



## ROBERT KARJEL IS THE AUTHOR OF *THE SWEDE*

***A Swedish security agent is summoned to interrogate a terror suspect held by the FBI—but the prisoner isn't the only one with something to hide.***

***The Swede. Written by an insider. Helicopter pilot. Former member of Swedish Special Forces.***

Find out more at [robert-karjel.com](http://robert-karjel.com)

## TEN QUESTIONS FOR ROBERT KARJEL

**1) Some have described *The Swede* as a thriller, and others as a novel. How do you see the book?**

I call it a literary thriller. The book is meant to be a page-turner, but for those who want more, *The Swede* has serious political and psychological themes.

**2) You wrote the book while a helicopter pilot and Lt. Colonel in the Swedish Air Force. How did your military career intersect with your writing?**

I wanted the book to feel real. For the details, I drew on my inside knowledge of the War on Terror, intelligence training, and the U.S. military system. Also, because of networks I've developed in my military and writing work, I was able to interview a number of operators in this ongoing war. Including a pilot who flew people to secret CIA sites around the world.

**3) Is *The Swede* a love story?**

Relationships between people are built on trust. If you want to get somewhere, you have to establish that first— even between interrogators and those being interrogated. That is the real theme of my book. And love is the supreme example.

**4) How much of *Grip* is you?**

Putting myself in *Grip's* position, under extreme pressure, I tried to imagine what I would be willing to do for my friends or my family. I thought I'd be willing to do anything, except possibly kill. And that's how you understand *Grip*.

But there's also another dimension. Before I wrote the book, I spent ten days interviewing a dying American homicide detective named Hugh Swaney. There are spoilers involved in his story, so if you want more now, see below.\* So I take the best in me, I take the worst in me, I push it to an extreme, I apply it to Hugh, and that's Ernst *Grip*.

**5) In *The Swede*, several characters disappear and reinvent themselves. What drew you to this idea?**

Much of the book was written at Amherst College, where I spent five months on a fellowship. For the first time in my adult life, I stepped out of everything familiar to me in Stockholm—family, friends, military career. I was a clean slate. I realized I had the chance to be whoever I wanted to be.

**6) *The Swede* also explores doubles and duality.**

Exactly. I used a lot of opposites in the book. Terrorists and innocents. Survivors and the dead. The magical and the real. Ernst *Grip* and Shauna Friedman. There are characters in *The Swede* who lead double lives. I'm convinced that that's more common than we think, or would like to think.

### **7) Art plays an important role in the book. Why Edward Hopper?**

I've always been drawn to Hopper's sense of solitude and silence. In his paintings, every figure stands alone—a defining symbol of the human condition. Everything in life is done in opposition to, or because of, this aloneness.

### **8) What is the most dangerous thing you've experienced?**

One time I was in a taxi in Djibouti, returning to my ship after a night out on the town. The driver was high as a kite on khat, driving 80 mph on dark unpaved streets, alternately laughing and insisting that what I needed most right now was a visit to a brothel outside of town. During that ride, I imagined a dozen ways I would die. Also I crashed a helicopter once, a long time ago.

### **9) You published three previous thrillers in Sweden, but *The Swede* gave you your big break. What made the difference?**

Although I often think of myself as a loner, the book's international success is a story of two old friends of mine.

I've known my agent, Jonas Axelsson, since we got in a fight when we were 6 years old. He ended up in the emergency room and still has a scar on his forehead. A few years ago, after a long career in publishing, Jonas started a new literary agency. I guess he had forgiven me. We teamed up.

My translator, Nancy Pick, is an American writer I've known for 25 years. She doesn't speak Swedish. But when I needed a fast translation of *The Swede* for a shot at Hollywood, she knew I was chasing a dream. So she offered to try, basically using Google Translate. For five weeks, we bounced drafts between Massachusetts and Stockholm, working 24/7. It was exhausting, but we did it—Twentieth Century Fox bought the option for an American TV series.

### **10) Will Ernst Grip return?**

Absolutely. One of Grip's characteristics is that he never gives up. In my next book, *The Sunni*, he travels to the coast of Somalia. The narrative draws on my experiences in the Air Force, as unit commander and helicopter pilot on the Swedish ship *Carlskrona*, fighting piracy.

## **THE STORY OF HUGH SWANEY**



Several years ago, I got to know a legendary American homicide detective named Hugh Swaney. He was dying of AIDS when I interviewed him, and what I learned during those ten days—about life and human behavior—became the basis for my character Ernst Grip. Hugh had once led a conventional life, married to a woman, with kids. But on weekends, he'd go off to San Francisco to meet men. The tension was destroying him. He'd volunteer to be the first to enter buildings on police raids, and people thought he was extremely brave. In fact, he simply wanted to die. Finally, a police psychologist told him he was gay. He left his family and changed his lifestyle, eventually finding a man he was very devoted to.

In his long and extremely successful police career, Hugh was known as an expert interrogator. Because he had lived with his own deception for so long, he understood how to ask the small and seemingly innocent questions that could get a suspected killer to crack.

# ROBERT KARJEL



"I was born in 1965 in Gothenburg, Sweden. My mother is Swedish, and my father Estonian.

I did my university studies at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, majoring in Applied Physics.

After graduation, I entered the military. At first I flew fighter jets, and then helicopters. I became a Lt. Colonel in the Swedish Air Force. I'm the only Swedish pilot to have trained with the U.S. Marine Corps and flown its attack helicopters.

I've written four thrillers, with a new one almost finished (The Sunni, sequel to The Swede). Researching my novels has taken me to the Libyan desert, Amazonian drug dens and the secret archives of the Vatican.

As for my hobbies, I've recently taken my younger daughter scuba diving in Egypt and the Maldives. I'm also a runner, and I like sea-kayaking.

And then there's the kitchen. For celebrations with friends and family, my official job is to make fancy desserts and chocolate pralines.

I have two daughters. The older is attending college in the US; the younger goes to high school in Stockholm, where I live myself.

My latest novel, The Swede, will be published by HarperCollins on July 7. (In the UK, its title is My Name Is N.) This is my first novel to come out in English."

Find out more at [robert-karjel.com](http://robert-karjel.com)

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## CONTACT

**Martin Wilson**  
**Publicist, HarperCollins**  
**Martin.Wilson@harpercollins.com**