



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Official Selection – Competition

THE RED SPIDER

by Marcin KOSZAŁKA

Each serial killer has his first time

English title: **The Red Spider**
Original title: **Czerwony Pająk**
Genre: drama, thriller
Running Time: 90', color
Poland / Czech Republic / Slovakia 2015

Screenplay Marcin Koszałka, Łukasz M. Maciejewski,
based on original screenplay titled "Lolo" by Marta Szreder
Director and Cinematographer Marcin Koszałka
Editor Krzysztof Komander, Marcin Koszałka
Music Petr Ostrouchov
Casting Julia Popkiewicz
Production design Ryszard Melliwa, Magdalena Dipont
Costume design Magdalena Biedrzycka
Makeup Magdalena Łęcka
Sound design Michał Fojcik M.P.S.E.
Sound Bartłomiej Bogacki
Production Manager Mirella Zaradkiewicz
Location Manager Kamila Kuś

Producer Agnieszka Kurzydło

Production Company MD4
Co-producers Fog'n'Desire Films s. r. o.(Czech Republic), Sokol Kollar spol. s. r. o. (Slovakia), Zentropa Interntional Poland,
Krakow Festival Office, Orange Polska
Supported by Polish Film Institute, State Cinematography Fund Czech Republic, Slovak Audiovisual Fund,
Krakow Regional Film Fund
Budget approx. 1.3 mln euro
Polish distributor Kino Świat
International Sales MD4
World Premiere IFF Karlovy Vary 2015; Competition

Cast
Karol Kremer Filip Pławiak
The Vet Adam Woronowicz
Danka Julia Kijowska
Karol's Mother Małgorzata Foremniak
Lt. Florek Wojciech Zieliński
Executioner Przemysław Bluszcz
Trainer Piotr Głowacki
Technician Andrzej Konopka
Vet's wife Dorota Landowska

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In his feature debut, Marcin Koszałka, acclaimed and rebel Polish director investigates the mind of a serial killer living in Communist Poland.

SYNOPSIS

Karol is an ordinary young man, living in the 1960s Cracow. Poland is under communist regime, times are dark and murky, while the city is empty and morose. After winning a diving tournament, Karol and his teammates go to a local funfair to celebrate his success. Karol leaves them and goes to take a piss behind one of the caravans. On his way back he discovers a body of a murdered boy, presumably the new victim of Red Spider, a terrifying serial killer, prowling the streets of Cracow. On his way back to the fair, Karol passes an ordinarily-looking man in his 40s, wearing a dark coat and a beret, holding a leather briefcase in his hand. Karol is strangely drawn to the man, who turns out to be a Vet. He follows him and tries to get closer to the silent, mysterious man, whom he believes to be the infamous Red Spider. In the meantime Karol is approached by Danka – a slightly older photographer at the local newspaper. Tempted by love, fascinated by death, Karol will soon have to make the most important choice of his life.

PLOT SUMMARY

Karol, an ordinary young man, runs into a much older man, whom he believes to be a Red Spider, the terrifying serial killer, prowling the streets of Cracow in 1960s. Karol becomes obsessed with the man and spies on him. Meanwhile he meets Danka – a slightly older photographer, working for the local newspaper. Tempted by love, fascinated by death, Karol will soon have to make the most important choice of his life.



THE RED SPIDER AN ARTISTIC FILM
BY MARCIN KOSZAŁKA

Marcin Koszałka is one of the most interesting documentary film directors in Europe. He is not only a director; he also wrote and lensed all of his films, which makes him a complete and self-sufficient filmmaker. He also worked as a cinematographer for feature film directors, such as Magdalena Piekorz (*Welts, Drowsiness, Close-ups*) and Borys Lankosz (*Reverse*), which gave him experience in creating images for fiction.

As an experienced documentary film director, Koszałka developed great instinct, an *inner polygraph* that allows him to detect when people are faking their emotions or lying about their stories. This skill helps Koszałka to achieve a high level of realism in his films. As a DoP he has a very distinctive and compelling visual style, so his films combine great storytelling with captivating images. This makes him a unique filmmaker, a *real author*.

Koszałka is a very unique director, because he was never interested in ordinary stories and protagonists. He is fascinated by the immensity of death, fear of dying and the impact that fear has on human lives and the decisions they're making. He also observes and studies the unending fight between good and evil in people's minds. Whether it's an old, dying actor, convicted criminal, serial killer or his own mother — he observes them sharply and relentlessly. Without default ethic perspective or any hidden agenda, Koszałka is a discerning and scrupulous researcher of the human nature.

Obsession with death is a result of the neurosis I acquired at home, where there were conflicts and a lot of pressure. I don't have time to treat it because I'm too busy. Besides, I'm afraid that if I was cured of my neurosis, then I wouldn't have as many ideas. I think film is a better therapy says Koszałka.

WORD FROM THE PRODUCER,
AGNIESZKA KURZYDŁO

It is the first film in Poland about a serial killer, but the audience here knows the genre very well: *Silence of the Lambs*, *Seven* or *Zodiac* to name just a few. We know Hollywood-style storytelling, which usually focuses on the serial killer being hunted by a detective or a policeman, but it wouldn't fit our film. ***The Red Spider*** is a story about a serial killer living in a communist country, where everything including the police, the state and the media was dysfunctional and was a caricature of what we have now, so we needed a new narrative.

Marcin took up this challenge and made a film that is original, universal and modern. Even though the action of ***The Red Spider*** is set in Communist Poland, our film is up-to-date, and gives an excellent perspective on the current situation in Poland. Last year many serial killers were released out of prison. Originally they were sentenced to death, but after the capital punishment was abolished in Poland, all sentences were converted to very long periods of imprisonment that have just ended. Experts in criminal psychology claim that the released convicts will kill again. We had a nation-wide debate on penitentiary system's effectiveness, as well as the ability of re-socializing criminals and whether they are threat to the society after being released from prison. ***The Red Spider*** is a unique project that combines all of Marcin Koszałka's talents and obsessions. I'm very happy and glad that Marcin decided to accept my offer of making this film.



THE RED SPIDER VERSUS THE REAL STORY

The Red Spider screenplay is inspired by a story of two serial killers that terrorized Krakow in the 1960s. The first one, Karol Kot, the only teenage serial killer known to date, inspired the character of Karol Kremer. The other one, the eponymous Red Spider, had more of an indirect influence on the film.

Karol Kot: “Vampire” from Krakow

Karol Kot was a good student, played sports and was kind to his neighbors and at the same time he attempted killing 14 people and succeeded in murdering two: an older woman and a little boy. Press and the police called him *The Vampire*. The city was crawling in fear, the children had a curfew, and even adults were reluctant to leave their homes after dark.

When Kot was arrested, he instantly became a local star. People couldn't associate him with his horrible crimes. Those who had met Karol Kot at the time, remembered him as a handsome boy with really good manners, not a monster. Disbelief in him being capable of those awful crimes also had to do with the communist propaganda that claimed that serial killers are products of the western capital society. Before Karol Kot, serial killers were hunted, arrested and convicted in secret. His case was the first public one — naturally for propaganda reasons. The Communist party wanted to show Polish nation how well they are protected. As many other actions carried out by the communists, this one also brought on the opposite effect.

Karol Kot was very talkative and offered a lot of details when officers and prosecutors asked about his murders. He seemed to be very proud of the killings and never regretted them. He said that he wanted to be remembered, to *make history* and wasn't bothered by the fact that he had to lose his life in the process. During his trial, Kot was allowed to take his high school final exams. His mental abilities were never questioned, nor was his

sanity. Karol Kot was sentenced to death and hanged on May 16th, 1968.

After his death Karol Kot became an urban legend. Marcin Świątlicki, a Krakow-based poet wrote a poem about him. There are some visual artists and painters, who got inspired by Karol Kot's deeds. Nevertheless the story told in *The Red Spider* is pure fiction. It's not a thriller, not a crime film, not even a biopic. The director is more interested in asking the question why someone becomes a killer than giving clear and direct answers. As Luis Buñuel once said: *Revealing a secret is like violating a child: that's the worst thing you can do.*

Lucjan Staniak: “Red Spider”

Lucjan Staniak is the only Polish criminal mentioned in the *The Encyclopedia of Serial Killers*, written by Michael Newton and published in the USA in 2004. In 1967 Staniak was arrested in his apartment at Aleja Wyzwolenia 117 in Katowice after killing and eviscerating 20 women. After every murder he sent a letter to a local newspaper written with his own blood. The only problem is that there is no Aleja Wyzwolenia in the city of Katowice and there was no Lucjan Staniak. No one knows who made him up and why people believed in this chilling story for almost 50 years. The fictional *Red Spider* inspired Koszałka to create the character of the Vet. He is a mentor of young Karol Kremer and impresses him with his charisma, courage and cunning.

The Red Spider plays with truth, false and made up beliefs. Choosing the name of the fabricated serial killer for the title of Koszałka's film is just another element of this game. Who is *The Red Spider* in the film? The Vet, Karol or maybe Communism? You watch it, you decide.



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR MARCIN KOSZAŁKA

Marcin Koszałka is a Cracow-based Polish documentary film director and cinematographer. His documentary films have been screened and acclaimed at many international film festivals including festivals in Nyon, Karlovy Vary, Jihlava, Cracow and Trento. He has a reputation for choosing controversial subjects for his films. The protagonist of his first documentary, “Such a Beautiful Son I Gave Birth to”, was his own mother. The recurring theme of his films is death and the fear of dying. Koszałka also worked as a cinematographer on many Polish feature films and lensed all of his own movies. **The Red Spider** is his feature film debut.

Selected filmography as Director

1999 *Takiego pięknego syna urodziłam / Such a Beautiful Son I Gave Birth to*
2003 *Imieniny / Name-day*
2003 *Made in Poland*
2004 *Jakoś to będzie / It'll Be OK*
2006 *Cały dzień razem / Whole Day Together*
2006 *Śmierć z ludzką twarzą / Death with Human Face*
2007 *Istnienie / Existence*
2010 *Deklaracja nieśmiertelności / Declaration of Immortality*
2012 *Będziesz legendą, człowieku / Man, you'll be a legend*
2012 *Zabójca z lubieżności / Killing out of lust*

Selected filmography as Cinematographer

2004 *Pręgi / Welts*
2009 *Rewers / Reverse*
2011 *Uwikłanie / Entanglement*

What is “The Red Spider”?

It’s a film for a smart audience, who wants to be challenged. Also, it’s a film for viewers who are interested in cinema as form of art. Those who expect a crime movie or a classic thriller may leave the screening disappointed, but I didn’t want to make a classic genre film. I wanted to explore the cinematic language. I worked on **The Red Spider** slowly, so that I could precisely design and engineer the plot, themes and style. I needed that in order to leave a lot of space for the audience. I believe that one of the worst things you can do in the cinema is to show all your cards and reveal all the secrets. I also wanted the audience to remember and relive **The Red Spider** for days, hopefully weeks, after the screening.

What was important to you in the creative process behind “The Red Spider”?

I feel tired of certain cinema formulas — its clichés and repeatability. I wanted to make a film in which the audience could notice and feel my personal stamp, my personal vision of the world. I am referring not only to the plot and themes of the film, but also its production design, colors, cinematography and sound effects. I wanted the atmosphere to evoke 50 per cent of the audience’s emotions. The other half is created by the actors and interactions between them.

Let’s talk about the style: you are known for sharp and edgy documentaries. However, “The Red Spider” is very subtle. Why did you choose this particular style?

Many people are surprised that I, a documentary director, use such sophisticated language. That’s good, because I like to surprise people. I think that the fictional stories should be told with a refined language, without too many distractions or too many details. While I wasn’t directly inspired by any director, those I admire most, like Michael Haneke, hide everything of importance beneath the surface in their movies. The audience have to dig it out by themselves. If I used sharp language in **The Red Spider** the effect would be trivial, boring, maybe even pretentious. Showing realistic scenes of murder does not have a stronger effect on the audience.

Why does the film take place in the 1960s? Is “The Red Spider” a metaphor of the communist system that poisoned the minds of so many people in Poland?

I actually cut my film off from politics. There are only traces of it, like bits and pieces my characters hear on the radio. **The Red Spider** directly has nothing to do with communism, but the atmosphere of Krakow in the 1960s — the music, style, mood, empty streets — helped me a lot in establishing the tone of the film. That era was dark and empty. If I wanted to place the action of the film in contemporary

Krakow, I would have to shoot in the middle of the night, though even then the city is not so dark and empty.

Why did you choose to star Filip Pławiak and Adam Woronowicz in the film?

I found Filip through audition. It’s his first big, important and such complex part. I chose him, because I needed an actor who has high self-awareness and is intuitive in his acting and who, at the same time, has little experience. If I could find a really talented non-actor, I would seriously consider him for the part. I needed someone who wouldn’t play Karol Kremer as an evil character. I needed someone who would suggest more complex emotions — anxiety, childishness, uncertainty, but also fascination with what the Vet did. It had to be someone who would leave space for the imagination. Think about this young actor from *We need to talk about Kevin* — when you see his face, it immediately becomes clear that in the end of the film he will kill someone. Adam Woronowicz is a different case. He is one of the best Polish actors of his generation. I asked him to play the Vet without an audition. He suits perfectly for the part of an ordinary-looking guy in a beret. In his warm face there is a shadow of agitation and dread.

You’re a very successful documentary director. Why did you do a feature film?

I wanted to broaden my horizons and to be challenged. I’m that kind of director who can’t sit in one place and constantly needs to do something new and to grow. Also, what fascinated me is that in feature films I can create anything, I can build the story from scratch and this is a big challenge, like a sports race. And I have no moral constraints that I felt when making documentaries, but it is only natural for this latter genre. But I am not finished with making non-fiction films. I don’t need to be. I will be still doing them as well as features.

INTERVIEW WITH FILIP PŁAWIAK - Karol Kremer

How did you get involved with "The Red Spider"?

I auditioned for the part. After a call back there was only me and one other actor left. Marcin sent me the script, I read it and we met to talk about it. He made a really good impression on me, being so involved in the project, or maybe even crazy about it. We had a great conversation, but I didn't get my hopes up, because the script said that Karol was dark-eyed and dark-haired and so was the other actor. Eventually, Marcin chose me – a blonde guy with blue eyes. Of course, I was happy and excited, but also I was impressed. Marcin is a director with a very clear vision, but also he is observant and vigilant – if he sees a better idea, better solution, better dialogue, he can change and adapt his original concept to the new one. I'm guessing he learned that when he was making documentaries – to be open to whatever the situation brings you.

What can you say about your creative process?

Marcin wanted to tell the story of *The Red Spider* using minimal, subtle means, so he asked me to adjust to that and not to *over-play*. When I was working with him I felt very secure, because Marcin has a great ear – he hears every false note in acting. He didn't want me to study the psychology of serial killers, I could only sit and listen to him talking about it to Adam Woronowicz, who played the Vet. Marcin told me afterwards that he wanted me to become fascinated by evil and murders in a way my character did: gradually. We had the same process in terms of my relation with Adam Woronowicz. Before the shooting we barely knew each other. Marcin didn't want us to spend too much time together. So I was getting to know Adam better, pretty much the same time my character was meeting his mentor. It was Marcin's method and I think it worked well.

What can you say about your character?

He is an ordinary guy, brought up in a normal family. I think that part of him has always been fascinated by the dark side of human nature and it was triggered when he saw a dead boy at the funfair. Karol was turned on, excited. Most people would be scared and would run to find a policeman, but not Karol. He wanted to meet the murderer, even though he wasn't sure why. It was an impulse, instinct... Karol felt like the most un-special guy... Why did he continue to pursue evil? Now that's the question we want our audience to answer.



INTERVIEW WITH ADAM WORONOWICZ - The Vet

How did you prepare for playing the Vet?

I had an opportunity to talk to a crime psychologist who is also a profiler. He was one of the four people trained by the FBI in Poland in the 1990s. He is an expert in his field, his lectures are usually crowded. I've read a lot about serial killers, I've read descriptions of their every crime. Those books opened up the gate to the dark realm of murder, obsession and violence. But not even the best book can give an answer, why serial killers do what they do. Their psyche is impossible to penetrate, even top psychologist can't really get to the bottom of it.

Has any serial killer ever explained why do they kill?

I haven't met any actual serial killer. But from what I read, I know that they can't really explain what drives them. They don't feel constant urge to kill, they say that there comes one moment, when they just can't restrain the dark side of their nature. Then they act on an instinct, like animals. After this moment passes, they act normal. Each of them has different gaps between murders, it may be a month, few years, decades even. That's why it is so difficult to profile and hunt down a serial killer. Also, they have unique modus operandi – each of them has his own murder weapon or killing method. So I could only imagine that taking life is like taking a strong drug. And once the criminal feels hunger, he can't refrain from his addiction.

Vet is ordinarily-looking guy. Is this intentional?

What we observed is that serial killers are not extraordinary. It's not like they're *übermensch* or have superpowers. These men usually lead double-life, they have regular home, normal family, they're clean and polite. When police arrests a serial killer, people who know him are usually very surprised, that their quiet neighbour did something so gruesome and horrible. Marcin Koszałka wanted to convey that.

The Vet has his moment, but other than that Marcin didn't want him to be weird, dark character, living in a basement with a lot of cats, boiling some disgusting stews. We wanted the Vet to be a mystery, even to himself. Paradoxically the ordinarily-looking serial killer character makes stronger impression on the audience. When they're watching the film they feel safe, because it's fiction, but then they leave the theatre and notice there are so many men wearing dark coats and berets...

Can you say something about the nature of a relationship between young Karol and the older Vet?

It's complex. They are both very mysterious, withdrawn characters. They have very rich inner world, so they're hard to get to know. You can say that in a way they're reflecting each other. Don't get me wrong: Karol doesn't see his future self in the Vet, nor the Vet sees his younger self in Karol. They have similar obsession, similar urge and when a Vet looks at Karol he can see himself, like in a mirror.



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design: Michał Zakrzewski



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