**Classic Film Club**

*October 25, 2012*

**Film Title**

*Night of the Living Dead*

**Starring**

Duane Jones, Judith O’Dea, Karl Hardman, Marilyn Eastman, Keith Wayne, Judith Ridley

**Director**

George A. Romero

**Run Time:** 1:33 **Release Date:** 1968

**Film Plot:**

Inspired by Richard Matheson’s novel *I Am Legend*, this grimly realistic 1968 shocker revolutionized the horror film, followed by two sequels *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* and many imitations. When unexpected radiation – possibly from a fallen NASA satellite - raises the dead, a small, typical American town has to battle flesh-eating zombies in George A. Romero's landmark horror film. The film opens with siblings Johnny (Russ Streiner) and Barbara (Judith O'Dea) whining and pouting their way through a graveside visit in a small Pennsylvania town, but it all takes a turn for the worse when the dead begin to rise. In the meantime, a group of people holed up in an isolated farmhouse. Bickering and panic ensue as the group tries to figure out how best to escape, while hoards of undead converge on the house; news reports reveal that fire wards them off, while a local sheriff-led posse discovers that if you "kill the brain, you kill the ghoul." After a night of immolation and parricide, one survivor is left in the house.... Romero's grainy black-and-white cinematography and casting of locals emphasize the terror lurking in ordinary life; as in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), Romero's victims are not attacked because they did anything wrong, and the randomness makes the attacks all the more horrifying. Nothing holds the key to salvation, either, whether it's family, love, or law. Topping off the existential dread is Romero's then-extreme use of gore, as zombies nibble on limbs and viscera. Initially distributed by a Manhattan theater chain owner, *Night*, made for about 100,000 dollars, was dismissed as exploitation, but after a 1969 re-release, it began to attract favorable attention for scarily tapping into Vietnam-era uncertainty and anarchist [anxiety](http://www.moviefone.com/movie/night-of-the-living-dead/3590/synopsis). By 1979, it had grossed over 12 million, inspired a cycle of apocalyptic splatter films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and set the standard for finding horror in the ordinary. However cheesy the film may look, few horror movies reach a conclusion as mournfully unsettling.

**Goofs:**

* When Ben, Tom and Judy are trying to escape from the zombies in the truck, it is dark, but when the zombies are giving chase, dawn is breaking, and when the truck gets to the gas pump it is now dark once more. This is just one of a number of scenes in this film that change from darkness to daylight and vice-versa.
* A scene is shown where the zombies smash the headlights of the truck that Ben arrived in. Later in the movie, when they attempt to refuel the truck, both headlights are fully intact and lit.
* When Ben is bent over a ghoul he just killed in the woods, you can see a hand waving the character away from the body and out of the scene.
* As Ben informs Barbara that the house is secure and all [windows](http://all-movie-goofs.info/night-of-living-dead-mistakes.html) have been sealed up, a plain, uncovered, [unsecured](http://all-movie-goofs.info/night-of-living-dead-mistakes.html) window is visible right behind him.
* When Barbra runs the [car](http://all-movie-goofs.info/night-of-living-dead-mistakes.html) into the tree, it is already dented before the impact.
* When Ben is nailing wooden boards to the door, small numbers can be seen on them. These were written on the backs of the boards so they could be removed and replaced in between shots, preserving continuity. Some numbers are visible because some of the boards were nailed on backwards.
* When Ben tackles the second zombie by the truck, he pins it to the ground right underneath him and starts beating it with a tire iron. You can see that to avoid actor injury, Ben is hammering the zombie at least 5 inches away from the zombie’s head.
* Ben contradicts himself all through the story he tells Barbara about the gasoline truck. First he says he had just gotten into a truck he found to listen to the radio when this happened. But then he says that when the gas truck came by it was all he could do to miss it – inferring he was driving. He also says that it was “screaming by” and that zombies were chasing it on foot and keeping up – but all the zombies we’ve seen can be out run by even Barbara. He also says that the truck was on fire during this chase and there were zombies hanging onto the truck yet we’ve seen that the only thing that scares zombies is fire.

**Trivia:**

* The scene where Barbara crashes the car into the tree wasn't scripted originally; an accident that put a large dent in the car before the scene was shot prompted George Romero to re-write the scene in such a way that the dent is justified.
* Duane Jones was the first African American to play a lead in a horror film. He also taught at and became the head of the Theatre Department at Old Westbury college in Long Island, New York. He remained there until he unfortunately passed away in 1988.