



# MY BUDDY

## THE UNDERWATER DIRECTOR

FEATURE **PATRICK VAN HOESERLANDE**

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The difficulty to communicate with the actors and the gaffers (light technicians) hampers coordination.  
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## The making of: "De koning leert duiken"

I met Erik De Groef a few years ago. He is the coordinator and instructor of the underwater videography course I attended in preparation for an article on the topic. It struck me that he was very passionate on the subject in general, and of particular scenarios. He stressed that our video montages, however short, should tell a story and that a decent plot is the secret to a good film. When I wrote, 'underwater director' under 'My Buddy' brainstorming list, Erik was the first candidate to spring to mind.

In response to my invitation asking if he would be my buddy for this story, I received the not so surprising reply, 'With pleasure. We have to make a movie'. I only had a very basic idea to what I had in mind, so I was thrilled with his proposal. How better can one observe the work of an underwater director than to be a part of a film production? Erik, as it befits a good director, would take care of everything. Everything except the lead role, that would be my part. This was the part of the proposal I was less enthusiastic about. Besides a few small stage roles at school, I have no acting skills. However, in the context of gaining new journalism experience, I couldn't find an excuse to get out of it. I was going to be the subject of this dive video and get the practical knowledge needed to write about the topic of underwater video making.

On the day of our appointment, 'Put van Ekeren' was busier than usual. Not only were there many divers about, but there was now

a complete film crew in the vicinity. I was a bit shocked by the size of the crew. I thought it was going to be a small get-together, but of course, you need a director, a cameraman, a script supervisor, support divers, and actors. If you add all these roles up, you quickly accumulate a team of ten people.

To be fair, this was the first time I had seen a film script. During my course with Erik we had talked about and seen a few examples of scripts with scenes, but we had never covered a complete scenario. Everything is written out scene by scene. The information for all the underwater parts were written down on dive slates to avoid us having to get out of the water to find out what to do for each next scene. As a whole it all looked very professional. This is serious business for Erik.

He wanted to take advantage of the remaining daylight to be able to finish all the above water scenes first. We would use powerful dive lights underwater, so the presence of daylight was less important. Fortunately, a film is not recorded in the order the clips are edited. The method of recording the shots in a different order to the timeline, and especially playing them that way, is a bit surprising for a newbie. This approach demands a high level of creativity from the actors as you must imagine the impact of the previous scenes without having yet played them.

Erik decidedly increases the pressure on our little

undertaking when he informs us that this is a low-budget film with only one day available to shoot it. He tells us that each scene can only be played once. Surprisingly, the first attempts worked wonderfully well. The fact that we did not have dialogue probably had something to do with this. We did not succeed in getting every scene in one take however, but we did manage to remain within budget.

After we had finished filming in our corner of the parking lot, we moved towards the pontoon, giving the public a show as a camera and film crew definitely stand out. My appearance as a king and the worries of my obliging lackey are not an everyday thing seen in Ekeren. With this said, we did benefit in getting the space required to film our project. Spectators and divers spontaneously moved to the side to get out of the picture. It did demand a little persuasion to get the bystanders on the pontoon to act as 'citizens' in our production. Not everyone was enthusiastic, but we did find some adventurous souls who were happy to play a part.

The director was satisfied with the footage we got on dry land and decided it was time for some wet action. The sunlight started to disappear. With my role as a diving king, I was already equipped in all my diving gear, but the rest of the film crew had to quickly change. As 'king', I had the time to go and greet my 'subjects' and explain to them the purpose of our performance of making a film for YouTube.





The preparation for the diving part proceeds as with any dive. Just because we chose to dive with a film crew of experienced divers is no reason to neglect the briefing and equipment checks. No, safety first. This is, however, no ordinary dive, so Erik gave us an adapted, comprehensive briefing with which scenes we would shoot and when, and where everyone should be positioned. The choreography between the different divers had to almost be perfect in order to get good shots. Each member needed to know where the other divers would be at any given time during the dive. The actors had to play their part, while the lights and camera circled the event as a whole. We agreed on a few adapted signals to synchronise this choreography.

The collaboration between director and cameraman is a major challenge underwater. The difficulty to communicate with the actors and the gaffers (light technicians) hampers coordination. It does not always work out the way the director had intended. Despite the preparation and the detailed, water-resistant slates, we were forced to coordinate the scenes a few times back up on the surface. The props and attributes did not always play along in our favour either: My special crown did not stay on my head, and my royal mantle (cape) would tend to float randomly through the water. I frequently had to move it away from my face. The many moving lights created a disorienting effect, so sticking together was much easier said than done. This of course

meant that recording took much longer than planned, but all the scenes were needed to complete the movie. It was a few hours of hard work, but we got it all in the end and we had great fun doing it.

During the debriefing, I was told that two films would be made. Erik would edit 'De Koning Duikt' (The King Dives) and Ben van Asselt was to edit, 'the making of'. I thank Erik and everyone from his voluntary film crew for this unique and fun experience, and then made my way back to my car.

After I had left the parking lot, I realised how much more work was yet to be done. The biggest job was now with Erik and Ben to edit the available video material into a finished film. Hopefully, they had collected enough material to use because there were no possibilities to reshoot new ones.

After this educational acting performance, I decide that a successful career as an actor is not for me. Becoming a king is also not an option, and I'm better off with sticking to my current occupation. And of course, to write. With this in mind, I reviewed my list to see who my next buddy is to be. It promises to be a peaceful dive that you will soon read about in the next story in this series. Your suggestions for new buddies are always welcome.

**EMAIL ME YOUR IDEAS TO:**  
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### ABOUT MY BUDDY

**Diver:** Erik De Groef

**First Dive:** 2004

**First Video:** 2010

**Number of Dives:** approx. 900

**Dive Club:** The Vilvodivers Club (VVDC), Belgium.

#### Certification:

- Assistant Instructor (<https://youtu.be/l6zSI Mug3x4>)
- Underwater Videography Instructor
- Specialisation in Underwater Biology
- EUL Cave 2
- EUL Tec I
- EUL Gas Blender
- EUL DPV
- Lifeguard

#### Special Equipment:

- Sony A7S Mark II
- Sony FE 16-35 mm F/4.0 ZA OSS VARIO-TESSART wide-angle lens
- Sony FE 90 mm F/2.8 G MACRO OSS macro lens
- Seacam compact underwater housing with Hugyflood arms.
- A dry suit with Santi heating system and heated gloves to get stable images.
- A Diver Propulsion Vehicle (DPV) – Suex Xjoy37 including camera attachment for long-distance diving.

**Favourite Local Dive Site:** The Flooded Mine of Denée, Belgium

(<https://youtu.be/Uah4KVfLXk>).

**Favourite Dive Abroad:** Baron Gautch, Croatia

(<https://youtu.be/wv-jPYiKOFI>).

**Preferred Type of Dive:** Cave diving

(<https://youtu.be/lw62QCdeiUE>).

**Most Spectacular Dive:** Dos Pisos, Mexico (<https://youtu.be/tA48WnVjK2c>).

### CHECK OUT THE RESULTS

You can take a look at the results from our filming day on YouTube (only available in Dutch):

De Koning Duikt by Erik De Groef  
[https://youtu.be/A\\_k8gylHn4A](https://youtu.be/A_k8gylHn4A)

The Making of 'De Koning Duikt' by Ben van Asselt  
<https://youtu.be/oFhtump88fg>