

YOU CAN'T GET AWAY from zombies these days, as vessels both of blood and pus and social and political satire. *Shaun of the Dead*, *Land of the Dead*, Showtime's *Homecoming*, *28 Days Later*, *28 Weeks Later*: You say, Enough zombies already? No, please, make room for *Fido*. A shotgun wedding of George Romero and SCTV, it's madly funny—a treat for moviegoers who don't mind gnawed-off limbs with their high jinks. The title character (played by the marvelous Scottish actor and comedian Billy Connolly) is a domesticated zombie who becomes a pet to a boy named Timmy (K'Sun Ray)—not incidentally the name of the kid in *Lassie*. This *Lassie* walks on two legs, makes goo-goo eyes at Mom, and, when his "containment" collar malfunctions, crunches into human flesh. But he has a sweet soul.

Fido takes place after a bloody conflict between the living and the undead—the latter brought under control by a military-industrial outfit that now calls the shots. Civil liberties be damned. Most suburbanites seem pleased with the arrangement, though. The collared (and, hence, neutered) zombies make fine groundskeepers. The serene Mr. Theopolis (Tim Blake Nelson) has a tall miniskirted number named Tammy (Sonja Bennett) who might have other chores. Timmy's mom

(Carrie-Anne Moss) needs to keep up with the Joneses and get a zombie, too, despite the squeamishness of her husband (Dylan Baker), who has never gotten over having to blow away his own father. (The elderly, who can at any moment drop undead, are suspect even in good health.)

Fido is set in a retro society reminiscent of the fifties—which is a bit of a drag, since the Fiestaware palette is heavy-handed and the decade's archetypes have, in terms of satire, been picked clean. But Andrew Currie, the director and co-writer (with Robert Chomiak), loves his characters too much to score easy points. Even the pipe-smoking zombie-war hero and quintessential fifties patriarch is full of surprises—in part because he's played by Henry Czerny, who understands that satire must never preclude spirit. Who knew Carrie-Anne Moss was so poised a comedienne? Even Julianne Moore would be in awe of the way she balances stylization and sexual longing. Dylan Baker has never been so funny and poignant. K'Sun Ray is a

find—as cute as a Culkin but with depths.

Billy Connolly appeared at the screening of *Fido* I attended—organized by the comic-book/gore store Forbidden Planet—and it deepened my admiration. Watching him extemporize brilliantly, with his long white hair and beard, I couldn't believe he'd have the guts to play a role in which he's mute and clean-shaven, let alone that he'd give a performance that conjures up Boris Karloff and Stan Laurel simultaneously. Although his skin is purplish and mottled, his features remain naked, and his eyes convey the sadness of someone caught between two worlds, unable to enter either. The bit of hubba-hubba that creeps in when he's around Moss gives us hope, though. The flesh is never that weak.

BACKSTORY

For Billy Connolly, the Scottish comedian and actor known for his verbose and at times vulgar stand-up routines, playing a **verbally challenged zombie** was a departure from his normal roles. Connolly told the *Calgary Herald*, "This was one of the hardest acting jobs I've ever done. I'm not being facetious. It was hard because I'm so used to words—they come in very handy. Especially when you want something. But I have to say, **years as a drunk** did help me access the nonverbal part of my brain." Connolly was actually the second choice for the role of Fido; Peter Stormare had to drop out after landing a recurring part on *Prison Break*.



IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE anyone could watch the devastating documentary *Unborn in the USA* without wanting, at some point, to run screaming from the theater. It began as a thesis project by two students at Rice University,