Following the crowd-pleasing JUAN OF THE DEAD (my review here) in the double bill presented by the Toronto After Dark Summer Screenings was THE PACT. With a confident hand on the wheel, director Nicholas McCarthy weaves together a complex and pleasingly modern take on the classic haunted house tale. Like any older house on the market, there are problems – the wiring doesn't always connect, one burner is always out on the stove and someone's tipsy uncle did the uneven tile in the bathroom—but despite the minor flaws the foundation is solid.

Annie (Caity Lotz) must reluctantly return to her childhood home and help her recovering addict sister Nicole (Agnes Bruckner) settle the family affairs in the wake of the death of their abusive mother. When Nicole disappears, leaving her young daughter Eva (Dakota Bright) it is up to Annie and police detective Creek (Casper Van Dien) to unravel the mysteries of the house and a family history even darker than Annie could imagine.

The haunted house works so well because a house is such a good metaphor. It's a place of safety, of refuge for us, but also a place of secrets. We as people tend to take off the various masks we wear outside when we get home. We shed the social skin and feel like we can settle into who we really are. For most, this is liberating and healthy, but for some the obscurity, the safety from the prying eyes of our peers unleashes a beast. We can be ourselves when we feel safe from judgment but we can also give ourselves over to our worst impulses. The bright sunroom might look appealing, but the basement is where we hide the ugly things we don't want the world to know.

So it is with THE PACT. The house is a lair of secrets that begins with the secrets of the abuse the sisters endured at the hands of their mother, to the secrets of a mysterious presence and the disappearance of Nicole. The search for truth leads right to the basement of course, but getting there is a complex and interesting trip that mostly works, but sometimes doesn't.

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