



The Poseidon Adventure (1972 film)

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The Poseidon Adventure is a 1972 American disaster film directed by [Ronald Neame](#), produced by [Irwin Allen](#), and based on [Paul Gallico's](#) eponymous 1969 novel. It features an ensemble cast, including five Academy Award winners: [Gene Hackman](#), [Ernest Borgnine](#), [Jack Albertson](#), [Shelley Winters](#), and [Red Buttons](#). Parts of the movie were filmed aboard the [RMS Queen Mary](#). The plot centers on the fictional [SS Poseidon](#), an aged luxury liner on her final voyage from [New York City](#) to [Athens](#) before being sent to the scrapyard. On [New Year's Eve](#), she is overturned by a tsunami. Passengers and crew are trapped inside, and a rebellious preacher attempts to lead a small group of survivors to safety.

It is in the vein of other all-star disaster films of the early-mid 1970s such as *[Airport](#)* (1970), *[Earthquake](#)* (1974), and *[The Towering Inferno](#)* (1974). By the end of 1974, it was regarded as a widely successful film. The film won two Academy Awards,^[3] a Golden Globe Award, a British Academy Film Award, and a Motion Picture Sound Editors Award.^[4] A 1979 sequel, *[Beyond the Poseidon Adventure](#)*, was also based on a novel by Gallico but was a commercial and critical failure.

Plot

The S.S. *Poseidon*, an ocean liner slated for retirement, is on her way to [Athens](#). Despite protests from the captain, who fears for the ship's safety, the new owner's representative insists he go full speed to save money, preventing him from taking on ballast.

Reverend Scott, a minister believing that "God helps those who help themselves", is travelling to a new parish in Africa as a punishment for his unorthodox views. Detective Lt. Rogo and wife Linda, a former prostitute, deal with her seasickness. Susan and younger brother Robin are traveling to meet their parents. Robin is interested

The Poseidon Adventure



Theatrical poster by [Mort Künstler](#)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Directed by | Ronald Neame |
| Screenplay by | Stirling Silliphant Wendell Mayes |
| Produced by | Irwin Allen |
| Starring | Gene Hackman Ernest Borgnine Red Buttons Carol Lynley Shelley Winters Roddy McDowall Stella Stevens Jack Albertson Pamela Sue Martin Arthur O'Connell |

in how the ship works and frequently visits the engine room. Retired Jewish store owner Manny Rosen and wife Belle are going to Israel to meet their young grandson for the first time. Haberdasher James Martin is a love-shy, health-conscious bachelor. The ship's singer, Nonnie Parry, rehearses for the New Year's Day celebration.

Passengers gather in the dining room to celebrate. The captain is called to the bridge in response to a report of an undersea earthquake. He receives word from the lookout that a huge tsunami is approaching from the direction of Crete at 60 knots. He issues a mayday distress signal and commands a "hard left" turn into the wave. The ship is unable to turn in time and is hit broadside, causing it to capsize.

In the dining room, survivors take stock of their predicament. Acres, an injured waiter, is trapped at the galley door now high above. Scott surmises that the escape route will be found "upwards", at the outer hull, now above water. Robin tells him the hull near the propeller shaft is only one inch (25.4 mm) thick. The Rosens, the Rogos, Susan, Robin, Acres, Nonnie, and Martin agree to go with Scott, using a Christmas tree as a ladder. Scott unsuccessfully tries convincing more passengers to join them. After the group climbs to the galley, there is a series of explosions. As seawater floods the dining room, those remaining attempt to climb the tree, but their weight causes it to fall. The water fills up the room and the *Poseidon* begins sinking.

Scott leads his group upward through the ship's hull, toward the engine room. While climbing a ladder inside a ventilation shaft, the ship rocks from more explosions. Acres falls and perishes despite Rogo's attempt to save him. Leaving the shaft, the group meets a large band of survivors led by the ship's medic, heading toward the bow. Scott believes they are heading for their doom, but Rogo wants to follow them and gives Scott 15 minutes to find the engine room. Although he takes longer than allowed, Scott succeeds.

The group discovers the engine room is on the other side of a flooded corridor. Belle reveals she is a former competitive swimmer and volunteers to go through, but Scott refuses her and dives in. Halfway through, a panel collapses on him. The survivors notice something is wrong, and Belle dives in. She frees Scott and they make it to the other side, but Belle suffers a heart attack. Before dying, she tells Scott to give her Chai pendant to her husband, who in turn will give it to their grandson. Rogo swims over to make sure Belle and Scott are all right, then leads the rest over. When Rosen finds Belle's dead body, he is unwilling to go on, but Scott gives him her pendant, reminding him that he has a reason to live.

Scott leads the survivors to the propeller shaft room's watertight door, but another series of explosions causes Linda to fall to her death. A heartbroken Rogo blames her death on Scott. A ruptured pipe releases steam, blocking their escape. Scott rants at God for the survivors' deaths. He leaps and grabs onto the burning-hot valve wheel to shut off the steam, then tells Rogo to lead the group before letting go of it, falling to his death in the flaming water below.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| | <div><div><div></div><div>Eric Shea</div></div><div><div></div><div>Leslie Nielsen</div></div></div> |
| Cinematography | Harold E. Stine |
| Edited by | Harold F. Kress |
| Music by | <div><div><div></div><div>John Williams</div></div><div>The Song from The Poseidon Adventure:</div><div><div></div><div>Joel Hirschhorn</div></div><div><div></div><div>Al Kasha</div></div></div> |
| Production companies | Kent Productions, Ltd. |
| Distributed by | 20th Century Fox |
| Release date | December 12, 1972 |
| Running time | 117 minutes |
| Country | United States |
| Language | English |
| Budget | \$4.7 million ^[1] |
| Box office | \$127.3 million ^[2] |

Rogo leads the remaining survivors—Rosen, Martin, Nonnie, Susan, and Robin—through the watertight doors and into the propeller shaft tunnel. They hear a noise from outside and bang on the hull to attract attention. The rescuers cut a hole through the hull, assist the sole group of six survivors from the ship, and fly them to safety.

Cast

- [Gene Hackman](#) as the Reverend Frank Scott
- [Ernest Borgnine](#) as Detective Lieutenant Mike Rogo
- [Red Buttons](#) as James Martin
- [Carol Lynley](#) as Nonnie Parry
- [Roddy McDowall](#) as Acres
- [Stella Stevens](#) as Linda Rogo
- [Shelley Winters](#) as Belle Rosen
- [Jack Albertson](#) as Manny Rosen
- [Pamela Sue Martin](#) as Susan Shelby
- [Arthur O'Connell](#) as Chaplain John
- [Eric Shea](#) as Robin Shelby
- [Leslie Nielsen](#) as Captain Harrison
- [Fred Sadoff](#) as Linarcos
- [Byron Webster](#) as Purser
- [Jan Arvan](#) as Dr. Caravello
- [Sheila Mathews](#) as Nurse
- [John Crawford](#) as Chief Engineer
- [Bob Hastings](#) as M.C.
- [Erik Nelson](#) as Tinkham

Production

Producer Irwin Allen had been an extremely successful television producer during all of the 1960s but had a hard time making the break into feature films. Upon coming across the book he immediately secured the rights and financing from 20th Century Fox to produce and distribute the film version. Writers [Stirling Silliphant](#) and [Wendell Mayes](#) co-wrote the screenplay removing some of the novel's more unsavory scenes including one where Pamela Sue Martin's character Susan is raped in the aftermath of the capsizing, the sweeping away the loss of her brother Robin in a panicked crew rush (his fate is never known) and the seductive behavior of Linda Rogo toward Reverend Scott and instead concentrating on just a few characters making them all more sympathetic. In the novel almost all the characters were deeply flawed and in most cases unlikeable.

A budget of \$4.7 million was set, but on the eve of production the studio pulled the plug on the film, the reasoning being that audiences were moving away from big budget extravaganzas in favor of gritty, realistic, and cynical fare. Fox was also losing money as a result of having produced several huge musical productions which mostly bombed at the box office. Allen managed to get two very wealthy friends to guarantee half the funding with their own money, but the studio still had one stipulation: the director had to be of their selection. Veteran British director [Ronald Neame](#), who had directed the critically acclaimed *[The Prime Of Miss Jean Brodie](#)* and *[Scrooge](#)*, was tapped to helm.

The film was shot mostly in sequence to give the cast the feeling of actually going through the adversity of the characters, and the cast got along very well. The two main characters, Rev. Scott and Rogo, were portrayed to the hilt by Hackman and Borgnine. In an interview many years later, Neame would comment that he really let them loose a bit too much and they both "really chewed the scenery." Shelley Winters gave one of her very best performances as Mrs. Rosen, a role that would bring her great praise. She even performed her own underwater stunts swimming for extended periods.

Both in the book and film, the *Poseidon* was closely based on the *Queen Mary* and many of the early scenes were shot aboard the actual ship, permanently moored as a floating hotel in Long Beach. The sets built to simulate the capsized liner were designed as closely to the actual ship's design as possible. To achieve the capsizing sequence in the main dining room, a full-size dining room was designed by art director William Creber in such a way that it could be redressed to appear upside down. Built on Stage 6 on the Fox lot, it was also designed to be lifted by large forklifts to simulate the ship being drawn into the giant wave. The set would be lifted up to a 30-degree incline, allowing a convincing slide for actors and stunt performers. This was further enhanced by tilting the camera in the opposite direction to exaggerate the effect. Once filming for the first half of the scene was completed, the set was completely redressed with tables being bolted to the inverted "floor" which had begun as the ceiling. Skylights with special padding for stuntmen to fall through were then built on the inverted "ceiling" which began the scene as the dining salon deck. Many of the other sets – such as the engine room, kitchen, and barber shop – were built inverted.

In order to give the movie a visual feel for being on the open ocean, a special double mount was built for the cameras used moving up and down and side to side. This was subtly done throughout the film both before and after the capsizing which gave the subliminal effect of rocking back and forth to the audience. For scenes with more action (such as the opening sequence on the bridge), the actors were coached to lean in the opposite direction of the camera tilt for more effect.

The scene when the large wave strikes the ship was all done with practical effects with thousands of gallons of water and a large model. To convincingly shoot the ship turning over in the ocean, special effects head L.B. Abbott obtained blueprints for the *Queen Mary* and built a 1/48th scale model at a cost of \$35,000 which was 21 feet long and weighed several tons. The model had working lights rigged throughout and was attached to a mechanical mount below the water to control the movements of the ship as she turned on her side, struggled to right herself, and then fully capsized.

The scene was shot in one of the largest water tanks available at the time, measuring 32 feet and with two large 1,200-gallon dump tanks built above it. The tanks were then tilted into the main tank creating the wave effect. The cameras filming the scene were run at seven times normal speed to achieve the effect of a huge amount of water hitting the ship. When run at normal speed the slow motion effect simulated a much larger scale to the action. The scene where Captain Harrison (Leslie Nielsen) looks out over the ocean and sees the approaching wave was actually a shot of the high surf at Malibu also filmed in slow motion. The model was then filmed from below fully capsized for several more scenes showing explosions blowing out of the funnels as the boilers blew and the ship settled deeper into the sea.

The ship model was used in several other productions over the years including a made-for-television film produced by Allen entitled *Adventures of the Queen* which was also a pilot for a proposed-but-never-picked-up series starring David Hedison with whom he had worked with on the TV series *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*

which allowed him to make use of stock footage from *The Poseidon Adventure* as well. It was also redressed for a *Titanic* television film before being donated to The Los Angeles Maritime Museum in San Pedro where it is presently located.

Reception

The Poseidon Adventure has received largely positive reviews, with review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes reporting 79% of 24 critics gave the film a positive review, with an above average score of 7.1/10.^[5] Boxoffice magazine reported *The Poseidon Adventure* was the #1 Box Office Champ of 1973. By the end of 1974, it ranked among the six most successful features in film history, along with *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *The Godfather* (1972), *Love Story* (1970), *Airport* (1970), and *The Sound of Music* (1965). It is listed in Golden Raspberry Award founder John Wilson's book, *The Official Razzie Movie Guide*, as one of The 100 Most Enjoyably Bad Movies Ever Made.^[6]

It is in the vein of other all-star disaster films of the 1970s such as *Airport* and later ones like *Earthquake* (1974) and *The Towering Inferno* (1974). The film earned estimated rentals of \$40 million in North America in 1973.^[7] *Mad*'s September 1973 edition satirized the movie as "The Poopsidedown Adventure". It became the best selling issue in the magazine's history.^[8] When the film made its network television premiere on ABC on October 27, 1974, it earned a 39.0 household share, making it the sixth highest film to ever air on network television.^[9] *The Poseidon Adventure* has become a cult film, particularly among gay audiences.^[10] It has been released on DVD and Blu-ray.

Awards

It won a Special Achievement Academy Award for Visual Effects and an Academy Award for Best Original Song (for "The Song from *The Poseidon Adventure*", also known as "The Morning After"). Shelley Winters won the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress – Motion Picture and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role. It also received nominations for the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture – Drama and for Best Original Score by John Williams.

| Award | Category | Subject | Result |
|---|---|---------------------------|-----------|
| <u>Academy Awards</u> | <u>Best Supporting Actress</u> | <u>Shelley Winters</u> | Nominated |
| | <u>Best Production Design</u> | <u>William J. Creber</u> | Nominated |
| | | <u>Raphaël Bretton</u> | Nominated |
| | <u>Best Original Song</u> ("The Morning After") | <u>Al Kasha</u> | Won |
| | | <u>Joel Hirschhorn</u> | Won |
| | <u>Best Visual Effects</u> (Special Achievement Award/non-competitive) | <u>L. B. Abbott</u> | Won |
| | | <u>A. D. Flowers</u> | Won |
| | <u>Best Original Score</u> | <u>John Williams</u> | Nominated |
| | <u>Best Costume Design</u> | <u>Paul Zastupnevich</u> | Nominated |
| | <u>Best Sound</u> | <u>Theodore Soderberg</u> | Nominated |
| | | <u>Herman Lewis</u> | Nominated |
| | <u>Best Cinematography</u> | <u>Harold E. Stine</u> | Nominated |
| | <u>Best Film Editing</u> | <u>Harold F. Kress</u> | Nominated |
| <u>ACE Eddie</u> | <u>Best Editing</u> | | Nominated |
| <u>BAFTA Award</u> | <u>Best Actor</u> | <u>Gene Hackman</u> | Won |
| | <u>Best Supporting Actress</u> | <u>Shelley Winters</u> | Nominated |
| <u>Golden Globe Award</u> | <u>Best Supporting Actress – Motion Picture</u> | | Won |
| | <u>Best Original Score</u> | <u>John Williams</u> | Nominated |
| | <u>Best Original Song</u> ("The Morning After") | <u>Al Kasha</u> | Nominated |
| | | <u>Joel Hirschhorn</u> | Nominated |
| | <u>Best Motion Picture – Drama</u> | <u>Irwin Allen</u> | Nominated |
| <u>Motion Picture Sound Editors Award</u> | <u>Best Sound Editing</u> | N/A | Nominated |
| <u>Satellite Award</u> | <u>Best DVD Extras</u> | | Nominated |

Sequel and remakes

A 1979 sequel, *Beyond the Poseidon Adventure*, which was also based on a novel by Gallico, was released later with an equally star-studded cast, but was a commercial and critical failure. In 1998, several episodes of the daytime soap *Sunset Beach* entitled "Shockwave" revolved around an earthquake and tsunami in California and major parts of the episodes take place on a cruise ship, the S.S. *Neptune* that is capsized by the giant wave. The

episode borrowed heavily from the plot line of *The Poseidon Adventure* and garnered huge audiences and spurring NBC to repeat it several weeks later in prime time. *The Poseidon Adventure* was remade twice, first as a television special in 2005 with the same name, and as a theatrical release titled *Poseidon* in 2006.

See also

- List of American films of 1972
- *The Last Voyage* (1960)
- Survival film, about the film genre, with a list of related films

References

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5. *The Poseidon Adventure* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1016584-poseidon_adventure) at Rotten Tomatoes
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7. "Big Rental Films of 1973", *Variety*, 9 January 1974 p 19
8. [1] (http://www.poseidonadventure.com/gangway/Tributes,044_Parodies_038_Satires/MAD_Magazine_and_Its_Imitators/) Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20160805112301/http://www.poseidonadventure.com/gangway/Tributes%2C044_Parodies_%2C038_Satires/MAD_Magazine_and_Its_Imitators/) 2016-08-05 at the Wayback Machine
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10. Vinciguerra, Thomas (2006-05-07). "Underwater, and Over the Top in 1972" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/07/fashion/sundaystyles/07poseidon.html?pagewanted=print>). *The New York Times*.

External links

- *The Poseidon Adventure* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0069113/>) at IMDb
- *The Poseidon Adventure* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v38807>) at AllMovie
- *The Poseidon Adventure* (<https://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/29197/enwp>) at the TCM Movie Database
- *The Poseidon Adventure* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1016584-poseidon_adventure) at Rotten Tomatoes

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