Built on a history of neglect and family secrets, the PARANORMAL ACTIVITY franchise has, until now and however unintentionally, managed to question why exactly we move to the suburbs. Peace, and quiet and family and freedom? The freedom from worry, from our childhood scars, from neurotically checking on the kids and from believing they might be getting into trouble when out of sight. Of course, kids get into trouble everywhere and in this series, they do it with demons.

Thus, PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 4's shift to a new brood and its subsequent conceit of how we keep an eye on them at first feels refreshed, until refreshment gives way to laziness and missed opportunity. Continuing the disappearance of Katie and baby Hunter, PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 4 plants itself in 2011 as Alex, her young brother Wyatt and their parents welcome the creepy kid across the street whose mom takes ill. Of course, creepy kid Robbie's mom is Katie and it seems they've both got an agenda.

Alex (Kathryn Newton) is constantly accompanied, physically or via iChat, by her pseudo-boyfriend Ben (Matt Shively), and together they aren't the grating teen twosome you'd expect. Directors Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman previously managed to turn the third entry into the best of the series (and make me uncomfortable on a whole other level outside of funhouse ghosts), through fine scares and knowing how to work with actors. Much like the family in that entry, Alex and Ben are funny, spontaneous and inquisitive throughout. It's too bad they find themselves in a sequel that shares none of these traits.

Joost and Schulman are playing in the same sandbox, with the same toys. And while their commitment to the series' humble beginnings as a low-key spookshow is admirable, this time it feels entirely too well worn. Even Robbie, whose menacing stare and *heinous* pants could've elevated him to legendary evil kid shitheaded-ness, finds his arc cut short. Another kid neglected in the PARANORMAL universe.

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