

TV Review: NBC's High-Powered 'The Firm' Barely Passes the Bar

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 8, 2012 - 3:46pm

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CHICAGO – If NBC's "The Firm" was viewed as a court case, the jury would probably be deadlocked. The problem is that most modern TV viewers don't try a case again. If they consider a premiere a creative mistrial — something with elements that work but not completely engaging enough to make it an instant addition to the Season Pass Manager — they usually don't come back. Ask fans of the now-canceled "The Chicago Code" and "Prime Suspect," two shows that significantly improved after flawed premieres but it was too late. It may already be too late for "The Firm."



Television Rating: **3.0/5.0**

While the two-hour series premiere of "The Firm" is far from awful (and I've seen some awful TV lately), I found myself constantly thinking things like "This has potential," "This could be good," or "This might get interesting," and then it was over and it hadn't really fulfilled its potential, gotten interesting, and wasn't really all that good. The cast is undeniably strong — the best thing about the show — but TV will always be about writing and the fact is that the two-hour premiere of NBC's latest Hail Mary attempt at a dramatic hit (it's been YEARS) simply isn't very well-written. It's cluttered, unfocused, and kind of silly at times. Sure, the A-list cast overcomes that but can they really do so every week?



The Firm
Photo credit: NBC

It may have been 19 years since the Sydney Pollack film became a blockbuster but it's only been ten years in the world of the movie/show (which leads one to wonder if NBC programming isn't stuck in some sort of time loop...it might explain a few things). A decade ago, Mitch

McDeere (Josh Lucas, smoothly making the transition from almost-a-movie-star to looking quite comfortable on TV) tried to take down the law firm that represented the mob and, therefore, had to go into witness protection with his family, including wife Abby (Molly Parker), soon-to-be-born daughter Claire (Natasha Calis), brother Ray (Callum Keith Rennie), and secretary Tammy (Juliette Lewis). Now that the mob boss of the family that the McDeere took down has died, they decide it's safe to live a normal life again and come out of hiding. Of course, they're wrong.



The Firm
Photo credit: NBC

"The Firm" is not only about a once-protected family avoiding sniper fire by the Chicago mob. In fact, that's only one of three prominent plot threads. In another, McDeere is struggling with his new independent law practice, realizing that the economy will not support it. And so when a friend named Andrew (Shaun Majumder) encourages him to join his firm as a partner, McDeere finds himself sucked into the high-powered world of those that defend the morally indefensible yet again (including an appropriately slimy Tricia Helfer, playing someone who seems less trustworthy than a Cylon). How the new firm will mess with McDeere's life is unclear but the bookends of the two-hour premiere, involving a man taking a final leap from a balcony, hint that it won't be smooth sailing.

Sounds like enough plot, right? Of course not. Every week is also going to include a stand-alone case for McDeere and his team to solve. In the premiere, a kid is accused of killing a classmate with a knife. Was it self-defense? Should he be tried as an adult? The twists and turns of the case-of-the-week this time are particularly poorly-written, including an arc involving the father of the victim that simply isn't believable. Juggling three arcs every week — the Chicago mob, the DC firm, and a new case for McDeere to be oh-so morally righteous — will weigh this show down in exposition. We'll never get to know the characters. They'll be too busy dodging bullets on their way to fighting for the little man.

Having said that, there is a lot to like about the cast here. Lucas fits on the TV screen, which might one of the reasons he never became the break-out star he was expected to be on the big one. He has the right gravity along with just enough everyman quality to be well-cast here. Same goes for Molly Parker, a beautiful woman who is still down to Earth enough to be believable as a suburban mom. Callum Keith Rennie and Juliette Lewis add the right level of personality to the supporting cast and Tricia Helfer makes everything better. Easily the best thing about "The Firm" is the ensemble.

But ensemble only gets you so far in legal drama. The cases need to be interesting. We need to care about the people who are involved them and the dialogue for Mitch McDeere comes off as false in the premiere. Part of the reason is the boneheaded decision to stretch it two hours. If a premiere is cluttered with plot, just making it longer doesn't help. This premiere needed to be streamlined and edited down. Leave them wanting more. In this case, many people are going to think they've already had enough.

"The Firm" stars Josh Lucas, Molly Parker, Juliette Lewis, Callum Keith Rennie, Natasha Calis, Shaun Majumder, and Tricia Helfer. It premieres on NBC on Sunday, January 8th, 2012 at 8pm CST before moving into its regular time slot, Thursdays at 9pm CST.



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