

dvd extras**Masturbation and Solitude**

The Adam Sandler production that will save mankind.

By Reihan Salam

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Simply put, civilization is doomed. Video games have finally surpassed conventional sexual reproduction in levels of interestingness and fun. Thus, digital delights have replaced family formation as the primary pursuit of a large, growing number of unmarried surplus males in the advanced industrial economies. In China, for example, vast armies of these "beta males" spend countless hours in cybercafes earning and hoarding virtual gold to purchase virtual blades to slaughter virtual enemies, and possibly to impress virtual babes. Virtual babes who will never, suffice it to say, give birth to actual babies. Within the space of a few generations, this sad state of affairs will ineluctably result in the replacement of men by a race of pale, limpid eunuchs. Only *Grandma's Boy*, perhaps the most underrated movie ever made, can save us from this Spenglerian spiral of misery and torment.

Mind you, I'm not referring to the perfectly respectable 1922 Harold Lloyd comedy *Grandma's Boy*. No, I mean the Happy Madison picture that came and went from theaters in January faster than you can say "pass the dutchie." When I saw *Grandma's Boy* during its brief theatrical run, a small boy—who should not have been watching an R-rated movie—tried to tie my friend's shoelaces together. An elderly woman in the back of the house, one of six audience members in total, yelled, "Look at that J!" as the movie's star rolled an enormously large marijuana cigarette. Sitting with this motley crew, I came to realize, in all seriousness, that *Grandma's Boy* is the most thoughtful meditation on the plight of the beta male that I've ever seen.

The story is simple. Alex, our hero, gets burned by his roommate, Josh. All along, he's been paying his rent on time like an upstanding citizen, but Josh has been using Alex's money to pay for the gentle ministrations of a gaggle of extremely expensive Philippine "massage therapists." We've all been there. And so Alex and Josh are thrown out of their filthy apartment. After a series of failed attempts to find a new home, Alex decides to move in with his kind grandmother Lilly and her roommates, Bea, a drug-addled basket case, and Grace, a self-proclaimed "dirty old whore" who may or may not have invented the hand job.

Like many of the best recent comedies, *Grandma's Boy* revolves around the world of work, in this case a video-game company called Brainasium dominated by the aspiring cyborg J.P., the villain of the piece, who created the legendary game Eternal Death Slayer at age 13. The jokes revolve around the unraveling of Alex's lies—he claims to be living with three sex-crazed nymphos who have been tormenting him with their erotic games—and Alex's surprisingly smooth courtship of his project-manager boss, Samantha, beautifully portrayed by nerd-hot *Freaks and Geeks* veteran Linda Cardellini.

So far, this sounds utterly conventional. Haven't we seen this movie before? Guess again, fools. The greatness of *Grandma's Boy* lies in its vivid, persuasive details. Our hero, as portrayed by longtime Adam Sandler associate Allen Covert, is a natural alpha male with the charm and physical grace of a champion athlete. The other video-game testers call Alex "Graybush," a seemingly contemptuous nickname that in fact captures their respect and admiration for his quick wit and formidable thumb-skills. Yet he's stuck in a pitiful rut, a beta male by choice. His best friend, Jeff, is worse: He dresses in footie pajamas and sleeps in a car bed. No one can touch Jeff's Dance Dance Revolution skills. But until one of the movie's key scenes, Jeff has never been touched by a woman, either. If there ever were a more nightmarish vision of our present

and future, full of surplus males searching for a meaningful life, I have not witnessed it.

Does this sound preposterous? You're living in a dream world. As the psychologist Leonard Sax recently pointed out, the number of men between the ages of 22 and 34 living at home with their parents has doubled over the last 20 years. You might call *Grandma's Boy* a crash course in Reality 101, complete with a troublingly literal Kool Keith theme song. One out of every three young men, like Jeff, lives at home. How many more, like Alex, are living in a life-sapping marijuana-fueled haze? The oft reviled French novelist Michel Houellebecq came closest to capturing what we could call "The Grandma's Boy Dilemma" in *Extension du domaine de la lutte* with this powerful passage:

In a totally liberal economic system, certain people accumulate considerable fortunes; others stagnate in unemployment and misery. In a totally liberal sexual system, certain people have a varied and exciting erotic life; others are reduced to masturbation and solitude.

Whereas most Hollywood movies celebrate the tycoons of the sexual economy, *Grandma's Boy* makes time for the paupers.

Remarkably enough, Sandler, the godfather of sexless dweebs, never appears in *Grandma's Boy*. Judging by the DVD's commentary track, his main creative contribution was the line, "You're a hooker!" (which is, in fairness, pretty hilarious in context). Remember that Sandler even made a cameo in Rob Schneider's *The Animal*. I mean, is that any way to hold it down for your homies? Even I, as audience member and customer, feel the sharp sting of rebuke. But sure enough, Sandler's absence is for the best. Here you'll find none of the treaciness that increasingly characterizes the master's work. There's very little that's touching about this movie, unless you count a profoundly disturbing sequence during which Alex "touches himself" while talking dirty to a half-dressed action figure sitting on top of a commode.

Such is the life of the beta male. Here even the erotic imagination is outsourced to the imagineers of Silicone Valley. What could be more passive, and more despicable, than ogling, fondling, and suckling mass-produced plastic bosoms? And yet *Grandma's Boy* doesn't simply counsel despair. The movie offers a way out of this hell. Eventually, Alex takes control of the technology that had bewitched and enslaved him, and, with a little help from his friends (and a monkey trained in the art of tae kwon do), he takes control of his life. What separates *Grandma's Boy* from your average stoner comedy is its hopeful vision of a more humane economy, one that gives even the gnarliest pothead the chance to flourish. If you are a beta male, or have one in your life, I urge you to run—don't walk—to buy *Grandma's Boy* on DVD. I promise you, this movie will rock you to your very foundations.

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