



## **STEP BROTHERS**

As I see it, the only way you can remotely enjoy director Adam McKay's *Step Brothers* is by accepting that all of the characters in it, even the seemingly levelheaded ones, are out of their minds. And even  
*then*  
you might not enjoy it.

Most slapstick comedies require a willing suspension of disbelief, so I went with the movie's setup, which finds Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly as severely stunted adolescents who are still living with their parents - one's 39 and the other's 40, though I forget which is which - and who are forced to share a bedroom after Ferrell's mom (Mary Steenburgen) and Reilly's dad (Richard Jenkins) marry. (I also went with the casting of Steenburgen, even though the actress is only 14 years older than Ferrell, and looks, at best, *five* years older.) No sane parent, of course, would put up with the shrieking tantrums and abject hostility that result from the cohabitation of these particular kids, but this didn't really bother me at

### *Step Brothers*

, in part because Steenburgen and Jenkins give the impression of being slightly off their rockers themselves - she's distracted and spacey, as if mildly tranquilized, and he's as quick to boil as Reilly is - and because, in more than a few scenes at least, the stars' psychotically antagonistic one-upmanship is

*really*  
funny.

This past spring, in the R-rated *Semi-Pro*, we discovered that Ferrell's traditionally aggressive piques of rage are less entertaining when uncensored - he's far more inventive when not  
*permitted*

to scream "F---!" at every given opportunity - and so it is with the R-rated

### *Step Brothers*

; his and Reilly's relentless cursing isn't offensive so much as tedious. But when the two are merely staring (rather than shouting) one another down, or hissing vicious threats from under their breath, the actors' deep-seated animosity hits notes of hysterical peevishness. And after the boys' loathing morphs into best-friendship, their combined 40-going-on-12 act features some genuinely, and even

*gently*

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Written by Mike Schulz

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, hilarious moments: the duo's giddy delight upon being told that yes, they

*can*

build bunk beds; their anguish when Steenburgen and Jenkins sit them down at the dinner table and explain that Mommy and Daddy are splitting up. ("Were we

*bad*

?!" asks Reilly, weeping.)

In the end, though, the credibility strain, and the persistent obnoxiousness, proves to be just too great. Not only has Steenburgen mothered an undisciplined, type-A lout, she's mothered *two* - the usually enjoyable Adam Scott shows up as Ferrell's hateful younger brother, and this moneyed jerk with the sexually repressed wife (the ill-used Kathryn Hahn) is an all-too-convenient villain for the boys to vanquish. The turnaround that finds Ferrell and Reilly finally having to act their ages is handled with embarrassing simple-mindedness. (Despite a complete lack of training, skills, and sense, both prove to be natural whizzes in the business world. Look, ma! No college!) And for every amusingly juvenile antic here, there are three or four more that are ... well, just juvenile, although the set piece in which Reilly's drums are literally man-handled is sure to be adored by many. I've seen worse Will Ferrell comedies than *Step Brothers*

- I've seen worse Will Ferrell comedies this year

*alone*

- but between

*Saturday Night Live*

and his subsequent films, the star has been doing this petulant-man-child shtick for more than a dozen years now. At what point will he decide to just grow up, already?



### ***THE X-FILES: I WANT TO BELIEVE***

In terms of professionalism and craftsmanship, *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* is a much stronger piece of work than

*Step Brothers*

. Here's the thing, though: Whatever its faults,

*Step Brothers*

is at least never boring, and sadly,

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### *I Want to Believe*

is boring as hell. The word "sadly" could actually be used in conjunction with most of my observations here, as this second cinematic outing inspired by the rightfully beloved series (after the terrifically entertaining

### *The X-Files*

movie of 1998) is, sadly, murkily plotted, indifferently directed, devoid of tension, devoid of thrills, and -

so

sadly - devoid of engaging byplay between David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, whose Mulder and Scully regard one another with mild interest and weary acceptance. Kind of the way I regarded the movie.

As a fan of the show - seasons one through four, specifically - it's too depressing to get into how bizarrely off-pitch director/co-writer Chris Carter's offering feels; it looks like *The X-Files*, and sort of

ounds

like

*The X-Files*,

but it plays like an

*X-Files*

that has undergone some creepy,

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

-like metamorphosis, with all of its personality and energy sucked dry. (It's a pod movie.) I would, however, argue that the best way to re-boot this once-vibrant, currently-passé franchise was perhaps not with a dour, meditative narrative concerning a kidnapped FBI agent and a dying child, or with a George-Bush-is-an-alien gag that would've been stale two years ago, or with scene upon deadening scene of nighttime manhunts through the snow, in which the most dramatic thing uncovered is a frozen stiff. Oh, the irony.