

## Space Zoo Patrol - Sci-Fi Movie Review Plus “Sci-Fact Behind the Sci-Fi”

**Review by Nell “Movie Mom” Minow**

**Sci-Fact by Chris Hadfield, Astronaut (NASA Shuttle # 74, 100)**

MEN IN BLACK *Grade: A-*  
1997 98 min, PG-13, 12 and up

Sci-fi movies about aliens are usually either funny, scary, or thrilling, sometimes all of the above, as with “E.T.” What makes this movie different is that it is just so cool.

Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith play the title characters, the Men in Black, who interact with the thousands of aliens who come to Earth for vacation, commerce, or just because they want to live here while the rest of us can’t even tell the difference. As the movie begins, Agent K (Jones) and his partner are patrolling the borders for illegal aliens. Not the Mexicans crossing without going through immigration – actual aliens from other planets. K’s partner realizes that it is time to retire, so K recruits a promising young cop (Will Smith) who survives a hilarious series of tests to find himself Agent J.

And then, as in all great alien films, our heroes have to save the world, this time from a sort of bug-man who is in search of a galaxy that is hidden away somewhere. On the way, K and J run into a talking dog, a beautiful medical examiner, a woman who said she saw something wearing her late husband’s body like a suit, and a woman who appears to be human giving birth to something that sort of looks like a squid.

What makes this movie so purely delightful are the hilariously outlandish details, brilliantly realized through a combination of CGI and puppetry, contrasted with the matter-of-fact, deadpan delivery of Tommy Lee Jones, perfectly matched with the energy and charm of Will Smith.

Aliens in movies always reflect more about the point of view of the film-makers than any speculation based on science. Families who see this movie should compare it to the cold war era “The Day the Earth Stood Still,” and the original “Invasion of the Body Snatchers.” Or the more helpful and friendly aliens of “E.T” and “Close Encounters of the Third Kind.” Smith appears in a very different movie about aliens, battling invaders in “Independence Day.”

### **The “Sci-Fact behind the Sci-Fi”**

Men in Black is a great movie, but let’s look at some of the science in it:

**Aliens** – Roswell costume parades and conspiracy theories aside, we haven’t actually found any ETs yet. It’s all fantasy and wishful thinking. But we’re looking! We have probes driving around on Mars, satellites out to all the planets of our solar system, and

we're even scanning the skies for radio signals. With half a trillion stars in just our galaxy, and half a trillion galaxies, the odds are pretty good that we're not alone.

**Spaceships** – since he crashed his UFO on arrival, Edgar commandeered a disk-shaped spaceship from on top of a pedestal. This has been done many times with airplanes, relics that were stored on display that were later taken down, fixed-up, and re-flown. I like it.

**A galaxy in Orion the cat's pendant** – this has long been the subject of imagination, atoms and molecules as a microcosm of stars and galaxies. But a trillion stars, even little ones, might weigh a cat down ...

**Ray Guns** – big or small, the zappers in Men in Black are pretty impressive. But where does all the energy come from? To push that much power through the air would take a lot of electricity. If we're ever going to have such things we need to make batteries or fuel cells (or dilithium crystals!) that are many times more powerful than anything we've invented so far.

But overall, an excellent movie, fun, full of ideas! *Grade: A*