SOLDIER
Released: 1998 by Warner Bros.
Produced by: Jerry Weintraub
Screenplay: David Webb
Music: Joel McNeely
Director of Photography: David Tattersall
Directed by: Paul Anderson
Starring: Kurt Russell, Jason Scott Lee, Connie
Neilsen, Jason Isaacs, Gary Busey

Rated: **R**

What do you get when you take a war movie and remove all the civilians (except as collateral damage)? Well, you get a movie something like *Soldier*.

Don't try to view *Soldier* as you would *The Grapes of Wrath*. Too many film critics, I feel, make this mistake and wind up hating a film because it doesn't live up to his or her preconceptions. *Soldier* is a "what if?" kind of movie. What if, in the future, the military is to take a child, isolate him from normal human contact, and mold him into the ultimate fighting machine? What if they next take a human embryo and genetically manipulate it to create an even more efficient fighting machine? Then, what if these soldiers are forced to confront one another? This is the basic premise of *Soldier*.

Director Paul Anderson, who brought us *Event Horizon*, delivers a brutal, uncompromising look at future warfare and its warriors. He paints a bleak picture. I found myself wondering what kind of a government would have such a callous disregard for human life. For me, it certainly blurred the line between the good guys and the bad guys. Anderson's previous science fiction outing, *Event Horizon*, gave us another, even gloomier look at the future, so *Soldier* is no surprise on that score. What sets *Soldier* apart, is the optimism at its core. Don't confuse optimism with sappy sentimentality, however, for there is precious little of that in this movie. We are given a look at a soldier's soldier completely disconnected from his command structure and, for the first time in his life, left without a mission. Forced to interact with a rag-tag group of civilians, he experiences non-military relationships he is ill suited to deal with. Anderson takes standard movie devices and works them without resorting to all the usual clichés. In that regard, there are three key factors that make *Soldier* work for me. The first is the "traumatized child" sub-plot—involving a cute kid who can't speak. Anderson handles it with finesse. The second is the protagonist's relationship with the female love interest. Again, Anderson makes no missteps in the way he handles it—totally within the context of the movie's premise. The third is the climactic fight confrontation—the part where our hero faces his ultimate test. Anderson doesn't disappoint me with the way he handles it either. Combined with star Kurt Russell's spot-on performance, Anderson hits the nail on the head with his depiction of the total warrior. Not once does the movie's namesake step out of character.

Once you suspend disbelief and accept the initial premise, *Soldier* is an engrossing movie. Its story is a simple and direct one—sort of like a soldier's combat orders. While it breaks no new ground in its examination of the human spirit, *Soldier* nonetheless

causes us to consider just how much the human psyche can be stretched, pummeled, and molded and still remain human. It certainly had me more than willing to take the trip to its surprisingly upbeat conclusion to find out.