

## BAD BOYS

### Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly are immature, crude — and pretty funny in 'Step Brothers'

Originally published in *The Blade* on Friday, July 25, 2008

BY RYAN E. SMITH  
BLADE STAFF WRITER

I know a mother who made a deal with her two little kids about the use of potty language. To get it out of their systems, they could say potty words but only when they were in the bathroom.

It worked, except they ended up spending a lot more time in the bathroom, whispering things like "poop" and "passy gassy" to each other and laughing hysterically.

That's kind of what it feels like watching the new Will Ferrell movie, *Step Brothers*, which opens today.

This is not a deep movie. It's not even a very clever movie. But it is a movie that makes you giggle at the most basic, childish level and reminds you that even as an adult, sometimes all it takes to make you double over in laughter is a well-timed naughty word or fart joke.

The plot is about as simple as it gets. Ferrell plays 39-year-old Brennan Huff, an unemployed man-child who still lives with his mom (Mary Steenburgen). When she marries and moves in with Robert Doback (Richard Jenkins), Brennan unhappily faces the reality that he has a new stepbrother, Dale, played by John C. Reilly. The wristband-wearing, immature 40-year-old who also lives at home is practically Brennan's mirror image.



Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly star in 'Step Brothers'

Cue the sibling rivalry, amped up to wildly adult levels.

The two, who share a room populated with sexy posters and a cowboy lamp that reflect their refusal to grow up, antagonize each other in every way imaginable. When they're not whispering crude verbal jabs at each other, they're fighting in vintage T-shirts on the front lawn. One of them even physically violates the other's drum set in a way that ought to be illegal — even to watch.

**Review:**  
**Three stars out of five**

What's delightful about all of this is the childish glee with which they do it. Ferrell and Reilly nail the art of portraying kids trapped in adult bodies. Everything from the eye rolling to the whining to the fear of TV privileges being revoked — "What are you doing? It's shark week!" — is spot on.

This carries over to when the stepbrothers inevitably unite, both against Brennan's successful but smarmy brother, Derek (Adam Scott), and a parental edict that they find jobs and their own places to stay as their antics take a toll on the new family. They may be clueless, but they're convinced that everything they do is the bestest ever. (When Brennan sings, Dale says his voice is "a combination of Fergie and Jesus.") The unbridled enthusiasm they show makes you wish you didn't have to give up some things as you get older.

Directed by Adam McKay, who worked with both stars in *Talladega Nights*, the film doesn't aspire to much. It's happy to milk laughs from creative swearing, goofy, childish behavior, and a hilarious digression that explains exactly why you should never wake a sleepwalker. It does all of this well.

That doesn't mean that other viewers won't find it tasteless. The filthy jokes push right up to the edge of what's comfortable, then plunge right over, leaving your mouth to drop in horror or laughter or both. And *Step Brothers* more than earns its R rating with the dirty words that spew out of the characters' mouths, sometimes to disturbing

effect. It's as if Ferrell and Reilly are possessed by Peter Pan and Joe Pesci at the same time.

Still, fans of Ferrell's juvenile humor will be pleased. Just be careful about repeating your favorite lines - unless you're in the bathroom.

Contact Ryan E. Smith at: [ryansmith@theblade.com](mailto:ryansmith@theblade.com) or 419-724-6103.

[< previous](#)

[next >](#)