Director Géla Babluani’s French thriller 13 TZAMETI was about as intense as films get—an urgent black-and-white nightmare about a secret club where the rich bet on their Russian-roulette gambling opponents. It wasn’t the sort of film that screamed “U.S. remake,” but here it is, on no-frills DVD and Blu-ray from Anchor Bay in the U.S. (following very limited theatrical play) and Canadian discs courtesy of VVS Films. And while not as relentlessly grim as the first incarnation, this 13 (also directed by Babluani) still has its merits.

The big boon, of course, is the premise itself. Sam Riley (so good as Ian Curtis in Anton Corbijn’s brilliant Joy Division film CONTROL) stars as the gaunt Vince, a working-class lad whose ailing father’s hospital bills are piling up. In dire need of scratch, Vince eavesdrops on a dying junkie’s conversation about a contest where he stands to make a fortune and, upon discovering the man dead, steals an envelope containing the details. Assuming the man’s identity, Vince follows a labyrinthine series of instructions before ending up in an abattoir—a dungeon where broken, desperate men are given partially loaded revolvers, numbered and, upon a signal, cued to fire at the man in front of them. At the end of the “game,” after everyone else’s brains are blown out, there will be one man left standing, his prize an exorbitant amount of money.

The horror at the core of Vince’s predicament was disturbingly effective in the color-sapped

original, and surprisingly, even with shadows filled in, it’s almost as gripping here. Exploiting man’s innate fear of knowing the moment of his own death, the film keeps the tension ratcheting to the point of nausea. Beyond Riley’s effective work, 13 hosts more beloved macho talent than THE EXPENDABLES, with that film’s Mickey Rourke again donning a cowboy hat and playing a mumbling outlaw. As always, Rourke is magnetic and effortlessly watchable, but in an apparent attempt to get the most out of his post-THE WRESTLER star power, Babluani and co-scripter Gregory Pruss decided to pointlessly pad out his backstory, which is unwelcome and bogs down the pace.

Jason Statham does the gruff Statham thing as his brother’s manager, and he’s fine, if somewhat miscast; the incredible Ray Winstone steals the show as said sibling, a mentally ill, reckless character who is as loathsome as he is tragic; and professional weirdo Michael Shannon chews through the industrial scenery as the bug-eyed, barking MC of the event, lending his typically sinister aura to a part that is essentially a flashy throwaway. Ben Gazzara and TRUE BLOOD/STRAW DOGS heartthrob Alexander Skarsgård also show up, as if the film needed any more manly star power.

Babluani directs with style and verve, clearly enjoying refashioning his original nightmare as a full-blooded, pricey color picture. If anything, the movie is only really let down by its blippy electronic score, one that compromises the raw terror of the gun battles and literally never stops clattering in the background. Otherwise, 13 is a fascinating companion to its source, and as a stand-alone thriller, it definitely provides the requisite thrills, blood and square-jawed testosterone that fans of these sort of thrillers love. Not a perfect film by any stretch, but braver and better than most pricier Hollywood fare, and totally undeserving of its virtual direct-to-video status.