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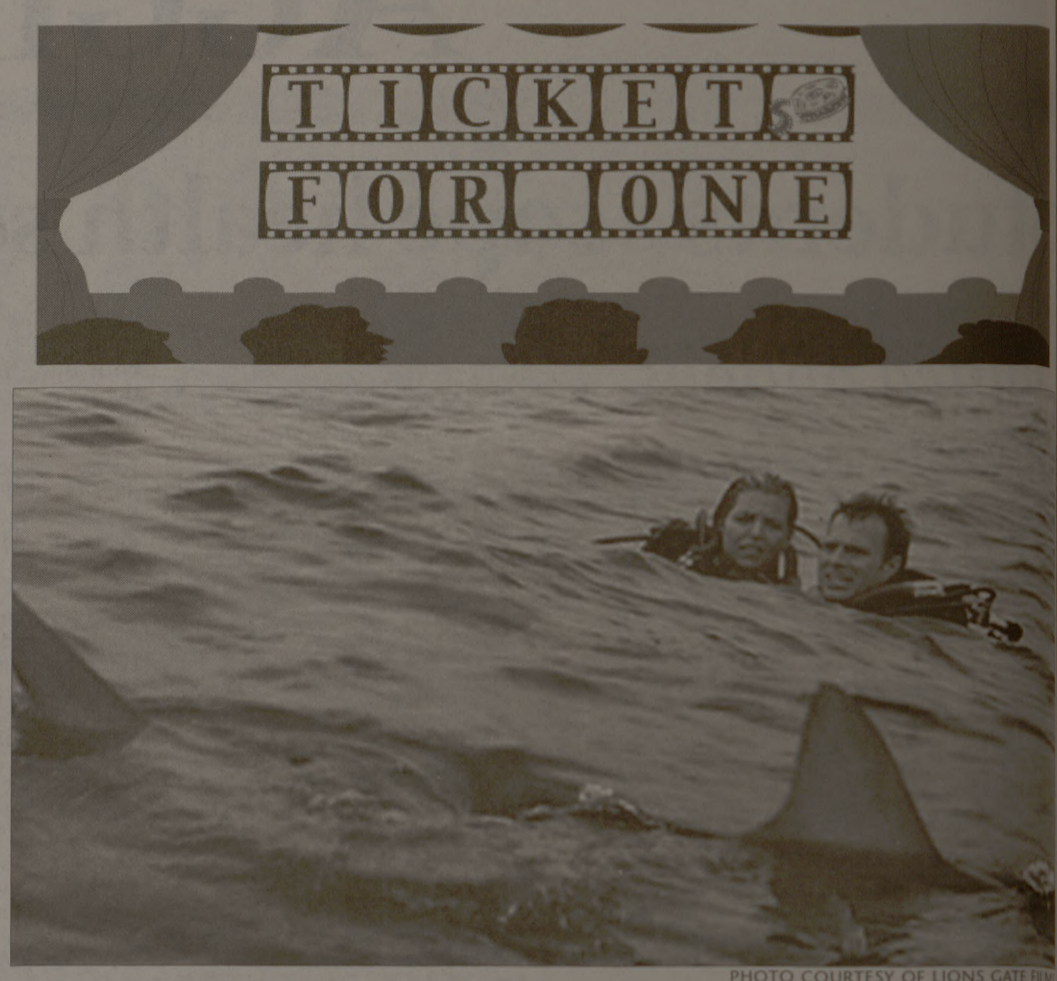
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In "Open Water," married couple Daniel and Susan are accidentally left behind by a scuba diving tour.

Open Water
Starring Blanchard Ryan and Daniel Travis
Lions Gate Films

The recent financial success of independent pictures such as "Lost in Translation" and "Napoleon Dynamite" has provided the means for other creepy cousin low-budget films to slither — excuse me, swim — into mainstream movie theaters.

"Open Water" centers on the plight of scuba diving couple Daniel (Daniel Travis) and Susan (Blanchard Ryan). The two find themselves forgotten and floating, following a hasty decision to escape the routine of occupational strife with a visit to an unidentified Caribbean island. Surrounded by miles of ocean waves and, oh yes, a school of sharks, the divers hold their breaths as each passing hour stoops toward an unavoidable and haunting fate.

Writer, director, editor and co-cinematographer Chris Kentis presents the film on digital video, creating the illusion of a documentary to coincide with the claim of a true event basis. In adherence with budgetary constraints, the participating actors were required to film and swim with actual sharks. Apparently, digital sharks are expensive.

These production choices have generated a decent amount of questionable hype. Do not be fooled. The rough framework of the digital video effect is frequently nauseating and annoying, as



audience members are forced to focus on close-ups of churning waters and ill-proportioned foreheads. The storyline is drawn out to the point of excruciation when random shots of water, more water and even more water break up the superbly well-written dialogue between Kentis' two characters.

The film ultimately bottoms out with the laughable hysteria resonating in Daniel's screams, "We wanted an ocean view. Boy, did we get it."

Furthermore, the assertion of a true-life scenario is lost to the realization that the firsthand account of the experiences of two missing individuals can only be based on speculation and conjecture. Without testimony, an insurance scam could motivate the absence of these divers as easily as man-eating sharks.

The only buzzworthy piece of cinematography encompassing "Open Water" is the inclusion of real sharks in the filming process. Ryan and Travis were placed in shark-infested waters for a number of the sequences. Sadly, the shooting experience is more terrifying than the film.

Aside from the series of misfires this film produces, it does offer a few pieces of information that can be used to avoid misfortune in the future. One, always view sharks at a safe distance from the television set. Two, commit the title of this title to memory. Some day, a self-assured independent film hippie may approach with words and phrases like 'zero-frills aesthetics' or 'imagined from real events.' If any of these aforementioned phrases follow or precede the name "Open Water," or any film for that matter, prepare yourself to punch the individual in the head.

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