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THE MANY FACES OF **TOM HANKS**

Cranky, yes, but I'm driven by fun

Tom Hanks tackles six roles in *Cloud Atlas*, but he still thinks its notions of karma and destiny are baloney, discovers *Matt Mueller*

In an illustrious Hollywood career that has seen him write, direct, land two Oscars (for *Philadelphia* and *Forrest Gump*) and become a formidable producer, there aren't many things that Tom Hanks hasn't already achieved. But playing six roles in the same film counts as one, which is what he does in *Cloud Atlas*, the big-screen adaptation of David Mitchell's supposedly unfilmable 2004 novel.

The sibling duo behind *The Matrix* trilogy, Andy and Lana Wachowski, took it upon themselves to crack the revered tome's celluloid code, with a helping hand from *Run Lola Run*'s Tom Tykwer, their co-writer and director.

When the Wachowskis turned up at Hanks's office to pitch him the project, their lofty, audacious vision impressed the actor. "They told me they wanted to make a cross between *Moby Dick* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*," he recalls. "That's really different from, 'you're a cop with a dog who solves crimes'. I said: 'Man oh man, I'm in. Just tell me where to show up.'"

Hanks might not be the all-conquering box-office colos-

At odds: Tom Hanks and Halle Berry disagreed about karma and past lives while shooting *Cloud Atlas*



sus of yore (see: *Big*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Da Vinci Code*...) but his name still gets films made. That's why the Wachowskis – themselves a somewhat tarnished force after their 2008 flop *Speed Racer* – needed the 56-year-old star on board to raise *Cloud Atlas*'s hefty \$100million budget.

In an epoch and genre-spanning yarn that threads together six different storylines, Hanks plays a seafaring medicine man, a Scottish hotel owner, a conscience-pricked nuclear scientist, a London-Irish criminal, a film actor and a Hugh Grant-evading goatherd in post-apocalyptic Hawaii.

Age, race, nationality, whereabouts... the only thing Hanks doesn't change (unlike fellow *Cloud Atlas* stars Halle Berry, Ben Whishaw and Hugo Weaving) is gender – surely an opportunity missed by the Wachowskis considering their star launched his career as a cross-dresser in sitcom *Bosom Buddies*.

But the playful side of Hanks still gets ample chance to shine in

Cloud Atlas, particularly in his sinister yet comedic turns as the nefarious Dr Goose, a 19th-century poisoner sailing the South Seas, and Dermot Hoggins, the carrot-tanned villain-turned-memoirist who chucks a critic off a roof over a bad review.

"I actually said: 'I'm playing Dermot Hoggins? Really?'" groans Hanks. "And Lana said: 'Yeah, because it's the same brand of self-loathing that you're gonna have to carry 1,000 years into the future as [goatherd] Zachry.'"

THE Wachowskis and Tykwer also instructed Hanks to imagine he was playing the same soul rather than individual characters, which sounds potentially befuddling. "They were taskmasters about it, too," he grins. "They steered us towards a specificness that only they had in their heads although, to be honest, I didn't get all the spiritual connections until I saw the finished film. But I've seen it three times now and discovered, I swear

to God, different, profound things with each viewing."

With *Cloud Atlas* exploring karmic destiny, Hanks recalls many an on-set discussion about reincarnation with his predominant co-star in the dystopian and 1970s storylines, Halle Berry – friendly debates that exposed "this huge chasm between Halle and myself". Guess which one believes in past lives. That's right, it ain't Hanks. "I think it's a bunch of baloney and malarkey," he bellows. "I'm known to be cranky that way. Look, I believe in the importance of the right now although I'm perfectly willing to envelop myself in the mystery of it all. As a layman who reads history, I can see that the human condition does not evolve until someone does the right thing, which is a version of saying: 'It's important the karma you put out right now because it's going to affect eternity.'"

Hanks snorts at the notion that people learn lessons during their lives that aid the journeys of their souls to a higher plane of existence, as posited by *Cloud Atlas* and the bulk of Eastern religions. "If this is the sum

total of the knowledge that I've earned," he chortles, "then I must have been a cow in my past life."

In this life, Hanks has achieved far beyond what most actors do and more than he dared to dream as a struggling New York thespian who piled his possessions into the back of an old Buick and drove cross-country for a make-or-break stab at a Hollywood career. "Individual jobs come and go but the fact that I had the courage to do that is the thing that I am most proud of," beams Hanks, whose early, troubled personal life has been succeeded by 25 years of wedded bliss to actress Rita Wilson, with whom he has two children (and four in total).

"Most people would have been afraid to do that. I was about to have a kid, which I found out halfway across the country. But rather than listen to all the reasons why I shouldn't do it, I adhered to the one reason why I should: it's going to be fun."

That it has been and continues to be, for Hanks and for us.

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Long-time love: Hanks and wife Rita Wilson at *Cloud Atlas*'s LA premiere

KARMA CHAMELEON HANKS'S ROLES IN CLOUD ATLAS



From left: Dr Henry Goose; a hotel manager; nuclear physicist Isaac Sachs; author Dermot Hoggins; an actor who plays Cavendish (Jim Broadbent's character); futuristic goatherd Zachry