

## the Usual Suspects

USA, 1995, Colour  
 Certificate 18, 105 minutes

### Cast

McManus	Stephen Baldwin
Dean Keaton	Gabriel Byrne
Fenster	Benicio del Toro
Hockney	Kevin Pollack
Verbal Kint	Kevin Spacey
Dave Kujan	Chazz Palminteri
Kobayashi	Pete Postlethwaite
Jack Baer	Giancarlo Esposito
Edie Finneran	Suzy Amis
Jeff Rabin	Dan Hedaya

Director	Bryan Singer
Screenplay	Christopher McQuarrie
Cinematography	Tom Sigel
Music	John Ottman
Producers	Michael McDonnell Bryan Singer et al

**FIVE CRIMINALS ... ONE LINE-UP ...  
 NO COINCIDENCE**



While awaiting release from police custody, small-time crook 'Verbal' Kint (Kevin Spacey) recounts the stages of a big-time robbery that ended in tragedy for his co-conspirators when a cargo ship was engulfed by fire at San Pedro harbour, California. However, be warned ... Verbal likes to talk and not all he says to investigating US Customs agent Dave Kujan (Chazz Palminteri) is necessarily "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me, God"!

So, who are the five criminals, brought together in a New York police line-up some weeks before the San Pedro incident, apparently by chance, following a truck hijack? Firstly, there's former cop Dean Keaton (Gabriel Byrne), a convicted smuggler trying to go straight; secondly, Todd Hockney (Kevin Pollack), an explosives expert; thirdly, Michael McManus (Stephen Baldwin), who specialises in breaking and entering, plus Fred Fenster (Benicio Del Toro) his partner in crime; and finally, Verbal Kint, (Kevin Spacey), a weasel of a con-man, out of his depth in this company.

As Verbal's tale unfolds, via a series of flashbacks, one question begins to loom large in the viewer's mind - Who is Keyser Soze? - because *The Usual Suspects* is not a "whodunnit" or a "why-did-they-do-it", but a "who-made-them-do-it". The shadowy presence of the mythical underworld boss is always there, just beyond the edges of the screen, as Verbal continually refers to his influence. As the gang gets drawn deeper into the plot, Soze sends his emissary to meet with Keaton, in the form of Anglo-Pakistani (honest!) lawyer Kobayashi, played by the ever-reliable Pete Postlethwaite, who needs all his advocacy skills to avoid a "shoot-the-messenger" scenario.

As has already been said, not everything that Kint says to Kujan is necessarily true, so don't try to sew the plot together into a seamless whole - it'll all make sense in the end. (Incidentally, what's this obsession that scriptwriter Christopher McQuarrie has with names beginning with K - Kint, Kujan, Kobayashi, Keaton, Keyser Soze?). The quality of the images, the snappy dialogue, and the cross-editing result in a very satisfying roller coaster ride through the brief existence of the Keaton outfit.



Pete Postlethwaite, Stephen Baldwin Gabriel Byrne

Gabriel Byrne puts in one of his best performances in years - how can anyone wear a custard yellow suit without laughing? - whilst Kevin Spacey follows up his tour-de-force in *Seven* with an Oscar-winning portrayal of Verbal Kint. Rising star Chazz Palminteri confirms his promise after *Bullets Over Broadway* and Stephen Baldwin is rapidly improving to challenge his more illustrious brothers William and Alec. However, it is the unknown Benicio Del Toro, as the jerky, almost unintelligible, Fenster who catches the eye in all the scenes where he is present. Only Kevin Pollack's explosives expert is relatively nondescript.

Whilst Bryan Singer and Christopher McQuarrie are clearly riding the post-Tarantino noir wave, *The Usual Suspects* betrays the influence of Alfred Hitchcock (who upset critics and audiences in 1950 by employing misleading flashbacks in *Stage-fright*) and early Stanley Kubrick - another 'K' name - who employed flashbacks in *The Killing* and was at the forefront of realism in crime thrillers. Finally, another influence is revealed in the film's title, which comes from *Casablanca*, when cynical police chief Claude Rains orders his men to "Round up the usual suspects" when investigating a terrorist bombing. Perhaps *The Usual Suspects* is not in the same league as *Casablanca*, but it was undoubtedly one of the most compelling films of 1995. Sit back and enjoy it.

IAN SOWERBY

## SITUATION SOON-TO-BE VACANT

As you may have read in the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 13 August, the post of Hon. Secretary will be vacated in December(-ish). So far, no-one has volunteered to take on the Committee work, although the preparation of notes and the collation of reactions have been snapped up.

The Hon. Secretary's role is not very onerous: the main duties are minuting meetings and preparing agendas, all of which is done in consultation with the Chairman. Other matters crop up from time to time, but the successor to the outgoing Hon. Sec. inherits a file full of material which can be used as models for just about any contingency. There are even a couple of diskettes with Word templates on them if you have the wherewithal to use them.

If you are interested in discussing the work of the Hon. Secretary, please come and talk to the present incumbent, Gill Rollings, or the Chairman, Iain McGlashan. If you would be interested in joining the Committee without committing yourself to a particular role, talk to any of the Committee members - new blood is always welcome.

## ONE WORLD WEEK AT WNCC

One World Week runs from 20-27 October this year. Each season, the WNCC Committee tries to select a film which has a connection with the theme for that year's One World Week: this year, the theme is "Living On The Edge". We're being encouraged to consider the difference between 'living on a knife edge' and 'living at the leading edge'. Our contribution is the film *Once Were Warriors*, being shown the week before (well, our timetabling isn't always perfect!) - it should give us plenty of food for thought.

For the last four years, Gill Rollings has set up a Traidcraft stall at the One World Week film and this year will be the last time (yes, I'm giving that up as well). The stall will comprise a small selection of foodstuffs, paper goods, jewellery and crafts.

## FROM THE COMMITTEE PAPERS

At its meeting on 9 September, the Committee decided not to proceed with Special Events in February and September 1997. The poor turnout at the September 1996 Science Fiction Day and the need to exploit the move to Kemp Room, which will return the Club to the centre of Woking, both seemed to indicate that the efforts put into organising a Special Event could be better used in another direction.

The 1995-6 accounts have been prepared and are available for inspection along with Committee papers at Club meetings. If you have any questions regarding the accounts, please feel free to talk to the Hon. Treasurer, Neville Ledsoe.

## NOTES AND NEWS

If you wish to write the notes for one of the films in the latter half of this season, please contact Ian Sowerby. Ian supplies lots of background information (which can include reviews, biographies of cast and directors, World Wide Web pages - anything that comes his way) and will be taking over the preparation of the notes in the new year.

Similarly, if you have any recordings which would be suitable for playing before and after the film and during the interval, please contact a member of the Committee. Soundtrack albums are an obvious source but if you have anything that would go well with any of the films from *The Round Up* onwards, we'd like to hear from you.

AUDIENCE REACTIONS

THE REMAINS OF THE DAY  
(Screened 19 September 1996)

10 \*\*\*\*\*  
9 \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*  
8 \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*  
7 \*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*  
6  
5  
4  
3  
2  
1

Average Mark: 8.4

No. of slips returned: 53

As one person wrote, the scoring speaks for itself.

Along with its high marks, it was described as "excellent ... splendid ... interesting ... enjoyable ... highly watchable ... a memorable cinematic achievement" - and "desperately sad".

The acting (with Hopkins and Thompson singled out by one or two) was variously described as "superb", "excellent", "fine performances" and "faultless".

I'm certainly not going to argue with any of that! Like several of you, I found it as compelling (if not more so) on a second viewing.

*Believable, interesting characters, clear comprehensible dialogue - quite a novelty!*

*A sad reflection of the English reserve.*

*The sort of film that critics would have us believe "they just don't make any more".*

*.. as for taking delivery of the port just two days before the dinner?*

*An epitaph written on the frozen heart of England.*

*.. one of the best I have seen at the Club (5 years) if not The Best.*

## Our Next Presentation

17 October 1996

Performance Ends 10.15pm (approx.)



### ONCE WERE WARRIORS

A massive success in its native New Zealand (where it outgrossed *Jurassic Park*), *Once Were Warriors* is a hard-hitting portrait of Auckland's Maori community, centering around a mother of three battling to keep her family together, with no help from her British husband - but the film shows how the changes in Maori society have led to a kind of social emasculation: all these men have left is their physical strength, which is less and less needed.

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