



Wolfe Video Presents



HOW TO WIN AT CHECKERS (EVERY TIME)

A FILM BY JOSH KIM

PRESS KIT

80 min • 2014 • Thai • Color • HD

More Info: <https://www.wolfevideo.com/products/how-to-win-at-checkers-every-time/>

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LOGLINE

An orphaned 11-years-old learns to play the game of life, doing whatever it takes to change his fate.

SYNOPSIS

In Thailand, all males turning 21 years old must participate in the annual military draft lottery. Drawing a black card grants exemption, while drawing red results in two years of military service.

On the morning of his draft lottery, Oat reflects back on his childhood -- when as a child, his older brother Ek faced the possibility of being drafted himself. Unable to convince Ek to do whatever he can to change his fate, young Oat takes matters into his own hands, resulting in unexpected circumstances.

Based on the short stories “*At the Café Lovely*” and “*Draft Day*” from the U.S. bestselling book *Sightseeing* by Rattawut Lapcharoensap, *How to Win at Checkers (Every Time)* is director Josh Kim's debut feature film.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The relationship between siblings, more so even than that between parents and children, is one of the most important and long-lasting relationships that a person could have in his or her lifetime.

The stories in the book, *Sightseeing*, by Rattawut Lapcharoensap exposed me to a world that I had never experienced. Yet, the characters were people that I could easily relate to - especially the two brothers in the short story, "At the Café Lovely". The dynamic between the siblings deepened my understanding of how poverty, politics and the loss of innocence can make or break such a precious bond.

And while my brother never took me on a night out like the one in the story did, maybe this was for the better - for the things I never saw, and the desperate things I never learned to do – at such a young age.

- Josh Kim, director

Interview with the Director: Josh Kim

What was the inspiration behind the film?

In 2007, I read the book, *Sightseeing*, by Rattawut Lapcharoensap. It felt as if I had just watched a movie. I remembered the vivid sunsets, the sound of motorbikes, the smell of gasoline and all the colors. It was a world I had never seen, yet populated with characters I felt like I knew from my own childhood. It soon became a story I wanted to tell through film.

What challenges did you face in adapting the book?

When I sent out early drafts of the screenplay for feedback, I found that there were parts where people didn't understand because they had not read the book. I realized then that I needed to put the original source material away and make sure the film script was able to stand on its own. It became very freeing to move beyond the boundaries of the book. I began to add characters and expand on themes and situations to make it my own.

Can you talk about the process of the military draft lottery in Thailand?

It's a very unique rite of passage. If you're a male in Thailand, on the year of your 21st birthday, you gather with guys the same age in your district to pick a card from an urn in front of everybody. If the card is black, your service is waived and you don't need to go. If it's red, however, you must commit two years of your life serving your country. Unlike the US, where military service is voluntary, yet unlike other countries such as South Korea, where it is mandatory, military service in Thailand is largely dependent on luck.

Before coming to Thailand, I had never actually seen this process before. And while I was writing, it was still unclear what the rules were regarding MTF transgenders. So in 2013, I made a short documentary, called *Draft Day*, which followed two transgender women on the day of their own draft. This research helped immensely and provided a strong reference for our team as we had to recreate our own draft for the film.

Describe the casting process. How did you find your actors?

Ryu, the young boy, was actually the first person that came in to read for the role. We tried out one of the emotional scenes and he nailed it. It felt way too easy so we kept looking. Some director friends had told stories of how they auditioned hundreds of kids before finding, "the one." After we auditioned our own hundred, we eventually came back to him, candidate #1.

What is the most challenging thing in making this film?

The draft lottery makes this a story which can only be told in Thailand. It was important that the film was a Thai film first before anything else. I wanted to be able to read the Thai script and communicate with the actors, so I moved to Bangkok in 2012 and enrolled in intensive Thai language classes.

During the production, there were massive protests which shut down the capital and eventually the military took over in a coup. Martial law was declared and soon after, a curfew was imposed. We were all worried whether we would even be able to complete the film because our shooting overlapped with the curfew.

What is the significance of checkers in the movie?

Chess was a game I played with my own brother. He was the one who taught me how to play. Every time I would joke that I would one day beat him, even though I never really believed I would win. So when I did eventually win, I wasn't sure what to do next because that had been my only goal the whole time. Similarly, when Oat beats his own brother, he begins to see the flaws in him. It's a bitter-sweet moment where he comes of age and realizes he must start to make decisions on his own.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Josh Kim is a Korean American filmmaker currently based in Asia. Born in Texas on 23rd April 1981, he started production as an intern at NPR in Washington DC and later moved to CNN in Hong Kong. In 2010, he worked as Associate Producer on the Korean remake of John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow*, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2010. He has since directed videos for Google, UEFA and Elite Models. Recently, he founded a micro-documentary web-series project called *Google Glass Diaries* which has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Fast Company*. www.joshkim.tv

Filmography

2013 Draft Day - short

2007 Postcard - short

2006 The Police Box - short

CAST

Ingkarat “Ryu” Damrongsakkul plays **Oat**, an orphaned 11 year-old boy who faces an uncertain future when his older brother must submit to Thailand's annual military draft lottery. Damrongsakkul began acting when he was 9. He has worked on 7 TV series and since starred in two feature films after *Checkers*.

Toni Rakkaen (Ilrah Wimonchailerk) plays the **Adult Oat** who looks back on his life on the day of his own draft. Rakkaen is popular star in his home country of Thailand, where he has acted in over 20 TV series and films, most notably *3 A.M.* and *Love in the Rain*.

Thira “Um” Chutikul plays **Ek**, Oat's older brother, who struggles with the pressure of being the family's breadwinner, especially when he faces the possibility of being drafted to the military. After receiving his B.A. in film studies at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Chutikul has worked on five films, including *The Last Executioner* and NBC Universal's *The Man with the Iron Fists 2*. A star in the making, he will next appear as King Rama 1 in the Thai big-budget production of *Siamyuth*.

Arthur “Jin” Navarat plays **Jai**, Ek's boyfriend who recently discovers the challenge their different social class poses to their relationship as they enter the real world of adults. Fresh-faced talent Navarat is in his last year of university while making a name for himself as a model and recently-signed actor to one of Thailand's most popular TV network, Channel 7.

Natarat “Nut” Lakha plays **Kitty**, a pre-op Male-to-Female (MTF) transgender, who is best friends with Ek and Jai and acts as a protective big sister to Oat. Lakha is a transgender actress who was crowned Miss Tiffany Thailand 2009's first runner-up and later, made her acting debut in *Tang Wong* that premiered in Berlinale 2013.

Vatanya “Jim” Thamdee plays **Auntie**, a superstitious and cynical woman reluctantly left in charge of her two nephews when their father (her brother) passes away. Owner of a talent agency, Thamdee has appeared in several films, TV series and commercials.

Anawat “Boat” Patanawanichkul plays **Junior**, the son of a powerful neighborhood mafia boss who constantly terrorizes Oat and his brother. Patanawanichkul made his acting debut in *Tang Wong* that premiered in Berlinale 2013.

Warattha Kaew-on plays **Kwan**, the daughter of Auntie and Oat's cousin, who loves to play tricks on the two brothers. *Checkers* marks Kaew-On's big-screen debut.

Nuntita “Belle” Khampiranon makes a special appearance as a singer at the bar where Ek works. Transgender singer-actress Khampiranon first gained prominence in the singing competition Thailand's Got Talent. She later made her acting debut in *It Gets Better* and has since released two full studio albums.

Michael Shaowanasai makes a special appearance as an abrasive customer at the bar where Ek works. Shaowanasai is a prominent performance artist and established film actor who has starred in 7 films, including *The Adventures of Iron Pussy* which he co-directed with Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

Seksan “Deaw” Suttichan makes a special appearance as Ek's bad-boy colleague at the bar. Suttichan is a popular actor who has starred in over 7 films and several TV series, most notably *5 Rows* and *Lucky Loser*.

Kowit Wattanakul plays **Sia**, a powerful mafia boss who owns all the businesses in Oat's neighbourhood. Starting from 1979, veteran actor Wattanakul has acted in over 200 films and TV series in Thailand, including Hollywood films *The Impossible* and *Only God Forgives*. He has received many Best Actor awards for his work.

CREW

Nikorn Sripongwarakul (Director of Photography) is a prolific cinematographer who has worked on a total of 11 feature films, including many of Thailand's commercial studio films by Sahamongkol Films and *It Gets Better* directed by Tanwarin Sukkhapisit (Best Film nomination, Thailand National Film Association Awards 2013). He is nominated for his work in *It Gets Better* at the Starpics Thai Film Awards 2012 and at the Thailand National Film Association Awards in 2013 for his work in *9-9-81* directed by Rapeepimol Chaiyasena.

Maenum Chagasik (Line Producer) graduated in 2002 with a degree in Film Production from Thammasat University. After working at the Thai Film Foundation helping to organize the Bangkok International Film Festival and designing/teaching filmmaking workshops for children, she segued into production as an assistant director for *Wonderful Town* and *Hi-Soby* Aditya Assarat, *Mundane History* by Anocha Suwichakornpong and *Eternity* by SivarojKongsakul. In 2011, she began producing a feature film *In April the Following Year, There Was a Fire* directed by Wichanon Somumjam that was selected for Tiger Awards Competition at the International Film Festival of Rotterdam.

After graduating from architecture school, **Rasiguet Sookkarn (Art Director)** started as an art director for several TV commercials and later made his way as production designer for many award-winning feature films such as *Eternity* directed by Sivaroj Kongsakul (Tiger Awards, Rotterdam Film Festival 2010), *P-047* directed by Kongdej Jaturanrassamee (Venice Film Festival 2011), *Tang-Wong* directed by Kongdej Jaturanrassamee (Berlin Film Festival 2012), *36* directed by Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit (New Currents Award, FIPRESCI Awards, Busan Film Festival 2012) and *Mary is Happy, Mary is Happy* directed by Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit (Venice Biennale Collage 2013). He has received many awards for his designs in his homeland and attended Berlinale Talents in 2014.

A graduate of Rangsit University at the faculty of Motion Pictures and Videos, **Phim U-Mari (Costume Designer)** worked in the art department of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Cannes 2010 Palme d'Or winner) before interning in the costume department with Cattleya Paosrijareon for *Concrete Clouds* directed by LeeChatametikool (Best Film nominations at Busan and Rotterdam Film Festivals). He went to costume design *Tang Wong* directed by Kongdej Jaturanrassamee (Berlin Film Festival 2012). Recently, he worked on Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit's *Mary is Happy, Mary is Happy* (Venice Biennale Collage 2013), in which he received a Best Costume Design nomination in the Thai National Film Association Awards 2014.

Kamontorn Eakwatanakij (Editor) has worked on an eclectic mix of Thailand's box-office films and award-winning independent features. After getting his start on *Bang Kerd Klaow*, he has since edited 8 commercial and feature films including *P-047* directed by Kongdej Jaturanrasamee (Venice Film Festival 2011), *Tang Wong* directed by Kongdej Jaturanrasamee (Berlin Film Festival 2013) and *Concrete Clouds* directed by Lee Chatametikool (Best Film nominations at Busan and Rotterdam Film Festivals). He attended Berlinale Talents and Asian Film Academy (Busan) in 2011.

Lee Chatametikool (Post Producer) has worked as film editor and post-production producer in New York and Bangkok. In 2001, he moved to Bangkok to work on Apichatpong Weerasethakul's first narrative feature *Blissfully Yours*. Since then, he has been the go-to editor for all of Weerasethakul's films including the Cannes 2010 Palme d'Or-winning *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. He has also edited and served as post-producer to a string of Thai biggest blockbusters (*Shutter*, *The Elephant King*) and award-winning independent films by many up-and-coming directors (*Wonderful Town*, *Karaoke*). In 2007, he won the Best Editor award for Weerasethakul's *Syndromes and a Century* at the inaugural Asian Film Awards in Hong Kong. The Bangkok Film Critic's Assembly awarded him for his work on *Wonderful Town* in 2008. He won Best Editor for the second time from the 2010 Asian Film Awards for his work on *Karaoke*.

PRODUCER'S BIOGRAPHY

Based in Indonesia, **Edward Gunawan (Producer)** founded Add Word Productions (AWP), to nurture young storytellers and sharing their stories to the world. AWP has produced notable short films and feature films that have been shot in America, Nepal, Israel, Thailand and South Korea. AWP's last international feature film co-production *Children of Srikandi* (Germany/Swiss/Indonesia) world premiered at Berlinale 2012. In 2013, he participated in Berlinale Talents, Talents Tokyo and Asian Film Academy.

Previously president of production at Sony's Columbia and TriStar Pictures, **Chris Lee (Producer)** supervised the Academy Award-winning films *Jerry McGuire*, *Philadelphia*, *As Good As It Gets* and other Hollywood hits such as *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Legends of the Fall*, *The Mask of Zorro*, and *Godzilla*. Lee was Executive Producer for Bryan Singer's *Superman Returns* and *Valkyrie*, and produced *SWAT* and *Final Fantasy* for Columbia Pictures, *Ballistic* for Warner Brothers, *One Foot Off the Ground* for Hua Yi Brothers in China, the independent films *White Frog* and the documentary *State of Aloha*. He is also the founder and director of the Academy for Creative Media at the University of Hawaii.

Founder of one of Thailand's leading independent production companies - Electric Eel Films, **Anocha Suwichakornpong (Producer)** has produced numerous critically acclaimed short films and features, including Wichanon Somumjarn's, *In April the Following Year, There Was a Fire*, Lee Chatametikool's *Concrete Clouds*, and her own *Mundane History* that won six international film awards, including the Best Film (Tiger Award) in Rotterdam. She is a graduate from Columbia University's MFA film program in which her thesis short film, *Graceland* became the first Thai short film to be included in the Official Selection at Cannes Film Festival (Cinefondation).

Andrew Tiernan (Executive Producer) has over two decades of experience in the banking and finance industry. Based in Hong Kong, he works closely with teams throughout Asia and Australia, with his views being regularly sought after by senior executives across the region. He has held various roles across the region, including Head of Strategy, Asia, for the National Australia Bank based in Hong Kong, the General Manager, Development for MLC/NAB in Beijing, and the Head of Income Streams, Australia, for MLC. Tiernan has also worked for Westpac and KPMG, and holds a Bachelor of Business from the University of Technology, Sydney. A graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, he is currently engaged in developing a number of businesses ranging from cosmeceuticals to film production, along with his corporate advisory engagements.

Interview with the Producers:

Edward Gunawan, Chris Lee, Anocha Suwichakornpong & Andrew Tiernan

How did the project get started?

EG: Chris, Andrew and myself have known Josh for a while. He had already acquired the rights to the stories in *Sightseeing* by himself back in 2008 and was showing us early drafts of the screenplay in 2012. Separately, we gave feedbacks as friends. But it wasn't until Andrew proposed that we should all work together that the project took shape.

AT: I remember my many late night chats with Josh and it became clear that he needed some help to make his first film. I wasn't in the business of films and I never had any intention to enter it. But I like his short films and I like his attitude towards people and life. He made it easy for us, "Let me help you." From there our roles slowly emerged within the team, with each of us taking on different tasks that best suited to individual's strengths. Edward laid the groundwork of logistics, I was in charge of fund-raising while Chris focused on the creative development of the script.

CL: With my background as a Hollywood executive and producer, I've always been most concerned with story. As good as Josh's script was, I think it went to the next level after I referred him to the Creative Lab development program in Hawai'i in late 2013. It was also important for him to shoot a short documentary on the actual Thai military draft, which was essentially a "proof of concept" for the story. The script was production-ready in early 2014. Edward and Josh had moved to Bangkok to set up by then. But we still needed to find a Thai production partner. We were thrilled when Anocha came on board!

AS: I had read *Sightseeing* a long time ago. The short stories had great cinematic qualities and I enjoyed them very much. Before I was approached, I was introduced to Josh through a friend and was happy to hear that Josh was working on an adaptation, as I wanted to see them on screen myself. Josh also showed me the short doc that Chris mentioned, which illustrates his ability as a storyteller and his commitment to the subject. So when I was later approached to be the Thai partner for the project, I immediately said yes. We began pre-production in April and principal photography took place from June to July 2014.

How was the experience of working together on this multi-regional production?

AS: One of the challenges of working on this project is that the producers are from Indonesia, Hong Kong, US and Thailand. And Josh himself is Korean American. Sometimes, we had to discuss at length about what is allowed/not allowed to be depicted on screen, as rules and customs vary from country to country.

EG: There are cultural shorthands that are not obvious to foreigners like me who had no prior filming experience in Thailand. It was a steep learning curve. But this also applies to the five of us - who come from very different cultural and professional backgrounds, and had to work together for the first time.

AT: We are based in different countries but that can have its benefits. As a cohesive production team, we can literally support the project 24 hours a day. There is always someone awake somewhere in the world to provide guidance and advice, or simply to help move things along or make decisions. The downside stems from the same issue. Different time zones, especially the US and Asia, make for some interesting tele-conference times. We quickly became very fluent in utilizing various web apps such as skype, whatsapp and Facebook private groups to communicate and coordinate.

What is the biggest problem for you in the production of this film?

AS: We were location scouting just outside Bangkok when the authorities announced that Thailand was now under Martial Law and curfew was being imposed. That was very stressful. We were not sure if the production could go ahead at all.

AT: We lost our biggest funder during production. It was right as the military coup began. We had to scramble for loans. But the real surprise for me, a person new to the industry, was the non-linear nature of filmmaking. Being an ex-banker, I found this quite challenging from a personal point of view. I would watch my fellow producers having no issues with changing timelines, gaps in production being filled at later dates... I'm sure it was all "business as usual" for them but I found this to be extremely frustrating.

SPECIFICATIONS

Original Title: How to Win At Checkers (Every Time)
Based on the short stories from the book *Sightseeing* by Rattawut Lapcharoensap
Production Company: Add Word Productions, Chris Lee Productions and Electric Eel Films in association with Hidden Rooster Films
Writer/Director: Josh Kim
Producers: Edward Gunawan, Chris Lee and Anocha Suwichakornpong
Executive Producers: Andrew Tiernan, Kuo Loon Loh, Mark Chen Paul Wong, Michael Rogers and Stea Lim
Co Producers: Maenum Chagasik Pornmanus Rattanavich Anthimes Arunroj-Angkul Raymond Phathanavirangoon
Director of Photography: Nikorn Sripongwarakul
Editor: Kamontorn Eakwatanakij
Production Designer: Rasiguet Sookkarn
Art Director: Manop Chaengsawang
Wardrobe Designer: Phim Umari & Rujirumpai Mongkol
Sound Designer: Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr
Music Composer: Böðvar Ísbjörnsson
Post Producer: Lee Chatametikool
Production Country: Thailand / USA / Hong Kong / Indonesia Shooting Location: Bangkok, Thailand
Shooting Format: Digital 4k
Exhibition Format: DCP
Runtime: 80 minutes
Ratio: 1:1.85
Colour: Colour and Black & White
Sound: 5.1 Surround
Language: Thai dialogue with English subtitles

CAST

Introducing

Ingkarat “Ryu” Damrongsakkul ... as Oat

Starring

Toni Rakkaen (Ilrah Wimonchailerk) ... as Adult Oat

Thira “Um” Chutikul ... as Ek

Arthur “Jin” Navarat ... as Jai

Natarat “Nut” Lakha ... as Kitty

Vatanya “Jim” Thamdee ... as Auntie

Anawat “Boat” Patanawanichkul ... as Junior

Warattha Kaew-on ... as Kwan

with special appearances by

Nuntita “Belle” Khampiranon

Michael Shaowanasai Seksan

“Deaw” Suttichan

and

Kowit Wattanakul ... as Sia

ABOUT WOLFE VIDEO

The largest exclusive distributor of lesbian, gay, bi and transgender (LGBT) films, Wolfe has been serving customers since 1985. Major Wolfe releases in 2014 include the award-winning lesbian romantic drama, *Reaching for the Moon* (co-starring Miranda Otto and Gloria Pires); the 2013 Sundance Film Festival hit, *Pit Stop*; and the highly acclaimed documentary *I Am Divine*. Wolfe is also well known for the DVD releases of such beloved modern classics as *Kiss Me*, *Undertow*, *Desert Hearts* and *Big Eden*. Wolfe’s acclaimed motion picture library can be found at WolfeVideo.com as well as at national retailers such as Netflix, Barnes & Noble, Amazon and VOD destinations such as Comcast, Time Warner, YouTube Movies, Hulu, iTunes and, of course, WolfeOnDemand.com. Find more info online at <http://www.wolfevideo.com>.