

POPCORN

“Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit”

Don't Volunteer

2 popcorns

One Popcorn, Poor — Two Popcorns, Fair — Three Popcorns, Good — Four Popcorns, Excellent

By **MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER**
Film Critic

If you had never ever seen an action/spy/thriller, then it's quite possible director Kenneth Branagh's "Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit," based on characters created by Tom Clancy, would wow you...at least somewhat. However, if you are among the other several hundred million of us moviegoers who have been force-fed this formula for decades, you will recognize its long, white beard.

The familiar chestnut is now the cinematic equivalent of dad's threadbare living room chair...out of fashion but durable and cozily unsurprising. The basic genre recipe, which alters little with time, maintains a modicum of entertaining credibility because it pretty much satisfies our general impression, both paranoid and naive, of things geopolitical.

Here, again, the American Empire is at grave risk, this time from a deceitfully planned one-two punch being engineered by the former Soviet Union. Gee, just when you thought these guys might truly become our friends. To paraphrase a pundit offering background to the hero who will try to save us from the Russian Bear this go-round, "They're still ideologues, but the ideology is now money." So much for pithy enlightenment.

Well, good thing we Americans are still growing people like Jack Ryan to fight the bad men who would destroy our way of life...the jealous cads. Selfless, smart, brave, tough and handsome enough to draw the heart-throbbing contingent into the theater, Chris Pine's title character drops out of his Ph.D. program at the London School of Economics to join the Marines after 9/11. His resume works toward his destiny.

Distinguishing himself but injured, whilst in rehab at Walter Reed he captures the eye of Navy Commander Thomas Harper, who's really a C.I.A. operative just champing at the bit to mentor Jack. "Go back, finish your doctorate and then we'll plant you in Wall Street to monitor potential terrorist threats," urges the father figure.

"O.K.," agrees the patriotic young man.

The years pass, during which time Jack forms a live-in relationship with Keira Knightley's Dr. Cathy Muller, the former medical student who had championed his recovery. Naturally, she can't know Jack is in the C.I.A. This makes for a sticky wicket any time something seems askew to the good doctor. Of course she never guesses it's the spy business that has him preoccupied, but rather, suspects that he's cheating on her.

Hence, matters are certain to get really complicated when Jack, scrutinizing stuff on his firm's computer, finds evidence among the international monetary comings and goings that something very detrimental to the U.S.

economy is in the pipeline. He tells Harper, who immediately orders him to Russia to take a dangerously closer look at the books. Jack reminds that he's just an analyst. Not anymore, instructs Harper, yeomanly portrayed by Kevin Costner.

So the stage is set for a standard variation on the ordinary man tossed into extraordinary circumstances. Our sensibilities are pleased that Jack is but a citizen soldier when in fact every facet of his life has been a preparation for this mission. And it's a good thing, too, because our man is hardly off the plane in Moscow when it becomes obvious the "audit" is not very welcome by his company's Russian affiliate.

The fancy finances are being orchestrated in Kremlin Town by nasty, cynical and disingenuous Viktor Cherevin. Played by Kenneth Branagh, the noted Shakespearean who also directs this potboiler attests that the folks behind the former Iron Curtain make for enemies far more intriguing than the Third World variety.

Now, if you hark back a few graphs you'll remember that Jack's gal doesn't completely trust him despite his all-American boy persona. So it only figures that she gets a few days leave from the hospital and follows him to Mother Russia. While absurd, this jealousy fly in the ointment facilitates that all important, tension filled, cat and mouse dinner scene necessary to all clichéd spy movies.

You know the routine. The hero makes like he's drunk and says some derogatory things about his lady fair. Too vain to realize it's a diversion allowing Jack to excuse himself and hunt the monetary Holy Grail. Viktor seizes the opportunity to prove that, while he would torture Cathy in a second, he must defend her against another man's mistreatment.

Thusly the banalities pile high, accompanied by a time bomb ticking. "Mission Impossible"-like score. Oh, didn't I tell you? Just in case we aren't entirely decimated by the famine and destitution caused by their fiscal malvolence, they've got a real, real big Molotov cocktail primed to explode somewhere in New York. Gotta find it! Gotta find it!

In other words, expect the usual implausibilities. All of which isn't nearly as farfetched as my theory that the title, "Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit," is really secret agent code embedded in Groundhog Day terminology...shadow meaning if you see this film you're in for 105 more minutes of mediocre, cloak-and-dagger same-old, same-old.

"Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit," rated PG-13, is a Paramount Pictures release directed by Kenneth Branagh and stars Chris Pine, Keira Knightley and Kenneth Branagh. Running time: 105 min.

Premiere Stages Celebrates 10th Anniversary Season

UNION – Premiere Stages, the professional theatre company in residence at Kean University, has announced it will kick off its landmark 10th Anniversary Season with the launch of two new play development initiatives, the Premiere Play Festival Alumni Reading Series, and the Bauer-Boucher Kean Student/Alumni Reading.

The Premiere Play Festival Alumni Reading Series will provide additional support to professional playwrights Premiere Stages has developed in the past, while the Bauer-Boucher Kean Student/Alumni Reading – named for long-time Premiere Stages patrons W. John Bauer and Nancy Boucher – will showcase the work of a gifted Kean University student or alumni playwright. Tariq Hamami, who graduated from Kean in 2006, and 2006/2010 Play Festival Finalist Tammy Ryan have been named as beneficiaries.

Premiere Stages will present the inaugural edition of the Play Festival Alumni Reading Series, Tammy Ryan's *Soldier's Heart*, on Thursday, February 6, at 7 p.m. in New York City. The reading will take place at 520 8th Avenue on the 3rd Floor, and feature Premiere Stages favorite and Emmy Award-winning actress Kim Zimmer.

In Ms. Ryan's affecting new play, an American soldier leaves her son behind to defend the country she loves. When her commanding officer becomes her assailant, she returns home to face her greatest test, bringing back more than she bargained for.

Seating for this reading is extremely limited, and can be reserved by calling (908) 737-4092 or emailing premiere@kean.edu.

Premiere Stages will present a full production of *Soldier's Heart*, a finalist for the 2013 Premiere Stages Play Festival, at Kean University July 10 – 27.

Premiere's first Bauer-Boucher Kean Student/Alumni Reading will feature an intriguing new work by Kean graduate Tariq Hamami. In *The One, Percy Ent*, a couple anxiously awaits the arrival of Percy Ent, a rich man who has the power to provide an escape from their mundane and empty world. Upon meeting Percy, the couple soon discover that there are significant strings attached to his promise of a better life. *The One, Percy Ent* will receive a free public reading in the Kean University Center Little Theatre, located at 1000 Morris Avenue in Union, tonight, Wednesday, January 29, at 7 p.m. All seats for this reading are free, though reservations are strongly recommended; those interested in reserving are encouraged to call (908) 737-4092 or email premiere@kean.edu.

A reception will be held honoring the playwright, Ms. Boucher

and Mr. Bauer following the reading. "John and Nancy have been extremely supportive of Premiere's commitment to new play development. We are honored and excited to officially make them part of the Premiere Stages family through this new initiative," stated John Wooten, Producing Artistic Director.

Tammy Ryan's award-winning plays have been commissioned, developed and performed across the United States and internationally at such theaters as The Alliance Theater Company, Florida Stage, Marin Theater Company, Dallas Children's Theater, Dorset Theater Festival, Stamford Theater Works, 29th Street Rep, City Theater Company, The Pittsburgh Playhouse and Bricolage Production Company, among many others. Her play *Dark Part of the Forest* won the 2006 Premiere Stages Play Festival and was subsequently published by Broadway Play Publishing. Her acclaimed play *Lost Boy Found in Whole Foods* was developed as part of the 2010 Premiere Stages Play Festival, was the recipient of the Francesca Primus Prize, awarded by the American Theater Critics Association, and was published by Dramatic Play Publishing.

Kean University graduate Tariq Hamami is an associate member of Original Binding Productions and a board member of Playsmiths, a NYC-based collective of theatre artists. His plays include *The Town of No One* (Fringe NYC '11), *White Picket Fences* (Access Theatre '13), *Spite* (Fringe NYC '08), *Everything Will Be Alright* (Horace Mann Theatre and BMCC '09), and *Queen Elizabeth of Factory Fifteen*, a 2011 finalist in the Samuel French OOB Festival.

Premiere Stages offers air-conditioned facilities and free parking close to the fully accessible spaces. Free or discounted tickets for patrons with disabilities are available. Call for a list of sign-interpreted, audio-described, or open-captioned performances. Assistive listening devices and large print programs are available upon request. Publications in alternate forms are available with advanced notice.

Premiere Stages is made possible in part through funding from The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, The Shubert Foundation, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, The Northfield Bank Foundation, The New Jersey Historical Commission, The Provident Bank Foundation, The Hudson City Savings Bank Foundation, Union County HEART Grants, The Hyde and Watson Foundation, The Union Foundation, E.J. Grassmann Trust, The New Jersey Theatre Alliance and through the generous support of individual patrons. Discover Jersey Arts is our marketing partner. Visit www.JerseyArts.com for more information about other arts programming happening around the Garden State.



WINNING STREAK... Colby Chen, a seventh grader at Edison Intermediate School in Westfield, won first place for the second consecutive year in Edison's Geography Bee sponsored by the National Geographic Society. Pictured, left to right, are: Andrea Brennan, Supervisor of Social Studies K-12; Jacob Tannanbaum, eighth grader, who earned third place in the Geography Bee; Colby, Jack Albin, second place winner who is in eighth grade; and Principal Matthew Bolton. Colby will take a written test as the next step to advance to the state level competition in the spring.

F-SP Service League Seeks Scholarship Applications

FANWOOD-SCOTCH PLAINS - The Fanwood-Scotch Plains Service League is now accepting applications for scholarships from Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) seniors and graduates currently attending college. Applications can be obtained from the SPFHS guidance office. Submission deadline is Saturday, February 15.

Scholarship recipients are selected with particular emphasis on demonstrated commitment to volunteerism and community while in high school and college.

The Fanwood-Scotch Plains Service League is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that has served our communities since 1974. Since its founding, the League has donated \$1.1 million

for local causes. Anyone interested in learning more about the League or League membership is invited to call (908) 322-5420, or visit www.scotchplainslts.org. Applications can be obtained from the SPFHS guidance office. Submission deadline is Saturday, February 15. Scholarship recipients are selected with particular emphasis on demonstrated commitment to volunteerism and community while in high school and college. The Fanwood-Scotch Plains Service League is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that has served our communities since 1974. Since its founding, the League has donated \$1.1 million



Wilmington University Awards Masters Degree

WILMINGTON, Del. – Samantha Jill Anderson received her Masters in Elementary Studies from Wilmington University.

Samantha received her undergraduate degree from Temple University in 2012 and is a graduate of Westfield High School, Class of 2008.



University of Scranton Announces Dean's List

SCRANTON, Pa. — The University of Scranton has announced its Dean's List, which recognizes students for academic excellence during the 2013 fall semester.

The list includes students from the Jesuit university's College of Arts and Sciences, the Kania School of Management, the Panuska College of Professional Studies and the College of Graduate and Continuing Education. More than 1,380 students were named to the 2013 fall semester Dean's List, including the following area residents.

Lauren Carosi of Cranford is a sophomore with a neuroscience major in Scranton's College of Arts and Sciences.

Kasey Donahue of Cranford is a freshman with a mathematics major in Scranton's College of Arts and Sciences.

Nicole Eniclerico of Westfield is a junior with a community health education major in Scranton's Panuska College of Professional Studies.

Ara Froehlich of Cranford is a junior with an accounting major in Scranton's Kania School of Management.

Danielle Jakubik of Cranford is a sophomore with an occupational therapy major in Scranton's Panuska College of Professional Studies.

Jaime Montalvo of Mountainside is a freshman with an undeclared major in Scranton's Kania School of Management.

Matthew Tarantino of Westfield is a junior with a media information technology major in Scranton's College of Arts and Sciences.

Shannon Tierney of Cranford is a senior with a human resources studies major in Scranton's Panuska College of Professional Studies.

A student must have a grade point average of 3.5 or better with a minimum number of credit hours to make the Dean's List.

Pomfret School Announces Honor Roll

POMFRET, Conn. – Christopher Kattak of Westfield was recently named to the High Honor Roll for the fall term at Pomfret School. A student earns Honors with a 3.0 average and no grade below a "B-."

Christopher, a member of the class of 2015, earned the distinction of High Honors with a 3.5 average and no grade below a "B-."

Cranford Dramatic Club to Hold Auditions for *Doubt*

Cranford Dramatic Club announced it will hold auditions for *Doubt: A Parable* by John Patrick Shanley and directed by Gina Lupi. Auditions will take place at the Cranford Dramatic Club located at 78 Winans Avenue in Cranford on Sunday, March 16, and Tuesday March 18, both at 7 p.m. Callbacks will be on Thursday, March 20, at 7 p.m. if needed.

Performance dates are May 2, 3, 9, 10, 16 and 17 at 8 p.m. and May 11 at 2 p.m. Rehearsals will begin with a read through on Sunday, March 23, at 7 p.m. Thereafter, rehearsals will be held on most Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings at 7 p.m., with two Saturday afternoons in addition.

Winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award, *Doubt* is set in a Catholic school in the Bronx in 1964. This thrilling drama follows the suspicions of the schools strong-minded principal, Sister Aloysius, that new priest Father Flynn might be making improper advances toward its first African-American male student.

She enlists the aid of a young teacher, Sister James, in her efforts to validate her concerns and confront Father Flynn. Flynn is as adamant in his denial of any wrongdoing as Sister Aloysius is certain that he is guilty. With Sister James and the student's mother,

Mrs. Muller, caught in the middle, the priest and principal face off in a battle of wits. Character Descriptions: Sister Aloysius – The head nun and principal of St. Nicholas School. In her fifties or sixties, she is watchful, reserved and unsentimental.

She is a no-nonsense, hardened administrator, determined to maintain order and tradition. Father Flynn – A new priest at St. Nicholas. His background is working class. In his thirties or forties, he is well-liked and particularly popular with the boys that he coaches in basketball. He's rather liberal and "modern" in his religious views. Sister James – A young nun in her twenties who is an enthusiastic but inexperienced eighth grade teacher at St. Nicholas. She is reserved, but cares about her stu-

dents and wants to think the best of everyone.

Mrs. Muller – The mother of St. Nicholas student Donald Muller. She is an African-American woman, late thirties to forties, working class, weary and wary of the world. She has learned to accept what she has to accept and work with it.

For more information email cdcpublicity@rjbrady.cnc.net.

Crescent Concerts Series Continues on February 9

PLAINFIELD — Six outstanding young musicians, 18 years old or younger, will present music for piano, violin and viola on Sunday, February 9, at 3 p.m. in the sanctuary of the Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church, at the corner of Seventh Street and Crescent Avenue in Plainfield. The concert is the fifth in this year's Crescent Concerts Series.

The young musicians, chosen by audition, are pianists Brianna Grace Tang of Edison, Amanda Cheng of Mendham, and Helen Shen of Basking Ridge. They will be joined by violinists Elizabeth Hendy and Jordan Hendy of Berkeley Heights and violist Johanna Nowik of North Plainfield.

A student of Yelena Ivanov, in 2012 Brianna Grace Tang performed with the Plainfield Symphony Orchestra Arensky's Fantasia on Themes of Ryabinin, op.48. She also performed Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto in G minor, op. 25 and Beethoven's Piano Concerto no.1 op. 15. at the "Festival Musica in Laguna" with the Orchestra Sinfonicadel Festival DeChoggia(Venice, Italy) under the direction of Maestro Pietro Perini. Recipient of The Mary Loftus/Sophie Rubman/Jim Ricketts Memorial Scholarship Award (Shandele Music Festival) and winner of multiple competitions, Brianna has performed at Carnegie Hall, Steinway Hall, and Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center.

For the Crescent Concert Tang will play music by Beethoven, Chopin, and Rachmaninoff.

Amanda Cheng, a student of Dr.

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK NEW PALTZ SUNY at New Paltz Awards Degree

NEW PALTZ, N.Y. – The State University of New York at New Paltz recently conferred over 100 graduate degrees.

Aswani Matta, a resident of Scotch Plains, was among the university's graduates.

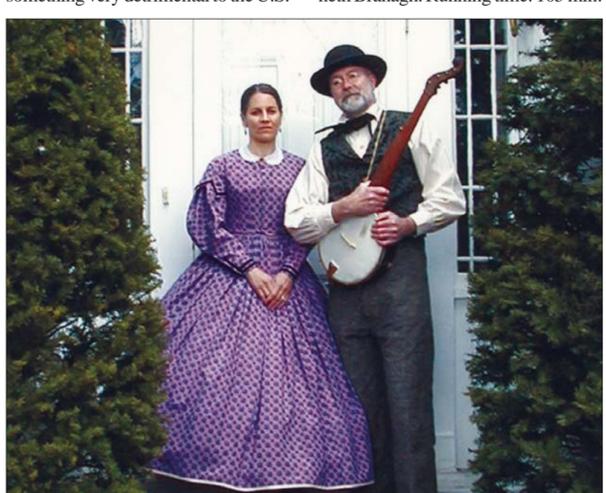
Aswani received a MBA in Business Administration.

Julia Lam, has received 16 first place honors in piano competitions. As winner she has performed at awards concerts in New York City and New Jersey, including Carnegie Zankel Hall, Carnegie Weill Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Merkin Concert Hall and the Mayo Performing Arts Center. Most recently, Cheng placed third at the NJMTA Young Musicians Competition, and was the Alternate winner (2nd Place) at the NJ MTNA Senior Duet Performance Competition. She also performed at two concerts in Budapest, Hungary at the invitation of the Hubay JenQ Music School and the Rózsavölgyi Márk Arts School. .

Amanda will perform music by Beethoven, Liszt, and Debussy.

Helen Shen first appeared at Weill Recital Hall in Carnegie Hall at the age of six as a winner of the Russian Music Festival Competition. Since then, she has performed Haydn's Concerto in C Major, Haydn's Concerto in D Major, and J.S. Bach's Concerto in G minor with the Orchestra Sinfonica del Festival di Choggia, and is scheduled to give her formal US Orchestral debut with the Plainfield Symphony Orchestra in February 2014. As a winner of numerous competitions, she has appeared at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, Steinway Hall (New York City), Shandelee's Sunset Concert Pavilion, (Shandele, N.Y.) and at St. Nicolò Auditorium. Since the age of five, she has studied with Lana Ivanov.

Helen will perform music of Moszkovski, Grieg, and Liszt.



CIVIL WAR ERA... Lisa Wilkins and Chuck Winch will sing authentic Civil War era songs and original compositions at a musical presentation at Masker's Barn, in the Deserted Village, on Thursday, February 13, from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. The program for adults will explore how popular songs shaped and reflected the sentiments of the time.

Trailside Offers ‘Songs of the Civil War: History and Myth’

WATCHUNG RESERVATION – Trailside Nature and Science Center is announced it will present a musical program, "Songs of the Civil War: History and Myth," for adults 18 years and older, on Thursday, February 13. Sponsored by the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Department of Parks and Recreation, this educational and entertaining program will take place at Masker's Barn in the Deserted Village of Feltsville from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Lisa Wilkins and Chuck Winch will sing both authentic Civil War era songs and original compositions to explore how popular songs shaped and reflected the sentiments and events of the time. Dressed in period clothing, their unique presentation illustrates how these songs continue to resonate emotionally among those interested in the Civil War and American history. The performers use authentic and

reproduction period instruments, including banjo, fiddle, guitar and bones. This musical program is sure to be enhanced by its location in the historic Masker's Barn, built in the period shortly after the Civil War.

Space is limited and pre-registration is required. There is no fee for this program; however, donations are welcome. Patrons are asked to meet and park in the parking lot at Cataract Hollow Road, off Glenside Avenue. A van will transport participants to the barn. Attendees are asked to arrive by 7:15 p.m. to allow for transportation to the barn.

For additional information about this and other programs and special events at Trailside, call (908) 789-3670 or visit www.ucnj.org/trailside www.ucnj.org/trailside. Trailside Nature and Science Center is located at 452 New Providence Road in Mountainside and is a service of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders.