

# ‘A Hologram For The King’ Review: Tom Hanks Faces Midlife Crisis In Saudi Arabia

by [Pete Hammond](#)

April 22, 2016 4:11pm

Delivering another understated but heartfelt and memorable performance, [Tom Hanks](#) emerges as the primary reason to put [A Hologram For The King](#) on your list.

On its own the movie is a fresh and rewarding movie experience, but Hanks takes the material one step above. In fact, as I say in my video review above, the movie written and directed by Tom Tykwer and based on Dave Eggers’ 2012 existential novel reminded me of the 1973 Jack Lemmon film *Save The Tiger*. In that film, Lemmon played a man in a midlife crisis who finds he is a stranger to modern times, a man whose best days were behind him.

Hanks, who often has been compared to Lemmon as an actor, plays Alan Clay, an American businessman who also seems to be on the downswing, caught in an era where everything he *thought* he knew is no longer true. He’s a newly divorced father dealing with a troubled daughter and a career as a salesman that seems to be going south. Working for a company that sends him to Saudi Arabia to push a new 3D teleconferencing system that is essentially a hologram, Clay only gets the assignment because of some distant connection with the Saudi Monarch’s nephew. Clay finds himself stuck in the middle of the desert, where a Middle Eastern utopian-type city is being built, with only a tent and no WiFi to show off this system to an AWOL King (who it turns out hasn’t been seen in the area in well over a year).

Waiting for the big moment, he finds himself going back and forth to the nearest city with the help of his thirtysomething driver Yousef (Alexander Black). He also has tentative involvements with a Danish woman (Sidse Babett Knudsen), and with a doctor he sees for a rather gross boil on his back that is not going away. His relationship with the latter (played nicely by Sarita Choudhury) seems to be leading to something that really never pays off, unfortunately.

Basically *A Hologram For The King* is a nice indie-style character study of a man whose life and work merges to find him literally adrift in the desert questioning where he is going. Between waiting for the King to show up and the nagging realities of his own life, Hanks has a lot to work with, and you wouldn’t be wrong to see elements of *Death Of A Salesman* here. Alan Clay is not quite Willy Loman, but they do share the fact that life seems to be rushing them by.

Although the film falls short of greatness, there is much that is worthwhile and it is miles ahead of the last Hanks-Tykwer collaboration, the miserable and incoherent *Cloud Atlas*. The opening fantasy sequence where Hanks finds himself singing Talking Head’s “Once In A Lifetime” is in itself worth the price of admission, but it is a red herring for what is to follow.

Stefan Arndt, Gary Goetzman, Tim O'Hair, Arcadiy Golubovich and Uwe Schott produced. Hanks' own shingle, Playtone, is among the production companies involved. Saban Films and Roadside Attractions releases it today.

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