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'Paranormal Activity 4' Review

1 week ago by [Ben Kendrick](#)

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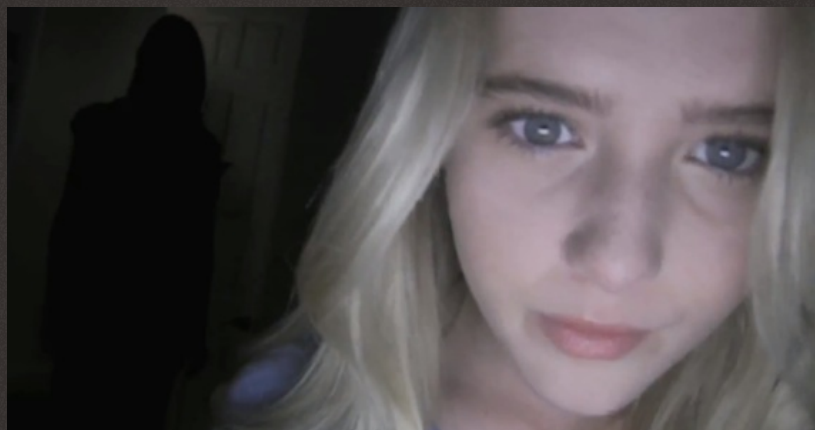
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Back in 2009, Screen Rant's Kofi Outlaw caught a preview showing of the indie-produced found-footage film **Paranormal Activity** – during director Oren Peli's campaign to have viewers "demand" film screenings in their area. Positive word of mouth eventually carried the film into a wide release and on to \$193 million dollars (from a \$15,000 budget). Since that time, the *Paranormal Activity* sequels have become standard Halloween season programming at the box office and with low-cost productions and massive ticket revenue, the films now rank as some of the most profitable movies ever made.

Now the producers are back with **Paranormal Activity 4**, re-teaming with their **Paranormal Activity 3** directors, Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman (*Catfish*). Despite some memorable scares, *Paranormal Activity 3* was criticized for the way it handled the larger (albeit thin) franchise "story." Can Joost and Schulman find a better balance this round – a film that delivers both creative scares and advances the *Paranormal Activity* mythsos?

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There's no doubt that the filmmakers faced a tough challenge, given the series' thin premise but nearly every element of the franchise has been watered down in part 4. The movie delivers a number of tense moments but only a few of them pay off with memorable scares. Additionally, the story, which takes place years after the events of *Paranormal Activity 1* and *2*, further muddles the larger franchise mythsos (creating significantly more questions than answers) and, like plenty of found footage films before it, fails to deliver a fulfilling conclusion. Some viewers will defend the film for being satisfyingly spooky but, compared to the prior entries, *Paranormal Activity 4* is by far the least compelling.

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Kathryn Newton as Alex in 'Paranormal Activity 4'

Ever since the original *Paranormal Activity*, the overarching series storyline has primarily been exploring events that led-up to the first film, jumping around in time, but number 4 finally moves the larger plot forward. Five years after Katie ruthlessly killed her boyfriend, sister, and brother-in-law as well as kidnapped her nephew, the demon-possessed woman has stopped running from the law and settled in suburban, Henderson, NV. However, despite headlining the cast, Katie is little more than a supporting character and the story once again centers on a clueless victim, Alex (Kathryn Newton), who attempts to make sense of spooky incidents in her home. Alex is a typical teenage girl, Skyping with her boyfriend Ben (Matt Shively) and playing table tennis on Xbox 360 Kinect – ignorant to the fact her new neighbors are a demon-possessed murderer and a troubled child. As the unexplained and dangerous happenings escalate, Alex comes face to face with the horrors of *Paranormal Activity*.

As a production concept, *Paranormal Activity 4* has a lot of smart components: Alex is a welcome change of pace from the camera-obsessed young adult husbands/boyfriends in prior entries and the dynamic between the character and her "boyfriend" offer a good mix of lighthearted scenes to offset all the creepy ones. In addition, an explanation for all the cameras is smart enough; though, for viewers who have trouble suspending disbelief, the film still presents plenty of "why would you film that?" moments.

Each camera, like in parts 1-3, is built with specific production "tricks" in mind (ex. the living room is enhanced by Microsoft Kinect's infrared laser grid). Unfortunately, none of them are nearly as entertaining as the setups that came before. For the most part, the Kinect sequences (which are essentially this installment's "fan cam") are a missed opportunity and, looking at the way the gimmick is used throughout the film, offers little payoff for the amount of time spent squinting through night vision shots. It's a problem that leaks into the larger film experience – as *Paranormal Activity 4* is the most meandering entry in the franchise. The pacing is stunted, especially in the final act, and the ratio of time spent in tense setups versus onscreen paranormal hijinks has noticeably lessened – resulting in scenes that are less rewarding and ultimately deliver fewer memorable payoffs.



Alex and Robbie (Brady Allen) in 'Paranormal Activity 4'

Mythology buffs who have been hoping for a competent extension of the *Paranormal Activity* series story will be equally underwhelmed. As mentioned, the film finally advances the larger narrative five years into the future but,

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surprisingly, creates more franchise plot holes than it addresses as well as significantly convolutes the "Toby" demon lore all while riffing on *Paranormal Activity 3* plot points – without adding anything fresh to the mix. Avoiding specific spoilers, it's fair to say that *Paranormal Activity 4* entirely side-steps primary questions that audiences have been asking for years, following the events of *Paranormal Activity 1*, *2*, and *3*, in service of predictable twists and a bungled "bigger is scarier" approach in the last act.

In addition to normal screenings, *Paranormal Activity 4* is playing in IMAX certified theaters but there's absolutely no benefit in paying the premium charge. The confined in-house found footage format isn't improved by a larger screen or louder sound and it's hard to find any reason for Paramount's choice to release in IMAX – aside from inflating ticket prices for a high profile film.

Whether you attend the *Paranormal Activity* movies for the scares or the story, part 4 is a step down for both audiences. The plot raises plenty of questions that fans will debate in the coming weeks but only because the film is extremely vague on what audiences are actually seeing minute to minute – not because Joost and Schulman create fresh directions or interesting mysteries in this installment (they don't). That said, creative setups have long-been the franchise linchpin; unfortunately, the spooky setups aren't particularly original this round either, rehashing familiar found footage ideas with minor twists that rarely deliver big scares. There's little doubt we'll see a *Paranormal Activity 5* but, given the measly \$14.15 million that has been spent to produce four entries in the \$576 million (and counting) global franchise, it's time for Paramount to reinvest some of that money in filmmakers who can deliver a better return on audience investment – i.e. a more satisfying set of scary movie experiences.

Note: If you do go, stay after the credits and then [read this article](#).

If you're still on the fence about *Paranormal Activity 4*, check out the trailer below as well as our [Paranormal Activity Story Explained in 3 Minutes video](#):



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What did you think of 'Paranormal Activity 4'?

- ☐ 5 stars
- ☐ 4 stars
- ☐ 3 stars
- ☐ 2 stars
- ☐ 1 star

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Let us know what you thought of the film in the comment section below. If you've seen the movie and want to discuss details about the film without worrying about spoiling it for those who haven't seen it, please head over to our [Paranormal Activity 4 Spoilers Discussion](#).

For an in-depth discussion of the film by the Screen Rant editors check out our [Paranormal Activity 4 episode](#) of the [SR Underground podcast](#).

Follow me on Twitter @benkendrick for future reviews, as well as movie, TV, and gaming news.

Paranormal Activity 4 is Rated R for language and some violence/terror. Now playing in theaters.

Our Rating:



2 out of 5



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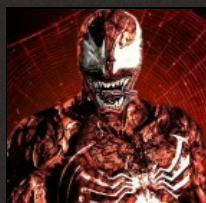


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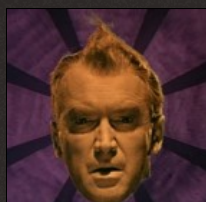
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abcdefg 1 week ago

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Andrew 1 week ago

This movie made no sense at all. Ok so if hunter wasn't "ready" yet for whatever the cult wanted to do to him, why did Katie kill his family and obduct him in PA2? Then put him up for adoption for 5 years? Why? Why not just wait another 5 years then possess Katie and obduct Hunter?

The whole adoption thing is stupid.

Reply



prithzilla 6 days ago

totally agreed! it was stupid...

Reply



tasouli 1 week ago

If we are comparing this movie to the other movies in the franchise, then it really wasn't that bad. Yea, we have seen this stuff before and the scares were not as good as the first but the movie still had the same feel for me as the others.

Problem here is that people are tired of the suspenseful build up with little pay off. Here we had that.

How they could have surprised audiences is if when the knife flew up in the kitchen, when the wife was dicing, if it then came down on her and cut her, that would have been dramatic. These movies have not incorporated any type of good kill.

Having a few sick kills would have been a way to change and reinvent the franchise, as opposed to snapping someone's neck and flinging people up and down rooms.

Will there be a 5th, undoubtedly. But with the fifth I think that the audience at this point is growing tiresome and would like to have a solid conclusion with a clearer explanation of the events.

Reply



Dean Eaketts 1 week ago

To compare this movie with the other 3 Paranormal Activity movies, I was quite good at some bits and poor at others, One thing is that the other movies had more scary sceens in it and the only scare screens in number 4 is at the end and the movie all it had was jumps.

So i give it out of 10 2/10.

Reply



Corey 6 days ago

Paranormal Activity 3 was absolute garbage. So bad that I actually wanted to walk out. A bunch of witches? Really? After reading here that they are still going with the witch route I have no interest in it. I mean what the Hell is scary about witches? The idiots that did part 3 should have been fired. Should have kept it a ghost story.

Reply



Spencer 6 days ago

Honestly, as a fan of the series, I enjoyed this film immensely. But when it comes to the how 'scary' it is, the videos Jacob Degloshi has posted so far are already 10x more terrifying than anything in PA4.

Reply



sylvia 5 days ago

The movie was not worth a penny to watch it. Spend the money somewhere else. Stupid movie. Stupid ending.

Reply



chris sheng 3 days ago

if you like pa4, then check out, <http://www.youtube.com/uscreamtv>

Reply



Anirudh 2 days ago

Can't wait to watch this movie!!

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