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Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated

by **David Cornelius**

"They're coming to sock puppet you, Barbara..."


Lacking both the whimsical adoration of "Raiders of the Lost Ark: The Adaptation" and the snarkish parody of "Star Wars Uncut," "Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated" is a new kind of DIY beast, a cinematic mash-up that sets out to use existing media as something of a blueprint for new artistic interpretation.

It's the latest in a new form of home-brewed tribute, a natural evolutionary step for the YouTube generation. Compiled by director/producer Mike Schneider, the film is a collaboration of over a hundred artists, all volunteers, pitching in to provide new visuals to be placed over the original soundtrack of George A. Romero's 1968 classic. (Despite Schneider's online comments about "reanimation" as an art form and its wordplay parallels to the zombie genre, the Romero movie's public domain status is likely the main reason it was chosen over other horror films.) As with "Star Wars Uncut" - in which fans are invited to submit a fifteen-second clip to remake however they wish - Schneider invited artists, professional and amateur, to contribute to excerpts of their choosing, resulting in a collage of animation styles, cut up, remixed, and edited to fit.

It's not a remake, nor does it intend to replace the original. Indeed, the film bills itself as a "response to" the classic. As such, the filmmakers assume a complete knowledge of Romero's work, aiming their collaboration at those who know the original by heart. There's so much jumping around from style to style, artist to artist, with some contributions lasting no more than a second, that it's impossible to follow "Reanimated" as a workable story - so much so, in fact, that the best animations are the ones that are the most abstract.

One recurring piece (arguably the film's best) transforms all characters into near-shapeless blobs held together in their centers by violent scribbles, sort of a stick figure's angry cousin. There's a beauty to the way these forms glide and morph across the screen, with basic shapes filling the background, minimally implying the shape of the farmhouse interior. To make sense of it without any knowledge of "Night of the Living Dead" would be hopeless, but that's the point: Schneider is taking a film that's buried itself into fans' minds and riffing on every tiny moment with art. We don't need to follow the story because we already know the film shot-for-shot, and are instead invited to marvel at reinterpretations of those images.

At its best, Schneider and company's work is an involving, impressive work countless steps above the realm of "fan art." The black and white imagery gets quite stunning, wowing us with gorgeous sketches, intricate pencil animations, and offbeat, experimental efforts.

Alas, "Reanimated" is rarely at its best. The film is ultimately a conceptual mess, with Schneider

USA
 N/A (NR)
DVD: 27-Jul-2010

UK
 N/A

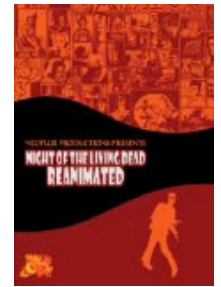
Australia
 N/A

Directed by
 Mike Schneider

Written by
 John A. Russo
 George A. Romero

Cast
 Duane Jones
 Judith O'Dea
 Karl Hardman
 Marilyn Eastman
 Keith Wayne
 Judith Ridley
 Kyra Schon

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(who bills himself as a "curator" and compares the movie to a museum display, a gallery of varying artworks tied together by a single theme) rarely allowing us to settle, too often over-editing in an attempt to cram everything in. This being a volunteer collaboration, perhaps he felt obligated to leave no one out, but that only leaves us with magnificent animation and cheap, uncreative fare juxtaposed to a most jarring effect.

It seems everybody wanted to tackle a few key moments - the old man, the discovery of the corpse upstairs, the zombie girl killing her mother - and few wanted the "boring stuff" - Barbara walking around the house, everyone sitting around watching the news, etc. Because of this gap, the film bounces from an ADD-fueled barrage of images (both great and otherwise, but we never get the chance to linger on any of it) to lengthy, tiresome shots of characters reborn as, say, Sims.

It's not the lack of artistic merit that hinders the "lesser" entries. It's the lack of creativity. For every wondrous abstract shot, there are dozens where the folks at home simply used a basic program to walk blocky computer-generated characters through their paces - or, worse, ran the original film's video through a variety of bland Photoshop filters, which is about as close to crafting original art as me turning the color knob on my old TV so Fred Flintstone is now green.

Other efforts fail on an even greater level, as they reveal participants interested only in getting a laugh. One shot features sock puppets; another, while skillfully animated, re-imagines the whole thing as a retro cartoon starring cats and mice. These bits would be cute if the entire film went this way, playing as a lark. But since so many other moments aim for dead (no pun intended) seriousness, the "funny" clips end up as jarring and obtrusive. (Are we supposed to laugh? If so, why?)

This mish-mash of fine art and comical "Clutch Cargo" parody, beautiful sketches and videotaped Barbie dolls, crappy CG and (sigh) shots of Furbys loses not just its novelty but its entire impact all too quickly. Schneider blends the contributions into a visual goulash that frustrates far more than it thrills. And as a "response" to Romero, "Reanimated" adds too little of actual value; the original's powerful themes and unforgettable frights are not merely diluted, they're smothered completely. A collection of "Living Dead"-inspired artwork might've made a nifty coffee table book. But as its own film? It's a frantic journey through the internet, set on random.

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