

Written by Administrator  
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Abramoff justifies his ambitions and articulates a personal philosophy. "Mediocrity is the elephant in the room," he nearly hisses. But he will never succumb to the "disease of the dull," he insists. The scene has a mean beauty that director [George Hickenlooper](#) exploits well in his bracing, entertaining satire, written by [Norman Snider](#).

It is one of those movie moments that can't be forced. A character must demand his or her over-the-top close-up. And "demand" is an apt verb when it comes to Abramoff, whose sense of entitlement is fascinatingly pathological.

When Abramoff addresses that mirror, the ship, as they say, has already hit the sand. He and business partner [Michael Scanlon](#) — portrayed with caffeinated verve by [Barry Pepper](#) — have been bilking the American Indian tribes whose gaming interests they represent on [Capitol Hill](#).

[Graham Greene](#)

plays

[Bernie Sprague](#)

, a Saginaw Chippewa tribal council member who is on to Abramoff and Scanlon's game.

The duo also have been plying the influential — including then- [U.S. Rep. Tom DeLay](#) — with gifts and lavish trips. In fact, Scanlon met his fiancée and the drama's catalyst,

[Emily Miller](#)

(

[Rachelle Lefevre](#)

) at DeLay's office.

While the movie depicts Abramoff as cultured (he plays piano) and devout (he's an Orthodox Jew), it also makes it clear that this K Street player was far from harmless.

"Casino Jack" is a portrait of an ideologically driven, power-obsessed plunderer and his "evil elf" — as Scanlon was characterized — working in an ethically challenged political realm. He took and took and then took some more. So much so that, in 2006, he was cast out of the garden of backscratches and horse-traders and was sentenced to prison for fraud and corruption. He was released earlier this month, in time for the opening of Hickenlooper's film about his wild ride and fall.

What a time director Hickenlooper would be having as "Casino Jack" heads into theaters. Cousin of Colorado Gov.-elect [John Hickenlooper](#), the 47-year-old died of an accidental overdose while in [Denver](#) for the election and the Starz Denver Film Festival in November.

Last week, Spacey was nominated for a [Golden Globe](#) for his performance.

Granted, Abramoff is quite the character. Long before becoming the subject of two films ( [Alex Gibney](#) 's documentary " [Casino Jack and the United States of Money](#) " opened earlier this year), he was a movie character in his own mind. He loved to do imitations. And Spacey has fun doing Abramoff doing [Al Pacino](#) , [President Ronald Reagan](#) and [Sylvester Stallone](#) .

But the typically strong Spacey isn't the only actor doing commanding work here. Or, in the case of [Jon Lovitz](#) , gnawing the scenery.

The comic actor provides nutjob fun as [Adam Kidan](#) . Abramoff and Scanlon bring in Kidan, a disbarred lawyer and onetime mattress hawker, to be the frontman on a deal for a casino ship they want to buy.

[Kelly Preston](#) portrays Abramoff's wife, Pam. Preston makes the quiet case that Pam is loyal, but hardly stupid. As the situation becomes further unglued, her support of Jack doesn't make her an accomplice so much as a complicated victim.

"Casino Jack" is crisply shot by [Adam Swica](#) . Hickenlooper and music supervisor [Amy Fritz](#)

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chose a score with hints of political thriller, but overall, it has the sound of an "[Ocean's Eleven](#)"-style heist film.

But that makes sense — because grandiose larceny is this movie's heart.

"Casino Jack"

Three stars out of four

Rated R

Directed by George Hickenlooper; written by Norman Snider; photography by Adam Swica; starring Kevin Spacey, Barry Pepper, Kelly Preston, Rachelle Lefevre, Jon Lovitz, [Maury Chaykin](#), Graham Greene.

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