

## Russia-Trump: Who's who in the drama to end all dramas?

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**It's more gripping than any box set we can get our hands on right now.**

The investigations into Russian interference in the US election, and whether the Trump campaign colluded with the Kremlin, continue to deliver daily developments and drama worthy of anything seen in House of Cards.

Thirty-two people have now been charged by Robert Mueller, the special counsel investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Here is your viewer's guide to the main characters in the first three seasons of the only political drama that matters.

Season One - The Election

**This is the season in which Donald Trump, the reality TV star, takes centre stage in his own political drama by launching a presidential campaign. He's supported by his family and gets the attention of the Russians. The season ends with a cliffhanger - could Trump the outsider actually win?!**

**It's been a while since all of this happened, so let's remind you of the key players in this season.**

Donald Trump  
The Boss



**Who is he?** Donald Trump, the billionaire candidate (who by Season Three is the 45th president of the United States). If you really need a refresher, [here's his life story](#).

**Key plot line** As Donald Trump was busy traversing the country canvassing for votes, US intelligence officials said Russia hacked into the emails of his Democratic rivals.

The question is why? Was the Kremlin trying to alter the outcome of the election, and what did Trump and his campaign know?

What, if anything, did Donald Trump do to try to cover things up in the ongoing Russia investigation?

Paul Manafort  
The Manager



**Who is he?** He was Trump's campaign chairman before being forced to quit over his ties to Russian oligarchs and Ukraine.

**Key plot line** Paul Manafort spent more than a decade as a political consultant in Ukraine. He resigned from the campaign in August 2016, after he was accused of having links to pro-Russian groups there. He also sat in on a crucial meeting with a Russian lawyer who may have been trying to feed the Trump team classified information (more on that later).

In Season Three, the FBI raids his house and he is eventually charged. Manafort is now facing two federal criminal trials - one, on charges of money laundering and illegal lobbying, is due to begin in September. Another, on tax fraud charges, will start in July 2018. He denies all charges.

**Read more:** [The man who helped Trump win](#)



**Who is he?** The president's eldest child. The Trump who we know did meet the Russians - the big question is why.

**Key plot line** The role of Donald Trump Jr in this unfolding saga all comes down to a meeting he had with a Russian lawyer, which was set up by a music publicist (the full details of which come out in Season Three). If it sounds random, then in many ways it is.

In June 2016, the publicist, [Rob Goldstone](#) ▼, offered him a meeting with lawyer [Natalia Veselnitskaya](#) ▼ promising Trump Jr dirt on Hillary Clinton. "This is obviously very high level and sensitive information but is part of Russia and its government's support for Mr Trump," Goldstone wrote. "I love it" Trump Jr replied, and so he invited the pair to Trump Tower, where they met Trump staff [Jared Kushner](#) ▼ and [Paul Manafort](#) ▼

This meeting is the key to much of our plot line because it raises several key questions. Did this amount to the campaign colluding with a foreign government? Why did he agree to the meeting? Don Jr says the meeting was about Russian adoption policy. It's the scene investigators will be playing over and over again as they try to work out if there was any impropriety.

**Read more:** [Trump Jr's habit for making headlines](#)

Season Two - The Transition

**Donald Trump confounds his critics by winning the presidency. But the transition is as gripping as the season before it as Trump picks his cabinet,**

introducing key characters to the mix. The season ends with Trump taking the oath of office on a cold January morning - but there are more twists to come.



**Who is he?** The granite-faced former general who later became the shortest-serving member of Donald Trump's cabinet. He resigned after not being honest about his contact with a Russian official - and was later charged with making false statements to the FBI.

**Key plot line** Michael Flynn was appointed national security adviser just days after the election, against the advice of then-President Obama, who warned Trump not to hire him. Flynn's starring role came in December 2016, when he spoke to the Russian ambassador, [Sergei Kislyak](#)▼.

The Washington Post and New York Times said the men discussed Russian sanctions, and that Flynn later lied to the Vice President Mike Pence about the conversation ([Mr Kislyak said the men discussed only "simple things"](#)).

The substance of those talks eventually led to Flynn being prosecuted as part of the investigation led by special counsel [Robert Mueller](#)▼

On 1 December 2017, [Mr Flynn pleaded guilty](#) to making "false, fictitious and fraudulent statements" to the FBI about what he and Kislyak discussed. The investigation reached Trump's inner circle.

**Read more:** [Out after 23 days - who is Michael Flynn?](#)

Sergei Kislyak  
The ambassador



**Who is he?** Many roads in this drama lead back to Sergei Kislyak, the jolly and charismatic figure, who up until July 2017 was [the Russian ambassador to Washington](#).

**Key plot line** Kislyak's role in this drama is unclear - but he makes several appearances as the man many of our cast have had meetings with. The key questions for investigators are - why were they drawn to him, and what was said? The Russian ambassador spoke to both [Flynn](#) ▼ and [Sessions](#) ▼ - meetings which both Trump officials didn't initially acknowledge took place.

Anything else we should know? Well, Russia fiercely fought back against claims on CNN that Kislyak was a "top spy and recruiter of spies".

Jeff Sessions  
America's top lawyer



**Who is he?** Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III hovered in the background during Season One, when he was an Alabama senator and a trusted Trump adviser, but we really got to know him during Season Two, when he became Trump's nominee for attorney general.

**Key plot line** Sessions is one of a number of Trump's team to meet the Russian ambassador, [Sergei Kislyak](#) ▼ and there are question marks over the nature of those meetings.

Since the FBI investigation focused on the Trump campaign, Sessions stood down from the inquiry. That decision led to plenty of tension, with Trump taking potshot after potshot at Sessions on Twitter.

Sessions has said any suggestion he colluded with Russia is "an appalling and detestable lie".

In January, it was revealed that Sessions had been questioned by Mueller. He appeared to be first member of Trump's cabinet to be interviewed.

**Read more:** [An attorney general dogged by scandal](#)

Season Three - The Presidency

**This is where the drama really picked up and all the plot lines came together. A lot of the background characters we saw in Season One came back with a vengeance and the infighting got nasty - and, don't look now, but the police are circling.**

Natalia Veselnitskaya  
The go-between



**Who is she?** A Russian lawyer with a fearsome reputation who has fought against US restrictions on Russia. But is she a Kremlin stooge?

In November 2017 she told the US Senate: "I operate independently of any governmental bodies".

But in April 2018 she admitted in an interview with NBC News to being an "informant" for Russia's prosecutor general.

**Key plot line** Hers is a small but crucial role - she's the one who [Trump Jr](#)▼, [Kushner](#)▼ and [Manafort](#)▼ met in June 2016, the details of which were disclosed a year later once Trump became president. She says the meeting was to discuss adoptions - but those who helped set it up said she was offering dirt on the Democrats and Hillary Clinton's campaign. That meeting would never have happened without...



The Agalarovs  
The pop star and his dad



**Who are they?** Emin Agalarov is Azerbaijan's biggest pop star, of course. Have you not heard Love is a Deadly Game? Emin helped bring ▼ [Donald Trump](#)'s Miss Universe competition to Russia and the two are close enough to [send each other birthday messages](#). His dad, Aras, is a billionaire who mixes in the highest circles of influence in Moscow.

**Key plot line** Emin is the man who set the wheels in motion on that [Trump Jr](#) ▼ meeting. An email sent to Trump Jr suggests Emin was offering information on the Democrats (Emin says he didn't). The email also says Aras Agalarov had apparently met the "crown prosecutor" of Russia - a role that weirdly doesn't exist - and got information on Hillary Clinton. Are you keeping up?

**Read more:** [The tough-talking networker](#)

Sally Yates  
The defiant lawyer



**Who is she?** One of those supporting characters who came from nowhere to play a massive role in the rest of the season. She was the acting attorney general, until [Sessions](#) ▼ was confirmed in his role. And then she was fired...

**Key plot line** She's the one who informed the White House that [Flynn](#) ▼ had not been truthful about his meetings with the Russians. She argued that the fact the Russians knew about these meetings, and that the White House didn't, made Flynn vulnerable to blackmail. Her reward? [Donald Trump](#) ▼ fired her over an unrelated matter weeks later. She's been a persistent critic of the president ever since.

Rod Rosenstein  
The deputy



**Who is he?** He became deputy attorney general under [Jeff Sessions](#)▼ In the TV drama of the Russia scandal, this is the sort of role that would go to a solid Broadway actor you recognise but can't put a name to.

**Key plot line** Given Sessions stood down from leading the main investigation into the Trump-Russia ties, it fell to Rosenstein to do that job. In a major plot development, he appointed [a special investigator](#)▼ - not a popular move with the White House. He's also the guy who recommended in a letter that FBI chief [Comey](#)▼ be fired. That move proved to be a bit more popular with the president.

**Read more:** [The man at the centre of Comey sacking](#)

Jared Kushner  
The son-in-law



**Who is he?** Married to Trump's daughter, Ivanka, Kushner is the character who is seen but very rarely heard.

**Key plot line** Amid cries of nepotism, he was given a plum White House job as senior adviser to the president with a wide-ranging portfolio. It's his contacts with the Russians during the election campaign and beyond that have led to investigators circling him. In June 2016, Kushner attended THAT meeting with [Donald Trump Jr](#) ▼ and [the Russian lawyer](#) ▼. He says he was so bored he messaged his assistant to call him so he could leave.

Kushner is also another cast member who had repeated contact with Russian ambassador [Sergei Kislyak](#) ▼ - contact that he initially failed to disclose.

**Read more:** [The son-in-law with Trump's ear](#)

Rob Goldstone  
The music man



**Who is he?** A British former tabloid journalist, with a penchant for selfies in silly hats, is perhaps an unlikely addition to the cast, but in most good dramas there's always room for the slightly out-of-place eccentric.

**Key plot line** Rob Goldstone finds his way into Donald Trump's circle of trust thanks to his connections with Russian pop star [Emin Agalarov](#) ▼.

Goldstone manages the pop star, and it was he who contacted [Donald Trump Jr](#) ▼ on behalf of his client to set up that now-infamous meeting at Trump Tower in June 2016. Goldstone sent an email to Trump Jr promising dirt on Hillary Clinton, in an email exchange that is a key piece of evidence in this inquiry.

Another highlight on Goldstone's CV is his work bringing the Miss Universe contest to Russia, and it is through these connections he once met Donald Trump himself.

**Read more:** [The Music Man with a love for hats](#)

James Comey  
The FBI boss



**Who is he?** At 6ft 8in (just over two metres), James Comey is a towering figure, the character who gives little away about himself personally, but has a huge personal role in this story.

**Key plot line** He first entered this drama in Season One, when as head of the FBI he reopened the investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails - just weeks before the election. Democrats blamed him for her loss, Republicans hailed him a hero. That, we thought, was the last we'd seen of him.

Cue Season Three, when months into the Trump presidency, Comey was fired by the new president. In true television drama style, he learned of his sacking as he was watching TV news during a trip to LA. By this point, Comey was heading up an investigation into possible ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. Was this why he was given the heave-ho?

His testimony to the Senate was one of the most gripping scenes in this drama so far, as - under oath - he told politicians he was asked to pledge loyalty to the president - but refused. He also said he was told by Trump to "let go" of the investigation into [Michael Flynn](#) ▼. A character whose stock is still high - it's unclear when he'll next make an appearance.

**Read more:** [The FBI director who took centre stage](#)

George Papadopoulos  
The middle man



**Who is he?** A former election adviser to Trump, although you'd be forgiven if you didn't remember the face. He was in only a few scenes in Season Two, but he had a massive role to play in Season Three, becoming the first person to plead guilty as part of the investigation.

**Key plot line** In late October 2017, court documents emerged showing Papadopoulos had pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about the timing of meetings with alleged go-betweens for Russia.

He falsely claimed that he had met two figures with Russian connections before joining the Trump campaign in March 2016. In fact, he met them after joining the campaign. After lying to the FBI, he deleted an incriminating Facebook account and destroyed a phone.

His guilty plea has the potential to damage the US leader because it relates directly to his campaign, analysts say. And, it turns out, he has been co-operating with Mueller's investigation. What has he revealed? And who has he implicated?

**Read more:** [Why Papadopoulos case matters](#)



**Who is he?** The man who could decide the fate of the Trump presidency.

**Key plot line** Some characters wield a lot of power, but don't have a starring role, such as Robert Mueller, the tall chiselled figure who was appointed as "special counsel" to take over the Russia investigation in the wake of the dismissal of [James Comey](#) ▼. Mueller comes from the same stock as Comey - both are former heads of the FBI. It's led some to accuse Mueller of not being impartial.

There have been reports that the president has considered firing Mueller - but he's still in the job. With a team of more than 15 lawyers, and a staff of more than three dozen, he's working quietly behind the scenes amassing evidence.

Mueller's inquiry runs alongside similar ones being conducted by politicians in Congress - but he's the only one who can press charges against anyone.

He [plays a big part](#) in Season Four onward.

Season Four - The legal fight

**After Season Three ended with the first charges being laid down by Robert Mueller, things really speed up in Season Four. The president's fury with the special counsel investigation increases, but investigators continue to circle.**





**Who is he?** OK, he's not Putin's chef any more, but he once was - now he's the man accused of spearheading Russia's attempts to interfere in the 2016 election.

**Key plot line** A little out of the blue, Mueller announces charges against Prigozhin and 12 other Russians, accusing them of tampering with the US election by (among other things) organising and promoting political rallies in the US.

They're also said to have tried to buy a cage large enough to hold an actress dressed as Hillary Clinton in a prison costume. Russia has dismissed the accusation.

**Read more:** [Seven key takeaways from indictment](#)

**Rick Gates**  
The aide who turned



**Who is he?** He worked alongside [Paul Manafort](#) ▼ as a consultant, and became an aide to the Trump campaign in 2016. He floated around the edges of Season One, so you wouldn't have seen that much of him.

**Key plot line** He was charged along with Manafort, and eventually pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy and lying to investigators (despite maintaining his innocence). His plea deal, and decision to co-operate with investigators, means he may have some interesting things to say - he actually stayed with the Trump campaign for some time after Manafort left, so was right in the middle of things.

***Text by Rajini Vaidyanathan and Roland Hughes; illustrations by Gerry Fletcher***