



EXPRESS NIGHT OUT

Grave Awakening: 'Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated,' on DVD

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Break out your torches: "[Night of the Living Dead](#)" has risen from the grave. Director Mike Schneider zombifies George Romero's 1968 masterpiece with the new "[Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated](#)," which re-imagines the down to the smallest, most grisly detail.

Schneider, who is billed as "curator," corralled artists from around the world to animate the movie, sticking closely to Romero's camera angles and careful crescendo of suspense. Artists worked in a variety of styles and mediums: CGI, charcoal sketches, claymation, puppets, comic-style line drawings, digitized abstractions, anthropomorphic doodles, and Barbie dolls. Schneider and his crew then spliced them all together over the original audio, and the result is part homage, part art show.

Romero's "Night of the Living Dead" may be the best and most influential horror movie ever made, an apocalyptic thriller that was both thoughtful and scary. In the 40 years since its release and unlikely success, it has inspired countless remakes, tributes and imitators, positing an end-of-the-world scenario with infinite metaphorical potential. Romero deployed the walking dead as ambling allegories for race, consumerism, military scare tactics, citizen journalism, blind conformity and anti-war radicalism. "Night of the Living Dead" introduced zombies as the blank canvas upon which each generation could paint its deepest, darkest fears.

For that reason, Mike Schneider's new "Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated" is a particularly fitting homage. The film can be jumpy, disorienting and sometimes hard to follow, but the purpose of this project is to tease out new meanings and implications from the source material rather than simply retell the tale. Even at its most frustrating, the film remains fascinating viewing, if only to see how the next artist will approach the next scene or animate the next zombie.

In general, the more tactile the medium, the more effective it is in communicating the story, character, emotion and fear of the original. The film's best passage may be a few wordless scenes when Ben (originally played by Duane Jones) and Barbara (Judith O'Dea) board up the house to stop the assembling hoard of zombies. The film employs several stop-motion styles to emphasize the characters' deliberations and labor, rendering Ben as an action figure, a Lego man, and — best of all — a paper cut-out that renders all

the action in stark two-dimensionality. These scenes emphasize the drudgery and dread of the task at hand, reflecting the characters' grim vulnerability.

The film's ending is compelling, too, depicting Romero's infamous downer of a closing scene in a style that resembles an illustration from a children's book. Rendered in the original flick's black-and-white, this simple format underscores the very real and very human horror of Romero's scene, imparting an unexpected gravity.

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Photo courtesy Wild Eye