

= The Usual Suspects =

The Usual Suspects is a 1995 American neo @-@ noir mystery crime thriller film directed by Bryan Singer and written by Christopher McQuarrie . It stars Stephen Baldwin , Gabriel Byrne , Benicio del Toro , Kevin Pollak , Chazz Palminteri , Pete Postlethwaite and Kevin Spacey .

The film follows the interrogation of Roger " Verbal " Kint , a small @-@ time con man who is one of only two survivors of a massacre and fire on a ship docked at the Port of Los Angeles . He tells an interrogator a convoluted story about events that led him and his partners in crime to the boat , and about a mysterious mob boss known as Keyser Söze who commissioned their work . Using flashback and narration , Kint 's story becomes increasingly complex .

The film , shot on a \$ 6 million budget , began as a title taken from a column in Spy magazine called The Usual Suspects , after one of Claude Rains ' most memorable lines in the classic film Casablanca . Singer thought it would make a good title for a film , the poster for which he and McQuarrie had developed as the first visual idea .

The film was shown out of competition at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival , and then initially released in a few theaters . It received favorable reviews , and was eventually given a wider release . McQuarrie won an Academy Award for Best Writing (Original Screenplay) and Spacey won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance . The Writer 's Guild of America ranks the film as having the 35th greatest screenplay of all time . It is now remembered for having one of the most definitive and popular plot twists in cinematic history .

= = Plot = =

The film opens with criminal Dean Keaton lying badly wounded on a ship docked in the San Pedro Bay . He is confronted by a mysterious figure whom he calls " Keyser " , who shoots him dead and sets fire to the ship ,

The bloodbath on the ship leaves only two survivors : Arkosh Kovash , a Hungarian mobster hospitalized with severe burns ; and Roger " Verbal " Kint , a con artist with cerebral palsy . Customs agent Dave Kujan flies in from New York City to interrogate Verbal , who describes in flashback the events that led him and four other criminals - Keaton , Michael McManus , Fred Fenster and Todd Hockney - onto the ship .

Verbal explains that , six weeks earlier in New York , he and the other criminals were arrested on a trumped @-@ up hijacking charge , and decided to pull another heist to get back at the police . Led by Keaton , a former corrupt policeman , they robbed a group of corrupt cops who transported smugglers in a police convoy . They then went to California to fence the stolen jewels with a criminal named Redfoot . Redfoot turned them on to another jewel heist , but the quarry turned out to be heroin , and the five had to shoot their way out . Soon after , a lawyer named Kobayashi contacted them and told them that Keyser Söze , a Turkish crime lord with a mythical reputation from whom all of the thieves had unwittingly stolen , had offered them a job : invade a ship manned by a gang of Argentinian drug dealers with whom Söze was competing and destroy the \$ 91 million worth of cocaine that they were transporting .

When Kujan learns of Söze from FBI agent Jack Baer , he questions Verbal about him . Verbal tells Kujan an underworld legend about Söze : that he had murdered his own family after they had been attacked by a gang of Hungarian criminals , and then massacred the Hungarians and everyone they held dear . He then went underground , never to be seen again , and did business only through underlings who did not know for whom they were working . He became a fearsome urban legend , " a spook story that criminals tell their kids at night " .

Verbal goes on to explain that , after Fenster had bailed on the group , Kobayashi gave them a location at which to find their compatriot 's dead body . They tried to kill Kobayashi , but he strong @-@ armed them into performing the heist by threatening their loved ones . They staked out the ship and killed several Argentinian and Hungarian gangsters , but found no drugs on board . McManus , Hockney and a man locked aboard the ship were killed by an unseen person , who also killed Keaton and set the ship on fire as Verbal looked on .

Verbal concludes his story , but Kujan does not believe it . He insists that Keaton must be Söze , as one of the murder victims on the boat was Arturo Marquez , a drug dealer who escaped prosecution by claiming he could identify Söze ? and who was represented by Edie Finneran , Keaton 's lawyer and girlfriend . Kujan claims that the Argentinians were selling Marquez to Söze 's Hungarian rivals and Keaton used the heist as a distraction to let him kill Marquez . Kujan also informs Verbal that Finneran has been murdered . Verbal says that the entire plan was Keaton 's idea , but refuses to testify in court . Verbal 's bond is posted and he is released .

Moments later , Kujan realizes that Verbal 's entire story was a lie , pieced together from details on a crowded bulletin board in his office . Meanwhile , Verbal walks outside , gradually dropping his limp and flexing his supposedly withered hand . As Kujan runs after Verbal , a fax comes in from California : a police sketch artist 's rendering of Söze , dictated by Kovaz , that looks exactly like Verbal . Kujan misses Verbal by moments , as the latter disappears into a car driven by " Kobayashi " .

= = Cast = =

Stephen Baldwin as Michael McManus . The actor was tired of doing independent films where his expectations were not met ; when he met with director Bryan Singer , he went into a 15 @-@ minute tirade telling him what it was like to work with him . After Baldwin was finished , Singer told him exactly what he expected and wanted , which impressed the actor .

Gabriel Byrne as Dean Keaton . Kevin Spacey met Byrne at a party and asked him to do the film . He read the screenplay and turned it down , thinking that the filmmakers could not pull it off . Byrne met screenwriter Christopher McQuarrie and Singer and was impressed by the latter 's vision for the film . However , Byrne was also dealing with some personal problems at the time and backed out for 24 hours until the filmmakers agreed to shoot the film in Los Angeles , where the actor lived , and make it in five weeks .

Benicio del Toro as Fred Fenster . Spacey suggested del Toro for the role . The character was originally written with a Harry Dean Stanton @-@ type actor in mind . Del Toro met with Singer and the film 's casting director and told them that he did not want to audition because he did not feel comfortable doing them .

Kevin Pollak as Todd Hockney . He met with Singer about doing the film , but when he heard that two other actors were auditioning for the role , he came back , auditioned , and got it .

Kevin Spacey as Roger " Verbal " Kint . Singer and McQuarrie sent the screenplay for the film to the actor without telling him which role was written for him . Spacey called Singer and told them that he was interested in the roles of Keaton and Kujan but was also intrigued by Kint who , as it turned out , was the role McQuarrie wrote with the actor in mind .

Chazz Palminteri as U.S. Customs Special Agent Dave Kujan . Singer had always wanted the actor for the film , but he was always unavailable . The role was offered to Christopher Walken and Robert De Niro , both of whom turned it down . The filmmakers even had Al Pacino come in and read for the part , but he decided not to do it because he had just played a cop in Heat . Palminteri became available , but only for a week . When he signed on , this persuaded the film 's financial backers to support the film fully because he was a sufficiently high @-@ profile star , thanks to the recent release of A Bronx Tale and Bullets Over Broadway .

Pete Postlethwaite as Mr. Kobayashi , Söze 's right @-@ hand man .

Suzy Amis as Edie Finneran , an influential criminal lawyer and Keaton 's girlfriend .

Giancarlo Esposito as FBI Special Agent Jack Baer ; investigates the boat explosion on the pier .

Dan Hedaya as Sergeant Jeffrey " Jeff " Rabin ; assists in Kujan 's interrogation of Verbal

Peter Greene (uncredited) as Redfoot the Fence ; he not only sets up a job for the five criminals in Los Angeles , but also puts them in touch with Kobayashi .

= = Production = =

== = Origins == =

Bryan Singer met Kevin Spacey at a party after a screening of the young filmmaker 's first film , Public Access , at the 1993 Sundance Film Festival . Spacey had been encouraged by a number of people he knew who had seen it , and was so impressed that he told Singer and McQuarrie that he wanted to be in whatever film they did next . Singer read a column in Spy magazine called " The Usual Suspects " after Claude Rains ' line in Casablanca . Singer thought that it would be a good title for a film . When asked by a reporter at Sundance what their next film was about , McQuarrie replied , " I guess it 's about a bunch of criminals who meet in a police line @-@ up , " which incidentally was the first visual idea that he and Singer had for the poster : " five guys who meet in a line @-@ up , " Singer remembers . The director also envisioned a tagline for the poster , " All of you can go to Hell . " Singer then asked the question , " What would possibly bring these five felons together in one line @-@ up ? " McQuarrie revamped an idea from one of his own unpublished screenplays ? the story of a man who murders his own family and disappears . The writer mixed this with the idea of a team of criminals .

Söze 's character is based on John List , a New Jersey accountant who murdered his family in 1971 and then disappeared for almost two decades , assuming a new identity before he was ultimately apprehended . McQuarrie based the name of Keyser Söze on one of his previous supervisors , Kayser Sume , at a Los Angeles law firm that he worked for , but decided to change the last name because he thought that his former boss would object to how it was used . He found the word söze in his roommate 's English @-@ to @-@ Turkish dictionary , which translates as " talk too much " . All the characters ' names are taken from staff members of the law firm at the time of his employment . McQuarrie had also worked for a detective agency , and this influenced the depiction of criminals and law enforcement officials in the script .

Singer described the film as Double Indemnity meets Rashomon , and said that it was made " so you can go back and see all sorts of things you didn 't realize were there the first time . You can get it a second time in a way you never could have the first time around . " He also compared the film 's structure to Citizen Kane (which also contained an interrogator and a subject who is telling a story) and the criminal caper The Anderson Tapes .

== = Pre @-@ production == =

McQuarrie wrote nine drafts of his screenplay over five months , until Singer felt that it was ready to shop around to the studios . None were interested except for a European financing company . McQuarrie and Singer had a difficult time getting the film made because of the non @-@ linear story , the large amount of dialogue and the lack of cast attached to the project . Financiers wanted established stars , and offers for the small role of Redfoot (the L.A. fence who hooks up the five protagonists with Kobayashi) went out to Christopher Walken , Tommy Lee Jones , Jeff Bridges , Charlie Sheen , James Spader , Al Pacino and Johnny Cash . However , the European money allowed the film 's producers to make offers to actors and assemble a cast . They were only able to offer the actors salaries that were well below their usual pay , but they agreed because of the quality of McQuarrie 's script and the chance to work with each other . That money fell through , however , and Singer used the script and the cast to attract PolyGram to pick up the film negative .

About casting , Singer said , " You pick people not for what they are , but what you imagine they can turn into . " To research his role , Spacey met doctors and experts on cerebral palsy and talked with Singer about how it would fit dramatically in the film . They decided that it would affect only one side of his body . According to Byrne , the cast bonded quickly during rehearsals . Del Toro worked with Alan Shatterian to develop Fenster 's distinctive , almost unintelligible speech patterns . According to the actor , the source of his character 's unusual speech patterns came from the realization that " the purpose of my character was to die . " Del Toro told Singer , " It really doesn 't matter what I say so I can go really far out with this and really make it incomprehensible . "

== = Filming == =

The budget was set at \$ 5 @. @ 5 million , and the film was shot in 35 days in Los Angeles , San Pedro and New York City . Spacey said that they shot the interrogation scenes with Palminteri over a span of five to six days . These scenes were also shot before the rest of the film . The police lineup scene ran into scheduling conflicts because the actors kept blowing their lines . Screenwriter Christopher McQuarrie would feed the actors questions off @-@ camera and they improvised their lines . When Stephen Baldwin gave his answer , he made the other actors break character . Byrne remembers that they were often laughing between takes and " when they said , ' Action ! ' , we 'd barely be able to keep it together . " Spacey also said that the hardest part was not laughing through takes , with Baldwin and Pollak being the worst culprits . Their goal was to get the usually serious Byrne to crack up . They spent all morning trying unsuccessfully to film the scene . At lunch a frustrated Singer angrily scolded the five actors , but when they resumed the cast continued to laugh through each take . Byrne remembers , " Finally , Bryan just used one of the takes where we couldn 't stay serious . " Singer and editor John Ottman used a combination of takes and kept the humor in to show the characters bonding with one another .

While Del Toro told Singer how he was going to portray Fenster , he did not tell his cast members , and in their first scene together none of them understood what Del Toro was saying . Byrne confronted Singer and the director told him that for the lockup scene , " If you don 't understand what he 's saying maybe it 's time we let the audience know that they don 't need to know what he 's saying . " This led to the inclusion of Kevin Pollak 's improvised line , " What did you say ? "

The stolen emeralds were real gemstones on loan for the film .

Singer spent an 18 @-@ hour day shooting the underground parking garage robbery . According to Byrne , by the next day Singer still did not have all of the footage that he wanted , and refused to stop filming in spite of the bonding company 's threat to shut down the production .

In the scene in which the crew meets Redfoot after the botched drug deal , Redfoot flicks his cigarette at McManus ' face . The scene was originally to have Redfoot flick the cigarette at McManus 's chest , but the actor missed and hit Baldwin 's face by accident . Baldwin 's reaction is genuine .

Despite enclosed practical locations and a short shooting schedule , cinematographer Newton Thomas Sigel " developed a way of shooting dialogue scenes with a combination of slow , creeping zooms and dolly moves that ended in tight close @-@ ups , " to add subtle energy to scenes . " This style combined dolly movement with " imperceptible zooms " so that you ? d always have a sense of motion in a limited space . "

= = = Post @-@ production = = =

During the editing phase , Singer thought that they had completed the film two weeks early , but woke up one morning and realized that they needed that time to put together a sequence that convinced the audience that Dean Keaton was Söze ? and then do the same for Verbal Kint because the film did not have " the punch that Chris had written so beautifully . " According to Ottman , he assembled the footage as a montage but it still did not work until he added an overlapping voice @-@ over montage featuring key dialogue from several characters and had it relate to the images . Early on , executives at Gramercy had problems pronouncing the name Keyser Söze and were worried that audiences would have the same problem . The studio decided to promote the character 's name . Two weeks before the film debuted in theaters , " Who is Keyser Söze ? " posters appeared at bus stops , and TV spots told people how to say the character 's name . Despite these efforts , all the actors in the film consistently mispronounce his name as " Soze " instead of " Söze " .

Singer wanted the music for the boat heist to resemble Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky 's Piano Concerto No. 1 . The ending 's music was based on a k.d. lang song .

= = Release = =

Gramercy ran a pre-release promotion and advertising campaign before *The Usual Suspects* opened in the summer of 1995. Word of mouth marketing was used to advertise the film, and buses and billboards were plastered with the simple question, "Who is Keyser Söze?"

The film was shown out of competition at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival and was well received by audiences and critics. The film was then given an exclusive run in Los Angeles, where it took a combined \$83,513, and New York City, where it made \$132,294 on three screens in its opening weekend. The film was then released in 42 theaters where it earned \$645,363 on its opening weekend. It averaged a strong \$4,181 per screen at 517 theaters and the following week added 300 locations. It eventually made \$23.3 million in North America.

= = Reception = =

On Rotten Tomatoes, the film received a rating of 88%, based on 69 reviews, with an average rating of 7.8 / 10. The site's consensus reads, "Expertly shot and edited, *The Usual Suspects* gives the audience a simple plot and then piles on layers of deceit, twists, and violence before pulling out the rug from underneath." On Metacritic, the film has a score of 77 out of 100, based on 22 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".

Roger Ebert, in a review for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, gave the film one and a half stars out of four, considering it confusing and uninteresting. He also included the film in his "most hated films" list. *USA Today* rated the film two and a half stars out of four, calling it "one of the most densely plotted mysteries in memory? though paradoxically, four-fifths of it is way too easy to predict." However, *Rolling Stone* praised Spacey, saying his "balls-out brilliant performance is Oscar bait all the way." In his review for *The Washington Post*, Hal Hinson wrote, "Ultimately, *The Usual Suspects* may be too clever for its own good. The twist at the end is a corker, but crucial questions remain unanswered. What's interesting, though, is how little this intrudes on our enjoyment. After the movie you're still trying to connect the dots and make it all fit? and these days, how often can we say that?"

In her review for *The New York Times*, Janet Maslin praised the performances of the cast: "Mr. Singer has assembled a fine ensemble cast of actors who can parry such lines, and whose performances mesh effortlessly despite their exaggerated differences in demeanor... Without the violence or obvious bravado of *Reservoir Dogs*, these performers still create strong and fascinatingly ambiguous characters." *The Independent* praised the film's ending: "The film's coup de grace is as elegant as it is unexpected. The whole movie plays back in your mind in perfect clarity? and turns out to be a completely different movie to the one you've been watching (rather better, in fact)."

= = = Accolades = = =

McQuarrie was nominated for the Best Original Screenplay and Kevin Spacey was nominated for Best Supporting Actor at the Academy Awards. They both won, and in his acceptance speech Spacey memorably said, "Well, whoever Keyser Söze is, I can tell you he's gonna get gloriously drunk tonight."

The film was nominated as the best film at the 1996 British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA awards). McQuarrie won the BAFTA Award for Best Original Screenplay, and John Ottman won the BAFTA Award for Best Editing. The film was nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards: Best Supporting Actor for Benicio del Toro, Best Screenplay for Christopher McQuarrie and Best Cinematography for Newton Thomas Sigel. Both Del Toro and McQuarrie won in their categories.

Bryan Singer won the Best Debut award at the 1st Empire Awards.

The Usual Suspects was screened at the 1995 Seattle International Film Festival, where Bryan Singer was awarded Best Director and Kevin Spacey won for Best Actor. The Boston Society of Film Critics gave Spacey the Best Supporting Actor award for his work on the film. Spacey went on to win this award with the New York Film Critics Circle and the National Board of Review, which also gave the cast an ensemble acting award.

= = = Legacy = = =

On June 17 , 2008 , the American Film Institute revealed its " AFI 's 10 Top 10 " ? the best ten films in ten " classic " American film genres ? after polling over 1 @, @ 500 people from the creative community . The Usual Suspects was acknowledged as the tenth @-@ best mystery film . Verbal Kint was voted the # 48 villain in " AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Heroes and Villains " in June 2003 .

Entertainment Weekly cited the film as one of the " 13 must @-@ see heist movies " . Empire ranked Keyser Söze # 69 in their " The 100 Greatest Movie Characters " poll .

In 2013 , the Writers Guild of America ranked the screenplay # 35 on its list of 101 Greatest Screenplays ever written .

American Film Institute Lists :

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Thrills ? Nominated

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Heroes and Villains :

Keyser Söze / Verbal Kint ? # 48 Villain

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Movie Quotes :

" The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn 't exist . " ? Nominated

AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Movies (10th Anniversary Edition) ? Nominated

AFI 's 10 Top 10 : # 10 Mystery Film (also Nominated Gangster Film)