

## Character Reboot 'Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit' Pales as Compared to Masterful Predecessors

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It's been 12 years since we've seen Tom Clancy's masterful, Jason Bourne-esque character Jack Ryan in 2002's "The Sum of All Fears" (led by Ben Affleck), which itself was a character reboot. We first saw Jack in 1990's "The Hunt For Red October" as Alec Baldwin and then twice in the body of Harrison Ford with 1992's "Patriot Games" and 1994's "Clear and Present Danger".

Clancy, who died very recently on Oct. 1, 2013, would not be proud of 2014's reboot of the earlier reboot. "Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit" is plagued by shallow character depth that doesn't give the interestingly complicated character justice like his other stories and films based on them do. It's the first Jack Ryan movie that's not directly based on one of Clancy's novels and it suffers because of it.



Chris Pine stars in "Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit".

*Image credit: Paramount Pictures*

The thin script, which is the debut from rookie writer Adam Cozad following a previous draft by Hossein Amini (who wrote the brilliant,

Oscar-nominated Ryan Gosling film “Drive”), leaves you underwhelmed and disappointed.

Despite lacking in story and character development, it finds saving grace in cinematography and swift action sequences that can glaze your eyes over enough not to consistently offend your thinking. Even then, we see mixed-feeling results when James Bond-like technology competes with someone who’s supposed to be an intellectual action star.

You never get the sense that 2013’s “Star Trek Into Darkness” star Chris Pine is physical enough to take on the role. You also can’t believe that he’s suddenly an economist turned computer hacker. Chris Pine is no Matt Damon or Pierce Brosnan and this version of Jack Ryan is child’s play as compared to all versions of Jason Bourne and James Bond.



Kenneth Branagh directs and stars in “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit”.

*Image credit: Paramount Pictures*

While this film is Cozad’s coming out to Hollywood, it evolved from an alteration to his spec script “Moscow” (originally titled “Dubai”). That one was also about an American citizen trying to thwart a terrorist plan to devastate the U.S. economy. Cozad used to geek out on Tom Clancy books and the Jack Ryan character. In college, his worst grades were in English and screenwriting “wasn’t love at first sight”.

While the “Moscow” script failed, it was modified – by movie studio force in order for Cozad to get paid – and reborn as “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit”. Cozad’s “Dubai” or “Moscow” was supposed to be an action flick starring Eric Bana, but Paramount Pictures asked him to rewrite it and change the lead character to Jack Ryan.

Fresh eyes and new blood can sometimes breathe reinvigorated life into a long-lost story, but here it feels amateur. Kudos go to Cozad for finally getting his light of day with this script or a version of it, but he appears to be the luckiest one while he leaves moviegoers falling short of what they deserve.





Chris Pine stars in “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit”.

*Image credit: Paramount Pictures*

Together with much more experienced writer David Koepp (“Jurassic Park,” “Death Becomes Her,” “Mission: Impossible,” “Spider-Man,” “Stir of Echoes”), the result is a rookie/veteran script struggle that is inconsistently directed by actor/director Kenneth Branagh. While Branagh is most known as an actor but isn’t new to the director’s chair (seen most recently at the helm of 2011’s “Thor” with Chris Hemsworth), he fails to selflessly develop the more important Jack Ryan character and greedily gets caught up in himself as the film’s villain.

Taking the role of Viktor Cherevin for himself, it’s the first time Branagh – a chameleon actor who has played British, German, Australian and American characters – tried to become Russian. While his accent was passable, he couldn’t control his emotions as a director. He became obsessed with making himself badass, mysterious and even more interesting than Jack Ryan himself.

Kevin Costner – who plays Chris Pine’s covert recruiter in “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit” – has never played the character of Jack Ryan. But he was offered the part for the first film in 1990. Costner turned down “The Hunt For Red October” role and became known for 1990’s “Dances With Wolves” – which won seven Oscars and was nominated for five others – instead. “The Hunt For Red October” won one.



Keira Knightley stars in “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit”.

*Image credit: Paramount Pictures*



Kate Beckinsale – who we all love in the “Underworld” films and truly understands the action-star business – was too cool to take on the role of Jack Ryan’s main squeeze Cathy. Jessica Biel and Felicity Jones would have been all wrong and Evangeline Lilly (TV’s “Lost”) would have passed muster just fine. “Lost” director Jack Bender, by the way, was first attached to direct “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit” before Branagh later took it over.

But the role of Cathy went to early front runner Keira Knightley. Her character in this film is only known as Cathy Muller instead of Cathy Ryan. *She* was gun shy to marry *him* rather than what’s more typical between men and women and is often the other way around. Knightley is commendable and pleasant to watch.

You can feel that she does care to develop her on-screen chemistry with her boyfriend turned fiancé. But as is the case with these “the husband is secretly ‘Superman’ for a living while his wife thinks he’s just Clark Kent” stories, her emotional transition into grappling with his true CIA background (after thinking he’s just an economist) is as ridiculous as ever.



Kevin Costner stars in “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit”.

Image credit: Paramount Pictures

Knightley’s character is completely inappropriately present in a CIA “conflict room” scene while she’s seeing her top-secret husband in action for the first time. She even speaks up to assist the government with an observation. The entire scene is as poorly written and unrealistic as it gets. And we can’t take comfort in her character’s relief that her husband is just in the CIA instead of having an affair.

When history views all of Jack Ryan’s cinematic incarnations, it’ll rate them in this order starting from best to worst: “The Hunt For Red October,” “Clear and Present Danger,” “Patriot Games” and “The Sum of All Fears”. Then, in a separate league that was never ready for prime time, “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit” will get a polite pat on the back. It will live as a testament of the need for a veteran lead writer and demonstrate how a film can fail when it’s instead led by a rookie fanboy.

*Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit* stars Chris Pine, Keira Knightley, Kevin Costner, Kenneth Branagh, Colm Feore, Lenn Kudrjawizki, Alec Utgoff, Peter Andersson, Elena Velikanova, Nonso Anozie, Seth Ayott and Gemma Chan from director Kenneth Branagh and writers Adam Cozad and David Koepp based on the character created by Tom Clancy. The film opened on Jan. 17, 2014 with a running time of 105 minutes. It is rated “PG-13” for sequences of violence and intense action and brief strong language.



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