

TV Review: HBO’s ‘Into the Storm’ With Brendan Gleeson, Janet McTeer

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 29, 2009 - 1:07pm

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CHICAGO – HBO’s “Into the Storm” is a different kind of WWII movie than audiences have recently become accustomed to seeing. This excellent drama is not about the people on the ground but about the powerful men that made the decisions that determined their fates.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

In 2002, HBO aired one of their most critically acclaimed and beloved TV films, “The Gathering Storm”. The historical drama starred Albert Finney as Winston Churchill and Vanessa Redgrave as his wife Clementine Churchill. The film detailed the rise up to WWII, ending just before Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940, which is where “Into the Storm” opens.



Into the Storm
Photo credit: HBO Films

“Into the Storm” is the next chapter in the series, detailing Churchill’s time during the war and starring Brendan Gleeson as Churchill and Janet McTeer as his wife. Once again, the film has been produced by Ridley Scott and Tony Scott. This sequel was directed by Thaddeus O’Sullivan.

Written by Hugh Whitmore, “Into the Storm” flashes back and forth from the days after the end of the war in Europe to some of the more defining moments of the preceding years and the effect it had on his personal life.



Into the Storm
Photo credit: HBO Films

"The people trust us. We must tell them the truth. We must never let them down." It is with this line early in the film that the basic dramatic foundation of "Into the Storm" is laid. "Into the Storm" portrays Churchill as a man of his people. He would risk any political or personal trauma to protect them.

There's another line in "Into the Storm" that illustrates a clear dramatic intention of the piece - "We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be." This line from Churchill's speech after the carnage at Dunkirk early in the war illustrates something often glossed over in depictions of the war - there was a viable fear on the part of British people that the Nazis would make it all the way to their front door. Imagine leading with that kind of national concern. Imagine the Iraq War if we thought the ground combat would make it all the way to small-town America. It's hard to do so.

But it's merely one detail in the thoroughly-researched screenplay for "Into the Storm," one that makes most theatrical films look shallow in comparison, much less the world of TV movies.

I do have a few quibbles with the structure of "Into the Storm". The way that the film jumps from war room conversations during the height of the early part of the war to the election after with trips to the White House in between is almost jarring in its structure and makes for a film that ultimately feels more episodic than it should.

For example, when the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor and the U.S. enters the war, there's a brief aside indicating Churchill's relief that he would have such a new powerful ally. The idea that Pearl Harbor helped the Brits survive the war is one that's certainly interesting enough for more than a scene or two, but "Into the Storm" often feels hurried.

And it's not that the film is overly long. With HBO's freedom with running times, why cover SO much material in under 100 minutes?

"Into the Storm" may be episodic but the episodes are riveting, well-made cinema. Brendan Gleeson continues to shine as one of the better actors of his generation working today. Most audiences probably know him best as Mad-Eye Moody from the "Harry Potter" movies but he gave one of the best performances of last year in "In Bruges" and was excellent in "Troy," "Gangs of New York," "28 Days Later," "AI," "The General," and many more. Gleeson may not have the household name value of Finney but he can more than handle the role. An Emmy nomination is very likely.

McTeer is good as Clemmie but the supporting cast is a little light. "The Gathering Storm" featured great actors like Derek Jacobi, Jim Broadbent, Linus Roache, and Tom Wilkinson in supporting roles. "Into the Storm" is more of a one-man show than I would have liked.

Gleeson, the interesting subject matter, and theatrical-level production value make "Into the Storm" an interesting alternative this weekend even if it doesn't quite stand up dramatically to the original HBO Film. It's still worth a look.

'Into the Storm,' debuts on HBO on Sunday, May 31st, 2009, at 8pm CST and plays throughout June. It stars Brendan Gleeson and Janet McTeer. It was directed by Thaddeus O'Sullivan.

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