

Indie Horror Films

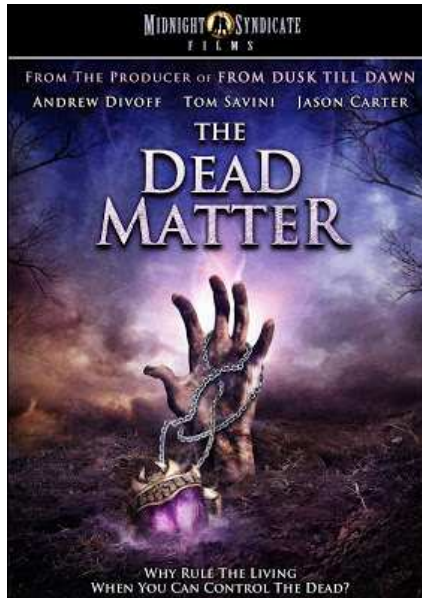
All genres of suspense, terror, and horror will be reviewed by Richard Gary. His address to send preview copies supplied upon request to rbf55@msn.com.

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DVD Review: The Dead Matter

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The Dead Matter

Directed by Edward Douglas

Midnight Syndicate / Precinct 13 Entertainment

89 minutes, 2010 / 2012

TheDeadMatter.com

MidnightSyndicate.com

MVDvisual.com

A modern vampire story with no werewolves? Wow, I am unsarcastically impressed. At least there are zombies. But I get ahead of myself, sorta. The whole film has a really good look, for the \$2 mill budget, reminding me of quality fantasy television shows like *Supernatural* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Despite whatever problems I found with the film, it's an enjoyable viewing exercise, and worth the rent.

The film opens in a small town in Germany with a bunch of zombies stumbling along in the thrall of a vampire, rather than wanting to eat some wet bits. Well, at least they have the mandatory gray shade and blood/gore attached to their faces.

We momentarily meet the main vampire of the story, Vellich, played by Andrew Divoff, who was also in the film *Wishmaster* (1997) and on television's *Lost*. He tends to overact, but it's good. The odd thing is he wears this long, flowing white wig that is so obvious, and makes no sense whatsoever, and it nothing less than distracting. The director says during the commentary that it is very much along the lines of Hammer Films, so I'll give him that.

What Vellich and the zombies are in search of is a scarab-shaped amulet, being protected by the bearded lan (Jason Carter, of *Babylon 5*) and the muscular Mark (Brian van Camp). They escape and take the necklace to a "mystical nexus," or as we know it... wait for it... Ohio.

It's there that the amulet gets hidden before a big fight, and is found by two

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Andrew Divoff on the right

couples. More about them later. Meanwhile, Vellich runs into a new order of vampires in the Buckeye State, who are under the wing of Sebed (make-up and effects wizard / actor / legend Tom Savini). He envisions an almost mafia-like vampire society with himself as Don, while Vellich is old world / old school. And we all can guess who is going to come on top by the end.

Now, does any of this sound familiar? There are a whole lot of themes from other films here, and I'm not saying this in a negative way, exactly, I'm just

noticing the trend. For example, taking the trinket to somewhere else to destroy is right out of *Lord of the Rings* (2001), modern vs. old zombie clan(s) could be *Blade* (1998), *Underworld* (2003), perhaps *Twilight* (2008). During a séance featuring the aforementioned couples, amorphous shapes come out of the amulet and swirl around and through the participants, straight out of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

But, let's get back to the aforementioned foursome. Y'got your nerdy scientist dude, Frank, played (sorta) by Christopher Robichaud. This is his only credit. He plays the role like someone in a cheap '50s horror film. Actually, he reminded me of the main character of the classic *Equinox* (1970). His clothes look like that as well (checked yellow-tan shirts, and the such; at least they didn't give him glasses). The director and producers are solidly behind Christopher, so maybe it's me? Frank works for a corporation making a diet product.

Next up is his newish girlfriend, Jill, portrayed well by CB Spencer. Where Frank is logical and scientific, she's more Wiccan closer to the supernatural. She's pretty solid in the role.

The hero (does anyone still say heroine) is Gretchen, played by the amazingly cute Sean Serino. Killer smile, dude. Gretchen is in pursuit in finding a way to contact her brother, who died in a car accident while she was the driver. Nearly a Candide figure (look it up), she tends to look at the positive side and be cheerful, even when there's a zombie at the door and vampire in pursuit.

Her boyfriend is Mike, acted by Tom Nagel. Mike may be the logical one who help keep it real for Gretchen, but he comes across as just a bit of a dick (sort of like the husband on that show *The Medium*). Truth is, the part is seriously underdeveloped, and you can tell that Nagel is a better actor than as the role is written.

That may be the biggest problem with the film to me – which is actually quite enjoyable, despite all the flaws I've mentioned – in that with the exception of Gretchen, there really is little context or character development.

I found it amusing that one of the better characters is a nearly voiceless zombie under Gretchen's control. Brian van Camp does a splendid job keeping us interested in Mark, even though all he does basically is stare into space while eating, drinking, and other things asked by Gretch, or whoever else touches the purple-glowing amulet.



Sean Serino



Mortem-Americans.

While not a comedy, there are definitely some fine comic moments. One is Gretchen putting one of those car pine-shaped odor eaters around the zombie's neck before an amusing montage as she takes Mark for ice cream (relevant to a memory of her brother) and to a merry-go-round. Another is the following dialog (which is included on the IMBD page, so I don't feel like I'm giving anything away):
Jill: A zombie?
Frank: They prefer to be called Post-

While the story is occasionally incoherent (why does the vampire want the amulet exactly? Okay, it controls the dead, including vampires (who are dead), fingernails and hair, apparently, but why he wants that control is never really explained. And why do the new vampires want to get their cohorts addicted to a drug? Yes, there is a positive side effect explained in the film, but not enough to make

them drooling junkies shooting up.

There is a decent if not abundant amount of gore, such as a ripped off head and a yank-removed jaw. There are also some fun surprise moments, especially towards the end that alone make this worth the view.

There are a few extras that are noteworthy including a gag reel and theatrical trailer. There are also a bunch of music videos that are okay in the spooky or death metal way. The longest is a feature-length documentary called "Maximum Dead Matter" in which the screen is broken up into four simultaneous sections. The top left is the film running, and the other three are full of interviews, original art, behind the scene shootings, and make-up. It is the most interesting when they involve the actual scene that's running at the moment. It gets tiresome at times, but I watched the whole thing and wasn't sorry.

The best extra is the commentary track with the director, producer and co-writer. Even though it was hard at times to tell who was talking (i.e., three dudes), they explained some of the questions I had, and didn't veer much from the shoot, which is a lot more interesting to me than joking around (even though they obviously are having fun doing it).

So, yes, I was a bit hard on the film, but now having sat through it three times (original and two extras modes), I still found it enjoyable enough to say it's worth the Saturday night viewing with the buds.

Posted by **Robert Barry Francos** at 1:03 PM

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