

'Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close'—A Powerful 9/11 Drama

by Eric Tiansay



I was disappointed when I missed *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* at the cineplex this winter, so I was eager to catch it on DVD.

Based on Jonathan Safran Foer's acclaimed 2006 best-selling novel of the same title, the movie tells the story of a 11-year-old boy Oskar (Thomas Horn) who lost his jeweler father, Thomas Schell (Tom Hanks), during what he calls "The Worst Day"—the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Oscar-nominated for Best Picture, although it failed to win, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is a powerful drama that extols the bond between a father and son, family and forgiveness. A year after his dad died in the World Trade Center, Oskar, who has problems socializing and had been tested for Asperger's Syndrome, is determined to continue his vital connection to the man who playfully pushed him into confronting his wildest fears.

While looking through his father's closet one day, Oskar finds a small envelope marked "Black," with a key in it. Oskar decides the key must belong to someone named Black, and he starts a methodical search for the right person. "If there was a key, there was a lock," Oskar surmises. "If there was a name, there was a person."

His quest is an attempt to maintain his father's memory of his father, and to participate in the sort of mysterious search that his dad sometimes sent Oskar. "If you don't tell me what I'm looking for, then how will I ever be right?" Oskar asks his father. Thomas responds: "Well, another way of looking at

it is how will you ever be wrong?"

Oskar's lock obsession leads to the wide chasm in his relationship with his mother, Linda (Sandra Bullock, who turns a bravado performance of a doting wife and loving mom).

Oskar finds an unlikely helper in the form of the Renter (Max von Sydow, who received an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor)—an elderly mute who rents a room in Oskar's grandmother's apartment.

Oskar goes through the five New York boroughs in search of the missing lock—meeting an eclectic range of people who are each touched by his quest.

Oskar meets what seems like a Christian woman who prays for the boy and asks other believers to lay hands on him. "Dear God, watch over Oskar ... keep him safe and in Your loving arms," she says. Later, she encourages Oskar to remember that "every day is a miracle." "I don't believe in miracles," he says. She responds: "Finding the lock this (key) fits would be a miracle."

Ultimately, Oskar is confronted with the realization that he must eventually let go of his father, connect with his mother who seems so far away and deal with the noisy, dangerous world around him.

In the end, the film offers a simple message about 9/11. "It's never gonna make sense because it doesn't!" Oskar's mother tells him.

Blu-ray and DVD features include "Finding Oskar," a look at the challenges and triumphs of the movie's first-time star Thomas Horn—whose first public exposure was as the winner of a kids' edition of Jeopardy!; "Ten Years Later," an effort to bring some reality to a scene involving the 9/11 Memorial Wall (where survivors posted pictures of missing loved ones); and "Max von Sydow: Dialogues with the Renter."

Content Watch: Rated PG-13 for emotional thematic material, some disturbing images and language, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is best suited for teens and adults—not children. The 9/11 scenes are not graphic, but disturbing. The movie features slurred foul language, disrespectfulness and lying. The film touches on some spiritual issues and questions of faith, but it doesn't offer answers.