

## Non-Gory Allegory

By Peter Clines

### The Film

## Fido

### Written By

Robert Chomiak & Dennis Heaton & Andrew Currie (also directed)

### Rating - 4 Stars

The bastard child of George Romero and Norman Rockwell, *Fido* is a sharp and hilariously funny film that has a big heart and surprisingly little blood. Part *Pleasantville*, part *Shaun of the Dead*, and part *Old Yeller*, this new spin on the classic tale of a boy and his...uhhh...zombie is social commentary camouflaged with clever storytelling and subtext to appear as that most mocked of all things...simple entertainment.

Timmy Robinson (K'Sun Ray) is just your normal fifth-grade outcast, living in an alternate 1950s where civilization has just survived a worldwide war against zombies. However, with the domestication collar developed by zombie specialists ZomCon, the walking dead have become less of a threat and more of a slave population -- delivering milk and newspapers, mowing lawns, and filling other mindless needs. Despite the objections of Timmy's father, Bill (Dylan Baker), mother Helen (Carrie-Anne Moss) insists the family simply must have a zombie of their own to keep up with the neighbors and reveals Fido (Billy Connolly), with whom their son quickly bonds and accepts as an odd pet. But when Fido's collar malfunctions and he begins to fall back on his many of his old habits, Timmy has to protect his new best friend from Mr. Bottoms (Henry Czerny), the ZomCon security chief who lives across the street, and Helen begins to see the remains of the once-living man beneath the monster.

Based on a story by Dennis Heaton (*Blood Ties*), the screenplay by Heaton, Robert Chomiak (*Gundam Seed*), and director Andrew Currie is light, fun, and breezy, taking full advantage of the odd contrast between Melmac bowls and man-eating monsters. Skillfully twisting the plots of family movies like *My Dog Skip*, the story shows the positive impact Fido has on Timmy and Helen as their actions jog his own memories of being alive. The need to protect his boy. The fun of playing with a hose on a hot day. The simple pleasure of smelling a woman's hair. While Fido's mind may be slow and rotted, these scattered half-memories are enough to reawaken similar feelings in the boy and his mother, who gladly return them after years with Bill, a man so emotionally distant he hasn't even noticed his wife's very obvious pregnancy. The relationship between Timmy and Fido humorously progresses from a kid with a new toy, to a boy with a new (sometimes troublesome) pet, and ultimately to a son with a new father figure.

However, like the great zombie films before it, *Fido* is also packed with observations and comments on the world its audience lives in, many of which are humorous in their own right. There are the obvious metaphors about zombies (second-class citizens, the power of conformity) but, like an iceberg, 90 percent of the substance is below the surface. At its heart, *Fido* is a zombie movie for the "war on terror" world set in the days of McCarthyism.

At first glance, the world ZomCon has created is a wonderful one. The town of Willard is an idyllic '50s landscape that combines all the best elements of *Mayberry*, *Mayfield*, and *Hill Valley*. The "wild" zombies are kept away from the town and out of sight by sturdy fences, and vans patrol the streets, ready to grab up any rogue undead that might develop...or anyone who might hide such creatures for misguided reasons based on previous relationships.

However, in their desperate attempts to either prepare for, fight, or avoid the undead threat, the people of Willard (and the world) have become the enemy they hate. Beneath the shine of chrome and primary colors, Timmy's hometown is a remarkably bleak place populated by nervous, paranoid people who are encouraged by ZomCon to stay emotionally distant, trust no one, and be prepared to kill their loved ones at a moment's notice. Nowhere is this more obvious than with Timmy's father, a man far more interested in going through the motions of a happy life than in actually having one. The irony, of course, is that Fido remembers far more about being human than Bill Robinson has ever learned. The zombie reminds his adopted family about what it really means to be alive and the real way they're different (well, one of the important ways) from the undead, flesh-eating ghoul that dwell outside their town's borders.

A zombie movie for the rest of us, *Fido* gets across its message of "us vs. them" with an ongoing dosage of solid, character-driven laughs that continue as the writers show us how dead the humans are and how alive the undead can be. In fact, the dose is so steady and even, it's hard to be sure where in the movie the title character stops being one of them, and simply becomes one of us.

### Roadside Attractions

Rated R; 91 min.

Peter Clines has had a lifelong love affair with the movies. He grew up in New England, where he studied English literature and education, and now lives and writes somewhere in Southern California. If anyone knows exactly where, he would appreciate a few hints.