



Disco Hummus Express

***You Don't Mess with the Zohan.* Adam Sandler, John Turturro, and Emanuelle Chriqui star in a film written by Sandler, Robert Smigel, and Judd Apatow and directed by Dennis Dugan.**

By Josef Woodard

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Mention the name Adam Sandler — a brand, a personality type, and invitation to low expectations — and several things leap to mind, including the great American tradition of protracted adolescent humor, swagger mixed with idiocy, and the light side of the *SNL* comedy ethos. So far in his filmography, Sandler has been involved in one near-masterpiece, *Punch-Drunk Love*, but that was mostly thanks to its creator, P.T. Anderson. In fact, by those low standards, Sandler's latest, *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*, scores a pretty respectable “could be worse” rating.

With his latest nutty romp, Sandler adds to his list a combo-character named Zohan, an Israeli counterterrorist turned N.Y.C. hairdresser — a valiant attempt to inject some well-meant humor into the Israeli-Palestinian quandary. It doesn't hurt that Zohan's foe is a hubristic Palestinian terrorist played by the wondrous John Turturro. Even if half the jokes fizzle on impact, and even if the movie's loftier goals are left half-achieved, *Zohan* has a surprising success rate. Sandler may be growing up, in some small way. *Zohan* carries the unmistakable imprint of comedy guru Judd Apatow, a cowriter on the team that also included Sandler and the ingenious Robert Smigel. Here we get a box office-approved, Apatow-esque mix of absurdity, raunch, and ultimate sentimentality.

Many American comedies lose their way and their buzz of audacity on the tricky path between narrative propulsion and the giddy rat-a-tat of jokes, and *Zohan* is no exception. We can almost pinpoint the spot where it heads south, during a climactic hacky sack tournament between Israelis and Palestinians and a disastrous cameo with Mariah Carey. Suddenly, the comic soda has gone flat, and we're left bored during the inevitable interethnic showdown (a potentially funny satire of that other Turturro classic, *Do the Right Thing*).

Naturally, *Zohan* benefits from the seasonal dumbing-down of movie audiences during this onramp to summertime. Our defenses and intellectual demands plummet as the temperatures rise and the multiplexes fill with cine-fizz. Oscar contenders take a holiday, and the *Zohans* of the world prevail, in all their half-baked glory and good intentions gone semi-pale.