

CORPSE GHOULS BLAME THE BOSS

By RICH CALDER

The two men accused of cutting open fresh corpses as part of a multimillion-dollar illegal body-parts ring contend the ghoulish scheme's mastermind had them believe they were acting with proper family consent, it was revealed yesterday.

Lee Cruceta and Christopher Aldorasi also told cops and prosecutors they were under the impression the removed tissue would be tested for disease before being delivered for implantation in living patients, said Cruceta's lawyer, Joseph Tacopina, who previously represented Aldorasi as well.

Tacopina told the Post that prosecutors offered Cruceta, of Monroe, N.Y., a deal to testify against former dentist

Michael Mastromarino, but that his client couldn't accept it because "he really doesn't know" whether Mastromarino is guilty. Law-enforcement sources confirmed the offer.

"They wanted Lee to say he knew what was going on and that Mastromarino gave the orders," said Tacopina, following a hearing on the case in Brooklyn yesterday.

"Mastromarino being the mastermind might or might not be true, but Lee can't deliver prosecutors the bacon they want because he didn't have any knowledge of any wrongdoing."

The Brooklyn District Attorney's Office declined to comment on the matter.

Cruceta and Aldorasi, of Staten Island, worked together for Mastromarino's

now-shuttered New Jersey business, Biomedical Tissue Services. Tacopina, however, said Cruceta never had contact with Joseph Nicelli, of Staten Island, a mortician also charged in the case.

Prosecutors say the illegal body-parts ring operated out of New York and New Jersey and netted \$4.7 million over a nearly four-year period ending in October by harvesting parts from 1,077 corpses without proper consent or disease testing.

All four defendants are free on bail and claim innocence. They appeared in a Brooklyn courtroom with their lawyers yesterday for a hearing about evidence and seized assets.

The case has sparked at least two dozen lawsuits against Mastromarino, his

company, and others. Some plaintiffs claim to have caught hepatitis from the tainted tissue.

Sanford Rubenstein, who previously filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of thousands of possible victims and their families, attended the hearing with four clients.

One of them, Pamela Grigorian, said the neck surgery she had two years ago "was bad enough," but learning that she might have received tainted tissue during the procedure was "crushing."

"I'm just lucky all the tests have come back OK, but I still have to go through this for a few more months. It's frustrating," said Grigorian, 48, of Suffolk County, who was tested for HIV.

rich.calder @nypost.com