



Blue-sea HR&CS presents



SHEN KONG

深空

A FILM BY CHEN GUAN

MACAU | 2021 | Colour | Romance | 103'

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SYNOPSIS



When a pandemic breaks out, Li You is left alone in his apartment occupying his time as he can with his cell phone. Bored, he looks for someone to have a walk with him. Everyone he knows is home and refuses to venture outside. Comes Xiao Xiao, the only one available, stuck in this unfamiliar city and willing to share time together. As if they were the only two citizens of this now ghost town, the pair starts wandering the streets in search of fun things to do. Discovering their surroundings slowly also means discovering one another.



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR CHEN GUAN



How did you get the inspiration of the film?

It was after the outbreak of Covid-19. I was driving on the highway. Why was I on the highway? I forgot. Anyway, I stopped the car in the middle of the road and walked out. Not a single car or a single person around. It felt like that long stay at home for two years after I quit my job had suddenly been unblocked and it was more or less exciting. Oh, I remember why I was there. It was Chinese New Year and I was trying to go to a supermarket for some shopping. Later, when I got home, I wrote the script for a short. Then the pandemic started. The whole world slowed down. Including my very busy friends, who had to cancel all the work they had. "Let's make a film then!" The main purpose was for us to find a reason to get together.

What's the meaning of the title "Shen Kong"?

It's the title of the short film I was thinking about. The general idea was to space the 24 hours of a day, like filling up 24 "pieces" to make a day as if you put things into a container. If you don't have enough, you can't make a day. It doesn't happen in normal life. When you can't get out because of force majeure factors, preventing you from doing something you were about to do, you immediately fill that "piece" with something else, such as playing mahjong. Otherwise, the quantified linear time suddenly fell vacant. And both you and time enter in an infinite void; and that void, like a container, is "Shen Kong". The literal meaning of "Shen Kong" is deep and far space, which is unexplored. The picture in my mind that matched the feeling I had when I was standing in the middle of the highway was a person melting under the grey sky. It was such an image that shaped the story of a man looking for something to do in an empty city.



When did you decide to start the shooting?

We thought things might get back to normal after Chinese New Year. So the plan was to have the film shot before the holidays. I was going to play the role of the main actor, because I thought I couldn't have found one. But then a friend recommended Wei Ruguang.

How did you choose him, WEI Ruguang, to be your leading actor?

He had previously played in a French film. I auditioned him by video call. I was auditioning several actors at the time and he was the last one (in the list). He spoke to me with big nostrils in front of the camera and I was so impressed that I couldn't see his face clearly. I asked him a rather bizarre question that I don't remember exactly, but the end of the question was: *Do you get it?* And he told me a story that ended with a girl crouching on the floor crying with him putting his hand on her back. And Wei Ruguang added: *I understood everything when I put my hand on her.* That was his answer to my question. We had a very short interview, about three or five minutes.

I decided that it would have been him then and there. I asked him to introduce an actress. Because of the relationship between the two characters, I wouldn't have had to spend too much time rehearsing. So "his" actress was casted too.



How did you choose your leading actress, Deng Keyu?

We had an audition too. I came up with a scenario for her to act in isolation in a small room. Because I was auditioning her by video, the camera was used to monitor her to



avoid her sneaking out. It was just a little story like that and we sat for almost two hours. Nothing was said, but there was some communication between us and the video showed her putting some glitter stickers on my face. She slowly became clear in front of my eyes. There was a very special texture about her that was different from other girls. I wanted to bring this feeling out, so I started to change the script for her, turning the short into a feature film.



How did it go with the shooting?

I was planning to shoot in Chongqing, but in the end I chose to shoot in Hunan. I went wherever there was more help and convenience. That was my motto at the time. But that's not enough. You need to have the ability not to worry too much. One thing I didn't think about was the fact that the pandemic had closed down many places and finding equipment was a big problem. In the end, a friend came from Beijing with a truckload of equipment from his own company and drove 2,000 kilometres, and, according to the producer, for free. I didn't inquire any further, but while passing by I heard them talking on the phone about the truck breaking down on the road. I pretended I didn't hear it, didn't know, didn't think about it. That was the key ability that allowed the shooting to go down well.

The film was shot in two parts, the first for 12 days and the second for 7 days. The seven-day shooting included some scenery shots and a masturbation scene, about 5 minutes in the final cut. So basically, it's 12 days of shooting for 100 minutes and 7 days of shooting for 5 minutes. When you do the maths like that, you really shouldn't spoil the director. There must be a reason for the market-based producer-centric system.



In Shen Kong, the characters are so free. How did you work with the actors?

During rehearsals, I just really wanted the actors to feel the physicality. So I would ask them to drop the script and they would start messing around. And I just watched them from the side. Of course there are other methods, but in general, whether it's physical, verbal or behavioural, how to build up people's perception of the film is the basis of the film's working method and content composition.

Environment, loneliness, freedom, salvation, and ideology flood this story, and there's no way to change them. I told myself "I have to adapt a new strategy, to take a different angle. I must find a different logic and a new way to cognize and identify with the world". I refuse to go into the silence and burden of reality. Instead, I want my characters to dance with true desire.

The film is set in an empty city in the midst of an epidemic, how would you define the relationship between the characters and the city?

It's like the fish and the water. An empty city would be safe, so fish could swim even with a cowbell.

We see this young couple going to the deserted amusement park, KTV or factory, why not an empty cinema?

I think today cinema is more important for people who make films. There are so many entertainments that can satisfy the immediate desires of young people. For Li You and Xiao Xiao, cinema is out of date.

Why did you choose to study cinema in France? How did the five years in France influence the formation of your cinematic concepts?

I wanted a reason to get away from home, and it was a coincidence that I met someone at a study-abroad agency who specialized in studying in France.

Most French film schools give you a lot of freedom. If you suddenly want to make a film, you may just ask a group of friends to do it and you don't have to go to school. But I think there is a subtle influence in me from these five years.





DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Writer, director and actor **CHEN Guan**, who starred in Jenny Teng's short THE LOBSTER'S DIVE, which competed at the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival in 2015, obtained a degree in film directing from EICAR (the International Film & Television School) in Paris. He directed the short film F**k, which premiered at the Côté Court Film Festival.

SHEN KONG is his first feature film.

FILMOGRAPHY

SHEN KONG

2021, 103', Venice Days, Opening Film & Jury Presidents' Special Mention

F**k

2016, short



CAST & CREW

Cast	WEI Ruguang as LI You DENG Keyu as XIAO Xiao
Director	CHEN Guan
Director of photography	YANG Zheng
Editor	CHEN Guan CAO Hangchen
Music	LI Yangfan
Sound Design	ZHANG Yang
Production Design	LI Xinyi LIU Lian
Produced by	HE Xuan LI Tianyu
Executive Producer	CHENG Qingsong
Production	Blue-sea HR&CS
International Sales	ASIAN SHADOWS

