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NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD: REANIMATED



Year Released: 2010

MPAA Rating: Unrated

Running Time: 101 minutes

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George A. Romero's seminal 1968 horror film, "Night of the Living Dead," has seen more studies, analyses and dissections than a high school biology lab. Credited for launching a new brand of horror story as well as a brand new type of monster, the low-budget, independently-produced Pittsburgh-spawned black and white miracle combined Richard Matheson's siege story "I Am Legend" with the idea of flesh-eating walking corpses, set it in a claustrophobic location and peopled it with a microcosm of characters, resulting in a tense, nail-biting thriller that has endured for more than forty years. His ghouls and survivors have been interpreted as social commentary for everything from withstanding the threat of communism to battling society's conformity itself. It's inspired countless sequels, homages, rip-offs, and books, fiction and critical non-fiction alike. It's also gotten under the skin of millions of horror fans across the world—and stayed there. A quick glance around the world of horror fandom reveals zombies, zombies and more zombies—an obsession that began with this very movie.

As George Lucas should have learned by now, when a movie captures the imagination of generations of viewers, it ceases to be its own thing and, above all, ceases to belong to its creator. "Night of the Living Dead" passed into the public domain, legally, upon its initial release, and it became the public domain of art and culture not too very long after that. As what might be the ultimate expression of this mass ownership of a work was recently brought forth on DVD by Wild Eye Releasing: "Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated."

Commercial artist Mike Schneider conceived the project and put out a call to arms across the internet, on everything from artist galleries to dating sites, looking for anyone, artist or not, who loved Romero's original enough to contribute to its ongoing evolution. After more than a year's worth of hard work on the part of more than a 150 people, Schneider included, the resulting project, "NOTLD: Reanimated," is a mass-created, mixed-media tribute to a single film.

Using the original movie's soundtrack as the only guideline, artists of every skill set took on the challenge of recreating or interpreting "Night of the Living Dead." Some tackled full sequences, others focused only on single shots and still others turned in isolated frames using whatever felt "right" to their imaginations. Iconic scenes are recreated in gorgeous chiaroscuro sketches and intentionally-crude clay stop-motion. Intricate comic book panels scroll past over the familiar stock music and sound effects, cutting directly to stick figure cartoons in some cases, megabyte-devouring CGI sequences in others. Sock puppets deliver the news, the climactic scene of Karen Cooper (Kyra Schon) murdering her parents in the basement plays out in real time with Barbie Dolls, giving new context to the toys' hideous rictus smiles. Other scenes unfold as abstract shapes and squiggles, reducing the horror to impressionism. Professional mixes with the amateur in a constantly changing, shifting, flickering montage of love and admiration and fascination for a single movie.

"Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated" is an exhilarating viewing experience. While the lovely chaos may not be the best jumping-off point for those unfamiliar with the original, the hard-core and even casual fan will recognize the imagery and interpretations that have been hard-coded into the zombie fan's DNA for four decades. The project proves not only the elasticity of a familiar subject, but the dizzying array of art forms and talents there is to be found on this planet. It's also an excellent primer for the study of art, animation and simple film concepts as editing and shot selection.

For the artistic viewer, it may also be a frustrating hundred or so minutes of missed opportunity (in the commentary track with journalist Peter Gutierrez, Stoker-award winning author Jonathan Maberry and distributor Rob Hauschild, Scheider mentions that he still gets inquiries for contribution, even though the movie is finished and commercially available).

Because of the nature of the armchair artist, any criticism of this movie will boil down to personal

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