Mitch is back to review The Sentinel, recently released at the box office and starring Michael Douglas, Kiefer Sutherland, Kim Basinger, and Swerb hearthrob Eva Longoria. As Mitch notes in the review, having a star studded cast isn't always enough though.

Michael Douglas and Harrison Ford can play exasperated action heroes running for their lives due to a case of mistaken identity or a frame up better than any actors I know. But unlike the always noble Ford, more often than not the character Douglas is playing has also made some sort of screw-up to get himself into his predicament. In “Basic Instinct”, “Disclosure”, “Fatal Attraction”, and “The Star Chamber”, he’s played a flawed man who is guilty of bad judgment such as affairs or questionable ethics that you nonetheless root for as he tries to save both his own life and his humanity.

Douglas is back in his element in “The Sentinel”, playing a flawed-but-decent Secret Service agent in a flawed-but-decent movie that is high on action, OK on suspense, and mediocre on logic, script, and direction.

Douglas plays agent Pete Garrison, a living legend at the Service who took a bullet for President Reagan during the Hinkley assassination attempt. But he’s never liked playing by The Rules, so it’s stood in the way of his career advancing

as far as it should have. Instead, he's head of the detail guarding the First Lady, played by Kim Basinger, an assignment he takes a little too personally, setting him up for some blackmail. This is possibly just a guise for framing him as a traitor when information comes to the Agency that there is a mole, and the President's life is in danger.

This sounds a lot like a plot line (and a lead character) from the TV series '24', and sure enough, who is assigned to investigate the treason but Jack Bauer himself…I mean, Kiefer Sutherland, as David Breckinridge, Garrison's former best friend. Circumstantial evidence convinces Breckinridge that Garrison is the traitor, but as always in these types of movies, Garrison escapes from eight heavily armed agents. He then follows the "wrongfully framed" playbook; putting himself in danger by trying to clear his name and thwart the assassination attempt.

What follows is the typical cat-and-mouse scenes of the pursued being smarter than anyone else, staying just one step ahead of the pursuers while he tries to crack the case. But at least most of this is done very well, and you do get caught up in the chase. It's not "The Fugitive" level of 'grip the sides of your seat" suspense, but it is still watchable, mostly due to the excellent acting from Douglas and Sutherland. The one good plot device used was in making their friendship estranged. Breckinridge is convinced that his mentor and former best friend was having an affair with his wife, and he's never forgiven either of them. Despite that anger, Sutherland does a good job showing the pangs of self-doubt and conflicted emotions as he's pursuing Douglas.

If only the rest of the cast was used as well. Kim Basinger stretches belief as the First Lady. No back story is given for why she's having marital problems with the President. In several scenes it's as if the writers forgot about that fact, and the film works well without it. y get along just fine. Unfortunately, Basinger doesn't come to her own aid by giving a good enough performance to let the audience in on her secrets.

But worse is the use of Eva Longoria as the rookie Secret Service agent that is assigned to Breckinridge the day before the proverbial stuff hits the fan. There is no logical reason for an agent just out of the academy to be working hand in hand with someone as high ranking as Breckinridge on such an important case. Oh, wait…yes there is…she's a big TV star now, and very, very attractive…so let's get her size zero rear end into as many scenes as possible. And then make it a little more obvious by having several other agents stare at said butt; allowing the

camera the same viewpoint as the leering chauvinists.

It's a cheap trick, and an obvious one. However, it's still not as obvious as the identity of the bad guy…and if you cannot figure out who the mole is within thirty minutes, you must not have ever watched a film of this genre before. Additionally, if the Secret Service was as inept in real life as they are in this film, then Presidents would have the type of job security seen by (a) Murphy Brown's assistants, (b) Spinal Tap drummers, or (c) CTU directors. Why is it that in these types of movies, only the 'stars' are able to shoot a gun with any accuracy?

As good of a job as Kiefer Sutherland did in this film, I would have still rather seen another side of him than a variation of Jack Bauer or a deranged psycho (eg Phone Booth). Granted this time he played the bureaucrat rather than the maverick, but it's still a little too close to what we've seen over the last five years on '24'. Hopefully with the new contract he's received from Fox TV, he'll have the artistic and financial freedom to stretch out a bit now and take more chances like he did in the underappreciated "Behind the Red Door".

Overall, we are left with a film that is entertaining, but pales in comparison to the clear point of reference for a Secret Service film; Clint Eastwood's "In the Line of Fire". In looking at that superior 1993 thriller, it is apparent that for a film like this to be great, there must be three things; a believable plot line to hang the action upon, an interesting villain to antagonize, and a well drawn out central character. The Sentinel's director, Clark Johnson, is a television director who has been behind the camera for only one other feature film, "S.W.A.T." (ironically, a former TV series). By missing two of those three components Wolfgang Petersen accomplished in "Line of Fire", Johnson has given us a film that will be OK to watch in his element…on television, either via DVD or on cable…but clearly a disappointment on the big screen.

My Rating: Kelly Holcomb: (2 Footballs). Disappointingly inconsistent with a few bright spots.