

## **Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close**

“Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,” adapted from the acclaimed (and panned) novel by New York writer Jonathan Safran Foer, turns on the character of Oskar Schell, a nine-year-old amateur inventor who laments the loss of his beloved father, Thomas (Tom Hanks), who died in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

The precocious Oskar finds a mysterious key left behind by his father in an envelope marked only “Black” and begins a search for families named Black to find the lock that fits that key, hoping it will all explain what happened to his father. In his search from borough to borough he is eventually joined by a renter (Max Von Sydow, still excellent after all these years). The renter is an ancient, silent figure, a survivor of the Dresden fire bombings of WWII who is staying in a nearby apartment with Oskar’s grandmother. The two, uncertainly, fitfully, try to unravel the “why” of the father’s death by methodically searching every Black name in the five boroughs.

The film comes with good filmic credentials, having been directed by Stephen Daldry (“The Reader,” “The Hours”) and written by Eric Roth (“Forrest Gump,” “Munich”). It does have its sweet and poignant side, most of it conveyed via the earnest and persistent performance by Thomas Horn, making his film debut here. Young Horn is, in fact, the principal reason to see this picture as he brings real dimension and yearning to a child trying to unearth meaning in the inexplicable. The fact that the key he has such hopes for turns out to be a red herring does not diminish his search or that yearning. Also, the byplay between the kid and the old man is touching and occasionally funny; Von Sydow himself (now almost 82) earned an Academy Award nomination for his playing of the mysterious renter, and the film was also nominated for Best Picture of 2011.

And just when you think the plot makes no sense because Oskar is so readily welcomed into the various nooks and crannies of the Naked City, his apparently oblivious mother Linda (Sandra Bullock) comes up with the big reveal as to how his search has been carefully vetted. This comes as a great surprise, but it somehow doesn’t convince. You are left with a troubled boy perhaps none the wiser for his dogged efforts, and a film that leaves you less moved than puzzled.

*(The film is rated PG-13 and runs a too-long 129 minutes.)*

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