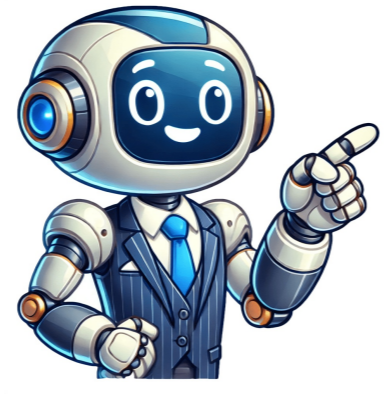


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We're getting everything ready for you. The page is loading, and you'll be on your way in just a few moments. Thanks for your patience! Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close is a realistic fiction novel written by Jonathan Safran Foer and based on the September 11 terrorist attacks that occurred in New York City in 2001. The novel was originally published in 2005. Its characters grapple with Fear of Death and Loss as an Obstacle to Living, The Complex Nature of Relationships, The Importance of Little Things, and The Influence of the Past on the Present. This guide uses the First Mariner Books 2006 edition of the novel.Content Warning: This guide contains references to self-harm and war-related violence.Plot SummaryNine-year-old protagonist Oskar Schell is going to his father's funeral with his mother and grandmother. Oskar's father, Thomas Schell, died in the September 11 terrorist attacks, although nobody is sure exactly how he died. Oskar, traumatized by this sudden loss, makes up scenarios to cope with the unpredictability of the world. A year after the funeral, Oskar's mother has made a friend named Ron, and Oskar worries that his mother is no longer grieving. Oskar finds a blue vase on the top shelf of his father's closet and accidentally breaks it. Inside is an envelope printed with the word Black, and inside the envelope is a key. Oskar quickly becomes obsessed with the mystery of the key. He is determined to find the lock it opens. He tries every door in the house, then visits a locksmith who tells him that the key unlocks a safe. He visits an art-supply store to ask about the word Black on the back of the envelope, and the store manager tells him that Black is likely a name. In art-supply stores, people often write their names on pads of paper to test the pen, and Oskar is perplexed to find his father's name written on such pads all over the store. Oskar believes that finding the lock to his key might bring him closer to his dad. He decides to meet everyone with the surname Black who lives in New York City. That night, Oskar listens to one of his father's voicemails, which upsets him. He calls his grandmother, who lives across the street, and they talk about his grandfather. Alongside the present story is a love story between Oskar's grandparents. The story is told in letters: Oskar's grandfathers letters to his son (Oskar's father) and Oskar's grandmothers letters to Oskar. Oskar's grandfather, Thomas Schell Sr., came to the United States after the Dresden bombing during World War II. His beloved fiancée, Anna, died in the bombing, along with their unborn child. Anna's younger sister, Oskar's grandmother, had always felt fascinated by Thomas Sr., and after the war, she found him in America at a bakery. By then, Thomas had lost the ability to speak as a result of his trauma and had tattooed the words "YES" and "NO" on his hands to communicate with others. He communicated by writing in notebooks he carried everywhere he went. Distraught to see him in this state, Anna's sister asked him to marry her. Thomas asked if he could sculpt her, and she agreed. They spent the rest of that day at the apartment as Thomas tried to mold her into the Anna that they both lost. Afterward, they made love. Thomas agreed to marry, but only if there were no children involved. Their marriage is an unhappy one, as both try to avoid the one subject that matters to them most: the loss of Anna. Because he still loved Anna, Thomas Sr. could never really love his wife. He began preparing to leave her, first by gifting her an old typewriter and encouraging her to write her life story. His wife had been pretending to be partially blind for yearsone of the many ways they preserved their privacy and avoided true intimacyand so she wrote pages and pages of nothing, pretending not to notice that there was no ink in the typewriter. Thomas then pretended to read the pages. When Thomas finally decided to leave, his wife followed him to the airport and watched him for hours as he sat and willed himself to get on a flight. Thomas returned to Dresden, the place where he fell in love with Anna. The last time Oskar's grandfather saw Anna was the day of the Dresden bombing. Anna had just told him she was pregnant. When the bombing started, Thomas ran through the city, desperate to find Anna, but wound up in the zoo and was tasked with shooting all the escaped carnivores. He was taken to a hospital and eventually evacuated to a refugee camp. He never saw Anna again. In the present day, Oskar feels powerless in the face of a newly incomprehensible reality. He remembers his father telling him that even if he only moves one grain of sand one millimeter, he will have changed the course of history in a small but significant way. He feels that his quest to find the lock, however small, is important. He plans to meet everyone named Black in alphabetical order. Oskar walks all the way to Queens to meet Aaron Black, who is too sick to come down and meet him. Frightened, Oskar leaves and goes to meet Abby Black in Greenwich Village. Abby seems lonely, and her husband yells at her from the other room as she and Oskar talk. Abby tells Oskar she knows nothing about the key, but Oskar thinks she's hiding something. Over the past weeks, he has met Abe Black, who convinced him to ride a roller coaster at Coney Island, and Mr. Black, a man who lived through the entire 20th century. Mr. Black confesses that he cannot hear anything because he hasn't turned his hearing aids on for years, and Oskar helps him to do so. Mr. Black has not left his apartment in 20 years, and Oskar realizes that Mr. Black must be lonely. He invites Mr. Black to join his mission. That weekend, Oskar and Mr. Black meet up to begin their first day together. They look for Agnes Black, but they learn that she died in the attacks. None of the other people they visit that day have any knowledge of the key. When Oskar goes to visit his psychologist, Dr. Fein, Oskar plays a word-association game and cannot think of anything to associate with happiness. The doctor tells Oskar's mother that he should be hospitalized, which deeply upsets Oskar. Oskar's grandmother writes to him from the airport in 2003, where she has gone to spend the rest of her life with her husband. She tells their story from her own point of view, admitting that she became pregnant against Thomas's wishes, which was what led him to leave. Oskar's grandmother remembers the love she felt for her sister as a child. One night, she asked her sister how it felt to kiss, and Anna kissed her to show her love. She told a depth of love for her sister in that moment that she never found again, and she slowly trained herself to feel less as life went on. In another letter to Oskar, his grandmother writes of her memories of September 11. She recalls watching the news as it changed to images of planes crashing into the buildings. Oskar's grandmother was relieved when she found out Oskar was safe at home, but she became ill the moment she realized her son had probably died. When Oskar's mother went out to post flyers, Oskar's grandmother kept Oskar company during the hardest day of his life. Thomas Sr. writes another letter to his son two years after his death. He tells of how he came back to his wife, Oskar's grandmother, and slowly made his way back into her life. After Oskar and Thomas Sr. took the letters and key to Thomas's grave and buried them, Thomas Sr. wanted to leave again, but this time, his wife followed him to the airport. There they remained. In her last letter to Oskar, Oskar's grandmother tells Oskar about a dream she had in which her entire life and the history of the world happened in reverse, including Thomas's death and the World Trade Center attacks. She reminds Oskar to always tell people he loves them.The night before Oskar's father died, he told him a long story about the mysterious Sixth Borough of New York, which was said to have been another island beside Manhattan. The river that divided the islands was so narrow that one man, called the leaper, could leap across it into Manhattan. He did so once a year, and the arrival of the leaper became a yearly celebration. One year, the man could no longer complete the jump, and it became clear that the Sixth Borough was floating away. A few years passed, and after efforts to keep the Sixth Borough in place, the city accepted that it was leaving. Its park, Central Park, was moved to Manhattan, pulled there like a rug across a floor (221). Children from the Sixth Borough were pulled with it. Oskar's first instinct is to believe the story is a fable, but his father tells him to keep his mind open to the possibility. After eight months of searching for the lock, Mr. Black decides he is sending Oskar a message. He gives him the key, but Oskar cannot speak, and Oskar feels like he can't trust him, but doesn't know why. Thomas Sr. tells Oskar that he came to live with Oskar's grandfather after Thomas died. Oskar tells his own story about all the people he met in his efforts to find the lock. He tells his grandfather of the day he met Ruby Black at the Empire State Building, a woman who lived in the building. Oskar runs home to get the old family phone and plays all his father's voicemail messages for this man he just met. He tries to get the man to use his voice again, but it seems impossible. Oskar goes to visit Mr. Black but finds his apartment empty. Inside his file of names, he finds one for himself along with the word "son." Just when Oskar wants to give up on the lock, Abby Black calls and admits that she withheld some information when she first spoke to Oskar. Oskar goes to her apartment and finds out that her husband is the owner of the lock. She also reveals that Oskar's mom was aware of his travels all these months past. Oskar finds her husband, William Black, at his office, and William explains that the key belongs to a safe-deposit box that was the property of his deceased father. After his father died, William sold his belongings, and Thomas, Oskar's father, bought the vase with the key in it. It was not until later that William realized there was a key inside. He spent years searching for Thomas. Oskar feels the need to admit to William that he did not answer the phone the day his dad called before he died. Having Williams forgiveness helps Oskar heal, but he wonders what to do with his life now that his mission is complete. He comes home to find a letter from Stephen Hawkinga response to the many letters Oskar has sent to the famous physicist over the years. Hawking tells Oskar he has a bright future in science. A few nights later, Oskar goes out to meet Thomas Sr. and bury the letters and key in Thomass empty coffin. Thomas Sr. feels as if he is finally giving his son the letters he never sent, and Oskar is glad to know that his father's coffin is no longer empty. Later, looking back on this moment, he feels that though he must have known his was sending a message to his grandfather, though he thought he was sending it to his grandfather, he must have known that Oskar was going to visit and why. 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