

THE REEF

Shark attack! Aussie filmmakers sink their teeth into a biting thriller



A REAL, LIVE CROCODILE ATTACKED AND chomped a costly camera during shooting of Australian writer-director Andrew Traucki's debut feature, *Black Water*. Apparently unperturbed by the mortal hazards of working with dangerous animals that could end you, bold Traucki and his intrepid technical team again opted to capture up-close footage of the toothsome villains of his follow-up, *The Reef*.

"It was a pretty full-on trip," understates Traucki about filming live sharks in South Australian waters several months ahead of *The Reef*'s five-week Queensland shoot.

"We had one underwater camera operator but only one cage, so I got on this little camera on a stick and was [controlling] it from on deck. Just like how on *Black Water* a crocodile took my camera, a shark took my camera this time. It was amazing... and a scary moment." He got the camera back, in working if wounded order.

Mercifully, *Empire* hasn't had to man up and get face time with sharks for its visit to *The Reef*, a toothy thriller about photogenic castaways menaced by a shark on the Great Barrier Reef.

Doubling for that watery wonder of the world today is Hervey Bay (opposite Fraser Island), which is hosting the controlled component of Traucki's shoot. It's here we see the director overseeing his floating main set – a capsized boat, hull exposed, anchored 50 metres from shore as crew members battle the elements to create high-seas *vérité*.

Despite the fact that 2007's *Black Water* operated in similar territory – three people under siege by a snappy crocodile in an isolated swamp – Traucki doesn't feel his cinematic shift from one scarifying water beast to another should have him pegged.

"I don't want to get pocketed as the creature-feature guy but it's more the fact

these are two compelling true-life survival stories," says calm and composed Traucki during a regimented lunch break.

"I knew about this shark story from ages ago, because it's based on something that happened in the mid-'80s.

"It just stayed with me."

Luring *Underbelly* co-stars Gyton Grantley and Damian Walshe-Howling, with fellow TV favourites Zoe Naylor (*McLeod's Daughters*) and Adrienne Pickering (*Rake*), Traucki's terror voyage is inspired by "a trawler that went down off of Townsville, and three people got locked inside it. And a shark started stalking them."

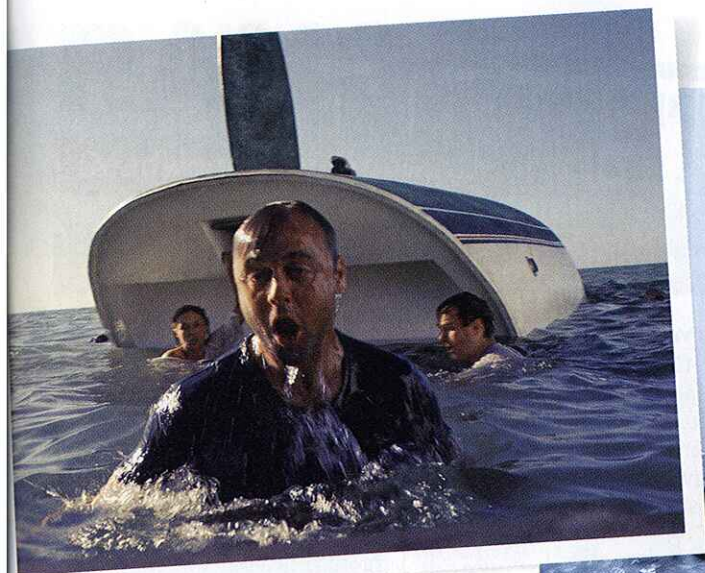
As *Empire* witnesses, along with curious locals armed with chairs and free time, Traucki's treatment has his attractive cast in and out, in and out, in and out of the water, facing fear when their sailboat goes belly up. Do they stay with the vessel, or make a swim for it?

"It makes you ask yourself, in the audience: well, what the hell would you do in that situation?" states bubbly Naylor who, with her tanned male co-stars, could be



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ANDREW TRAUCKI

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hanging out at a beach BBQ rather than taking a breather from dodging the dangers of the deep.

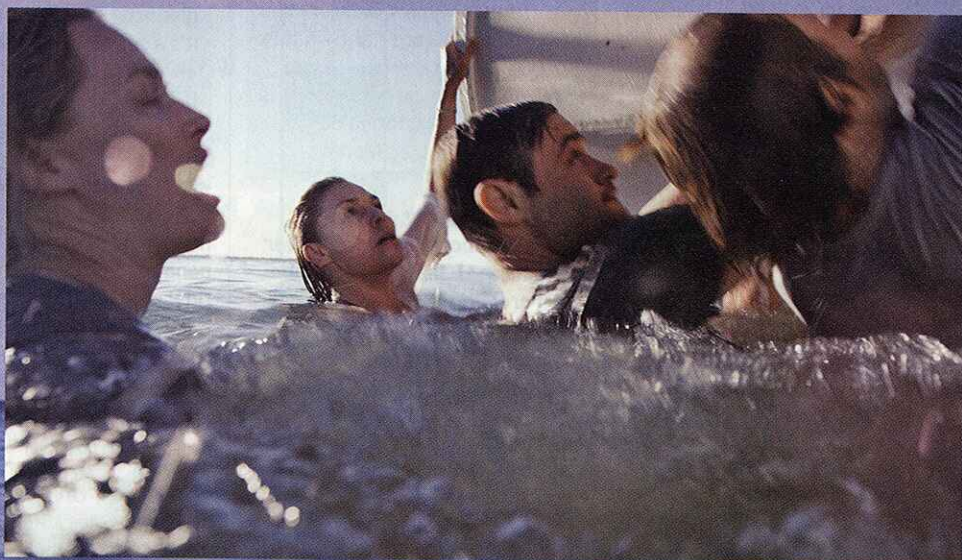
"This is a genre film, there's no denying that, but what excited me the most – especially after watching *Black Water* – is Andrew brings this uniqueness to it," explains tired yet jocular Grantley. "He steers away, as much as possible, from clichés... It's fresh and exciting."

Not for the Sunshine State's tourism types, who have already vehemently spoken out about what damage might be inflicted by *The Reef*. Along with bizarre fin sightings in flood-ravaged inland areas, and Queensland last year hosting production of another shark terror tale (gore-fest *Bait 3D*, still awaiting release), going back into the water does seem set for bad publicity.

In terms of approach and intent, Traucki places *The Reef* somewhere between lo-fi *Open Water* and the shark movie, *Jaws*. The director is confident he can combine wild wildlife footage with big-screen chills, and only wants to frighten us, not endanger species.

"My films are more about the thrills rather than the gore... I'm sure people will be there to be scared by sharks – and it will do that – but I don't think it will have the impact like *Jaws* did in the '70s, when people wanted to start killing them all. I'm not anti-shark; in fact I'm quite pro-shark. I just want to scare people."

> *The Reef* is released on March 17 and will be reviewed in next month's *Empire*.



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