

## All Intention, No Delivery in ‘Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 20, 2012 - 8:15am

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The September 11th tragedy is still percolating through the cinematic filter, and there is a well intentioned thread throughout the various interpretations. But the latest attempt, “Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,” stretches this intention too far, despite a cast featuring Tom Hanks and Sandra Bullock.

This parable about a boy trying to come to terms with his father’s passing in the Twin Towers strains credibility too much, leaving in its wake a New York City that everyone wishes would exist (but doesn’t), relatives who conveniently are conjured when only necessary and more magical non-realism than a cheaply written fairy tale – which it is. While as planned we may feel for the boy’s journey, the sticky sweet way that he gets through it produces a fine antidote for any emotional connections.

Oskar Schell (Thomas Horn) is a pint size Rain Man, an introverted, super-intelligent New York City kid whose best friend is his father Thomas (Tom Hanks). Dad is constantly directing Oskar toward some adventure or expedition, challenging him to find mythical lands like NYC’s “sixth” borough. This is all done with the encouragement of his supportive mother (Sandra Bullock) and a jolly doorman (John Goodman). Things change on September 11th, 2001.



Thomas Horn (Oskar) and Tom Hanks (Thomas) in ‘Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close’

*Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures*

Stuck on the upper floors of the South Tower – the first one to collapse – Thomas desperately tries to call home, leaving several messages on

an answering machine before he meets his end. His voice and the messages are the substance of Oskar’s motivation to solve a mystery a year later – he has found a key among his father’s belongings. On the envelope containing the key is the word “Black,” so the boy systematically tries to find a lock for the key by visiting every NYC resident with that last name. Along the way he enlists an old man who doesn’t speak (Max Von Sydow) and tries to come to terms with his father’s demise.

Thomas Horn’s performance of Oskar has that modern-type kid actor performance that motivates the strangulation of any stage parent. It’s just too, too much. He reacts hyperbolically to everything, and never gives any subtlety to his grief or loss. Despite his persona as being somewhat of a kid genius sort, his arrested emotional development and personality schizophrenia is teeth grindingly irritating. Even though the sudden death of any loved one causes actions that make no sense, Oskar’s reactions make no sense even within the context of no sense.

The key mystery also turns out to be less than satisfying. While jousting with all the New York City folks with the Black last name, the direction this windmill tilting goes ends cheaply both with Max Von Sydow’s character and mystery itself. This is taken from the source novel by Jonathan Safran Foer, and the film does nothing to mollify the most cloying parts of the novel – Oskar takes a tambourine with him wherever he goes, for example.

And with the 2011 double whammy of “Larry Crowne” and this film, the Tom Hanks all-good-guy-aw-shucks character may have jumped the shark. His saintly turn and gestures in a small but crucial role play off Oskar’s quirks with a anti-sentimental backlash. The eccentricities aren’t endearing this time, they are grating, such as a memory of the Hank’s character sticking his arm in a barrel of coffee beans “just to see how it feels.” It’s all too much.



Max Von Sydow (The Renter) is Mute in ‘Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close’  
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

I suppose some of the inconsistencies and contrivances can be forgiven through the fairy tale nature of the proceedings, but it is astounding how Oskar can travel New York City with no supervision – his grandmother and mother disappearing conveniently in deference to the plot – and then emerge with the trustworthiness of virtually everyone he touches. Has the Disney-fication of Times Square bled through to its residents?

The weirdness, the mass madness of September 11th is a resonating force, almost defining everyone who remembers it with a before-and-after sensibility. The subject matter has been handled better in other films, but here it is reduced to the type of sentimental goo that adds no feelings or substance to that peculiar and unforgettable day.

*“Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close” opens everywhere on January 20th. Featuring Tom Hanks, Sandra Bullock, Thomas Horn, Max Von Sydow, Jeffrey Wright, Viola Davis and John Goodman. Screenplay by Eric Roth, directed by Stephen Daldry. Rated “PG-13”*



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