment on a drug deal gone bad. Cooper gave him a \$150,000 loan to buy a 17-unit apartment house in the Bronx from a jailed heroin dealer named Jorge Santiago.

"I spent \$2 million in about two years," Angel said. "I knew every major heroin trafficker in the city. They all trusted me. I was on top of the world."

A snag

In January 1990, Gerald McAleer and Steve Whipple — two DEA agents assigned to Delta Group 23 — were watching the house of a suspected Brooklyn heroin dealer, Bailey. Angel's leasing partner, was seen driving away from the house. The agents pulled him over and found heroin in his briefcase. Bailey was driving a 1990 Merkur leased from R&R Choices.

A few days later, Angel went to DEA headquarters to get the car back. He was told it had been returned to Cooper.

This disturbed Angel greatly. Not only was Cooper trying to snatch one of his cars, but the DEA appeared to be closing in. It looked like it was only a matter of time before the authorities got to them.

That afternoon, he went to a church in Flushing. He knelt in a confession and told an anonymous priest ev-

erything he knew about the heroin business. The priest told Angel simply and gently: "Do what you think is right. Your life is not lost yet."

That night, Angel met with McAleer and Whipple.

"I can give you the heroin business," Angel told them.

In the first hour of his new role as a paid informant, Angel identified a half-dozen major heroin trafficking organizations. Using DEC's client list as a road map and Angel's ability to navigate the murderous terrain, the feds made dozens of cases over the next three years. No less than a dozen major heroin organizations — culminating last month in the arrest of Roberto Torres — were crippled.

"The guy was fantastic," said one law-enforcement source. "When it

came to heroin, he was our Rosetta Stone."

The first case, a car-leasing sting by the DEA and IRS, resulted in Cooper's arrest and the seizure of 40 vehicles in April 1991. Cooper, who pleaded guilty to money laundering charges, is awaiting sentencing.

Last year, Cooper's former bookkeeper at DEC hired a gang to extort \$60,000 from him, threatening to kill his children. The gang was arrested and jailed. All of these experiences forced Cooper to turn his life around. He now spends seven days a week working at his synagogue.

Tomorrow: The tale of two brothers: one a major heroin trafficker, the other a New York City cop.

ADVICE

Doused by an unstable louse

DEAR ANN: AN ATTRACTIVE man I worked with in a hospital pharmacy was dumped by his fiancé. He caught her in bed with another man. I knew "Glen" was hurting and tried to help. We ate lunch together every day and spent hours after work in his car talking. We are both shy and never became intimate.

When Glen was transferred to a city 100 miles away, I was devastated. We were separated for six months, and I really missed him. When he came home for a weekend, I was thrilled. Glen docked his sailboat and invited me aboard. We kissed for the first time, and I was in seventh heaven. We ended up making love all night. It was wonderful. I visited him several times after that, and everything was terrific.

Two months ago, when I went to see Glen, it was as if he had turned into a Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde. He opened a window from the second story, dumped a pail of water on my head and yelled, "Leave me alone!" I was terribly upset and couldn't understand what was wrong. He screamed at me to go away. I said, "I'm not leaving until you tell me what's wrong." Then he called the police and tried to have me arrested for trespassing.

I've known Glen's family for years. I don't want to give up on him. He's a very sensitive man and gets hurt easily. I believe his odd behavior is related to his ex-girlfriend.

I've let some time go by, written and called, but he refuses to talk to me. My friends say he's crazy and I should forget about him, but I can't. Glen is special,

and I love him. Should I persist, or is it time to give up?

— In Pain in Kinston, N.C.

Dear Kinston: Glen's erratic behavior suggests that he is mentally ill. My advice is to leave him alone. Apparently your presence makes him angry, and he could become violent. P.S. I'm afraid that night on the boat meant a lot more to you than it did to him. Too bad.

Dear Ann: After reading your column about people who don't have the decency to RSVP to invitations, I decided to share this story with you.

A group of elderly gentlemen was talking about the invitations to an upcoming wedding of a distant relative. One of the men, of German descent, told the others that he had decided not to attend the wedding. When asked why, he replied that he simply could not afford the kind of present the couple had requested.

His two cronies tried to figure out exactly what he meant but were unable to make sense of it. The old German fellow finally told them that his invitation had a card in it saying "RSVP" — and to him that meant Real Silver Wedding Presents.

I've had fun retelling this story and hope you enjoy it, too.

— Paula in St. Louis

Dear Paula: I certainly did! Thanks for passing it on.

They're easy to get, easy to use and even easier to get hooked on. If you have questions about drugs, you need Ann Landers' booklet "The Lowdown on Dope." Send a self-addressed, long, business-size envelope and a check or money order for \$3.65 (this includes postage and handling) to: Lowdown, c/o Ann Landers, P.O. Box 11562, Chicago, Ill. 60611-0562. © 1993 Creators Syndicate



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