



DVD

DISC DETAILS

OUT: Now
RRP: £24.99
DISCS: 3
ASPECT RATIO: 1.78:1
AUDIO: DD 2.0
PICTURE: ★★★
SOUND: ★★★
EXTRAS: Commentaries on two episodes with writer-creator Julian Fellowes, directors Brian Percival and Ben Bolt and series producer Liz Trubridge; 'The Making Of Downton Abbey' featurette; 'A House In History' featurette; Deleted scenes; Subtitles

SHOW DETAILS

DISTRIBUTOR: Universal Playback
CERT: 12
RUN TIME: 365 mins (7 episodes)
YEAR: 2010
STARS: Maggie Smith, Hugh Bonneville, Elizabeth McGovern

OR GET IT ON...
Blu-ray (£29.99)



The guests were aghast when the bouncy castle blew away.

SHOW ★★★★★ **EXTRAS** ★★★

DOWNTON ABBEY: SERIES 1

This Upstairs, Downstairs drama is all heirs and graces...

"No Englishman would dream of dying in someone else's house!" exclaims Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham (Maggie Smith) in the third episode of *Downton Abbey*. "Especially someone they didn't even know!" Why? It wouldn't be proper.

Downton's glowering matriarch provides plenty of sour reminders as to How Things Should Be Done and this idea of etiquette and social mores lies at the heart of the show. Created by Julian Fellowes, who won an Oscar for his *Gasford Park* script, it follows the toffs and servants at stately Downton Abbey, from Robert, Earl of Grantham (Hugh Bonneville) and his American wife, Cora (Elizabeth McGovern), to the maids, butlers and valets who tend to their every need - down to ironing their newspapers.

Enjoyable and engrossing, the show depicts a series of power struggles - it's all about petty politics and pecking orders. It's also a reminder of just how much things have changed in the past hundred years, this being a time when women couldn't inherit property and you were allowed to sack your butler for having a limp.

The programme-makers worked hard to keep things authentic, although the promo-Making Of doesn't tell us much about this. When will TV and film companies understand that we don't just want to hear about how great it all is? We definitely didn't need to hear historical advisor Alastair Bruce helpfully explaining: "Actors are brilliant because they can adopt quite a lot of information and make magic with it."

One day, perhaps, the people who make these featurettes will include some actual

information about the production process. You do get to see some nice interaction between Smith and Penelope Wilton, plus brief titbits about cameras and costumes, but it's all fairly missable. Ditto the 'A House In History' featurette, ostensibly about the house where the show was filmed, which doesn't really tell us much.

Thank goodness, then, for the audio commentaries, although these only appear on the first two episodes. Directors Brian Percival and Ben Bolt, series producer Liz Trubridge and Fellowes are among those offering insights into the programme-making process, including tales of driving a car without a handbrake. There are also a handful of deleted scenes but no outtakes. Shame - we'd like to see Smith corpsing her colleagues. She probably doesn't do that, though. It wouldn't be proper, after all.

Anne Wollenberg

FINAL WORD

A lavish, well-acted drama with a few soapy moments, this is a great watch. The extras are rather more downstairs than upstairs, though.



"Votes for women! We love X-Factor too!"

NEXT STOP...

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS (1971-75)
The original epic toffs-and-servants show. Network's complete boxset comes with commentaries, archive interviews, five documentaries and the 1975 Christmas special.
Show: ★★★★★
Extras: ★★★★★