



4-1-2002

## K-PAX

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### Recommended Citation

Wayman, Denny and Conklin, Hal (2002) "K-PAX," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 15.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.jrf.06.01.15>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol6/iss1/15>

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## K-PAX

### Abstract

This is a review of *K-PAX* (2001).

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Appearing mysteriously one day in Grand Central Terminal in New York City, Prot (Kevin Spacey) claims to be a visitor from K-Pax on a five-year mission to earth. We learn that he is a being of energy and light whose home is in continual twilight due to the orbital pattern of having two suns and several moons (the two suns are named "Agape" and "Satori"). Such a world has taught him to travel many times the speed of light and incarnate on our planet in his present human form. To support his claim, the physicians in the psychiatric hospital into which he is committed observe certain unexplained physical abilities. For example, Prot has the ability to see types of light the normal human eye cannot see, he is unaffected by the massive doses of Thorazine prescribed to him, and he is able to describe to the leading physicists in the world both mathematical and astrophysical explanations about the binary stars and their orbits that are proven to be true by their computer calculations and telescopic observations.

Though psychiatrist Mark Powell (Jeff Bridges) alludes to the fact that each of these has a possible psychological explanation as the body adapts to the mind's beliefs and creates appropriate mental and physiological abilities, the film nevertheless shows Dr. Powell struggling with his own sense of reality, particularly displayed in the final scene that follows the credits.

The power of the mind to effect changes in our bodies is a phenomenon that both worries and inspires us. In moments of trauma when the mind can no longer stay present and instead steps behind a protective shield to safely observe what is happening to the body, the resultant relief can be so powerful that the mind can decide to stay in that place

and create a new life. Such dissociative reactions can create alternate thought patterns and biochemical reactions such that the body itself takes on a measurably different life.

As expected, Dr. Powell and his associates raise the question as to whether Prot is what he says he is or is he just a damaged person living out a grand delusion? In his research, Dr. Powell uncovers a man of similar description named Robert Porter who suffered an indescribable horror five years earlier, the same day that Prot says he arrived on earth. But Dr. Powell wants to believe that someone "out there" could come and help us in times of need. And so do all the other patients who share the psychiatric facility with Prot. This is a belief that is so primal and powerful that many of the people are healed of their mental illness and Dr. Powell himself is healed of a long-standing family dysfunction by Prot's caring presence.

The wonder of cinema is that we are left asking just what did happen in Prot's life. Is he suffering a dissociative delusion, or is he a visitor from another planet who has had a life-long relationship with Robert Porter and has come now in his time of need? Five years to the day after he claims he arrived, Prot disappears along with a patient that had desired to return to K-Pax with him. But we are left with the catatonic body of either Prot or Robert Porter. Whether he was who he claimed to be, all who came into contact with Prot shared a desire to believe in life beyond this world.