

Russians are humanized in *Russkies*

Russkies
Alliance Releasing
Odeon Theatre

review by Glenn St-Germain

One stormy night off the coast of Florida, a Russian spy ship waits as a three-man raft paddles toward shore. Its mission: to steal some kind of device (we never find out what) from a U.S. military base.

The raft capsizes during the storm, and one sailor washes up on the beach.

Meanwhile, three 12-year-olds find some kind of Russian code book. They immediately start looking for Russians, and eventually find one: Mischa, the sailor who washed up on the beach.

Russkies is only the second film since 1980 that has sympathetic Russian Characters. (The other was *Gorky Park*.) American Cinema of late has painted Russians with the same brush: Evil. Evil Russians abound in pictures like *Red Dawn*, *Rambo*, and *Born American*.

On the other hand, Mischa is a nice guy. He's sensitive, he's friendly, he's a bit shy. Sort of like a Russian Alan Alda.

Unfortunately, that's the best thing that can be said about *Russkies*. The rest of it is, in a word, mediocre.

The three boys are best of pals, who all think alike despite their varied backgrounds. Two of them are Army brats; the other's a son of a liberal.

These kids spout anti-Soviet rhetoric like the most ardent rednecks, and treat Mischa like a captured spy when they catch him. These kids know what they're doing: they read "Sargent Slammer" comics, which feature a character that makes G.I. Joe, Dirty Harry, and Captain America look like wimps.

Anyway, Mischa and the boys eventually establish a rapport, and they indoctrinate him on Americana: MacDonald's, polo shirts, and Walkmans. Clearly a case of trying to win him over to Our Side.

Russkies could have been a better film had there been more depth. The characters and their performances are basically one or two-

dimensional (although Whip Hubley as Mischa gets points for being likeable). The plot is predictable. The clichés are all there where you'd expect them to be: the older sister of one of the boys who falls in love with the stranded sailor, the boy who stands by his convictions and refuses to trust Mischa, the daring life-saving rescue....

The movie does have its redeeming qualities. The Russians are humanized, for instance. Standard Hollywood would have made Mischa want to stay; Mischa wants more than anything else to go home.

A peculiarly interesting touch was the appearance of "Sargent Slammer" at a July 4th celebration, as the actor in the Sargent Slammer costume is revealed to be a drunk. Poetic, somehow.

Russkies isn't really a bad film. It's just not all that good, either. It had potential, but the makers missed the mark. I'll admit it was enjoyable in a time-killing sort of way. If there's nothing else to see, this may be worth a look.

But don't set your expectations too high.

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