

KINO LORBER

presents

COMPUTER CHESS

Written and Directed by Andrew Bujalski

Produced by Houston King and Alex Lipschultz

92 minutes, Analog NTSC Video, USA, 2013

A Kino Lorber Release

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Synopsis

Set over the course of a weekend tournament for chess software programmers circa 1980, *Computer Chess* transports viewers to a nostalgic moment when the contest between technology and the human spirit seemed a little more up for grabs. We get to know the eccentric geniuses possessed of the vision to teach a metal box to defeat man, literally, at his own game, laying the groundwork for artificial intelligence as we know it and will come to know it in the future.

Director's Bio

Andrew Bujalski has written and directed the films *Funny Ha Ha*, *Mutual Appreciation* and *Beeswax*, all of which have appeared on *The New York Times* critics' "Top Ten of the Year" lists. *Funny Ha Ha* was also identified by A.O. Scott as one of the "Ten Most Influential Films of the '00s." Between duties to his own projects, Andrew has also worked as a screenwriter-for-hire and a teacher of film production at Boston University and the University of Texas. *The Boston Globe* describes him as "unerringly polite and somewhat disheveled."

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Director's Statement

“What on Earth made me think that it was a good idea to make an existential comedy about the oddball geniuses who thought it important that a machine learn to defeat its masters at, of all things, chess? Perhaps it was already an existential comedy before I got there?”

For a decade now I've been making features on beautiful, outdated 16mm film, and people have asked constantly, ‘Why don't you just shoot on video?’ Right, I wondered, why don't I? Why don't I dig up a beautiful, *really* outdated old video camera and start dreaming in a language of images that time has passed by entirely? *Computer Chess* was a long, fondly held fantasy project for me and certainly the most purely intuitive thing I've ever undertaken.

From time to time over the years, when I would sometimes despair of trying to come up with a ‘mass appeal’ project to pay my bills, I would escape off to a fantasy vision of this weird-looking, weird-feeling, weird topic project and a smile would cross my face. In retrospect it feels like my subconscious was putting the whole thing together, very slowly and in complete seclusion (as if fearing terrible reprisal should the conscious mind ever find out about it).

The mysteries of the mind of course also form the backbone of our story. As a species we're learning more and more about how our brains work, but it's difficult to imagine that we'll ever feel fully enlightened about our own processes—as you may know from your own adolescent and/or pot-smoking experiences, when the mind starts to examine itself too intently, things get really...confusing. How bold it seems of us to try to build an ‘artificial intelligence’ without anyone quite able to satisfactorily explain what ‘natural’ intelligence is!

It's easy (and, I'll admit, fun) to laugh at the big, igloo-sized computers of 30+ years ago. Of course today's iPhone has plenty more processing power than the mighty PDP-11 our characters are seen struggling to push across a room. And in the 21st century, plenty of computer programmers have nice haircuts and go to the gym and drive cool cars. But the ‘nerds’ of yesteryear, certainly those at the vanguard of AI were, I believe, a different breed. I think of these early programmers almost as a sect of monks, absorbed and dedicated utterly to their mission, to a degree that the rest of the world must have seemed like so much noise and distraction to them.

In our current Oprah-fied culture where we so value ‘well-roundedness,’ something seems almost frightening about that kind of antisocial focus. I, of course, can't help but admire it. I have no idea if building artificial intelligence is a noble goal or not, but after spending this much time trying to push my imagination into these programmers' world, I've come to love the guys (and the *very rare*, in those days, women) who saw this mountain and insisted on climbing it.

It's at least as noble as moviemaking, anyhow...”

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Cast Bios

PATRICK RIESTER – “Peter Bishton”

Patrick Riestler is a lifelong resident of Austin, TX. After attending University of Texas to study film, he began working as an editor of documentaries and commercials for Beef and Pie Productions. Most recently, he was the assistant editor on the feature film *Man On A Mission: Richard Garriott's Road To The Stars*. *Computer Chess* marks his acting debut.

WILEY WIGGINS – “Martin Beuscher”

Wiley Wiggins starred in director Richard Linklater's seminal films *Dazed and Confused* and *Waking Life*, as well as Dia Sokok's *Sorry, Thanks*. He currently operates an independent videogame design studio with *Computer Chess* co-star James Curry, where the two are creating the forthcoming iPad game Thunderbeam.

MYLES PAIGE – “Michael Papageorge”

Myles Paige first met Andrew Bujalski at Harvard University, where the two were students together. Though not a trained performer, Myles acted in Bujalski's *Funny Ha Ha* in the role of “Dave.” He currently lives in the San Juan Islands in Washington State where he works as a gardener and chocolatier.

ROBIN SCHWARTZ – “Shelly Flintic”

Robin Schwartz is an Austin-based editor, having cut both *America's Parking Lot* for director Jonny Mars as well as a season of A&E's “Shipping Wars.” She is presently editing the forthcoming documentary *The Great Invisible* from director Margaret Brown. *Computer Chess* marks her acting debut.

GERALD PEARY – “Pat Henderson”

Gerald Peary is a film studies professor at Suffolk University, film critic for the Boston Phoenix, and programmer of the Boston University Cinematheque. He is the author of nine books on cinema, and the writer-director of the feature documentary, *For The Love of Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism*. *Computer Chess* marks his acting debut.

GORDON KINDLMANN – “Tom Schoesser”

Gordon Kindlmann is an assistant professor in the Computation Institute and the Computer Science Department at the University of Chicago. His research in scientific visualization and image analysis is aimed at simplifying how scientists gain insights from their scanned imaging data. Recent projects include the Diderot language for parallel computing on tensor fields. *Computer Chess* marks his acting debut.

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Crew Bios

ANDREW BUJALSKI – Writer, Director, Editor

Andrew Bujalski has written and directed the films *Funny Ha Ha*, *Mutual Appreciation* and *Beeswax*, all of which have appeared on *The New York Times* critics' "Top Ten of the Year" lists. *Funny Ha Ha* was also identified by A.O. Scott as one of the "Ten Most Influential Films of the '00s." Between duties to his own projects, Andrew has also worked as a screenwriter-for-hire and a teacher of film production at Boston University and the University of Texas. *The Boston Globe* describes him as "unerringly polite and somewhat disheveled."

HOUSTON KING – Producer

Houston King has distributed and sold all three of Andrew Bujalski's prior features, as well as producing the films *Godspeed*, *The Beautiful Game*, *The Trip* and *Beeswax*. In addition, he has licensed and managed the theatrical distribution of numerous other feature films. Before entering the movie business, Houston worked in international corporate finance for Lehman Brothers and ING Barings.

ALEX LIPSCHULTZ – Producer

Alex Lipschultz first began working with Andrew Bujalski on *Mutual Appreciation*, assisting with the movie's marketing and home video efforts. He has since served as executive producer on the television series "Up To Speed" for Hulu and director Richard Linklater, as well as production supervisor for the Austin unit of Catherine Hardwicke's upcoming feature film *Plush*. Alex studied film at Boston University's College of Communication.

MATTHIAS GRUNSKY – Director of Photography

Matthias Grunsky has worked with Andrew Bujalski for over a decade, having served as cinematographer on all of his feature films. Other credits as cinematographer include Grace Lee's *American Zombie*, Joe Swanberg's *Nights and Weekends* and Dia Sokol's *Sorry, Thanks*. He is a member of the German Society of Cinematographers, bvk and a graduate of the American Film Institute.

MICHAEL BRICKER – Production Designer

Michael Bricker's most recent credits include *Blue Potato*, Bryan Poyser's *The Bounceback* and Robbie Pickering's *Natural Selection*, which won the 2011 SXSW Grand Jury Prize. Additionally, Michael is the co-founder and chief innovator of People for Urban Progress, an Indianapolis-based non-profit and urban design do-tank. Michael earned his Master in Architecture from the University of Texas at Austin, where he taught production design at the University of Texas Film Institute.

COLIN WILKES – Costume Designer

Colin Wilkes is a graduate in Costume Design from CalArts, where she costumed for Theater, Opera and Puppetry. Beginning her film work designing Robbie Pickering's *Natural Selection* she continued onto design costumes for features like Kim Henkel's *Boneboys*. Colin currently costumes and lives in New Orleans.