

If you think "Casino Jack" came and went from Seattle theaters earlier this year, you're both right and wrong: "Casino Jack and the United States of Money," Alex Gibney's documentary about disgraced D.C. lobbyist Jack Abramoff, played briefly here early last summer. Now we have "Casino Jack" (which could have benefited from a different title), George Hickenlooper's feature film about Abramoff

starring Kevin Spacey — and this larger-than-life character definitely merits the two-movie treatment.

And both movies, as luck would have it, are well done. Hickenlooper, working from a screenplay by Norman Snider, makes this "Casino Jack" a snappy ride through the corridors of power. Abramoff, played with glee and smarts by Spacey (it's the most energetic screen performance he's given in years), is the sort who, when told that news of his wrong-

doing has been reported on page 1 of The Washington Post, asks, "Is it above the fold?" A fast talker given to movie quotes and impressions — including spot-on riffs on Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton — he's a fascinating bundle of contradictions: a deeply religious man devoted to the cause of making money, who jokes his way through increasing tensions with his wife (Kelly Preston). As a way of life, it works — for a while, until a series of bad decisions and an e-mail trail bring him down.

It's a star turn, but Hickenlooper surrounds Spacey with strong support: Barry Pepper as Abramoff's snakey right-hand man, Michael Scanlon ("Jack and I are doing God's work, baby" he tells his fiancée); Jon Lovitz, uncannily well cast as a low-rent mattress entrepreneur turned frontman; Rachelle Lefevre, last seen as a "Twilight" vampire and memorable here as Scanlon's vindictive fiancée; veteran character actor Maury Chaykin, playing a hit man in one of his final screen appearances. (Two sad postscripts haunt "Casino Jack": Chaykin died in July, at 61, and Hickenlooper, just 47, died in October.)

By the end, we learn that Abramoff is now teaching screenwriting in prison (prior to his lobbying career, he worked in Hollywood as a writer/producer of two Dolph Lundgren action movies; no, you can't make this stuff up) and that "Casino Jack" is a portrait of a player — a man always dancing, always spinning.

Moir Macdonald: 206-464-2725 or mmacdonald@seattletimes.com

'Casino Jack': Kevin Spacey is on the money as lobbyist Jack Abramoff - Seattle Times

Written by Administrator

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