

## THE ACCOUNTANT (2016)

- Released October 14th, 2016
- 2 hour 8 minutes
- \$44 million million budget
- TOTAL BUDGET INCLUDING P&A: EST 70-75 MILL
- Gavin O'Connor directed
- Rated R for strong violence and language throughout
- Warner Bros., Electric City Entertainment, RatPac-Dune Entertainment
- Produced by Marty P. Ewing, Steven Mnuchin, Gavin O'Connor, Jamie Patricof

## QUICK THOUGHTS:

- Phil Svitek
- Marisa Serafini
- Demetri Panos
- Stephanie Wenger

## DEVELOPMENT

- Around 2011, I got sent the script and I loved it. I met with Lynette Howell, the producer, and Mark Williams, and we] talked about the movie.” -O'Connor
- (Ben Affleck)“Are you open to doing this with Warner Brothers? Because I had a deal there. I make all my movies there and I love them.” I was like, “Yeah, if you’re a filmmaker, they’re the studio to work at.” So we gave it to them and they said, “Go ahead and make the movie.”
- This was originally envisioned with Mel Gibson starring, with the Coen Brothers directing

## WRITING (Bill Dubuque)

- *The Headhunter's Calling, The Judge*
- Producer named Mark Williams approached him with a rough idea for a financial thriller centered on a fast-talking forensic accountant.
- What if the accountant was on the autism spectrum?
- Dubuque did extensive research into autism while writing the script
- The screenplay for this film was featured in the 2011 Blacklist, a list of the "most liked" unmade scripts of the year.
- By Bill Dubuque (previously wrote *The Headhunter's Calling* and *The Judge*)

## STORY/CAST

- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Autism (portrait)
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Converging storylines
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Brother/father relationship
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Thinking drama vs action set piece (plus comedy?)
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** McGuffin
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Treasury department subplot
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Meribeth (her motivation)
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** The embezzlement

- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Ending
- This is the second time [Anna Kendrick](#) and [J.K. Simmons](#) have starred together. They previously starred together in the film [Up in the Air](#) (2009).
- The film cast includes two Oscar winners, [Ben Affleck](#) and [J.K. Simmons](#), and two Oscar nominees, [Anna Kendrick](#) and [John Lithgow](#).
- Ben Affleck, J.K. Simmons, Jon Bernthal and Cynthia Addai-Robinson have all played comic book characters: Batman and The Punisher, J. Jonah Jameson and Commissioner Jim Gordon, The Punisher and Shane from "The Walking Dead," and Amanda Waller, respectively
- Gavin O'Connor: I will never cast someone without meeting them first and just getting a sense of who they are as a person. Then, what I do is I always check them out. I call around because I think anybody can kind of bullsh\*t their way through for an hour. But on a set, you can't fake who you are. So I check them out. On this, every one of them got just hugely high grades. They're all just really good people and great actors. Every day, even if someone's in a bad mood. They might get a bad phone call or something's happening with their kids, I mean, life just happens. You just deal with that. I'm just talking about their spirits, though. They're all good, just really all solid people.

#### **BEN AFFLECK** (Christian Wolff)

- Affleck and O'Connor built on by meeting with numerous experts and people in the autistic community to ensure they were portraying Wolff's condition sensitively and realistically.
- "As a director he really knows... he shows up, he's prepared, he just lifts everything. He's making everything fine. He's considerate and he's respectful and he just does the work. He's committed." - O'Connor
- BEN AFFLECK: It was a very challenging role and it required a lot of research. (Director) Gavin [O'Connor] and I went around and spent time with people who were at various places on the autism spectrum, and observed behavior and talked to them and engaged with them in everything from what their daily life is like to what type of movie they'd like to see about someone with autism. We got a lot of different responses, but really, the value was in grounding the guy and making him like real people we had met and seen in real life, rather than just an imagined version of what it might be. It was a cobbling together of observed behaviors and character traits from people we met. That's what I anchored the performance in.
- What we wanted to do was be respectful and be accurate, and to tell a truthful story. We didn't want to try to sex it up or gloss over things. We just wanted to peer into the reality of that life. Also, I think it was a good thing showing that different can be good, better and special. Obviously, anytime you're gonna deal with a real-life issue like this, that touches people lives and that is really important to some people, there are going to be a lot of people with really strong opinions and feelings. Our hope is that people in that community, who are on the spectrum of autism, like the movie and like that it's a superhero story about them.

That was what I got from the people that I met with. That's what they wanted to see. That's what they were excited about, so I hope that's what we deliver on.

- AFFLECK: Gavin was very concerned about the action being real and good, which is something he'd done very well in Warrior, for example. So, training was as much a part of this as it was for the Batman movie. In fact, even more so with this because it's a lot harder for the stuntman to do your stunt when you're not wearing a mask. So, I had to really be on top of my game and work hard with some really great professionals who were very helpful and really good at the stuff, and they educated me about this fighting style (the Indonesian style of Pentak Silat). It was a learning experience. I have a lot of respect for the guys who do it for a living.
- **FLASHBACKS:**
  - Pencak Silat, which is an Indonesian martial art. "I chose that style because it's flashy, in a cinematic way, but also incredibly efficient; and I just kept coming from a place of... in his present day fighting still, [Wolff] would be very mathematical about it: "How do I eliminate this person as quickly as possible?"- O'Connor
  - This comes out of Thailand. He's blasting the music, which is because people on the spectrum don't like loud music. By blasting music, you're conditioning yourself to get used to something that is not innately something that you like. In Thai martial arts, they might roll bottles or sticks on their shins because you develop scar tissue. Guys who were fighters could go and kick a piece of wood and it won't even hurt their shin because they roll on it so much. It develops so much scar tissue and deadens all the nerves that you can fight.
  - My intention was that this was a father who didn't know a lot about children on the spectrum. Back then, no one did. Parenting is not a sport for perfectionists. The only tools he has in his tool belt and the only philosophy that he can apply to raising a child was how he grew up and how he saw his own world, which was the world of the military. For him, it could be a very cruel world. How do you prepare for that? This is what he did. I'm not saying it's right. I mean, we learn later that the reason Chris is basically donating all of this money is because he knows that there's a better way. The thing that was important to me, though, was that he always know that everything his father would do was generated by love. It wasn't like he watched him as a kid and he was just this mini-Bruce Lee. He was learning. He was being conditioned. He was taught how to survive and taught how to peel back the layers of aggression and taught how to survive under duress. He was conditioned to fight because his father thought that's what this kid [needed].

#### **ANNA KENDRICK** (Dana Cummings)

- "I just knew she would bring a sense of humor and a lightness that I really wanted for the movie to be fun."- O'Connor

- Affleck & Kendrick bonded over was Affleck's beloved New England Patriots. Kendrick roots for them regularly, but she was in full fanatic mode the night before filming started in 2015, when the Patriots and Seattle Seahawks were battling in Super Bowl XLIX.
- "My mom is an accountant, so I gave her the script and was like, 'Can you please help me understand what is happening in this movie?' I basically managed to retain as much information as she gave to me for the duration of the filming and the second we were done it was like my brain dropped this proverbial 50 pound bag I'd been carrying around. And it was like 'I'm never picking that up again.' "
- Anna Kendrick based her character on her mother, a real accountant who went over the script and explained the math to her daughter.

### **J.K. SIMMONS** (Ray King)

- Third film with Ben Affleck
- "I was really drawn to how smart it was and what an interesting blend of genres it was — action and adventure,"
- "He'd shoot a few days, and then he'd go off and literally go win a Golden Globe and then come back and work," she recalls. "I felt really lucky to share screen time with him especially right at that moment. There's a little bit of an intimidation, but at the same time, you know, these are my peers, these are the people that are doing what I'm doing." - Addai- Robinson

### **CYNTHIA ADDAI-ROBINSON** (Marybeth Medina)

- *Arrow, Spartacus: War of the Damned*
- Born in London and raised in Maryland, largely credits the accessibility of television in her childhood home while she was growing up as her inspiration for what drew her toward pursuing acting professionally.
- New York University-trained actress
- "Everybody who was assembled was exciting and intimidating and obviously it was an opportunity for me to raise my game and rise to the challenge and work with all of the various award-winning people associated with this movie."
- "I loved reading [the script] and I also know they had this really huge task of translating all the details of this story and particularly this mystery of who The Accountant is and how he came to be the person that he is... It's definitely a script I had to read several times."
- "I did a lot of online research in terms of what the Treasury Department sort-of 'handles,' but in this instance Mary-Beth works specifically in the financial crimes division. So this is sort of following the money flow in terms of drug cartels and terrorists and that sort of thing. So I sort of did all of that research in terms of the world we were in."

### **JON BERNTHAL** (Brax)

- "Bernthal has been a buddy of mine, and from the beginning I didn't read anyone else for that part. I offered that part to Jon right off – I wanted him to play that role." - O'Connor

- Walking Dead

## **PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY** (Seamus McGarvey)

- *Nocturnal Animals*, *Pan*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Godzilla*, *Anna Karenina*, *Anna Karenina*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*
- Two-time Oscar-nominated
- 35mm film
- ““We removed clutter and color and there were no errant elements. We shot at a deeper stop for expanded depth of field. There was a crispness to it.”
- Shot with the Panaflex XL and converted to hand-held and Steadicam for action. “We shot spherically widescreen 2:39:1 because of the low light and two camera setups. I worried about shooting wide open on the anamorphic lenses,” he said.
- Although the film was shot on location in Atlanta, Georgia, the film actually is set to take place in Plainfield, Illinois, with scenes in downtown Chicago, Illinois. Also, the high school Anna Kendrick's character mentions (Naperville North) is an actual high school, which Bob Odenkirk (Better Call Saul) graduated from.
- According to a slideshow posted on the "11 Alive" (Atlanta NBC affiliate) website, several Atlanta area locations were used in the filming of this movie including the Gwinnett County Jail (for Leavenworth) and the campus of Georgia Tech (for the HQ of Living Robotics).
- Two-time Oscar-nominated cinematographer Seamus McGarvey (“Anna Karenina” and “Atonement”) — no stranger to shooting on 35mm film — was thrilled to shoot his two latest movies, “The Accountant” and “Nocturnal Animals,” on his preferred format for both aesthetic and practical reasons.
- “The start has a spare, unadorned frame — blankness — in keeping with the character’s orderly life,” McGarvey said. “We removed clutter and color and there were no errant elements. We shot at a deeper stop for expanded depth of field. There was a crispness to it.”
- For the action sequences, McGarvey exacerbated the grain and pushed the highlights and contrast. The final shootout in a house surrounded by glass was tricky because of the darkness and reflections, but he achieved an inky blackness.
  - “It became grittier, essentially, and that’s where I love film because we were able to pull all of the disparate looks from the negative hand-in-hand with the digital intermediate. It was fun to have that latitude to do that.”
- “Film gives you the flexibility to go into any direction, which was important for these two films, which are very different,” McGarvey told IndieWire.
- On November 12, 2014, [Variety](#) reported that [Anna Kendrick](#) was in early talks to co-star in the film, alongside Affleck. Later that day, [J. K. Simmons](#) was also announced as being in talks to join the cast.
- On November 14, 2014, [Jon Bernthal](#) was also in talks. On January 6, 2015, [Variety](#) reported that [Cynthia Addai-Robinson](#) was added to the cast.
- On January 14, 2015, [Jeffrey Tambor](#) was added to the cast of the film, with the addition of [John Lithgow](#) on the same day.

- Filming began on January 19, 2015 in [Atlanta, Georgia](#). On March 16–20, filming was taking place at the [Georgia Institute of Technology](#)
- In one of the scenes, the children were trained by a martial art fighter. The set was in a tropical place and the Father held a newspaper called 'Jakarta' something. In the end of that scene, the older brother said 'It's Ok. Just continue' in Bahasa Indonesia. So it appeared that Christian and his family have lived somewhere in Jakarta, Indonesia when they were younger.

### **DIRECTING** (Gavin O'Connor)

- *Jane Got a Gun, Only Human, Warrior, Pride and Glory*
- I was sent the script by Lynette Howell [Taylor] and Mark Williams, the producers, and I was just sort of floored by the originality of it and the puzzle.
- First time working with Ben Affleck
- “[Ben & I] had many, many meetings with specialists, with guys who are high-functioning autism. We had days when we were in like a classroom setting with like thirty of them, asking them questions for hours, in conversation with them.”
- Gavin O'Connor: Well, budget informs certain things, but I also wanted to keep it grounded. I didn't want to make an elevated kind of superhero movie. I wanted it to be grounded in a reality, so that was important to me. We'd go and we'd work on the script. We never touched the puzzle elements of the script. That was all in there and perfectly calibrated. We did some character work, action, and the flashbacks we changed with the writer, Bill [Dubuque].

### **SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA**

- Affleck appears in Kendrick's upcoming book *Scrappy Little Nobody*
- Throughout the film, Ben Affleck's character recites the rhyme "Solomon Grundy" to calm himself down. In the DC comics, Solomon Grundy is actually a villain who comes into conflict with Batman. Affleck plays Batman in the DC Extended Universe.

### **EDITING/VFX** (Richard Pearson)

- *Kong: Skull Island, Dracula Untold, Maleficent, Red Dawn, Safe House, Iron Man 2, Quantum of Solace*
- Screened it for some people from Autism Speaks and some other organizations and foundations related to autism,” O'Connor said. “We wanted to make sure we were passing their test of authenticity and honesty, and we've gotten fantastic responses from them, which feels really good.”
- There are several narratives that are happening at once. At the beginning, they're very separate. Is that something that plays out exactly as it does in the script or does the shifting perspective change a lot in the editing room?
  - A: Gavin O'Connor: No, because it's such a puzzle and the script is so finely tuned and calibrated. There were things that just had to be hit at certain points, where you're just sort of teasing out the information. I think that, as a director, what I was really going for was to lift it in regards to

making the movie fun. I really wanted it to be a fun film, which was difficult. Like walking a bit of a razor's edge. It was tricky tonally because of all the different elements and storylines running concurrently in the script. Then there's the back story with the flashbacks, which are pretty soberingly intense.

### **SOUND/MUSIC** (Mark Isham)

- *Reversal of Fortune, Point Break, From the Earth to the Moon, Crash, The Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans, ABC's American Crime, Once Upon A Time*
- Worked with Gavin four times
- "There is a great deal of the score that embraces the beauty of mathematics, and of course there's a great deal of mathematics in music itself. So some of the more electronic elements of the score really try in a non-intrusive way to make the mathematical beauty of patterns part of the fabric of the sound."
- Used orchestra, solo cello, choir, percussion.
- Electric piano, and a tremendous amount of sampled sounds
- "I think the first *Accountant* preview, it was mostly all temp, because of the nature of still exploring where we were going. But by the second preview it was 60% me. You can start to see, to learn to love the approach that the producers and directors are helping to find with me."
- **The Accountant** (2016) is Mark Isham's fourth collaboration with O'Connor including the other three named as *Miracle* in 2004, *Pride and Glory* in 2008 and *Warrior* in the year 2011.
- "*There's a great deal of pure math in rhythm,*" as said by Isham has proved to be an aesthetic effect as as we all know, "*the aesthetic choice is always the final choice.*"
- The composer also said that a composer should "*read into your roots as composer of pure, heart-driven emotion, find whatever those things are.*"

### **PROMOTION**

- The film was released on October 14, 2016.<sup>[15]</sup> Before that, [Warner Bros.](#) had scheduled it for January 29, 2016, later moving it to October 7, 2016, before moving it back another week.

### **BOX OFFICE**

- Domestic Summary (As of October 16th: \$24,710,273
  - Worldwide: \$27,910,273
  - Opening Weekend: \$24,710,273 (#1 rank, 3,332 theaters, \$7,416 average)
- Widest Release: 3,332 theaters

### **RECEPTION**

- IMDB: 7.9

- Cinemascore: A
- RT: 49% Tatometer, 87% Audience

## SEQUEL/LEGACY

- “If audiences decide that it should be, I would love that. Because I want to spend more time with Chris. There’s more to be explored with this character. What excites me is that, most franchises are IPs that people know about. Books or comic books and super heroes. This is entirely original and that’s what I loved about it. This is sort of his origin story. Even though no one has a comic book to read or a book to read or a graphic novel. This is all brand new for everybody. If it works and people want it and there’s an appetite for it, there’s more stories to be told.”- O’Connor
- Vince Mancini of [Uproxx](#) gave the film a positive review, writing, "It’s transparent in its attempt both to pimp a future franchise and give autistic kids their own superhero. There’s a genuine sweetness to the latter that converts me on the former. Headshots, math problems, and pained social interactions? Sign me up. Of the two movies Ben Affleck has been in so far this year, *The Accountant* and [Batman V Superman](#), *The Accountant* has by far the most franchise potential.

## FINAL THOUGHTS