

The Next Big Deal

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Episode 7: A shroud of secrecy, a legal gambit, and a mystery solved.

After Paul Calder Le Roux was captured in 2012, his status was guarded with fanatical secrecy by the United States government. His location and even his lawyer's name were known only to federal law enforcement. At first his clandestine status made sense, of course: Through at least mid-2014, Le Roux was essentially an undercover DEA operative in U.S. custody. By virtue of his phone calls and emails, agents were able to build elaborate sting operations around the fiction that he was still out in the world.

The illusion was fragile. As early as December 2013, the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S.Paulo* reported that Le Roux had been arrested. Fortunately for the DEA, that story was published in Portuguese and didn't spread widely. Then, a year later, *The New York Times* discovered that Le Roux was the cooperator behind the takedown of Joseph "Rambo" Hunter, arrested for plotting to kill a DEA agent. Le Roux's time as a government asset was over.

The secrecy around Le Roux continued, however, propelled by its own internal logic. His name may have been made public, but Le Roux's entire case file remained sealed. So did significant portions of the prosecution against Hunter, his team of would-be assassins, and the group of Le Roux functionaries arrested for trafficking North Korean meth. Soon many of those cases ended with guilty pleas, obviating the need for Le Roux to ever testify. I'd been following the cases since Hunter's arrest in September 2013, and as one defendant after another admitted their guilt, I realized that I might never see Le Roux in a courtroom.

Then, in late 2015, a pair of lawyers in Minneapolis, Joseph Friedberg and Robert Richman, came up with a legal gambit to pull Le Roux out into the open. Their client, Moran Oz, had run Le Roux's call center in Israel. In a federal indictment in Minnesota, Oz was charged with 83 counts of prescription-drug crimes and wire fraud. The case was based in part on communications between Le Roux and Oz, who believed that his boss was at large when in fact Le Roux was in U.S. custody, calling and emailing at the behest of the DEA.

Digging through the evidence, Richman realized that the U.S. Attorney's Office had collected some of those calls and emails without a warrant. He filed a motion to have the material suppressed, arguing that federal law required at least one party in the communication to consent to the monitoring. Richman knew that Oz hadn't given *his* permission. Had Le Roux?

The government produced statements from DEA agents claiming that he had. But Richman and Friedberg argued that Le Roux himself needed to testify to that fact. The judge overseeing Oz's case agreed and ordered the government to produce Le Roux.

Here, after two years of chasing his shadow, at first online and then on the ground in numerous locations around the world, was my chance to see Le Roux face-to-face. I bought a ticket to Minneapolis and arrived on a clear, frigid early-March morning. The hearing was across the river in St. Paul, and walking to court through the city's habitrail-like aboveground tunnels, I ran into Richman and Friedberg. They showed me a copy of what appeared to be a fake arrest record for selling cocaine, seemingly generated by the U.S. Attorney's Office as a cover story for Le Roux's transfer into the local jail. It was evidence that Le Roux was nearby—and of how far federal prosecutors had gone to keep him under wraps.

"Le Roux's lawyer filed an emergency motion to seal the courtroom," Richman told me. In a sealed letter to the court, the lawyer argued that Le Roux's family would be put in jeopardy by allowing the media to report on the proceedings. I took a seat in the back of the courtroom, alongside some local reporters and Oz's wife, and waited.

Oz arrived sporting a dark, trim beard, a yarmulke, a black jacket, and jeans that covered up the court-ordered electronic monitoring bracelet on his ankle. The bracelet was a condition of his bail, ensuring that he didn't leave Minneapolis, where he'd arrived some 18 months before. His wife moved their three kids to the U.S., after a battle with American immigration officials, and the family had been embraced by members of the city's Jewish community. Some had loaned them an apartment and a car and came to the hearing to support Oz. For someone about to see the man who'd threatened to have him killed, then set him up to be arrested, Oz looked cheerful.

He joined Richman and Friedberg at the defense table, across from Linda Marks, the prosecutor in charge of the case at the Department of Justice's Consumer Protection Branch, who had flown in from Washington. The judge opened the hearing by noting that "the court has received a request from an attorney to close these proceedings."

"Let me turn first to Mr. Oz's counsel," he continued. "Do you continue to assert your constitutional rights to have an open hearing, Mr. Richman?"

"Yes, your honor," Richman replied. "I find this procedure somewhat baffling." Le Roux, he pointed out, was a government informant. That his attorney would petition to close the courtroom was strange, at best. Le Roux's name was public, and court hearings are typically sealed at the behest of the government, not a private attorney. "This is a matter that has generated great interest," Richman continued. "There are members of the press in the back of the courtroom, as well as Mr. Oz's family."

Richman pointed out that Le Roux's identity had been revealed over a year before and "no harm has fallen on the family. And that document"—meaning the attorney's letter—"also suggests that the government has taken steps to protect the family."

This was news: It was the first time anyone had acknowledged that the U.S. government was working to protect Le Roux's family even as it tried to keep him out of court. Now the moment had arrived that could decide whether Le Roux would ever be asked to publicly answer for his past, from the murders to the arms shipments, and for his work on behalf of the U.S. government, from the Joseph Hunter plot to the North Korean methamphetamine setup. As the judge considered the motion, I realized that this decision could determine whether, after so much time trying to piece together his existence, I might ever see Le Roux in the flesh.

For a year, I'd been trying to understand what it was that Le Roux had accomplished as an informant that warranted the level of secrecy surrounding him. That tenure began in September 2012, soon after he stepped onto the DEA's chartered plane in Liberia, bound for New York. He arrived north of the city at the White Plains airport the next morning, out of public view and into a new life of public service. In Manhattan federal court a few hours later, he was appointed a public defender named Jonathan Marvinny. "I was on the case for a while, and now I'm not," was all Marvinny would tell me when I called him a few weeks ago.

Le Roux faced two indictments: The first one was in New York, where the main charge was conspiracy to import meth into the U.S., a product of the fake drug deal he intended to pull off in Liberia. In Minneapolis, he was accused of violating the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, wire fraud, and money laundering in connection with RX Limited, the online prescription-drug organization that had made him his fortune.

The morning he arrived in New York, Le Roux signed a proffer agreement, a common arrangement that allows individuals to admit wrongdoing without threat of prosecution. Essentially, Le Roux couldn't be charged with any additional crime he confessed to the DEA or U.S. attorneys. Not only did he agree to spill what he knew, but he also decided to assist the government in bringing down associates like Joseph Hunter and Moran Oz.

In the ensuing years, very few people would be privy to exactly where Le Roux was held, but my two law-enforcement sources Jody and Sol (not their real names) told me that Le Roux was placed in special custody in New York City. The DEA immediately put him to work concocting irresistible, and imaginary, deals with new partners from South America. After Le Roux helped the agents create a Gmail account to mirror his address, john@fast-free-email.com, agents from the DEA's Special Operations Division could also act the part of Le Roux themselves.

The agents needed a judge's approval to pull Le Roux out of confinement, to transport him either to a DEA office near JFK airport or, in at least one case, to the airport Hilton. (In one inexplicable security slip, someone allowed Le Roux's record to remain searchable on the Bureau of Prisons site. "Paul Leroux"—without the space—was listed as "Released On: 09/04/2013," perhaps an artifact of one of those occasions when he was moved outside jail.) From these offices and hotel rooms, Le Roux would reach out to his former employees; if his handlers needed him to make late-night calls to other parts of the world, they might keep him overnight.

According to one source with direct knowledge of these sessions, Le Roux was an enthusiastic participant. "He clearly considered himself to be the smartest person there," this source told me. "But he had a humor about him, too. He was clearly trying to provide the information so that he would not spend the rest of his life in jail."

For the better part of 2013, the DEA and U.S. attorneys kept Le Roux busy orchestrating the stings against Joseph Hunter's assassination crew and the former employees Le Roux had enlisted to procure and ship North Korean meth. Both operations required months of careful planning, executed at a delicate pace—deals good enough to keep the targets on the hook, but not so good that they became suspicious.

The RX Limited prescription-drug case, led by an investigator named Kim Brill, was a lower priority. But eventually, the agents decided to corner members of that operation as well. In 2013, Le Roux emailed Moran Oz, the former manager of his Israeli call center, to set the trap.

By the time Le Roux reached out to him, Oz had moved on from his strange role at the center of the prescription-drug business. It had been four years since he was floating in the waters off the coast of Manila, dodging gunfire from Le Roux's enforcers. And it had been nearly two years since Le Roux asked him to wind down the call center and sell off the furniture and computers. He had left that life behind, almost.

Periodically, he wrote to Le Roux to ask about severance payments for former employees. As the company wound down, Le Roux had wired two-thirds of the money, which was owed under Israeli law, and promised that the rest would come later. Oz felt bad for the lower-level employees who'd been stiffed, including friends hired by him and Alon Berkman, the other longtime Israeli employee who ran the call center.

Then, in September 2012, Le Roux disappeared. There were rumors in the organization that he might be in Australia or Brazil. "We knew something had happened," one former manager told me. "We prayed that he was dead." Oz contacted Shai Reuven, one of Le Roux's right-hand men in the Philippines; Reuven told him that the boss had gone underground.

Oz, meanwhile, was building a house in Jerusalem and starting a new business. Together with a few partners, he was working to open a burger place in Tel Aviv. But he felt responsible to the people who were owed money, most of whom had never heard of Paul Le Roux. "He was getting phone calls from employees saying, 'You shut down the company, you disappeared, you have to pay us, by law,'" a close friend of Oz's, whom I'll call Rafael, told me. So Oz was relieved when Le Roux reappeared in 2013. Then in early 2014, Le Roux called to say that he had the money. He just needed to see Oz in person to finalize the transfer. In March, Oz agreed to meet him in Romania.

Oz invited Rafael to come along on the trip; they had an Israeli expat friend in the country whom they visited often. Rafael took a few days off work, and they flew to Bucharest, spending two days hanging out and gambling in the local casinos. Oz won a few thousand Euros at his preferred game, roulette.

Oz was supposed to meet Le Roux on the third day, but as the time approached he grew nervous. He asked the friend in Bucharest if he could arrange security, "just to make sure that there are no surprises." "He was worried that the boss was going to do something to him," Rafael said. They managed to find a couple of burly bodyguards they could pay by the hour.

Le Roux had set the meeting at a large hotel not far from the airport. Oz, Rafael, and their friend arrived in the morning, and Oz and his bodyguards walked to a distant part of the lobby, out of sight. Rafael and the friend waited at the lobby entrance; after a half-hour, Oz texted to say that his boss hadn't shown up yet. When Rafael texted a while later, Oz didn't respond.

Worried, they decided to look for him. They found him at another hotel entrance, surrounded by several men and at least one woman. Oz explained to Rafael that they were plainclothes police officers, that they'd shown up looking for him and wanted to take him to the station to ask questions. The bodyguards seemed to have slipped away.

The officers asked Rafael and the other friend to accompany them to the station, and the three men climbed into the back of an old unmarked car. Oz seemed terrified. "Look, they don't wear police uniforms," he said in Hebrew. "I hope it's not one of his tricks." He was afraid the cops were actually Le Roux's men.

The two were relieved when they arrived at a Bucharest police station. Oz's local friend found him a Romanian lawyer while Rafael went to their hotel to retrieve their passports, hoping the whole thing could be cleared up by the evening. After he returned, the lawyer told Rafael that his friend had been arrested on behalf of an American agency. The woman at the arrest had been Kim Brill, from the DEA, the brains behind a seven-year investigation into RX Limited.

“Go back to Israel, meet Moran’s parents, and tell them to get a good lawyer,” the attorney told Rafael. “Because they are going to move him to the U.S. for a trial.”

Moran Oz would be among the last of the former Le Roux employees lured into U.S. custody by their old boss. In three years, Le Roux’s clandestine handiwork generated at least 11 arrests in addition to Oz’s. The DEA picked up at least seven more without his direct involvement.

The ensuing prosecutions were divided among three groups. Oz and the former employees of RX Limited had been indicted in Minnesota, where they would be prosecuted by Linda Marks from the DOJ’s Consumer Protection Branch. The five defendants—Scott Stammers, Philip Shackels, Allan Kelly Reyes Peralta, Ye Tiong Tan Lim, and Adrian Valkovic—whom Le Roux had coaxed into supplying North Korean meth to a bogus Colombian cartel would be prosecuted in the Southern District of New York, in Manhattan.

The Southern District would also try Joseph “Rambo” Hunter’s crew, which Le Roux had helped lure into monitoring drug shipments and plotting to kill a DEA agent for those same “Colombians.” Within a few days of Hunter’s arrest in Phuket, Thailand, in late September 2013, he was extradited to New York and charged with conspiracy to murder a law-enforcement officer. So too were the members of his assassination team, Denis Gögel and Timothy Vamvakias, who’d been picked up in Liberia preparing to carry out the hit. The last two, Slawomir Soborski and Michael Filter, had been arrested in Estonia and were extradited in the ensuing months.

All of the New York defendants had been busted in reverse stings, set up for airtight prosecutions. The participants had been told that any drugs would eventually be sold in New York, for example, to make sure that the U.S. would have jurisdiction to prosecute them. The meetings with the “Colombians” had all been taped, creating evidence that was almost impossible to dispute. And the DEA had let the plots proceed almost to completion, to show the defendants’ intentions to see them through.

Joseph Hunter’s appointed lawyer, a New York criminal defense attorney named Marlon Kirton, hoped to exploit Hunter’s history with Le Roux. In January 2015, he filed a motion asking the judge to dismiss the case partly on the basis of duress, arguing that Hunter had only gone along because he believed Le Roux would kill him if he didn’t. Years before either man was arrested, Hunter claimed that Le Roux threatened him and his family, in connection with a Malian gold deal gone bad. “Mr. _____ literally killed and threatened his associates with the full knowledge of his other associates,” Kirton wrote in the motion. Le Roux’s name was still officially sealed, and Kirton was required to blank it out despite the fact that *The New York Times* had revealed it a month earlier. “How then can law enforcement use this man to engage the same person as part of a reverse sting operation? What choice did Mr. Hunter have? The answer is death, death of a family member or continued membership in the group.”

The government called those claims “uncorroborated,” although later, Lulu, Le Roux’s relative who knew and worked with Hunter, confirmed to me that the threats did take place. But the government argued that even if Le Roux had threatened Hunter, it was at a much earlier time, and that Hunter could have quit the organization or gone to the police.

Several weeks later, before the judge in the case on Kirton’s motion, Hunter changed his plea to guilty.

So it went, over the course of 18 months, with the rest of the defendants. Timothy Vamvakias and Dennis Gögel pleaded guilty to conspiracy to murder the DEA agent and received 20 years apiece in federal prison. Michael Filter, charged only with surveillance of a plane carrying cocaine, got eight years. Slawomir Soborski still awaits sentencing.

Adrian Valkovic, the “ground commander” of the North Korean meth gang, was sentenced to over nine years. Allan Kelly Reyes Peralta, the middleman between Le Roux and Ye Tiong Tan Lim, from the Hong Kong criminal gang that planned to supply the meth, received a seven-and-a-half-year sentence. Peralta’s girlfriend was pregnant when he was arrested, and he now has a two-year-old he’s never met. Stammers, Lim, and Philip Shackels have yet to be sentenced.

In Hong Kong, which had once been the financial hub of Le Roux’s operations, Le Roux’s Israeli employees were prosecuted by the Hong Kong government. Doron Zvi Shulman, who managed Le Roux’s gold stores there, pleaded guilty to two charges of “property known or reasonably believed to represent the proceeds of an indictable offence” and was sentenced to more than five years in prison. Omer Gavish and the other Israeli guards denied any knowledge of where the gold had come from but were convicted of the same offense and sentenced to between four and five years apiece. At least two of them were released early and returned to Israel. Through an intermediary, they declined to speak with me when I traveled there in February.

Joseph Hunter, meanwhile, is currently scheduled to be sentenced in mid-May, facing a possible life sentence on each of the four murder and drug counts to which he pleaded guilty. Kirton has asked for a lower sentence of ten years, arguing that Hunter was entrapped and that he worked for Le Roux because of the threats. Kirton has also filed reports from a psychologist diagnosing Hunter with severe PTSD from his time in the military and as a contractor in Iraq. The filings assert that Hunter had sustained that trauma in part by participating “in classified missions for the United States government,” which Hunter refuses to discuss. The government has called those claims “speculative” and argued that there is nothing causal between Hunter’s PTSD and his crimes, which “involved careful long-term coordination with others in connection with the planning and carrying out of international murder-for-hire conspiracies.”

When I tallied the results of Le Roux's cooperation—at least the part of it in the public record—I wondered what it really amounted to. The DEA had captured a prized criminal they'd been after for the better part of a decade, then spent several years and tremendous resources setting up the people beneath him. In legal circles this is called “cooperating down.” He'd given them three people, including two former U.S. soldiers, willing to kill a DEA agent for money, and eight more happy to help import drugs. But the DEA knew that Le Roux had ordered at least a half-dozen murders and had been the mastermind behind arms and drug deals that dwarfed what his flunkies had been prepared to carry out.

Perhaps the most confounding case was the brutal murder of the real estate agent Catherine Lee. In late 2015, I traveled to Taytay, the city outside Manila where her body was found. In the case file at the local police station, I found a note indicating that the DEA had been there several months after Hunter's guilty plea, to investigate Lee's killing. Witness accounts and other evidence helped U.S. attorneys charge Adam Samia and David Stillwell with the murder. Arrested last July in Roxboro, North Carolina, they are currently awaiting trial in New York.

But the person who had allegedly paid Samia and Stillwell \$35,000 each to carry out the assassination, in retribution for a real estate deal Lee had failed to carry out, was Paul Le Roux. The person who had allegedly arranged for the murder, and the guns with which to carry it out, was Joseph Hunter. Neither Le Roux nor Hunter have been charged with Catherine Lee's murder. Whether they might be witnesses in the case none of the defense attorneys seemed to know.

The government, meanwhile, continued to protect information concerning Le Roux with almost pathological secrecy, even as his identity and exploits found their way into court documents and international news. Spokespeople from all parts of the DOJ have declined to speak on the record, citing the fact that cases involving Le Roux are still pending.

Many of the defense attorneys began to wonder if there was a larger issue in all the secrecy, something more than just Le Roux's cooperation in the sting operations. In 2014, the anonymous developers behind TrueCrypt, the decade-old, unbreakable open-source disk-encryption software originally based on Le Roux's code, had suddenly announced that the technology was no longer secure. Encryption experts puzzled over possible explanations, and I wondered if it might have something to do with Le Roux's arrest. Perhaps Le Roux was helping the government break his own code, but then the TrueCrypt announcement could have been a coincidence.

In a closed proceeding in August 2013, Le Roux dispensed with Marvinny, his appointed attorney, and hired a New York criminal lawyer named Bernard Seidler. Sometime later he fired Seidler and hired another attorney, whose name has been sealed. One defense attorney told me that when they asked federal prosecutors how to contact Le Roux's new lawyer, they were told that the information wasn't public, because that attorney feared for

their own safety. No one I spoke with, including a former federal prosecutor who had worked on sensitive terrorism cases, could find any precedent for sealing an attorney's name when the defendant's is public. The secrecy "is ludicrous," Robert Richman, one of Moran Oz's attorneys, told me.

After his arrest, Oz spent two months in an overcrowded Romanian jail, housed with seven other inmates in a stifling seven-by-ten-foot cell. One of his cellmates had a heart attack and died. Oz's family hired a local lawyer to fight his extradition, but the hearings were all conducted in Romanian, and Oz often had little idea what was going on. His only contact with the American government was through the agents who had questioned him briefly after his arrest. According to what he later told his attorneys, he was baffled that the U.S. had used Le Roux to get to him and not the other way around. He would have helped them, he said, if they'd asked him. He told them about how Le Roux had ordered him thrown off the boat and shot at. "You're hunting people that feel like they are dead wherever they go," he said.

Finally, on the last day he could be legally held in Romania, a judge overruled Oz's opposition to extradition and he was put on a plane to the U.S. He was held at the Sherburne County Jail, outside Minneapolis. His family back in Israel pitched in to hire a pair of prominent Minneapolis criminal defense attorneys, Richman and Friedberg.

One morning last November, I met them in a downtown Minneapolis high-rise. Friedberg, a garrulous litigator with pronounced jowls and wispy brown hair, exuded a witty charm that had served him well in some of the most high-profile criminal cases in the city. Richman, quiet and reserved, has parted gray hair and a reluctant smile. He had taken on much of the heavy lifting for the upcoming trial. "This case is extraordinary," he said. "There are a million documents and probably tens of millions of pages." He was trying to grapple with "the web of internet connections and phone connections and bank connections," he said.

In addition to Oz, the indictment included a menagerie of Le Roux associates. Three of the defendants, including Alon Berkman and Shai Reuven, were still at large overseas. (The third, Lachlan Scott McConnell, was later picked up by the Philippine Immigration Bureau and now awaits extradition.) Omer Bezalel, an Israeli who served as a logistics man for RX Limited, had been lured to Romania at the same time as Oz. Not long after he was extradited to the U.S., in 2014, Bezalel was released on bail to a halfway house and walked away, presumably out of the country. He hasn't been seen since.

One defendant, Jonathan Wall, has already pleaded guilty. Wall, an Israeli-American who'd once worked as a call-center manager for Le Roux in the Philippines, was arrested in Kentucky. He had returned to the States a few years earlier and worked for Le Roux from there, providing him with "hard goods" as variable as cars, computer servers, dive

equipment, and a private plane. The arrests also included three doctors who had prescribed drugs for the network and a pair of pharmacists, one of them Babubhai Patel, the Detroit-area businessman who was soon convicted in an entirely separate Medicare fraud case.

In Oz, Richman and Friedberg were representing the only major figure from inside Le Roux's operation willing to take his defense to trial. Oz freely admitted that he ran CSWW, Le Roux's call-center business in Israel. He knew that the company was part of the RX Limited network, which had sold millions of prescription drugs for hundreds of millions of dollars. His email address, ron_oz11@hotmail.com, turned up again and again in the messages gathered under warrant by Kim Brill and the other Minnesota investigators. But Oz asserted that he'd always believed the business was legal, and that many people in the office used his email account to deal with customer-service issues.

Oz also told Richman and Friedberg about the incident in which Le Roux had him thrown off a boat and shot at, and they thought it could form a basis for a duress defense. The problem was, how would they get Le Roux into court to prove it? As in the other cases, prosecutors had declined to produce their star cooperator and said they had no plans to call him as a witness. "The government is embarrassed," Richman said. "They don't want to admit that he is involved."

Then Richman hit on the idea of making a motion to suppress the phone calls between Le Roux and Oz, arguing that neither had given consent for them to be recorded. If the government wanted to prove that Le Roux did so voluntarily, Richman said, the man himself would need to say it under oath. On January 15, the judge handed down a decision on Richman's motion: "IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Defendant Moran Oz's Motion to Produce Government Informant Paul Calder Le Roux for a Motion Hearing is GRANTED."

So it was that in early March, I was sitting in the St. Paul courtroom wondering if Le Roux's attorney's last-minute plea to close the hearing would succeed and Le Roux would stay hidden yet again.

"I am going to deny the request," the judge finally said. "Nothing has been established that would override the strong interest that the defendant has in a public proceeding."

And with that the hearing began. First, Linda Marks, the U.S. attorney, called two DEA agents to testify about Le Roux's arrest. Then it was Richman's turn. "Your honor," he said, "we would call Paul Calder Le Roux."

Le Roux entered the courtroom through a side door, escorted by two plainclothes United States Marshals. He wore a gray, slightly unruly beard and a billowy lemon yellow T-shirt over orange correctional pants. He looked heavier than he seemed in the few photos I'd been able to find. Later, my sources sent me more images of him, and I realized that it was likely he'd actually lost weight in custody.

The Marshals unshackled his arms and pointed him to the elevated witness stand. He scanned the courtroom intently as he settled into the leather-back chair, as if puzzled by who had shown up to see him. For a moment we locked eyes, but he quickly moved on, expressionless.

If Le Roux's lawyer was in attendance, they didn't make their presence known. So, in a confusing legal setup, Le Roux was functionally represented by Marks, as if he was an agent of the government.

Richman approached the podium and began by asking Le Roux his profession.

He thought for a moment. "Essentially," he finally said, "I worked as a programmer for many years." That was certainly one way of putting it.

For the next hour, Paul Calder Le Roux was forced to answer publicly, for the first and potentially only time, for his endeavors of the past decade. As Richman calmly and sometimes amusedly fired questions at him, Le Roux leaned back in his chair, his arms folded. When he answered, he bent in close to the microphone, his tone polite, cold. "Please restate it, if you would," he said numerous times, his Zimbabwean accent still strong. The judge at one point agreed with Richman that he was questioning a "hostile witness," but Le Roux betrayed no emotion beyond a periodic hint of annoyance at what his demeanor implied was the stupidity of the questions.

But his testimony also provided confirmation of the facts—or, in some cases, Le Roux's versions of the facts—that I'd been chasing for years. Le Roux admitted that he had created the encryption software E4M but denied that he had developed TrueCrypt, its famous progeny. He confirmed some of his aliases, including Johan Smit, Bernard Bowlins, and John Smith. He admitted having organized the 200-kilo cocaine shipment on the *JeReVe*, out of Ecuador.

The casualness of Le Roux's admissions was striking. Besides the two real estate agents, he admitted that he also ordered the murder of Dave Smith with a flat-toned "that's correct." The judge didn't allow Richman to ask whether Smith had first been placed in a freshly dug grave. (Later a U.S. law-enforcement official told me a different story of Smith's demise, one that offered an ironic counterpoint to Smith's incident with Oz. According to the official, Smith had been thrown out of a boat and then shot. Le Roux himself had fired several bullets from a .45 as Smith floated in the water, already dead.)

Then Richman walked Le Roux through his decision to cooperate with the U.S. government, fishing for evidence that he'd done so under pressure from the DEA or in exchange for promises that he could, for instance, avoid the death penalty.

"The government has given no assurances in the plea deal," Le Roux replied, sounding well practiced. "They simply state that they will make it known to the court if I'm truthful and I

provide information that's of substantial assistance."

When he'd first decided to cooperate, however, Le Roux acknowledged that he'd only been facing charges in the meth deal he'd traveled to Liberia to finalize. The possible sentence was ten years to life, but as Le Roux helpfully pointed out to Richman, the recommended sentence was "only around 12 years." Richman prodded at why such a light possible sentence would induce Le Roux to instantly cooperate.

Q. You knew that your legal situation was far worse than just a methamphetamine charge, correct?

A. In what way?

Q. Well, for example, you ordered multiple murders, correct?

A. Yes, that's true.

Q. And, for example, you ordered the murder of a Filipino customs agent, correct?

A. That's not correct.

Q. What is not correct about it?

A. The individual wasn't a customs agent.

Q. So it was a real estate agent, correct?

A. Correct.

Q. And then there was a second real estate agent, correct?

A. Correct.

Q. Who was also murdered on your orders, correct?

A. That's true.

Q. And you know that there are two individuals, Mr. Samia and Mr. Stillwell, who are under indictment for one of those murders, correct?

A. That's correct.

Q. And do you understand that if you were charged in that case, you could face potentially the death penalty?

MS. MARKS: Objection, Your Honor.

THE COURT: Overruled.

THE WITNESS: Charged where in respect to that case?

MR. RICHMAN: In New York.

A. I'm not aware of how the laws relate to that case, so I couldn't answer that.

Q. You don't know whether you could face the death penalty if you were charged with a murder in the United States?

A. I don't know the law here, so I couldn't answer that. If you say so.

When it came to other countries' laws, Le Roux claimed a rather detailed knowledge. He was vulnerable to criminal charges in the Philippines and Ecuador, he admitted, the latter "since the cocaine shipment originated there." But he'd committed no crimes in Brazil, he said,

because it “lacks a conspiracy law.” As for his adventures in Somalia, he said, “Somalia lacks any government, so I am not concerned about whatever actions took place there because they are not crimes.”

Le Roux also showed a keen awareness of his own media coverage. “We were not growing any hallucinogenics in Somalia,” he responded to one question. “This is something reported in the press which is not accurate.” When Richman asked him about the quantity of gold that had been confiscated, he replied that “I can only go by what’s been reported.”

By this point, it seemed like Richman had achieved his goal. He’d flushed Le Roux out into the open. If he called Le Roux as a witness at Oz’s trial, he’d clearly be able to establish his criminal and murderous past. Richman tried one more gambit. “Isn’t it true that you had a reputation for killing people who stole from you?” he asked. Le Roux replied, “That is an exaggeration.” Richman had nothing further. After a brief cross-examination, in which Marks reestablished that Le Roux had agreed to have his phone calls and email monitored, the hearing was over. Two Marshals reshackled Le Roux and escorted him back through the side door.

Outside the courtroom, Friedberg seemed almost triumphant, even though ultimately they would lose the motion to throw out the phone and email records. “Certainly, the phone calls will come into evidence, we always knew that,” he said. “Getting a look at this guy is worth a lot to us.” The defense team still plans to call Le Roux as a witness in Oz’s trial, scheduled for October.

There was another bombshell hidden in Le Roux’s testimony, one that held a key to the incredible secrecy surrounding him. As part of the proceedings, Marks introduced documents outlining some of the crimes that Le Roux had admitted to, including one that startled everyone: Le Roux, it seemed, had confessed to selling technology to the government of Iran. In a charging document that Le Roux pleaded to, the allegation reads:

Later, both Sol and Jody, the law-enforcement sources who had been briefed on the case, confirmed to me that Le Roux had sold, or at least claimed to have sold, some sort of missile-guidance systems to Iran. The revelation was of a piece with other rumors I’d heard about Le Roux from high-level employees, including that he’d become increasingly interested in ventures in North Africa and the Middle East, and that he’d also dispatched a deputy to Pakistan, looking to buy and sell weapons. In addition to helping the U.S. government take down former employees, he’d promised them information about his Iranian contacts.

Everything beyond that, Sol and Jody told me, was classified. Whether it was truly helpful to the U.S., Sol was skeptical. “His pipe dream was that he was dealing directly with some general in the Iranian army, and Iran was talking about building missiles for nuclear

weapons,” he told me. “It would have been front-page news. But people in that world think they are bigger than they are.”

What will the U.S. government do with Paul Le Roux now? With everyone I talked to, from former managers in Le Roux’s companies to Philippine federal agents—in coffee shops in Manila, over lunch in Tel Aviv, and during late-night encrypted chats—the conversation ultimately came back to that question. They feared that someday he would end up back on the street, with access to millions of dollars that he’d squirreled away around the world; this fear led most of them to demand anonymity in exchange for speaking to me.

Part of Le Roux’s case file was unsealed in March, after the St. Paul hearing. For now, his fate lies with Loretta A. Preska, a federal judge who will decide his sentence. It’s unlikely that Preska will do so until the other cases in which he could be called as a witness, including Oz’s and the Catherine Lee murder prosecution, are concluded. Le Roux’s possible futures range from life in prison—on a combination of the meth, Iran missile-technology-sales, and prescription-drug charges—to as little as ten years. He will not be charged for any of the seven murders he admitted to after signing his proffer agreement, although the judge is allowed to factor them into his sentence.

If the case follows the path of other cooperators, an attorney from the Department of Justice will stand before Preska and argue that Le Roux’s cooperation entitles him to a lesser sentence. There is a chance that he could get less prison time after admitting seven real murders than some of his former employees got for plotting two imaginary ones. He would only be the latest in a long line of famous cooperators, from heroin trafficker Frank Lucas, whose cooperation was later memorialized in *American Gangster*, to mob enforcer Salvatore “Sammy the Bull” Gravano, who earned a five-year sentence by helping bring down John Gotti. But as Le Roux himself noted in his testimony, there are no guarantees.

In the past few days, I was finally able to confirm with multiple sources the identity of Le Roux’s current attorney, the one who requested to close the courtroom in Minnesota: Joseph DiBenedetto. Based in Manhattan, DiBenedetto is known for taking on highly publicized criminal cases, including the defense of John Gotti’s brother Peter, once accused in a plot to kill Gravano. He also appears regularly on Fox News and in other media outlets to discuss legal cases in the headlines. He did not return my phone calls or emails this week about Le Roux’s case and why, in this instance, he had chosen to work anonymously. Nor did the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District respond to my inquiry about why DiBenedetto’s name is mysteriously absent from Le Roux’s unsealed case file, which includes the names of his two previous attorneys.

If and when Le Roux is released, federal authorities could place their former asset in witness protection. They could deport him, setting him adrift to find a new life—or restart his old one. Officially, the DEA confiscated only \$300,000 from Le Roux, on top of the Hong Kong gold seizure. In his testimony, Le Roux claimed that this constituted “the bulk of my assets at

the time of arrest,” but I was hard pressed to find someone from his former organization who believed him. Sol told me that the DEA had found one Le Roux bank account with \$8 million in it, which was drained before they could seize it. By whom, he said, they have no idea. “He’s betting he’s going to do ten years,” Sol told me, “and he’s got millions.”

One source in Manila told me that not only were there tens of millions of dollars of Le Roux’s gold buried in the Philippines, but that the government was racing Le Roux’s former associates to find it—a modern version of Yamashita’s treasure, a supposed cache of loot left by the Japanese after World War II that has spawned decades of fruitless hunts.

Buried gold aside, most former Le Roux employees I spoke with believe that he has hidden millions, money he could use to reconstitute his empire. Last week in an online chat, I asked Lulu whether he thought Le Roux would come after him if and when he was released from prison. “Yes,” was his full reply. Did he think there was any chance that Le Roux’s time on the other side of the law could change him? “I really doubt it,” he said. Le Roux “loved what he did and wouldn’t give it up. I think it was fun for him, I think he really wanted to be the biggest thing. He wanted the infamy.”

What Le Roux wanted and why is a subject I’ve asked dozens of people about. For some the answer was obvious: money. He was corrupted by it, enamored with his power, enraptured by the feeling of it flowing toward him, more than he could ever spend. Others speculated that his drive was fueled by something deeper—his feelings about being adopted, or another childhood affront for which he was forever exacting an imprecise revenge. For my part, I always suspected that part of the answer lie in his life as a programmer. Le Roux had found his place inside code, a universe in which he could bend reality to his will. It seemed to me that he tried to apply the detached logic of software to real life. That’s why the DEA schemes must have appealed to him as much as his own. His approach was algorithmic, not moral: Set the program in motion and watch it run.

But Lulu’s comment about infamy stuck with me. Perhaps that wasn’t Le Roux’s aim at first, but over time it became something he coveted. Le Roux had known all along that he’d get caught—ultimately, the program could only lead to one outcome. But that meant that I, too, was part the design.

One afternoon, two months ago, I met an Israeli former employee of Le Roux’s at a quiet upstairs table in a café inside a Tel Aviv mall. I’d had a difficult time persuading this man to talk to me at all. He was free of Le Roux’s organization, on to new things. He hadn’t been indicted in the prescription-drug case, despite working in one of the call centers, although he said he planned to wait a few years before traveling to the U.S., just in case. I asked him this question, too: What did Le Roux want? “He wanted to be the biggest ever caught,” he said.

As we said good-bye, he told me, "What's important is that justice be done, for what Paul did." Then he leaned in, pointing at my notebook. "If you publish this story, ultimately you are giving him what he wanted. And by talking to you I guess I am, too. This is what he wanted. This story to be told, in this way."