

Blu-Ray Review: Roman Polanski's Brilliant Thriller 'The Ghost Writer'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 9, 2010 - 1:13pm

- [Blu-ray Review](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Ewan McGregor](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Kim Cattrall](#) [6]
- [Olivia Williams](#) [7]
- [Pierce Brosnan](#) [8]
- [Robert Harris](#) [9]
- [Roman Polanski](#) [10]
- [The Ghost Writer](#) [11]
- [Timothy Hutton](#) [12]
- [Tom Wilkinson](#) [13]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [14]

CHICAGO – Roman Polanski's name has drawn a lot of media attention in 2010 due to his continued international legal problems but the controversy regarding his real life has overshadowed the fact that he recently made one of the best films of his career, the tragically underrated and straight-up brilliant "The Ghost Writer," a must-see now that it's on Blu-ray and DVD.



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

Ewan McGregor stars (and gives his best performance since falling prey to curse of George Lucas) as the titular character, a writer-for-hire tapped to help a controversial U.K. Prime Minister named Adam Lang (a perfectly-cast Pierce Brosnan) put the finishing touches on his memoirs. It should be an easy enough assignment — spend a month in a beautiful cottage on an island and give the story of a political figure a personal touch. Of course, they say something about the best laid plans...

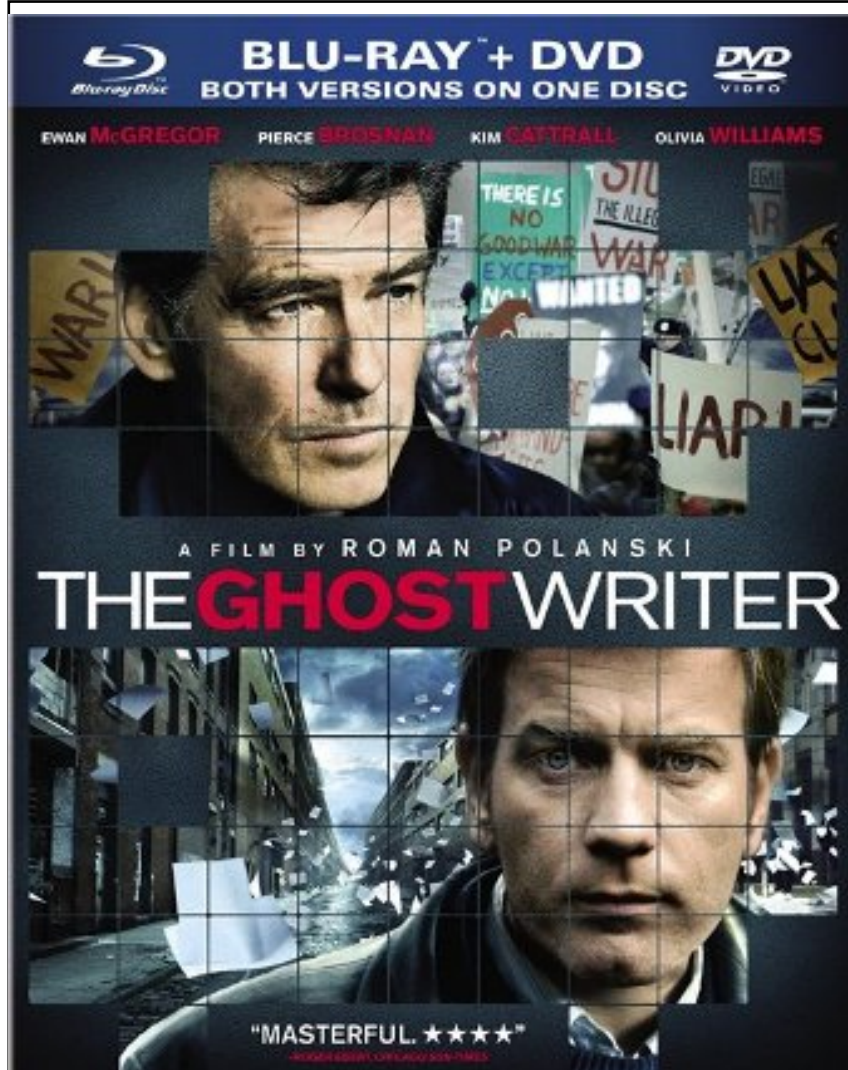


The Ghost Writer was released on Blu-ray and DVD on August 3rd, 2010

Photo credit: Summit

Before he knows it, our hero (who cleverly goes nameless throughout the piece, adding to his "ghost" persona) is caught in the middle of an international controversy about Lang's decisions while in office. Lang is accused of being a war criminal and the press descends on him and his new writer. It's not long before the P.M. is jetting off to Washington for U.S. support and leaving his ghost with his wife (an excellent Olivia Williams) and his increasing paranoia. You see, the previous ghost writer of Lang's memoirs was found washed up on the shore not far from the cottage after reportedly driving his car on to the ferry and either committing suicide or accidentally falling to the deadly waters below. But something's not adding up.

Not only is the death of his predecessor suspicious but the writer is starting to have his doubts about the opening chapter of Lang's book. The charismatic leader's recollection of how he went from a non-committal theatre student to a political activist just doesn't make sense and as our lead starts to put more and more of the pieces together, he also starts to see shadowy cars following him and men tracking his every move.



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Photo credit: Summit

Far too many films are dubbed "Hitchcockian" without any real understanding of what the term means but this is the film most-deserving of the adjective in a long time. "The Ghost Writer" brings to mind arguably the hardest element of Hitch's work to mimic which is the master's incredible skill with the atmosphere of paranoia. Was the previous writer killed? If so, why? And will our hero end up the same way? Polanski realizes that the mood of a piece like this one is far more important than any plot twist and he meticulously turns up the dial on the suspense as the story progresses.

Don't go into "The Ghost Writer" expecting some sort of revelatory final act like "Shutter Island" (although there are a few great twists) or an action-thriller like "The Silence of the Lambs." This film is more about the small moments that raise questions in an intelligent viewer's mind. Instead of traditional thriller tricks, Polanski's film merely keeps piling on question after question about conspiracies and character motivations until the viewer is just as discombobulated as the lead. We become the ghost, lost in the swirling mist of history and deception.

"The Ghost Writer" is easily one of the most expertly directed films of the year. Working from a novel by Robert Harris, Polanski comes alive in a way that he hasn't in years, bringing to mind his most creatively-rewarding period from the '60s and '70s. It's meant as no slight to "The Pianist," but this film reminded me of prime era Polanski works that similarly focused on souls caught in situations beyond their control not unlike "Repulsion," "Chinatown," or "The Tenant." Clearly, with those caliber of films as comparisons, this is one of the best of 2010.

The Blu-ray release of "The Ghost Writer" is a bit disappointing in terms of special features but the video quality is above average. As for bonus material, there are three featurettes that focus on separate elements of the production — the writer, the director, the cast — but they all run around ten minutes and feel like perfunctory talking-head material. The one memorable thing that I took from them was when Polanski claimed that he "makes movies for adults." If only more people did.

'The Ghost Writer' stars Ewan McGregor, Pierce Brosnan, Olivia Williams, Kim Cattrall, Tom Wilkinson, and Timothy Hutton. It was written by Robert Harris and Roman Polanski and directed by Polanski. It was released on DVD and Blu-ray on August 3rd, 2010 and is rated R. It runs 128 minutes.



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