

movie

review

Tom Cruise faces danger by joining
‘The Firm’

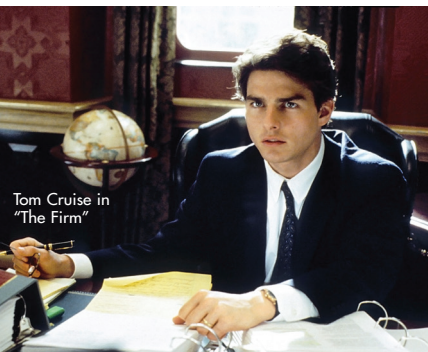
Novelist John Grisham’s law thrillers have been rich resources for moviemakers for almost 30 years, and “The Firm” is one of the most entertaining results.

Being shown by Cinemax on Sunday, Oct. 16, and Friday, Oct. 21, the 1993 drama runs a bit shy of three hours, but it’s to the credit of veteran director Sydney Pollack and his team that its pace rarely if ever flags and it remains thoroughly watchable throughout. While Tom Cruise is the nominal star, he gets strong support from a top-notch cast, with some members getting roles that rank among their best.

Cruise plays earnest Mitch McDeere, the newest recruit of a Memphis firm that entices him with all sorts of perks, including a salary that stuns his schoolteacher wife Abby (Jeanne Tripplehorn). Soon after they relocate from Boston, the firm is hit with a tragedy involving two of its lawyers, launching McDeere’s suspicions that all is not right.

That hunch is advanced by an insistent FBI agent (Ed Harris) who intends to use McDeere as an informant though the firm’s security chief (Wilford Brimley) is just as determined not to let the Feds get any such information. A private detective (Gary Busey) and his secretary (Holly Hunter, who was an Oscar nominee for best supporting actress here, but won best actress for “The Piano” the same year) also become involved in the situation.

Also registering very strongly is Gene Hackman as McDeere’s appointed mentor in the firm, the smugly self-assured Avery Tolar, who plays fast and loose with rules ... extending to his clear coveting of Abby, something that offends her at first, but ultimately works in her favor when she eventually takes an active role in trying to extricate her husband and herself in the dangerous intrigue that has enveloped them. Put off a bit by Mitch’s knowledge, Tolar says to him about being a protege, “I’ve never had one. You ever been one?”



Tom Cruise in
“The Firm”

A standout element of “The Firm” is the acoustic piano score by frequent Pollack collaborator Dave Grusin, which works phenomenally well whatever the mood of a given scene calls for, be it the tender early nature of the McDeeres’ marriage or Mitch’s desperate efforts to evade pursuers. Hal Holbrook, David Strathairn, “Law & Order’s” Steven Hill and an uncredited Paul Sorvino (who says a lot by saying nothing) are among other notable cast members.

“The Firm” got a do-over of sorts about 20 years later in an NBC series that built upon the original story, with Josh Lucas as McDeere, but Pollack’s movie services the tale just fine – particularly with its long but appropriate running time. It really takes care of its business, and no viewer is likely to be left wanting at the end.

TOM CRUISE’S

TOP 10 MOVIES

BY JAY BOBBIN

“Mission: Impossible – Fallout” (2018): Deemed by many to be the best entry in the action series thus far, this chapter has Cruise’s Ethan Hunt revisiting aspects of his past while trying to find missing plutonium before it can be used for evil purposes.

“Magnolia” (1999): Cruise is dynamic as a motivational speaker who has a strained relationship with his dying father (Jason Robards).

“Jerry Maguire” (1996): Arguably Cruise’s best-rounded performance, his portrayal of a sports agent who’s eventually driven by more than profit is, in a word, great.

“The Firm” (1993): Cruise is a fine match for novelist John Grisham’s hero Mitch McDeere, a young attorney who learns evil lurks behind the doors of the Memphis law office he’s just joined.

“A Few Good Men” (1992): Cruise packs power as a military lawyer trying to determine who’s ultimately responsible for an enlisted man’s death by hazing.

“Born on the Fourth of July” (1989): Gambling with his image to play Vietnam War veteran and activist Ron Kovic, Cruise is superb.

“Rain Man” (1988): Cruise reacts as much as acts against Dustin Hoffman’s sterling work as an autistic savant, and the result is stunning.

“The Color of Money” (1986): Cruise holds his own as a young pool shark who takes on the king of hustlers, “Fast Eddie” Felson (Paul Newman).

“Top Gun” (1986): As impulsive pilot Maverick, Cruise felt the need for speed. So did millions of moviegoers who made this adrenaline-charged drama one of the biggest hits in screen history – and the recent sequel, “Top Gun: Maverick,” also was a blockbuster.

“Risky Business” (1983): The movie that really got things rolling for Cruise remains one of his very best, as enterprising student Joel ends up running a makeshift brothel for a night and learning the wisdom of the phrase, “What the f... .”



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