

IN ANTICIPATION OF PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 3,
RUE MORGUE ASKS REAL-LIFE PARANORMAL INVESTIGATORS
TO WEIGH IN ON THE SERIES AND ITS POPULARITY

SUPERNATURAL REALITY

BY JENNIFER M. WOOD

WHEN IT COMES TO MATTERS OF THE PRETERNATURAL KIND, NUMBERS CAN BE A TRICKY THING. While recent polls conducted by the Associated Press, Ipsos and Gallup have concluded that only about one-third of Americans believe in the existence of ghosts, you can't seem to change the channel without stumbling upon a haunting-related series, special or ad for a new movie. Nor has this skepticism toward the spectral prevented the *Paranormal Activity* films from becoming one of Hollywood's most reliably profitable franchises (the initial entry, estimated to have cost just \$15,000 to make, recorded box office receipts of \$183 million worldwide).

Utilizing *The Blair Witch Project* method for terrifying an audience – the less you see of the ghoul, the better – the *Paranormal Activity* franchise has earned its reputation as a box-office behemoth by building to its scare-'em-up moments with long stretches of conversation, research and exposition. For experts in the paranormal field, it's a befitting tactic, as much of their investigation time is spent looking at, well, nothing.

"It can be very tedious and drawn out," admits Barnaby Mortensen, lead investigator/technical specialist for the Northeast Paranormal Investigations Society. "It can sometimes take weeks and multiple visits to a location to generate results that you can completely classify as 'unexplained.' Obviously this can't be depicted on TV or in a theatre – who has the time to watch that?"

As such, the producers of paranormal vehicles need to employ a good dose of creative license when seeking to up the suspense factor. While the *Paranormal Activity* team is keeping mum on details of the third film, set to be released on October 21, the early trailer shows the movie as a prequel – intercutting the scariest moments from the first two films with video footage of eternally stalked sisters Katie and Kristi as children, presumably when the demon who has been haunting them makes its first appearance.

"During years of paranormal investigating I have seen many very, very strange, inexplicable things," says JV Johnson, publisher and editor of *TAPS ParaMagazine*, the official publication of The Atlantic Paranormal Society, which is headed up by *Ghost Hunters* stars Jason Hawes and Grant Wilson. "While the depictions in *Paranormal Activity* are extreme, they are not beyond what has either been witnessed or recounted within the paranormal community."

Ryan Buell, producer/star of *Paranormal State* and *American Ghost Hunter*, and founder of the Paranormal Research Society, agrees.

"As outrageous and over-the-top *Paranormal Activity* is at times, they did get a few things right. Particularly the denial by the family, which is often the male of the

house. They try to confront the activity in their own ways, try to hide it, ignore it, and all that does is make the activity worse. It's like a bully or an abusive spouse. If you play submissive all the time, they're going to continue to push and push and push until it seems there's no turning back. People absolutely do claim to suffer from demonic possession."

So if the situations in the films aren't entirely unheard of, what about the techniques employed to quiet the spirits, such as Ouija boards and incense-burning?

"Many paranormal experts claim that Ouija boards can generate or encourage destructive or malicious activity from the spirit world," says Johnson. "While the evidence is a little thin, common advice from our profession is to leave the Ouija board in the box."

Mortensen adds: "I've heard many, many stories about the success of protection prayers and incense to help rid paranormal disturbance. To this day I don't know if the success is because of the use of these things, or if it's the simple act of making it clear that you don't want the

presence of the activity in your home any longer. There are many psychics and mediums who feel strongly [that] a spirit associated with paranormal disturbance can't be 'whisked away' unless it wants to leave."

Though the numbers say that we are still – for the most part – a society of non-believers, Johnson says that reports of paranormal activity have been rising significantly for nearly a decade. But it's not a spike in real-life spirit activity that's fuelling the popularity of *vérité*-style supernatural movies such as *Paranormal Activity*. Rather, blame your television, he says.

"It is clear that the introduction of and the acceptance of paranormal investigating – particularly in the form of paranormal reality television shows such as *Ghost Hunters* – has signalled the 'all-clear' when it comes to discussing paranormal topics. Previously, these discussions were whispered in the back corner of the room, and now they have become part of dinner conversation."

Buell goes one further, noting that people aren't just talking about it, they're seeking out investigators like himself. "It seems now a lot of people who would normally try to shrug it off or ignore the phenomenon are now wondering, 'What if it's worse? What if it's going to escalate like in *Paranormal Activity* and suddenly my daughter becomes possessed?' So they call us. ... I think *Paranormal Activity* certainly makes for good entertainment and for a good scare – heck, I jumped a few times – but trust me when I say that the truth is a *lot* scarier than any of the films." 🧛



Spooked Sisters: A still from *Paranormal Activity 3*'s home video footage of young Katie (left) and Kristi Featherston.