

= Keyser Söze =

Keyser Söze ( / ˈkɑːzər ˈsoʊzeɪ / KY @-@ zər SOH @-@ zay ) is a fictional character and the main antagonist in the 1995 film *The Usual Suspects* , written by Christopher McQuarrie and directed by Bryan Singer . According to petty con artist Roger " Verbal " Kint ( Kevin Spacey ) , Söze is a crime lord whose ruthlessness and influence have acquired a legendary , even mythical , status among police and criminals alike . Further events in the story make these accounts unreliable , and , in a twist ending , a police sketch identifies Kint 's face as Söze . The character was inspired by real life murderer John List and the spy thriller *No Way Out* , which featured a shadowy KGB mole .

The character has placed in numerous " best villain " lists over the years , including AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Heroes & Villains . Spacey won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor , turning him from a character actor into a star . Since the release of the film , the character has become synonymous with infamous criminals . Analysis of the character has focused on the ambiguity of his true identity and whether he even exists inside the story 's reality . Though the filmmakers have preferred to leave the character 's nature to viewer interpretation , Singer has said he believes Kint and Söze are the same person .

= = Concept and creation = =

Director Bryan Singer and writer Christopher McQuarrie originally conceived of *The Usual Suspects* as five felons meeting in a police line @-@ up . Eventually , a powerful underworld figure responsible for their meeting was added to the plot . McQuarrie combined this plot with another idea of his based on the true story of John List , who murdered his family and started a new life . The name was based on one of McQuarrie 's supervisors , though the last name was changed . McQuarrie settled on Söze after finding it in a Turkish dictionary ; it comes from the idiom " söze boʻmak " , which means " to talk unnecessarily too much and cause confusion " ( literally : to drown in words ) .

Keyser Söze 's semi @-@ mythical nature was inspired by Yuri , a rumored KGB mole whose existence nobody can confirm , from the spy thriller *No Way Out* . Kint was not originally written to be as obviously intelligent ; in the script , he was , according to McQuarrie , " presented as a dummy " . Spacey and Singer had previously met at a screening for *Public Access* . Spacey requested a role in Singer 's next film , and McQuarrie wrote the role of Kint specifically for him . McQuarrie said he wanted audiences to dismiss Kint as a minor character , as Spacey was not yet well @-@ known . Spacey made it more obvious that the character is holding back information , though the depth of his involvement and nature of his secrets remain unrevealed . McQuarrie said that he approved of the changes , as it makes the character " more fascinating " .

= = Fictional history = =

*The Usual Suspects* consists mostly of flashbacks narrated by Roger " Verbal " Kint ( Kevin Spacey ) , a disabled con artist . Verbal has been granted immunity from prosecution provided he assists investigators , including Customs Agent David Kujan ( Chazz Palminteri ) and reveals all details of his involvement with a group of career criminals who are assumed to be responsible for the destruction of a freighter ship and the murder of nearly everyone on board . While Kint is telling his story , Kujan learns the name Keyser Söze from FBI agent Jack Baer ( Giancarlo Esposito ) and demands Kint tell him what he knows .

According to Kint , Söze began his criminal career as a petty drug dealer in his native Turkey . His legendary persona is born when rival Hungarian smugglers invade his house while he is away , rape his wife , and hold his children hostage ; when Söze arrives , they kill one of his children and demand he surrender his business . Instead , Söze kills his own family and all but one of the Hungarians , who he knows will tell the Mafia what has happened . Once his family is buried , Söze targets the Hungarian Mafia , their families , friends , and people who owe them money . He goes underground , never again doing business in person .

Söße 's ruthlessness is legendary ; Kint describes him as having had enemies and disloyal henchmen brutally murdered , along with everyone they hold dear , for the slightest infractions , and he personally murders anyone who can identify him . Even his own henchmen often do not know for whom they work . Over the years , his criminal empire flourishes , as does his legend ; remarking on Söße 's mythical nature , Kint says , " The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn 't exist " , a line borrowed from Charles Baudelaire .

Kint describes how he and his cohorts are blackmailed by Söße , through Söße 's lawyer Kobayashi ( Pete Postlethwaite ) , into destroying a large drug shipment belonging to Söße 's Argentinian rivals . All but Kint and a Hungarian are killed in the attack . Baer believes there were no drugs and the true purpose of the attack was to eliminate a passenger who could identify Söße . Kujan confronts Kint with the theory that Söße is one of the four other criminals with whom Verbal had worked : a corrupt former police officer and professional thief named Dean Keaton ( Gabriel Byrne ) . Kujan 's investigation of Keaton is what involved him in the case .

In the final sequence , it is revealed that the story that Kint had told Kujan is a fabrication , made up of strung @-@ together details culled from a crowded bulletin board in a messy office . The surviving Hungarian describes Söße to a sketch artist : the drawing faxed in to the police station closely resembles Kint . Kujan realizes the fabrication and pursues Kint , who has already been released , his limp gone . He enters a car , driven by " Kobayashi " . As the two drive away , Kujan desperately looks around the crowded streets for him .

= = Reception and legacy = =

A. O. Scott of The New York Times called him the " perfect postmodern sociopath " , and Quentin Curtis of The Independent described him as " the most compelling creation in recent American film " . Jason Bailey of The Atlantic identified the role as turning Kevin Spacey from a character actor to a star . Kevin Spacey received the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance .

The character placed 48th in the American Film Institute 's " AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Heroes & Villains " in June 2003 . Time placed him at # 10 on their list of most memorably named film characters and # 5 in best pop culture gangsters . Entertainment Weekly ranked the character # 37 in their list of the 100 greatest characters of the past twenty years , # 6 in most vile villains , and # 12 in the best heroes and villains . Ask Men ranked him # 6 in their list of top ten film villains . Total Film ranked him # 37 in their best villains and # 40 in best characters overall . MSN ranked him # 4 in their list of the 13 most menacing villains . Empire ranked him # 41 in their " 100 Greatest Movie Characters " poll .

= = = Analysis = = =

In an interview with Metro Silicon Valley , Pete Postlethwaite quoted Bryan Singer as saying that all the characters are Söße . When asked point blank whether his character is Söße , Postlethwaite said , " Who knows ? Nobody knows . That 's what 's good about The Usual Suspects . " Spacey has also been evasive about his character 's true identity . In an interview with Total Film , he said , " That 's for the audience to decide . My job is to show up and do a part ? I don 't own the audience 's imagination . " Singer said the film is ambiguous about most of the character 's details , but the fax sent at the end of the film proves in his mind that Kint is Söße .

Bryan Enk , writing for UGO , states that the myth @-@ making story of Söße 's origins is a classic ghost story that would be right at home in horror fiction . Writing about psychopaths in film , academic Wayne Wilson explicitly compares Söße to Satan and assigns to him demonic motives . Wilson states that Söße allows himself to be caught just to prove his superiority over the police ; this compromises his ultimate goal of anonymity , but Söße can not resist the urge to show off and create mischief . In The Journal of Nietzsche Studies , Lewis Call states that Söße 's mythological status draws the ire of the authoritarian government agents because he " represents a terrifying truth : that power is ephemeral , and has no basis in reality . " According to Call , Söße 's intermediaries ? the " usual suspects " themselves ? are more useful to the police , as they

represent an easily controlled and intimidated criminal underworld , in direct contrast to Söze himself .

Hanna M. Roisman compares Kint to Odysseus , capable of adapting both his personality and his tales to his current audience . Throughout his tale , Kint adapts his confession to Kujan 's revealed biases . Roisman draws direct parallels to Odysseus ' tales to the Phaeacians : like Odysseus , Kint allows his audience to define him and his narrative . Appealing to Kujan 's arrogance , Kint allows himself to be outwitted , humiliated , and broken by his interrogator ; Kint further invents a mythical villain that he credulously believes in and gives Kujan the privileged perspective of the skeptic . Kint thus creates a neo @-@ noir thriller inside of a neo @-@ noir thriller and demonstrates the artificiality of storytelling . Benjamin Widiss identifies post @-@ structural elements to the film , such as the lack of a clear protagonist throughout much of the film . This extends to ambiguity over Kint 's role as author or reader , and whether he is Kint pretending to be Söze or the reverse .

Söze was also subject to detailed fan analysis and debate . Fans contacted Singer personally and quizzed him on explanations for the film 's complicated plot . Fan theories about Söze 's identity became a popular topic on internet forums . After the film 's festival premiere , the ambiguity of Söze 's identity and how to pronounce his name were used in the film 's marketing . Pronunciation had previously been an issue for distributor Gramercy Pictures , who used , " Who is Keyser Söze ? " to demonstrate both proper pronunciation and stoke speculation . The ad campaign was later highlighted by Entertainment Weekly as " question of the year " for 1995 .

= = = In popular culture = = =

Since the release of the film , the name " Keyser Söze " has become synonymous with a feared , elusive person nobody has met . Television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer used the character 's name as part of a slang phrase that means to " definitively manipulate , outmaneuver " . In June 2001 , Time referred to Osama bin Laden as " a geopolitical Keyser Söze , an omnipresent menace whose very name invokes perils far beyond his capability " .

In his 1999 review of Fight Club , which was generally negative , film critic Roger Ebert commented , " A lot of recent films seem unsatisfied unless they can add final scenes that redefine the reality of everything that has gone before ; call it the Keyser Söze syndrome . "

Forbes used the character in a study of what it takes to succeed in business . After positing different hypothetical situations , writer Russ Alan Prince concludes that a number of the " self @-@ made super @-@ rich " would respond to these situations in the same manner as Söze .