

# Tom, Thanks for The Money Pit

April 22, 2020

THE MONEY PIT (1986)

Directed by Richard Benjamin

Written by David Giler

Starring Shelley Long, Alexander Godunov, & Tom Hanks as Walter Fielding

When I first had forty dollars to my name, I might as well have been the richest person alive. Or *not* alive for that matter; Bruce Wayne, Gordon Gecko, Scrooge McDuck. It was the most dough I'd ever seen and it was mine to spend as I pleased. "Should I buy my parents house out from under them? A fleet of sports cars I can't legally drive? My *own* Pizza Hut?" All of these options seemingly at my fingertips, I spent my savings on a toy version of Sebulba's pod racer from *The Phantom Menace*, complete *with* Sebulba. And it's with those twin cylinder engines on the sun-seared tundra of Mos Espa Grand Arena that I achieved my record millage on a payment of forty dollars. That amount of cash never went so far again. As soon as you've spent the most money you've ever spent, it's no great accomplishment to repeat. In fact, it's only a win if you manage not to spend more. When we bought our house in the Summer of 2018, we had to reach for the absolute ceiling of our budget. We felt cosmically drawn to this place, and though we've never regretted it, we've always felt we got taken for a bit of a ride by the sellers. But as I've learned, that's just how the game is played, and anyway, it's not the sticker price that hurts. Buying a house is fun! It's the cost of filing paperwork, and paying lawyers, and securing loans, and acquiring inspection clearance, and all these other closing rituals that tease your emotions and your financial center of gravity. First it hurts like a throat-punch, and much like the trodden experience of first spending forty dollars on a cool toy, the spending hurts less and less until you feel nothing at all.

Bleak? Pardon me. 1986's *The Money Pit* is hardly an anti-capitalist indictment of man's enslavement by the almighty dollar. It's a wacky (and I mean *wacky* in the most 80's movie way) 80's movie. But it does occasionally engage bleakness, with themes of providership, familial instability, and distrust. Tom Hanks plays Walter, an entertainment lawyer living blissfully with his girlfriend Anna, in the swanky apartment she used to share with her ex-husband Max. When Max returns, Walter and Anna are forced to relocate and, as luck would have it, a grand and enviable mansion is newly on the market for a total steal. Walter borrows two-hundred grand from a child pop-star he represents, and buys the house without considering what he's getting himself into. He and Anna quickly learn their new home is a dump, an ineffably upright arrangement of sticks and bricks, ready to crumble at any wrong step. At first, they share the optimistic intention of working to make the house all it can be. But the stress and unyielding expense puts their patience on trial.

This wouldn't be a zany 80's flick without a premise that's fundamentally flawed - Ferris Bueller packs far too many activities into the span of one day; Daniel Son wins the final tournament with an illegal crane kick; Gremlins can't be fed after midnight and yet it's literally always after *some* previous midnight - you get the picture. *Money Pit* writer David Giler's entire story would have unraveled if he'd considered any of the basics of real estate. Rule 1: Buy within your means (Walter purchases this massive house he believes is worth a million dollars to live in with just one other person). Rule 2: Secure financing (Walter doesn't belong to a bank? He has to beg for money from the teeny bopper he works with? Houses aren't paid for with bundles of cash in pillow cases). Rule 3: Consult industry professionals, a realtor who's frank about your options, a home inspector who can ensure your investment is sound (Seriously, Walter?). Not only did the writer ignore these essential home-buying tenets, he ignored *writing* ground rules too! Rule 1: Don't expect us to believe your main character is Justin Bieber's lawyer if he doesn't have a savings, a vehicle, connections, or even his own mailing address. This advice is very specific but applicable here.

Hey, all these sins are easily forgiven. It's an 80's movie. The physical comedy provided by TH is black-belt-Buster-Keatonism and, particularly the Mouse-Trap scene where the entire reno-operation collapses, prompted in me a genuine roar of laughter. That's the thing about having TH and Steven Spielberg and Kathleen Kennedy (producers) at the center of your imperfect film: it'll still have great moments. For all its misgivings, how bad can *The Money Pit* be when the foundation is so solid? This is essentially what the movie is about. If Walter and Anna love each other, no hardship can ever best them, and with perseverance, you can make any house a home. The final act introduces a dark turn where Anna, exhausted by the unrelenting misery of her dwelling, confides in her ex-

husband, who openly wants to win her back. She passes out drunk at his place, and is erroneously told by him that they slept together (HOW ROMANTIC). This leads to a hostile break-up between Anna and Walter. I guess my second piece of writing advice is to not hinge your entire climax on a lie, but this fault is forgivable too because, you know, 80's movie.

We've been working on a kitchen make-over. I'm not handy in an especially utilitarian way, but the painting was successful if not downright enjoyable. Our only job this weekend was to replace the old cabinet knobs and I honestly think it would have been easier to replace my own fingers. But we got it done and have since been basking in the pleasure of self-actualization, as home-owners without an inherent know-how, but instead, a drive to learn together and build the home of which we dream. It feels good. Not quite as good as forty dollars down on a podracer with fan-blade pump functionality, but pretty darned good.

Thx!