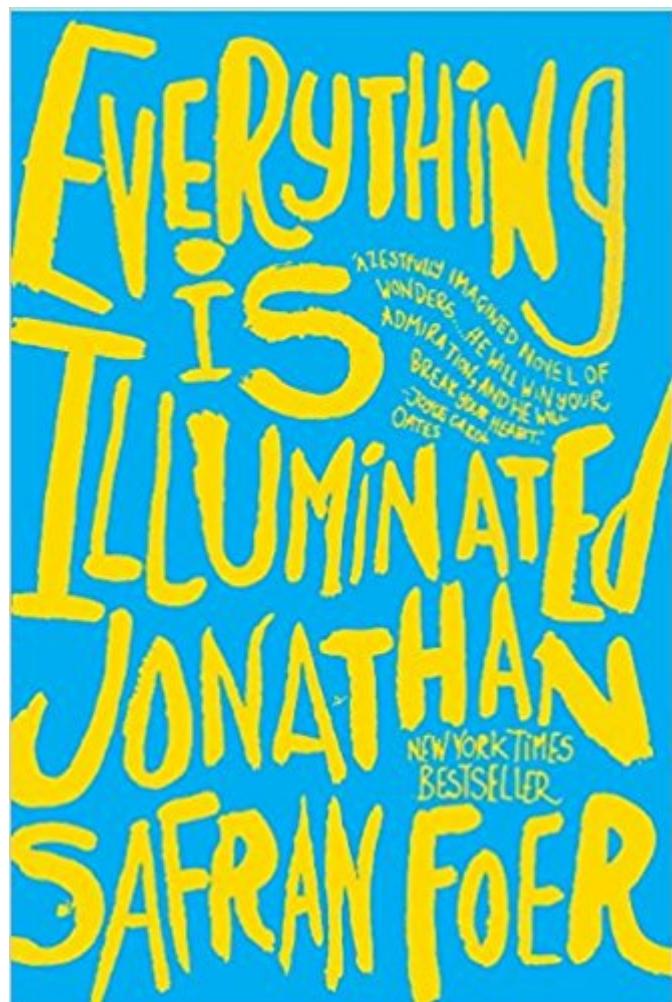


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Everything Is Illuminated: A Novel



Synopsis

With only a yellowing photograph in hand, a young man -- also named Jonathan Safran Foer -- sets out to find the woman who may or may not have saved his grandfather from the Nazis.

Accompanied by an old man haunted by memories of the war; an amorous dog named Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior; and the unforgettable Alex, a young Ukrainian translator who speaks in a sublimely butchered English, Jonathan is led on a quixotic journey over a devastated landscape and into an unexpected past.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The simplest thing would be to describe *Everything Is Illuminated*, Jonathan Safran Foer's accomplished debut, as a novel about the Holocaust. It is, but that really fails to do justice to the sheer ambition of this book. The main story is a grimly familiar one. A young Jewish American--who just happens to be called Jonathan Safran Foer--travels to the Ukraine in the hope of finding the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis. He is aided in his search by Alex Perchov, a naïf and Ukrainian translator, Alex's grandfather (also called Alex), and a flatulent mongrel dog named Sammy Davis Jr. Jr. On their journey through Eastern Europe's obliterated landscape they unearth facts about the Nazi atrocities and the extent of Ukrainian complicity that have implications for Perchov as well as Safran Foer. This narrative is not, however, recounted from (the character) Jonathan Safran Foer's perspective. It is relayed through a series of letters that Alex sends to Foer. These are written in the kind of broken Russo-English normally reserved for Bond villains or Latka from *Taxi*. Interspersed between these letters are fragments of a novel by Safran Foer--a

wonderfully imagined, almost magical realist, account of life in the shtetl before the Nazis destroyed it. These are in turn commented on by Alex, creating an additional metafictional angle to the tale. If all this sounds a little daunting, don't be put off; Safran Foer is an extremely funny as well as intelligent writer who combines some of the best Jewish folk yarns since Isaac Bashevis Singer with a quite heartbreakingly moving meditation on love, friendship, and loss. --Travis Elborough, .co.uk --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

What would it sound like if a foreigner wrote a novel in broken English? Foer answers this question to marvelous effect in his inspired though uneven first novel. Much of the book is narrated by Ukrainian student Alex Perchov, whose hilarious and, in their own way, pitch-perfect malapropisms flourish under the influence of a thesaurus. Alex works for his family's travel agency, which caters to Jews who want to explore their ancestral shtetls. Jonathan Safran Foer, the novel's other hero, is such a Jew an American college student looking for the Ukrainian woman who hid his grandfather from the Nazis. He, Alex, Alex's depressive grandfather and his grandfather's "seeing-eye bitch" set out to find the elusive woman. Alex's descriptions of this "very rigid search" and his accompanying letters to Jonathan are interspersed with Jonathan's own mythical history of his grandfather's shtetl. Jonathan's great-great-great-great-grandmother Brod is the central figure in this history, which focuses mostly on the 18th and 19th centuries. Though there are some moments of demented genius here, on the whole the historical sections are less assured. There's a whiff of kitsch in Foer's jolly cast of pompous rabbis, cuckolded usurers and sharp-tongued widows, and the tone wavers between cozy ethnic humor, heady pontification and sentimental magic-realist whimsy. Nonetheless, Foer deftly handles the intricate story-within-a-story plot, and the layers of suspense build as the shtetl hurtles toward the devastation of the 20th century while Alex and Jonathan and Grandfather close in on the object of their search. An impressive, original debut. (Apr. 16) Forecast: Eagerly awaited since an excerpt was featured in the New Yorker's 2001 "Debut Fiction" issue, Everything Is Illuminated comes reasonably close to living up to the hype. Rights have so far been sold in 12 countries, the novel is a selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club and a main selection of Traditions Book Club, and Foer will embark on an author tour expect lively sales. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As others may have mentioned, some sections of the book are written in broken English, so if you are a stickler for grammar, you might want to pass. Likewise, you may want to look elsewhere if you

have prudish tendencies, as some parts can get quite vulgar. You will, however, be missing out on a pleasant (-ly surprising, at least for me), engaging story. I hate spoilers, so I won't go into detail regarding the plot, but I can tell you that I found myself reading this book at every free moment, and had a difficult time putting it down. It's been some time since I've become so engrossed in a book.

It was a difficult read.

This book starts out hilarious. Several people didn't like the beginning, but I was reading it in public (on a bus, by a swimming pool) and laughing out loud in several parts. Yes, it is a bit sophomoric, but the young Ukrainian narrator is so endearing and the situations he describes so hilarious. I actually liked the later parts of the book less and was often confused as to what was going on. Too many different literary styles and the ending was somewhat unsatisfactory.

It was an ok book. I liked *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* much better. This story was a bit hard to follow with 3 narrators, but then started making sense as you got into it. I liked Alex and his terrible use of the English thesaurus. I liked the stories about Alex and his Grandfather, and Jonathan's search, but didn't particularly like the stories about the past. It was a little too surreal in a book that I hoped to be more realistic. But I'm glad I read it.

I had read this book before and I loved it so much that I thought it was worthy having it to re-read or maybe lend it to friends, so the best option I had was to get it through because I live in Brazil and sometimes is quite difficult to find some books in English. I was very surprised to know about the tracking system because I thought once it got to Brazil I would lose track of the book, but the total opposite occurred: I could track every single step and even when it was delivered I could check online the name of the doorman that received the package! Plus I want to congratulate and the seller for the efficiency considering that I received my books in less than a week - 6 days to be more exact. Thank you!

This is a very beautifully written book about the relationship between a young Jewish man from New York who is searching for his ethnic roots in the Ukraine and a Ukrainian youth who is a little younger who becomes his interpreter. The former goes by the same name as the author, the latter is called Alex (like his father and grandfather, who both figure in the story). One of the Jonathan's ancestors survived the Holocaust so the search deals with how he did so. All that Jonathan has is

the name of the shtetl and the picture of a woman named Augustine. The first part of the book is very humorous because it is narrated in the very imperfect English of Alex. Alex's narration is layered between stories written by Jonathan about life in the village of his ancestors. It is hard to actually enjoy books that deal with the Holocaust, and this novel is no exception. Nevertheless, it is definitely worth reading.

This book is hard to follow and not funny at all. The only thing I appreciated about it were the Holocaust scenes.

A journey of non-buddies spans two centuries in a small village. Magical realism infuses this tale of heritages, war, and grief.

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