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'Firm' well-acted film with weak plot line

I'll admit that I didn't go to *The Firm* expecting to be well entertained. John Grisham's novels, including *The Firm*, have always sounded like pulp fiction, a "good read." I'd rather spend my time on more refined pursuits, like reading pulp science fiction. However, *The Firm* is a swift, well-acted film that delivers the goods.

Cruise stars in the film as Mitchell McDeere, who has just finished fifth in his class at Harvard law school and is courted by the elite law firms of the country. However, he is given a deal that seems too good to be true from a Memphis law firm specializing in tax law. Everyone at the firm is family, and despite his wife's misgivings, it is a seemingly perfect place for McDeere, who wants to forget the rest of his original family exists.

However, all is not well in the land of Elvis. The firm's tax business is merely a front for laundering money for mobsters in Chicago. No lawyer has ever left the firm alive. (Apparently, these lawyers Hoop and Bob in the firm until they die.) And to make matters worse, McDeere is pressured by the FBI to turn over evidence that will prevent him from ever practicing law again.

Cruise is strongly supported by a star-studded cast. Jeanne Tripplehorn, who was the *brunette* bisexual psycho (maybe) killer in *Basic Instinct*, plays Cruise's wife; Wilford "Oatmeal" Brimley is cast as the firm's head of security; Hal Holbrook is charming as the firm's senior partner; Gene Hackman plays Avery Tolar, Cruise's mentor; David Strathairn is Cruise's older brother in jail for manslaughter; Ed Harris is a not-so-smart FBI agent; Gary Busey is a seedy detective; and Holly Hunter is his sometimes-blond, sometimes-redhead, ditzzy secretary. Lesser-known actors also excel.

Seeing Gene Hackman's name appear as the opening credits rolled made me both eager and anxious. Eager because Hackman is a superb actor who always makes a film significantly better simply by his presence. Anxious because he rarely appears in good movies, acting in such films as *Superman II* and *No Way Out*.

(One notable exception was *The Package*, but that co-starred Tommy Lee Jones, who also can carry a film, so that movie deserved two stars + Gene Hackman + Tommy Lee Jones = four stars.)

Instead of exploring McDeere's past, which is the key to what drives him in the early parts of the film, the script throws out a few lines and has Cruise wear a leather jacket at times to convince us he came from humble beginnings. It makes Cruise's performance seem contrived. It's hard to believe Cruise ever had a pimple, let alone lived in a trailer park.

This is an even stronger handicap for Cruise this summer, competing against movies starring Clint Eastwood, Harrison Ford and Tommy Lee Jones, who are all handsome leading men, but by no means pretty boys. He's too confident for someone who is allegedly so insecure.

However, Cruise has typically been more convincing as an actor in situations that demand cleverness rather than emotion, and in *The Firm*, Cruise is at his best when he's working on finding a way to save his skin and get his brother out of prison.

The film's ending is apparently quite different from the book's. It's an ingenious twist, but rather improbable.

The Firm is not in the same league as *The Fugitive*, but strong acting overcomes a mediocre script to make it a worthwhile summer flick.

Local movie flap settled

(AP) — Environmentalists have settled their disagreement with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management over filming part of a motion picture starring Meryl Streep in a wild section of the Rogue River.

However, a dispute continues over proposed filming of another wild section of the river administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Film locations include the

area of the river around Whiskey Creek, which is administered by the BLM, and Blossom Bar, which is under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service.

The Pacific Rivers Council and the Oregon Natural Resources Council had appealed a permit granted by the BLM allowing Universal Pictures to film *The River Wild* in the wild area.

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