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Carrie-Anne Moss makes recreational use of Billy Connolly in "Fido," a satirical zombie film directed by Andrew Currie.

Hard to Find Good Help? Not in This Little Town

Much like zombies, zombie movies show no sign of rolling over and staying dead, really, truly, most sincerely dead. In recent years, they have run speedily amok in Danny Boyle's spine-tingler "28 Days Later" and its sequel, "28 Weeks Later" (where the virus-stricken creatures are more zomboid than true zombies), as well as in the remake of

**MANOHLA
DARGIS**

**FILM
REVIEW**

George A. Romero's "Dawn of the Dead." Ever the classicist, Mr. Romero keeps his zombies moving slow but steady in his rollicking "Land of the Dead," the 2005 chapter in the zombie epic that shuddered into existence with his 1968 masterwork, "Night of the Living Dead."

In the ticklishly amusing satire "Fido," the undead stagger along like stunned toddlers. With their shuffling, uncertain gait, their limbs slowed by the onslaught of rigor mortis, these zombies are thoroughly, satisfyingly old school. Lost in a twilight zone between life and death, gripped by a hunger that can only be satisfied with a mouthful of warm human flesh, they live, in a manner of speaking, to eat. The good news for their would-be snacks and treats, meaning everyone who's nominally alive, is that these zombies are also in the grip of remote-controlled obedience collars that keep them as harmless as a neutered Rottweiler on a very short leash. One zap and they're mewling like kittens or at least growling more quietly

ters, Mr. Currie exhibits distinct cannibalistic tendencies, starting with the clever black-and-white educational reel that opens "Fido" and lays out the back story ("the zombie wars" and what followed). Watching morosely from the last row in class is little Timmy (K'Sun Ray), the only, crushingly lonely child of Helen and Bill Robinson (Carrie-Anne Moss and Dylan Baker). With his wide-pooling eyes, Timmy looks straight out of central casting, if also seriously ill at ease when squeezing off rounds during zombie-target practice. He's not much of a shot, one of the few in the class who doesn't raise a hand when a visiting containment expert, Mr. Bottoms (Henry Czerny, excellent), asks: "How many of you have ever had to kill a zombie?"

Timmy would rather play catch, which he does soon after Helen decides to elevate her social standing by bringing a collared and apparently tamed zombie home. (Everyone else in the neighborhood has one, she whines.) Named Fido — and played by a wonderfully expressive, nearly

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quite useful.

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Directed by Andrew Currie, who wrote the guffaw-splattered, lightly bloody, bit too modest screenplay with Robert Chomiak and Dennis Heaton, the film takes place in the 1950s, or some freaky-fantasy variation on the same, in a small town washed in muted colors and occasionally rocked by a blast of angry red. In this perky Pleasantville, where father knows best except when he loses his head, zombies don't feast on the living; they serve them. They mow the lawns, guard the crosswalks and deliver the daily paper. Every so often, they also dispense a little something extra, like the teenage zombie, Tammy (Sonja Bennett), whose tight curves and scarily chattering teeth keep her owner, Mr. Theopolis (Tim Blake Nelson, a hoot), dementedly smiling.

Like his slower-moving charac-

ter Billy Connolly — the Robinson, zombie soon becomes a mostly cherished member of the family, with Bill the sole dissenter. As Bill nervously twitches and Helen basks in the glow of consumer satisfaction, Timmy and Fido bond, first over a baseball and mitt, then over a little accidental bloodletting and later during one wittily shot scene in a sweeping field that summons up every boy-and-dog story that brought a tear to the eye.

Mr. Currie and his collaborators don't push their slave-master allegory far; unlike Mr. Romero or the zombie comedy "Shaun of the Dead," where the living are so zombie-like they don't initially notice the undead, the filmmakers remain content to graze and to nibble, skimming the surface rather than sinking in deep. They set up a divide between the light-skinned humans and the dark-skinned zombies that they never fully engage, shying away from anything heavy or dangerously downbeat. Mr. Currie and company are happy to make you laugh, which they do easily enough, especially with a beautifully slow-to-build joke that demands a familiarity with the typical story arc and climactic dialogue from the old "Lassie" television series. It won't make you bleed, just howl.

"Fido" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). In spite of some gnawed-off limbs and bloodied necks, the gore quotient is surprisingly modest.

Fido

Opens today in Manhattan.

Directed by Andrew Currie; written by Robert Chomiak, Mr. Currie and Dennis Heaton, based on an original story by Mr. Heaton; director of photography, Jan Kessler; edited by Roger Mattiussi; music by Don Mandonald; production designer, Rob Gray; produced by Blake Corbet and Mary Anne Waterhouse; released by Lionsgate. At the Anglika Film Center, Mercer and Houston Streets, Greenwich Village. Running time: 91 minutes.

WITH: Carrie-Anne Moss (Helen), Billy Connolly (Fido), Dylan Baker (Bill), K'Sun Ray (Timmy), Henry Czerny (Mr. Bottoms), Sonja Bennett (Tammy) and Tim Blake Nelson (Mr. Theopolis).