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TIFF Review: Fido

Posted Sep 19th 2006 6:32PM by Kim Voynar
Filed under: Comedy, Horror, Independent, Lionsgate Films, Theatrical Reviews, Toronto International Film Festival

All is well in the peaceful town of Willard, where life seems permanently stuck in the 1950s. The sun is always shining, the flowers are always blooming -- and zombies handle most of the more mundane tasks, thus freeing up the good citizens of Willard to enjoy their lives. You see, several years back, space dust fell on the earth, causing the dead to rise and become flesh-eating legions of the undead. There were the terrible Zombie Wars, when mankind fought not to be cannibalized by the rotting corpses of friends and family, and then came ZomCon. ZomCon invented a security collar that, when attached around a zombie's neck and activated, it turns a vicious, flesh-devouring monster into a productive member of the community. Thanks to ZomCon, zombies deliver mail, take care of the trash, and do countless other menial tasks, and the living citizens of the community are safe -- so long as the collars work.

Everyone in Willard seems pretty happy with the zombie arrangement; after all, so long as the collars work, the zombies are perfectly safe, and the more zombies one owns, the less physical labor one has to do. No one has actually asked the zombies their opinion, of course, but since they're already dead, no one seems to think that matters much -- except for young Timmy Robinson (K'Sun Ray). Timmy is always troubling the adults

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around him with his penetrating questions about zombies. Like, for instance, are zombies alive? Do they remember their lives and their families? And if the star dust made all the dead come back to life, what about all those people buried in coffins? Timmy is also confused about the relationship his neighbor, Mr. Theopolis (Tim Blake Nelson) has with his zombie, Tammy; let's just say that Mr. Theopolis is a little unnaturally attached to his relatively attractive zombie ("Got her before she even started to decompose!" he explains cheerily to Timmy), but his parents don't really want to answer Timmy's penetrating questions any more than his teacher does.

Timmy's family doesn't have a zombie, because his father, Bill (Dylan Baker) has, well, zombie issues that cropped up after he had to kill his own zombie-father. But one day Timmy's mother Helen (Carrie-Anne Moss) brings home a zombie anyhow. She's always hated being the only one on the block without one, and the new neighbors -- the dad of the family is the head of security for Zomcon -- have three. Timmy isn't sure about this whole zombie thing, much less about his family actually having one, until one day the zombie starts playing catch with him after Timmy's dad stands him up yet again. Timmy names his zombie Fido (Billy Connolly), and before you can say "substitute father figure" they are doing everything together. At last Timmy, the boy nobody likes, has a friend. After Fido saves Timmy from a pair of bullying brothers who are always picking on him, the pair become inseparable.

Meanwhile Helen is also finding there's more to Fido than just the convenience of having someone else to do the household chores. She finds in Fido the warmth and companionship missing from her frigid marriage. Then Fido's collar malfunctions, and he accidentally kills a neighbor, who becomes a zombie herself, and so on, and so on, until murderous zombies are running amok within the pristine parameters of Willard. Will Timmy be able to protect Fido from the ramifications of snacking on the neighbor, or will he lose his one and only friend?

Fido is a very funny film, and well-directed by helmer/co-writer Andrew Currie. There's a political message under there as well, even if the film doesn't beat you over the head with it. Put it in the context of the absurd -- zombies as household slaves and pets -- and it's a farce. But issues of race and class divide are very real, and as you watch *Fido* you can't help but make comparisons to our own social issues. Moss and Baker are good as the mom and dad, but the real stars of the show are Connolly and Ray, who bring the relationship between Timmy and Fido to life. Connolly does an admiral job of giving Fido warmth and personality without ever saying a line, and Ray, I expect, we'll be seeing a lot more of in the future.

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