

Shattering Power of True Story of 'The Impossible'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 21, 2012 - 2:21pm

- [Brian Tallerico](#) [2]
- [Ewan McGregor](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Juan Antonio Bayona](#) [5]
- [Movie Review](#) [6]
- [Naomi Watts](#) [7]
- [The Impossible](#) [8]
- [Tom Holland](#) [9]



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Juan Antonio Bayona's "The Impossible" captures what its title implies. It transports us to an unimaginable situation, into an absolute nightmare in which air is replaced by rushing water, families are ripped apart, and people's lives hang in the balance. It is a remarkable achievement in filmmaking, a film that is at times devastating, at times emotional, at times inspirational, and always riveting. It's one of the best films of 2012.

This true story is of a privileged family who uses their wealth to go to one of the most gorgeous vacation spots in the world for Christmas. They enjoy the lush scenery, open gifts on the veranda of their four-figure-a-night room, and play on the beach. Henry (Ewan McGregor) is the nervous type, the kind who worries repeatedly on the plane that he didn't lock the front door. Maria (Naomi Watts) is stronger but has more practical fears when turbulence hits the plane on their way to paradise. Lucas (Tom Holland) is their oldest son and their strongest while Thomas (Samuel Joslin) and Simon (Oaklee Pendergast) are more fragile. Everything is progressing normally until the earth cracks and sends a wall of water hurtling towards thousands of innocent lives.



The Impossible

Photo credit: Summit Pictures

The tsunami itself is one of the most remarkable technical accomplishments on celluloid in years. It is a masterful cacophony of water, noise, and abject terror as Maria sees Lucas across yards of rushing water. They are somehow kept together through the horror but separated from Henry and the other two boys. Maria is also very badly hurt. While she lies in a makeshift hospital hoping to cling to life for the sake of her son, Lucas helps others injured or separated from loved ones. Meanwhile, Henry doesn't give up hope that the impossible could be true – his wife and eldest son may still be alive.

Like so many great films, "The Impossible" is not an average story of an average family destroyed by natural tragedy and most of the criticisms of the film seem to have missed the title. This is a story of a miracle. This is a story of a family who was both privileged and remarkably, incredibly, ridiculously lucky. Bayona and his writer Sergio G. Sanchez (who also wrote Bayona's "The Orphanage") never miss that fact. There are lessons to be taken away about the importance of humanity in the midst of horror – we'd all love to think that our sons will be as giving and compassionate as Lucas is to complete strangers – but Maria and Henry aren't saved because they're skilled, special, or of a certain race (a claim that has been blindly leveled at the film in ways that make me think some people saw a different movie). They're saved because they refuse to give up emotionally but also because they're simply lucky to be missed by the flying cars and other debris that took so many lives.

"The Impossible" is an undeniable technical accomplishment. Bayona opens his film with a wall of sound, the same, underwater aural nightmare that will probably ring in the nightmares of these people for the rest of their lives. And when the tsunami hits, it's jaw-dropping, the kind of horror that one knows is carefully planned in a water tank to keep actors safe but that feels honestly dangerous. The film is technically accomplished throughout with striking cinematography by Oscar Faura and an effective score by Fernando Velazquez.



The Impossible

Photo credit: Summit Pictures

The technical achievements of "The Impossible" would be something notable but it's also an accomplished acting piece for its entire cast. Watts feels completely in the moment in every scene, never revealing the fact that there's a heated trailer and catered food on just the other side of the camera. We feel her pain. We feel her fear that she will die here. And we feel her need to save her son before she passes away. It's one of the best performances of the year and it's nearly matched by great work from the young Tom Holland and the most emotionally revealing work from Ewan McGregor in years. They're both great.

Movies need to retain the power to move us. In our increasingly cynical world, if we can no longer distinguish between melodramatic manipulation and honest emotion, we'll lose an important function of cinema. "The Impossible" takes us to a situation we could never otherwise imagine and it does so in honest, inspirational ways. It's a truly moving film, a story of human triumph against natural terror. And it's a film that you won't soon forget.

"The Impossible" stars Tom Holland, Naomi Watts, and Ewan McGregor. It was written by Sergio Sanchez and directed by Juan Antonio Bayona. It opens in Chicago on December 21, 2012 and expands around the rest of the country in January.



[10]

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/ewan-mcgregor>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocontent>
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- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/naomi-watts>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/the-impossible>
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