

FILM REVIEW

THE SHALLOWS

Rated PG-13

86 Minutes

Released June 24

“The Shallows” is the ubiquitous summer shark movie. However, it is very much worth seeing for many other reasons. If you can forgive the requisite foreshadowing “shark point-of-view” shots covered by ominous music, this is a beautiful film and Blake Lively does a fine job of carrying it, mostly alone on screen. She does most of her own stunts, except for surfing. Her surfing stand-in is 18-year-old Australian Isabella Nichols, a Junior World Champion. If you just come to watch extraordinary surfing photography, you will be rewarded.

Reality check: As someone who spent my teen years living on the beach in Malibu, I didn't buy into a set of gigantic waves that suddenly appear in a calm pristine cove ... in addition, said huge surf would have washed a floating whale carcass, pivotal to the story, either onto the beach or out to sea. And then ... sharks do not tend to select human from their dinner menu, so a depiction of a shark hunting down a woman may not be realistic - let's call it artistic license. Although, true, you do not want to be mistaken for a seal by a nearby shark. Director Jaume Collet-Serra does a nice job of never showing too much. He knows that sometimes the absence of a shark fin is more ominous than showing its presence.

This is a great summer movie with a lot of tension and emotion. The location scenes were shot in Lord Howe Island, a World Heritage Site about 2 hours by air from Sydney, Australia. The scenery is gorgeous. Lively turns in some of her best work yet, with only an injured seagull sharing scenes

with her - similar to the “Wilson” and Tom Hanks relationship in “Cast Away” (2000).

The seagull actually gets a credit as one of the cast. His name is “Sully Seagull,” nickname “Steven Seagull.” By all accounts, he has a great personality and solid acting skills. Collet-Serra knew that he did not want to use a CGI seagull for such an important role. Everyone thought he was crazy to think he could cast a real one. However, he found Sully at an Australian seagull sanctuary. Due to an injured wing, Sully has been cared for by humans most of his life. He was so in tune with people that he knew instantly when to react in a scene. He could sense when a retake was being done and would reset for it. The crew worked with him for many weeks and fell in love with him. The New York Times called him “the most important movie character of the summer.” Note: Birds have a lot more going on than we think - take a good look above you when you get the chance.

Although in my opinion the ending “jumped the shark,” I would highly recommend “The Shallows.” The director, crew and cast have done an excellent job putting together a difficult-to-film thriller with beautiful visuals and a great score. As for the story, Lively summarized it this way in an interview: “You see the shark has a hook in her mouth. You see the shark has been hunted too. It's really a story of us all trying to survive on this planet. It sounds lofty, but when you boil it down that's what it is.”

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