

‘The Shallows’ is as silly as it is suspenseful

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 87 min.

If you're going surfing, remember to always do so with a friend. Rip currents and sharp coral are dangerous, not to mention the stinging jellyfish and, well, sharks that make the Great White from *Jaws* look like a mild-mannered aquarium pet. At least, that's what *The Shallows* seems to want you to take away from the experience. This movie throws in just about every ocean-related malady it can think of in less than 90 minutes.

The story involves a young woman named Nancy (Blake Lively). Reeling from the recent death of her mother, she has taken a break from medical school to travel to a remote Mexican beach (the location was a favorite spot of her late guardian). But after surfing too close to a feeding area, she is suddenly targeted by a very aggressive shark. Wounded and alone, Nancy takes refuge on a raised rock in the ocean that is 200 yards away from the shoreline.

It's difficult for any young star to carry an entire picture on their shoulders. While the character isn't remotely complex, star Lively is at least likable enough to keep us watching. And it's a good thing, considering the awkward situations the screenplay puts her in. Clearly, a cast of one makes exposition difficult. The script often uses Nancy's medical schooling as an excuse to have her speak out loud to herself and explicitly state what she's doing (as if she's in an emergency room). It's quite a strain and isn't the most believable way to convey information.

Director Jaume Collet-Serra (*Run All Night*, *Non-Stop*, *Unknown*) is more familiar with action than terror, and it often shows. Given the filmmaker's previous credits, it's hard not to wonder what movie tough-guy Liam Neeson might have done in the same situation (I believe he

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probably would have dived headfirst back into the sea, insulted the fish, and then punched it in the nose). At least this director knows how to shoot and cut suspenseful chases, with Nancy struggling to reach safely while the shark is in pursuit... he often extends skirmishes by having the character get caught in coral or other sharp objects as the attacker closes in. The moviemaker also succeeds in generating a couple of decent jumps in which the aquatic beast pops into frame unexpectedly.

Yet while the events depicted are often tense, they are rarely scary. We end up seeing a lot of the fish; in fact, far more than we should. It's obviously a digital creation, and the more we're shown, the less of an impact it has. The most impressive images in the film are suggestive, including some nifty overhead shots of the shallow reef and silhouettes of the shark moving within the water.

This isn't a particularly realistic tale, either. As the battle escalates, events become increasingly exaggerated until they border on ridiculous. There are a series of misadventures in the final third that really strain credibility. And a couple of decisions are highly questionable; in the case of one choice, this character must have had an incredible sense of foresight.

Overall, *The Shallows* doesn't swim anywhere close to the likes of *Jaws* (or even *Deep Blue Sea*). Yet while it is nowhere near as frightening as the ads have promised, as a goofy popcorn flick, it still offers an engaging lead and a couple of fun, if silly, shark sequences. If your expectations aren't too high, you might have a reasonable time wading in.

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