

DVD Review: Second Season of HBO's Brilliant 'In Treatment'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 21, 2010 - 3:45pm

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CHICAGO – "In Treatment" is something of a TV miracle. It is a drama that focuses solely and purely on how what we say is as important as what we do. With real-time therapy sessions that play like mini-plays, "In Treatment," the second season of which is now available on DVD, is far and away one of the best shows of the last several years. It's a major commitment of time and emotion but it gives more than it takes.



DVD Rating: **4.0/5.0**

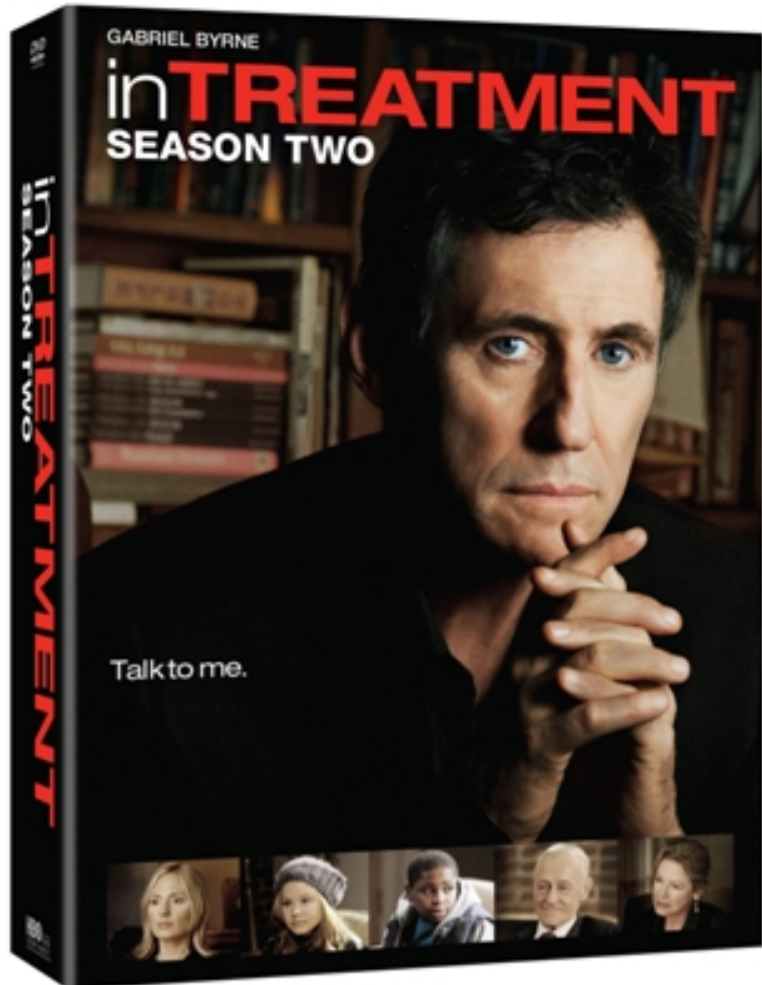
It could be the former theatre major in me, but I look at "In Treatment" with a certain sense of awe. It is human interaction completely stripped down to performance and dialogue. As great as shows like "Lost" and "Mad Men" are they have production elements that hook the viewer in their own way. For "In Treatment," it's all about the characters and the people portraying them. And with some of the best performances on television to go along with some of the best writing, "In Treatment" is a TV masterpiece.



In Treatment: Season Two was released on DVD on October 12th, 2010

Photo credit: HBO Home Video

"In Treatment" is broken up into five half-hour therapy sessions a week all with the same therapist, Dr. Paul Weston (the incredible Gabriel Byrne, who should have won the Emmy for this season). For the first four episodes/sessions of the week, we see Dr. Weston's patients in real-time, half-hour sessions and in the final installment of the week we see Paul go to his own doctor (Dianne Wiest, who won an Emmy for her work on the show in season one).



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Photo credit: HBO Home Video

Season two features Mia (Hope Davis), April (Allison Pill), Oliver (Aaron Shaw), and Walter (John Mahoney). The diversity of the patients — middle-aged woman, young woman, child, older man — is the only element of the show that feels a bit forced but it allows for the program to feel fresh and new with each half-hour. With this much of a time commitment, repetition could be the death of a show like “In Treatment,” but this is one of the most well-paced programs on television. It’s never dull.

Mia is arguably the most-fascinating patient in season two. She was a patient of Dr. Weston's twenty years ago who is now defending him in a lawsuit while clearly needing to deal with her own issues of self-worth. Brought brilliantly to life by the Emmy-nominated Hope Davis, Mia is a bundle of passive-aggressive behavior masquerading serious doubts about how her life has turned out. She’s constantly prodding Paul, who she honestly believes “owes her a child,” considering she had an abortion while he was her therapist. Davis is perfect and the show would be worth your time just for her sessions.

The second session features another female patient who often plays mind games with Dr. Weston, April (Allison Pill, who should have been Emmy-nominated), a student who has a deadly illness that she’s kept from her family and friends. Unlike Mia, April has honest reason to be an emotional wreck but she’s in denial, thinking that ignoring her physical plight will make it go away. Pill is spectacular.

The third session presents the most problems for the show as it’s arguably the most ambitious. Instead of one-on-one, Paul’s Wednesday sessions feature family therapy, focusing mostly on 11-year-old Oliver (Aaron Shaw) and how the divorce of his parents (Russell Hornsby, Sherri Saum) is impacting his life. These episodes feel the most forced and often melodramatic with dialogue that doesn’t feel as nuanced or shaded as the other nights of the week. Issues of divorce and its impact on children are perhaps too complex for 20% of a show like “In Treatment.”



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Photo credit: HBO Home Video

The fourth session brings the great John Mahoney to the forefront as Walter, a CEO dealing with professional scandal and personal loss and suffering panic attacks. This man has been in control of thousands of lives for years, but when lack of control, especially over his daughter's safety, seeps into his world view, he collapses.

Finally, Paul goes to see Dr. Gina Toll (Dianne Wiest, nominated again for this season) and deals with own, sizable issues, often amplified by what he's heard in the previous four sessions. The idea that therapists are not machines and that they are going to be emotionally and personally impacted by their patients is brilliantly rendered in these episodes and Byrne truly shines here. I love how different he is in his own therapy, sitting on the other side of the dynamic and allowing emotions to the surface that he can't as a doctor.

Like most things that are worthwhile, "In Treatment" requires heavy commitment. Asking for 150 minutes a week of time commitment has made the show less popular than HBO would have liked (and it was barely renewed for season three, which is debuting on October 25th, 2010 and which we'll cover then) but it's the perfect show for DVD. It's worth the time and effort.

As for the DVD release, it's undeniably disappointing. The DVD grade at the top takes that into account, turning a 5-star show into a 4-star release. The video transfer is lackluster and not a single special feature is included. I'm sure I'm not the only one curious about the making of a program that sometimes feels like it was shot in one take and often feels so genuine that I wonder if part of it is improvised. Maybe we'll get some behind-the-scenes material on season three.

'In Treatment: Season Two' stars Gabriel Byrne, Dianne Wiest, Hope Davis, John Mahoney, Alison Pill, and Aaron Shaw. The show was created by Rodrigo Garcia. It was released on DVD on October 12th, 2010 and runs 870 minutes.



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