

TOM
HIDDLESTON
**A god
among men?**

Hollywood A-lister, ELLE writer, YouTube sensation – Tom Hiddleston’s cult status



is evident on every platform. And, as ELLE’s Annabel Brog discovers, he’s not afraid of revealing, well, everything

Photography **Mari Sarai**

When ELLE’s Editor-in-Chief Lorraine Candy was at Wimbledon last year, she rather naively tweeted afterwards: ‘I sat next to actor Tom Hiddleston and his girlfriend Jane. He’s a very funny man.’ She has never – bear in mind this is a mother of four who edits a fashion magazine, which puts her high on a certain demographic hit-list – been trolled like it. The responses veered between righteous fury that she had outed Hiddleston as being With Girlfriend, and rather bloodthirsty expressions of envy that she had, you know, talked to him.

Tom Hiddleston inspires fervour in his fans. He’s an extraordinary actor who has won universal acclaim – his roles include feckless Prince Hal in the BBC’s *The Hollow Crown*; sweet, doomed Captain Nicholls in Spielberg’s *War Horse*; and currently the blood-drenched warrior Coriolanus at the Donmar Warehouse – but it’s his performance as pallid, sociopathic god of mischief Loki in the *Thor* and *Avengers Assemble* films that catapulted him into the stratosphere. To put it in context: Hiddleston recently donated a pair of signed Converse to the Small Steps charity auction, alongside the likes of Mick Jagger >





and Kate Moss. His shoes sold for £4,500 (more than anyone else's). He is very appreciative of the interest, while simultaneously being uncomfortable with the idea of fame. 'Do I like it? It's sort of inconsequential in a way, a weird corollary to everything else I've done. I cannot tell you how surprising it is. It's like, really? REALLY? I honestly try not to think about it too much.'

We are nestled under a heater in the beer garden of a north-west London pub on a chilly December evening. Hiddleston is drinking whiskey, which is part of my cunning strategy to break him down - he has always given me the impression of being very prepared in interviews - but it doesn't work. After five shots, he remains entirely in control.

Nonetheless, he is rather adorable: ferociously bright (he went to Eton, then Cambridge, where he got a double first), earnest ('I know. I'm sorry. I can't help it'), obliging, and old-fashioned. Partly that's his classically handsome face, partly it's his impeccable manners, and partly it's the way he constructs his sentences.

Describing his favourite book, William Boyd's *Any Human Heart*, for instance, he says, 'Like all life, it contains multitudes'; or, on opening up to new people, 'I fear I am initially quite private.' When he is sure of his subject - talking about work, family, culture - he is eloquent and assertive. When he is less certain - typically on the subject of himself - his voice rises slightly

in inadvertent questions: 'I'm solitary [but] I don't think that's a good thing, I think I'm better in company?' Or: 'I know that there's this thinking capacity, which is possibly not a good thing?'

Tom William Hiddleston is 33 (on 9 February, to be precise), a middle child with one sister 15 months older, and another five years younger. His childhood sounds like a simple, pleasurable place. 'I have memories of climbing trees and watching *The Snowman*, with David Bowie introducing it in his snowman scarf.' He starts to laugh. 'When I actually learned who David Bowie was, I was like, "That's the man from *The Snowman*". And

people were: "Never say that again. That's Ziggy Stardust. Shut up!"

His parents are incredibly proud of him: 'It's taken us a while to get there. It's one of those conversations I don't have with them, but I just know that they are [proud]. If we [he and his mother] start talking about it, we will both collapse in a heap of tears. It's moving to make your mother proud.'

Growing up surrounded by women has had a glorious effect on his view of them. 'I believe in the strength and intelligence and sensi-

I believe in the strength and intelligence and sensitivity of women. My mum is a strong woman and I love her for it'



Photography: Mari Sarai. Tom wears: Previous page: Black wool coat, £1,819, Giorgio Armani. Navy cotton T-shirt, £105, Hugo Boss. Blue denim jeans (worn throughout), £125, A. P. C. This page: Left: Silk-mix jumper, £150, Karl Lagerfeld. Top right: Black wool coat, £345, and blue and cream cotton and leather trainers, £255, D'ice & Gabbaro. Bottom right: Cotton T-shirt, £105, Hugo Boss.

tivity of women. My mother, my sisters [they] are strong. My mum is a strong woman and I love her for it.' He is also - praise the Lord for men like Hiddleston - very romantic. When asked about love and relationships, he simply says, 'Honesty is a gift - to be honest about who you are and how you feel - because it encourages intimacy, and intimacy is really where's it at. To be known and know someone is an amazing feeling, and you don't get there if you're pretending to be anyone else.'

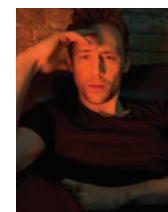
Hiddleston voices Captain Hook in Disney's *Tinker Bell And The Pirate Fairy* (out this month), and has a high-impact cameo in *Muppets Most Wanted*. But his next lead in a film is in an homage to both strong women and love. *Only Lovers Left Alive* is an enchanting, funny, somnolent Jim Jarmusch project in which he plays Adam, a 500-year-old vampire rock star with suicidal leanings. 'Adam is a delicate soul,' says Tom. Adam is, indeed, delicate, but he is also (and this is where Tom's gift for comedy comes into play) sweet and entirely useless, a reclusive musician suffering the despair of being eternal. Think undead My Chemical Romance fan. He stars opposite Tilda Swinton, who he says is just like her giddy, optimistic character, Eve. 'She's the most beautiful woman in the world, and it's seemingly effortless. She's very, very warm. Tilda and I would be laughing sometimes and Jim would come in and say [he adopts a lazy Ohio drawl]: "Taaammmm, you smile

a lot, man. And Adam doesn't smile so much.'" He also loved the purity of the love story. 'Adam is so deeply flawed, and depressive, and melancholic. But Eve just loves it, loves his commitment to it. We were trying to make a film about acceptance. And true love is an acceptance of someone else for who they are.'

So Hiddleston is clever, eloquent, charming, sensitive and earnest. But then there's that other side, the spontaneous and silly side, best seen on YouTube, where he has become an inadvertent sensation due to the fact that 'I don't know what my boundaries are, I just say yes to things'.

That's how he ended up throwing some serious shapes on *Alan Carr: Chatty Man*, which, for the record, was 1) not planned: 'I promise I had no idea I was going to do that'; and 2) the genuine Hiddleston disco experience: 'If you asked me to dance now, it would be the same moves. That's my dance.' He can also be seen singing Michael Jackson's *Man In The Mirror* on Korean TV, because the talk show host asked him which part of his body he had most confidence in and he said his voice. (And, yes, he was tempted to say something smutty: 'I'm English, so I'm dirty.') His own favourite clip features him teaching the Cookie Monster a lesson in delayed gratification. ('Are you saying if me wait, me going to get cookie?') 'I'm proud that I've met him. >

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He's the Cookie Monster, a cultural icon. My mum loves it and my niece loves it. She's two years old and she thinks there's nothing illogical about Uncle Tom speaking to the Cookie Monster.'

So when we meet for the second time, after he comes off stage at the Donmar, I am tempted to see if the no-boundaries thing is for real. There is beer involved (the man can drink) and a line of questioning veering from the absurd to the inappropriate. Put it this way, he's a very good sport...

Annabel Brog: Will you throw me your best insults?
Tom Hiddleston: [Laughs] Why are we doing the insult game?
AB: Just go with it, I can take it.
TH: Um. 'You utter, utter [with increasing emphasis], utter c**k' is good.
AB: I just wondered if foul language, delivered beautifully, sounds less foul. Which, in fact, it does.
TH: When I get angry with myself, when I forget lines, I'll be like, 'You absolute f**king f**k c**k b***ocks p**s f**k. You, you... f**ker'.
AB: You say that to yourself?
TH: Yes.
AB: How do you feel afterwards?
TH: I feel better! The word f**k is enormously satisfying.
AB: OK, I am going to describe teenage Tom to you and you are going to tell me how accurate I am.
TH: [Grins] OK.
AB: I've realised this may be quite insulting. Please remember it's only a game.
TH: That's totally fine. It may well be more favourable than the truth.

AB: Teenage Tom wasn't uncomfortable with girls, but he didn't get to touch one for quite some time. First kiss, 16.

TH: NO! [Emphatic] First kiss 10! Yes, 10 years old, tongues and everything. [Laughs] She was a huge crush, we were in the same class, a lot of note swapping, and eventually it all went down in a cricket pavilion on an autumn night. It was very thrilling.

AB: I got it so wrong.

TH: I was sometimes quite alarmed by friends of mine at school who didn't have sisters, the way they treated girls, the way they spoke about them... I was like, 'Guys, they're not aliens, they're human beings.'

AB: You hear stories about Eton schoolboys, and the fan girls who line the cricket pitches when they play...

TH: I don't relate to that at all. I didn't have a serious relationship until I was about 19. I fell head over heels in love and I was with her for two years, and it was an amazing relationship. So I don't know who those girls are, who line the cricket pitches.

AB: How would you describe yourself as a boyfriend?

TH: Very honest, I hope. God, I don't know. I hope I'm fun, I hope I'm a good time. Spontaneous, surprising, affectionate? I hope, kind. Dancing... a lot of dancing. I insist upon dancing. Anywhere. Anytime. The more dancing, the better.

AB: [Referring to an incident last year when Tom, on a press call with Swinton for *Only Lovers Left Alive*, was photographed in a revealingly tight trousers] Cannes. Trousergate. Discuss.

TH: Trousergate?

AB: Please tell me you know what I am referring to.

TH: What are you... I genuinely don't know what you're talking about. Cannes?

AB: Oh God, really? Oh no. OK, OK, shall we move on?

TH: [Squeaky] What's trousergate? [Clears throat] Trousergate...

AB: Maybe I should just get it up on the iPhone and show it to you.

TH: OK, get it up on the phone.

[AB types 'Tom Hiddleston Cannes' into Google Images and hands him the phone]

TH: [Slowly] Ohhhhhh heavens...

AB: It has a Tumblr account and everything.

TH: Oh God. [Laughing but horrified] How monumentally shaming! What does one say to something like that? What do I say? Do I need to explain it? I don't think I can.

AB: Would you like to move on from this subject?

TH: Maybe. Yes...

AB: OK.

TH: [Determined] Look, I had a very interesting experience going to Cannes. An airplane in Heathrow caught fire and they shut down the whole airport. There were no tickets on Eurostar. All the flights from Gatwick were booked. So I got in a taxi and drove to Dover. I got on the ferry at 2am, with people on the booze cruise, and students going on hockey tours, got to Calais at 5am, another taxi to Paris airport, flew to Nice, landed

'I don't know where my boundaries are, to be honest. I just say yes to things'





Photography: Mari Sarai. Styling: Molly Haylor. Grooming: Caroline Barnes at Frank Agency using Kiehl's skincare and Bumble and Bumble. Tom wears: Below left: Cashmere jumper, £885, and coat, as before, both Dolce & Gabbana. Top right: Coat and trainers, as before, Dolce & Gabbana. Bottom right: Cotton sweatshirt, £21, American Apparel. For shopping details, see Address Book.

about 11.30am, went through customs, got in another cab and drove to straight to THAT photo call, where THAT picture was taken, having changed in the car on the way there. So I think I look all right, for someone who's been up all night.

AB: You look great. [Long pause] It's just a shame no one's looking at your face.

TH: [Laughs] They're looking at Tilda! That's what they're looking at.

You can't really profile Tom Hiddleston without going there on his looks. He is, in the flesh, a determined and imposing physical presence. If you have seen his *Coriolanus* - raging with pride and betrayal - you will know this, and on the ELLE shoot it is evident most when we film him running. Hiddleston has a fine-looking run. He may look like a matinee idol; he may speak like a 19th century poet; but watch him run and you are suddenly very aware that he is 21st century man. It would be nice, I suggest, to see him in a role that's unquestioningly modern. 'I would really like to,' he says. 'I'm knocking at the door, honestly.'

As expected, he is game for anything on our shoot. He hurls plastic chairs across the warehouse, he sprints down Scrubs Lane, and he scares the crap out of the whole team by leaping over the railing of a 10-foot staircase, which would have ended his *Coriolanus* run rather spectacularly if it went wrong. At the end of the day, Hiddleston is hard to pin down. He tells me a story,


about a spontaneous, solo trip he took to Hawaii after he flew to LA to audition for a part he didn't get.

'I went canoeing with whales, ran around the island, climbed the volcanoes. There's this beach where all the surfers go to challenge themselves, the waves are like 30 feet high, and I was introduced to this lifeguard by some landscape gardeners I met. We were watching these kite surfers and I was in awe, frankly, of their courage and I said, "Why would you do that? It's so dangerous." And he looked at me with this amazing, generous smile and said [adopts a US accent]: "They're just trying to answer the same question we're all trying to answer, man." And I said: "What question is that?" And he said: "Is it enough?"'

'I'm a very honest boyfriend, I hope. I hope I'm fun, I hope I'm a good time... a lot of dancing, I insist upon dancing'

EXCLUSIVE VIDEO



SCAN WITH  Download the layar.com app, then hold your phone over the play symbol to watch Tom in action

So there you have it. Tom Hiddleston: big talent, big laugh, big thinker, non-planner, great dancer. In his own beautifully phrased words, he is 'just as complex and contradictory as everyone on this planet'. Or, in our rather more base words, pretty damn hot. ●
Only Lovers Left Alive is out 21 Feb. Get your exclusive Tom Hiddleston cover by downloading the digital edition of March ELLE now. Go to elleuk.com/magazine for details