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THE X-FILES

Israeli Immigrant Jacob "Cookie" Orgad Was an Unlikely Godfather: A King of the International Ecstasy Market Whose Subjects Included Strippers, Hasidic Teens and a Texas Couple with a Retarded Son.

By Julian Rubinstein

In the early evening of April 7, 2000, one of the strangest and most lucrative careers in the history of American drug smuggling was coming to an end. Twenty undercover agents, most from the U.S. Customs Service and the Drug Enforcement Administration, fanned into position outside a plush midtown Manhattan high-rise waiting for Jacob "Cookie" Orgad, the enigmatic Israeli king of ecstasy, to return from dinner.

When he arrived, at around 9:30—a babe on each arm and reeking of cologne—the former "Beeper King" of Los Angeles calmly consented to a search of his three-bedroom penthouse. What would a 43-year-old self-described former rabbinical student have to hide? But with Cookie, nothing was ever the way it seemed. As the search commenced, one of his girlfriends entertained the agents by showing them the marijuana leaf tattooed on her ass.

Such was the bizarre and incongruous world of Jacob Orgad—a.k.a. Tony Evans—a man feared by some and considered a joke by others, whose rise to prominence on the Hollywood scene as a close associate of Heidi Fleiss gives new meaning to the immigrant ideal of the self-made man. Was Cookie the Pablo Escobar of ecstasy? If so, he went down without so much as a splash. "Wait up for me," he told the girls through his thick Israeli accent as he was cuffed and put into a waiting car. "I'll be back in a few hours."

But Cookie wasn't going to be coming home for a long, long time. There were too many people—from the notorious former Gambino crime family underboss Sammy "the Bull" Gravano down to the Las Vegas strippers and Brooklyn Hasidic teens employed as drug mules—who had been convicted for working in the worldwide ecstasy empire Cookie shrewdly came to rule. "It was one of the most sophisticated and complex operations we've seen," says Dean Boyd, a spokesman for U.S. Customs. It was also one of the

most unlikely.

Cookie's rise and fall traces a precipitous Wall Street-like graph: His fortunes boomed spectacularly in the mid-to-late 1990s—when the emergence of a massive market for ecstasy reconfigured the power structure of the world drug market—before crashing at the tail end of an investigation that spanned three continents and tore up the lives of scores of the most unlikely pushers imaginable. Take 19-year-old Simcha Roth, a Hasidic Jew from Brooklyn who pleaded guilty to ecstasy-smuggling charges in a related case. At his bail hearing, he was released to the custody of two rabbis.

As much as 90 percent of the world's ecstasy supply is manufactured in secret, high-tech labs scattered throughout the Netherlands, where the materials to make the hallucinogen are not as closely regulated as they are in the rest of Europe and the United States. For years, a cabal of Israelis have used Holland as a base for diamond smuggling through the ports in Antwerp and Rotterdam. In the mid-nineties, some of them noticed that an even more lucrative trade had blossomed around them, one with few players as well positioned to cash in as they were. "Israelis are everywhere, and they get to know each other very fast because of the language and the tradition," says an Israeli intelligence official familiar with his countrymen's stronghold on the world ecstasy market. "It doesn't take long for a guy like Cookie to get big."

Authorities say that by the time of his arrest, Cookie had brought in more ecstasy to the United States than any other individual ever has: an estimated 9 million pills with a street value of more than \$270 million. A former discount-electronics salesman, Cookie climbed to the top of the world drug trade chiefly by lying with such élan that emboldened associates were eventually threatening to "whack" Mafia made man Gravano. But in the end, Cookie's sex-filled gangster paradise grew too big for its own good.

"I was stupid," Cookie told me through his lawyer from a federal detention facility in Brooklyn—one of the few comments he agreed to make for this story. "It was a macho thing."

What most people who knew Cookie in his early L.A. days remember is that he was a member of Mossad, Israel's elite intelligence organization. Cookie grew up in Israel—in a big Moroccan Jewish family in the north of the country—and followed his ex-wife, Sigal, and 6-year-old daughter, Ravid, to the United States in 1985. He spent a few years in Fort Lauderdale before moving to Los Angeles in 1989. And though he has been able to keep many of the facts about his life a mystery even to the authorities who tracked his case for years, one thing is certain: Cookie was never an intelligence agent.

Cookie might never have amounted to more than a street-level salesman if it weren't for his extraordinary ability to exploit opportunity—the Southern California equivalent of good genes. An opportunity presented itself to Cookie in the form of Heidi Fleiss, who showed up at his electronics store one afternoon in 1990, looking for a bargain on a big-screen television. Not that Fleiss needed a bargain. She was already running what she brags was the best operation of its kind in the world—a \$1,500-a-night call-girl service. (The "Hollywood Madame" eventually drew three years in prison.) "I dealt with the richest people in the world and the best-looking girls," Fleiss crows from her Los Angeles home,

where she remains sequestered as part of her parole agreement.

Cookie knew who Fleiss was; a mutual Israeli friend had told him that she would be coming in for a deal on a TV. Law-enforcement officials here and in Israel believe Cookie was already involved in drug dealing—cocaine, mostly—but it was small-time stuff; it's unlikely that's why Fleiss sought him out. What is clear is that Cookie sold Fleiss a television and drove it to her now-infamous \$1.6 million Benedict Canyon pleasure palace himself.

"Next thing you know, Cookie's doing favors, running errands," says Ivan Nagy, Fleiss's boyfriend at the time. The call-girl market, much like the ecstasy scene that would soon explode, was fiercely competitive. With demand exceeding supply, many girls were looking to use Fleiss as a springboard to their own service.

Cookie didn't look like much—short, pudgy, hairy, with a sartorial style reminiscent of Steve Martin's Wild and Crazy Guy: tight pants, shirts unbuttoned to his navel, lime-green Valentino jackets, and chest-nesting gold chains. But Cookie recognized Fleiss's need for someone to protect the business, and the Mossad tale was born. "Heidi and I looked at him like he was a moron," says Nagy. "But at that time, anyone who suggested they could be some kind of an enforcer was valuable."

Fleiss (who has little bad to say about Cookie) says she never believed his Mossad yarn but did make use of it. "I had a lot of enemies," she says. "Sometimes I needed to find out something about a girl and he'd help me."

"He and his friends would wait around for the girls to come home and then sneak up on them and say, 'When are you going to go see Heidi?'" recalls one source. "They killed one girl's cat."

As Fleiss's "enforcer," Cookie had found a place for himself in the Hollywood scene. But he quickly came to realize that the role was limiting. He had a legendary libido—"He could fuck all day," says one source—but being feared didn't get you much action that you didn't have to pay for. Nor did it command respect. While dapper johns like Charlie Sheen were whisked into the clubs with the Fleiss posse, Cookie had to stand in line with the rest of the losers.

But not for long. If there was one thing his days with Fleiss seems to have drilled into Cookie's head, it was this: Girls are the universal currency; they're accepted anywhere, and the more you have the more powerful you become. Soon, Cookie's services to Fleiss involved more than just security. He began recruiting women for her, picking one girl up outside a Western Union by offering to shoot modeling photos. Cookie also ingratiated himself with women by providing them with drugs. "Sometimes guys would request drugs from the girls," says the source, "mostly coke and 'ludes."

The official federal case against Cookie, which charges him as the leader of an international ecstasy-smuggling conspiracy, involves offenses committed only between 1998 and 2000. But law-enforcement sources say he was operating well before that. "He began moving a lot of cocaine in the early nineties," says one source at Customs.

Fleiss refuses to comment on the drug allegations, but doesn't deny Cookie was pimping for her. "He knew a lot of really cute girls," she says. "Some needed money, a little makeover. I turned these girls into millionaires and they loved Cookie for the introduction. I paid him, on average, \$500 a girl."

Around this time, Cookie moved out of his dingy apartment and into a swanky high-rise just off Sunset Boulevard. He was now in the heart of Hollywood, where self-invention is standard operating procedure. But he soon learned that trying to prove you're legit in an illegitimate world can also be dangerous. Within a year, his new twelfth-floor bachelor pad became the scene of an incident that nearly sidelined him before he became a true contender.

In February 1993, Cookie began spending time with a beautiful 22-year-old named Laurie Dolan. They'd known each other about two weeks when Cookie showed up at her apartment one evening in a limousine and whisked her and another young woman to dinner at the popular fashionista hangout Tatou. "She called me from there," remembers her father, Paul. "It was obvious that she was out partying, but she said, 'Dad, I'll be all right.'"

After dinner, the group showed up at their regular hangout, Bar One, where Cookie was now a part-owner—no more waiting in line for him. He made a show of buying buckets of the best champagne before heading back to his apartment with Dolan and two other women. ("He always liked three or four women in his bed," says one former associate. "It was like Caligula every night.")

Dolan surfaced around 5 p.m. the next day, when Cookie left her comatose body at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. She never regained consciousness and three days later was pronounced dead, the victim of a massive drug overdose. An investigation into the death didn't begin in earnest until four months later, in the wake of Fleiss's June arrest. When the media put together the Fleiss-Cookie-Dolan connection, the mysterious death of one of Heidi's supposed call girls became fodder for Hard Copy and tabloid headlines all the way to London.

Fleiss claims that she never met Dolan before in her life. But perhaps it was only a matter of time. "A girl like Laurie Dolan was worth \$50,000 to Heidi," says Nagy. "She was gorgeous, natural, young." Nonetheless, the investigation into her death was eventually dropped after witnesses refused to speak to authorities, and Cookie was never charged. That fact hasn't changed the mind of her father. "He should have been arrested for murder," says Paul Dolan. "He took away Laurie's innocence, her beauty, her life. This is what he did for a living. He drugged girls up, got them hooked, and turned them into prostitutes."

As the Fleiss affair filled the tabloids in the fall of 1993, casual acquaintances began to reconsider their association with the woman the New York Post called "the Heidi Ho." For Cookie, who appeared by that time to be using the Fleiss scene as cover for his growing

drug business, their relationship meant danger.

As L.A. burned, Cookie split town. For several months, he began showing up nightly in the high-end strip clubs in New York City and Las Vegas, throwing his money around like a sultan. "He would drop \$10,000 to \$20,000 a night," says the owner of a New York club.

But in 1994, three clubs he frequented barred him from the premises. "He was soliciting the women," says one of the New York managers who banned him. "He liked the bisexual ones with big tits. He'd tell them, 'I'll take you shopping tomorrow. We'll go out to eat.' Soon, they were on his payroll and not coming to work anymore. I thought he was a pimp, not a drug dealer."

With Cookie, who left almost no paper trail and few documents registered to his name, it was always hard to tell. While he appeared to be angling to succeed Fleiss—at least outside California—back in L.A., he was returning to his straight sales roots. A year earlier, he'd opened a pager store called J&J Beepers, and in 1994, he began a major promotional campaign. According to his own newspaper and radio ads, Cookie was now the "Beeper King" of Los Angeles.

But if Cookie was really looking to go clean, he chose an odd location for his headquarters. J&J Beepers—a narrow storefront in a small strip mall—was at the corner of Sunset and La Brea, ground zero for drugs and prostitution. "There could only be two reasons he would open a store there," says a source close to the Fleiss investigation. "One, he wanted to move in on the drug market, or two, he wanted to become a police informant to stay out of trouble."

Neither Cookie's lawyers nor the federal government will address the rumors that Cookie was an informant, but it's clear that he was able to track the phone calls of every pimp, floozy, and drug pusher he sold a beeper to. "They had some technology that enabled them to monitor the phone numbers of all the calls coming in and out," says a source, who saw "these huge call logs."

Cookie's connections to strippers and small-time pushers may not seem significant, but within a few years, court papers show, many of them had become part of a multitiered, multinational organization that would blow away its competition in the ecstasy trade. And like any successful businessman, Cookie wasn't only looking for help from below. By utilizing all of his new connections—from Fleiss's moneyed associates to the Israeli community on both coasts to his ever-growing stable of strippers—he began to shore up ties to big money. In Los Angeles, he befriended Judah Hertz, a multimillionaire developer, who paid Cookie hundreds of thousands of dollars in the mid-nineties in what he says were real-estate-broker fees. And in New York, Cookie was frequently seen at the fancy flesh pits with Sholam Weiss, a New York-based Israeli plumbing magnate who would later be convicted, along with John Gotti Jr., in a \$450 million life-insurance scam and sentenced to 845 years in prison, the longest federal sentence in U.S. history.

"Cookie had access to big, big money," says a Customs agent close to the investigation. "We suspect this was one way he funded his drug purchases."

By 1996, ecstasy had become the drug of the decade, and Hollywood was the world's biggest market for the love pills. The area known as Sunset Plaza turned into a showroom for the world drug trade's new aristocracy. On a typical afternoon, Ferraris and Porsches were lined up along the street, and a group of immigrants, including the young Egyptian cousins John and Tamer Ibrahim, would be dining out in the sun under bright-colored umbrellas, fighting for the check.

At the time, according to Customs and DEA sources, Cookie was still primarily a coke dealer. But it was this younger group that got in on the ecstasy trade first, and they flaunted the rewards, flashing \$50,000 Rolex watches. Cookie seemed to view these upstarts as a threat. One night he hired a cameraman to film him presiding over a lavish dinner party at the model lounge the Gate, and he bought his own VIP table at the popular dance spot the Key Club.

Cookie burnished his godfather reputation away from the clubs as well. According to a source close to the investigation, he kept a safe in his apartment stacked with cash; selected female guests were invited to grab as much as they could with one fist in exchange for sexual favors. But, Cookie quickly realized, it was ecstasy, not cocaine, that could keep your coffers stocked. What could be bought from a lab for a dollar could be resold for eight times that amount to street dealers (who then resold the pills at clubs for as much as \$40 each).

According to documents seized by the feds, Cookie began making frequent trips to Amsterdam, where he set up a connection with a Dutch chemist who had a lab in an industrial building north of the city. The ecstasy trade was quickly consolidating as well-connected players staked out their markets. The alleged former diamond smuggler Israeli Oded Tuito was already said to control much of Miami. Tuito also had a major piece of the New York market, along with Ilan Zarger (also an Israeli) who was the head of BTS, the notorious Brooklyn Terror Squad infamous for beating and robbing clubgoers and other dealers to insure their dominance of the market.

But as ruthless and conniving as those players were, Cookie would ultimately outwit and outplay them. Several people contacted for this story claim Cookie was "all bark and no bite." But sometimes his bark was enough. "Blackmail is a powerful tool," says one, and Cookie wasn't above using it against even his mightiest money connections. In 1996, he shook more than \$200,000 out of one wealthy associate by threatening to show his wife videotapes of the man having sex with prostitutes.

The deposition of one of the members of his organization, 44-year-old Melissa Schwartz, shows how Cookie roped in lower-level deputies while squashing the competition. Schwartz met Cookie through another acquaintance in the fall of 1998 in Amsterdam, according to a sworn statement she later made to French authorities. She was deeply distressed at the time over the fact that a man she called Victor had asked her to smuggle ecstasy back to the States. "Cookie told me not to transport the package, and that he would take care of me," she stated. "He sent someone to take the package from me."

When Schwartz returned to New York sans ecstasy, Victor and his contacts were furious. "They threatened to mutilate me, to hurt my family," Schwartz told investigators. They

robbed her and told her to stay in her hotel room. She called Cookie in Europe, who persuaded her to call the police. When Victor returned to the hotel, he was arrested. "This made me feel closer to Cookie," Schwartz said. "From then on, he took care of me financially, but also morally."

Cookie invited Schwartz to Paris, where they stayed at the Hôtel California, a luxury bed and breakfast off the Champs-Élysées. "We spent a few weeks together, had a good time going to discos, nice restaurants," Schwartz told investigators. "But one day Cookie became mean, and he even told me that without him I would be dead, and that I owed him for everything he had done for me."

Schwartz became one of as many as 50 people who went to work for Cookie's organization, which federal investigators say started smuggling and selling ecstasy in the summer of 1997. "Cookie's organization had three layers of people who were tasked to do different things," says a source at Customs. "He removed himself from actually touching the drugs but not from knowing what was coming in and where it was going." The drugs would be picked up in Amsterdam from contacts for Cookie's chemist. Someone would then drive them to Paris, where they would be packed inside socks and toys by people like Schwartz. About 60,000 pills were hidden in each false-bottom suitcase that couriers carried on flights into Los Angeles, Houston, and New York.

But it wasn't until early 1999 that Cookie's business began to boom, soon after a confidential tip led authorities in France to arrest Oded Tuito. Coincidentally or not, a beeper Tuito carried was traced back to Cookie's store in Los Angeles.

Cookie's operation quickly expanded to Tuito's territory on the East Coast, primarily in Miami, where he was soon a regular on the club scene. He also made significant inroads in New York by hooking up with the Zarger/BTS organization, some of whose members came to believe that Cookie was the "head of the Israeli Mafia."

When Sammy Gravano, then living in the witness protection program in Arizona as Jimmy Moran, got into the ecstasy business and had one of his men beat up Zarger's connection in Arizona, the response was appropriately moblike. Cookie's associates sent a hit man nicknamed Macho to Phoenix, according to court documents, where he was "standing by to whack Gravano"—a man who has confessed to killing nineteen people himself. But ultimately, at a Cosa Nostra-style powwow, it was Cookie's men who blinked first. "I own Arizona, it's locked down," Gravano is said to have told his Israeli rivals. They agreed to give Gravano a 25-cent tariff on every pill sold on his turf.

It was a drop in the bucket compared with what was coming in. "Cookie made millions," says the Customs source. "A lot of it went back to his mother in Israel. He owns some apartment buildings there."

After an anonymous tip in 1999 led feds to take down L.A. ecstasy king Tamer Ibrahim (who has not been tried), rumors began flying through the L.A. scene that Cookie was a rat. And as anyone in the underworld can tell you, when that happens, it's a slippery slope to the end.

On July 4, 1999, a stripper carrying pills for Cookie was busted by Customs coming into LAX. Five days later, two more went down, and the Customs-led "Operation Paris Express" went full tilt with cooperation from the DEA as well as officials in the Netherlands, France, and Israel.

Cookie should have quit while he was ahead, but it doesn't appear he considered that to be an option. "You know, there's a reason we always get them," says a DEA agent who worked the case, "and that's greed. They have a million, they want 2 million. They have ten, they want twenty. They have control in Los Angeles, they want New York. The only way that they get out of this business is when we arrest them. They don't retire."

Cookie could feel the heat. Around this time, he applied for and was granted U.S. citizenship. The name he gave himself on his new papers: Tony Evans. He also changed all his phone and beeper numbers and relocated himself to a high-rise in New York. But he wasn't quitting.

Instead, Cookie overhauled his organization from top to bottom, putting in new lieutenants who knew less about his involvement and masterminding a new plan for the couriers. If they were looking for strippers, he figured, he would send strippers. Only this time, they would be decoys. Meanwhile, the same flights, from Paris to JFK and LAX, would have people on them he thought would never be suspected of toting drugs: Hasidic Jews in black jackets and high hats and hillbillies with kids.

"Cookie knew how to play the game," admits the Customs source. One couple from Texas was nabbed traveling with their retarded teenage son. "They said we'd get more money if we took a kid," says a 25-year-old woman who turned herself in after smuggling drugs with her infant son in tow.

In March 2000, Cookie made his last trip to L.A., where he led a Passover service and feast for 40 friends and family in the conference room of his apartment building. The same week, French authorities raided the stash house he'd leased (under another name) in Paris, and three of the highest ranking members of Cookie's organization—including Melissa Schwartz, who had worked her way up the ladder—were arrested. "Our investigation started from the bottom and worked its way all the way up," says Boyd, the Customs spokesperson. "All paths led back to Cookie."

On June 27, 2001, after fifteen months in custody, Cookie finally decided to give up his game and plead guilty to the seemingly unbeatable charges of operating a continuing criminal enterprise and conspiracy to distribute ecstasy.

As he was led into the courtroom at the federal courthouse in Brooklyn, Customs and DEA agents clucked at the sight of the almost unrecognizable religious penitent before them. There was Cookie, a short wisp of a guy with dark olive skin, a fishlike face with bulging green eyes, a well-trimmed salt-and-pepper beard, and a yarmulke. Were it not for the fact

that he wore drab, blue federal-issue clothing, he could have been going to temple for a prayer service.

Cookie stood motionless with his hands clasped behind his back as Judge John Gleeson, who'd presided over dozens of cases involving Israelis and ecstasy, handled the 30-minute proceeding. Nothing Cookie had done in years seemed so bland and uninteresting. **But in the world of drug trafficking, this was as symbolic a moment as any. "It's the end of an era," says Cookie's former attorney Ronald Richards, who has represented more ecstasy cases than anyone. "You'll never see individual dealers getting this much power in the ecstasy trade again."**

While Gleeson sternly read the charges, Cookie actually seemed to be shrinking. There were no family members or friends in attendance, and he made no statement other than a brief acknowledgement of his role in the conspiracy for which he would be sentenced to between fourteen and seventeen years in the States, after which he will be extradited to France, where he stands to serve another twenty. At one point while Cookie read his statement, his voice was so quiet and heavily accented that the judge had to ask him to move closer to the stenographer.

Los Angeles's boisterous sugar daddy was dead and gone. But he hadn't retired. "I just want to make things right for myself, my family, and my God," Cookie tells me later through his lawyer. After all he'd been through, he wasn't going to be just another inmate. Cookie, a.k.a. #54737053, was now also a rabbi.

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