

Kathryn Newton: Normal Teen, "PARANORMAL ACTIVITY"

Written by Trevor Parker

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Get ready to feel old: When asked what's next on her slate following a star turn as terrified teen Alex in *PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 4* (out on DVD/Blu-ray this Tuesday), effervescent young actress Kathryn Newton replies, "I'm doing my high school academic decathlon tomorrow." Although already an experienced film and television actress, Ms. Newton's tender age is uncommon; especially with the horror genre's often shameless propensity for stuffing much older actors into teenage roles. It's Newton's authenticity and fresh appeal that adds spark to a franchise on its fourth installment and entices audiences to ride once again through the reliable *PARANORMAL* funhouse.

Newton says that she adapted easily to the verité camera style and entirely-improvised dialogue so central to *PARANORMAL*'s effectiveness. "The hardest part about filming the movie was that I didn't get to change the color of my nail polish for six months," she jokes. "Alex is just like any other teenager, except she's a little bit cooler than I am, I've got to say! It was all improv, so a lot of it just came from me, just came naturally. It was easy to just be yourself—although I don't get chased by demons on a daily basis like Alex, thank goodness! Every take we did was something different. We never said the same things over again, especially in scenes with Matt Schiveley (who plays Ben). We would either do really minimal takes, or if it was a funny scene, we'd do ten takes because every time we did it, it got funnier. So it was just about finding the right temperature and what we all really liked about the scene. It's just like when you're having a conversation with somebody; when you get to the best part you want to keep talking about that part, so we just did it until we got the best thing possible."

Newton also got the opportunity to display some more technical talents during the shoot. "Whenever I got to go behind the camera, I was actually filming it," she says. "I got to do the cinematography." She was also thrilled to receive an unexpected third credit on the film—as a songwriter? "The scene where I'm playing guitar, [Directors Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman] called the song 'Robbie's Playhouse' (Robbie being the creepy moppet next-door that terrorizes Alex) and actually gave me credit in the film. I was laughing really hard when I saw that."

Having two directors on a feature film is unusual, but Newton says the partnership between Joost and Schulman was friction-free. "Henry and Ariel, they're amazing. They're

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mega-positrons," she says. "Having two directors helped a lot. They're best friends, they'd [bounce] ideas around." The directors would also team up in efforts to startle some lively reactions out of their cast. "Sometimes they'd try and make me jump," Newton remembers. "They had a big bass drum on set that they would never tell anyone that they were going to use, and that would get me. Every time that I'd have to do a scare, I would be really funny because there'd be someone in the room or the closet that I was going to walk into. With those, you have to just commit and go for it because you don't want to have to redo the scene thirty-two times and keep screaming."



It goes without saying that movies of PARANORMAL 4's nature are best enjoyed in collaboration with an eager, non-ironic horror movie crowd, when that sublime state of mass audience hysteria is reached. Newton, who would eagerly await prior PARANORMAL entries as a fan before being cast in part 4, agrees: "That was the coolest part about working on such an established franchise was the amazing fanbase. When I did the first screening with all the fans—it was the 'Want It' screening (an innovative Facebook campaign in which online votes determined which cities would host preview screenings), I didn't know that people were so loyal and so excited about it. That made it so much better. Nothing can compare to seeing it with fans. Every scare, they were so pumped! They were screaming at the screen and throwing popcorn, laughing, crying... That was a great experience."

There does happen to be one benefit in watching the film at home on DVD, and that will be the debut of "The Recovered Files" as an extra feature; something that Newton promises will add more tantalizing strands to the web of over-arching mythology that the PARANORMAL series as a whole has woven. "I just watched The Recovered Files and I was freaking out; I was scared. The Recovered Files is basically our favorite stuff that didn't make it into the movie, but there's so much of the storyline that's revealed that if you're really into what's going to happen (with the franchise), you need to watch it. There are clues and new hints. You have to see it, because I don't want to spoil them!"