

# FILM THREAT

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## SWIMMERS

by Daniel Wible

(2005-01-29)

2004, Un-rated, 90 minutes

[CREDITS](#)


In a quiet working-class town on Maryland's coast, a young girl's innocence may forever be shattered as she confronts the realities of adult weakness and pain.

The young girl is the focal point of "Swimmers," a raw and riveting family drama from writer/director Doug Sadler. Yes, I know what you're thinking: yet another family drama from the independent film circuit, oh what joy! But trust me on this one, if you're a lover of the finest in film acting and potent drama, "Swimmers" is one of those "smaller" films you won't want to miss. (And you won't find it on the Lifetime Channel, I checked.)

In a breakthrough performance, Tara Devon Gallagher is Emma Tyler, a fiercely intelligent and observant 11-year old suffering from some unspecified illness requiring expensive surgery. Grounded, literally, from her favorite pastime, swimming, Emma is forced to look for alternative ways to pass those lazy summer days and soon meets Merrill (Sarah Paulson), a seriously damaged young woman newly returned home. In keeping with countless other Sundance '05 screenings I've caught, the two strike up, yes, a touching Unlikely Friendship. Though, to be fair, this friendship makes total sense and is therefore probably not all that unlikely. The sweetly innocent Emma allows the world-weary Merrill to in some ways reconnect with her own lost innocence, while Merrill, for her part, provides an oasis for Emma, who feels invisible at home in the eyes of her struggling parents. Will and Julia Tyler (superbly portrayed by Robert Knott and Cherry Jones, respectively) love their daughter immensely, but suffer the financial woes of a poor fishing season, the sudden loss of Will's boat (for which he may be responsible, having a reputation for liking the bottle, as they say), Will's fierce pride in not having to ask for handouts, and possibly even an extramarital affair. Added to this volatile mix of domestic strife and crisis is a love story desperately trying to emerge between Merrill and one of Emma's older brothers Clyde (Shawn Hatosy). As the two attempt to meet cute, Merrill's ugly past and pathologic need to be used threatens to resurface and destroy her newfound sense of purity.

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### FilmThreat Poll

Vote for your "Actress in a Supporting Role" Oscar pick!

- 1) Amy Adams in "Junebug"
- 2) Catherine Keener in "Capote"
- 3) Frances McDormand in "North Country"
- 4) Rachel Weisz in "The Constant Gardener"
- 5) Michelle Williams in "Brokeback Mountain"

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### Box Office

Idyllically filmed in a small waterfront town along the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, "Swimmers" has a wonderfully evocative sense of place. Sadler and cinematographer Rodney Taylor draw exquisite visual parallels between the gentle rise and fall of the tide and the banal rhythms of daily seaside life. Their use of water as a timeless surrogate for life, hope, and even death, is particularly interesting, if not entirely original. Not to be outdone by the silent, but omnipresent character that is the setting, the film's cast is uniformly authentic and mesmerizing. Their noteworthy performances, along with Sadler's smartly observed script, elevate the film well above the Lifetime Channel schmalz you probably fear. Fresh from her recent stints in Shyamalan's "Signs" and "The Village", Cherry Jones pilfers nearly every scene she graces. Give this woman an Oscar already! As beaten goods, Sarah Paulson is equal parts desirable and nutty, but always in command of her role. But "Swimmers" is ultimately young Tara Devon Gallagher's film. The rookie actress improbably delivers a profoundly mature performance that belies her experience. Discovering all this emerging talent makes one remember why they come to Sundance in the first place.

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2/0	<a href="#">Date Movie</a>	18.9/ 18.9
3/1	<a href="#">The Pink Panther</a>	16.5/ 42.2
4/3	<a href="#">Curious George</a>	11.2/ 29.4
5/2	<a href="#">Final Destination 3</a>	10.1/ 35.8
6/4	<a href="#">Firewall</a>	9.0/ 27.3
7/0	<a href="#">Freedomland</a>	5.9/ 5.9
8/5	<a href="#">When A Stranger Calls</a>	4.9/ 41.2
9/6	<a href="#">Big Momma's House 2</a>	4.4/ 61.3
10/7	<a href="#">Nanny McPhee</a>	3.7/ 37.8

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