

If the look on Will Ferrell's face is anything to go by, I am not the first person today to ask about his scrotum. In fairness, he has been talking about it — and the part it plays in his new comedy, *Step Brothers* — for some weeks now. What I wanted to know was not whether the scrotum glimpsed on screen is prosthetic (it is), or, if so, whether he had to model for it (he claims he did), but how two grown men — Ferrell and the movie's director, Adam McKay, with whom he co-wrote the screenplay — came to conceive of a scene in which Ferrell's character gives his stepbrother's beloved drumkit what can only be described as a comprehensive tea-bagging.

"We made a list of all the things we'd never seen in a film, and then we tried to get them into the script," explains 41-year-old Ferrell when we meet at a London hotel. The implication being: it's not rocket science, pal.

The drumkit incident is the culmination of a tit-for-tat campaign between Brennan (Ferrell), a 39-year-old crybaby who still lives at home, and Dale (John C. Reilly), a similarly stunted 40-year-old whose father marries Brennan's mother. Ferrell's specialty is playing innocent or self-absorbed types unaware of how out of sync they are with the world around them. In *Elf* (2003), he is Santa's gangliest helper, lost in New York in his felt suit and pixie shoes, mistaking the gum on the subway handrail for free candy. In the glorious *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (2004), he plays a strutting 1970s newscaster who considers himself catnip to women. And in *Step Brothers*, he plays a character who can't see what is sleazy about a middle-aged man gawping at TV aerobics shows, one hand grasping at a pile of nachos, the other rummaging in his underwear.

It would be difficult to underestimate the popularity of these various infantilized boy-men, who enjoyed a resurgence with the rise of the Frat Pack — Ferrell, Ben Stiller, Vince Vaughn and the Wilson brothers, Owen and Luke. If you want to put a price on it, try US\$20 million — the salary that Ferrell has commanded since 2005. (Yes, even for *Bewitched*.)

"I keep getting drawn back to these innocents," he smiles, stretching his long legs beneath the coffee table. He is a proper Gulliver; his crown of tight brown curls, tiny pleading eyes and suggestion of controlled mania make him resemble an XL-sized Gene Wilder. In person, he is cheery but soft-spoken, as though concerned not to cause offence. Which is ironic, really, given all that drumkit business, not to mention his turns as a sexually ravenous jailbird in *Starsky & Hutch* (2004) and a player cruising funerals in *Wedding Crashers* (2005).

Ferrell cast his mind back to his early teens, he says, to capture Brennan's timid, withdrawn nature. "I didn't feel sure-footed back then. Had I not taken this career path, it's likely that I would have just sat at home and waited for the perfect job to come along." His confidence increased when he started goofing around at school; he perfected the trick of appearing to walk into a door, which was a hit with his classmates.

But as the son of Lee Ferrell, a keyboard player with the Righteous Brothers, he concluded that the entertainer's life was not for him. "My brother and I witnessed the instability of what our father did. He'd be working at a nightclub for a year. Then one evening we would say, 'Are you going to work tonight, dad?' and he would say, 'No, we're not playing there any more.' I remember thinking, 'Gosh, this is tough.' I knew I'd have to get a real job when I grew up. I didn't know what I'd do, but it would have to involve carrying a briefcase. And I'd definitely live in a house." Having been raised in a two-bedroom apartment in Irvine, California, he was certain about wanting that house. (Now he's got one, as well as a summer home in Gnesta, with his Swedish wife, the actor Viveca Paulin, and their two children.)

Ferrell ended up studying sports broadcasting, not realizing at first why he had chosen that course. "I was placating myself. I saw that as a more legitimate way to be an entertainer. I understood later that I had wanted all along to try my hand at comedy, but I was scared of the uncertainty. Sports broadcasting seemed like a more solid career, less treacherous. But as I got closer to graduating, I knew I should try this thing" — this thing being comedy — "rather than suppressing it." He moved back home and started on the long path of auditions and rejections that is the lot of any aspiring comic.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

Will Ferrell, right, squares off against a grizzly bear in his latest film, *Semi-Pro*.

PHOTO: REUTERS



The triumph of Will

Will Ferrell has become one of the top comic actors in Hollywood playing dorky, immature weirdos. Could it have something to do with his habit of walking into doors as a child?

BY RYAN GILBEY
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON



[TECHNOLOGY REVIEWS]

While the chunky Suunto X10 might not go well with a tuxedo, James Bond would still love it. The watch hides a Global Positioning System unit, stopwatch, compass, barometer and altimeter into a package not much bigger than 007's favorite Omega.

Because the X10 can track GPS satellites, you can record and download your last run or hike to Google Earth or other digital mapping programs. You can also plan routes and set waypoints for future trips on a PC using the included Track Exporter software.

The X10 offers 33 percent longer battery life than its predecessor, the X9i, and charges via an included USB

cable. It also uses a newer GPS chip that finds and locks onto satellites faster than the X9i.

If you become lost, a press of the "Find Home" button will direct you back along the same route you came or even offer a more direct route. The watch also displays current speed and distance traveled.

It should be available in September, sadly without the garrote or sleeping gas attachments available from Q branch.



logear Laptop Console KVM for quick PC-to-PC networking.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

For people who routinely use two computers at once, a keyboard/video/mouse (KVM) switch has long been a useful add-on: with it, you can use the same keyboard, monitor and mouse and simply switch between PCs. Of course, the computers remain separate devices — they are not linked or networked as a result.

That's why logear's new USB Laptop KVM Switch (US\$130) is so interesting.

One double-ended cable connects two Windows PCs or laptops together (a Mac version should be available soon). Then, you can use one PC to control the other and even drag files and folders between the machines.

This isn't as esoteric as it may sound. If you bring your company's laptop home and connect it to your PC with this cable, you can share and sync files between the two machines. You can add an external hard drive or other peripheral "between" the two computers that both machines can use.

You can also use your laptop as a second screen: Your e-mail inbox could live on the laptop's smaller screen while, say, a large Excel spreadsheet is on your larger monitor. And since you'll also be using your full-size keyboard and mouse for both machines, you won't just be more productive — you'll probably be more comfortable.

Parents have been telling their children to turn the volume down since "wireless" meant "AM radio," but noise-monitoring has gotten trickier as music has moved into headphones — where sound levels can get dangerously high. With parental concerns in mind, the LoudEnough earbuds from Ultimate Ears have volume-limiting safeguards built into the hardware.

Although safe volume levels are still important, the components in the LoudEnough earbuds also



Ultimate Ears LoudEnough headphones for children.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

reduce sound-pressure levels up to 20 decibels, or one quarter of the volume of other earphones. They use a standard 3.5mm stereo plug, which allow the Ultimate Ears to fit just about any portable MP3 player or other audio device.

The earbuds, available in three colors, sell for about US\$40 and can be found at www.loudenough.com. Each pair comes with two sets of silicone tips in three sizes (extra-small, small and medium) for keeping the buds in place inside the ears — which may even make them appeal to adults who complain that the iPod earphones are too big and tend to fall out.



Avatar high-performance gaming mouse.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Adventurous questing and fierce battles are much easier when a player has good weapons on both sides of the screen. Made with the needs of video-game fans in mind, the Avatar mouse from NZXT comes with seven programmable buttons that can be custom-configured for different types of games, including multiplayer online worlds, real-time strategy contests and first-person shooters.

To increase its responsiveness and accuracy in those do-or-die sharpshooting situations, the Avatar mouse also comes with an optical sensor under the hood that can reach a maximum resolution of 2,600 dots per inch, or dpi — compared with the 800dpi or 1,000dpi offered by many standard mice.

The Avatar gaming mouse connects

through a USB port and costs about US\$60; full specifications and a list of stores are at www.nzxt.com/products/avatar. The Avatar's Teflon feet keep gameplay smooth; even southpaw warriors need not worry — the Avatar has an ambidextrous design.

Combining a graphics tablet with a built-in camera and a computer-based set of creativity tools, Stylin' Studio, out this week from Girl Tech, part of the Radica division of Mattel, is the latest thing in face-editing technology. Intended for older girls, Stylin' Studio (US\$60, www.girltech.com) is this year's replacement for Digi Makeover, a TV-connected toy that was harder to use.

First, you install the software on a Windows computer and plug in the USB cable. Next, you start the software, line up your face in the viewfinder and snap a photo, a process made easier by a small mirror. You can also import any face from a digital photo, if you want to give your parents earrings or put a tiara on your Facebook picture.

The real fun begins when you start smearing on the eyeliner, available in dozens of shades, or mixing and matching the hair, clothing, jewelry, backgrounds and photo frames, all of which can be dragged and dropped into place with the stylus. You can save your work as standard photo files for convenient e-mailing to your local modeling agency.

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The Suunto X10 GPS watch lets you track your hikes.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE