

## Blu-Ray Review: 'The Eclipse' Chills the Blood, Touches the Soul

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on June 29, 2010 - 7:58am

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CHICAGO – I often find that the most interesting characters in a ghost story are not the ghosts themselves, but the humans who encounter them. Ghosts are reflections of a past we are unwilling to depart from, even if it halts us from entering the future. It's a consolation for us to believe that our departed loved ones view us as their "unfinished business."

Like "The Sixth Sense," "The Eclipse" is primarily a human drama with occasional jolts of chilling horror. It centers on a character we've all seen before, the haunted widower grieving over his wife's death, yet the filmmakers refuse to turn him into a cliché. He's played by Ciarán Hinds, one of the finest and most underrated character actors in recent cinema, who's popped up in everything from "There Will Be Blood" to "In Bruges," and will soon be known to American audiences as Aberforth Dumbledore in the final "Harry Potter" installments. He has been sorely deserving of a lead role, and "Eclipse" provides him with a worthy showcase.



Blu-Ray Rating: **4.0/5.0**

Hinds plays Michael Farr, a teacher and father in an Irish seaside village that's hosting an annual literary festival. Farr volunteers as a driver for the visiting authors, including a smug American novelist (Aidan Quinn) who's pursuing a radiant author (Iben Hjejle) specializing in the supernatural. A lesser filmmaker would have these characters fall into a routine love triangle, but director Conor McPherson, best known for his work as an acclaimed playwright, isn't interested in recycling tidy formulas. He captures the awkwardness and occasional sloppiness of human behavior with a raw authenticity that is strikingly juxtaposed with the picturesque surroundings, masterfully lensed with a painterly eye by cinematographer Ivan McCullough. What distinguishes McPherson from most playwright-turned-filmmakers is his gift for purely visual storytelling. There are a number of moments in which a great deal is conveyed merely by a hesitant pause between words or a subtle move of the camera. McCullough pulls off some spectacular extended shots that are all the more effective because they don't draw attention away from the story.



Iben Hjejle and Ciarán Hinds star in Conor McPherson's *The Eclipse*.

*Photo credit: Magnolia Home Entertainment*

If there's a major problem with the film at all, it's the ghosts themselves. While they are undoubtedly frightening, and guaranteed to send some viewers leaping from their chairs on at least a couple occasions, their jarring appearances are disappointingly conventional. The filmmakers build such a convincing atmosphere of dread and tension that it's somewhat of a letdown when the ghosts show up, exuding a theatricality and gruesomeness that would've fit better in a Sam Raimi picture. "Eclipse" is stronger during its more ominous moments, such

as when Farr, in a dreamlike stupor, spots a blurry figure wandering through his house (that moment produces as big of a chill as anything in "Paranormal Activity"). And there's a sequence late in the film that plays out in complete silence, and hits the perfect note, fusing genuine awe with unbridled heartbreak.



The Eclipse was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on June 29th, 2010.

Photo credit: Magnolia Home Entertainment

It's ultimately the human relationships that make this film such a rewarding experience. Hinds is touchingly restrained, and once again succeeds in making acting look as natural as breathing. The other stand-out in the cast is Quinn, who somehow manages to make his egomaniacal character halfway sympathetic, even as his misguided vanity destroys everything he touches, resulting in a drunken fistfight so realistic that it inspires a wince. Like Farr, he's haunted by an unattainable object of his desire, yet the only spirits he comes in contact with are the ones he consumes on a daily basis.

"The Eclipse" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.00:1 aspect ratio), which brings crystalline clarity to every ominous shadow. The disc includes a standard HDNet featurette, as well as an extended 27-minute making-of documentary featuring interviews with the cast and crew. Co-writer Billy Roche discusses his short story collection "Tales from Rainwater Pond," which provided McPherson with inspiration for the story, though the supernatural elements were entirely the director's idea. Hinds previously collaborated with co-star Jim Morton, who plays Farr's ailing father-in-law, in McPherson's Broadway production of "The Seafarer," and says that the playwright-turned-filmmaker is surprisingly open to actors changing his words during rehearsal. Though the film's original cut clocked in at around three hours, no details are revealed about the deleted material (the final cut is a mere 88 minutes). The picture was financed out of Ireland without a sales agent, and ended up being warmly received at the Tribeca Film Festival. McPherson clearly doesn't consider the film's plot to be all that far-fetched, since he believes that life is an inherently "supernatural experience."

*'The Eclipse' is released by Magnolia Home Entertainment and stars Ciarán Hinds, Iben Hjejle, Aiden Quinn and Jim Norton. It was written by Conor McPherson and Billy Roche and directed by Conor McPherson. It was released on June 29th, 2010. It is rated R.*



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