



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**UN CERTAIN REGARD**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

IDTV Film, VPRO and Les Petites Lumières present a film by David Verbeek

# R U THERE

STIJN KOOMEN KE HUAN-RU





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IDTV Film and VPRO in coproduction with Les Petites Lumières

present

# R U There

a film by David Verbeek

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## Synopsis

Jitze, a young Dutch professional gamer, travels the world to compete in video game tournaments. During a stay in Taipei his arm starts to hurt and he's forced to take a few days rest. A night in his hotel, Jitze meets a girl and starts realizing what it means to be human in the age of the virtual worlds.



## Technical details

87 minutes, color, Cinemascope, Dolby SR  
Netherlands – Taiwan, 2010

## CAST

<b>Jitze</b>	Stijn Koomen
<b>Min Min</b>	Ke Huan-Ru
Team manager Luc	Tom de Hoog
Hai-Li	Phi Nguyen
Paulo	David Davis
Vlad	Pavio Bilak
John	Eugene Callegari
Brazilian boy	Robert Samudion
Aunt Shin	Hong Li Ying
Uncle Xu	Tsai Jie De
Brother Hsi-Sheng	Wang Jheng Wei
Escort girl	Wang Gwan Chi
Girl on Scooter	Chen Jia Chi
Acupuncturist	Chen Jheng Fong

## Crew

<b>Screenplay</b>	Rogier de Blok
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Lennert Hillege NSC
<b>Art Direction</b>	Wang Chih Hui Lin Ing Chyang
<b>Stylist</b>	Chen Yao Chung
<b>Casting director (NL)</b>	Marina Wijn
<b>Sound production</b>	Victor Horstink
<b>Composer</b>	Lim Giong
<b>Editor</b>	Sander Vos
<b>Sound design</b>	Peter Warnier
<b>Re-recording mixer</b>	Bruno Tarrière
<b>Visual effects</b>	Shosho
<b>Line Producer</b>	Judy Maat
<b>Executive producer</b>	Arnold Heslenfeld
<b>Co producer</b>	Joost de Wolf Natacha Devillers
<b>Producer</b>	Frans van Gestel

With the participation of The Netherlands Film Fund for the special project De Oversteek  
Stimuleringsfonds Nederlandse Culturele Mediaproducties  
CoBO-fonds and Centre National de la Cinématographie



## BREAKING OUT OF THE BUBBLE

Director David Verbeek on his film *R U There* (by André Waardenburg).

“What we want to portray in *R U There* is the first worldwide generation of people who grew up living lives that are, for a large part, lived virtually. What does this kind of virtual contact mean for people and what kind of future does it have? It’s a complex subject that has not been dealt with a lot in cinema - except perhaps only at plot-level. But cinema is the perfect medium to explore different kinds of reality and I’m very enthusiastic about the way reality, the world of gaming and *Second Life* exist, not just separately from each other, but actually add together and can blend to such an extent that the audience is reached in a very emotional way. It can be so much more than just a plot device and I wanted my film to reflect this contemporary landscape of feelings.

The film is about a Dutch professional gamer who plays game tournaments all over the world. It could have been set anywhere, but I chose to film it in Taipei, Taiwan. One reason for this is simply that a lot of these competitions are held in Asia. America was never an option, because it is too much like home for the protagonist, a culture he knows inside and out. He has to break out of his bubble of game playing, a world in which he is in control, where he is a hero who masters all the rules - rules that are less complex than the rules of social interaction in the real world, which, by contrast, he is unable to master. The best setting to place him in, which would put him out of joint and at a loss, was a place where everything is completely different, with a language and culture completely foreign to him. That’s why I decided to film somewhere far away in an exotic location, and chose Taipei. Another reason to film there is the notion that life in Asia is geared more towards the world of dreams and fantasy than life in the West. When I’m in Taiwan I feel there is a need to escape from society. People have a more abstract logic about life, one that seems less neat and structured. In a country like Holland we are extremely individualistic, much more so than anywhere in Asia, but on the other hand our minds work with a very clear set of notions. We are free yet surprisingly sober. The idea of living in a dream manifests itself in different ways in Taiwan. One potent symbol is the phenomenon of the ‘betelnut girl’. In my film you’ll see an average betelnut shop, I could also have used the kind of shops where the girls have bunny ears and wear tiger striped dresses or Manga outfits with very short skirts, but in a sense I found those kinds of locations to be too much like a stereotypical film decor. A standard betelnut shop was dreamlike enough for me.

Although I did find elements I needed, like very busy cities close to rustic nature, my film is not about understanding a complex society like Taiwan. It’s about something far more existential.

Sander Vos, my editor, already spent a long time in *Second Life*. He knew a lot about it, and we incorporated many of his experiences into the film. As further preparation I made my own avatar in *Second Life* and during the editing stage Sander and I spent a lot of time in *Second Life*, exploring worlds and building our own avatars. We designed much of our *Second Life* world ourselves. Via *Second Life* we also hired someone to help with the art direction of the *Second Life* sequences, such as Min Min’s avatar. This was someone from Taipei whose own avatar had beautiful outfits and moved in a very smooth way. The designs created through *Second Life* in Asia are far more advanced than what’s been coming out of the West and so she helped us a lot. People choose identities on *Second Life* that are sometimes far removed from their own, but Jitze’s avatar is closely modeled on his gaming persona, that of a soldier.

The switch from the world of gaming to *Second Life* is intentionally a hard transition, after that point the fusion of the different worlds takes place in a more gradual and organic way. The last shot of Jitze stepping out of the airplane is the ultimate symbol of this fusion of two worlds. In both the real and virtual world he is liberated from his existence as game champion and he finally feels free.

During pre-production we went to a lot of gaming conferences. I did not want to portray gamers as nerds and I was confirmed in this choice when I interviewed a couple of gamers. They turned out to be more like sportsmen than nerds. Gaming is almost an Olympic sport, with a strong competitive element and a lot of money going around.

Jitze locking himself up in virtual worlds actually has to do with making contact, however paradoxical it may seem at first. In *Second Life* you can be more yourself than in real life. What he surrenders in the end is his need to

always control his environment. He opens up to real life, although initially it is in a virtual world. In *Second Life* he lies down on the beach and looks for nature, just as he did in reality during his stay in South Taiwan. He's open to new experiences and, eventually, also to social and physical contact. Because they are so different, Jitze and Min Min would never share their universe in real life, but in the virtual world they can. What they, despite their many differences, have in common is the need to feel free and be liberated from the constraints of life. Something they cannot accomplish in the real world, but can in *Second Life*. Virtual reality enriches their experience, despite being an imaginary world. The value of this experience is something I leave open. I don't feel the need to judge it. The film does however express a sense of distance that frightens me. In the beginning of the film, when a girl has a horrible accident right in front of our protagonist, he does nothing. Where in the virtual world he is a hero, in reality he is useless and unable to give even the most basic aid. The film is about a transition in how he experiences the world. He is however still alone. We all live in our own air bubble."

## Director – David Verbeek (1980)

From 1999 till 2001 David Verbeek studied Film, Photography and Philosophy at the New School University in New York. Afterwards he continued studying at the Dutch Film and Television Academy in Amsterdam.

He directed several short films in New York and at the Dutch Film and Television Academy. **November Always** (2004) was his first cooperation with writer Rogier de Blok. Their collaboration continued with their first feature film, **Beat**, they made the same year. This film was selected for the main program at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and several other festivals. For VPRO television he directed his first TV Film **Yu-Lan** in the VPRO series 'Nieuwe Lola'. His final graduation film followed in 2005: **alt.suicideholiday.net**, again a cooperation with Rogier de Blok.

His short film **Melody Z**, shot in Shanghai was a preliminary study for **Shanghai Trance** (2007). This film was selected for the Tiger Competition at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam 2008. Shanghai Trance was also selected for several festivals around the world like Chicago, Hong Kong and Premier Plans d'Angers and had a big release in China. His low budget film **Club Zeus**, also shot in Shanghai is currently in post production.

### **Jitze - Stijn Koomen (1987)**

When Stijn was ten years old he began to attend acting classes at the Youth Theatre School. At this school he developed his dancing, singing and acting skills for six years.

At the age of twelve Stijn made his first television appearance in the youth series

**Wat nou!**. For the first time he worked together with directors like Eddy Terstall and Simone van Dusseldorp.

When he was fourteen years old Stijn played his first leading role in the VPRO series

**Ik ben Willem**, directed by Mijke de Jong. The series was awarded by a CineKid Award.

Two years later Stijn was asked by Eddy Terstall to play a part in the Dutch feature film **Simon**. This film was awarded with four Golden Calfs at the Dutch Film Festival 2004. One year later Stijn starred in the second season of the hit series **Ik ben Willem**, once again directed by Mijke de Jong.

At the age of eighteen Stijn played the leading role in the feature film **Diep**, directed by Simone van Dusseldorp.

One year later **Stages** followed, directed by Mijke de Jong.

### **Min Min - Ke Huan-Ru (1980)**

Ke Huan-Ru played her first part in a feature film in **Love at 7-11** (2003), directed by Tang Young Shen. This film was selected for the Pusan International Film Festival and the International Film Festival of Tokyo. In 2007 she played in two feature films, **Kawaii** by Sha ShaoYu and **About Fei** by Jem Chen, both films were selected for the Golden Harvest Awards Festival in Taiwan. She played in **Summer Afternoon** (2008), by Wi Ding Ho. This film was selected for directors' Fortnight in Cannes and was nominated at the Taipei International Film Festival and at the Palm Springs International Shorts Festival. The film was selected for many more festivals around the world. This same year she acted in two more feature films called **Summer's Tail**, by Cheng Wen Tang and **Can Not Help It** by Niu Chen Gze. This last film was selected for the International Film Festival Rotterdam and Taipei International Film Festival in Taiwan. In 2009 she played in **Ghosted** by the German director Monika Treut, this film was selected for the Berlin International Film Festival.

Ke Huan-Ru played in several TV series like **Meteor Garden** (2001), **True Image** (2003), **Dana Sakura** (2004), **Dream By The River** (2005), **Dangerous Mind** (2006), **Hooping Dulcinea** (2008), **About These Three Women** (2009), **All About AH Long** (2009) and **Summer's bubble** (2010).