

(Entire review is in Times New Roman: Title 16pt, Heading 12pt, Body 10pt)

## *The Accountant* Does Not Live Up to Its Potential

(single sp)

Name

English 101-section # here

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(single sp)

Rating 3\*/4

(single sp)

*The Accountant* is both an intriguingly and maddeningly schizophrenic action drama: It's intriguing due to its audacious attempt to make an antisocial, on-the-spectrum math genius into an action hero, and maddening because, having gone halfway toward genuine eccentricity, it conforms by relying on fatigued genre tropes when it finally gets down to business. All the more frustrating because of its conceptual freshness and Ben Affleck's sly turn in the title role, this sleek action thriller ends up delivering standard shoot-'em-up goods after initially suggesting it might provide something rather different. The sizable target audience probably won't mind.

It was definitely a nifty little brainstorm screenwriter Bill Dubuque (*The Judge*) had — to hatch the notion of a “different” sort of kid whose computer-fast talent with numbers, combined with fighting and marksmanship skills forced upon him by his sadistic military father, made Christian Wolff (Affleck) into a valued employee for big-time mobsters and others interested in cooking their books and keeping their stashes safe.

Suffice it to say that, instead of getting shrinks, emotional coddling and extra time on school tests, young Christian received the sort of education Uma Thurman had when she went to China in *Kill Bill*. As a grown-up hunk he's like Rock Hudson in the 1950s, with short black hair, shoulders as broad as Atlas, spectacles, conservative black suits and limited conversational proficiency.

This latter trait proves frustrating to Dana (Anna Kendrick), a nerdily cute accountant for Living Robotics, a high-end high-tech company run by genius type Lamar Blackburn (John Lithgow), who, finding that nearly \$70 million has gone missing from company accounts, hires Christian to uncook the books. This the numbers wiz does literally overnight, barely enough time for chatty Dana to pry more than a sentence or two out of the taciturn hunk.

In the early going, Dubuque and director Gavin O'Connor (*Jane Got a Gun*, *Warrior*) wring a

good measure of wry, low-key humor out of their leading man's unusual character: He speaks in Samuel Beckett-like mini-sentences that put others on edge, is prim and precise, uses a pocket protector, works (for his straight job) in an anonymous little mini-mall accounting office and keeps his valuables — which include original Renoir and Jackson Pollock paintings, loads of cash and enough heavy artillery to bring down the Albanian air force at the very least — in a pristine old Airstream trailer hidden in a storage garage.

The fact that neither Dana nor any other woman can make much headway with this Einstein-brained piece of granite merely augments his fascination. But then a virus called mundane plot mechanics begins infecting the system; for reasons that are probably explained but remain both unclear and unconvincing, some bad dudes led by a brawny hot-head named Brax (Jon Bernthal) start coming after Christian and anyone else who gets in their way, which clicks on the body-count register.

At this point, Affleck may as well have put on his Batman suit, as he's obliged to spend most of his time from here on taking down Brax's goons, either with rifles so huge that they look like only a superhero could lift them or in hand-to-hand combat, specifically the Indonesian martial art called pentjak silat — employed here probably because it's been little-seen in American films compared to more familiar Asian fighting styles (it was featured far more extensively and amazingly in the two *Raid* features).

In other words, by the time push comes to kill, the ingenuity — or perhaps it's just cleverness — of the central concept has been reduced and abandoned for the sake of generic action moves. Thus is a relatively unconventional idea converted into a conventional film, which is a disappointment, as who's to say that an on-the-spectrum genius might not be just the right iteration of crime fighter for the current season?

For a good little while, *The Accountant* is sufficiently different from standard-issue, big studio

R-rated action dramas to keep an audience with it, and Affleck's tightly wound, subtle, quietly mischievous performance compounds the pleasure. The star is onscreen alone a good deal of the time, and he sustains unbroken viewer interest in a character of a sort hardly anyone would ever get to know in real life. Every gesture, look and utterance has a purpose, no movement is wasted and the minimalism is all the more effective coming from a big man. And certainly the goofy contradiction implicit in seeing this hulk do the work of a socially awkward math teacher proves more amusing than watching him spring into heroics peering down the barrel of a very long rifle.

Kendrick provides a good foil for Affleck, while the rest of the stellar cast (including J.K. Simmons, Jeffrey Tambor and Jean Smart) is vastly overqualified for what they're asked to do in the film's roster of uninterestingly written supporting roles.