

Film Review: Andrew Bujalski's Wonderful Commitment to 'Computer Chess'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 26, 2013 - 2:26pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Andrew Bujalski's "Computer Chess," opening tomorrow at the Music Box Theatre here in Chicago and playing soon On Demand as it expands around the country after a very successful festival run, is a film utterly committed to its concept. We've seen films that recreate an era before but few that do so with such unique, surreal style, and straight-up absurdity. It's a hard film to capture in words because it's really unlike anything else that's been released this year. It's absolutely bizarre but in such an amazingly consistent way that it becomes kind of mesmerizing. The best way to describe it might be what a programmer would dream about in 1983 after too many late nights working away on his computer. And even that doesn't capture the oddity of a movie that I think will develop a quick cult following.

Bujalski's cinematographer Matthias Grunsky shoots "Computer Chess" on something that resembles an old VHS camera. It's black-and-white, full-frame, fuzzy, poorly-framed, and tracks like some dude holding a giant machine on his shoulder in the corner of a room. The movie looks purposefully horrendous and yet it takes on a bizarre beauty in its own way simply because it's so visually unique. It looks worse than the security camera in your apartment building but the aesthetic adds to the surreal nature of it all. It's like a time machine to the early '80s of development and if the computers are clunky, the filmmaking should be too. It's a daring decision that pays off.



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In this monochrome frame, we watch the saga of a weekend of computer chess at a no-name motel in the middle of America. Teams of developers who have spent time trying to craft a computer program that can beat a human opponent face off against each other. Computer plays computer. The winner of the tournament gets to play an actual human being. Bujalski very carefully weaves chess metaphors into the sagas of the people at the tournament. It seems not coincidental that there's only one woman.

"Computer Chess" is an undeniably episodic piece of work as we meet a number of the developers and follow them like a roving camera man, interested for a while but quick to move on to another subject who may be doing something more interesting. The ensemble is completely devoted to the overall aesthetic from their self-important tones to the mustaches and '80s fashion they wear. Many people who catch only a few minutes of the film on cable could mistake it for a documentary.



[Continue reading for Brian Tallerico's full "Computer Chess" review.](#) [11]

"Computer Chess" stars Patrick Riester, Wiley Wiggins, Myles Paige, Robin Schwartz, and Gerald Peary. It was written and directed by Andrew Bujalski. It opens in Chicago on September 27, 2013.



Computer Chess

Photo credit: Kino Lorber

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