

Pugs

A companion dog at heart, Pugs offer an out-of-this-world personality and capacity to love.

By Susan McCullough

One of the most entertaining characters from *Men in Black* and *Men in Black II* (Columbia Pictures; 1997, 2002) isn't human or even a creature of this world. He's an alien from outer space, but to conceal his origin and blend in with the local populace, he adopts a disguise. He transforms himself into, of course, Frank the Pug.

Assuming that one would have an infinite variety of disguises to choose from, why might an alien choose to spend time on Earth as a Pug? Here, from devotees of the breed — and from my own experience — are some possible reasons.

Extraterrestrial Adaptability

Enthusiasts often say that Pugs have big-dog personalities in little-dog bodies. Although the Pug is the largest of the toy breeds, he's still a toy, and that means he's small. Generally, the Pug is a mere 12 to 14 inches tall at the shoulders and weighs between 14 and 18 pounds. But the Pug's outsized, outgoing personality more than makes up for his diminutive size, as Kristiana Mortensen Hengel, secretary of the Heart of Minnesota Pug Dog Club, can attest.

"After owning a succession of large-breed dogs throughout my life, my children talked me into getting a Pug," Mortensen Hengel says. "At the time, I didn't consider a Pug a real dog. I thought it would be more like a snorting pig with fur and wouldn't have much to offer a big-dog person like me. Boy, was I wrong. I fell head-over-heels in love with the breed: small, bulky and robust, with a big, round, sassy and silly attitude to match."

Dianne Bourgeois, author of *Pugs: Animal Planet Pet Care Library* (TFH Publications, 2006), says that "physically, the Pug is described by the Latin phrase *multum in parvo* (a lot in a little), which refers to this compact little dog as being 'a lot of dog in a little space.' Small dogs can live in apartments, be travel companions, be exercised indoors in inclement weather, and even can be taught to potty indoors on a pee pad or in a doggie litter box."

But Bourgeois, who lives in Ashburnham, Massachusetts, takes pains to point out that the Pug is not a shy little darling. "People often underestimate the Pug's drive to be the ultimate companion," she says. "The Pug needs to be an interactive member of the family. The Pug craves love and attention from his human family members, and he will insist on reciprocating it."

The Pug's extroverted nature extends beyond the members of his family and can include humans as well as nonhumans. Pugs excel in work as therapy dogs, and they also get along well with other dogs. However, there's a flip side to this affability: A Pug is relatively useless if he's confronted with an intruder. In her book, *Choosing a Dog for Dummies* (Wiley, 2001), Chris Walkowicz says that Pugs "know no enemies and are totally useless in warding off a burglar."

Moreover, the Pug's extroverted temperament can get him into trouble if an owner doesn't take the necessary precautions. For example, if a Pug lives in a house with a yard, the yard should be fenced. "If a Pug leaves a yard, he'd just as soon go visit the neighbor as come home," Mortensen Hengel warns. "If the neighbor's door is open, he'll walk right in to say hello. No Pug has ever met a stranger."

Still, the Pug's outgoing nature would serve any alien who wants to understand the planet and culture in which he has found himself. Appearing to be an outgoing little Pug would open doors that probably would be closed to an unusual-looking creature from another planet.

Martian Mayhem

The Pug's bulging eyes, flat snout and monkey-like face give this breed a singularly clownish look, and many Pugs exhibit clownish behavior to match their goofy-looking mugs. "There's not a day that goes by without at least one of [my Pugs] doing something that makes me laugh out loud," says Pam Donaldson, recording secretary of the Patriot Dog Club in Sterling, Massachusetts. "They have lots of joie de vivre; they're so happy all the time."

I have seen firsthand how the Pug's humorous appearance and ability to entertain can affect the people around him. When my daughter's high school was presenting *Carnival*, a 1961 musical that required the services of a dog in the opening scene, she — as the stage manager — asked me to find an appropriate canine thespian. After a few phone calls,



I located the perfect pooch for the part: a Pug mix named Cooper.

Just a few days before the show was to open, the dog handler broke her toe and asked me to fill in. The scene required Cooper and me to walk to the center of the stage, get yelled at by the cranky ringmaster and walk off the stage, with Cooper walking on his hind legs. After a few rehearsals (and after finding a very tasty treat that would give him an incentive to perform the maneuver), the little guy performed the trick with gusto and drew thunderous applause at each performance.

What does this have to do with an alien? It's simple: The ability to entertain would definitely appeal to an alien — or anyone — who wants to ingratiate with the local populace.