

Alec Baldwin Charges: How is Involuntary Manslaughter a Crime?

BY SHANNON COOK

Q UITE SURPRISINGLY, ALEC BALDWIN was charged with involuntary manslaughter after an incident on the film set of what would have been his newest movie, "Rust." When Baldwin was aiming a prop gun at the lens of the camera during a rehearsal, the cinematographer of the film, Halyna Hutchins, was killed instantly as the gun accidentally went off. The question is, why was the gun loaded? And how is this a crime? Baldwin was handed the gun by another crew member in charge of the props, and was under the impression (rightfully so) that the gun was empty. Baldwin believed it was a "cold gun," meaning it had not been used for shooting and was never loaded. It was only intended to be used as a prop.

"This was a movie set, where responsibilities are delegated and actors have every reason to believe

that the guns they are being handed are props – or at least unloaded, or loaded with blanks," stated Jill Filipovic from CNN. I believe this to be true. Baldwin was handed the gun trusting the crew members that the gun was not loaded. How did a loaded gun even make it onto the set? Charging Baldwin was a surprising move—it makes us question what a crime really is. The shooting was an accident, at least that's what it seems. So why is Baldwin being charged?

People want someone to blame. The victim's family wants someone to blame. But who is really to blame here? Baldwin was directed to aim the gun, believing it was not loaded, at the lens of the camera for an epic shot. The gun going off was a tragic mistake, but is charging Baldwin with manslaughter really the answer to the grief felt by the people affected? Nothing can undo the past—

and this situation makes me wonder, if something is unintentional and a complete accident, how can we be charged for it? The argument is that someone must be blamed, and Baldwin should have checked if the gun was empty. But when you've been working as an actor for so long, and have worked with prop guns for so long, is it really surprising he didn't?

Would it have been smarter if he made sure the gun was empty before aiming it, just in case? Sure. But he didn't, and that's no one's fault except every person on the set who chose to pass the (loaded) gun along to him without also checking to make sure it was empty. Shouldn't they be charged as well if Baldwin is? To me, these charges seem like the desperate attempt to pinpoint a scapegoat. Grief works in mysterious ways, but I doubt that ruining a well-known and beloved actor's life and career based on a tragic mistake is going to make anyone feel better in this situation. Had this incident not been covered in the press, we might wonder how things would have turned out differently. Is Baldwin simply being used as an example? Do the lawyers want to bring him down to stick it to the rich man? That is what it looks like to me.



Photo Credit: Chris Murray