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 dreamed 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 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. 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.
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 who he worked with 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 investiga-

tor 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 know that there weren’t any weapons of mass destruction. They have to cover up.

My biggest surprise is the media and press falls for this. I really gave them more credit — they are investi-
gators and they can go out and discover the truth, but nobody tries to do it. It is an easy job. They are being trained to do it. The leaders of countries need loyal people to cover up.

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

I have done for Israel that are classified. 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 about what I have done, that’s why I retired from Mossad. There are moments that you [remember]. 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 don’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 directed more by emotion. He is clearly recalling an image, a situation that cuts to his core. Whatever it is, it cer-

tainly 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] know 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 circumstances, I wouldn’t do anything different.

Very early in my life, my father told me one thing that was not easy for me to forget: “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 followed that lesson. A longer version of this interview can be read at www.robmcgibbon.com

by Rob McGibbon

Juval Aviv’s FANTASY PLAYS

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 give you that headline, even if you are right.

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

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What would be the Fantasy News Schedule?

Newspapers

I have a team of six or seven people who are trained to read a huge load of worldwide newspapers for me, including all the British newspa-

pers, and give me a digest each morning. Notoriously (sic) I always read the financial news-

papers to get the facts. Much of my work is financial investigations.

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 who he worked with 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 investiga-

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