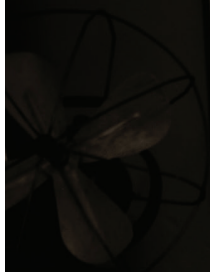




NEW ACCOUNTANT[®]

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The Next Movie: The Forensic Accountant?





Cover Story



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The Next Movie: The Forensic Accountant?

So you have seen or wish to see *The Accountant*, starring Ben Affleck, about an assassin with an accounting day job and autism bent. Ethan Anderton called it “preposterous, ludicrous, and fun.” Alonso Duralde said the movie “shouldn’t add up, but somehow it does. Whether audiences warm to a hero who’s equally skilled at tax codes and tae kwon do, the filmmakers certainly can’t be ac-

cused of going for the tried and true.”

Matt Singer says Christian Wolff (Ben Affleck) “is as deadly with a calculator as a Glock.” Alon So says Wolff “is a ninja and a crack shot and a whiz at tax deductions.”

But the overall premise of the movie is that Wolff is called in to investigate the possible cooked books of a robotics company.



D. Larry Crumbley
Emeritus Professor
Louisiana State University

Broad Approach to Forensic Accounting

Fortunately, the writer, Bill Dubuque, adopts the broad approach to accounting and not the “number crunching” image of the accounting profession. Regrettably, however, the movie was not called “The Forensic Accountant” - the interesting branch of accounting. Hopefully, professors who now adopt the narrow approach to forensic accounting will see the light and teach their students how exciting and broad forensic accounting can be.

Most accountants are considered to be dull bean counters without many original ideas. “After all, everyone knows that bean counters are bespectacled, pale-skinned wretches who spend mind-numbing lives in dreary cubicles poring over faint computer printouts and dusty ledgers. Right?” Yet within recent years a bolder and exciting accountant has evolved with a skeptical mind. This forensic accountant looks behind the façade and does not accept financial records at their face value.

I believe that forensic accounting’s scope is much broader than fraud detection. Even in the area of fraud, a forensic accountant may be employed in a wide variety of risk management engagements within business enterprises as a matter of right, without the necessity of allegations. In other words, predication is not an absolute step in forensic accounting practice, so that the forensic accounting practice is preventive and proactive.

More than Financial Accounting or Fraud Auditing

Rosenthal defines forensic accounting as “the use of intelligence-gathering techniques and accounting and business skills to develop informa-

tion and opinion for use by attorneys involved in civil litigation, and give trial testimony if called upon.”

A financial audit is generally a sampling activity that does not look at every transaction. Thus, someone, such as executive, who knows how to “cook the books”, can exploit the system. Also, the forensic accounting field is broader than fraud auditing because it involves accounting, auditing, and litigations support. In addition to the broader perspective, forensic accounting also requires a different mindset from tax-and-audit jobs. Accountants are often trained that numbers do not lie. Auditing is about following the rules, so auditing professors maybe not be the appropriate people to teach the forensic course if they are unwilling to develop forensic accounting concepts.

Forensic accountants take the opposite position because they cannot assume books and financial statements are correct. Books any be cooked, financial statements may be deceptively constructed. Records may be false and invoices may be fake. Forensic accountants follow the motte: “Nothing is as it seems.”

Interested in Forensic Accounting?

Are you interested in becoming a forensic accountant? Advice from a retired IRS executive gives this description of a forensic accountant:

Someone who can look behind the façade-not accept the records at their face value-someone who has the expertise to go out and conduct very detailed interviews of individuals to develop the truth, especially if some are presumed to be lying.

Doesn’t this sound like Chris Wolff in “The Accountant”?

One of my novels, *The Big R: A Forensic Accounting Action Adventure*, published by Carolina Academic Press, revolves around a series of heinous biological and chemical murders occurring every time there has been a perfect game in baseball. The home run record by Barry Bonds or the latest World Series winner is forgotten. Using sarin and other chemical and biological weapons, baseball is completely unprepared for the risk this season-major league murders in the stands.

This instructional novel mixes baseball, forensic auditing, serial killers, fraud, risks, chemical and biological agents, and scuba diving to get a better way of learning forensic auditing. A certified internal auditor, a forensic accountant, and a FBI agent work together to find serial killers striking at baseball parks. The killers are able to frame Milt Pappas, a former Chicago Cubs pitcher, as the person responsible for the terror. In 1972, Milt Pappas came within one out pitching a perfect game, but according to Pappas, the umpire called at least two strikes balls, resulting in the twenty-seventh batter walking to first base. That umpire is killed in the novel.

Serial killers strike with impunity as you read how a FBI agent, an internal auditor of the New York Yankees, and a forensic accountant stalk the killers as a baseball is traumatized by grisly murders in various baseball parks.

Fraud Detecting

Another of my novels entitled *Accosting the Golden Spire*, teaches basic accounting while weaving an intricate plot of international intrigue involving sleazy financial consultants, jade merchants, hit men, and con artists who plot to steal treasures from a

Myanmar (Burma) pagoda. According to the Washington Post, “the hero is sort of an Indiana Jones of the Ledger set—a Wharton School of Finance professor named Lenny Cramer who uncovers a conspiracy to steal foreign government treasures.” Lenny Cramer, an imaginary forensic accountant “can sniff trouble out of a ledger more quickly than Quincy, a forensic pathologist, could detect a murder on the popular television show.” He testified before Congress and appears as an expert witness in a court battle.

While he and his daughter are on a tour of Myanmar, another tour member, a beautiful jeweler named Dana Scott, who also is from Philadelphia, enchants him. After they return to the U. S., Lenny calls Dana, stops by her shop to visit, and becomes involved in checking her books because she believes her partner is stealing from their business. Thefts, murders, and a host of underground dealing follow.

An Auditing Tale

Another adventure of Lenny Cramer appears in *Trap Doors and Trojan Horses*. Lenny Cramer, a widower with a teenage daughter, is a forensic accountant who recently joined the accounting faculty at Georgia State University. In addition to his professional duties he is conducting an operational audit for the world famous soft drink company, Coca-Cola. Intrigue and fraud place Lenny’s life on the line as he uncovers an evil scheme to steal Coke’s secret formula. The story features a variety of settings, from Atlanta to Washington, D.C. to Poland. The suspenseful story combines computers and auditing in a fashion even a novice can understand and enjoy.

Cramer and his sidekick, Slam Duncan, employ auditing and computer concepts in making real-life decisions. Along the way, business practices, political controversies, contemporary corporate planning, accounting fraud, and the lives of CPAs and their colleagues are elucidated in a way that students, instructors, and even casual readers will find gripping and informative.

Forensic Cost Accounting

Another adventure of Lenny Cramer appears in *Costly Reflections of a Midas Mirror*. This novel mixes fraud, murder, art, ethics, and cost accounting together to get a better way of learning the accounting process. Lenny Cramer, now a professor at Columbia University, tries to help a wealthy friend of his university. As a managerial professor, he uses his forensic accounting background to solve a “whodunit” plot. Along the way, business practices and accounting concepts are elucidated in a way both students and instructors find gripping as well as informative.

The potential murders are, likewise, numerous in this fast-paced Philip Marlowe-type intrigue. Although a fundamental premise in accounting is that the reporting entity is a going concern in the absence of evidence to the contrary, with so many murders in this plot, a liquidation assumption is more appropriate. A reader must keep sunken cost values and salability of assets in mind as one unravels the plot, rather than the traditional historical costs. The authors point out in the preface that an effective managerial accountant must be a good detective, even without the fedora and snub-nosed revolver.

Conclusion

If you would like to learn more about forensic accounting or you know a producer looking for another accounting script, check out some of my 13 educational novels. I have two movie scripts. Why is there not a television series about the life of a forensic accountant like Christian Wolff?



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