

NextGen.

Gabriel Bateman

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They say that every generation has its icons- whether it be movies, songs, actors, actresses, or entire film franchises. In 1988, the world met Chuckie, a Generation X icon, in the first *Child's Play* movie- a movie that remains one of history's most iconic horror franchises. Over 30 years later, Chuckie has been revived- and Generation Z has a new icon.

At just 14 years-old, Gabriel Bateman, the star of the new *Child's Play* remake, has already established himself as one of Hollywood's leading young men and he's just getting started. Bateman is every bit the young teen idol with his boy band-esque hair and charming good looks. Yet once he begins speaking, it's clear that we are in the presence of an artist who's maturity belies his age. Despite standing just over five feet tall, Bateman manages to sound both confident even as he's describing summer break plans.

With three other films currently underway in addition to *Child's Play*, it's a wonder he has time to play at all, and when he's not on set, he's spending time with his close-knit family. For Bateman, hanging out with family can likely seem like a full-time job in itself as Bateman has eight older siblings, several of whom have also had success in commercial, television, and film. He has also worked with his sister Talitha Bateman (known for starring in *Annabelle: Creation*) in the historical drama *Robert The Bruce*.

"She would try to give me a lot of different notes and I'd give her notes," he says of being on set with Talitha. "Obviously because we're siblings, there was a kind of sibling rivalry, so there was a little bit of bickering on set sometimes, but overall it was really fun."

When asked about what it was like to grow up with seven other siblings in addition to Tabitha, Bateman speaks fondly of "the chaos" as he puts it, noting, "there was always someone to talk to, to hang out with, especially when you're mad at one of your other siblings," laughing before adding, "I think we're all really close, which might be weird since there's so many differences with everyone, but we're all very close overall."

Despite coming from a large family, Bateman was brilliantly cast in *Child's Play* as only child Andy, a young boy living with his down-on-her-luck single mom, played by Aubrey Plaza. This contemporary re-imagining of the 1988 horror classic, released to favorable reviews and it remained true to the ethos of the franchise. For Bateman, this meant that he had a twofold challenge: to live up to the iconic role of Andy while simultaneously holding audiences' attention for 88 minutes.

To prepare, Bateman watched the first two *Child's Play* movies, films that were made over a decade before his birth. "I really enjoyed them," he says of the films, which were released in 1988 and 1990, respectively. "I can definitely see why they have such a big fan base, but also a cult following at the same time," he notes.

Yet Bateman showcases his talent and versatility as he describes how he crafted the "new" Andy. "I would probably [say] that first of all, it's a reimagining of an extremely iconic character, but it's different

enough from the original that you can't really compare the films. There's so much range in the film. I really enjoyed just how much they let me do, how many different emotions and situations they let me portray rather than just being kind of a one track character," he says, before describing what he feels are the major differences between the old and new films.

"This time, Chucky is built with AI [artificial intelligence] and not possessed, but also, the other thing is that there's more of an emotional connection between Andy and Chucky in this one. Andy really cares for Chucky, which brings an interesting dynamic to it in a lot of situations. There's a lot of laughs, a lot of tears, a lot of screams, and so it's very character-driven. You get attached to every character."

For Bateman, playing a wide range of characters is nothing new. From appearing in dozens of international commercials and on major television shows including *Stalker*, *Your Family or Mine*, *Wicked City*, *American Gothic*, *Outcast*, and most recently, *The Dangerous Book for Boys*, as well as at least a dozen major feature films before he's hit high-school, Bateman's already impressive resume speaks for itself.

Most notably, Bateman has truly established himself as the new face of young horror in a time during which the horror genre is being redefined. Like all trends, the horror genre has experienced cyclical growth. Just as 80's films relied on shock and awe and 90's/2000's films relied on special effects, today's horror films, are finding success due to their strong character development and plot development. Following his scene stealing, critically acclaimed performance in *Child's Play*, Bateman solidified his place as a fan favorite and playing a major contributing role to the franchise's ongoing success. Additionally, while the horror films of yesteryear were more likely to focus on the supernatural or hauntings, today's horror movies are more likely to incorporate, or be driven by, technology.

If Bateman's objective in *Child's Play* was, "bringing such an iconic character to a younger generations," he definitely brought the fresh and new, but he also got to work with one of his very own icons, Aubrey Plaza. "It was amazing honestly. She [Plaza] was so quirky and weird and awesome to hang out with that we really got along and clicked. It was awesome to be able to work with her. I've always been a big fan of hers. We're still friends to this day."

And speaking of friends? Another icon, Mark Hammil, serves as the iconic Chucky doll's voice, quoting the notorious original line of 'I will never leave you,' before promising to be Andy's 'new best friend.' There's even a video making the internet rounds where Hammil sings Bateman's praises, commenting on his natural talent.

While there is no word yet on whether this *Child's Play* will be getting a sequel, Bateman's summer schedule remains extremely full as he also has three other movies currently out coming and is set to begin work on another undisclosed film this Summer. Whether he ends up playing a serious, comedic, dark, or quirky role remains yet to be seen, one thing is for certain: this young icon is rapidly growing into one of Hollywood's next big names.

