



Off World and Zeppers Film & TV present

# ON THE TRACK OF ROBERT VAN GULIK

a film by Rob Rombout

Robert van Gulik (1910-1967) is one of the world's most popular Dutch writers, but relatively unrecognized in his own country. A diplomat, Chinese specialist and scholar, he became famous with his detective series about Judge Tie, which in many ways, are projections of his own life: a permanent duality between his real life and the hero in his books.

Written and directed by	Rob Rombout
Director of photography	Stef Tijdink, Benjamin Wolf, Stefano Bertacchini
Edited by	Adriana Moreira Oliviera
Sound engineer	Yves Goossens-Bara
Co-producer	Frank van den Engel
Duration	88 minutes
Technical details	Spoken in English, Dutch, French, Chinese and Japanese Subtitled in Dutch, French or English.

On The Track Of Robert Van Gulik is a production by Off World in coproduction with Zeppers Film & TV (NL), with the support of the Flanders Audiovisual Fund, le Centre du Cinéma de la Fédération



[www.offworld.be](http://www.offworld.be)



[www.vaf.be](http://www.vaf.be)



[www.flandersimage.com](http://www.flandersimage.com)



## LONG SYNOPSIS

On The Track Of Robert van Gulik is a documentary quest about one of the most read Dutch writers in the world, Robert van Gulik (1910-1967). This diplomat, author and scholar was a highly versatile man and a connoisseur of Japanese and Chinese languages and cultures. He owes his fame to his detective fiction starring Judge Dee.

The filmmaker Rob Rombout follows in his footsteps to discover the author's legacy in his diaries, the people he inspired and the witnesses to his life. During Rombout's years-long travels through the Netherlands, Indonesia, Japan, the U.S. and China he located many of van Gulik's contemporaries and devotees of both Judge Dee and van Gulik: people whose lives changed after entering his universe. These are unique people who emulate the writer, the scholar and the diplomat.

Robert van Gulik's life reads like a novel. His books are in many respects projections of his own life. In one of his rare interviews, van Gulik accidentally disclosed: "... Judge Dee, that's me..." It can be difficult to draw the line between fact and fiction with a character like Robert van Gulik. In the documentary, reality and fantasy, past and present will flow into each other, at times imperceptibly.

The narrative form is a quest where the filmmaker takes us on a journey in the author's tracks. At times by plane, by ship or literally on tracks, by train just as the writer himself often travelled. The film is structured (often broken up) with fragments of diaries and stylized interviews. The filmmaker's own voice blends into the spoken diary texts.

The challenge is to bring to life a deceased writer using modern day images and without recourse to archive images. The author's private archive material will be used in moments: handwritten letters, manuscripts, diary extracts, photographs and films.

So this is not a biopic or reconstruction but a journey in search of what is left behind. The film presents a liberal interpretation of the writer's life and at times provides a pretext for the exploration of other subjects. One door opens another. Through the portrait of van Gulik, the filmmaker addresses themes such as the relationship between fact and fiction, the East and the West, diplomacy and writing and the romantic and the erotic.

The duality and the mystery of the man at the heart of this film are reflected in the cinematic form it takes: a continual flirtation with the boundaries of the documentary genre.



## ABOUT DIRECTOR ROB ROMBOUT

Rob Rombout is an experienced independent documentary maker. Besides teaching at filmschools in Belgium he lectures at universities and filmschools all over the world, giving documentary workshops and seminars. He's a member of several film commissions in Belgium and is often chosen as a jury-member. Since 1985 he directed 17 documentaries and he's developing several new projects. Travelling is the common thread in his documentaries. Several of his recent and earlier documentaries were awarded.

## ABOUT CO-PRODUCER ZEPPERS FILM & TV

Zeppers Film & TV is an independent film production company based in Amsterdam. It has produced over 100 films in the last 20 years and is specialized in creative documentaries. Our documentaries are generally co-produced with Dutch and international public broadcasters. Many of these films travelled the world to international festivals and art-house cinema's and some films have been awarded at festivals including: IDFA's prizes for best Long Documentary and best Mid-length Documentary, Grand Jury Prize at the Tribeca Film Festival and Golden Calves at the Netherlands Film Festival. For full filmography, visit [www.zeppers.nl](http://www.zeppers.nl).

Frank van den Engel (1956, Rotterdam) started Zeppers Film & TV in 1997. Nowadays he combines production work with the development and realization of his own film projects, and with the coaching of first time directors. His debut *Normaal - I always come back* (82 mins) was theatrically released in 2002. *Between Heaven and Earth* (70 mins) was released in the cinema in 2007.

ZEPPERS FILM - Ruysdaelkade 223 bg - 1072 AW Amsterdam - The Netherlands  
T +31 20-6758594 | [info@zeppers.nl](mailto:info@zeppers.nl) | [www.zeppers.nl](http://www.zeppers.nl)



## ABOUT PRODUCER OFF WORLD

Off World is an independent production company based in Brussels, capital of Flanders, Belgium and Europe. Off World's main goal is to produce international author documentaries. Over the last few years, the company has built up a large portfolio and a solid reputation as delegate producer and co-producer of many creative and original documentaries.

Select filmography: **Archibelge**, a series by Olivier Magis and Sofie Benoot, VRT- Canvas, RTBF and Playtime Films // **Red Star Line**, a film by Daniël Cattier and Fabio Wuytack, in coproduction with VRT- Canvas, RTBF, Eklektik, RSL Museum – sold in more than 10 countries // **Rêve Kakudji**, a film by Ibbe Daniels and Koen Vidal, in coproduction with VRT- Canvas - Official selection IDFA 2013 // **Reinoud, my sculptor**, a film by Blaise D'Haese, in coproduction with RTBF (3 awards) // **Little Heaven**, a film by Lieven Corthouts, in coproduction with DG-D, Lichtpunt – IDFA 2012 (+20 festival selections/ 3 awards) // **The Boy is Gone**, a film by Christoph Bohn, in coproduction with Simple Production, VRT-Canvas, BRF, RTBF (BE) and SeriousFilm (NL) // **The Last Passage**, a film by Iurre Telleria and Enara Goikoetxea, in coproduction with RTBF (BE) Moztu Filmak, ETB (ESP) and Amo Film, France Télévisions (FR) // **Kongo**, a film by Samuel Tilman, in coproduction with Eklektik (BE), RTBF, ARTE, VRT-CANVAS // **Leaving Mandela Park**, a film by Saskia Vredeveld, in coproduction with Zeppers Film & TV, IKON (NL) and Lichtpunt (BE) // **La Royale Harmonie**, a film by Manu Bonmariage, in coproduction with RTBF // **The Promised Land**, a film by Luckas Vander Taelen and Pascal Verbeken, in coproduction with Canvas en RTBF // **Paul Dujardin, The Long March**, a film by Manu Riche, in coproduction with Canvas, RTBF, & ARTE // **My Future**, a film by Lieven Corthouts, broadcasted by ARTE, TV5 MONDE, TV3, TVI24,... for the complete filmography, visit [www.offworld.be](http://www.offworld.be)

## FOR SCREENERS, MORE INFORMATION OR INTERVIEWS WITH THE FILMMAKERS, PLEASE CONTACT:

Frederik Nicolai +32 485 404 207 [frederik@offworld.be](mailto:frederik@offworld.be)