

PATRIOT GAMES

Directed by Phillip Noyce
Produced by Mace Neufeld and Robert Rehme
Distributed by Paramount Pictures
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We never really know what we are going to do, despite all the promises we make that when faced with a difficult situation we won't cower, but will fearlessly act where others have failed their consciences. We cannot know what we're really made of until we're tested. Sometimes the test never comes. We die, never knowing. But we didn't fail, either. For those who are tested, but cower and let something awful happen, to survive may be worse than dying.

When Jack Ryan finds himself in the middle of a terrorist attack on the royal family, he first sees to the safety of his wife and child. With one car already blown up and another being primed, he knows this is a life-or-death matter. The terrorists have no reason to back down.

Ryan looks at his wife and child, hesitates, and then charges the nearest killer. Cathy yells in protest. She values her husband's life more than the well-heeled strangers. But Jack doesn't listen. He was a Marine and knows something about fighting. Sure, it's been at least fifteen years since all that. But, as he reflects later, "pure rage" was driving him. No way would he let these people die without him doing anything. He'd never forgive himself. And against all odds, Jack Ryan succeeds. He never made an explicit promise that he would save somebody being threatened by terrorists, but something told him that he couldn't look himself in the eye if he did nothing.

The twist is, if Ryan does nothing and the terrorists are thwarted anyway (perhaps the police arrive quicker), Ryan would still feel awful. It had all worked out, but it wasn't about them; it was about Ryan, himself. By cowering, by staying put and not putting up a fight, he would fail himself.

Of course, after Ryan unloads on the terrorists, his troubles really begin. It just goes to show that even when we do the right thing, bad things happen. (If Ryan had done nothing, he and his family would never have been bothered, but Ryan would be miserable.) We can control nothing. All we can do is choose to respond to the challenges of the day with honor, fortitude, and faith.

Not every challenge calls for overt heroics. Sometimes it's as simple as deciding when to speak and when to remain silent.

Whatever we face, it may be a one-time thing, as it was for Ryan. Sometimes we never get a second chance. And if we're too afraid of failure, we may actually miss our chance to act.

While a fear of failure can be met with action, there is no recourse for regret.