

THE MAN WHO PLAYED WITH FIRE

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PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

This gripping 4-part Scandi Noir thriller explores the 1986 unsolved assassination of Sweden's Prime Minister, Olof Palme. A case that sent shockwaves around the world, and is often dubbed "Europe's J.F.K shooting".

The Swedish leader was mysteriously shot from behind at point blank range, as he walked on one of Stockholm's busiest streets, late at night in February 1986. It became the world's largest murder investigation, with over ten thousand people questioned and 134 confessions received, but somehow always remaining unsolved.

The swirling question marks around the events that night, the true identity of the killer and the murky reasons behind the assassination have consumed many in the intervening years. In Sweden there is even a word to describe the obsessive interest and mental anguish many develop when exploring the case. *Palmeviruset* translates directly into English as "The Palme Virus". One surprising person who developed an obsessive interest was the best-selling crime novelist, Stieg Larsson, author of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and *The Girl Who Kicked The Hornet's Nest*. For over a decade, Larsson secretly investigated the case, examining it in intricate detail and going to painstaking lengths to uncover clues. Determined to crack the case, his investigation led him down a trail of Cold War power games, international espionage and right wing extremism. But when Larsson suddenly passed away in 2004, this extensive research was packed up with his papers, put into storage, and locked away.

For years, his extraordinary analysis full of dossiers, suspects and fascinating leads went untouched, until a chance discovery of them in 2013...

From the producers of *The Tinder Swindler*, *Three Identical Strangers* and *Don't F**k with Cats*. This is the shocking true story of Europe's most high profile assassination, Stieg Larsson's extraordinary investigation, and those determined to get to the truth.

FOR PRESS: NOTABLE CONTEXT

- ***The Man Who Played With Fire*** explores the global political backdrop of the 1980s, with startling parallels to the world we currently inhabit: Much like the situation with Ukraine today, The West and The USSR were engaged in dangerous brinkmanship, vicious proxy wars and dirty tricks. Olof Palme was in power during the height of the Cold War, when both superpowers were trying to gain ground and influence by any means necessary, and when Olof Palme's Sweden was on the front line between "East and West"
- **NATO membership** In the 1980s, Sweden was publicly debating whether to join NATO, but under Olof Palme's leadership, was controversially keeping its historic neutrality and non alignment. Only this year, amidst great public debate once more, did Sweden start the process of

becoming members of NATO. Russian President Vladimir Putin said it would have “serious military and political consequences” for the nation.

- **The Rise of Extremism** - Just like today, the 1980's saw a rise in Right Wing extremism and Ultranationalism - especially in the USA and Europe. Palme himself was targeted viciously by right wingers and was the subject of many death threats from extremists because of his politics. Extraordinarily, the series reveals how Stieg Larsson had been mapping out the far right and international organizations in detail, investigating key individuals and where their financing was really coming from. He was exploring whether the assassination could have involved members of extremist groups, and financing from political organizations. In December '22 a far right plot in Germany ~~dubbed~~ was uncovered, <https://www.ft.com/content/b7565be2-0130-4d1d-9ace-c3f4787775d8> with sinister plans to overthrow the German state, which had eerie similarities to what Larsson was uncovering decades earlier.
- **Disinformation and influence campaigns** - In recent years online disinformation and influence groups have become a major talking point - From QAnon to Covid Vaccinations - we are now in a post truth era where no one knows what to believe. This series explores the murky Cold War disinformation campaigns that were already underway in the 1970's and 80s, in order to influence public debate and sway political opinion as far as possible to the Left or Right - depending on who was funding it.
- **International Espionage:** In recent months, a number of dramatic raids and arrests have been made on alleged Russian spies around the world - from dawn helicopter raids in Stockholm, to expulsions from the USA. A web of covert Russian intelligence gatherers has recently been unraveling.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-64975200> <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-spies-europe-exposes-out-of-the-shadows-sweden/>

The Man Who Played With Fire features first person testimony from ex spies, intelligence sources and politicians, who take us into the original East v West espionage battle. They reveal a startling array of secret activities that were going on in the 1980s - including covert CIA operations and Soviet activity. Two interviewees reveal the contents of a 1986 bug placed inside a Russian Diplomat's residence, that suggested KGB involvement in the assassination of Palme.

FOR PRESS: TOP LINES

- When the official Swedish Police Investigation was closed in 2020, it caused a storm of protest, disappointment and accusations of a “cover up”. The police named a long deceased man as the probable ‘lone killer’, despite having no new evidence, no forensic link, nor murder weapon. ***The Man Who Played With Fire*** features an array of original witnesses to the shooting, who unanimously claim the man they saw kill the Swedish Prime Minister was without doubt not the individual the police and prosecutor named when they closed the investigation.

- ***The Man Who Played With Fire*** also features prominent and notable interviewees from around the globe, from politicians, to eye witnesses, who believe the case must now be reopened.
- ***The Man Who Played With Fire*** features never broadcast secret recordings with key individuals who have been linked to the killing - including those the police never managed to question.

EPISODE 1 DESCRIPTION

On a cold February night in 1986, the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme was shot from behind on one of Stockholm's busiest streets. As the killer fled into the night, Palme was left to die in the snow. Almost 30 years later, the chance discovery of a collection of boxes deep inside a Stockholm storage facility, led one man, Jan Stocklassa, to believe the answers to who murdered the Swedish Prime Minister lay buried inside these forgotten files.

The contents of the boxes were the work of one of the world's best-selling crime writers, Stieg Larsson - author of multimillion selling novels such as *The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo*, and *The Girl Who Kicked The Hornets' Nest*. For a decade Larsson had been tirelessly investigating the mystery, before he suddenly died of a heart attack in 2004.

As Jan Stocklassa begins to explore the paperwork Stieg Larsson left behind, we learn how influential but also controversial Olof Palme was during the Cold War. This is a man who may have created many powerful enemies around the world and at home.

Stieg Larsson had carefully mapped out and pieced together a detailed timeline of the murder. First hand testimony from key eye witnesses, reveal the strange and brutal events they saw that night. They tell of a killer who showed no mercy before fleeing up an alleyway, up 89 steps and seemingly disappearing into the darkness.

As the episode progresses, we are also taken into the heart of the initial police investigation, as original police officers on the case reveal the chaotic response. Ignored leads, bad decision making, missed evidence... After months of botched investigative work, and no culprit, Stieg Larsson began to ask if the police were merely inept, or if something more sinister could be going on? Did the authorities want to avoid the truth around who killed Olof Palme?

Eventually, the episode reveals that deep within the official paperwork a variety of statements, testimonies and tip offs all point towards a sophisticated, organized killing. One witness reveals to us first hand the strange events he witnessed that evening, and which have haunted him for decades.

Finally, the trail leads to an ex-Yugoslavian military intelligence officer who warned authorities weeks in advance that Palme was going to be shot - and claims he had been offered a large amount of money to pull the trigger himself.

EPISODE 2 DESCRIPTION

As Stieg Larsson's investigation into the 1986 murder is unpicked, a picture emerges of the many enemies Prime Minister Olof Palme may have created on the world stage. As the Cold War reached its zenith, Palme was walking a dangerous tightrope between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. In startling parallels to the situation in Ukraine today, Soviet Russia was looking to expand, whilst The USA and the West, were desperate to keep Sweden away from Soviet clutches. Sweden had huge geographical and strategic importance if the West was going to defend Europe, and the established order.

But Olof Palme was keeping Sweden as neutral, non-aligned, and out of NATO. And he was seen by people on both sides as "playing for the other team". By remaining neutral, did he in fact make himself a target for both sides of the conflict? As Soviet submarine incursions began deep inside Swedish Waters, many clamored for Sweden to officially join NATO, but Palme's willingness to stay independent whilst also remaining in dialogue with Soviet leaders, enraged many within his country, and possibly in the White House.

As the episode develops, we meet Ex spies, and military intelligence sources from the 1980s who reveal how Sweden was in the middle of sophisticated global espionage, disinformation and influence campaigns. The stakes were high enough that a covert paramilitary group had been formed within Sweden by the CIA, to protect the country in the event of a Soviet invasion. Could this group have had any involvement in an organized assassination?

Or was it the other side? An ex-intelligence agent reveals how a secret recording was made on the night of the killing. A bug had been planted inside a Russian diplomat's residence, in which he was caught telling his wife that Palme would be killed that night. Was the KGB in on the plot? In a world of half-truths and lies, who can you trust and what do you believe?

As Jan Stocklassa continues to unpick Stieg Larsson's investigative threads, he starts to see how the extreme cold war politics of Left v Right was also playing out on the streets of Sweden - and Palme was a target for them. Larsson had been meticulously mapping out extremists within Sweden and Europe, their international links and who was funding them. Within this dark web, Stieg Larsson seemed to have homed in on three key individuals he believed may have been involved in the assassination.

Jan Stocklassa becomes determined to find where these men are three decades later – and what secrets they may have been keeping...

EPISODE 3 DESCRIPTION

Following the trail Stieg Larsson left behind, Jan Stocklassa is led to a whole new continent, where a surprising motive for Olof Palme's murder is revealed.

Olof Palme was a leading light in the liberation movements inside Africa, and the Swedish Government was secretly funding anti-apartheid movements like the A.N.C. in South Africa. South African Liberation leaders and campaigners reveal what Palme was doing covertly – and how the brutal Apartheid regime reacted.

Increasingly sure that Stieg Larsson had uncovered the truth about the assassination, Jan manages to track down and speak to a former South African intelligence operative who admits he was involved in

helping organize attacks on European soil, and who also reveals Stieg Larsson's research was startlingly accurate.

As Jan Stocklassa increasingly believes he is getting closer to the truth, he starts to take more risks, culminating in an undercover, secretly recorded meeting in Northern Cyprus, with a man Stieg Larsson described as a "middleman" in the assassination.

EPISODE 4 DESCRIPTION

As Jan Stocklassa pieces together the loose strands of Stieg Larsson's investigation, the risks he takes get higher, and his tactics more extreme and controversial – but Jan believes they are getting results and that the three decades old murder case, described as "an open wound on a nation's soul", is about to be cracked.

As the pieces begin to fall into place, the trail leads Jan to approach two unlikely individuals for assistance: A mysterious Czech woman on the internet, and a former Swedish diplomat. Two dangerous operations begin, including the recording of clandestine meetings with top military intelligence generals inside South Africa.

With startling new information, Jan hands his work to the official Swedish Police investigation team. Suddenly, the Swedish police call a press conference to make a shock announcement. Will this confirm Stieg Larsson and Jan Stocklassa's theory on who killed the Swedish Prime Minister?

BIOGS

JAN STOCKLASSA

Jan Stocklassa came across world famous crime writer Stieg Larsson's archive in 2013. For several years Stieg had amassed a wealth of information in his investigation into the unsolved assassination of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. Engrossed by what he discovered, and with Stieg now deceased, Jan picked up the threads of where Stieg left off. After completing his own investigation, Stocklassa released the true crime bestseller, *The Man Who Played with Fire: Stieg Larsson's Lost Files and the Hunt for an Assassin*, published in 2018. His book has since been translated into 27 languages and sold in more than 50 countries worldwide.

STIEG LARSSON

Stieg Larsson is best known as the man behind the Millennium trilogy of crime novels, *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Kicked The Hornets Nest*, and *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, all featuring the crusading investigative journalist Mikael Blomquist and one of the most original, unforgettable characters in crime fiction: Lisbeth Salander, the girl with the dragon tattoo, a dark past and a quest for revenge.

Tragically, Larsson never got to witness the international sensation his page-turning thrillers became. The books were all published posthumously in 2005, after Larsson had died of a sudden heart attack, shortly after he delivered the manuscripts to his publishers.

He became the first author to reach over a million downloads on the Kindle, and simultaneously had each of his novels in the top ten best selling Kindle books of all time. He was the second-best-selling fiction author in the world in 2008, and his third and final novel in the Millennium trilogy, *The Girl Who*

Kicked the Hornets' Nest, became the bestselling book in the United States in 2010. By March 2015, his series had sold 80 million copies worldwide. The trilogy was later adapted as three motion pictures in Scandinavia, and one major motion picture in the U.S. starring Daniel Craig.

Although best known for his literary creations, Larsson had spent years as a journalist, working at first as a graphic designer at Sweden's largest News Agency, but eventually becoming an investigative journalist who focused on exposing right-wing extremist groups. He was the editor in chief of an anti fascist investigative magazine, Expo, and a leading expert on antidemocratic, right-wing extremist, and Nazi organizations.

OLOF PALME

Sven Olof Joachim Palme (30 January 1927 – 28 February 1986) was a Swedish politician and statesman who served as Prime Minister of Sweden from 1969 to 1976 and 1982 to 1986. Palme led the Swedish Social Democratic Party from 1969 until his assassination in 1986.

Palme was a pivotal and polarizing figure domestically as well as in international politics from the 1960s onward. He was steadfast in his non-alignment policy towards the superpowers, accompanied by support for numerous liberation movements.

He was the first Western head of government to visit Cuba after its revolution, and was a mediator in the Iran-Iraq War.

Frequently a critic of Soviet and American foreign policy, he expressed his resistance to imperialist ambitions and authoritarian regimes. He was extraordinarily outspoken against the Vietnam war, and even marched with a North Vietnamese ambassador in a rally in Stockholm.

As leader of a new generation of Swedish Social Democrats, Palme was often described as a "revolutionary reformist". Domestically, his leftist views, including on taxation, immigration, and the drive to expand labour union influence, engendered hostility from the business community and the right.

NOTABLE INTERVIEWEES IN SERIES

JOAKIM PALME (Son of Olof Palme)

Joakim is the eldest son of Olof Palme and Lisbet Palme, and was living in Stockholm at the time of the killing. He was one of the first to reach the hospital where his father Olof Palme was rushed that night, but by which time his father had been declared dead.

LORD KINNOCK (British friend of Olof Palme and Former Leader the Opposition)

The Rt Hon Lord Neil Kinnock was a close friend of Palme, and had even stayed as a guest at Palme's residence in Sweden not long before the killing. The former British politician served as Leader of the opposition and Leader of the Labour Party from 1983 to 1992. He served as a Member of Parliament (MP) from 1970 until 1995, first for Bedwellty and then for Islwyn. He was Vice-President of the European Commission from 1999 to 2004.

ULF DAHLSTEN (Swedish colleague of Olof Palme)

Ulf Dahlsten was a prominent Swedish politician who worked as Palme's Chief of Staff in 1986, and also Secretary of State. He worked in the Ministry of Industry 1982–1983, with Prime Minister Olof Palme in the State Council Committee 1983–1986 and at the Ministry of Communications 1986–1988. He was one of the first people notified by the secret police that Palme had been murdered, at Lisbet Palme's (Olof Palme's wife) request. He rushed to the hospital to comfort the family, and also helped oversee the forming of an emergency government.

EDWARD LUTTWAK (American Military Strategist)

Edward Nicolae Luttwak is a long term strategic advisor of the US Government, and worked for the Reagan administration during the period Palme was in power. He describes Palme as 'anti American' and someone who generated hostility to the United States.

CARL COLBY (American)

As a young boy Carl's parents moved him and the family to Stockholm, after his father was posted there as First Political Secretary for the U.S Government. But Carl eventually discovered it was all just a cover story. His father, William Colby, would go on to be the head of the CIA - and within Sweden at this time, was involved in covert activities for the CIA. His role was to help set up "Stay Behind" groups - a secret network of men who received training, arms and assistance, to become an unofficial guerilla army should the Soviets invade, or their sympathizers take control.

DALI TAMBO (South African Anti Apartheid Activist)

Dali Tambo was the son of the African National Congress President, Oliver Tambo. Oliver Tambo had launched the A.N.C with Nelson Mandella. Dali saw first hand how deeply Olof Palme was getting involved in issues in Africa. "He was a fellow freedom fighter". He says. "My father and Palme were brothers in arms". Dali himself launched Artists Against Apartheid, and organized and promoted anti apartheid protests in Europe where his family had been exiled to.

ALLAN BOESAK (South African Politician and Anti Apartheid Activist)

Allan Aubrey Boesak is a South African cleric, politician and anti-apartheid activist. Along with Beyers Naudé and Winnie Mandela, Boesak won the 1985 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award given annually by the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights. He rose to prominence during the 1980s as an outspoken critic and opponent of the National Party's policies and played a major anti-apartheid activist role as a patron of the United Democratic Front (UDF) from 1983 to 1991.