

Enemy Mine ★★★½

Year of Release: 1985

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: See It

Director Wolfgang Petersen's science fiction drama *Enemy Mine* completely took me by surprise. During its theatrical release, the critics were very unkind to it. I cannot understand why.

Enemy Mine is a superb film that is extremely effective on two levels: science fiction and emotional drama. The movie is set in a distant future during which Earth is at war with the planet Drak over issues of planetary settlement and galactic expansion. During an intense space battle, two fighter pilots—one a human and one a Drak—lose control of their respective ships and simultaneously crash on a barren planet. They find themselves stranded together, and the movie tells the story of their battle for survival. The two enemy pilots must learn to overlook their differences (both physical and ideological) and cooperate with one another in order to sustain themselves on the threatening planet.

The acting in *Enemy Mine* is exceptional. Dennis Quaid stars as the cocky earthman, Davidge, and Louis Gossett, Jr. (under pounds of makeup) stars as the Drak pilot, Shigan. Quaid reveals the full depth of his considerable acting ability in *Enemy Mine*. He gives a riveting and moving performance as the brash young earthman who must overcome his fear, anger, and prejudice against the enemy Drak, with whom he finds himself stranded. Director Petersen and screenwriter Edward Kharma develop Quaid's character to an extent uncommon in most science fiction movies. Quaid's Davidge is not shallow or cartoonish; the character seems authentic.

Gossett is (as usual) superb as the reptilian and hermaphroditic Drak, Shigan. Gossett is more or less unrecognizable under his elaborate makeup and costume; his physical appearance is at first horrifying, repulsive, and threatening both to Davidge and to us. With time, however, we and Davidge grow accustomed to, and even fond of, Shigan's appearance, personality, and customs. The makeup and costumes in *Enemy Mine* are extraordinary. The Draks look more than convincing; they look astoundingly real. In an inspired performance, Gossett fleshes out his character and makes it more than merely a marvel of makeup. Shigan is a believable alien, an individual full of pride and spirit from an ancient and noble race.

Like Quaid's character, Shigan is very well developed and defined. If his character has one fault, it is that, despite his strange physical appearance, Shigan almost is too human in terms of his beliefs, emotions, and behavior. Behaviorally, the Draks in *Enemy Mine* could have been just a bit more foreign and bizarre. To its credit, however, the film never crosses the line beyond which Gossett's character, Shigan, becomes just an unusual looking human. The chemistry between Gossett and Quaid is powerful, and watching their relationship change, grow, and develop is an interesting and moving experience.

The technical aspects of *Enemy Mine* are all first-rate. As I mentioned, the Drak makeup and costumes are exceptional. From the space ships and battles to the planetary creatures, the special effects easily live up to the industry standard. The cinematography is breathtaking; *Enemy Mine* is a beautiful film with its scenic panoramas and realistic sets. The filmmakers, with an eye for detail, have lovingly created the wild planet on which the two pilots are stranded. It is a wonder to behold with its rugged landscapes, beautiful sunsets, meteor showers, and exotic creatures.

The fine acting and technical achievements in *Enemy Mine* would have been for naught had the film not been in the hands of such a capable director and had it not told such a compelling story. With a steady hand, Petersen (known best for his work in *Das Boot*) integrates the various aspects of the movie into a unified whole. He has created an emotional, intelligent, and exciting film that is well-paced and contains a satisfying balance of action, suspense, melodrama, character development, and special effects. Although the story line in *Enemy Mine* really doesn't break any new ground, it is compelling and touching nevertheless. The tale explores such time-honored themes as man's cruelty, blind prejudice, and inhumanity. And like many stories that address these themes, *Enemy Mine* also portrays man's potential to overcome his destructive tendencies and exhibit truly noble and heroic behavior.

I must strongly disagree with the critics of this film. *Enemy Mine* is a follow-up to *Das Boot* in which Petersen should take great pride.