

LAFF: Islander

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First up is *Islander*, directed and co-written by rising talent Ian McCrudden and starring fellow co-writer Thomas Hildreth, Amy Jo Johnson, Ron Canada and Boogie Nights' Philip Baker Hall in a key supporting role (above, with Hildreth). Set in a tight-knit Maine coastal community whose lobster industry is drying up and causing all sorts of tensions, the movie centers on irascible family man Eben Cole, whose aggressive protection of territorial fishing boundaries against mainland interlopers yields unfortunately life-changing results. Returning to the island after an absence of several years, Eben finds himself a pariah, as well as a virtual stranger to his daughter Sara, whom ex-wife Cheryl (Johnson) has cut off all contact with. What we see, though, is a changed and much more pensive man, even though Cheryl has moved in with Jimmy (Mark Kiely), a former colleague of Eben's. Reluctant to lose his family and start anew elsewhere, Eben must fight to reestablish a claim to the only life he has ever known, even if the mooring of that life appears to be hopelessly eroding.

Islander is just a bit obviously plotted and overcooked early on — in its eagerness to set the scene, every interaction is emotionally charged — but you can veritably taste the salt water air of the setting, courtesy of cinematographer Dan Coplan's beautiful blue-grey palette and composer Billy Mallery's gentle, evocative score. Fed by McCrudden and Coplan's melancholic close-ups and some quite fine ensemble acting, the movie only deepens as it progresses. Hildreth in particular — a dead ringer for a more mature Skeet Ulrich, if ever there's a need for a *Chill Factor* sequel — is a revelation, proof that there's leading man talent in many an actor resigned to supporting character roles. In charting Eben's struggle to reclaim what he has lost, *Islander* indulges a quietude not frequently seen in much modern studio product, and consequently blossoms into a stirring nostalgia tale of small town Americana.