

Was Len Sassaman the real Satoshi? We asked his widow about new HBO exposé

People & culture



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- Polymarket punters think the HBO documentary will point to late American cryptographer Len Sassaman as Bitcoin's creator.
- Sassaman's widow Meredith L Patterson shares her views with DL News.
- Sassaman is one of many candidates, including Nick Szabo, Hal Finney,

and Adam Back, believed to potentially be Satoshi.

The true identity of Bitcoin's pseudonymous creator, Satoshi Nakamoto,



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The debate has just been reignited, with US network HBO's fresh shot at solving the mystery. Its new documentary, titled "Money Electric: The Bitcoin Mystery," airs on Tuesday. Since Bitcoin's inception in 2009, various names have been floated as the real creator. But according to [a slight majority of bettors](#) on Polymarket, the documentary will point to late American cryptographer Len Sassaman.

Sassaman, who died in 2011, isn't Satoshi, says his widow, Meredith L Patterson. And HBO never even approached her when making the documentary, she told *DL News*, "which is the strangest thing about all this to me."

HBO has not disclosed whether the documentary will reveal the identity of Satoshi, or if anyone will be identified at all.

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"I kind of wonder whether I'm screwing with the prediction markets by answering honestly when people ask me questions, but long story short, fuck em," Patterson told *DL News*.

But Sassaman's best friend, Bram Cohen, seems more open to leaving the possibility on the table.

The real Satoshi?

The great mystery surrounding Bitcoin has persisted since Satoshi released a nine-page white paper outlining the cryptocurrency's design over 15 years ago. As the largest holder of Bitcoin — [worth some \\$67 billion](#) — Satoshi, whether an individual or a group, ranks among the world's wealthiest.

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Patterson, a security researcher based in Belgium, told *DL News* that her belief that Sassaman is not Satoshi has remained unchanged. “The best case against him being Satoshi is some newbie mistakes in the design of the original protocol, like being able to send to an IP address,” she told *DL News*.

She's referring to early versions of Bitcoin, where users could send Bitcoin directly to an IP address, simplifying transactions but compromising privacy. This feature exposed users to the risk of eavesdropping and tracking, as IP addresses could be easily linked to identities. Satoshi later removed the feature to make Bitcoin transactions truly anonymous.

The suggestion that Sassaman could be Satoshi Nakamoto is not a new one. When similar claims circulated in 2022, Patterson [refuted them](#), emphasising that Sassaman was “a Mac user.” Early Bitcoin development was focused on Linux, and Satoshi [had to ask for help](#) building the MacOS version, which is the operating system used by Apple devices like the MacBook.

But not everyone close to Sassaman dismisses the possibility.

Bram Cohen, founder of popular peer-to-peer protocol BitTorrent and now the tokenisation project Chia Network, [lived and closely collaborated](#) with

Sassaman. In 2021, he [said](#): “Len posted pseudonymously on the cypherpunks list constantly,” though he didn’t know the pseudonym. Cypherpunks is the mailing list where Satoshi announced Bitcoin.



“Len also tried to get me to publish BitTorrent pseudonymously, which seems indicative of something,” Cohen [said](#) at the time.

Cohen, who told *DL News* that Sassaman was his best friend, said he has no insight into what that documentary will find. He also said that he has already shared publicly what he feels comfortable discussing on the subject and does not wish to elaborate further.

Why Sassaman?

In addition to his aptitude in cryptography and involvement in the same mailing list as the Bitcoin creator, there are several reasons why some people speculate that Sassaman might have been Satoshi.

One is the timing of Sassaman's death, which coincided with Satoshi's disappearance from public communication. Satoshi sent [his final known email](#) in April 2011, just a few months before Sassaman took his life in July that same year.

Another intriguing detail that fuels the speculation: a [reference found](#) in Satoshi's writings to [an obscure academic conference](#) that took place in 1999 near the Belgian city of Leuven — the same city where Sassaman later earned his PhD. Sassaman [did not list](#) this conference among those he attended, and its proceedings were [likely accessible](#) online.

One of his doctoral advisors, Bart Preneel, [told](#) the Belgian newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* on Monday that he finds it “highly unlikely that one of his old protégés would be the unknown founder of Bitcoin.”

Preneel did not immediately respond to *DL News*' request for comment, nor has Sassaman's other doctoral advisor, David Chaum.

Interest in Sassaman as the real Satoshi has endured, said Patterson, but not as intensely as before.

“This time around, people are actually being less nosy, if anything. I used to get a lot of DMs that were like, ‘Where were you on the following dates?’ with a list as long as your arm of dates from 2009–2011.”

“And now it's mostly people DMing to say, ‘[Your cats](#) are really cute’ and, ‘Thank you for supporting anonymity and privacy,’” Patterson said.

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