

‘Unabomber’ exclusive – first look at Jacob Tremblay as Ted Kaczynski

**See first photos of Jacob Tremblay’s teen ‘Unabomber’ in
Netflix movie**

Brian Truitt

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Jacob Tremblay plays infamous mail bomber Ted Kaczynski as a teenage math prodigy in “Unabomber.”

See more from the Netflix true-life psychological drama (streaming Sept. 25) in this exclusive first look.

Jacob Tremblay might not be the first guy you think of to play the Unabomber, a disheveled, middle-aged killer who baffled authorities for years before being caught. That’s not the man Tremblay inhabits, however – instead he’s a 16-year-old Ted Kaczynski who is just beginning to go down a very dark path.

USA TODAY has the exclusive first look at the Netflix drama “Unabomber” (streaming Sept. 25), an unconventional true-life drama told over two cross-cutting timelines. One focuses on Ted as a teenage prodigy attending Harvard in the 1950s who becomes the unwitting victim of abusive experiments by his psychology professor, Henry Murray (Russell Crowe).

The other flashes forward to the mid-1990s and focuses on a team of FBI agents (including Shailene Woodley and Alexander Ludwig) hunting the elusive Unabomber who get a significant lead in the case connected to Kaczynski’s past.

Though it would have been “so interesting” to portray Ted in his older years as well, Tremblay, 19, confesses, “I did really enjoy playing a young Ted and an innocent take on this domestic terrorist.”



Harvard psychology professor Henry Murray (Russell Crowe) recruits young Ted Kaczynski (Jacob Tremblay) for his 1950s experiments in mind control and manipulation in “Unabomber.”



Henry Murray (Russell Crowe) and his associate Christiana Morgan (Annabelle Wallis) run experiments that manipulate and break young men in “Unabomber.”



FBI agent Joanne Miller (Shailene Woodley) leads the manhunt for the adult Ted Kaczynski in the 1990s and finds a break in the case in “Unabomber.”



Shailene Woodley reached out to real-life FBI agents to hear stories about hunting Ted Kaczynski to portray the fictional Joanne Miller in “Unabomber.”



Jacob Tremblay, left, was director Janus Metz's first and only choice to play a young Ted Kaczynski in "Unabomber."

“I’m playing a character who has no idea who the Unabomber is. He has no idea of the man he’s going to turn into.”

The film’s narrative also tied into Woodley’s interests. “I am always fascinated by the why’s and the how’s behind choices made throughout a life,” says the actress, who plays FBI agent Joanne Miller. “Learning about Ted’s college years juxtaposed with the investigation to find him was something I haven’t seen much before in true crime.”

Director Janus Metz (“Andor,” “Borg vs. McEnroe”) enjoyed the deep dive into the mind of a young Kaczynski. Though most people know about the Unabomber’s criminal history, not many realize he was a math genius who got into Harvard at 16 and was recruited by Murray and his associate Christiana Morgan (Annabelle Wallis) as a guinea pig for experiments in mind control and manipulation.

These were “funded by the CIA and were some of the first traces of what later became the MK-Ultra experiments,” Metz says. “Murray is seductive and charismatic, and as Ted starts to see him as a father figure, he discards his real parents and sees the shimmer of everything he is aspiring to be – until the reality of the experiments is brutally unveiled to him.”

In the movie, the quiet and awkward Ted at first is belittled in these experiments, where verbal abuse is used to break him, and he ultimately becomes aggressive himself. Tremblay points out an important scene when Ted goes home and has an angry confrontation with his parents. “They find out that his grades have been suffering because of what they think is just a philosophy club that he had joined, and it wasn’t,” Tremblay says. “Ted snaps at them. He screams at them, he lashes out, and that was a very pivotal point because it showed that there were consequences to his abuse.”

That timeline forms the man who, from 1978 to 1995, killed three people and injured more than 20 in increasingly sophisticated mail-bombing incidents. Joanne Miller is a fictional agent who in the film leads the manhunt for the adult Ted and uses the words in the Unabomber’s manifesto to track him down. Reading that manifesto and listening to real agents’ stories about the Kaczynski case was “the most helpful for me to understand the true weight these people carried during the investigation,” Woodley says.

For his part, because a lot of Kaczynski’s younger years are a mystery, Tremblay studied the cadence of his voice and attitude during recordings of him being interviewed by investigators. “That was just fascinating, listening to him speak and how confident and cocky and arrogant he was at the same time,” the actor says. “He was this total lunatic living in a cabin, but he’s just so articulate.”

Tremblay was Metz’s first and only choice for the role. “Jacob is in a very interesting place, breaking out from being a child actor and taking on complex roles,” the director says. “He is in a very formative stage of life, as was Ted when he was at Harvard, so the two are linked in that sense. The world is wide open at that age, and you are so vulnerable to the people – the grown-ups – that influence you.”

Tremblay, who was 5 when he had his first film role (“The Smurfs 2”) and earned a Screen Actors Guild nomination for “Room” at age 9, did feel a connection to Kaczynski.

“I know what it’s like to be in an environment where you’re always going to be the youngest in a room,” Tremblay says. “Obviously, my experiences have been completely different from Ted’s. I’ve had wonderful people around me who have taken great care of me since I was young.

“Another reason I was drawn to this film is because there’s a bit of a message of how important it is to protect the youth. We live in a world right now where so many young children are being harmed, physically and mentally. It really has consequences to their life and the person that they can turn into and who they might end up hurting as well.”

The Ted K Archive

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