



Trailer

Max Bergmann:

This is the story of how a Russian asset became president of the United States. It is possibly the greatest espionage success story in modern history. Donald Trump, a reality TV star,

[Donald Trump:](#)

You're fired.

Max Bergmann :

an oft-bankrupt businessman,

Tim O'Brien:

And the lawyer puts the chips into the briefcase and the cash goes into the window and Donald's managers then take the cash and use that to make the debt payment that they needed to make in order to stave off bankruptcy. It completely flouted casino regulations.

Max Bergmann:

and a man plagued by scandal.

[Anderson Cooper:](#)

You said "locker-room banter." You described kissing women without consent, grabbing their genitals. That is sexual assault. You bragged that you have sexually assaulted women. Do you understand that?

Max Bergmann:

Somehow Donald Trump becomes president of the United States. But despite all of its complexity, the story of Trump and Russia is also a rather simple tale. A man who is corrupt in his personal life and corrupt in his business life is offered help by a hostile foreign power to win an election and he accepts it.

[Donald Trump:](#)

Russia, if you're listening, I hope you are able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing.

Max Bergmann:

This is a story about greed, about doing whatever it takes to stay afloat and get ahead. It's also the story of an American adversary, Russia. An adversary looking to hit back and weaken the United States of America. And ultimately it is a story about two campaigns: One run out of Trump tower, the campaign to elect Donald Trump, and one run out of the



Kremlin, the Russian campaign to elect Donald Trump. These campaigns shared the same goal, same tactics, and same strategy. And there was no bright line separating these campaigns. They were in constant contact. They were communicating, and yes, they were colluding.

[Newscast](#) :

Reporter: President Putin did you want President Trump to win the election and did you direct any of your officials to help him do that?

Vladimir Putin: Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

Max Bergmann:

There is so much to sift through in the 448 pages of Special Counsel Robert Muller's report. But despite all the answers it contains, the report fails to explain the why: Why was Donald Trump so eager to praise Putin? Why did the Trump campaign take policy positions favorable to Russia, and why, as president, has Trump been so eager to embrace the Russian president, even in the face of intense political blowback? To understand why, we need to do more than just read the report. We need to take a step back. The Trump-Russia story has been so bewildering that it is easy to lose the plot. With so many leaks and bombshell reports, arrests and convictions, over such a long period, it is like we have been staring at an impressionist painting two inches from the canvas. Up close all you can see are brush strokes. If you don't take a step back, you can't make out what you're looking at. But when you do take that step back, it becomes abundantly clear that Donald Trump is a Russian asset. This may sound like hyperbole, but Trump has done more to advance Russia's interests than almost anyone.

Angela Stent:

President Trump's view of President Putin is somewhat mysterious. This is the only major world leader whom he's never criticized. He stood next to President Putin and said that he believed President Putin when President Putin said that Russia didn't interfere in the US elections, completely contradicting, obviously, the conclusions of his own intelligence agencies.

Max Bergmann:

He is financially entangled with Russian money.

Luke Harding:



Trump was basically synonymous with money laundering. He was the guy that, if you'd stolen money in Moscow, you could dump a bag of cash on his table or go and see him and you could buy a condo in New York or or wherever.

Max Bergmann:

And Trump has backed and supported Putin when it makes no sense to do so. This has seemed so inexplicable. But it's not. The question is, whether Trump is a witting asset, the type you think of in spy movies deliberately working on behalf of the Kremlin, or is he an unwitting asset, acting on behalf of Russia without even realizing he's being used.

Asha Rangappa:

He is incredibly easy to manipulate.

John Sipher:

He grew up very comfortable working outside the system, very comfortable working with mafia kind of people.

Asha Rangappa:

A lay person can see that it's very easy to get him to behave in very predictable ways.

John Sipher:

Clearly a zipper problem over the years.

Asha Rangappa:

If you, for example, if you flatter him, he will bend over backwards to kind of keep that praise coming.

John Sipher:

Of those vulnerabilities where you're looking for, to manipulate, you know, he exhibits essentially all of them.

Asha Rangappa:

He is very motivated by money.

John Sipher:

And so, in terms of a target, he, he's a beautiful target for the Russians.



Asha Rangappa:

And so, you know, I don't think you would actually need to be like, "Donald you are now a spy for Russia" to be able to use him and, and use those vulnerabilities that he has. Exploit them to your benefit.

John Sipher:

If I remember correctly, it's called Polecni Durak, which is the essentially, you know, useful idiot.

Max Bergmann:

I'm Max Bergmann, and for years I worked at the State Department on sensitive military and national security issues under Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry. I now run an initiative for the Center for American Progress Action Fund called The Moscow Project. And for the past two years we have been examining Russia's interference in the 2016 election. And so, over the next 10 episodes of this podcast, we are going to take everything we learned over these past two years and help you make sense of the biggest political scandal in American history. To do so, we are going to go back decades starting with the son of a real-estate mogul trying to make a name for himself, to the collapse of a superpower and the rise of its new leader. We will take you from the skyscrapers of Manhattan to the casinos of Atlantic City, from a KGB outpost in East Germany to a revolution in a square in Kiev. And eventually from the Kremlin in Moscow directly to the White House in Washington. This is The Asset.

David Corn:

Trump helped an attack against the country.