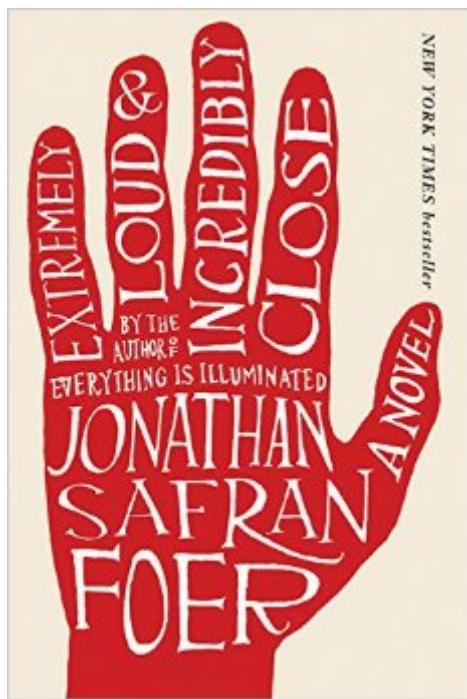


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Extremely Loud And Incredibly Close



Synopsis

Jonathan Safran Foer emerged as one of the most original writers of his generation with his best-selling debut novel, *Everything Is Illuminated*. Now, with humor, tenderness, and awe, he confronts the traumas of our recent history. Nine-year-old Oskar Schell has embarked on an urgent, secret mission that will take him through the five boroughs of New York. His goal is to find the lock that matches a mysterious key that belonged to his father, who died in the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11. This seemingly impossible task will bring Oskar into contact with survivors of all sorts on an exhilarating, affecting, often hilarious, and ultimately healing journey.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Extremely Loud is one of those novels that more than most will live or die on a particular reader's personal taste. Some will find it's twinned tales of a 9-year-old's grief over his father's death on 9/11 and his grandparents' tale of woe (centering on the Dresden firebombing) incredibly moving. Others will find it typographical and textual experiments wildly stimulating (blank pages, color plates, pages of nothing but numbers, photos, etc.). And some will have no trouble suspending disbelief with regard to Oskar's incredible precociousness or the fairy-tale quality of the New York City he moves in. Others, though, will find the book sentimental rather than emotional, cloying rather than powerful. The experimentation will be gimmicky distractions that mar rather than enhance the story. And the narrator's various quirks and gifts (his tambourine play, his vocabulary, his inventions and lists of aphorisms) not only unbelievable but almost unreadable. The lucky thing is it won't take you long to figure out which reader you're going to be. If the former, you'll settle in for an enjoyable ride. If the

latter, it will be a long argument with yourself over just where you'll finally give in and quit reading. Unfortunately, I fell into the latter category. It's rare that I come across a book that can have so much good writing in it that also makes me regularly want to hurl it across the room while I claw out my eyes. In the end, *ELIC* was a story ruined by talent, though I couldn't decide if it was insecure talent (propping up his story with gimmicks) or self-indulgent talent (throwing in everything and anything just cause he could). As mentioned, the story centers on young Oskar, whose father left him several phone messages before being killed on 9/11. One day Oskar finds an envelope marked "Black" with a strange key in it up in his father's closet (in typical fashion, not a normal closet but a closet with a whole host of quirky associations). Deciding "Black" is a name, Oskar then goes off on a quest to find what the key opens, attempting to interview all the Black's of NYC. Interspersed between Oskar's movements are letter written by his grandparents concerning their history, which includes the firebombing of Dresden. Oskar's story can be moving; there are some wonderful and truly brilliant passages. But for me it was marred by both his precociousness and his preciousness. One without the other would have perhaps been simply annoying, but both together made it almost unbearable. Toss in a consistent sense of arbitrary quirkiness and the book often left a bad taste in my mouth. Oskar for instance decides to interview the Black's alphabetically rather than by geographic proximity. Why? It serves the story's purpose. When seeking clues, a storeperson tells him it's interesting his father wrote "Black" in a red pen as that's so hard to do, write the name of a color in a different color ink. Really? Has anyone ever truly had to struggle to write the name of any color when using the trusty blue or black pen? Of course not. But this sounds quirky and mysterious. And so it goes. The grandparents' sections also have their moments of true brilliance, but are also marred by problems of credibility with regard to voice and, again, quirkiness (such as designating parts of their apartment "nothing" areas), along with typographical stunts that from my view seldom enhanced the story. *ELIC* therefore was extremely frustrating rather than loud, with the sense that one could have pulled out various lines/passages and put together a truly beautiful novella, but instead the reader got this. Is there talent here? Absolutely. Can you find places that will move you or make you laugh or make you marvel at the language? Absolutely. Is it worth it for those moments? From my perspective, absolutely not. But there is so much good here that I wouldn't recommend against trying it. I'd say give the book 30 pages (that's really all you'll need). If you can stomach Oskar's voice and mannerisms, you'll probably end up enjoying the book. If you find yourself cringing, save yourself. Put the book down and slowly back away. Don't strain to continue; you'll only pull something.

Sometimes an author has a theme running through all of his writing -- in the case of Jonathan Safran Foer, it seems to be a quest of the soul. His follow-up to the cult hit "Everything Is Illuminated" is the poignant, quirky, tender "Extremely Loud And Incredibly Close," which takes readers back to the rubble of ground zero. Oskar Schell is a precocious preteen, who has been left depressed and traumatized. His father died in the September 11 attacks, leaving behind a mysterious key in an envelope with the word "Black" on it. So with the loyalty and passion that only a kid can muster, he begins to explore New York in search of that lock. As Oskar explores Manhattan, Foer also reaches throughout history to other horrific attacks that shattered people's lives, including his traumatized grandparents. Though the book is sprinkled with letters and stories from before Oskar's time, the boy's quest is the center of the book. And when he finally finds where the key belongs, he will find out a little something about human nature as well... Historically, only a short time has passed since 9/11, and in some ways "Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close" reopens the wounds. It reminds me of all the families who lost fathers, mothers and children. But Foer doesn't use cheap sentimentalism to draw in his readers, nor does he exploit the losses of September 11th families. It takes guts to write a book like this, and skill to do it well. In some ways, this book is much like Foer's first novel, but he deftly avoids retreading old ground -- the "quest" is vastly different, the young protagonist is very different, and the conflicts and loss are different, though no less hard-hitting. Foer also sticks to that wonderfully oddballish prose, which gives a gloss of lightness to a deep plot. After all, that is what made his first book so appealing -- there are parts of "Extremely" that are laugh-out-loud funny, and quirky characters worthy of a Wes Anderson movie. For example, one scene has Oskar sending a letter to Stephen Hawking, asking, "Can I please be your protégé?" Child genius Oskar will probably make you want to either smack or hug him -- I tended more towards hugs. That's because Foer doesn't make Oskar seem like a tiny adult -- he's brilliant, but his mind still has the whimsy of a child's mind. His little "inventions" are just the sort of thing you'd expect an imaginative nine-year-old to create, and his quest is a realistic one, considering the tragedy he had suffered. "Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close" proves that Jonathan Safran Foer was no one-hit wonder. His enchanting second book tackles a great tragedy with warmth, depth and sensitivity. Outstanding.

I just finished reading this wonderful book, and I really can't describe all the feelings swirling inside of me. This is more than a book with a story, it is an experience. When I write my reviews I never describe the plot of the book, because it does it very well, and of course other people do it in their reviews....so no need. Well, even if I wanted to describe this book I couldn't. So again, I will just tell

you why I loved it. Mr. Foer is a wonderful writer. I had not read his first book yet, although I will do that now, but something in the description of this book caught my eye, so I tried it. I laughed and cried and even when I was laughing, I was profoundly sad. I loved the characters and their flaws, their fears, their stories, their realistic humanity even among such unrealistic situations. I just can't describe how much I loved this book or why, but it has been put on my shelf of favorite books, to be read and reread, or experienced and experienced again. Again, it made me so sad and yet, when I was done, the sadness was mixed with such wonder and even hope. Mr. Foer, you are a marvel, to the readers, don't miss this one.

My husband found this book to be brilliant after reading the paperback edition. Since I had just purchased my Kindle, I wanted to read it on my Kindle. Unfortunately, due to a large number of illustrations in the book, this is not a good read for a Kindle. I was very happy to be able to look up pages on the paperback to be sure of what I was seeing. The Kindle graphics are not quite up to this book yet. I think I lost a lot of the enjoyment of the book due to this fact.

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