KINONIK

HOUSE OF GAMES (1987)

Directed by David Mamet

WEDNESDAY October 14th 7PM

SATURDAY October 17th 2pm / 7pm

16mm - Color - 1h 42m



A man at the poker table turns his ring when he's bluffing. That's the tip, anyway. Mike, who runs the back room of a Seattle pool hall called the House of Games, needs someone to watch for it while he steps out, and he's found the most qualified observer in the building: Dr. Margaret Ford, psychiatrist, author of a best-seller on compulsion called Driven, who came down here at night to sort out a patient's gambling debt. She has spent her career reading people. Tonight she gets to read a stranger's hands for money, and she's very good at it.

David Mamet had a Pulitzer for Glengarry Glen Ross and screenplays for The Verdict and The Untouchables when he finally stepped behind the camera in 1987, and he arrived with opinions. He wanted a camera that reported rather than editorialized, and actors who didn't act. Lines land flat and exact, every comma and pause accounted for, until the dialogue starts to sound like an incantation. Joe Mantegna's Mike is the purest instrument of it: patient, amused, a teacher who enjoys his subject. Lindsay Crouse, Mamet's wife at the time, plays Margaret as a woman who built a life on control and is just beginning to enjoy losing it.

Mike's first lesson is the oldest one in the trade, and lately the most lucrative: the con isn't getting the mark to trust you. It's getting the mark to believe you trust her. Everything that follows comes out of that inversion, and the movie runs it on you as patiently as Mike runs it on Margaret. You're shown how the game works. You're told what to watch. You watch. A word of caution, then, from someone whose job is telling you where to look: in this house, the one explaining the game is never the one you should be watching.