

# GHOST WRITER 2010



*by Miles Mathis*

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This is a straight-up review of a 10-year-old movie, so if you aren't looking for that sort of thing, you can move on now. The only reason I watched the flim in the first place is that it was available for free at Youtube. It got great reviews, and it was that or watch *War Games* for the 10<sup>th</sup> time, so there I was. I can't explain it beyond that, so I won't even try.

After watching it, I wanted to give it a crushing review, but thought why bother. It had probably been done. So I went to Rotten Tomatoes to see all the crushing reviews. Which weren't there. The flim has an 84% fresh rating, and tons of great reviews, but very few splats. Even more, most of the splats had been memoryholed. The only negative review I found that satisfied me at all [was from Kyle Smith](#) of the *NYP*ost, since he was quite clever. But even he was too generous and hadn't said anything I wanted to say or to see said. So. . . here I am.

I have often thought that the reviews and awards for movies are fake. All these people are hired to give thumbs-up, and Roger Ebert himself gave this POS 4 stars. Was he still alive in 2010? I guess so—don't care enough to look it up. *Ghost Writer* actually won Best Film of 2010 from the International Federation of Film Critics, the European Film Awards, the Berlin Film Festival, the Gaudi Awards, Globo d'oro, the Polish Film Awards, and best adapted screenplay from the Cesar Awards. Roman Polanski won best director from many places as well.

The only thing nice I can say about the flim is that it remained watchable, despite being crap. It was fairly well acted, except for Kim Cattrall. Ewan McGregor avoided being too obnoxious, though he can definitely go there. One reviewer called him restrained, which seems to me like a proper adjective here. Polanski somehow continually makes you think the plot is suddenly going to blossom, though I don't know exactly how, since it never does. Maybe because the camera work was good?

But the problem is the script, which is one long series of holes and jumps. I suspect it follows the poor

writing of the book, though there is no way I am going to waste time finding out. McGregor plays second ghostwriter to the retired Prime Minister (Pierce Brosnan), after the first ghost has been found washed up dead on a beach. He is to complete his memoirs, which are still in a first draft. The only way we can continue to watch is to accept that McGregor, as the ghost, is dumb as dirt. . . or has some sort of death wish based on unresolved issues from his childhood or something. Because nothing he does makes any sense. Right after he is hired, two guys beat him up and steal the manuscript he is carrying. But he just shrugs it off as normal. He is being paid \$250,000 for two weeks' work, *plus* expenses, and you would think the first thing he would ask for, or hire, is security, but no. The thought never crosses his mind. He is expected to work at the Prime Minister's US retreat, on Martha's Vineyard or some such place, and he arrives to find it under heavy security. But when they dump him that night at a deserted hotel by himself, he doesn't complain. If it had been you or me or any other sane person, we would have demanded heavy security or quit immediately. But not McGregor. The second evening, when he returns to his hotel room, he finds the door open and his room rifled. Does he call the police, call security at the retreat, or even notify hotel management? No, he simply asks if anyone was looking for him. When the girl tells him he is the only one in the hotel, he shrugs and goes back up and goes to sleep!

It was at this point I almost quit, and probably should have, but my curiosity had been piqued by this unbelievable stupidity. I'm funny that way. I thought to myself, "can't these big-budget movies hire a continuity editor, or logic editor, or whatever they are called—someone, *anyone*, with a functioning brain?" It just surpasses my ability to conjure, that no one—not Polanski, not his scriptwriting team, not McGregor, *no one*—noticed how stupid this was. Polanski's coffee gofer, watching the dailies from the wings, could have spotted this: raised his little hand and suggested that no person with an IQ over 50 would have acted like that in that situation.

But the idiocy wouldn't quit. Despite being a college graduate capable of writing 700-page bestsellers, McGregor's character couldn't quit acting like a retarded chimp. Even *after* realizing his predecessor had been murdered, he still couldn't find any sense. In the next scene he decided to ride his bike alone—in the pouring rain—to go look at the crime scene on the beach. So not only is he too stupid to ask for security, he is too stupid to come in out of the rain. The only way he could have looked more like a dimwit is if he had been riding nude in a pinwheel hat, dragging a cacophony of tin cans. He finds more confirmation of the murder, since an old woman who found the body is now in a coma. So after returning to the house and sleeping with the Prime Minister's wife, he decides to drive out and confront the probable murderer. . . yes, alone and unarmed.

But wait, you say, he slept with the Prime Minister's wife? Pierce Brosnan's wife? Olivia Williams? After being in the house for just three days? How did he manage that? Nobody knows. Just because he is Ewan McGregor, I guess. Which reminds me of [a Louis CK routine](#), where Louis calls Ewan the most gorgeous man he has ever met, and says he is the one guy he would sleep with. But again, I have to say, WHAT?! Is everyone else living in a different world than I am? Am I seeing something different on my screen? To me, McGregor looks like a short, average-looking guy, of no special charms. Half the people on my trivia team have more looks and charisma than Ewan McGregor—though, I have to admit, he does have superior dental work and possibly a better haircut.

Anyway, as I say McGregor takes a long drive, across a big ferry, to visit a man he suspects murdered the previous ghostwriter. He walks right up to the door and rings the bell, then goes in and shows the guy the evidence he has against him. Brilliant, right? Then he is surprised when he is followed on the way home. Since he is in a BMW [product placement], he kicks it up to 100mph for about twenty seconds, and that is enough to lose them, on a road with no turns. Because, well, that makes sense. I

guess the CIA guys had to stop for some sheep or turtles on the road. But that still isn't stupid enough, so to be sure he has lost them, he turns into a rural drive that is an immediate deadend and parks. You are thinking, geez, he is trapped for sure now, since all they have to do is pull in behind him. But no, he backs out and moves on.

Any person with more than one marble would drive straight to the nearest police station, but that never occurs to our hero, who looks for a better place to get trapped: the ferry! He does indeed get trapped there, but our idiot-hero is able to outwit trained CIA agents by simply stepping off the ferry just as it is departing, while they are on the other end ordering MilkDuds.

McGregor is now without a car, out in the middle of nowhere, and the CIA agents saw him get off the ferry. Since according to my deepest research, the CIA *did* have cellphones in 2010, all they had to do is call in his location. A second team would have been there within 15 minutes, 5 by air. But the flim isn't nearly over, so that can't happen. Instead, McGregor calls the Prime Minister's old foreign secretary Rycart to come rescue him. This despite the fact that neither we in the audience nor McGregor can have any indication by that time that Rycart is a good guy. Our hero now believes the Prime Minister is CIA, so why wouldn't his own foreign secretary also be CIA, or similarly compromised? Do bad Prime Ministers normally appoint good secretaries? Is that what we are supposed to believe? Conveniently, this British foreign secretary who we had just seen on British TV happens to be in the US and only an hour's drive away from this rural ferry. When he arrives, McGregor again tells him everything he knows, because, you know, why not?

Rycart confirms that the Prime Minister is a real war criminal, besides being CIA, etc, etc. So McGregor decides the best thing he can do is ride back with the Prime Minister on his private plane, and accuse him to his face of being CIA, showing him the evidence. But Brosnan just laughs it off, before stepping off the plane in New York and getting assassinated by a sniper. Was the sniper CIA, ex-military, some wingnut? We never find out. Maybe he was just someone shooting snipe from the roof of LaGuardia.

McGregor finishes the book at last, then goes to its publishing debut with Cattrall, the PM's secretary. The PM's wife is giving the opening speech. While there, McGregor finally breaks the code in the original manuscript, which tells us that the **wife** is actually the CIA agent. Wow, shocker, right? No one saw that coming . . . except those who had seen the previous parts of the movie, which telegraph it over it and over. So what does our idiot-hero do? Exactly what you would expect him to do: he passes her a note telling her he knows. He then waves to her from the audience and runs from the room. Same thing any other person with a death wish would do. Fortunately, the wife was prepared for just this eventuality, calling a car waiting on the street outside, which runs over McGregor as he tries to hail a cab. To make it easier for them, McGregor is of course hailing a cab *from the middle of the street*. He is also temporarily deaf, since he can't hear the car gunning from a block away, though we can.

So what was all that miscalculation about? How did this mess ever get to celluloid, and why? We are told it is because the original author of the book, Robert Harris, hated Tony Blair, and wanted to tell the world Blair should have been tried for crimes against humanity. He also wanted to out the CIA. So we are supposed to believe Polanski and his producers also wanted that. Is there any chance that is true? No.

Can I unwind it for you? I certainly can. That is what I can do that no one else will do. I think the reason the plot made no sense is that no one in production paid any attention to it. They figured movie audiences would watch any garbage put in front of them, because, well, they always had. So plot was

not job one. It was job three at best. Job one was selling recent history as real, and job two was selling the CIA. Not blackwashing it, but whitewashing it. Let's hit them in order.

The crime against humanity Brosnan—and therefore Blair and the CIA—was supposed to be guilty of was allowing the CIA to illegally kidnap middle eastern terrorists and torture them for information. One small subplot in the flim involves the father of a US soldier caught up in the mess, the father screaming to the cameras that his son died “needlessly”. Of course that subplot, like the rest of the flim, goes nowhere: it is just floated and then dropped without resolution. But it is meant to remind us of the whole series of manufactured events since the First Gulf War, up to and including the post-911 renditions of prisoners to Guantanamo. You see, in all those events, the governments of the world don't care whether you are for or against them. They don't ultimately care if you think these illegal captures and tortures are justifiable or not. As long as you believe *they happened*. Because as long as you think they happened, you will think the defense budget was spent on *something*. You may not agree with the defense expenditures as a matter of morality, but you will assume the money was spent on a real project.

But [as we have seen at Guantanamo](#), it wasn't. It was all a stageplay, put on to drain the treasury. Those guys in Guantanamo are just actors and the whole thing is a fraud, but the treasury, and therefore *you*, have been billed exorbitant sums to maintain the fraud. Same goes for the fake killing of Saddam Hussein, which never happened. Same goes for the fake killing of bin Laden, which never happened. Same goes for the fake killing of Gaddafi, which never happened. Same thing for all the other terrorist theater, back to the time of Bush, Sr.

Flims like *Ghost Writer* make you think those things **did** happen, and they do it very cleverly: by making it appear the writers and producers **disapproved** of those events. This is a great way to fool you, because you tell yourself these people wouldn't sell as real events they disapproved of. If they knew they were fake and disapproved of them, they would just tell you they were fake, right? Therefore, the events must be real.

If you are watching this flim, they know the odds are you knew something about it going in. You probably knew something about the plot in the book, and the Blair thing, and so on. So, odds are you disapproved of the wars or the renditions in some way. Blair fans aren't going to be buying tickets for this. So to get to you, the producers have to be on your side. They know you are far less likely to look closely at someone or something you agree with. So, if the author and the director and the producers seem to disapprove of Blair, Bush, and the CIA, you aren't going to question them. You are going to follow them along, and go where they lead you. And it is especially easy, since they aren't really leading you anywhere. They are just confirming what you already think you know. They are salting in recent history, making sure you don't begin questioning it at any deeper level. They confirm to you that it is proper to question it this far and no farther: whether it was legal or proper for the US and UK to have done these things. But you should never question *whether* they did these things at all. They want to make sure that never occurs to you.

Even more insidious is that they have ways to sell you the CIA even while seeming to out the CIA. At the end of this movie and all similar movies, you come away with two major ideas about the CIA: one, it is or may be doing illegal or indefensible things, which is bad; two, it is extremely powerful and is not to be messed with on any level. It is the second idea that is primary here, and that really matters. As far as the first idea goes, being seen as bad doesn't really bother them. The word “legal” no longer has any meaning to the CIA. They have been above the law from the beginning, so they couldn't really care less about that. But even here, we find them selling their side of it. See the scene on the plane,

where Brosnan gives the required speech against critics of the CIA, yelling that extreme tactics work, since only extreme tactics ensure our children's safety—or something to that effect. In other words, the CIA will let itself be blackwashed as part of the larger play, but even while doing so its embedded writers will always require the mandatory insertion of scenes like this, if only to keep morale among agents high.

As for the second idea, concerning the awesome power and reach of the CIA, that is what flims like this are all about. That is why the final scene is the hook of the whole thing—and why it is such a dud. It is confirmation that the CIA will get you. They are everywhere and can take you down at a moment's notice. Be afraid, be very afraid. Despite the Constitution, the courts, and free speech, the CIA is actually the final arbiter of all things on Earth and in Heaven. They are judge, jury, and executioner. . . or just executioner. So always do exactly as you are told.

And because the CIA really does think this way about themselves, it makes them look pathetic. It makes them sign off on flims like *Ghost Writer*, and such endings, without realizing how laughable they are. They have lost all self-awareness. Drunk on power, they have lost all balance and sanity, which is why they can't spot these things you and I see from a mile off. They greenlighted this tragedy and paid thousands of critics to praise it, which means they are living in some parallel universe.