Kevin Hicks and Jan Rubes share a warped sense of humour (among other things) in Blood Relations.

identify with their ensuing course of action. But after listening to the continual dribble coming out of their mouths, this seldom happens.

It is no surprise, then, that the most effective segments of Blood Relations are Marie’s dream sequences of Andrew and Thomas luridly hurting her. They are skillfully directed with an effective distortion of both the voices and motions of the actors. Towards the end of the film, when Marie is running down a corridor in Andrew’s secret operating room, you are genuinely startled to find out that this is no dream sequence. At this point, the film finally delivers the goods, only to end in a madcap, free-reined barrage of lurid and grisly twists and counter-twists, which conventionally tie all the loose ends together, and leave the audience chuckling mirthfully along. Which left me with the thought that making a horror film without scaring anyone, is like making a porn film where everyone keeps their clothes on.

Suffice to say, Campbell & Co. could conceivably have had a cult classic on their hands if they had done the whole thing in the same manner the dream sequences were shot; i.e., with a deliberate distortion of both the actors’ movement and dialogue, which would then only enhance the sense of discomposure. One ultimately has to break away from safe territory in order to establish a unique approach to a particular format. Although cliched, the actors are well cast and Dr. Wells’ sprawling mansion makes a suitable neogothic locale.

So, if you’re in the mood for a quasi-thriller/comedy/suspense/horror experience, be sure to have all your appropriate emotional responses kept on hold. Don’t worry about not getting too excited. You’re not expected to.

J.D. Stewart


Martyn Burke’s Witnesses

“On God’s, from the venom of the cobra, the teeth of the tiger, and the vengeance of the Afghan, deliver us.”

— Old Hindu saying

In 1980, Canadian journalist Arthur Kent wondered if the Soviets were at a loss to crush the Afghan resistance from the rough mountain slopes and valleys, despite their superior firepower and trained military personnel. Kent’s film, Afghanistan Spring (Fighting With Earth), ended with the Mujahideen (the resistance) saying, “We are patient. We must fight and trust that our holy war will be the capital of Kabul. The tactics he used in 1986, marked a change in fighting strategy. Until then, the typical methods used were quick ambushes. Massoud then decided to launch a large-scale attack against this key position. The ultimately successful battle plan is outlined with the aid of graphics. Combat footage combined with the dispassionate narration doesn’t minimize the impact of seeing the tape distort suddenly, as a voice relates that the Afghan cameraman, who filmed the sequence, was at that moment killed instantly as “a bullet went into the camera, a videotape, and into his head.”

Director Burke places his “witnesses” against a simple background in the interview sequences. Their Western clothing in this staging contrasts sharply with their physical presence in the Afghan landscape where they wear the clothing of the country. These are individuals who have placed their lives at the service of the Afghan people in their war of liberation. Afghanistan is a hard country without an overabundance of amenities emanating from its village economy. Michael Barry, a former Princeton scholar, who became involved in Afghanistan says, “The most
striking thing about being in this country is not just the physical hardship of it, but the fact the physical hardship is not a question of choice, it has to be endured.

This war, in which donkeys carry weapons to be used against tanks, where highly trained Soviet forces battle against rebel fighters, is a war which evolved from a civil contest into a fight against domination by foreign invaders. The Soviets did not bargain on the traditional Mujahideen commitment to jihad or hold (blood for blood). Witnesses explore the idea of commitment to a concept, an individual, a people, and an ideology. In days of facile political correctness and limousine liberalism it is difficult to come across genuine examples of courage which aren’t bludgeoned by media sensationalism. Of course, the situation in Afghanistan was markedly different by the very dearth of any major media coverage. This lack makes all the more startling Burke’s sensitive treatment of the position of both the Afghans and the outsiders.

The Soviet troops were plagued by widespread drug addiction and alcoholism which contributed to the low morale. A Russian mother tells of the guilt she feels at having written letters to her son inciting him to fight in her village would be bombed, but people still had to go on about their business later that day. Why then did the villagers keep circling but not firing. When asked what the villagers were doing, a village woman replied that it was choosing which village it would attack. Unremarkable as it is unadventurous, it is also a commercial. By design, the film plots out its unambiguous motives and textbook style, executes the story quite economically, neatly avoiding all the bumps and crevasses that flaw but make better films more convincing.

Sandy Wilson’s Mama’s Going To Buy You A Mockingbird

As far as disease-of-the-week movies go, Mama’s Going To Buy You A Mockingbird is pretty standard fare. One of only a handful of features produced by the CBC each year, the film clocked in at 97 minutes. A personal project of John Talbot’s cancer and the process of the young woman. You can’t imagine what she’d want to do with Jeremy, the real geek. But she’s the “love interest” and Jeremy finallyoverride: When things get complicated, cut to a fantastic rendition of Blueberry Hill or the recurring Mockingbird theme. Or a commercial. By design, the film plots out its unambiguous motives and textbook style, executes the story quite economically, neatly avoiding all the bumps and crevasses that flaw but make better films more convincing.

Helen Lee