

Lights, camera, fabrication

A high-budget online docudrama claims crime boss Daniel Kinahan is the victim of a conspiracy between a rival gang and the authorities. Crooks always love to rewrite history, finds John Mooney

As video releases go on YouTube, *The Regency: Discover the Truth*, was a short-lived affair. The 15-minute documentary, about the paramilitary-style assault on a boxing weigh-in held at the eponymous Dublin hotel in 2016, was first broadcast on Sunday night but taken down on Thursday over copyright infringement.

No expense had been spared in the making of the production. The docudrama featured actors, dressed as the garda's emergency response unit and carrying imitation AK-47 assault rifles, sweeping through the corridors of a hotel in search of their target, Daniel Kinahan.

At least 100 actors were hired for the shoot, which is thought to have been directed by a Welsh film-maker. Attention was paid to minute details – the producers commissioned a replica of the Regency hotel's welcoming mat – and there were even pyrotechnics: a getaway van explodes after being set on fire on a residential street.

Lloyd James, a Welsh portrait photographer, was hired to play the role of Kinahan, who in real life escaped from the venue by running through an emergency exit, though one of his friends, David Byrne, was shot dead. James dyed his hair and grew stubble to play the role.

The propaganda film suggests the Regency attack was a conspiracy between a rival gang, the gardai and Fine Gael to win the 2016 election. It is a bizarre conspiracy theory, but it had already attracted more than 90,000 views before being taken down on Thursday following a complaint from Independent News & Media, whose material was used without permission.



Industry sources say making the film cost in the region of €300,000. It was uploaded by Scarcity Studios, a YouTube channel run by Douglas Alan Hone, who said he received the film from someone who contacted him anonymously on a "dead account" on Instagram.

"I didn't receive any money to upload it. I just thought it was interesting. It was given to me as something that showed a different version of events about the Regency attack," said Hone, who posts videos of crime on his YouTube channel.

"The claims in the film are not my

claims. I can't confirm anything in it," added the Scarcity manager, who lives in Birmingham. "Maybe I should have put a disclaimer at the beginning of the video to say I wasn't endorsing it, or saying it was factual, as it upset a lot of people. I just thought it was an interesting film."

While the identity of the film's financier is unknown, it is assumed that Kinahan sponsored the film as part of a strategy to rehabilitate his reputation and cast doubt on his involvement in organised crime.

The cartel he controls has already supported the publication of *Blood Feud*, a print-on-demand book that portrayed him in a sympathetic light. Gardai have also identified what they describe as a small army of internet trolls who post favourable content on Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook about Kinahan, who is regarded as the richest criminal in Ireland, if not in Europe.

The British rapper J Spades has also recorded a song, *Major Plans*, about Kinahan, who he claims "helps" lots of people. It has received 1.5 million views on YouTube.

"I can't ever recall a case where a criminal has done something like this for PR purposes," said Brian Sherry, a retired detective inspector who has extensive experience of Dublin's underworld. "Irish criminals tend to keep a low profile."

Security services believe that Kinahan is trying to engage in brand management in order to distance himself from organised crime. Since leaving Ireland in 2016, he has become a significant figure in the glitzy world of boxing promotions and event management.

Kinahan was recently appointed a special adviser to KHK Sports, a company controlled by Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, a member of Bahrain's royal family. Last week the gangster issued a press statement announcing his appointment as a special adviser to KHK Sports and MTK Global to promote mixed-martial arts events in the Middle East. He is also believed to be playing a role in setting up a heavyweight unification title fight between Tyson Fury, part of his MTK Global stable, and Anthony Joshua.

Kinahan is not the first organised crime figure to try to influence public opinion and create a new persona through films, books and social media.

The yakuza of Japan have financed films that portray bosses as men of the people. Pablo Escobar, the Colombian narco-terrorist, spent millions on reputation management by sponsoring hospitals and charitable events while at the same time murdering politicians, police and his rivals.

According to James Densley, a professor of criminal justice at the Metropolitan State University in Minnesota, organised crime groups have often tried to enhance their reputations through such means. "In the 1970s and 1980s, the yakuza bank-rolled films that cast

British rapper J Spades, below, has recorded a song about Kinahan, portrayed by Lloyd James in the film, above, being victimised by 'the feds'

them in a popular light," he said. "These films often made the yakuza appear to be the victim of a government conspiracy. At other times, yakuza bosses were made out to be benevolent patriarchs and the criminal organisation a positive force in society."

He said the yakuza's involvement almost killed the Japanese film industry. "Audiences stopped watching because it was propaganda. Audiences don't like it when history is rewritten," he added.

Densley said organised criminals have always sought to convince the public they are "the good guys".

"The Italian mafia in Naples are handing out small loans to business to help them get through the pandemic, but it always comes with strings attached," said Densley. "Pablo Escobar was another criminal who did this. He wanted to be a folk hero. Escobar tried very hard to try to preserve his reputation as a man of the people."

The academic said that the most compelling aspect of the Regency film is the attempt to portray the Irish government to be a sinister force, while the criminals seek to exonerate themselves from their involvement in crime. According to Densley, this approach is not uncommon for criminals trying to rebrand themselves.

"We are all aware of the saying that gangsters either end up dead or in prison, but there's another story whereby they claim to have turned their backs on crime in order to go legit. People often forget a lot of these people aspire to becoming legit," he added.

Densley described the process whereby criminals try to portray themselves as victims or in a favourable light as "signalling".

"Criminals at the very apex of an organisation often go to great and expensive lengths to signal that they're more than what the police say they are, like spending €500,000 on a film to make themselves look good. They will get involved in charities or associate with public figures who give them credibility. The flip side of this is obviously the fact that these guys are master con artists."

"Just as they once deceived the police and their criminal associates, there is an element of them that finds it easy to deceive those who buy into the new story. A lot of the traits that made them successful in crime are also the traits that enable them to infiltrate polite society."

Will Kinahan manage to erase his past and reinvent himself as a boxing promoter? He is banned from entering the United States, and he is fearful of entering Europe should he be arrested and extradited.

"The Middle East is another matter," pointed out one gardai familiar with the criminal.

"He might just have found a place where people don't ask too many questions, once you have enough money to make friends and buy influence."

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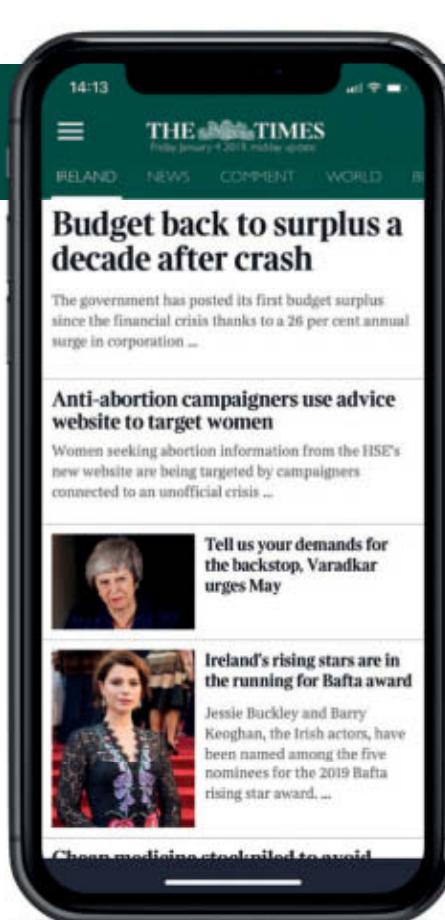


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Criminals at the apex often go to great lengths to signal they’re more than what the police say they are



Kinahan was believed to be the target of the Regency hotel shooting

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Spectre of job losses, polarised society and dissidents

Security experts predict the economic fallout and ensuing civil unrest from a no-deal Brexit could spill over into violence on the border, writes John Mooney

For Ferguson has no doubt about the threat posed by Brexit to his livelihood. The sheep and cereal farmer from Magherhill, Co Armagh, believes the agricultural sector in Northern Ireland would be ruined if the UK left without a deal.

"We would find it difficult to keep things going," said Ferguson, who farms 150 acres of land. "The tariffs on cross-border trade would destroy us. Farmers currently receive 24p [27c] per litre of milk, which means they are already losing money. If they had to pay a further 17p per litre in tariffs, it would finish them," said Ferguson, of the Ulster Farmers' Union. Ulster's agri-food industry is worth an estimated £5bn and employs 70,000 people.

"It's not just the dairy sector that would be affected," said Ferguson. "If there's no deal, we wouldn't be able to export goods without paying tariffs, which would be the cause of financial nightmarés for all of us."

If there is a no-deal Brexit, Ferguson also fears that sinister forces might try to take advantage of the ensuing chaos. "I would have concerns that other elements would make use of the situation for political reasons," he said.



Officer due with a no-holds-barred Belfast in 1972. Analysts fear a no-deal Brexit could encourage a new generation to embrace extremist ideals

and rejected by more nationalists, especially on border counties.

How the border will look post-Brexit and how the EU will protect its single market is the most contentious issue now facing Britain and Ireland. Westminster has told the government it will come from organised crime. If gangs who smuggle tobacco, alcohol and fuel start smuggling everyday goods, such as nappies and

For the moment, gardai and the PSNI are adopting a "hands-off" approach to patrolling the border, which runs for 360km between Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough. The two forces have no plans to police checkpoints on the hundreds of road crossings.

Simon Byrne, the PSNI chief constable, has publicly said his officers will result roughly divided along sectarian lines. Brexit was supported by more unionists

lar, though his team is considering a plan deployed to contain the fort and mount a massive outbreak of 2001 in the event of an unforeseen emergency.

What is the greatest security threat the gardai will face in the event of a no-deal Brexit? In confidential briefings, Harris has told the government it will come from organised crime. If gangs who smuggle tobacco, alcohol and fuel start smuggling everyday goods, such as nappies and

chocolate, it will result in an exponential increase in crime, gun violence and illicit money going into the black economy.

Harris has told the Department of Justice that this would undermine policing, ruin local businesses and help finance terrorist groups.

Few disagree with Harris. Pat Curtis, a former UK customs officer, said crime

gangs would fund terrorist activities

simply to disrupt customs operations. "If they do this, it would ensure fraud and smuggling were lower priority," he said.

Jonny Byrne, a lecturer in criminology at Ulster University, agrees. Like Harris, he suggests organised crime will pose the single biggest problem. "The organised crime architecture is already there, supplying the market. Once Britain leaves the EU, we will have a much bigger market for them – it's just a matter of the criminals expanding it," he said.

Byrne points out that the full consequences of Brexit will not become apparent until it happens. "In security terms, Brexit is still an abstract concept which no one understands, as it hasn't happened yet. It is almost so complex, understanding its security consequences is impossible. Security issues in Northern Ireland are like dominoes. Something happens and there is a response, and then there's a response to that, and so on," said Byrne.

Those familiar with paramilitary groups fear that Brexit has given them a new lease of life. "The threat posed by dissident republicans, to a degree, is the same as it's always been, but Brexit has provided them with a new platform," said Byrne. "It has created questions where there have been none. What happens if customs or the police are attacked? What about the border?"

The New IRA said as much last April when its army council declared it would be remis to not capitalise on the opportunity afforded by Brexit. The paramilitary group, thought to be growing in size, has carried out six attacks so far this year.

Brexit may also serve to revive paramilitary groups such as the Ulster Volunteer Force and Ulster Defence Association, which are using the debate around the issue to recruit new members. This could lead to civil disorders and riots, if not outright conflict.

William Matchett, a retired member of the PSNI who is now a senior researcher at the Kennedy Institute for Conflict Prevention at Maynooth University, believes loyalist groups will inevitably seek to assert themselves if there is any dilution of the north's status within the UK.

"Loyalism is now about creating issues where there are none. Whether it's campaigns about huge bonfires in housing estates, or civil protests against what they perceive to be a bad Brexit deal, they are looking to create issues. Brexit also suits their agenda," said Matchett. The PSNI say loyalist groups are actively involved in gun crime, racketeering and drug dealing.

Loyalists, says Matchett, are already sharing content about Brexit online, and some are turning to organise protests similar to those in 2013 after Belfast city hall decided to erect a flagpole on the Union Jack to celebrate days. The flags issue became a rallying point for people in loyalist communities, some of whom vented their grievances by rioting.

"Could loyalists get people out to protest in large numbers once again and could they expand beyond east Belfast?" asked Matchett. "I just don't know, but I think they might try."

As Varadkar's finance minister stood beside him in the Dail, explaining that this year's budget was predicated on Britain crashing out of the

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Leo and Boris revive flagging hopes of a deal

Thursday was a red-letter day in the quest for a Brexit deal. Have Varadkar and Johnson done enough?

Justine McCarthy

With its lead-lined windows and wood-panelled walls, the decor of the hotel room where Leo Varadkar and Boris Johnson pored over a compromise formula to achieve a Brexit deal could be described as Churchillian.

While the two leaders teased out potential pitfalls over three intensive hours of negotiation on Thursday, their officials waited together in an annex at Thornton Manor, Merseyside. Now, and again some of them were summoned to the meeting room to provide information. The mood, everyone agreed, was convivial.

"Surreal," was how one official later described the new amity in Anglo-Irish relations, which had probably reached their lowest ebb in a quarter of a century just 48 hours earlier.

The Taoiseach had looked tired in the Dail on Tuesday. A television camera caught him swallowing a glass of Pádraig Ó Donnchaidh's water during a budget speech. That morning, Spectator magazine, of which Johnson is a former editor, had reproduced a written Brexit briefing from a Downing Street source. It blamed the Taoiseach for the stalemate in EU-UK talks and predicted they would grind to a halt by the weekend with no hope of reviving them.

"Varadkar doesn't want to negotiate," said the source, who was widely believed to be Dominic Cummings, Johnson's chief adviser.

“Can Johnson navigate a new deal through the House of Commons?

Varadkar was keen on talking before the (Hillary) Benn Act, when he thought the choice would be "a tentative sense of where [the negotiations] could go".

According to one Irish source, the travelling party included Brian Murphy, the Taoiseach's chief of staff; Martin Fraser, secretary-general of the Department of the Taoiseach; Helen Blake, a senior policy adviser; John Callinan, a second secretary-general in the Taoiseach's department who leads the Brexit team; and Nick Miller, the government press secretary.

In Dublin, the briefing was given by Simon Coveney, the tanaiste, said "an element of pressure on Ireland, put pressure on the Taoiseach". When Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, tweeted that "what's at stake is not winning some stupid blame game", Coveney tweeted his agreement.

The prime minister's delegation consisted of Cummings; Mark Sedwill, the cabinet secretary; Edward Lister, Johnson's chief strategic adviser; and John Bew, a member of the Downing Street policy unit.

At their conclusion, the two sides agreed to keep silent about the detail of the discussions. In Johnson's statement, the leaders said they had concentrated on the challenges of customs and consent. "Both continue to believe a deal is in everybody's interest. They agreed that they could see a pathway to a possible deal."

There is conjecture that the new proposal envisages a refined version of the



Leo Varadkar and Boris Johnson met at Thornton Manor in northwest England last week to hash out a possible Brexit deal

is many a slip between cup and lip, and lots of things that are not in my control."

The mood on the plane as it headed back to Dublin was not quite jubilant. The attitude was that the hard work was yet to be done. As Coveney warned: "Mark my words, we are not there yet."

On Friday morning, some of the officials who travelled to Liverpool with Varadkar flew to Brussels to liaise with Barnier, who met with Stephen Barclay, the UK's Brexit secretary. Declaring the meeting "constructive", Barnier then briefed the 27 ambassadors, including Ireland's David Kelleher. They gave him permission to resume talks with the UK.

On Tuesday, Coveney and Helen McEntee, the junior minister for European affairs, will attend a meeting in Luxembourg of the EU's general affairs council to finalise the agenda for the council summit of leaders on Thursday and Friday. The Brexit withdrawal deal will be at the top of the list.

If details of the new proposed deal have not been nailed down in time for the summit, there will be no great panic, according to an Irish source. There will still be 13 days after the summit before the Brexit clock stops ticking. One of the biggest tests ahead, however, is out of the EU's and Ireland's control. Can Johnson navigate a new deal through the House of Commons?

Last Tuesday, there was speculation that the deadline for the Brexit withdrawal deal would be delayed, possibly until June 2020.

There is notably less talk for an extension.

Johnson attends his first leaders' summit as prime minister this week. If all goes according to the plan he and Varadkar have devised, it should also be his last.

Northern Ireland backstop originally agreed in December 2017 with Theresa May, Johnson's predecessor as prime minister.

In the new version, Northern Ireland would have one foot in the UK customs union and the other in the EU's. Through it would leave the EU customs zone, goods crossing the Irish border in either direction would be governed by EU rules.

Goods from Northern Ireland could travel freely to Britain through a green channel, thus getting around the DUP's rejection of a

border in the Irish Sea.

A red channel would apply to UK goods entering the Republic from Northern Ireland. There would be no border checks but there would be provision for spot checks anywhere in Ireland or Britain. The Stormont assembly would allow a vote to end this arrangement by a majority vote of cross-community MLAs. This arrangement would mean no party having a veto.

Whether the EU would consent to resume negotiations on the basis of a half-in/half-out customs

arrangement would not become clear until Michel Barnier, the EU's chief negotiator on Brexit, briefed the EU's 27 ambassadors (permanent representatives) in Brussels on Friday.

Varadkar could hardly wait to open up a press conference at Liverpool John Lennon Airport on Thursday evening, however. "It is possible for us to come to an agreement, to have a treaty agreed to allow the UK to leave the EU in an orderly fashion, and to have that done by the end of October," he said. "But there

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Why I attacked the Quinn companies

A saboteur involved in the campaign of violent intimidation against QIH gives *John Mooney* an insight into his motives

Tis the dead of night in the wilds of Co Fermanagh, and a man who admits to being part of the long-running campaign of sabotage against companies once owned by the former billionaire Seán Quinn is reflecting on the predicament he now faces.

"We were used to do their dirty work. Do I regret getting involved? Yes, I do. It was never about money. No one was paid," he says. "We were told it was all to get the companies back for Seán Quinn and his family. Around these parts, you stand by your neighbours and you don't steal their property. We stood by Quinn."

He is middle-aged, of medium height, and his only distinguishing feature is a strong border accent. Thoroughly immersed in the culture of insubordination that exists in border communities, we will give him the pseudonym Diesel.

Over the course of two interviews with The Sunday Times last week, the man explains why people along the Cavan-Fermanagh border involved themselves in a violent campaign that began after the banks seized control of Quinn's business empire in 2011. He says he knows nothing of a shadowy paymaster, but claims the attacks were directed by a small circle of people, some of whom are part of the staff at Quinn Industrial Holdings (QIH).

Why is he talking now? He suggests it is because the Dublin-based media do not understand what is going on, but have become fixated on a narrative

The saboteurs would throw metal chains from the ground at overhead wires to cause them to short-circuit. This only temporarily stopped production at the factories, however, so they were asked to begin cutting down electricity poles using chainsaws.

"We were told which poles to cut down. He [a named person] told us to cut right through the stay of the pole, or cut them down the middle, halfway through. There were no phones used to organise this. He would call to the house to arrange things," says Diesel.

The organisers seemed to have access to information on what electricity cables to target.

For every attack which took place, five more were aborted. On one night, his group ventured out in the darkness to attack electricity poles on farmland near Kinawley. "We went out to cut poles and one of the men directing it shouted 'stop', because they supplied electricity to local dairy farms. The local farmers wouldn't have been able to milk the cows. It was called off," he says.

Diesel and the other men involved were careful not to get caught. They used a range of different chainsaws after they were told the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) had begun spraying an invisible chemical marker on poles, which tagged any blade that came into contact with them.

Some acts of intimidation involved physical attacks on the factories themselves, using heavy goods vehicles to

out of the company and get it back for Seán Quinn," says Diesel, who suggested that the keys to the vehicle may have been removed from a company safe box earlier.

Running parallel to this were campaigns on Facebook by Concerned Irish Citizens (CIC), which condemned the actions of the banks. Public meetings and protests were also organised to criticise the banks, sometimes attended by those involved in the sabotage.

Diesel is careful not to identify others who helped carry out attacks but insists none of his group was involved in torching O'Brien's car outside his home in Co Meath, or responsible for sending bullets and funeral wreaths to business people interested in buying the company.

The attacks were usually organised by word of mouth. Planning meetings were held in a farmhouse owned by one of the people directing the sabotage, who occasionally participated in the raids themselves. These included the arson attack that caused extensive damage to an isolated electricity sub-station near a wind farm on Slieve Rushen near Derrylin, which Diesel helped set alight in November 2012.

"We met behind the sheds at his farmhouse that night and set off across the fields. There was a lot of talk beforehand. One of their wives was there. The keys were supplied to us so we could get past the rail [outside fence] around the station and then get inside," he says.

"We used a quad to transport the petrol across the fields. When we got inside the station, he [a named person] used these big spanners to take the bolts off the electrical equipment. The petrol was poured into it and then set on fire. When she went up, we all went back to his house. It caused huge damage."

The purpose of the first series of attacks, between 2011 and late 2014, was to prevent Wallace from selling off Quinn's assets to third parties. There was a temporary lull in 2015 when QIH bought some of Quinn's cement and building materials factories for €90m with the backing of the American investors Brigade Capital, Contrarian Capital and Silver Point Capital, but the attacks soon started again.

Although QIH hired Quinn as a consultant to help run the business, the business was targeted four days after its founder's return in January 2015. On that occasion, a lorry parked outside its head office was set ablaze.

This attack was carried out in an attempt to confuse the gardai and PSNI about the group's motives for the earlier incidents.

The attacks against Quinn's other companies near Derrylin continued, though not at the same intensity. Security staff at the wind farm on Slieve Rushen were threatened by masked men, while boulders were used to block the mountainous road leading to it. The road was used by engineers who serviced the turbines. Many of these incidents were allegedly carried out by people who were QIH staff.

By late 2015, the relationship between the local people who carried out the attacks and those who secretly directed them soured when it became known that Quinn would not be taking back control of QIH. The businessman had become embroiled in a bitter row with QIH and subsequently left in May 2016, saying he had been given assurances he would be allowed to run the business but promises had been broken.

"The people who got us involved at the start continued working in QIH after Quinn left. They think no one knows about their involvement in the attacks. They think no one will say anything in case they incriminate themselves," says Diesel, who suggests this is among the reasons why the attacks on QIH have recommenced.

The second tranche of attacks, focusing not just on QIH but its board of directors, commenced before Quinn's departure and have continued since. He has repeatedly condemned all attacks on the business and its staff. Some of these attacks were carried out by Diesel and his accomplices, who sabotaged machinery and put signs up warning local people



Police forensic experts examine a burnt out lorry near the Quinn Group HQ

You stand by your neighbours and you don't steal their property

crash into buildings. As before, those involved were instructed by the same people who had information on how to avoid detection. The attackers were supplied with the keys of company vehicles and told they were unlikely to be caught on CCTV.

Three days before Christmas 2011, Diesel and his accomplices were told to use a rigid lorry to smash into the headquarters of the Quinn Group. The staff canteen had to be demolished afterwards, such was the damage they caused.

"The keys to the lorry used in the attack were left in the dash. There were people on watchtower. We rammed the lorry into the canteen and crashed it. Our instructions were to drive Paul O'Brien recommended.



about QIH and its directors. The signs describe the board members as "money-grabbing traitors".

Diesel says he had no involvement in the more serious attacks on the company's executives, or the kidnapping of Kevin Lunney, the QIH chief executive, from outside his home in Fermanagh. If he does know who organised the abduc-

tion, he is not saying. He claims most local people knew Cyril McGuinness, one of the criminals suspected of involvement in the abduction, to see around the area, but would have been wary of him. McGuinness, 54, died of a suspected heart attack during a police raid 10 days ago at a house in Buxton, Derbyshire.

"Most of the attacks were organised by certain people who used us to do their dirty work," Diesel concludes.

"They stayed in QIH after Quinn left. They are rotten to the core. We were used by these selfish people who now think they can walk away – but they are mistaken. This has a way to go yet."

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