

'Men In Black 3': Third Time's the Charm?

The Men In Black franchise has been cleaned up a bit for the family audience in *Men In Black 3*. Though it is still rated PG-13 for plenty of foul language and action violence, gone are the smarmy sexual references from the second movie, and gone are most of the over-the-top gross elements from the original movie. In their place are a few more uplifting, touching elements that also replace the first movie's New Age cynicism.

The new movie unleashes a villain called Boris the Animal into New York City. Boris has escaped from a maximum-security prison on the moon. His goal is to track down Agent K (Tommy Lee Jones as the older K, Josh Brolin as the younger) and get revenge by killing him for shooting his arm off in a gun battle in 1969.

Boris leaps back in time to change the course of history by killing the younger K before K can set up the Arcnet protecting Earth from an invasion of Boris the Animal's evil alien compatriots in 2012. The aliens had died out when they couldn't invade Earth. To save his partner—and the whole world—Agent J (Will Smith) also has to jump back in time. Otherwise, his partner will have to fight two Borises rather than just the one.

The first few minutes of *Men In Black 3* get off to a rough start, as Boris is too scary and leering. Also, an initial gun battle in a Chinese restaurant feels too much like the bloated action movies of the 1980s, complete with slow motion. The early jokes also fall flat in the first few minutes, before Emma Thompson as the new MIB boss arrives on screen with a hilarious impression of an alien's speech patterns.

The movie becomes much more enjoyable when Will Smith's Agent J has to leap back into 1969 to save Agent K and the world from Boris and the future alien invasion. The effects as Smith leaps into the past are spectacular. Also, his interactions as a 2012 African-American dealing with 1969's less-friendly racial climate are frequently funny, but could have been made a larger element of the script.

By the end, however, there's so much exciting action and enough funny lines to make the movie a fun ride. While not up to the standards of *The Avengers*, *Men In Black 3* is a much more entertaining movie than the summer dud *Dark Shadows*, and slightly surpasses the slapdash but patriotic charms of *Battleship*.

Although there's still too much foul language, the obscenity count is more similar here to the first sequel. Also, the gore and sexual innuendo is much less frequent than the previous movies. Secular, hedonistic fanboys may find these things upsetting but the general audience will appreciate them.

Best of all, *Men In Black 3* has some surprisingly heartwarming and redemptive, but slightly bittersweet, plot twists. These twists lend more gravitas to this sci-fi action comedy. They also give the new movie a more positive worldview that's relatively moral and uplifting.

For example, Will Smith's character, Agent J, clearly cares about his partner, Agent K. And, the movie's ending shows that Agent K cares more for Agent J than he really knows. Thus, despite the time traveling, time-changing plot, the ending serves as a really nice coda to a franchise that has, up to now, less than it should have been.

Men In Black 3 also adds a new endearing, funny alien character who seems to have a really big heart. This character plays an important role in the movie's second half and its final resolution. The creators behind *Men In Black* finally

seem to be on the right track.