

A scenic landscape featuring two men standing in a shallow lake, viewed from behind. They are looking towards a large, green mountain with a snow-capped peak under a clear blue sky. The scene is framed by lush green foliage on the sides.

Lifelike

a feature drama by
Ali VATANSEVER



Terminally ill, Izzet (19) spends his remaining days in VR-Chat.
His father takes refuge in God, his mother in social media
— until he's ready to depart.



SYNOPSIS

ABDI(46), a once-aggressive school-bus driver, has grown quieter under the weight of his son's terminal illness. His wife, REYHAN (43), in contrast, refuses to yield to despair; her social media presence as cancer-fighting mom has garnered tens of thousands of followers, turning her son's care into an experimental treatment. Amid these extraordinary circumstances, their son IZZET(19) seems to be the only one taking the situation lightly, spending all his remaining time in VRChat with virtual friends.

When Abdi and Reyhan overhear Izzet in VRChat that he accepts the inevitable end, a state of emergency ensues at home. Abdi seeks solace in religion, visiting a local Hodja, while Reyhan doubles down on alternative therapies. She sends Abdi to herbalists after a wild plant from Anatolian mountains, showcased in a follower's video: a holy elderly cures cancer with a miracle plant. Meanwhile, Izzet impulsively invites a virtual girlfriend to his physical home. Their meeting goes sideways, Izzet attempts suicide. Outside the hospital, the couple's relationship crumbles.

Abdi consults the Hodja about Izzet's desire to end his life, only to be accused of neglecting his fatherly duties. Enraged, he transforms the school-bus into a makeshift room with a view. Convincing Reyhan that he's heading to the cancer-curing man and the wild plant, he takes Izzet on the road.

Alone at home, Reyhan cleans the apartment, feeling remorse as if erasing the last traces of her son. She persuades the neighbors to gather at her place.

Abdi and Izzet stop at a lake, chanting loudly. Raising his hopes up, Abdi changes direction towards the plant, only to find out that the old man has vanished.

Unable to manage enough space in the living room, Reyhan serves food on the sickbed. After consuming the untouched food, she goes live on social media.

Abdi and Izzet climb uphill for the plant, increasing their morphine intake. The vast scenery gradually takes on a virtual world resemblance. Father and son call Reyhan, leading to a sincere conversation. Wearing VR headset, Reyhan joins them on the hill. Along with virtual avatars, they dance in euphoria.





“ LifeLike is inspired by the first euthanasia lawsuit in Turkey — an act that blurred the lines between mercy and desperation, compassion and crime. That moral ambiguity became the soul of the film. ”





“At its heart, LifeLike is about a parent’s painful, unwavering attempt to be there for their child — fully, unconditionally.”

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

ON THE MORAL HEART OF THE FILM

Lifelike is inspired by the first euthanasia lawsuit in modern Turkey — a father who, after months of hopeless struggle for a cure, ends his terminally ill son's life. An act that blurred the lines between mercy and desperation, compassion and crime. That moral ambiguity became the soul of the film.

I spent a long time reflecting on this event. How does someone cope with bursts of love, anger, and hope under such extraordinary circumstances? After placing myself in the middle of this emotional whirlwind — and writing many dark drafts—I uncovered the core of *Lifelike*: a parent's painful, unwavering attempt to be there for their child—fully, unconditionally.

ON LIFE, DEATH AND DYING

Until recently, when people sensed the end of life approaching, they gathered their loved ones and said farewell. Today, that moment often happens in

hospital rooms, behind sterile walls, in isolation. We chase longevity but avoid talking about death. With *Lifelike*, I want to approach it with the natural — even positive — attention it deserves. In that light, I want to explore what makes a life feel complete.

ON ABDI'S EMOTIONAL JOURNEY

Though the film spends equal time with each family member, it is Abdi—the father—who drives the emotional arc. At first, he can't stand to be near his son; instead, he distracts himself with errands and takes refuge in faith, hoping for divine intervention. When Izzet attempts suicide, Abdi is forced to question everything he believes. The time they spend together on the road becomes transformative. Abdi begins the journey as a father who can't bear to face his son—by the end, he finds the courage to truly see him.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

ON VIRTUAL REALITY AS A CINEMATIC TOOL

A defining element of the film is Izzet's relationship with virtual reality. Since first encountering VR at Berlinale in 2017, I've been exploring ways to connect it with cinema both visually and conceptually. Izzet's retreat into VR is both a mirror of his physical limits—and a window into our own longing to escape them. His virtual sanctuary extends his incapacitated body and reflects a universal desire to overcome human constraints. By shooting inside VRChat, we're not just telling a story — we're exploring a new cinematic language. Through this, the film also engages critically with new media tools, using virtual cameras and lenses to capture cinematic depth in digital space.

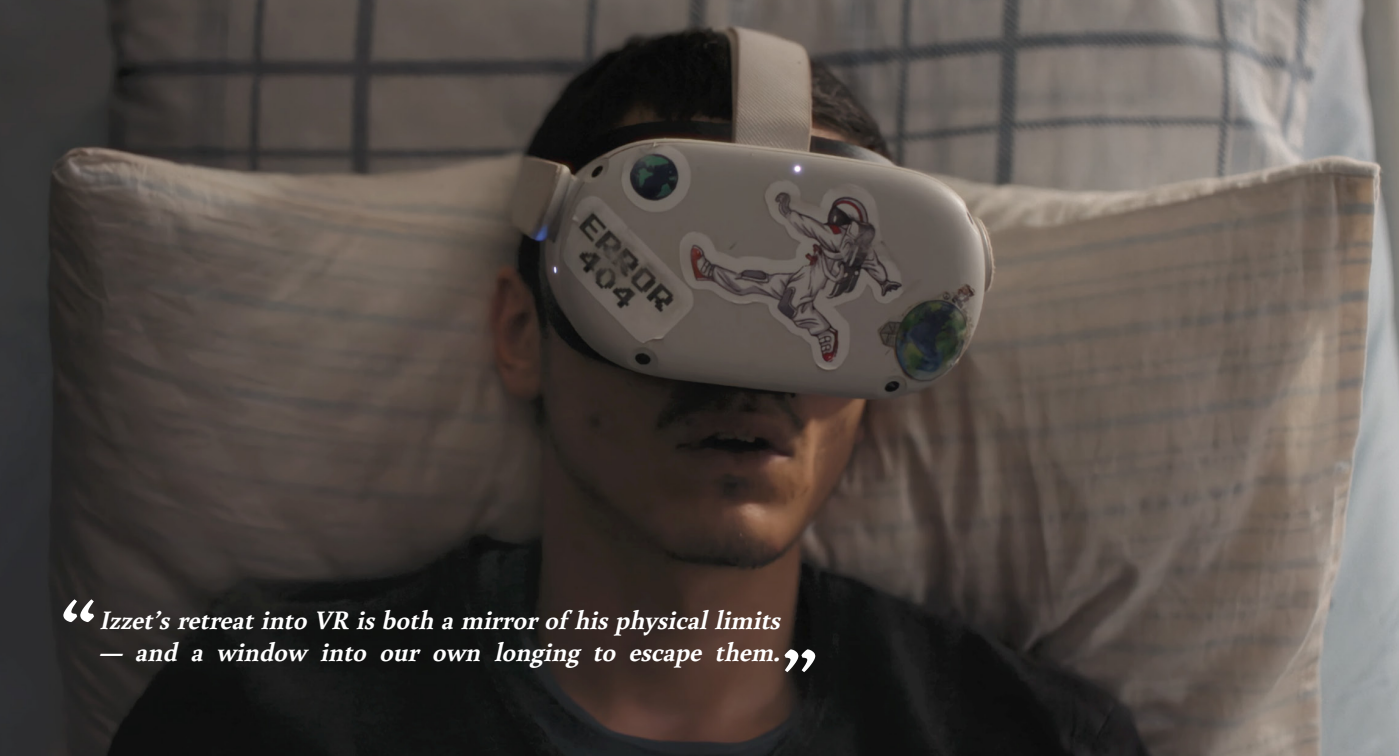
ON EUTHANASIA AND ISLAM

Discussing euthanasia in an Islamic society is still taboo. Lifelike dares to voice a family's quiet, desperate plea. In Turkey, where religious authorities are state-run, there is little room for progressive discourse on body politics.

Religious and medical institutions, in this story, serve similar purpose: preserving silence over suffering. They become indistinguishable, both bound by systems that cannot meet human need.

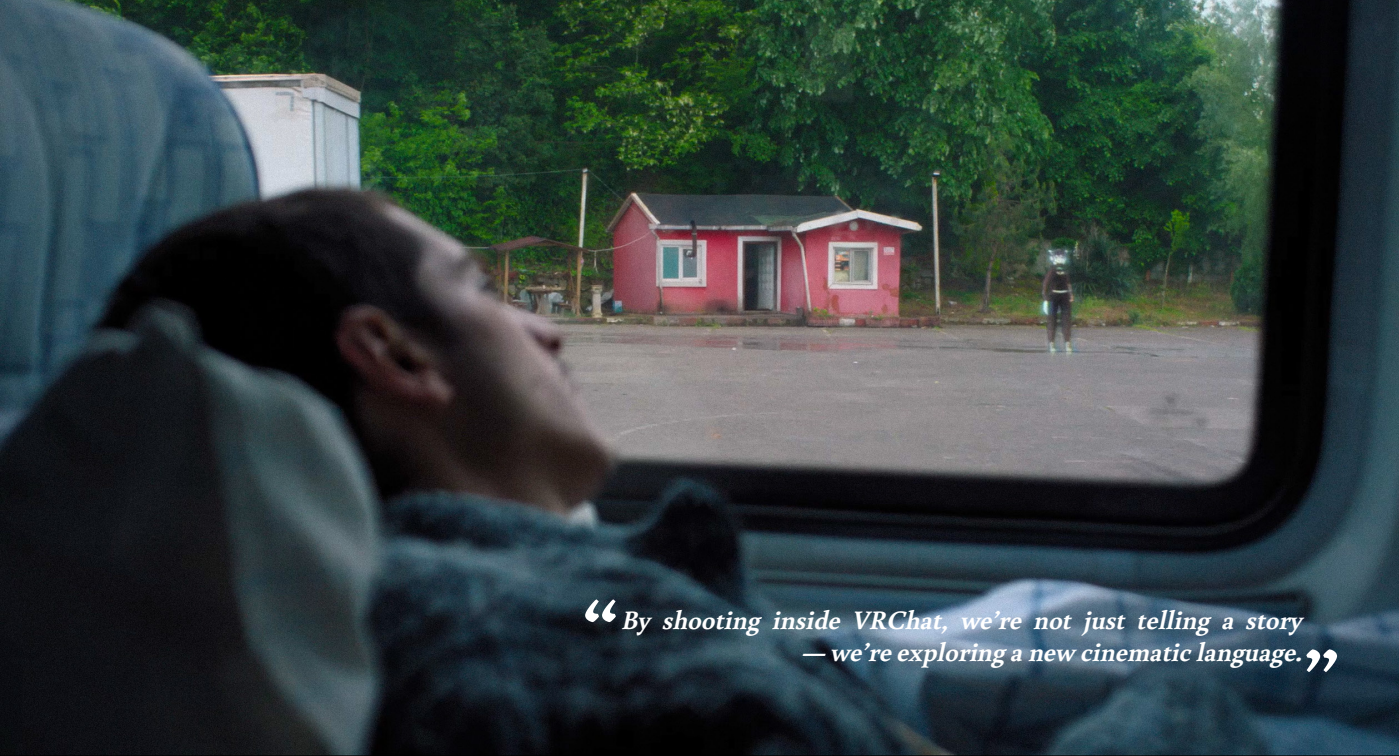
ON STRUGGLING GLOBALLY AND PERSONALLY

When I began writing Lifelike, the COVID-19 pandemic hadn't yet begun, and my mother had not yet been diagnosed with cancer. Through years of frustration and struggle, I gained a deeper understanding of anticipatory grief, which helped shape the film's emotional tone. After two fragile, isolated years—both globally and personally—and amid growing intolerance toward those with different worldviews, Lifelike became more than a narrative: in a post-COVID, post-truth world, Lifelike is a story of quiet resilience — a natural act of choosing dignity in both life and death.



“Izzet’s retreat into VR is both a mirror of his physical limits — and a window into our own longing to escape them.”





*“By shooting inside VRChat, we’re not just telling a story
— we’re exploring a new cinematic language.”*

DIRECTOR - ALI VATANSEVER

Ali studied design and film production. As a co-founder of Terminal Film, he develops and directs films that explore human stories with depth and nuance. His second feature, *Saf*, premiered at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival. *LifeLike* is his third feature.

In addition to his filmmaking, Ali blends storytelling with cutting-edge technology in his work on immersive VR experiences. He also teaches Film Production and VR at Koç University. He was trained in screenwriting mentorship at Sources2, and now mentors aspiring filmmakers and immersive artists through m2 Film Lab and KARMA Mixed Reality Lab.

2025

Life-like (118 min. fiction)

2018

SAF (102 min. fiction)

2012

El Yazısı (99 min. fiction)

VR

2025

Aleutians VR (7 min. Interactive documentary)

2023

Guam VR (11 min. Roomscales documentary)

2021

Parchman VR (10 min. 360 documentary)

2017

Do What You Love, LA Underground Beat Scene (7 min. 360 documentary)

A cinematic photograph of a film set. In the foreground, a man with a beard and dark hair, wearing a dark quilted jacket, looks off-camera with a serious expression. To his right, a woman with dark hair, also in a dark jacket, is seen in profile, looking in the same direction. In the background, a camera operator is visible from behind, holding a professional video camera on a tripod. The camera's LCD screen displays the number '135'. The background is filled with a dense field of out-of-focus, warm-toned bokeh lights, suggesting a night scene in an urban or festival setting. The overall color palette is dominated by cool blues and teals, contrasting with the warm bokeh lights.

“Discussing euthanasia in an Islamic society is still taboo. Lifelike dares to voice a family’s quiet, desperate plea. Religious and medical institutions, in this story, serve similar purpose: preserving silence over suffering.”





“While writing *LifeLike*, my mother faced a difficult diagnosis. That experience deepened my understanding of anticipatory grief and shaped the film’s emotional tone.

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“Today, we chase longevity but avoid talking about death. With Lifelike, I want to approach it with a natural — even positive — attention it deserves. In that light, I want to explore what makes a life feel complete.”



PRODUCTION CREDITS & TECHNICAL INFO

a Production

Terminal Film (Turkey)
Aktan Görsel Sanatlar (Turkey)
Foss Productions (Greece)
Da Clique SRL (Romania)

Co-Production

Tolan Film (Turkey)
Lighting Doctors (Turkey)

Supported by

Turkish Ministry of Culture
TRT (Turkey)
ERT (Greece)

Participated in

Meetings on the Bridge (Turkey)
MFI (Greece)
Agora WiP

Cast

Fatih Al
Esra Kızıldoğan
Onur Gözetten

Key Crew

Cinematographer: Konstantinos Koukoulis, GSC
Art Directors: Emre Yurtseven & Meral Efe Yurtseven
Editor: Evren Luş, Feyza Kayıkçı KUDA
Sound Designer: Dumitru Alexandru
Composer: Erdem Helvacıoğlu
VR Producer: Serra Çağatay

Specifications

Runtime: 115 min
Format: 1.85:1, DCP
Shot on: ARRI 35 w/ Zeiss B Speeds (mid 1970s)
VRCLens

TERMINAL FILM

Founded in 2008, Terminal Film is a creative production house based in Istanbul that produces a wide range of audio-visual content for both international and local audiences and clients. Our main focus is feature film production, and we also offer co-production and line-production services.

Terminal Film has produced two feature films written and directed by Ali Vatansever, including “Saf,” which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in 2018 and is represented by Party Film Sales. In addition to feature films, we produce high-quality and niche audio-visual content for our clients, including commercials, music videos, documentaries, and videographics.

In 2021, Terminal Film launched m2 Film Lab, a sectoral development platform supported by Film Independent Global Media Makers. m2 Film Lab provides project development, screenwriting, and production mentorship to filmmakers in Turkey.

Filmography:

- “Lifelike”, drama, written and directed by Ali Vatansever
- “I’ll Leave You Two Alone,” 2021, short, by Elif Refiğ (co-producer)
- “Saf,” 2018, drama, written & directed by Ali Vatansever
- “One Day or Another”, 2012, drama-comedy, written & directed by Ali Vatansever

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LifeLike

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