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CHICAGO'S FREE WEEKLY

Queen of Diamonds The most incredible moment in *Queen of Diamonds* is the 17-minute card-dealing sequence, shot with a variety of camera angles in a crowded, noisy casino in Las Vegas. Dominating the table is the card dealer, a cool, silent, beautiful young woman; the rest of the film, mostly shot with a static camera, shows the slow erosion of her poise. *Queen of Diamonds*, the latest jewel in the crown of independent filmmaker Nina Menkes (who writes, produces, and shoots her own films, and usually, as she did here, casts her sister Tinka in the starring roles) obsessively reworks very personal themes: desert and water, thirst, physical discomfort, the cheap glamour of neon signs, a woman's loneliness in a landscape that oppresses her. The film constantly surprises the viewer with unexpected images (an inverted cross, a burning palm tree, elephants surrounding a car accident), sharply composed and exquisitely shot, that are never gratuitously expressionistic but subtly vibrate with the protagonist's unspoken emotions. Demanding but immensely rewarding, *Queen of Diamonds* may become for America in the 90s what *Jeanne Dielman* was for Europe in the 70s: a cult classic using a rigorous visual composition to penetrate the innermost recesses of the soul. (BR) (Esquire, 9:30)

--BERENICE REYNAUD

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