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The rise of Alf Sjöberg: The Strongest

Born in Stockholm in 1903, Alf Sjöberg attended the Dramatic Theatre School, studying alongside Greta Garbo from 1923 to 1925. From 1925 he acted and directed plays, rising to Chief Director at the Stockholm Theatre by 1930. Early influences on Sjöberg include Pabst and Eisenstein, whose films he saw in the late 1920s and who excited him enough to attempt a production using some of the Russian's techniques. The result, *The Strongest* (*Den Starkaste*, 1929), is most certainly a brilliant début, but it was ignored because silent films at the time of release had reached their popular low.

Sjöberg collaborated with his cameraman, Axel Lindblom, who also wrote the script. The film stars Hjalmar Peters, Anders Henrikson and Bengt Djurberg. Arctic Norway provides the setting for a story that concentrates on the tenacious men who fish for survival. The film's lack of theatricality was not in fashion at the time, and this may have been part of the reason for Sjöberg's inability to finance further projects for at least ten years.

WORLD CINEMA 2: SWEDEN
-BRIAN McILROY

Critics have mentioned the well-photographed scenes of Tromsö, the small settlement, the ship negotiating the ice, and the men at work under very dangerous conditions as marvellous examples of naturalism. Survival of the strongest is quite obviously a pervading theme in Sjöberg's early work.