



# Check and Mate

Chess is the game of life in *Queen to Play*

**QUEEN TO PLAY:** Directed by Caroline Bottaro. Screenplay by Caroline Bottaro and Bertina Henrichs, based on the novel by Bertina Henrichs. Cinematography, Jean-Claude Larriue. Music, Nicola Piovani. Editor, Tina Baz. Starring Sandrine Bonnaire, Kevin Kline, Valerie Lagrange, Francis Renaud, Alexandra Gentil, Alice Pol, Dominic Gould, Jennifer Beals. Studio Canal, 2009. R. 97 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Chess is the perfect game — easy to learn but impossible to master, pretty much devoid of that thing called luck, calling for cold calculation and cunning strategy and, despite this, infinite in its possible outcomes. So the metaphors pile up like pawns on the make: Chess is like war, chess is like life, chess is like thought itself, a series of synaptic snaps and pops propelling the cosmos of cause and effect. And yet, with its medieval armament of phallic aggression, it's hard to imagine a less sensual game than chess. As Helene, the stymied chambermaid in director Caroline Bottaro's lovely film *Jouese*, says to her daughter: "It's not a women's game."

As wistful, yearning and compact as a short by Chekov, Bottaro's film — marketed in the U.S. as *Queen to Play* — is something of a Cinderella story, a pat fable of empowerment and love. Played by the wonderful Sandrine Bonnaire, whose severe but stunning beauty blossoms with every hint of a smile, Helene is trapped in a dull, monotonous life on the otherwise gorgeous Corsican coast of France. She and her husband Ange (Francis Renaud) work themselves ragged, barely making ends meet; they have neither the time nor the energy for romance, much less a decent conversation, and when they do talk it is usually of exhaustion and economic woes. Their teenage daughter Lisa (Alexandra Gentil) is disgusted by her parents' poverty, and regularly tells them so. Helene's economic status echoes her existential dilemma: Having stifled all hope of a better life, she lives on the outside looking in, a spy in the house of love and her life a long, unvarying march to death. She is Madame Bovary in a smock and hair net.

Until one morning when, cleaning a room in the hotel where she works, she sees a couple (Dominic Gould and Jennifer Beals) out on the sun porch, engaged in

a very intimate game of chess. Helene is captivated and surprisingly moved, especially by the easy sensuality and casual charm of the woman as she plays the game. Helene buys her husband a chessboard for his birthday, but he's only frustrated by the game. So she stays up every night, often until dawn, smoking cigarettes and pitting herself against the board's computerized opponent. She starts seeing elements of the game everywhere: chess pieces in saltshakers and hunks of candy, a chessboard in the checkered floor she mops every day. Helene is fascinated and newly aroused by the idea that, in chess, "the most powerful piece is the queen."

Having gone about as far as she can go with a computer, Helene approaches one of her clients, Dr. Kroger (Kevin Kline) — a mysterious, misanthropic American expat grieving the death of his wife — with a gambit: She will clean his rooms for free if he teaches her to play chess. What follows is no less romantically sublime for being completely predictable. The relationship that develops between Bonnaire and Kline is fraught with a supercharged sexuality that is channeled into the spirit of the game itself. Both actors are a joy to behold, and the complex chemistry they work on screen elevates this small, simple film, which could have gone the way of *Mr. Holland's Opus* meets *Pretty Woman*, to something more than the sum of its set pieces.

In fact, what makes *Queen to Play* so appealing, especially in this season of 3D sequels and CGI shell games, is exactly its stature and simplicity. Like the best of art, it captures in its slice-of-life details a bevy of universal themes — themes of class, spiritual renewal, love, mortality and loss. Thanks in large part to Bottaro's nicely paced direction, which allows her actors room to breathe, the film achieves a kind of breezy grace, even while offering a fairly well-worn story of inspiration. But themes and symbols and inspiration are damned. As Dr. Kroger cautions Helene, no matter how serious it gets, chess is only a game, so have fun. Which brings that wry, warming smile to her face — a smile that says check, and mate. **EW**

THU July 21	FRI July 22	SAT July 23	SUN July 24	MON July 25	TUES July 26	WED July 27	THU July 28
SAINT MISBEHAVIN' 5:45 ENDS TONIGHT!	QUEEN TO PLAY 4:45	4:45	4:45	KEVIN KLINE 5:00	5:00	ONE WEEK ONLY! 5:00	5:00
	THE TREE OF LIFE 5:30 8:30	2:00 5:00 8:00	HELD OVER! 2:00 5:00 8:00	5:30 8:30	5:30 8:30	5:30 8:30	TBD call for showtimes
	MIDNIGHT IN PARIS 7:45 10:00	2:30 7:00 9:10	2:30 7:00 9:10	HELD OVER! AGAIN! 7:25 9:40	7:25	7:25	7:25
	THE ROOM 11:00 Late Nitro punch passes accepted! Fri Sat	11:00		THOMAS HACKETT PRESENTS 9:30	BIG BOY 9:30	9:30	
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<b>CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER (3D) PG-13</b> SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 10:30, 1:30, 4:30, 7:30, 10:30	<b>HORRIBLE BOSSES (DIGITAL) R</b> 12:15, 2:55, 5:25, 7:55, 10:25
<b>CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER (DIGITAL) PG-13</b> 11:30, 12:30, 2:30, 3:30, 5:30, 6:30, 8:30, 9:30	<b>PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ON STRANGER TIDES (3D) PG-13</b> SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 1:00, 7:20
<b>CARS 2 (3D) G</b> SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 10:25, 4:10, 9:50	<b>PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ON STRANGER TIDES (DIGITAL) PG-13</b> 4:15, 10:30
<b>CARS 2 (DIGITAL) G</b> 1:20, 7:05	<b>TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON (DIGITAL) PG-13</b> 10:30, 1:50, 5:10, 8:30
<b>FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS (DIGITAL) R</b> 11:55, 2:30, 5:05, 7:40, 10:15	<b>TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON (3D) PG-13</b> SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 12:30, 3:50, 7:10, 10:30
<b>LARRY CROWNE (DIGITAL) PG-13</b> 12:35, 2:55, 5:20, 7:45, 10:10	<b>WINNIE THE POOH (DIGITAL) G</b> 11:00, 1:05, 3:00, 5:00, 7:00
<b>HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS, PART 2 (3D) PG-13</b> SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 10:00, 11:30, 1:00, 2:30, 4:00, 5:30, 7:00, 8:30, 10:00	<b>THE ZOOKEEPER (DIGITAL) PG</b> 12:00, 2:35, 5:00, 7:30, 9:00, 10:00

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<b>JUDY MOODY AND THE NOT SUMMER SUMMER PG</b> 11:15, 1:40, 4:15, 7:25, 9:40	<b>THOR (3D) PG-13</b> SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$2.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 11:05, 1:45, 4:25, 7:05, 9:45
<b>JUMPING THE BROOM PG-13</b> 11:20, 1:55, 4:30, 7:30, 10:00	<b>WATER FOR ELEPHANTS PG-13</b> 11:55, 3:00, 7:10, 10:05
<b>PRIEST PG-13</b> 11:40, 2:00, 4:10, 7:35, 10:15	<b>X-MEN: FIRST CLASS PG-13</b> 11:45, 3:55, 7:15, 10:10
<b>RANGO PG</b> 11:00, 1:30, 4:00, 6:30, 9:25	
<b>RIO G</b> 12:25, 3:15, 5:40, 8:15	

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CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER (PG-13) ★ Fri. - Sun. (10:45 1:30 2:30) 4:15 5:15 7:00 8:00 9:45 10:45  
FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS (R) - ID REQ'D Fri. - Sun. (11:05 1:35 1:45 2:15) 4:20 5:00 7:15 7:45 9:55 10:20  
✓ HARRY POTTER & DEATHLY 2 IN REALD 3D - EVENT PRICE (PG-13) ★ Fri. - Sun. (10:00) 4:00 7:05 10:00  
HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS 2 (PG-13) ★ Fri. - Sun. (11:00 2:05) 5:00 8:05  
HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS 2 (PG-13) ★ Fri. - Sun. (11:30 1:20 2:35 3:00) 5:30 6:30 8:30 9:30  
OC & DA: WINNIE THE POOH (G) Fri. (11:25 AM) Sat. (2:20 PM) Sun. (11:25 AM)

WINNIE THE POOH (G) Fri. (2:20 PM) 4:40 PM Sat. (11:25 AM) 4:40 PM Sun. (2:20 PM) 4:40 PM

THE ZOOKEEPER (PG) Fri. - Sun. (11:20 AM)

THE ZOOKEEPER (PG) Fri. - Sun. (10:50 1:20) 4:05 6:45 9:40

HORRIBLE BOSSES (R) - ID REQ'D Fri. - Sun. (10:40 1:55) 4:35 7:50 10:10

TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF IN REALD 3D - EVENT PRICING (PG-13) ★ Fri. - Sun. (2:45 PM) 7:05 PM 10:25 PM

TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON (PG-13) Fri. - Sun. (11:10 AM)

CARS 2 (G) Fri. - Sun. (10:35 1:15) 4:10 7:10

BAD TEACHER (R) - ID REQ'D Fri. - Sun. 9:50 PM

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HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS 2 (PG-13) ★ Sat. - Sun. 9:50 PM  
HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS 2 (PG-13) ★ Sat. - Sun. (11:5) 4:40 7:45 10:40  
HARRY POTTER & DEATHLY 2 IN REALD 3D - EVENT PRICE (PG-13) ★ Sat. - Sun. (10:5) 4:10 7:25 10:20  
HORRIBLE BOSSES (R) - ID REQ'D Sat. - Sun. (12:5) 4:20 7:35 10:35  
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HORRIBLE BOSSES (R) - ID REQ'D Fri. - Sun. (1:30) 4:15 7:15 9:55

CARS 2 (G) Fri. - Sun. (11:5) 4:45 7:45 9:50

THE TREE OF LIFE (PG-13) Fri. - Sun. (10:00) 4:00 7:00 10:20

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