

= Night of the Dead Living =

" Night of the Dead Living " is the ninth episode and first season finale of the American police drama television series Homicide : Life on the Street . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on March 31 , 1993 . In the episode , the homicide squad works the night shift on a summer evening , but no calls come in , leaving the detectives to brood over their personal matters . The teleplay was written by Frank Pugliese based on a story he wrote along with executive producer Tom Fontana . It was directed by Michael Lehmann .

" Night of the Dead Living " was originally intended to be the third episode of the season , but NBC programmers moved it to the end of the season because they felt its slow pace and lack of traditional action was inappropriate early in the series , when the show was trying to woo viewers . The broadcast schedule change led to some consistency and time @-@ line errors , which Homicide producers addressed by adding the words " One hot night , last September ... " to the beginning of the episode . Actress N 'Bushe Wright makes a guest appearance as a cleaning woman who loses her baby in the police station .

Since ratings for Homicide had gradually declined throughout the season , NBC announced a decision about whether the series would be renewed would depend on the Nielsen ratings of the final four episodes , including " Night of the Dead Living " . Nevertheless , it was seen by 6 @. @ 7 million household viewers , marking one of the lowest viewerships of the season . It received generally positive reviews upon its original broadcast , although some mainstream television audiences were turned off by its minimalist approach . It marked the last original episode of Homicide for nine months until the second season premiere , " Bop Gun " . The episode 's teleplay won a Writers Guild of America Award for Outstanding Achievement in Television Writing for Episodic Drama .

= = Plot summary = =

The episode begins with an unknown person lighting a candle in the homicide squadroom . One by one , the detectives arrive for the night shift on an unusually hot September evening . A furious Gee (Yaphet Kotto) calls maintenance to complain about the non @-@ working air conditioner and learns it has been shut off for the night . Felton (Daniel Baldwin) and Lewis (Clark Johnson) try to find out who secretly lights the candle every night ; they blow it out a number of times , but it always ends up lit again without anyone noticing . Munch (Richard Belzer) loudly complains about his ex @-@ girlfriend breaking up with him . While the other detectives sweat and complain about the heat , a calm and comfortable Pembleton (Andre Braugher) wears a tie and drinks hot tea without sweating . Bayliss (Kyle Secor) , who acts uncooperative with his partner Pembleton , says he has found the fingerprints of a man named James Hill who he believes is the murderer in the Adena Watson case . Officer Thormann (Lee Tergesen) brings in Hill , who turns out to be a 12 @-@ year @-@ old boy (Kenny Blank) , much to the amusement of the other detectives .

The detectives are shocked at the lack of homicide @-@ related calls they are receiving throughout the night . Bolander (Ned Beatty) tries several times throughout the night to call Medical Examiner Blythe (Wendy Hughes) and ask her out on a date , but he cannot build up the courage . With encouragement from Howard (Melissa Leo) , he finally asks Blythe out and is shocked when she accepts . Crosetti (Jon Polito) gets agitated when his daughter calls and wants her boyfriend to sleep over . Gee comforts Crosetti and lets him go home to take care of her . Gee finds a baby boy in a small animal carrier @-@ like cage on the bottom floor of the police department . The baby is very popular with the detectives , who take care of him while they wait for social services to arrive . After the social services worker takes the baby , the cleaning lady Loretta Kenyatta (N 'Bushe Wright) hysterically screams somebody kidnapped her baby . The detectives get the baby back for her while Bayliss , infatuated with Loretta , listens to her talk about her life .

Howard gets a call from her sister , who has recently found a tumor on her breast . The sister has just learned her husband has been having an affair . Although Howard is initially hesitant to confide in Felton , he eventually surprises her by offering genuine words of comfort . A drunken man

dressed as Santa Claus (Cleve Wall) is arrested for threatening his wife and a crowd of people with a water pistol . Later , the detectives get a call that Santa Claus has escaped from custody in the department , and he is found after falling through the ceiling and landing on Munch 's desk . Meanwhile , Pembleton and Bayliss discuss the Watson murder scene . Bayliss insists he has already gone over the information repeatedly , but Pembleton tells him he needs to think outside the box and approach it with from the mind @-@ frame of a criminal . Later , Bayliss reexamines the information and realizes the killer brought Watson down a fire escape , offering a new lead in the case . As the new day dawns , Gee has the detectives assemble on the roof so he can spray them with a garden hose to cool them off .

The episode ends with Munch revealing to Thormann that he lights the candle each night " for all the ones who have been killed , " while Thormann admits that he re @-@ lit it in Munch 's absence because he knew it meant something to him .

= = Production = =

" Night of the Dead Living " was directed by Michael Lehmann . The teleplay was written by Frank Pugliese based on a story he wrote along with executive director Tom Fontana . It was originally intended to be the third episode of the first season , but NBC programmers felt it was too slow @-@ paced to run so early in the season . The episode takes place entirely within the squad room and lacks the traditional action of a typical police series , which NBC executives felt was not appropriate for an early stage when the series was still trying to woo viewers . The programmers also preferred to end the series on the upbeat note of the final scenes in " Night of the Dead Living " , which includes the detectives happily smiling and laughing on the roof of the police department building as Gee sprays them with a hose to relieve the summer heat . In contrast , the originally @-@ planned season finale , " Smoke Gets in Your Eyes " , which Homicide producers felt had a sense of resolving season storylines , was a somber episode which ended with a sad image of Bolander quietly singing to himself at a bar over a beer .

Running the episode out of sequence produced several notable continuity errors . For example , Bayliss and Pembleton are still working on the Adena Watson murder , which they had stopped actively investigating in the earlier episode " Three Men and Adena " . Additionally , Officer Thormann is seen onscreen working and healthy , although he was blinded in the earlier episode " Son of a Gun " as a result of a gunshot wound to the head that forced him to leave the police department . These consistency errors were addressed by Homicide producers by adding the words " One hot night , last September ... " to the beginning of the episode , thus establishing the events of the episode took place within the correct timeline of the series , even though the episodes are shown out of order . The Watson case depicted in the episode was based on the real @-@ life 1988 Baltimore slaying of Latonya Kim Wallace , which is chronicled in Homicide : A Year on the Killing Streets , the 1991 David Simon non @-@ fiction book about a Baltimore Police Department , which was adapted into the Homicide series .

During " Night of the Dead Living " , Crosetti displays an overriding concern for the safety and welfare of his daughter Beatrice . After Crosetti was revealed to have killed himself in the third season episode " Crosetti " , many viewers claimed suicide was unrealistic for his character based on his feelings about his daughter displayed in this episode . Beatrice is referred to only by name in " Night of the Dead Living " , and would not appear onscreen until she grieved over her father 's death in " Crosetti " . While discussing the mysterious candle with Lewis in the episode , Felton said he generally solves cases with physical evidence , witnesses and confessions , not by investigating motives . This insight into detective work is consistent with the conclusions Simon drew in Homicide : A Year on the Killing Streets , and reviewers have praised Homicide for its realism in portraying detective work from this perspective , which is in stark contrast to other typical police dramas .

N 'Bushe Wright , best known to this point for playing the student activist Claudia Bishop in the NBC drama series I 'll Fly Away , made a guest appearance in " Night of the Dead Living " as the cleaning woman Loretta Kenyatta . Wright was cast in the role based on her performance in Zebrahead (1992) , a drama film about an interracial romance . A number of songs play on radios in the squad

room throughout " Night of the Dead Living " . Among the music featured in the episode were the songs " Lay Down My Life " by Carole King , " Texas Slide " by Jean @-@ Jacques Milteau , " N.Y.C (Can You Believe This City ?) " by Charles and Eddie , " Little Boy Blues " and " Break Up " by Gary Fitzgerald , and " Tropic Call " by Mitchell Coodley and Andrew Snitzer .

= = Ratings = =

Ratings for Homicide : Life on the Street gradually declined since the series first premiered . In response , NBC announced to fans that a decision about whether Homicide would be renewed or canceled would depend on how the last four episodes of the season fared in the ratings , including " Smoke Gets in Your Eyes " . In its original American broadcast on March 31 , 1993 , the episode was watched by 6 @.@ 7 million households , according to Nielsen Media Research , earning the episode a 7 @.@ 2 rating . It was one of the lowest ratings of the first season of Homicide : Life on the Street , continuing the downward trend of the season . By comparison , the previous episode , " Smoke Gets in Your Eyes " , was seen by 7 @.@ 08 million households , while the season premiere , " Gone for Goode " , was watched by more than 18 million households due to a lead @-@ in from Super Bowl XXVII . Homicide ranked low in the Nielsen ratings compared to other shows the week of " Night of the Dead Living " , while its time @-@ slot competitor , the ABC comedy Home Improvement , ranked second for the week with 20 @.@ 39 million household viewers .

At the time that the season finale aired , Homicide producers still did not know whether their show would be renewed for a second season . After the season finale , Homicide : Life on the Street went on a hiatus while the network decided whether the series would be renewed . That hiatus ultimately lasted nine months until the premiere of the second season premiere , " Bop Gun " .

= = Reception = =

The episode received generally positive reviews from commentators , although David P. Kalat , author of Homicide : Life on the Street : The Unofficial Companion , said mainstream television audiences were " somewhat turned off by the minimalist approach " . USA Today writer Matt Roush gave the episode four out of four stars , comparing it to David Mamet 's Glengarry Glen Ross and calling it " minimalist drama (with) maximum impact " . Roush wrote , " Imagine a crime show during which no crime occurs . Next to nothing happens . Yet every second counts . " Lon Grahne of the Chicago Sun @-@ Times also gave it four out of four stars . He wrote , " If Life on the Street winds up dead after tonight 's episode ? the victim of low Nielsen ratings ? at least the nine superb actors in the squad will know they made a grand exit . "

The Salt Lake Tribune writer Harold Schindler praised the episode , particularly the " excellent writing , great acting [and] super atmosphere " . Rocky Mountain News writer Dusty Saunders called the series " superb " and described Night of the Dead Living as " fascinating character studies of police officers in the squad room " . In a 2007 article , Star Tribune writer Neal Justin included " Night of the Dead Living " in a list of 10 excellent network television episodes dating back 40 years . Justin said the episode proved it was not acting that made for good television , but rather strong writing and acting . Not all reviews were positive . John J. O 'Connor of The New York Times praised the series in general , but said the various overlapping subplots in " Night of the Dead Living " ? like the Santa Claus suspect , the pre @-@ teen murder suspect and the cleaning woman 's missing baby ? felt like gratuitous " oddball routines " . O 'Connor added , " Too much cleverness can be grating . "

Frank Pugliese and Tom Fontana won a Writers Guild of America award for Outstanding Achievement in Television Writing for Episodic Drama for the " Night of the Dead Living " teleplay . The script competed in that category against another Homicide episode , the first season premiere " Gone for Goode " . The " Night of the Dead Living " teleplay also defeated scripts for the shows I 'll Fly Away , Life Goes On , Picket Fences , TriBeCa and Reasonable Doubts .

= = DVD release = =

The first and second season episodes were included in the four DVD box set "Homicide : Life on the Street : The Complete Seasons 1 & 2 " , which was released by A & E Home Video on May 27 , 2003 .