

[Check and Mate by Ali Hazelwood](#)

Reviewed by S.T., Class of 2029

Format: Book

★★★★☆

Genre: Romance

This book interested me because I enjoy reading romance novels and have read Ali Hazelwood's novels before. I heard about it from a friend who had good things to say about it.

This book does not have one setting but multiple as the protagonist travels for chess. One setting the book comes back to multiple times is New Jersey, where she lives. It is a contemporary novel.

The protagonists' are Mallory Greenleaf and Nolan Sawyer. Mallory is very funny and unserious but also passionate about what she loves such as chess. She is very caring and protective of her family. The reader gets to know Nolan as the story progresses and he shifts from mysterious to light hearted and loving. Together they are funny and have undeniable chemistry.

The story follows Mallory, a former chess prodigy, who starts to get back into the world of chess. At first, she is meant only to play one game. When she beats the number one chess player in the world, Nolan Sawyer, she inevitably gets pulled back into the game. She returns to a hobby she both loves and hates. Mallory struggles to overcome the past memories chess brings back such as the reason she quit, her father, who passed away. She has to find a way to keep the chess world separate from her personal life in order to avoid being hurt again by the game. Yet, she is pulled towards the mysterious Nolan. Nolan is currently a celebrity heartthrob going viral for being the best chess player in the world. Mallory wants to know what's underneath all of the fame and rumors surrounding him.

The author effectively makes banter between the characters funny and romantic. The scenes between them were fun to read and addicting. The characters also had good backstories that explained characterization. A weak point of the media was the ending. It seemed almost lazy and skipped over a main plot point that excitement was being built up for. The story is also a bit cliché and corny.

Some themes were: balancing aspects of identity, gender bias, family relationships, overcoming past experiences.

The cover art does show what the book is going to be about, a chess romance. It does look kind of childish though but the book is suitable for and can be enjoyed by 12-15 year olds.

I personally enjoyed reading this book. It was a light read that was funny and cute. I would recommend it to others who enjoy romance novels.

Readalikes/Watchalikes are: The Love Hypothesis by Ali Hazelwood, The Summer of Broken Rules by K.L. Walther, The Queen's Gambit is a show released in 2020

Submitted December 2025