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## Books

# Brown: Fact-based shark tale really about loneliness, acceptance, perfect Scholastic fare

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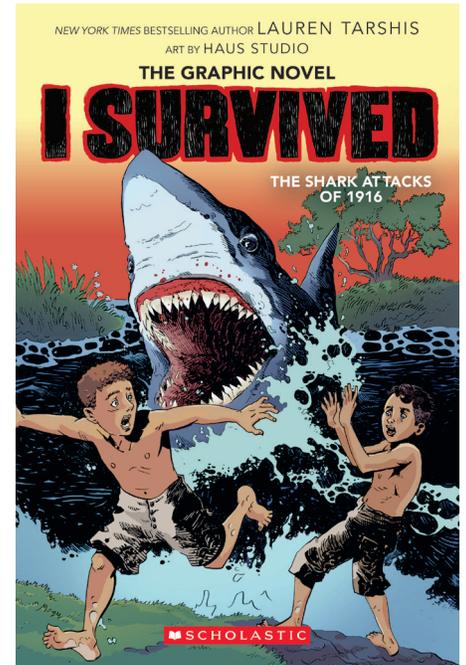
By Dan Brown | October 2, 2020

It's comforting to know the venerable publisher Scholastic is still around. As a kid in the 1970s, I got many paperbacks through their monthly program for school children.

Even cooler, Scholastic now has a graphic novel line including the new release *I Survived the Shark Attacks of 1916* by Lauren Tarshis, which is an entertaining read, even if the title gives away the ending.

The book is based on a series of incidents that took place on the U.S. East Coast more than 100 years ago. A giant killer shark would make its way up a stream into a tiny village. Tarshis has loosely based *I Survived* on newspaper reports from the time.

The new kid in this New Jersey town is Chet. The boy has moved with his parents from place to place, which has made him wise beyond his years, but also friendless. He seems like an inconvenience to his folks, who put him in the care of his uncle, the owner



of the local diner in Elm Hill.

It surprised me there isn't a larger sense this is all taking place while the First World War is raging. Wouldn't that colour everything in the lives of these characters? Yet it feels like a timeless world, unfolding leisurely in what rocker Don Henley once called "That same small town in each of us."

And the truth is the shark plot is really just a shell for Tarshis to fill with a narrative that is, at its heart, about loneliness and acceptance, just the kind of eternal theme you would expect from Scholastic.

If your young one is not quite mature enough for young-adult material, the vibrantly illustrated *I Survived* might make a good bridge to more serious comic fare.

Incidentally, it was established Jaws lore the 1916 attacks inspired Peter Benchley to pen his pulpy 1974 thriller, which served as the basis for the first summer movie blockbuster. However, Tarshis, disputes that in notes at the end of her tale.