



## OUTSIDERS AND EXILES: THE FILMS OF JERZY SKOLIMOWSKI

# The Lightship

### The Lightship

*Director:* Jerzy Skolimowski

*Production Companies:* CBS Productions, Mutoskop-Film

*Executive Producer:* Rainer Söhnlein

*Producers:* Moritz Borman, Bill Benenson

*Unit Manager (Sylt):* Hanno Schilf

*Unit Manager (Munich):* Andreas Grosch

*Production Manager:* Martin Häussler

*Location Manager:* Jurgen Christiansen

*Production Assistants:* Susan Elmore, Susanne von Hanstein

*Assistant Director:* Candace Allen

*Screenplay:* William Mai, David Taylor

*Based on the novel by:* Siegfried Lenz

*Commentary Writer:* Robert Dunn

*Director of Photography:* Charly Steinberger

*2nd Unit Photographer:* Gernot Köhler

*Steadicam Operator:* Randy Nolen

*Special Effects:* Heinz Ludwig

*Special Effects Assistant:* Klaus Huber

*Editor:* Barrie Vince

*Editor (USA):* Scott Hancock

*Art Director:* Holger Gross

*Set Decorator:* Michael Adlmueller

*Costumes:* Nikola Hoeltz

*1st Wardrobe:* Gabriele Friedrich

*2nd Wardrobe:* Reinhard Klebeck

*Make-up:* Hasso von Hugo

*Titles and Optical:* Pacific Title

*Music:* Stanley Myers

*Orchestrations:* Nancy Beach

*Electronic Music Produced by:* Hans Zimmer

*Music Editor:* Robert Takagi

*Sound Recording:* Günter Stadelmann

*Sound Re-recording:* William Nicholson, Dean Okrand, John Asman

*Supervising Sound Editor:* Kevin Spears

*Supervising Dialogue Editor:* Donald W. Ernst

*Sound Effects Editor:* Sam Horta

*ADR Editor:* Devon Heffley

*Cast:*

Robert Duvall (*Calvin Caspary*)

Klaus Maria Brandauer (*Captain Miller*)

Tom Bower (*Coop*)

Robert Costanzo (*Stump*)

Badja Djola (*Nate*)

William Forsythe (*Eugene Waxler*)

Arliss Howard (*Eddie Waxler*)

Michael Lyndon (*Alex*)

Tim Phillips (*Thorne*)

USA-West Germany 1985

89 mins

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**SIGHT AND SOUND**

### Jerzy Skolimowski on 'The Lightship'

Somebody brought my attention to Siegfried Lenz's book, and I thought there was great potential there for a film. There are similarities to Joseph Conrad's *Victory*, which is something I've always wanted to do. Maybe the geographical situation of Poland makes people specialists in those kinds of issues. *Victory* has been a project of mine for 15, 20 years now, so in a way I could make use of the Conradian philosophy which I'd been accumulating on *The Lightship*. Robert Duvall is almost like Mr Jones in *Victory*, although Lenz had already described that character pretty well.

I suppose the project was brought to me because I have the reputation of being an expert in that kind of claustrophobic situation, where characters are locked into some kind of game. But I didn't like the first draft of the script, written by William Mai. It was a mechanical translation from the German setting to an American one. It was too simple, almost vulgar. So it didn't look like I would be making this film until, two years ago, when I was presenting *Success Is the Best Revenge* in Cannes, I was approached once again with the project, when there was already interest from Robert Duvall and Klaus Maria Brandauer. The script was then rewritten by David Taylor. I had it in mind to do it myself, but I couldn't at that stage because I was acting in *White Nights*.

At the end, I was still writing the script while we were cutting the film. It wasn't until then that the narration was written, which I did with the help of a young American writer, Rob Dunn, who is not even credited on the film. I felt there was a need for narration, but I wasn't sure which character should be the narrator. My first try was Caspary himself, which somehow didn't work. It was almost too much, it threw the film out of balance; it became a film *about* Caspary. Then we tried another character, then on the third try I decided for Alex. And for that character I was looking for a particular writer who would be able to express the language of the kids. That was when I found Rob Dunn, who has some writing credits and is also an actor. He played one of the two policemen chasing Richard Gere in the remake of *Breathless*.

In fact, there's a peculiar combination of many writers on this story. If we count Siegfried Lenz as writer number one, then there was the writer who did the first draft, then number three would be David Taylor (who wrote most of Caspary's speeches). There was also a writer on set who is not credited, who tried to build bridges, to cover the gaps we had between the drafts, who would be writer number four. Then there is Rob Dunn, number five, and there is some of my writing in it, I am the sixth. And Conrad should be counted too, so we have seven writers involved in the whole thing.

We did keep quite faithfully to the book. What appealed to me was this Conradian setting where the moral issues were strongly established, but there was a lot of room for work on the details, the characters. Also it was an ideal subject for my first American movie. The sea looks the same everywhere, so I didn't have any headaches about the background or the reality which I may not have known well enough to control. The seamen are also pretty universal characters. Caspary's two hoods were the ones we did most to adapt. We wanted to make them really like characters out of *Key Largo*. But the story itself is quite universal.

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### The Shout

Tue 28 March 20:45 (+ intro by Jerzy Skolimowski);  
Wed 5 Apr 20:55; Fri 28 Apr 18:30

### Walkover (Walkover)

Wed 29 Mar 18:20 (+ Q&A with Jerzy Skolimowski);  
Sat 8 Apr 18:10

### Moonlighting

Wed 29 Mar 20:45 (+ intro by Jerzy Skolimowski);  
Sun 9 Apr 13:00; Sat 15 Apr 18:20

### Hands Up! (Rece do gory)

Fri 31 Mar 20:45; Mon 10 Apr 15:40

### Barrier (Bariera)

Sat 1 Apr 18:20; Tue 4 Apr 20:50 (+ intro by season  
curator Michael Brooke)

### EO

Sat 1 Apr 20:50; Wed 5 Apr 18:20; Fri 21 Apr 20:50;  
Sat 22 Apr 18:20; Thu 27 Apr 20:45

### Dialogue 20-40-60 (Dialóg 20-40-60)

Sun 2 Apr 12:30; Sat 15 Apr 20:45

### Deep End

Sun 2 Apr 15:40; Mon 10 Apr 18:30;  
Wed 19 Apr 20:55

### Le Départ

Sun 2 Apr 18:30; Mon 17 Apr 20:40

### Identification Marks: None (Rysopis)

Mon 3 Apr 21:00; Sun 9 Apr 18:40

### Outsider and Exile

Tue 4 Apr 18:15

### The Lightship

Sat 8 Apr 12:15; Fri 14 Apr 20:40

### 11 Minutes (11 minut)

Sun 16 Apr 12:30; Sat 29 Apr 20:30

### Four Nights with Anna (Cztery noce z Anna)

Sun 23 Apr 12:40; Fri 28 Apr 20:50

### Essential Killing

Sun 23 Apr 18:40; Sat 29 Apr 14:40

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*EO* will be available on BFI DVD and Blu-ray from  
3 April (available to pre-order at the BFI shop)  
*Identification Marks: None* and *Hands Up!* will be  
available on a 2-disc BFI Blu-ray from 24 April

*Walkover* and *Barrier* will be released on Blu-ray by  
Second Run later this year

Perhaps I was asked to do *The Lightship* because after *Success Is the Best Revenge* I also became an expert in father-son relationships. *Success* is a pretty bitter film, I must say, but there is an optimistic element in it, which actually happened, and which has to do with my son, Michael Lyndon. He wrote this story about himself, which is the part he has in the film. And I wondered why a 15 year-old boy, who is in a London school, who lives in acceptable conditions with his family in a little house in Kensington, should be so unhappy that one day he decides to paint his hair pink and go back to Poland. I thought that this initial seed was so original, simple and tragic at the same time that I wanted to develop it. So I showed that story to all my potential backers and said, look, it's a lovely little story and I know that I can develop a matching story about the father. He would also be caught in that whirlpool of historical circumstances to do with Poland, someone who is a bit lost, who doesn't know exactly what he is doing.

I thought I could also say something more about Michael's character in *The Lightship*. I thought I could exploit a certain knowledge about that character. It was like giving the boy another chance, after the not fully fulfilled chance of *Success*. I guess I also owed it to Michael himself to give him a little better exposure. Actually, while making *The Lightship*, I was caught in almost the same situation as Alex. I was working with two actors who were both strong individuals, and were in a way from two different schools. Duvall is a great professional, who knows exactly what he is doing, while Brandauer has great talent and potential but is quite uncontrollable. Almost everything he does is too much, and it's very difficult to 'ensemble' him into a realistic setting. We had a lot of problems on the set, and I was caught between these very strong waves.

I couldn't identify with the character of Caspary; he's much too sinister and too pretentious. But I also couldn't identify with Captain Miller. He irritates me in a way – his stubbornness and arrogance, his self-destructive urge. He's almost provoking bad things to happen. So if there is a character with whom I could identify, it would be this young boy, who looks at them and thinks they're both playing some strange game with no rules. They square each other, as he says. I could identify with Alex being caught between those two and being unable to take sides.

I am afraid that I am someone who cannot adapt well or establish himself in any given circumstances. I have made films practically all over the world now. It seems to me that I am a kind of accidental tourist: I go places, find a reason to make a film, get some financing. But it's always a temporary arrangement. Perhaps it's time really to settle somewhere. Hollywood seems to be one of the places where I could find a job from time to time. I tried to settle in England, but it is really difficult to establish oneself here as a permanent filmmaker. I really don't know what my next project will be or how it will be done. Perhaps some Conradian project wouldn't be a bad idea. I would like to do *The Secret Agent*, which could be done in this country. I have a script for that and some great ideas for the casting.

Interview by Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1986