

The American Review

An unconventional, slow-moving thriller worth seeing starring George Clooney

By marketing a film as a thriller starring George Clooney, the audience obviously comes to expect certain things: to be glued to the edge of their seat and to see the classic “George Clooney” character, one of Hollywood’s classiest, smoothest, and coolest actors working today. So when director Anton Corbijn, a former rock and roll photographer, chooses to go an entirely different direction with his second feature film, *The American*, it is certainly puzzling at first. This is a thriller that consistently pulls back from thrills and traditional action elements; a studio film with more focus on artsy flourishes typically found in indie films; and a Clooney character devoid of any of the charm and wit he is normally called upon to display. Though these all may seem like complaints at first, and at some points may even be, they actually help give the film an unexpected unique and retro quality that sets it apart from the crowd. *The American*, based off of Rowan Joffe’s adaptation of the novel *A Very Private Gentleman* by Martin Booth, revolves around assassin/weapon specialist Jack (or Edward or Mr. Butterfly depending on who you ask) played by Clooney. After a peaceful Swedish getaway with his lover that opens the film takes a wrong, bloody turn, Jack determines two things: one, some people clearly want him dead, and two, he wants out of this business for good. To solve both of these problems, Jack has to complete one final mission for his boss. The job? Create a specialized weapon with extreme power and accuracy for another hitman. While working on this project undercover in Italy, Jack meets a priest and a prostitute, both of whom work on cracking his tough exterior to find the man inside him throughout the film. If this seems simple enough, then you’re on the right track. The film has very little in terms of storyline, and relies mostly on ambiguity and atmosphere to sell its story. This sort of minimalistic approach carries over into all aspects of the film. Dialogue is extremely sparse and to the point, and background music rarely plays throughout the film. Even during its few action sequences, everything remains very quiet and direct. Everything Corbijn shoots in this movie, from scenes of Jack building new weapons to love scenes, from shoot-outs to still shots of Italy’s beautiful scenery, is very meticulous, slow, and well thought out. This patient, slow-moving aspect of the film is what is most likely to turn most viewers off and cry of “boredom.” And in their criticisms may lay some truth: the film certainly does take its sweet time to reach its climax and has a sort of emotionally-detached feel that makes it more difficult to connect with its characters. However, these faults certainly don’t change the fact that this is a quality piece of work boasting terrific, restrained performances from the entire cast and Clooney in particular, a compelling story and character study, and some beautiful camera work. Though not a traditional summer blockbuster by any means, if you are able to push your expectations aside, *The American* is a unique, worthwhile film that, despite its flaws, is definitely worth checking out. Verdict: B