

the press conference with JUVAL AVIV

So much about Juval Aviv is unconfirmable or comes tagged with that highly annoying cop-out caveat “based on true events”. Apparently, he was a lethal Mossad assassin who led Israel’s revenge attacks on the PLO terrorists responsible for the 1972 Munich Olympic massacre, but there is no official corroboration.

Aviv’s (apparent) activities were the inspiration for the 1984 book *Vengeance*, and he was a consultant to Steven Spielberg on the movie *Munich*, which was based on the book. The lead character, Avner, is meant to be him. Canadian author George Jonas and Spielberg were satisfied with Aviv’s authenticity, but his exact involvement in either project is conveniently inked out.

To add to the confusion, Aviv has written a novel about a newspaper tycoon who is murdered while on his yacht (the plot details are CLASSIFIED), but any suspicion that this is about Robert Maxwell would mean it’s your medication time.

What is indisputable is that Aviv, now 59, was an Israeli army major and is now a top corporate private investigator living in New York. He has recouped billions in cash and probed the Lockerbie bombing and the *Daily Mirror* pension scandal.

A father of two, Aviv is 5ft 11, heavy set, with a handshake that squeezes like a python limbering up to prepare dinner. He wears a cosmetic department dose of Aramis. Despite his dark past, he is a cheery fellow, with darting brown eyes, who talks with enthusiastic abandon in a heavy Israeli accent, with some broken grammar.

So, here I am, interviewing the unconfirmed inspiration for a book and a film about unconfirmed events because he is promoting a book which is most definitely not about Maxwell. Well, fine. Then, what follows is based on an unconfirmed conversation in a Westminster Hotel. But, equally, it might be a load of nonsense I dreamt up after a long lunch in Beirut.

Juval, your novel seems to be blatantly based on Robert Maxwell, but where does the truth end and the fiction begin?

This is the hardest question to answer. I am a private



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investigator and one of the rules of the trade is that you do not talk about your investigations and clients. I wanted to go really into the non-fiction side of the [Maxwell] investigation, but I can’t, so then I wrote a fictionalised version. So, the answer really is, the book is a treasure hunt. I let the reader make a decision about how much of it is true. It is really a fiction book based on true events. How much of the events are true? Well, I can tell you off the record... [cue quick briefing]. I can say a lot of it is based on fact, but naturally the book itself is a fiction version of the truth. [That’s clear, then?]

What did you uncover about Maxwell during your investigation? What did you make of him?

Because of who I am and the access to information that I have, I suddenly stumbled on a world that nobody knew about Maxwell. He is bigger than life. The man is a natural clandestine spy type of person. He served three enemy countries at the same time —

Portrait
Phil Adams

which is not a fiction. He was a consultant to Andropov in Russia, to the KGB, a consultant to Margaret Thatcher and MI6 and to Israel and the Mossad [Aviv says Mossad like lard, not had]. He was this kind of person who could travel among those three major intelligence agencies and be trusted by all of them. He could do things that nobody else could do.

You give graphic details of the murder of Max Robertson [ooh, clever] in your book. Is this what you believe really happened to Maxwell?

Again, that is part of the big question of the fiction and non-fiction. Personally, if you ask me, unrelated to the book, I think he was murdered. He did not end up jumping into the water to commit suicide. He did not fall off the boat. It’s a fine line between the fiction and non-fiction. The only thing I cannot do is pick things out and give you the blueprint. I cannot help you do that, because I wrote a fiction book.

by **Rob McGibbon****JUVAL'S NEWS SCHEDULE****Newspapers**

I have a team of six or seven people who read a huge load of worldwide newspapers for me, including all the British newspapers, and give me a digest each morning. Notoriously (sic) I always read the financial newspapers myself. Much of my work is financial investigations, so I read the *Financial Times* and *Wall Street Journal* and look for financial scandals because they can become cases. I also read the *New York Times* because I am interested in politics. I can speak Arabic and look at some Arab newspapers to see what they are saying.

Magazines

I love magazines. I regularly get *Time* and *Newsweek* and many European magazines because I want to keep my languages [he speaks eight, three fluently]. I read a lot of German magazines: *Stern*, *Der Spiegel*.

What do you think would happen if you did break this fiction-non-fiction code? Besides, it all seems so blatant anyway.

There could be retaliation by the family, there could be retaliations by any one of those agencies that I suggest he was involved with. There is a lot of issues. The issue about what he worked on and with whom he worked is so sensitive. There are enough elements out there who would not be happy that the truth comes out. So, the clever way to go about it is to just say it is a fiction, let the reader make a decision. But I am not hiding. I investigated it. I am an investigator and I wrote based on experiences that I had. But I cannot really tell the public. Maybe it is all fiction.

I interviewed Stella Rimington recently and she told me that MI5 would never misinform the press. From your experience in Mossad would you say that is the case?

[Chuckles]. I mean please! I love them all. The FBI, MI6, CIA and KGB and Mossad — they all never misinform the press? Ha! They LIVE by it. They are trained to do it. The leaders of countries need loyal people to cover up for them when things don't go well. Who do they go to? All those agencies were designed to protect the government from mistakes. There has to be denial — we can always find a scapegoat, blame everything on him and that is the end of the whole thing. Look at what happens in the war in Iraq. They knew that there weren't any weapons of mass destruction. They have to cover up.

My biggest surprise is the media and press falls for it. I really gave them more credit — they are investigators, they can go out and discover the truth, but nobody tries to do it. It is an easy job. They are being fed and take whatever they are being told. A few leading newspapers like the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* write something and the rest follow. I am appalled at the level of journalism when it comes to government mistakes and how they cover up. People look at newspapers as bibles and believe everything they say, but don't really use common sense.

Television

I am a terrorism consultant for Fox News, but I watch all kinds of news channels, as I travel so much. I love the old British comedy shows. Notoriously, I watch, *Are You Being Served* — this is big in America — and all those old stupid things, *Benny Hill*, *Fawlty Towers*. We love it.

Radio

I don't have much time to listen to radio, so I only listen when I am driving, but don't tune into a particular station. I do a lot of interviews on radio in America for business.

Web

Again, my team research the web for me, as I don't have time. When I get into the office each morning, I have a whole dossier of things that I should pay attention to, from news events to political issues and business and legal issues. We subscribe to over 2,000 databases worldwide and we use many websites.

Stella Rimington also told me categorically that she never recruited a journalist as a spy.

[Guffaws]. Please. I am not calling her a liar. I am just saying she is saying what she has to say. Can you imagine the headlines in England if she said: "Oh yes, absolutely, we are doing it every day?" You are almost asking her something that she has to lie about. If she doesn't, then somebody will call her up and say: "You know, Stella, you are sick, you are getting old, we are going to have to help you." Then you see what happens.

During your investigation into Maxwell, did you come across journalists in his organisation who were also a part of the spy game that you reckon he was in?

I came across, and know of, people who are top reporters and editors of magazines and newspapers who Maxwell convinced to spy for — I won't say whom — but spy for and act in a double life. I met them. They didn't confess to me, but I worked with them. Some are probably retired, some are probably too young to retire, so I would assume some are still in the business. I have not looked for them.

Mossad denies you and there is always a question mark over your authenticity. Does that bother you?

One side of me is disappointed and I want people to know the truth. I understand [Mossad] had to say that. It is part of the cover up, part of the denial. When they recruited me, they said they would always deny my existence. It has happened just as they said. What else could they do? The thing in my favour — and I only realised this much later, when I have kids and grandchildren — is, hey, it's great that people say I am not the one. I am secure physically from any retaliation because they are not going to come after the guy that everybody says is not the person. Good, I am very happy with that. I know who I am. I know the truth. My family and friends know the truth. That's what counts. If half the world doesn't believe me, what am I going to do?

Is it true that your Mossad mission inspired the film *Munich* and the character played by Eric Bana [Avner] is based on you?

I am not at any time — for legal reasons — saying it officially to the press that I am Avner. I'll let you guess. I cannot answer that question. I do not answer this question. I would really like to talk about Max!

Of course, but we've already talked about that and you can't say much! What CAN you tell me about you, Avner and Munich?

I can tell you that I was an agent, that I was assigned to do a clandestine operation abroad. I was involved in very exciting missions, which I cannot talk about. I am proud of what I have done. Did it solve the world? Did it solve the issue of terrorism? The answer is no. I am as frustrated about that as everybody else. This [the post-Munich mission] was not a solution. It was good revenge for certain events. We clearly avenged what we wanted to do. We got the right



people. We didn't do collateral bombing of countries. We surgically went after [terrorists]. That was the mission. That is all I can say.

So, Juval, it follows that you have murdered people. What was that like?

I will not get into this. Are you aware that legally there is no statute of limitations for killing? The families of those deceased can sue you under the Haig Convention forever. And lately there have been a lot of lawsuits around the world, including in America. Have I killed anybody? Probably. I was in the army. I was a soldier, I probably did.

If the film *Munich* is anything to go by, you have witnessed and perpetrated some real horror. Are you at all haunted by your experiences?

Absolutely. There are moments that you [remember]. This is the bad part, the payback, God is paying back. You have to live with it. Whether you were perfectly right to do it, whether the people you have been involved in eliminating deserved it, or whatever, you have still become the judge and prosecutor yourself. The next question should be, "If you had to do it all over again, would you do it?" The answer would be probably yes, because at the time I believed that whatever I did was right. Will it change the world, what I have done? No.

What are the things that haunt you most?

I can't talk about it. It's really hard to. If you read *Vengeance* or see the movie, it is really nightmares about those events. Me standing in front of a person. [Aviv is distracted momentarily and his eyes glaze with emotion. He is clearly recalling an image, a situation that cuts him to the core. Whatever it is, it certainly seems "based on true events"].

If you have done all the things that people think, why have you not been silenced and killed?

I think — thank God — there are so many events on a daily basis, that I am not important enough after so many years. Maybe the few years after, if they [PLO terrorists] knew who I am and they could find me, absolutely I was in great danger. But as time has passed there are so many other events that are greater than that, and other people who did more damage than I did.

Clearly, you've had, shall we say, an interesting life. Would you change it? Any regrets?

No. It was a struggle, but I like to be in a struggle. I like to work hard, to go against all odds. I am the person who needs to be challenged and I have had ample challenges. Looking back, I would probably change some things, because I would know it was a waste of time, but how can you think like this? If I were back in the same time, under the same circumstances, I wouldn't do anything different.

Very early in my life, my father told me one thing that was a good lesson: "Always tell the truth." If you just tell the truth, no matter what it is, you won't have to worry about anything. Tell the truth and you will prevail. I have always told the truth.

A longer version of this interview can be read at www.robmcgibbon.com

Juval Aviv's**FANTASY FLYERS****What would be the Fantasy Headline of the story you would most like to read?**

I wish I could write the TRUTH about events, whether it be the war in Iraq, Princess Diana's death, Lockerbie. Whatever event dominates the news, I would have the headline: "The Truth Of The Day". A bit like "The Emperor Is Naked".

What would be the Fantasy Headline involving yourself?

"I Told You So: Juval Aviv Vindicated". I don't want to be praised, but I want to be vindicated about certain things. It will never happen, because they will never give you that headline, even if you are right.

Who would you most like to interview and what question would you ask?

I met Bill Clinton when I was working

with Spielberg. I asked him about the Kennedy assassination, but he didn't want to deal with it. I would like to talk to him about that. I think I know the truth.

What question would you never answer?

I won't get into my personal life for obvious reasons. It is more to do with security than anything that I hide. I will not answer anything to do with operations that I have done for Israel that are classified.

What would you like the headline to be on your obituary?

I want to be sure that all I have done was not for nothing and that finally the truth came out. I told my kids, even if the truth comes after I have died, go and change my tomb. They can put something like: "Eventually he was right!"