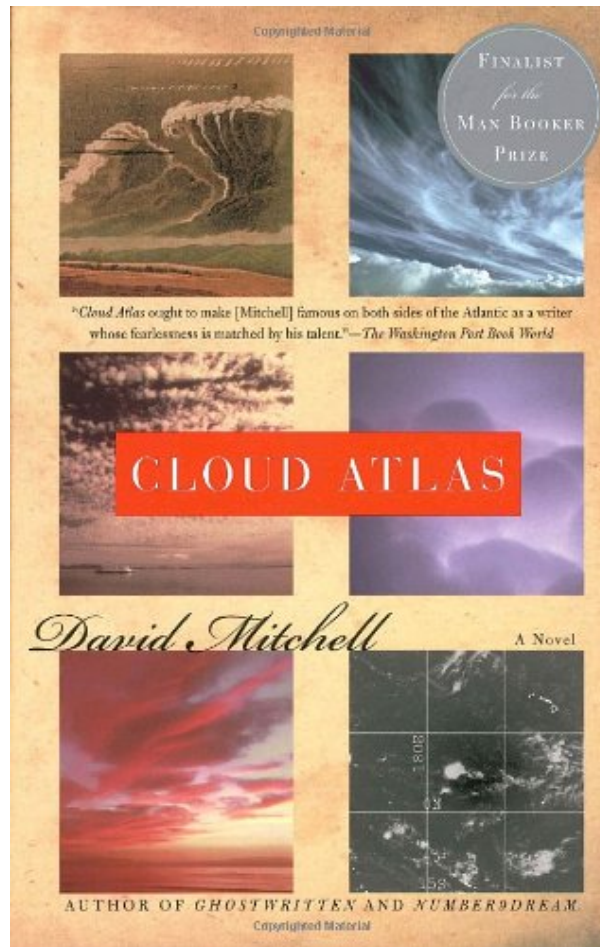
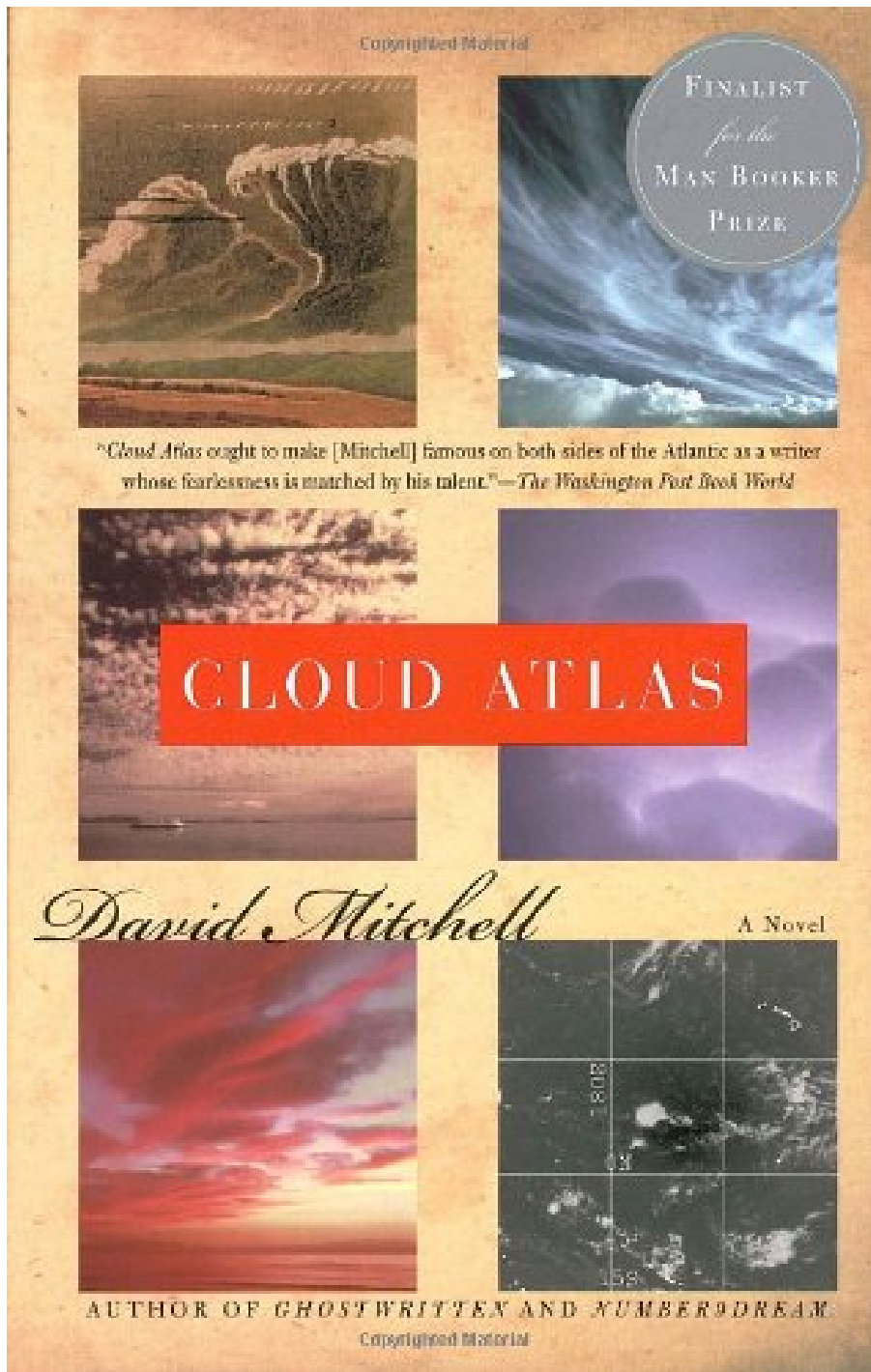


# CLOUD ATLAS: A NOVEL BY DAVID MITCHELL



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From Publishers Weekly

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By the New York Times bestselling author of *The Bone Clocks* | Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize

A postmodern visionary and one of the leading voices in twenty-first-century fiction, David Mitchell combines flat-out adventure, a Nabokovian love of puzzles, a keen eye for character, and a taste for mind-bending, philosophical and scientific speculation in the tradition of Umberto Eco, Haruki Murakami, and Philip K. Dick. The result is brilliantly original fiction as profound as it is playful. In this groundbreaking novel, an influential favorite among a new generation of writers, Mitchell explores with daring artistry fundamental questions of reality and identity.

*Cloud Atlas* begins in 1850 with Adam Ewing, an American notary voyaging from the Chatham Isles to his home in California. Along the way, Ewing is befriended by a physician, Dr. Goose, who begins to treat him for a rare species of brain parasite. . . . Abruptly, the action jumps to Belgium in 1931, where Robert Frobisher, a disinherited bisexual composer, contrives his way into the household of an infirm maestro who has a beguiling wife and a nubile daughter. . . . From there we jump to the West Coast in the 1970s and a troubled reporter named Luisa Rey, who stumbles upon a web of corporate greed and murder that threatens to claim her life. . . . And onward, with dazzling virtuosity, to an inglorious present-day England; to a Korean superstate of the near future where neocapitalism has run amok; and, finally, to a postapocalyptic Iron Age Hawaii in the last days of history.

But the story doesn't end even there. The narrative then boomerangs back through centuries and space, returning by the same route, in reverse, to its starting point. Along the way, Mitchell reveals how his disparate characters connect, how their fates intertwine, and how their souls drift across time like clouds across the sky.

As wild as a videogame, as mysterious as a Zen koan, *Cloud Atlas* is an unforgettable tour de force that, like its incomparable author, has transcended its cult classic status to become a worldwide phenomenon.

Praise for *Cloud Atlas*

"[David] Mitchell is, clearly, a genius. He writes as though at the helm of some perpetual dream machine, can evidently do anything, and his ambition is written in magma across this novel's every page."—The New York Times Book Review

"One of those how-the-holy-hell-did-he-do-it? modern classics that no doubt is—and should be—read by any student of contemporary literature."—Dave Eggers

"Wildly entertaining . . . a head rush, both action-packed and chillingly ruminative."—People

"The novel as series of nested dolls or Chinese boxes, a puzzle-book, and yet—not just dazzling, amusing, or clever but heartbreaking and passionate, too. I've never read anything quite like it, and I'm grateful to have lived, for a while, in all its many worlds."—Michael Chabon

“Cloud Atlas ought to make [Mitchell] famous on both sides of the Atlantic as a writer whose fearlessness is matched by his talent.”—The Washington Post Book World

“Thrilling . . . One of the biggest joys in Cloud Atlas is watching Mitchell sashay from genre to genre without a hitch in his dance step.”—Boston Sunday Globe

“Grand and elaborate . . . [Mitchell] creates a world and language at once foreign and strange, yet strikingly familiar and intimate.”—Los Angeles Times

From the Hardcover edition.

- Sales Rank: #5467 in Books
- Brand: Random House Trade Paperbacks
- Published on: 2004-08-17
- Released on: 2004-08-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.46" h x 1.12" w x 5.49" l, .94 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 528 pages

Features

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Most helpful customer reviews

1959 of 2022 people found the following review helpful.

Loved this book but not for everyone

By sb-lynn

This goes down as one of my favorite books of the year.

Story in a nutshell (without spoilers):

*Cloud Atlas* consists of 6 [slightly] interlinking stories, told from the viewpoint of 6 different individuals at different points in time. The first story consists of the letters of Adam Ewing, and his fateful trip on a ship in the Pacific in the mid 1850's.

From there we go to the second story, which takes place in the 1930's and is told from the viewpoint of Robert Frobisher, a talented disinherited musical composer who visits an infirm maestro and his family in an attempt to get work and advantage. His story is told through his letters to a scientist friend/lover named Rufus Sixsmith.

The next story takes place in the 1970's, and has to do with reporter Luisa Rey, and her exposure of corporate malfeasance that could result in disaster. Sixsmith is a scientist there, and plays an important part of the story.

Next, (and my personal favorite), is the story of Timothy Cavendish, in present day England, and the tale of his (mis) adventures as a book publisher. Utterly hilarious and poignant.

The second to last story becomes a sci-fi read of future corporate controlled Korea, complete with cloned



humans. And the final story is one that takes place in post apocalyptic Hawaii.

And then we go back to each story, in opposite order, and put the pieces together and complete the cliffhanger endings from the first half.

I think this book is brilliant. I often found myself rereading various sections because I found them so ingenious and profound. I think David Mitchell is one of the most talented new writers around.

My only complaint? Sometimes I think that the author was a bit taken with his own writing, and was too clever for his own good. At points the writing became tedious, although never to the point that I wanted to throw in the towel.

Note...I personally had trouble getting through chapter one, but then I was hooked by chapter two. If you find yourself getting impatient, hang in there.

Highly recommended, with the reservations expressed above.

417 of 459 people found the following review helpful.

Extraordinary work

By Leah Shafer

I've just finished this phenomenal book by David Mitchell, a present from a friend who recommended I read it immediately.

So glad I did. It has aspects of the dystopian future scenarios that I so loved in *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Dune*, and *The Sparrow* coupled with recent past and long-past stories. It addresses basic questions of where we are going as a species, following one soul reincarnated through six lives. That soul is on a trajectory that traces the basic human desire for domination, the often-myopic thinking of the powerful, and the fate of the powerless. It is on a grand scale, beautifully told, and quite enthralling.

The structure is what had me hooked to start--it is a mirror of itself. Rough breakdown: The first and twelfth chapters are "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," a story of subterfuge, gullibility, and poison on a ship bound from the South Seas to London.

Second and tenth chapters are epistolary, taking place in 1939 through the correspondence of Frobisher--a bit of a cad and scammer--to his friend Sixsmith. Frobisher is a brilliant musician but the family shame, in the process of writing his great masterpiece while apprenticing under a syphilitic genius composer.

Third and ninth chapters follow the efforts of investigative journalist Luisa Rey to uncover serious evil at a soon-to-be opened nuclear facility in the mid-70s. One of her primary sources in the mystery Sixsmith, Frobisher's correspondent from the last chapter, but now 35 years older.

Fourth and eighth chapters are the disturbing and frequently funny tales of Timothy Cavendish, a bumbling, arrogant, failure of a publisher in London during roughly our current times, maybe a little later.

Fifth and seventh chapter are my favorites--here Mitchell hits the sci-fi, dystopian future part with full gusto. Sonmi-451 is a human clone of sorts, grown in a womb tank (like all "fabricants," as they are called) and born into service to Papa Song Company. The world as we read about it is governed and shaped around corporate structures and the economy is based on the slave labor of these fabricants.

This chapter is her testimony about her ascension from fabricant to full human thinking and feeling. She observes the world outside Papa Song restaurant and ventures into the broader culture (a scary place, indeed).

I don't do these chapters justice. Sonmi~451 weaves a wonderful tale about this future world, using neologisms and appropriated words that make perfect sense based on how we are using language now. The links and connections to life in the 21st century make it compelling.

The peak chapter, "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After," describes a fallen world, one that has collapsed in on itself leaving the vast majority of humans in a new Dark Age where violence and predatory actions are the way of those who want to live very long. The strong dominate and destroy the weak. The protagonist, a goat herder, refers to the "Civ'lized days before the fall when people was ler'nd." It's written in this dialect and he tells a hard-wrought tale of lawless times.

But it's all believable. Mitchell never stretches his story in any part of the book beyond what we can imagine. He begins with a tale of dishonesty in the 1800s and spins it into the future, following some of our baser instincts to their logical, if stunning and frightening, conclusion.

This book is complicated and ambitious--it's a little over 500 pages of teeny, tiny print and plot lines that crisscross over chapters, lives, and hundreds, maybe thousands, of years.

The reincarnation theme is only hinted at in the vaguest of terms--it's not even a central part of the book, but it does weave the narrative thread from character to character. I can't begin to fathom how many Post-it notes and spreadsheets it took Mitchell to keep track of all this.

Cloud Atlas was the most thought-provoking novel I've read in years and I found myself meditating on the lives of the characters long after I'd put it down and moved onto something else. Extraordinary work.

231 of 252 people found the following review helpful.

A Unique Collection That Won't Work For Everyone

By Ethan

I came upon this book through the recommendation of a friend. He warned me that it would be unlike any novel I had read before, so I entered this story with excitement and curiosity. In Cloud Atlas, author David Mitchell has proved that he has the technical capabilities to write anything that his heart desires. A master of construction and dialect, Mitchell combines six separate stories into a fascinating novel that spans from the 19th century to a distant future.

The novel begins with the story of Adam Ewing, an American notary who is on a ship, headed home. Presented as Ewing's personal journal, Mitchell wonderfully captures the voice of a homesick man, full of religious zeal. When a black, foreign stowaway is discovered on board, Ewing fights to keep the man away from the harm and racism of the captain and crew. When Adam begins to feel ill, his only friend on the boat, Dr. Henry Goose, begins to treat him for a "poisonous worm" living inside of him. With the threat of death, Ewing struggles to maintain his morality in the seemingly sinful environment of the ship.

Abruptly, the novel jumps to the early 20th century with the letters of a young aspiring English composer, Robert Frobisher. He finds himself in Belgium, short of financial stability and a clear musical direction. He seeks out local composer Vyvyan Ayers, whose music he sees a revolutionary, to become a kind of understudy to the ailing composer. Ayers accepts the offer and begins to have Frobisher assist him in writing new music. Unfortunately, Robert finds himself in the middle of a forbidden affair, and begins to feel that

Ayers is taking advantage of his own musical ideas.

The story of young American journalist Luisa Rey, reads like a fast paced thriller. The year is 1975 and Luisa, who is struggling to overcome the shadow cast by her famous journalist father, believes she has found the story that will provide her with her big break. As she attempts to uncover the reported corruption of a local nuclear company, she finds herself entangled in a web of conspiracy, love, and murder.

Timothy Cavendish is a sixty-something publisher who finds unexpected success after his client, a gangster who recently published his memoirs with Cavendish's company, murders a critic at a local event. The client, of course, is sent to jail, and the novel becomes a bestseller. With his newfound wealth, Timothy seems to be living the high life. When the brothers of his client attempt to violently persuade Cavendish to give them the money from their imprisoned brother's book, he flees the city. Unfortunately, he mistakes a nursing home for a hotel and finds himself unable to escape.

Sonmi-451, a genetic fabricant, created to serve food in a fast food restaurant of the dystopian future, is being interviewed about her escape and rebellion of the established society. She tells of how she was able to leave the restaurant, and discover how she, and others like her, have been taken advantage of by the established society. As she amasses knowledge she was never supposed to possess, she begins to feel emotions and make human connections that were never intended to be possible.

In the very distant future, we find Zachary, a primitive member of a tribe who is learning to face his fears in this strange world. After the death of his father and the capturing of his sibling, he blames himself for not preventing the attack. When a woman, a visitor from another group of people who seems to have more "knowledge" than Zachary's tribe, moves in with his family, he must face new threats to his tribe's beliefs and ways of life.

The stories, except for the one about Zachary, are all interrupted in the middle, giving the novel a kind of ABCDEFEDCBA arc. Mitchell ties this all together by making each new character the witness, mostly through reading, of the previous character's story. I think that each character could also be interpreted as a reincarnation of the previous because they all seem to share a similar birth mark. With each story, the author adapts to a different style of narrative, making some of the tales read easier than others. Notably, the strong dialect of the middle character makes his story nearly impossible to comprehend. Despite his ingenious presentation and construction, I couldn't help but feeling a bit disappointed at this end of this. The novel can be such a chore to read, that I didn't feel that I got some revolutionary message at the end of this, otherwise, expertly crafted story. Despite being glad that I took the time to read this unique novel, I can't help but wonder if my time would have been better spent reading something with a deeper meaning.

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