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Kicking and charming his way to stardom

BY CAROLYN PEIRCE
[SUN REPORTER]

Ryan Pinkston's life is just like that of any 19-year-old's — except that on any given day, he may read a screenplay, stop by a few auditions or call up his buddy Ashton Kutcher.

A really good day might include kissing Carmen Electra.

Pinkston may not yet have achieved the fame of his friend Kutcher, but his face is instantly recognizable to anyone who has watched the hidden-camera hit *Punk'd*.

These days, the Columbia native is living in Los Angeles while searching for his next step toward stardom. His latest project is the lead role in the film *Full of It*, about a high schooler who lies his way to popularity and then must deal with the consequences when the lies start coming true.

The movie opens today, and Pinkston is in town to throw a red-carpet movie premiere at the AMC theater in Columbia. [Please see PINKSTON, 8C]



"Full of It" star Ryan Pinkston relaxes at his parents' home in Columbia.

C.T. ASSAF [SUN PHOTOGRAPHER]

FROM THE COVER

Pinkston is charming his way to stardom

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tomorrow for family and friends — and maybe a few celebrities. (But he's not saying who.)

"We could have done it in L.A., but I wanted to bring this to Maryland to give my family and friends that experience," says Pinkston, who's draped across a sofa in his parents' home. (The Columbia residence was featured on MTV's *Cribs* in May 2004.)

Long before Pinkston became an actor, he was high-kicking his way to recognition as a black belt karate champion. By the time he was 14, Pinkston and his adult partner were four-time world champions in team synchronized karate. "I was a wild kid, always flipping off couches and getting in trouble at school for beating people up," Pinkston says.

"My parents threw me into karate more as a discipline. It was my first love. I wish I could still compete, but it's too hard with acting now."

Still, those karate skills helped pave the way to his acting career. His father, graphic designer Mark Pinkston, entered his then-12-year-old son in Ed McMahon's *Next Big Star* contest. The youth's hip-hop karate performance won the competition and landed Pinkston on a *Jenny Jones Show* episode featuring talented kids.

"I looked at the camera and said, 'For anyone watching, I want to be an actor,'" Pinkston recalls.

Soon after, he was working with Kutcher on the first season of MTV's *Punk'd*. In the hit prank show, Pinkston, who at 19 still has the clean-cut freshness of an adolescent, charmed celebrities into speaking with him on the red carpet — then bombarded them with embarrassing questions.

He boldly asked actress Denise Richards how it felt to play a smart person, and disconcerted singer Tori Amos by calling her Tori Spelling.

"It was so much fun, to call it work makes me laugh," Pinkston says. "It was a great way to bring someone up here down to here. Everyone needs to be grounded once in awhile."

After *Punk'd*, Pinkston landed roles in Fox's *Quintuplets*, MGM's *Bad Santa* (he played the video-game shoplifter) and his personal favorite, *Spy Kids 3-D*. His acting dreams had come true, but Pinkston worried he was missing out on high school.

"My parents always told me I could stop and go back to school, but the only thing I really cared about was going to prom and graduation," Pinkston says. Nonetheless, he managed to juggle movie shoots with homework (filing assignments via e-mail) throughout his sophomore and junior years.

"When he came to me as a student, he was already involved with acting professionally," says Pamela Land, Pinkston's drama teacher from Howard County's River Hill High School. "It was a given that he was talented, but he didn't come in thinking he knew ev-

erything, he always wanted to learn more. ... He remained just Ryan first and foremost." He also never missed an assignment in her class.

In the end, Pinkston returned for his senior year — and was able to take his girlfriend, now a student at Frostburg State University, to the prom.

These days, Pinkston, whose older brother, Aaron, is a producer for MTV News, tries to stay grounded by visiting friends and family in Columbia as often as possible. "It's easy to get caught up in that life. You have to surround yourself with good people and have a strong support system. For me, that's my family. And you have to stay humble and know that at any second you could be nobody," he says.

"If I didn't have to live in L.A. I wouldn't, but I don't feel like I've made it yet. I think of it as a steppingstone to something bigger," he says.

Pinkston now is working on a comedy called *Parental Guidance Suggested* and reading as many scripts as he can. "I get to wake up every morning and do something I love," he says. That includes kissing Carmen Electra for a scene in *Full of It*.

It "was the worst day of work ever," Pinkston says.

"No — just kidding! It was awesome."

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