

Like moths to a flame, great actors gravitate to the singular genius of playwright-screenwriter David Mamet, who updated his Pulitzer Prize-winning play for this all-star screen adaptation. The material is not inherently cinematic, so the movie's greatest asset is Mamet's peerless dialogue and the assembly of a once-in-a-lifetime cast led by Al Pacino, Jack Lemmon, and Alec Baldwin (the last in a role Mamet created especially for the film). Often regarded as a critique of the Reagan administration's impact on the American economy, the play and film focus on a competitive group of real estate salesmen who've gone from feast to famine in a market gone cold. When an executive "motivator" (Alec Baldwin) demands a sales contest among the agents in the cramped office, the stakes are critically high: any agent who fails to meet his quota of sales "leads" (i.e., potential buyers) will lose his job. This intense ultimatum is a boon for the office superstar (Pacino), but a once-successful salesman (Lemmon) now finds himself clinging nervously to faded glory. Political and personal rivalries erupt under pressure when the other agents (Alan Arkin, Ed Harris) suspect the office manager (Kevin Spacey) of foul play. This cauldron of anxiety, tension, and sheer desperation provides fertile soil for Mamet's scathingly rich dialogue, which is like rocket fuel for some of the greatest actors of our time. Pacino won an Oscar nomination for his volatile performance, but it's Lemmon who's the standout, doing some of the best work of his distinguished career. Director James Foley shapes Mamet's play into a stylish, intensely focused film that will stand for decades as a testament to its brilliant writer and cast.