

Who Is Keyser Soze

By Eric Konarske

Peruse the movie section of your local newspaper, and perhaps you'll notice what I believe to be a most disturbing trend. Likely you'll find that most, if not all, of the current box-office hits rely on fancy high-dollar special effects to entice would-be moviegoers to part with their hard earned dollars. Sure there are exceptions, but too often, it seems, movie makers take the easy route with sense-dazzling sights and sounds while crossing their collective fingers in hopes the audience won't notice there is little or no substance to go along with the Sony SDDS soundtrack and super wide screen digital picture. One such exception is The Usual Suspects. Possessing an intricate plot packed with numerous twists and turns, The Usual Suspects forgoes the typical Hollywood formula and will likely please anyone looking for more than just beautiful wrapping paper on an otherwise empty package.

I certainly don't mean to suggest that I'm immune to Hollywood's sensual wizardry. In fact, it's likely that I never would have seen The Usual Suspects had it not been for a liberal dose of prodding from one of my good friends to give up the two hours.

Knowing almost nothing about it, I somewhat reluctantly rented the movie. For the first few minutes of the film, my divided attention was focused as much on the new REI catalog I was thumbing through as it was on the rapidly unraveling plot. But it became apparent even before I got to the rock climbing gear that my attempt at multitasking wasn't going to cut it for this film. I've now seen this movie twice, and commitment to a third viewing would no doubt open my eyes to even more important subtleties I'm sure to have missed the first two times around.

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It's this intensity that has the potential to turn off someone looking to voyage into simple stimulation of the rods and cones. On the other hand, the movie's success would suggest that the majority of viewers agree with my belief that this is the equation for a thoroughly enjoyable movie going experience.

In most cases a clever ending can save an otherwise less than brilliant film. It's simultaneously sad and humorous the number of times I've gone to see a movie and was unable to recall the title only one day later when asked for a review. Dirty Rotten Scoundrels comes to mind when I think of movies that populate this category. Had that movie's glorious parting twist not slapped me like it did, no doubt I wouldn't have remembered the title past dinner.

The reverse also holds true. A beautifully scripted film with top-notch acting, thought provoking undertones, and even some pleasing eye and ear candy can quickly plummet into the movies-soon-to-be-forgotten black hole as the result of a finale unable to live up to the rest. Though I'm relatively certain this happens often, I can't give an example because, well, as evidence of this phenomenon, I can't recall a single one.

Being somewhat slow and hard to follow, The Usual Suspects, too, could have fallen into the abyss of movies whose greatest quality is that of postponing the lawn getting cut or the dishes getting washed by a couple of hours. Fortunately, the writer's exceptional genius derailed that possibility.

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Long before I made the decision to part with the couple bucks required to rent The Usual Suspects, I had heard that meaningless question—meaningless at the time, anyway—“who is Keyser Soze?” on numerous occasions. Meaningless in much the same way as the question “who is John Galt?” is to someone who hasn’t read Ayn Rand’s Atlas Shrugged. However, unlike Mr. Galt, after all 106 minutes of The Usual Suspects have ticked by, Mr. Soze’s true identity is only barely less of a mystery than it is at the beginning. But I find that to be one of the movie’s great appeals.

A quick Internet search will demonstrate that this film’s appeal is indeed widespread and far-reaching. It took only a few quick clicks to find many whose admiration for this film closely mirrors my own.

One great site where this enthusiasm really shines is Alex’s Usual Suspects Page. Alex, who is quick to point out that this is her favorite movie of all time, has created a nicely done site complete with a short plot summary, a page of sounds from the movie, the complete movie script, and an assortment of photos as well (Alex’s Usual Suspects Page).

Welcher’s Usual Suspects Web Page is another site my hasty search turned up. Also nicely done, this site includes similar content to Alex’s with the addition of a small discussion board where devotees can gather to share their enthusiasm. Though the discussion board is barely used, the time and effort that went into creating it does

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demonstrate the impact this movie has had on its biggest fans ([Welcher's Usual Suspects Web Page](#)).

With the advent of the Internet, the extremes of any group now have a voice the past did not provide. It's become almost effortless to turn your excitement or disgust of any subject into a window on the computer to be seen by virtually anyone in the world. The benefits of having this incredible global network at our fingertips are awesome to be sure, but it can have its drawbacks. My concern was that visiting only the sites of the few extremists might not accurately represent the general population's feelings about this movie.

For a larger and considerably more reliable sample, I surfed over to the Internet Movie Database, one of the most useful sites on the Internet in my opinion. IMDB provides a user-based rating system that gives a good impression of how well a movie was received compared to any other movie in their database. Though I think very highly of this movie, I was still surprised to find just how high it rated with IMDB users.

With over 65,000 votes, [The Usual Suspects](#) was rated 8.7 out of 10 and is on the list of the top 250 movies at a very respectable number 16 (IMDB). Pretty impressive for a script that Hollywood would have tossed in the recycle bin. Those numbers became even more impressive when I looked up George Lucas' box office smash [Star Wars](#) for comparison. The original episode, released in 1977, scored an 8.8 and is number 9 on the top 250 list, only a marginal ascent over [The Usual Suspects](#) lofty 16th place (IMDB).

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As mentioned, with its lack of glitz and glamour, the script to The Usual Suspects was in fact turned down by Hollywood. One would expect their skills at predicting audience reactions to be a bit better honed than to let this precious gem slip by. Fortunately for us, Polygram, a British film company, saw its genius and made Bryan Singer and Christopher McQuarrie's vision a most wonderful reality (Crow).

My findings should be all the evidence Tinsel Town needs to conclude that a low-budget film with a brilliantly written plot, some interesting characters, refreshing dialog, and a surprise ending not recycled from dozens of preceding movies, provides all of the ingredients needed to make the iceberg that sinks Hollywood's Titanic.

Perhaps it's just wishful thinking on my part, but maybe Hollywood learned something from this. My hope is that they did. Countless potential celluloid masterpieces are likely sitting on dusty shelves in damp storerooms the world over just waiting for their day in the projector. It would be a shame if that day never comes. A shame for the creators, and a shame for the viewing public stuck with the current array of production line, cookie cutter, recycled movies we have to choose from.

So please, if you're a movie writer looking for a sure-fire way to propel your work into one of the premier slots on my all time favorite movies list, give it an ending that I can't figure out even before the introductory credits have finished rolling. Endings and plot twists that cause your jaw to hang slack in disbelief long past the time required

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to clean yourself of the stray popcorn kernels that didn't make it to your mouth are what make great and memorable movies. To that end, The Usual Suspects gets a perfect 10 in this moviegoer's book.

References

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