

THE GURU

Written by

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Based on a true teaching philosophy

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Shooting Excerpt  
October 27, 2025

FADE IN:

SUPERIMPOSE:

"Other people, with their differences, can also be right."  
-- IB Mission Statement

1 EXT. HILLSIDE FOREST - DAY

1

We glide low across dry grass and scattered leaves, finally settling on a small MOUSE wrestling with a walnut. Tiny paws claw at the shell, to no avail.

We linger for a moment.

We drift forward, rising just enough to pass over the mouse's head. Ahead, a small hill emerges. At its peak sits GRANDALF (55), a wise-looking man dressed in simple, off-white robes. He sits cross-legged, silent, motionless. His brown, wavy hair brushes his shoulders. An old, weathered metal teapot and a teacup rest on a round coaster beside him.

We begin circling him. On his right side, mostly hidden until now, sits an open laptop. We drift toward the laptop until its screen fills the frame. On the screen: the ManageBac platform.

A hand enters from the left -- Grandalf's. He swiftly closes the laptop lid, pulling darkness down over the frame.

2 INT. BARREL - DAY

2

Darkness. Stillness. Then --

Scraping sounds. Dry earth shifts at the center of the screen, revealing a small circle of light as dirt is brushed aside by a young hand.

Through the emerging glass pane, the face of JOSH (17) becomes visible.

We realize: we're beneath a sheet of glass, buried in soil. Josh continues to clear the surface, then leans in -- curious. His face now out of focus.

3 EXT. FARMLAND - CONTINUOUS

3

Josh stands beside the barrel, staring down at the dirt-smudged glass top, confused. In the background, there is a small hut.

Josh's father, FARMER (48) calls out on his rough voice.

(CONTINUED)

23 EXT. OPEN FIELD WITH A DIRT ROAD - DAY (IAN'S DAYDREAM) 23

A dirt road race. The audience cheers for Ian. Rhythmic pounding of feet on the track.

Ian is in the lead, smiling, surging toward the finish line, the cheers growing louder with every stride. Then --

Someone suddenly steps out from the crowd.

SPECTATOR #1  
(seriously to Ian)  
Don't eat at school! Don't eat at school!

Ian is startled, but keeps running. From the crowd, more and more people lower their welcoming arms. Their faces harden, turning dead serious, stripped of any expression -- eyes locked on Ian. They step toward him -- closer and closer -- until they spill onto the track, blocking his way.

Ian doesn't have room to run anymore. They all begin chanting, each starting at their own moment:

CROWD  
(overlapping)  
Don't eat at school! Don't eat at school!

Ian's initial surprise shifts into growing dread.

From somewhere behind him:

SPECTATOR #2 (O.S.)  
Find him!

Ian snaps his head back -- and in that same instant, his dream shatters.

24 INT. CLASSROOM - DAY 24

Josh's hand is on Ian's right arm, snapping him back. Ian blinks rapidly, trying to regain his bearings.

MR. PHILIPS  
Ian! We're all waiting for your answer, but I suppose we'll never get that, unless I repeat the question for the third time. So.  
(didactically)  
Considering that reflective thinking is itself subject to cultural bias, to what extent can a metacognitive approach neutralize those biases without introducing new ones?

(CONTINUED)

Ian stares at the teacher, eyes wide, frozen mid-breath. The bell rings, signaling the end of class. Most of the students rush out of the room. Ian stays in his seat, but exhales in relief.

MR. PHILIPS (CONT'D)  
We'll get back to this!

The teacher heads back to his desk.

MR. PHILIPS (CONT'D)  
Now eat something, for Christ's  
sake! You look pale.

Josh has already stood up from his desk. He puts a reassuring hand on Ian's shoulder.

Celeste, Cara, Josh, and Ian spill out into the hallway. It's lunchtime. The place comes alive. Ian's eyes are still distant, lost in thought. They walk a few steps before Josh suddenly stops short, throwing an arm out to block the others.

JOSH  
Wait a second! It's Tuesday! So we  
probably have chicken for lunch if  
we are fast enough! Let's hurry!

Josh hurries off. Cara takes some steps to follow him, but Celeste and Ian barely move. Everyone halts again.

JOSH (CONT'D)  
What's up?

IAN  
I'm sorry, my friend, but...  
(beat)  
I just can't eat at school today.

JOSH  
What? Why?

IAN  
I saw these...  
(beat)  
zombies...

JOSH  
What the hell are you talking  
about?

IAN  
Never mind. I just feel like...  
choosing Metallic Fish today.

35

INT. CELESTE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

35

Celeste walks down the hallway with tired steps, finally entering her room.

36

INT. CELESTE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

36

Celeste's desk is neat, with a computer and writing supplies on it. On her bed, a thick stack of educational books sits piled up.

Celeste drops her backpack and flops onto the bed with a thud, staring listlessly ahead.

A beat.

With an angry swipe, she knocks the books off the bed onto the floor. In one swift motion, she throws herself face-down on the bed, buries her head in the pillow, and SCREAMS.

37

INT. CARA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN/FOYER - EVENING

37

Cara sits at the table facing us with a sour expression, towards us, yet still staring into nothingness. In front of her lies an empty flat plate, next to the plate a knife and fork, beside them the rice cooker pot.

Cara places the knife with a calm motion pointing to 12 o'clock, then places the fork on it pointing towards 9 o'clock.

She slowly stands up and heads towards Meerah's room.

38

INT. MEERAH'S BEDROOM - EVENING

38

Meerah is playing with plush animals. There is a plush rabbit in a toy prison. Next to the prison there are two other plush animals, a cat and a lion.

MEERAH

(as the plush cat, to the  
prisoner rabbit)

How could you do such a thing?  
Didn't you know what serious  
consequences it would have?

CLOSE ON THE PLUSH ANIMALS

MEERAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(as the plush lion)

I can't believe I won't see my  
little girl grow up.

(as the plush cat)

What a tragedy!

(CONTINUED)

The plush cat bursts into tears.

WIDER ANGLE

Cara knocks on the room's door.

MEERAH (CONT'D)

Come in!

Cara enters, sees the setup.

CARA

Hey, Meerah. What are you playing?

MEERAH

This rabbit got imprisoned for academic dishonesty. She'll be released in 25 years.

CLOSE ON PLUSH RABBIT

The rabbit stares blankly ahead.

WIDER ANGLE ON CARA

Cara needs a moment. A fuse blew in her brain.

CARA

Okay. Look. Um.... Here is this cube

--

MEERAH

(surprised)

-- Where did you get this?

CARA

You like it that much?

MEERAH

No, I just.... I didn't know you would play with such a thing.

CARA

Well, yeah, I got this from someone, and although I do find it cool, I just can't solve it. And my friends are not interested. So I thought I'd give it to you, maybe you'll enjoy tinkering with it.

MEERAH

Well... Okay, thank you, Cara, it's kind of you. I'll try to solve it.

Cara hands the cube to Meerah. Meerah checks the cube's condition, then looks at Cara, waiting to see if there's anything else.

CARA

Yes, well, that's all I wanted.  
Enjoy the game!

MEERAH

Thank you!

Cara leaves the room. Meerah looks at the cube one more time.

CLOSE ON THE CUBE -- STILL SCRAMBLED.

CLOSE ON CARA'S COMPUTER SCREEN

After a few seconds, an e-mail notification pops up.

INSERT - NOTIFICATION

It says: "You have 1 new email from requests@ib.org."

Then another email notification pops up under that, saying: "You have 1 new email from requests@ib-darwin.uni."

Then another one pops up under the previous one, saying: "You have 1 new email from deadline@your-ib.org."

BACK TO SCENE

Cara arrives and plops down in the chair at her desk. She sees that something's off. She leans closer to get a better look at the notifications.

CARA

(wearily)

Oh!

She reaches for the mouse and hovers it over the first email.

A beat.

She doesn't click it.

CARA (CONT'D)

I can't.

She closes the laptop lid and slumps over it exhaustedly.

50

EXT. YIBAIYUN FOREST PATH - DAY

50

The four students continue hiking determinedly along the path. Cara starts limping slightly, slowing down. Josh leads the group, phone pressed to his ear.

JOSH

What? What kind of Urumqi?

(beat)

No, Urumqi TOK College isn't good.

Only Darwin IB University is good.

I've told you a hundred times  
already.

(beat)

What's the difference?! Well, I  
don't know. Maybe 8000 kilometers,  
some cultural background, and a bit  
of the language.

(pause)

I really appreciate that. Really.

And sorry, but the deadline is  
breathing down my neck so...

(beat)

Yeah. Thanks.

JOSH hangs up the phone.

CELESTE

(to Ian)

Was that the one I think it was?

IAN

That's the one! The family's secret  
black-suited sheep.

CELESTE

And does he really work for the  
government?

IAN

Josh claims so, but it's not worth  
getting into.

JOSH

You are being funny, but he can  
really be the guy who makes just  
one cold call and the rules  
suddenly change.

CARA

An insane amount of dust got into  
my shoes.

Cara stops and sits on the ground to take off her shoes and clean them out. The others stop too. The boys scan the environment for any sign of human activity.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE

Yeah, the dust around here is special. I read that in this forest, the particles are as fine as sand on a Thai beach. Scientists are still researching why.

Cara shakes out one shoe. An unreal amount of dust pours out.

CARA

Celeste... You're unbelievable. Girls your age read romance novels about wall-climbing superheroes, while you're geeking out over the meta-micro-nano diameter of southeast Chinese dust.

CELESTE

It's not that weird. Inquiry-based learning.

CARA

Very professional book-based learning.

Cara puts her shoe back on and starts emptying the other one.

Josh spots something ahead where the road curves left. In the bend, a signpost with a left-pointing arrow reads: Lóngcháo Lookout.

JOSH

There!

IAN

What is it, Josh?

Josh runs ahead to the bend and crouches, examining the ground. The others gather around -- Cara joins after slipping her shoe back on.

Josh draws a shape in the dust with his finger, then pokes two sets of dots with three fingers.

JOSH

That was brutal.

IAN

What was brutal?

JOSH

Well, there was a cat here, but an eagle swooped down from above and grabbed it. They fought for a while, but then suddenly a bear showed up and dragged them both away.

The others' jaws drop.

CARA  
(shocked)  
A bear? There are bears here?

Ian leans in closer.

IAN  
And you got all that from this?

JOSH  
Yeah.

CLOSE ON THE DUSTY GROUND

Practically no information there -- just faint, meaningless marks in the dirt.

CLOSE ON IAN'S STUNNED FACE FROM BELOW

IAN  
Wow. Impressive.

BACK TO SCENE

CELESTE  
I call it bull.

Josh stands up and heads right into the forest, ignoring the left curve. Dense vegetation spreads out before him.

JOSH  
This way!

CELESTE  
What? But the lookout is that way!

She points left at the fork.

Josh stops, turns back.

JOSH  
The lookout's just an idea. Not the end goal. The end goal is finding the guru.

He turns away again and continues into the forest.

CARA  
But how do you know the guru's that way?

JOSH  
(without turning back)  
I don't.

CARA  
Then why the hell would we turn  
right here?

JOSH  
(calling back)  
Because the bear turned left!

CARA  
Oh, my God -- let's go!

Cara, terrified, hurries after Josh into the forest thicket. Celeste gives Ian a questioning look. Ian shrugs and gestures to Celeste, ladies first -- this is it, into the woods.

51 EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

51

A DUNG BEETLE laboriously pushes a small, spherical ball made of crumpled tiny papers through the grass and undergrowth, rolling it with determined effort.

52 EXT. FOREST TREE BRANCH - DAY

52

A vibrant, colorful BIRD perches on a branch, feeding its eager chicks in the nest with tiny 2:3 ratio paper slips.

53 EXT. FOREST GLADE - DAY

53

A majestic DEER grazes peacefully near a tree. Then --

A RABBIT bursts from the tall grass. Startled, the deer leaps sideways -- its antlers embed into the tree trunk with a THUD.

CLOSE ON THE TREE TRUNK

The deer's antlers cast a sharp, distinct shadow.

TIME-LAPSE

The shadow sweeps across the bark like a sundial. Hours pass in seconds.

The shadow comes to a rest as the golden hour begins.

Ian rises onto his tiptoes for a moment, then drops back down.

IAN

Well?

JOSH

Yes! I got it!

Josh scrambles down from the rock and hurries back to the girls.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Smoke! Not far from here! Two, maybe three kilometers. Could be a camp! Maybe they're making lunch!

Doubtful, Ian steps onto the rock himself. He peers forward, mimicking Josh's hand-visor gesture.

IAN'S POV

Just the dense forest. Nothing more.

BACK TO SCENE

Ian climbs down from the rock.

IAN

(to himself)

Unbelievable.

He starts back towards the group.

A cluttered space. Old papers, open books, A4 documents, and scraps of craft material cover a huge desk. An aging desktop computer sits on the desk, its bulky CRT monitor flickering faintly, with an old yellowed keyboard in front of it.

At the desk, Meerah works alone, humming softly to herself. She leans over a large grid of squares, drawing colorful patterns as she fills the grid.

The four students walk along a forest path. This time, Celeste and Cara lead the way, with the boys trailing a few meters behind.

(CONTINUED)

JOSH'S POV

The undergrowth lining the path. His eyes scan the undergrowth, passing over a sock on a bush. Then his gaze SNAPS BACK to it. A sock!

JOSH (O.S.)

Hey!

BACK TO SCENE

Josh rushes over to the sock.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Look!

Josh plucks the sock from the bush and holds it up for the others, who gather around. Ian looks highly amused. The girls are disgusted.

CARA

Eww! Gross!

CELESTE

A single, smelly sock. Wonderful.  
What are you even doing with that?  
Collecting trash for fun?

JOSH

No! Don't you guys get it? This is probably the guru's sock!

IAN

What now?

CELESTE

Give it a rest, Josh! That's enough of your brilliant insights for one day. Why on earth would this one sock belong to the guru?

CARA

This is cognitive dissonance.

CELESTE

(to CARA)

No, this is confirmation bias.

JOSH

I can't believe how dense you guys are! Just think about it! If you were a guru, wouldn't you just toss your socks in the woods instead of washing them? If you were a guru.

(CONTINUED)

CARA

If I were a guru, I wouldn't be  
wearing socks in the first place,  
to be honest.

CELESTE

(to Josh)  
Exactly.

JOSH

But if you did!

IAN

Makes sense to me. He's right.

CELESTE

(to Ian)  
You kidding, right?

Cara turns and marches back down the path.

CARA

Okay, that's it. If we're losing  
our minds this early, I'm turning  
back right now. Not waiting until  
sunset.

Josh brandishes the sock in Cara's direction, then in front  
of Celeste's face.

JOSH

You're ignoring the evidence! Then  
how are we supposed to make any  
progress?

CELESTE

Cut it out! I'm gonna suffocate!  
Give me that stinky sock!

Celeste snatches the sock and turns it over in her hands,  
noticing a GUCCI LOGO sewed on it. Her jaw drops.

CELESTE (CONT'D)

Whoa.

INSERT - GUCCI LOGO

BACK TO SCENE

CELESTE (CONT'D)

Cara, wait! This is a real Gucci  
sock!

Cara stops in her tracks, turning back in surprise.

(CONTINUED)

CELESTE (CONT'D)

I can't believe I'm saying this, but this lunatic is right. A normal person wouldn't just throw away a designer sock like this. Only a fanatic guru, who doesn't even care about trends!

Cara slowly walks back towards the group.

CARA

(to Celeste)

Thank God you've got such a sharp eye.

JOSH

(ironically)

Yeah, all credit to Celeste.

CELESTE

(to Josh)

Even a blind squirrel finds a nut sometimes.

Josh's smile is a tight, thin line. He won the argument, but the victory feels hollow.

The dense forest opens up to a wide, sun-dappled riverbank. The air is filled with the sound of birds and the gentle flow of water. A deep sense of tranquility hangs over the scene.

In the distance, GRANDALF lies motionless on his back near the water's edge, like a piece of the landscape. He is wrapped in his simple, off-white robes, his hands folded peacefully on his stomach. Two smooth, flat stones rest on his closed eyes.

The image holds for a long beat, a portrait of absolute stillness.

We begin to slowly turn as we hear the approaching voices of the group from OFF-SCREEN, mid-conversation.

CARA (O.S.)

...except the restaurant owner is her mom's half-brother. And her mom called them, told them not to give her a double cheeseburger, even if she pays double for it.

The teens reappear on the dirt path crossing the clearing, walking towards us. Ian is in the lead, followed by Cara, Josh, and Celeste.

JOSH

So she had no idea her mom had a  
half-brother?

CARA

Not a clue.

Ian stops dead, staring ahead in shock. The others walk past him.

CELESTE

Still, that's pretty harsh. I get  
that the girl is built like a tank,  
but probably that's not the  
solution.

Cara turns back to Ian, and the others follow suit.

CARA

What's up, Ian? Run out of steam?  
You coming?

Ian just stares forward, his eyes wide with disbelief.

JOSH

You okay, man?

Very slowly, Ian raises a trembling hand, pointing towards Grandalf in the distance. The other three slowly turn in unison, tracing the line of his outstretched finger.

Following Ian's pointing finger, we CRASH ZOOM right between them to the reclining figure of Grandalf.

The kids run down to the riverbank. But as they get closer, seeing Grandalf's complete stillness, they falter.

Scanning down Grandalf's perfectly still body, no physical injuries are visible. But then, his feet...

CLOSE ON - THE GUCCI SOCKS

Pulled up high and tight, in all their glory.

CARA (O.S.)

Look! The lunatic was right!

BACK TO SCENE

Cara stands there, her arm still outstretched, finger pointing at Grandalf's socks.

CELESTE

I know, right?

JOSH  
Oh my God! Is he dead?

CARA  
(desperately)  
Then we have to call the coroner!

IAN  
Phones are toasted, remember?

CELESTE  
We don't know if he's dead yet.  
Ian! Please. Check if he's still  
alive!

IAN  
(grimacing)  
Why am I always the bait?

Ian cautiously inches closer to Grandalf. When he's right beside him, still nothing. Ian leans over Grandalf and with a slow, trembling hand, reaches to remove one of the stones from his eye. But before he can touch it --

GRANDALF  
(motionless)  
I'm not dead yet.

Startled, Ian lurches back, losing his balance and landing hard on his butt. The others also jump back in shock.

Grandalf slowly takes the pebbles off his eyes and sits up.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)  
Who are you looking for?

CARA  
We're... supposedly... looking for  
you. If you are --

CELESTE  
-- We're looking for the IB guru.  
Would that be you?

Grandalf chuckles to himself, then gets to his feet. Ian crab-walks a little further back.

GRANDALF  
About that, I cannot lie to you.

He elegantly spreads his arms wide, then brings them back.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)  
Yes. I am he.

JOSH  
Whoa!

He holds his palm out to Celeste. High five! Celeste slaps it.

CELESTE

Yesss!

JOSH

I knew it!

Ian slowly gets to his feet, dusting himself off. The others now dare to step closer. Cara sizes up Grandalf.

CARA

Seeing is believing.

GRANDALF

I know we've met already. My name is Grandalf.

IAN

Yes, Grandalf.

GRANDALF

Your intentions must be serious if you've made it all this way, to a place where human infrastructure doesn't exist. So, how can I help?

IAN

Well, we all applied to the same Australian university, the Darwin IB University. We have to submit about fifteen IB documents... but since we've been away from home for two days, it might as well be seventeen or even eighteen documents by now, and none of us has the faintest idea how to fill them out or word them.

GRANDALF

I see.

(beat)

But why not just look at the guidelines, or simply ask your teachers?

IAN

Because that's so easy to understand, right? The whole thing is a giant enigma! An abstract mental labyrinth where, right from the starting line, you feel like your brain is not more capable than an avocado cut in half.

GRANDALF

I understand. Well... IB is indeed a serious, complex subject. And you think I can explain it to you?

IAN

Well, if not even you can, then --

CELESTE

-- If even you can't make us understand it, then we'll respectfully give up. And we'll go home with our heads held high, because at least we tried.

GRANDALF

Do your best, right?

CELESTE & JOSH

(in unison)

Exactly!

Celeste and Josh exchange a look. Grandalf sizes up the kids.

GRANDALF

Alright. I will help you. You must understand --

He's cut off as a man, KIDNEY PATIENT (60s), bursts from the trees, dressed in tattered rags, his face half-covered by a cloth. He hurries towards Grandalf with a severe limp.

KIDNEY PATIENT

-- Master!

The students flinch back, but Grandalf stands unshaken.

KIDNEY PATIENT (CONT'D)

Master!

CARA

Jesus Christ!

KIDNEY PATIENT

Master! Heal me! Please! One of my kidneys failed over the weekend, and if I go on like this, the other one will fail soon too.

IAN

(to Josh)

Go on like what?

Josh shrugs, he doesn't get it either.

KIDNEY PATIENT

Please!

(CONTINUED)

Grandalf places a hand on Kidney Patient's shoulder.

GRANDALF

Do not be afraid. Go down to the river, wash yourself in it seven times, and you will see, you shall be healed.

KIDNEY PATIENT

And my kidney will restart?

GRANDALF

Yes. It will restart.

KIDNEY PATIENT

But I could barely drag myself here, and I have no one to help me to the river.

GRANDALF

You must have faith! If you made it this far, this last step will be nothing, you'll see.

KIDNEY PATIENT

Very well, then. Thank you, Master!

The Kidney Patient squeezes Grandalf's hand, bows gratefully, then starts towards the river, just a few meters away -- quickly moving out of the group's line of sight.

As he nears the water, his limp and twitches grow more exaggerated. Meanwhile --

GRANDALF

(to the kids)

Now, where were we?

CARA

At this point, I'd like to note that it's very kind of you, Master, to help not just those who are lost in spirit, but those who are physically ailing as well.

GRANDALF

Thank you very much. It says a lot about you that you can appreciate that.

CELESTE

The Master has a heart of gold!

Grandalf raises a palm: "No problem."

The Kidney Patient reaches the river, his body now twitching uncontrollably from exhaustion.

Finally, with a strained groan, he falls face-first into the water and remains floating there, motionless.

The others notice none of this.

GRANDALF

How kind of you. Believe me, anyone in my place would have one. But let's not linger! Come with me! Lunch will be ready at the camp soon.

IAN

Oh, that's great! I'm starving!

Grandalf starts into the forest, the students follow him.

We stay on the motionless body of Kidney Patient, still floating on the river's surface.

A long moment.

JOSH (O.S.)

I wonder if they have chicken.

The camp is simple. A small wooden cabin is the only permanent structure, surrounded by tents.

Numerous students in various school uniforms bustle about, including a few in pink. They are all preparing for lunch, bringing disposable plates and cutlery from the cabin and spreading blankets on the grass.

Our four students arrive, trailing behind Grandalf.

CELESTE

So, we're not the first ones at all!

GRANDALF

Far from it. These young people, much like you, are searching for the truth.

IAN

And just how easy or difficult is it to find this truth in the IB documents these days?

GRANDALF

(with a wise smile)

If you have ears to hear, you will see.

65

EXT. YIBAIYUN FOREST - GRANDALF'S CAMP - DAY

65

The campers are eating simple food on blankets spread across the grass. Cara, Celeste, Ian, and Josh eat on a separate blanket. Grandalf sits further away, eating with other students. The two wine bottles rest beside him.

CELESTE

Sometimes I can't tell if we're on the right path, or if everyone here has lost their minds.

JOSH

Let's hope we find out soon.

A student, BEETA (17), approaches Grandalf.

BEETA

Master. Do we have anything left to drink?

GRANDALF

Of course.

He hands the bottles to Beeta. Beeta is pleased and hurries to pass the drink around.

As the students pour the liquid into their cups, it's clear! They start murmuring to each other, "It's a miracle!", "He performed a miracle!". Someone shouts, "Baijiu!".

A boy, MARTIE (17), examines the drink closely, then tastes it. He leaps up from his blanket triumphantly.

MARTIE

(to Grandalf)

Master! Others in your place would try to win the students' trust and affection with some cheap, sugary soda! But you offer us the most delicious water! Thank you!

The students also thank Grandalf and applaud him. Grandalf raises a palm to show it was his pleasure. Then he stands. The applause soon dies down.

GRANDALF

In a world full of sugar and stimulants, sometimes what we need most... is...

He raises the glass of water in his hand in a toast.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

... clarity.

Then another student, LUND (17) stands up:

(CONTINUED)

LUND

True balance begins with hydration -- and the mind flows where the body rests.

Then another student, GIGER (17) stands up.

GIGER

Only when the wine is gone do we see the value of water.

Then another student, FEENAN (17) stands up ceremoniously.

FEENAN

Cognitive performance is enhanced by adequate mineral intake.

Everyone nods in agreement.

GRANDALF

Cheers!

ALL STUDENTS

Cheers!

Everyone contentedly drains their glasses.

CELESTE

I can tell... there is real learning going on here.

Cara and Josh nod in agreement. Ian is lost in suspicious thought.

The campers turn back to their food.

In the dense woods, a beautiful, multi-colored bird sings on a branch. But a fox, with a well-aimed leap, snatches it.

Grandalf's face fills the frame, a satisfied smile on his face.

GRANDALF

(loudly)

I hope everyone enjoyed lunch! Thanks to Texas Freightened Chicken, which, in my humble opinion, is the best fast-food chain in the world!

GRANDALF

You're still new here. It's only right that we have some time to ourselves, so you can ask questions freely.

JOSH

That's very kind and thoughtful!  
Thank you, Master!

IAN

Thank you.

GRANDALF

It's nothing, really. Get ready!

Grandalf leaves as Cara and Celeste return.

CARA

Get ready for what?

JOSH

We're going with the Master.

CELESTE

Wow.

Cara, Celeste, Josh, and Ian walk with Grandalf on a dirt road through the forest. Grandalf gestures subtly, his mind elsewhere -- as if preparing for a lecture. Cara steps up beside Grandalf.

CARA

Master, may I?

Grandalf continues to gesture, not reacting to Cara's question.

CARA (CONT'D)

Master?

GRANDALF

What? What is it?

CARA

Forgive me for disturbing you. But we have so many questions.

GRANDALF

Go ahead! I'm listening.

Slowly, the others also move closer.

CARA

So, there's this T.O.K. thing. I don't really get what it's all about.

GRANDALF

T.O.K.? "Tok." Ah, of course! Tik Tok. Well, you know, it's a video-sharing platform, like YouTube. But I'm not really on those, I'm more of a BiliBili guy.

CELESTE

Not Tik Tok! Just T.O.K.! Theory of Knowledge. You know! The one and only IB subject! Rings a bell?

GRANDALF

Ah, that "Tok"! Of course, how could I not know it. A very exciting subject! But what's your problem with it?

CARA

It's hard to even explain.

IAN

You know that feeling when you want to learn how to fry an egg, but then they explain to you the composition of the second protective coating on the inside of the pan, and in hardcore scientific language, on top of that.

GRANDALF

Oh, now I see.

Grandalf stops, and the others stop with him.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

Look. T.O.K. is a serious matter.

Grandalf grabs Cara by the shoulders, leans in, and looks deep into her eyes.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

This cannot be taken lightly.

He lets Cara go, straightens up, and continues on his way. The students exchange confused glances for a moment, then quickly hurry to catch up with him.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

All knowledge has a background, and if we're being honest, we must admit that even this background has a background. You have to accept that. Don't fight it.

They all ponder this for a while.

CARA

So?

GRANDALF

So what? -- Wait!

CARA

Huh?

The group stops again. A small, grassy clearing spreads out before them.

Grandalf crouches, pressing his palm theatrically to the ground.

CARA (CONT'D)

Master?

GRANDALF

Unfortunately, this area is known for quicksand. Like this patch right here in front of us.

CARA

This is quicksand?

CELESTE

Quicksand? Here?

They all freeze, staring wide-eyed at the patch of ground in front of them.

Grandalf stands, dusting off his palm.

GRANDALF

That's right. But let me cross. If I succeed, you can follow. But don't you dare move until then! This is not a game.

CARA

(worried)

But Master...

Grandalf raises a hand to Cara's face, silencing her.

GRANDALF

As I said. You just wait here.

He turns and, with arms spread wide, takes ten dignified, slow-paced steps forward onto the supposed quicksand. Meanwhile, the students watch him with growing astonishment, their jaws dropping in awe.

After his sixth step--

JOSH

He's crossing the quicksand with  
dry feet!

CELESTE

This is not possible!

IAN

Yeah, it's not.

CARA

A miracle!

After his tenth step, Grandalf turns back to the students. A wide smile on his face, his arms still spread wide.

GRANDALF

You can come now! Now, it's safe.

The students follow, but with extreme caution. They tiptoe gingerly from one spot to the next, testing the ground before each step.

A moment later, they all make it across to Grandalf. He looks them over.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

(proudly smiling)

Are you all good?

The students just nod, their eyes downcast, a mix of shock and confusion still on their faces.

CARA

Yes, we are.

GRANDALF

Then let's go on!

Grandalf continues to lead the group further through the forest.

A long moment. They are slowly moving away.

IAN

Why didn't we just go around?

They keep walking.

69

EXT. YIBAIYUN FOREST - DIRT ROAD - LATER

69

The group proceeds down the path. Josh is now walking beside Grandalf, the others falling into step behind them.

JOSH

You know, Master, I've been thinking a lot about the end of the IB mission statement. When it says, "other people, with their differences, can also be right." What does that mean in practice?

Grandalf stops, gazes into the distance, his eyes searching, then suddenly points at something incredibly far away.

ZOOM SHOT

We glide along Grandalf's pointing finger and, following his eagle eye, fly at lightning speed to his target. The target: a MEERKAT, surveying the landscape.

BACK TO SCENE

Grandalf points into the distance.

GRANDALF

Do you see that animal over there?

Josh tries to spot what Grandalf is pointing at.

JOSH'S POV

The vegetation sways peacefully in the gentle breeze. No sign of animal activity.

BACK TO SCENE

JOSH

To be honest, no. I don't.

GRANDALF

That animal is a Suricata suricatta. In Latin. But if you were to call it a Civettictis viverridae, then, despite the difference, you would also be right.

(with a kind smile)

Do you understand now?

(CONTINUED)

Grandalf walks on with the others, leaving Josh behind. Josh stands frozen for a moment, jaw dropped, still squinting into the distance. Then, lost in thought, he scrambles to rejoin the group.

JOSH

I think I understand.

(beat)

So, to use a simpler example. If a classmate claims that milk is black, but I say it's white. Then despite the difference, I'm also right! Do I get it?

GRANDALF

Exactly! You see, it's not that difficult after all!

JOSH

Thank you so much, Master!

GRANDALF

You're very welcome!

The small group walks on.

As they walk along the road, they notice a man lying on the path. He is SAMIR (50s).

GRANDALF

Oh, my God!

They all rush over to the man, who is beaten black and blue, his clothes torn in several places.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

(to Samir)

Dear Lord, what happened here?

Grandalf and Josh try to help the man up -- which they slowly manage to do.

SAMIR

I was just trying to take a few documents to my grandmother's house in the woods, because she loves to read, too. But suddenly, robbers attacked and robbed me.

(bursts into tears)

They took everything I had.

GRANDALF

I see. Please, calm down. What kind of documents were they? Were they valuable?

Samir tries to pull himself together, getting control of his crying for a moment.

SAMIR

Yes, they were very valuable IB documents. My grandma and I read them all the time. Let's see! I had the Academic Integrity Policy, Learning and Teaching, Making the PYP Happen, which is our personal favorite, by the way, and I even had an A2-size Mission Statement poster with me.

(bursts into tears again)  
And now it's all gone!

GRANDALF

I see. Don't cry, now. We'll find a solution for you. I will help.

Grandalf and Josh support Samir from both sides, helping him to the doorstep of a small house. Cara and Celeste follow them in silence.

Grandalf knocks on the door. An old man, HOLST (65) opens the door just a crack.

HOLST

Yes. What is it, what happened, what can I do for you?

GRANDALF

We need help. Look what happened! This poor man was beaten up on the road, and the vile scoundrels even took his IB documents. His wounds need to be treated.

HOLST

Ooh.

GRANDALF

I'm asking you to tend to him properly, heal him, and reorder his lost documents on Taobao.

HOLST

Ooh.

GRANDALF

So please, get the following.

Holst opens the door wider, revealing that he is already equipped with a notepad and pen, and now he's ready to take notes.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)  
Academic Integrity Policy, Learning  
and Teaching, Making the PYP  
Happen, and an A2-size Mission  
Statement poster.

A moment. Holst jots it down.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)  
Got it?

HOLST  
(muttering to his notepad)  
I see. And...  
(to Grandalf)  
Don't you need the ATL Checklist as  
well?

GRANDALF  
(to Samir)  
Do we need the ATL Checklist?

SAMIR  
(to Grandalf)  
No.

GRANDALF  
(to Holst)  
No, thank you. That one is not  
needed.

CLOSE ON - HOLST'S NOTES

On Holst's notepad, the titles are neatly listed, one per line. At the bottom of the list: "ATL Check List." With several back-and-forth strokes, Holst's pen vigorously crosses this title out.

WIDER ANGLE

HOLST  
I see.

Holst now opens the door wide. Grandalf ushers Samir over the threshold, but doesn't enter himself. Holst takes over, holding Samir by the arm.

GRANDALF  
I'll pay for the publications, of  
course. I'll give you the money  
when I return.

HOLST  
Oh.

(CONTINUED)

With that, Holst takes Samir into the house and closes the door.

Grandalf turns and returns to the road, the four students following him.

They walk in silence for a while.

CELESTE

Master... forgive me... but aren't these publications available for free download on the internet?

Grandalf stops, grabs Celeste by the shoulders, leans in, and looks into her eyes.

GRANDALF

It's not the price that matters, it's the intention.

He lets Celeste go, straightens up, and continues on his way -- the others with him.

We stay.

CELESTE

Oh.

JOSH

Hm.

The students nod in agreement, only Ian's face shows a hint of doubt as he looks back at the small house.

CARA

The Master has a heart of gold.

Grandalf raises a palm: "Got it, it's nothing."

Grandalf and his four followers arrive at a wide open field, already crowded with students. The students are talking, playing, in high spirits, some chasing each other. As some students see Grandalf approaching, they begin to form rows, sitting down in the grass to listen to him.

As we get closer, Celeste notices a lonely girl, sitting sadly apart from the others, staring into space. This is DIANE (17).

Celeste stops her friends, while Grandalf continues towards a high point from where he can be seen by everyone.

CELESTE

Wait! Everyone here is so together, except for that girl.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DIANE

Does he really?

CELESTE

Well... at first glance, it seemed like it.

DIANE

Alright. Then you guys should stick around for a while, and good luck to you. To us. Or I don't know.

Celeste looks thoughtfully at the crowd of students settling down on the field, preparing to listen to Grandalf. From a distance, Ian gives Celeste a questioning "Well?" look. Celeste just shrugs in response.

CELESTE

(to Diane)

Aren't you joining the others?

DIANE

Thanks, but I'd rather stay. After two months, I'll hear what I need to from here.

CELESTE

I see.

Celeste slowly, uncertainly backs away, then turns on her heel and quickly returns to her friends.

Grandalf's face fills the frame, his mesmerizing eyes looking out at the off-screen crowd of students before him.

GRANDALF

I see the burden in your eyes. I see the weight of the History IA on your shoulders, the confusion caused by various IB documents in your souls. You ask, "What now? Where is the light in the infinite silence of the rubrics?"

(beat)

And I say to you: Blessed are those with a low Predicted Grade, for theirs is the kingdom of surprise.

A low murmur ripples through the off-screen students.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

Blessed are those who mourn their failed Math IA, for they will be comforted at the retake exam. If they prepare for it, that is.

The crowd of students sits disciplined on the clearing, listening intently to Grandalf. Celeste and Cara are sitting right in front of them as part of the audience.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

Blessed are the obedient who endure their teachers' instructions, for in a given situation, they will be the ones to use the school elevator without reprisal.

We focus on the attentive crowd.

GRANDALF (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the IB language, for they have some faint hope of one day, perhaps, understanding it.

We slowly move behind the last row of the crowd.

GRANDALF (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Blessed are the pure in heart who respect CAS, for they will see the essence at the bottom of the sea of administration. Blessed are the peacemakers who create harmony in group work, for they will become the class monitors. Blessed are those who suffer a war in their souls over filling out an IB document, for they will eventually get into universities. You are the light in the darkness of the rubrics. Do not, therefore, hide your lamp under a bucket. If you confine your thoughts to the prison of the given character count, how can you shine? If the salt loses its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? You have heard that it was said to older generations: "Analyze, Evaluate, Justify." But I tell you: Feel the source! Do not just analyze it, but live it! Do not just evaluate it, but let wisdom flow through you! True knowledge does not reside in the Command Terms, but in the silence between two submission deadlines. Look at the trees of the forest! They do not write reflection journals, yet they grow to the sky.

We arrive behind the last row, specifically behind two girls sitting there, HUMMEY (17) and HUNGER (17).

HUMMEY

Damn, I could eat a horse.

HUNGER

Yeah, me too. And some chicken.

GRANDALF

Look at the flowers of the field!  
They do not worry about the  
summative assessment, yet they are  
magnificent.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

If nature takes such care of them,  
will the IBO not take care of you,  
who are worth more than any essay?

We jump back to Grandalf.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

So do not worry about tomorrow's  
assignments.

IAN (O.S.)

Master!

GRANDALF

Those papers will worry about  
themselves. Each day has enough  
trouble of its own.

JOSH (O.S.)

Master!

GRANDALF

I hope and believe...

IAN (O.S.)

Master!

GRANDALF

(rushed)

...that my little rationale is a  
help to you all now.

(irritated, to the boys)

Yes?

Josh and Ian stand before the front row of students. They each hold a basket, dangling by their legs, but the contents are not quite falling out. Josh's basket has 5 loaves of bread, Ian's has 2 fish.

JOSH

Master! The guys are getting  
hungry, and the way back to camp  
isn't short. We need energy for it.  
Shouldn't we get going?

GRANDALF

Not at all. You have the food right there, you give them something to eat!

JOSH

But these are supposedly stale loaves from last time. They're not very good.

IAN

And besides. We only have five loaves and two fish.

Grandalf opens his arms to them.

GRANDALF

Give them to me!

Josh and Ian step closer and hand the baskets to Grandalf. Placing the baskets on top of each other, Grandalf raises them to the sky.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

(to the sky)

This journey is not a solitary pilgrimage. We must draw strength from each other's knowledge and from the nourishment that sustains both our bodies and our souls. For we are all one learning community. Tonight, when the sun sets... Or rather, right now, because we are hungry now... Let us leave the books and laptops! Let us break bread and fish together, and share not only our thoughts, but our food as well!

Grandalf closes his eyes, meditating. A long moment.

JOSH

Master?

Grandalf quickly opens his eyes and urgently hands the baskets back to Josh and Ian.

GRANDALF

Okay, that's enough. Go, give them something to eat!

The boys stand there, bewildered.

IAN

But... this will be freaking gone by the middle of the first row!

GRANDALF

Do not worry! I just explained it.  
Let the miracle happen!

IAN

Look, Master, as far as I know, the last time this trick worked for someone was 2000 years ago, and we can't even verify if that one story is true.

GRANDALF

Just do as I say, and you will see.

The boys shrug -- so be it. Josh and Ian begin to distribute the five loaves and two fish from the edge of the front row. Celeste and Cara also stand up -- they want to see how this turns out. Not everyone takes from the baskets, but even so, everything is easily gone by the 8th person. The boys turn to Grandalf with their empty baskets.

IAN

Now what?

Grandalf is already reaching into his pocket for his phone.

GRANDALF

(to the boys)  
It's not about the result. It's about the trying journey.

CELESTE

Learning journey.

GRANDALF

That's what I'm saying.

And he raises his phone high, showing it to the crowd of students.

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

(to the crowd)  
My friends!

CARA

(to her friends)  
What's he doing with that?

JOSH

I have no idea.

GRANDALF

My friends! The bad news is that we've run out of food. But the good news is that anyone who orders a Hyper Menu from Texas Frightened Chicken gets a twelve percent discount today!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

Get your phones out, people, and let's eat and be full! Remember, a lean body is a sign of disease!

Almost everyone in the crowd pulls out a mobile phone and starts scrolling to order food.

Grandalf closes his eyes and raises his arms to the sky again. Cara, Celeste, Josh, and Ian stare, mouths agape, trying to process the events. Just then --

As if by magic, 3 food delivery cars appear on the road behind the field, honking. The cars are packed to the brim with food containers. The drivers jump out and open the trunks. The crowd of students, with a wild battle cry, storms the cars, starting a brutal stampede to see who can get to the food first.

The students sit in rows, eating with great enthusiasm. At the end of a row sit Cara, Celeste, Josh, and Ian. They are not eating, just staring ahead, still trying to process the events.

CARA

How the hell does everyone have a phone here? Wasn't the whole point that there's no reception at all?

JOSH

Apparently, it works right here in this open field.

IAN

I can't believe this.

Grandalf leads the crowd of students back towards the camp. He walks alone, with the crowd following a good 15 meters behind.

Cara, Celeste, Josh, and Ian are at the rear. They walk side by side, pondering.

CARA

What now?

CELESTE

All I know is I don't want to end up like that disappointed girl, what was her name.

JOSH

Whatever, obviously we want results.

IAN

Think about it, did we learn anything today?

A moment.

JOSH

I don't know.

CARA

Maybe.

IAN

Maybe.

JOSH

Well, he did teach us something about certain animals I couldn't see.

CELESTE

And some humanity, too.

IAN

Wonderful. Just, last time I checked, the IB guys in Darwin wanted beautifully and perfectly filled documents, not moral lessons. And this "wonderful" speech didn't go beyond those limits, did it?

A moment.

CELESTE

Fair point. We need to talk to him. I mean, getting straight to the point, going through it document by document. I have no better idea. Then we'll find out if he can really help.

JOSH

Okay. Should we go up to him?

IAN

I guess there's no point in waiting.

Ian quickens his pace, the other three with him. They overtake a few students. Just then --

A VAN appears, overtaking the walking crowd from the left. From its window, one of the Pinks, Leader, waves mockingly at Ian's group, then forms a 'V for victory' with his fingers as they pass.

JOSH

How did they...?

CELESTE

Is that one of their dads, or are they driving the van themselves?

IAN

Pretty weird. Though I'm not really surprised they're too lazy to walk.

CARA

I'd love to know how the hell they got a van out of nowhere.

JOSH

Yeah.

The four continue to walk quickly towards Grandalf, overtaking the other students. As they catch up to the students at the front, the van pulls up right next to Grandalf.

It BRAKES suddenly! Dust kicks up. Grandalf is startled. The van's sliding door flies open. Pink hands reach out from the van -- Stan and Pan's hands. They grab Grandalf and pull him into the vehicle with an aggressive move. Grandalf cries out, but has no strength to defend himself.

IAN

Hey!

JOSH

No way!

Celeste and Cara would scream, but the scream freezes in their throats. A wave of panic ripples through the crowd.

The van's sliding door slams shut, and the vehicle takes off with screeching tires, leaving a large cloud of dust behind.

Some of the students continue to panic, while others, including Celeste, Ian, and Josh, try to run after the van, but it's no use. They soon realize this is a race they can't win.

CELESTE

I can't freakin' believe this!

Ian yells at the sky in fury.

IAN

God-damn Pinks! Aaa!

The students look at each other, clueless. Josh is the first to pull himself together. He runs a little further ahead and starts examining the tracks on the ground.

IAN (CONT'D)

(to Celeste and Cara)

Fantastic. It seems this tracking genius is our last hope. Celeste! Talk to the others, because obviously many of them want to go back to the camp, they're exhausted, and so on. And somebody call the cops. As it turned out, we have enough phones for that. I don't know who's in charge here. But we can't just let this go.

CARA

And us?

IAN

(pointing at Josh)

We... we'll see what kinda theory the genius comes up with this time.

CELESTE

Alright.

Celeste turns and heads towards the bewildered crowd of students.

IAN

(referring to Josh, to  
Cara)

Let's see this.

He and Cara start walking towards Josh, who is still examining the tracks.

A small, run-down, single-story house with peeling paint and a broken window. The yard is overgrown with weeds.

The Pinks' van careens into the front yard, swerving wildly. It finally skids sideways to a jarring halt, kicking up dirt and dust. The engine CUTS. The van's side door is THROWN open.

Stan and Pan drag Grandalf out. Leader and Chip jump out to help, Chip from the driver's seat. Leader quickly slings a thin black backpack over his shoulder.

A rough burlap sack covers Grandalf's head. His hands are zip-tied behind his back. He struggles, feet scuffing the dirt, muffled protests coming from under the sack.

The Pinks haul him towards the house and up the rotting porch steps. Leader KICKS the front door in. The lock rips from the frame and clatters into the hallway. The door swings open into darkness.

They shove Grandalf inside, and the others follow. The door is KICKED from the inside, BANGING against the frame but not latching.

A small group of students walks along the forest road, following a set of tire tracks. Josh leads the investigation. Ian, Cara, and Celeste follow him, along with a few other students who didn't return to camp with the rest.

After a few more steps, Josh raises his right hand.

JOSH

Wait!

Josh walks ahead and crouches down to get a better look at the tire tracks. After a few seconds, he waves the group closer. The others follow his lead. Josh stands up.

JOSH (CONT'D)

This is our chance. They can't have gotten far.

IAN

What makes you think that?

JOSH

'Cause one of the axles couldn't handle the rough road.

CELESTE

And how do you know that?

JOSH

Just look ahead more carefully.

Josh points to the road -- "voilà."

FROM ABOVE, we see the road. The van's two tire tracks are clearly visible in the dust. Up to Josh's position, both are normally straight. But from Josh's position onward, only the right track is straight. The left one is an impossible, exaggerated wavy line.

A dimly lit, poorly furnished living room with a decaying floor. There's almost no furniture. Against the wall opposite the entrance sits a large dining table with an old wooden armchair tucked underneath. To its left is an old wardrobe.

(CONTINUED)

To the right of the table, another identical armchair faces us.

With some struggle, Stan and Pan drag Grandalf into the chair. They secure his arms to the armrests and his legs to the chair legs with zip ties. Stan and Pan then stand at the ready on Grandalf's left.

Finally, Chip yanks the sack off Grandalf's head, then pulls a cloth gag from his mouth. Grandalf gasps for air, his hair completely disheveled.

GRANDALF

Aah! You cruel bandits! What do you want from me? I sweat blood with a gentle soul to help you, and you terrorize me?

LEADER

Good afternoon, "Master Grandalf"!  
Let's slow down a bit, shall we?  
(to Chip)  
Chip, get a chair. I'm tired.

Chip brings the other chair from the table and places it behind Leader. Leader takes off his backpack and sits down comfortably. Chip stays by his side.

GRANDALF

You won't get away with this, you pink-headed punks!

LEADER

Like I said. Slowly.  
(beat)  
What do you think, "my Master," why are we here? I'm so curious if you can guess!

GRANDALF

I suppose because I didn't let you drink, and for breaking camp rules, I locked two of you in the camp toilet for a few hours. This is still not the appropriate reaction!

Leader laughs at the suggestion. The other Pinks also exchange glances and chuckle.

LEADER

Please! I can get out of that toilet whenever I want!

Leader leans forward in his chair meaningfully.

LEADER (CONT'D)

No, "my Master," that's not why we're here.

(CONTINUED)

Leader jumps up, pacing around.

LEADER (CONT'D)

We know each other well. This isn't our first time at your run-down camp. But why would we torture ourselves with this? To get into the IB universities, which we'd never manage on our own in a million years. But no worries, because "the Master" is here to help!

He leans close to Grandalf.

LEADER (CONT'D)

For months, we've been listening to your bullshit and eating your stupid chicken, but I bet there isn't a single student in this miserable camp who is even one damn filled-out questionnaire closer to increasing their pathetic little chance at getting into university!

Grandalf snarls angrily, but can't offer a rebuttal. Leader straightens up.

LEADER (CONT'D)

I'm right, aren't I?

A moment. Grandalf glares furiously at the floor, unable to make eye contact.

LEADER (CONT'D)

So that's why we are here. Because today, in this solemn setting, right here, together...

Leader starts unpacking a stack of about 200 pages of A4 documents from his backpack in several batches. He slaps them all on top of each other on the table.

LEADER (CONT'D)

...we are going to fill out every single IB document. All of them! For all of us! It's going to take a while, but I'm pleased to report, (leans closer to Grandalf) we've already passed the exam in patience with flying colors, "my Master."

He straightens up again.

LEADER (CONT'D)

You get a drink when you help. No

food. Including chicken!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LEADER (CONT'D)

Bathroom break is when we're done  
with all the documents. Capisce?

(beat)

The circumstances of your departure  
are still under discussion.

(aggressively, in a raised  
voice)

Am I clear, guru?

GRANDALF

Go to hell, you punk!

Leader, backpack in hand, crouches down by Grandalf's chair.

LEADER

Resistance is not in your best  
interest, Master.

He reaches into his backpack.

LEADER (CONT'D)

I'll show you why.

Leader pulls Grandalf's laptop out of the backpack.

GRANDALF

My laptop! You thieves! How the  
hell did you get that?

Leader turns the laptop in his hands, taunting him with it.

LEADER

No. The real question is, how can  
you be stupid enough not to set a  
password?

GRANDALF

I can't remember passwords, big  
deal.

LEADER

I wonder how you log into ManageBac  
then, "Master", but you know what?  
I don't care.

Leader sits back down in his chair. Leaning on the armrest,  
he still holds the laptop up.

LEADER (CONT'D)

What I care about is whether you're  
willing to help before you have to  
face serious moral losses.

Grandalf snarls furiously.

GRANDALF

You... You vile scoundrel.

IAN (CONT'D)

If anyone comes this way, try to stall them and ask for help. In case it's not more Pink criminals, of course. Got it?

The students signal that they understand, and a few of them start moving up the road. Ian turns back to Josh and nods: mission accomplished.

JOSH

Alright, now we go stealth mode and crawl to the house --

CARA

(snapping)

Are you crazy? I'm not crawling in the dirt for you.

JOSH

Ssh! Keep it down! They'll hear us!

(beat)

Fine, the point is we have to approach the house quietly and without being seen. Are you ready?

CELESTE

Ready.

They all nod.

Josh, Ian, Celeste, and Cara, in a crouched position, sneak to the nearest corner of the small house. They all try to survey the area from there. No movement.

They venture further. Reaching the porch steps, Josh signals for the others to wait. He slowly steps up the stairs to the door. He notices that the door is ajar, as the lock is now missing. He slowly pushes it open. A faint CREAK is heard. Josh peeks inside. The coast is clear so far. He signals for the others to follow.

The four of them enter the house.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN - FULLSCREEN

On Grandalf's laptop screen, a ManageBac lesson plan is visible. A large, square-ratio cat meme is being dragged from one point to another on the image.

PAN (O.S.)

No! Don't put it there! Put it right in the Learning Experience, that's funnier!

STAN (O.S.)  
(laughing)  
Okay, you got it!

GRANDALF (O.S.)  
Stop it, you barbarians! That's an  
official document!

BACK TO SCENE

Stan and Pan are messing with Grandalf's laptop, which they've placed on the corner of the table. Chip is still standing next to Grandalf, and Leader is sitting opposite him, an unfilled IB assignment sheet in his lap.

LEADER  
So, help me out! What do I write  
here?

GRANDALF  
I won't tell you! I don't negotiate  
with terrorists!

LEADER  
What are you? The United States of  
America? Here! What do I write  
here? Tell me now, or the boys will  
redesign your lesson plan a bit!

GRANDALF  
Choke on it!

LEADER  
Okay, boys, then do it!

PAN  
(to Chip)  
What should it be?

CHIP  
I dunno. Let's do something about  
football.

PAN  
Okay!  
(to Stan)  
Type this in! It can go in the ATL  
Skills.

STAN  
Are you stupid? You can only check  
boxes there!

PAN  
Then go to the Reflections.

STAN

But no one reads that.

PAN

(snapping impatiently)

Fine, then write it in Community Engagement! Damn. Click on it! And make it this: "Cristiano Ronaldo..."

ON COMPUTER SCREEN - FULLSCREEN

The Community Engagement section in the ManageBac unit planner. As Pan dictates, his words appear on the screen.

PAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

"... is the best football player in the world." Not a period! Three exclamation marks!

The period at the end of the sentence is deleted -- three exclamation marks appear in its place.

BACK TO SCENE

Stan and Pan snicker at Grandalf with malicious grins.

GRANDALF

(angrily to Stan and Pan)

Messi is the best!!!

LEADER

(to Grandalf)

Oh, please! Don't get me started.

GRANDALF

Leave my lesson plan alone!

CHIP

And I'm afraid it's just the warm up session yet, Master.

IN THE HALLWAY

Josh, Ian, Cara, and Celeste are eavesdropping at the door of the interrogation room. Ian presses his ear to the door. They speak in hushed, tense whispers.

CELESTE

What are they doing?

IAN

I think... they're writing football facts into ManageBac.

(CONTINUED)

JOSH  
Crazy.

IN THE INTERROGATION ROOM

LEADER  
(to Grandalf)  
Still not talking?

GRANDALF  
Not even if you burst a vein!

Leader glares at Grandalf for another moment. To no avail.

Leader jumps up from his chair, tossing the unfilled document behind him onto the seat. He shoos Stan and Pan away from the laptop.

LEADER  
Watch this!  
(to Grandalf)  
Enough messing around. Time to  
raise the stakes.  
(to Stan)  
Where's that folder?

STAN  
(pointing at the screen)  
Here.

LEADER  
(reading the monitor)  
Let's see this one! "Action and  
Reflection: The CAS Journey"!  
(to Grandalf)  
Creativity, Activity, Service!  
Well, you don't exactly excel in  
any of those, so you probably  
haven't had much use for this  
anyway.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN - FULLSCREEN

In the file manager, IB documents are neatly lined up in alphabetical order in the given directory.

A keyboard key CLICKS. A dialog box pops up:  
"Are you sure you want to delete Action and Reflection: The  
CAS Journey.pdf?"

The cursor moves to "YES," then another key CLICKS. The dialog box disappears.

LEADER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Oops! Now you see it, now you  
don't!

(CONTINUED)

GRANDALF (O.S.)  
You bastard!

BACK TO SCENE

GRANDALF (CONT'D)  
I downloaded that during my  
university years from the very  
first official IB server!

LEADER  
But now it's gone, because you  
messed with me.

Grandalf tries to free himself from the chair. He struggles,  
but it's useless, the zip ties hold him fast. He cries out.

GRANDALF  
Aaargh!

LEADER  
So, are you going to help?

GRANDALF  
Never!

Leader turns back to the laptop.

LEADER  
Then let's see what else we have  
here!

GRANDALF  
Don't you do it!

LEADER  
(reading the monitor)  
"Standards and Practices: Authentic  
Assessment in the DP"  
(to Grandalf)  
You don't even teach DP! In fact,  
to be honest, after all this, it  
seems even MYP is too advanced for  
you. You don't need this!

With a theatrical gesture, Leader slams the ENTER key on the  
keyboard.

LEADER (CONT'D)  
Boom! That one's history too!

GRANDALF  
That was from the first edition,  
you sadist! A numbered copy!

LEADER  
I'm not impressed at all!

He jumps back to his chair, snatching up the document and waving it menacingly in Grandalf's face.

LEADER (CONT'D)

Talk!

GRANDALF

Don't hold your breath!

LEADER

Fine, I've got all the damn time in the world.

(reading the monitor)

There's plenty more where that came from!

Now Celeste's ear is also pressed against the door next to Ian's. The two of them face each other.

IAN

Wow.

CARA

What?

CELESTE

Now they're deleting IB documents from his computer.

JOSH

Brutal.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN - FULLSCREEN

The pointer glides over the file names -- it quickly finds a new victim, then stops.

LEADER (O.S.)

"A Guide to the IB Learner Profile"!

BACK TO SCENE

LEADER (CONT'D)

(to Grandalf)

I'm sorry to inform you that none of the learner profiles apply to you, so this one can go in the trash too.

(CONTINUED)

GRANDALF

Don't you dare delete that one!

Leader makes a show of exaggerated regret, hand to his face.

LEADER

Oh, I'm sorry, too late!

GRANDALF

(flatly)

But you haven't even pressed enter yet.

LEADER

Oh. You are right.

He slaps the ENTER key again.

LEADER (CONT'D)

Now it's too late!

GRANDALF

You heartless scoundrel! I got that from my first love in high school!

LEADER

Don't bore me with your nonsense, the IB didn't even exist back then!

GRANDALF

I'm not that old, you monkey!

Leader sighs.

LEADER

(to himself, into the air)

God, this man is so boring!

PAN

Yes, he is, isn't he?

CHIP

Should we move on to Plan 'C'?

LEADER

Why, what was Plan 'B'?

CHIP

Well, this, deleting his files.

LEADER

Ah. You got it.

Leader looks over his team, seeking their agreement.

LEADER (CONT'D)

Alright, let's do it!

(to Grandalf)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LEADER (CONT'D)

But I'm warning you, this is going to be brutal. And there's no going back.

GRANDALF

Let me go! This whole thing is pointless!

LEADER

Chip! The flash drive!

Chip reaches into his pocket, pulls out a flash drive, and hands it to Leader right in front of Grandalf's nose. Leader takes it, then crouches in front of Grandalf's chair. He prepares for one last warning.

LEADER (CONT'D)

Do you know what's on this?

GRANDALF

Knowing your twisted mind, probably some dirty little virus.

LEADER

Worse.

He stands up.

LEADER (CONT'D)

Linux.

Grandalf's jaw drops, he's speechless. The Pinks laugh at him.

LEADER (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Linux!

(to his team)

High five!

He high-fives Stan, Pan, and Chip.

GRANDALF

But... Linux doesn't support ManageBac!

LEADER

(aggressively)

That's the whole point, genius! You can say goodbye to the entire shebang!

GRANDALF

You can't do this! I may not have helped, but I didn't cause any harm either!

LEADER

You've already caused harm just by  
making us be in the same stinking  
room with you.

He hands the flash drive to Pan.

LEADER (CONT'D)

(to Stan)  
Boot it up! And let him watch!

Stan nods and reboots the computer. Chip, showing  
considerable strength, turns Grandalf, chair and all, to face  
the table. Stan turns the laptop towards Grandalf.

A flash -- black screen. Another flash -- a dark boot screen.

Stan quickly selects the appropriate menu for system  
installation and parks the selection bar in the right place.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN - FULLSCREEN

The selection bar is on this line:  
"UEFI: Kingston DataTraveler 3.0 - LINUX"

PAN (O.S.)  
That's the one!

A key CLICKS.

A new dark screen. At the top, a question:  
"Where do you want to install the system?"

Below it, a list of drives:  
> Partition 1: Windows OS - 250 GB (with a small Windows  
logo next to it)  
> Partition 2: Data - 500 GB  
> Partition 3: Recovery - 20 GB"

The selection bar is already on the "Windows OS" partition.

GRANDALF (O.S.)  
Don't do it! Stop!

STAN (O.S.)  
Hehe.

A key CLICKS emphatically.

An ominous dialog box pops up in the middle of the screen. In  
white letters, the question:

"Are you sure you want to delete Windows and install Linux  
instead?"

Below it, in the same box, a text FLASHES in red letters:  
"WARNING: MANAGEBAC WILL NOT WORK!!!"

At the bottom sit two buttons: [NO] and [YES].

Now Josh's and Cara's ears are pressed to the door. Ian crouches behind Josh, Celeste stands behind Cara.

CARA

(quietly)

And now they want to install Linux  
on his computer.

GRANDALF (O.S.)

No!

CELESTE

(to Ian)

ManageBac doesn't work with that,  
does it?

Ian shrugs.

JOSH

These guys are savages.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN - FULLSCREEN

The cursor jumps from [NO] to [YES].

BACK TO SCENE

Stan's finger is already in the air, ready to strike.

GRANDALF

I'm begging you!

LEADER

So what's it gonna be, "Master"?

This is your last chance!

GRANDALF

I'll give you anything!

LEADER

Don't give me anything, help me!

He slaps the stack of documents on the table.

LEADER (CONT'D)

(aggressively)

How do I fill these out? How?

(CONTINUED)

Grandalf shakes his head, defeated.

GRANDALF  
(broken, to himself)  
I... I...

Leader snatches the document he had previously tossed onto his chair. He shoves the document in Grandalf's face, pointing to the first rubric.

LEADER  
What do I write here?

GRANDALF  
I...

LEADER  
Spit it out already! What the hell do I write here to get into university? --

GRANDALF  
(aggressively)  
-- I don't know!

LEADER  
What?

GRANDALF  
I have no clue! You follow?!

LEADER  
What's this? Now you change your style of lying or what?

GRANDALF  
I'm not lying, you idiot! I really have no idea. I'm fake! Capisce?

Leader, stunned, closes the laptop lid with a robotic motion.

PAN  
(to Leader)  
What does it mean?

CHIP  
Yeah. How can you be fake?

GRANDALF  
I'm not really an IB guru. I have a contract with the restaurant, Texas Frightened Chicken. I get them hundreds of student clients who easily get addicted to the industrial, worthless, tasteless, disgusting, but sweet junk food, and from then on, they'll keep eating it.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GRANDALF (CONT'D)

These Texas guys want to crush KFC  
by the end of the semester.

LEADER

Ha! Makes freakin' sense.

GRANDALF

That's the deal. In reality, I  
don't understand the IB much better  
than you do. Frankly, I don't even  
understand how anyone can.

Leader lunges at Grandalf, grabs him by the collar, his other hand clenched into a fist, ready to strike.

LEADER

Give me one reason why I shouldn't  
smash your nose into your face!

GRANDALF

Wait, wait, wait!

LEADER

What the hell am I waiting for?

GRANDALF

I know one person who truly  
understands and speaks the IB  
language.

Leader shakes Grandalf by the collar.

LEADER

Who?

GRANDALF

I don't know her name!

LEADER

Now this is when I rasterize your  
face!

GRANDALF

I mean, I don't know her real name,  
but I've spoken to her many times!  
She calls herself IB Kid.

Leader's fist swings back to strike. Just then --

The door to the room flies open. Celeste, Ian, and Cara stand in the doorway. Josh is missing.

Stan, Pan, and Chip flinch back in fear. Leader drops Grandalf's collar.

LEADER

(to Ian's group)

Well, I was wondering what the hell  
was missing! Tongwen!

IAN

That's enough! In case you didn't  
know, this is a crime.

Chip performs a few spectacular karate moves on the spot  
towards the Tongwen students.

LEADER

(to Chip)

Cut it out!

Chip instantly stops his karate demonstration, his arms  
dropping to his sides as he suddenly looks sheepish.

LEADER (CONT'D)

(to Ian)

Yes, smartass, a crime has indeed  
been committed, but through our  
persistent investigation, we've  
unmasked the fraud. And you, little  
Tongwen chicks, should be grateful,  
because without us, you would've  
spent who-knows-how-many weeks here  
in vain. And you wouldn't have  
gotten into university either  
because of this impostor. You're  
welcome.

IAN

Maybe the guy is a fraud, but it's  
not because of him that we won't  
get into university, but because --  
let's face it -- we were unable to  
show enough diligence and attention  
to the IB curriculum. It's very  
easy to blame someone else for  
that. But I think it's time for  
some self-criticism.

GRANDALF

He's right!

Chip kicks the leg of Grandalf's chair.

CHIP

You shut your mouth!

LEADER

Self-criticism.

IAN

That's right.

LEADER

(to Grandalf)

I'd rather practice Wing Chun kung fu on your stomach!

Leader makes threatening fist gestures towards Grandalf's stomach, but Ian steps in and grabs his arm.

IAN

Leave him be!

Leader shakes Ian off.

LEADER

Back off, Tongwen!

IAN

Just let the poor bastard go, what do you want with him?

Josh bursts into the room from the hallway.

JOSH

Don't let him go yet! They're coming for him.

IAN

What? Who's coming for him?

On the dirt road where the other students are waiting in ambush, an elegant black car appears from the direction of the city. The waiting students move to the side of the road. The car passes them and turns towards the abandoned house.

The car stops in front of the house, behind the Pinks' van. From the back seats, a police officer jumps out from each side of the car. They open the front doors, then move to the rear of the car, watching the entrance of the house.

Two gentlemen in black suits and sunglasses get out of the two front seats. They adjust their perfectly matching outfits. The man who got out of the front passenger seat is JUSTMAN (50s). He is Josh's secret agent uncle. He casually walks over to his driver partner. They both focus on the entrance of the house.

JUSTMAN

I'm curious to see this.

His partner gives an elegant nod.

A beat.

The door of the house opens. Grandalf steps out, escorted like a prisoner by Josh on his right and Chip on his left, holding his arms tightly. Grandalf's hands are tied behind his back.

The other students who were in the house also come out. Pan is carrying Grandalf's laptop. Seeing the black car and the authorities, everyone stops in shock, only Josh continues to move forward.

Seeing the black car and the authorities, everyone freezes in shock, including Chip. Josh, still moving, is jerked to a halt.

JOSH  
(to Ian)  
Take him.

Now Ian grabs Grandalf's right arm. Josh hurries forward to his uncle. They shake hands, greeting each other inaudibly.

Josh signals for the escorts to bring Grandalf closer. The students thus move closer with Grandalf, stopping in a line in front of the black car. The Pinks are on Grandalf's left, the Tongwen students on his right.

Josh goes over to Pan and takes the laptop from his hand. Then he hurries back and gives it to his uncle.

The black-suited agent-driver signals for the police officers to take the prisoner. The officers swiftly take Grandalf from Ian and Chip.

GRANDALF  
What the devil is the meaning of  
this? I am a respected IB educator!

The students groan in outrage, booing Grandalf. Grandalf struggles, but the officers hold him firmly.

The driver raises a hand and puts a finger to his lips, asking for silence. The students fall silent.

JUSTMAN  
Good afternoon. The situation is obviously quite strange for all of us. It's clear that you've had a varied and complicated adventure, during which you've broken numerous laws -- especially our colleagues in pink costume. Damage to private property, trespassing, kidnapping, torture, and some...

Justman takes a meaningful and threatening step towards the Pinks, his gaze fixed on Leader's face from behind his sunglasses.

JUSTMAN (CONT'D)  
(to Leader)  
... even started to pick protected  
flowers for fun.

Justman steps back, tuts, and shakes his head.

JUSTMAN (CONT'D)  
However! To our shame, we must  
thank you.  
(towards Grandalf)  
We've been hunting this fraudulent  
criminal, Bill Grandalf, for a long  
time. But... despite our extensive  
resources, only you were able to  
catch him.

The students murmur in surprise, looking at each other upon  
hearing this information.

CELESTE  
(to Ian)  
I thought Grandalf was his first  
name.

IAN  
Doesn't matter.

JUSTMAN  
So, thank you very much!  
(to the policemen)  
You can take him.

The police officers start to lead Grandalf towards the back  
seat of the car, but he resists.

GRANDALF  
This is ridiculous! What's the  
charge?

JUSTMAN  
This time? Well, uh... misuse of  
the IB name, err...

He falters, then turns to Josh, palm open.

JOSH  
(to Grandalf)  
Commercial exploitation and  
continuous misrepresentation under  
the unauthorized use of the  
International Baccalaureate  
intellectual property.

JUSTMAN  
(to Grandalf)  
That's the one.

The students are stunned. The two police officers professionally place the bitter but ashamed Grandalf in the back seat. The agent-driver also gets back into the car.

JUSTMAN (CONT'D)  
(to the students)  
Have a great day!

Justman walks over to the front passenger seat. He opens the door.

JUSTMAN (CONT'D)  
(to Josh)  
How many more times do I have to  
bail you out of trouble?

JOSH  
Wanted to ask the same question.

Justman gives a short laugh, appreciating the joke. He drums twice on the roof of the car, then gets in.

The car turns around and drives off.

The four Tongwen students and the Pinks watch it go, bewildered.

The students waiting in the distance also don't understand what's happening; they start to stir, a scattered wave of them moving towards the house -- some cautiously, others with urgency. Josh starts back towards them. Cara, Ian, and Celeste follow.

CARA  
(to Josh)  
And now?

JOSH  
I'm afraid that's it.

IAN  
Then at least, since you were so  
clever at calling the agency, let's  
finally call an actual parent, who  
can get us out of here!

Josh reaches for his phone.

JOSH  
I told you, when this guy shows up  
the rules suddenly change.

IAN  
Yes, you did, didn't you?

Josh raises the phone to his ear. Leader and his team still linger around their van.

LEADER  
(yelling after the Tongwen  
students)  
So what's the plan, geniuses?

CELESTE  
You do whatever you want, moron!

Celeste also leaves the scene.

MEDIUM SHOT - IAN

Ian is wedged in the middle of the back seat. He stares ahead, his face full of worry.

IAN'S FATHER (O.S.)  
I can't believe this.

PULL BACK

To reveal the full car. In the back, Ian is flanked by Josh on one side and Celeste on the other. Ian's also worried father drives. Cara sits shotgun, staring straight ahead.

IAN'S FATHER (CONT'D)  
Was it worth it?

IAN  
We had to try. We felt like... This  
was our last hope.

IAN'S FATHER  
Maybe a bit less fooling around,  
but a lot more focus and diligence  
in your studies should've been your  
last hope.

A moment passes. The students stare blankly into space.

IAN'S FATHER (CONT'D)  
I understand how you guys feel. But  
you also have to understand how  
worrying parents feel. So Ian.  
After this, you are grounded for a  
month. You know the rules. And no  
running either.

IAN  
(to Josh)  
I wish I hadn't predicted this.

IAN'S FATHER  
It wasn't too hard to predict.

CARA (CONT'D)

I'd better go get her. Instead of having a shouting match with you here.

Cara reaches for the doorknob.

MOMMY

Don't you both disappear on me now!

CARA

Don't panic, I'll help her. And now I really wanna see what kind of IB project she's talking about all the time.

Cara steps out of the apartment, closing the door behind her. Mommy's only company in the kitchen is the soup simmering on the stove. She slumps onto a chair, staring blankly ahead, clueless.

MOMMY

(to herself)

If only I knew what IB is...

The front door opens. Cara steps out, scanning the dark, quiet street.

She spots Meerah's small figure already halfway down the block, walking with a determined pace. Cara starts after her, her own steps quick and urgent.

Cara closes the distance. She's now only fifty yards behind, about to call out her sister's name --

-- but she stops.

Meerah reaches a fork in the road. Without a moment's hesitation, she takes the path leading away from the school.

A flicker of confusion on Cara's face. Then, suspicion. Her posture changes. The worried sister is gone; a spy takes her place. She hangs back now, using the shadows of parked cars and trees for cover.

Meerah's path leads her to a desolate row of identical, locked-up garages. She stops at one in the middle of the row.

She gives a quick, paranoid look around the empty street.

Cara ducks behind a large trash bin, her heart pounding.

Seeing the coast is clear, Meerah unlocks a heavy combination padlock and lifts the metal garage door just enough to slip inside.

The door RUMBLES down with a heavy, final thud, plunging the area back into silence.

Cara waits a beat.

She darts from her hiding spot, moving from lamppost to lamppost. She crosses the asphalt in silence and edges up to the garage door. She presses her ear to the cold metal -- listening.

Nothing.

The brakes of a bus SCREECH as it pulls up to a lonely bus stop in the middle of nowhere.

The door opens. Josh is the only one to get off.

The door closes, the engine roars, and the bus drives away.

Josh stands motionless for a beat, watching the receding red taillights of the bus.

After a moment, he starts down the road, then turns onto a dirt path that cuts through the fields.

Josh arrives at the farm. His gaze immediately falls on a familiar, solitary barrel. He walks over to it. Lifts the lid, looks inside.

Dark, barren soil. No sign of life.

No surprise on Josh's face, just weary disappointment.

He carelessly drops the lid back on.

He looks out over the empty farm. The small cabin is dark. The fields are silent, save for the chirping of crickets.

JOSH  
(shouting)  
Dad?

Only the wind answers.

He tries again, his voice louder, sharper.

JOSH (CONT'D)  
Dad!

Nothing.

Josh looks around.

JOSH (CONT'D)

(to himself)

And I thought I was the one who  
disappeared.

Meerah's garage door fills the screen. A little further away, Cara is asleep, curled up at the base of a lamppost.

The garage door RUMBLES open, jolting her awake. She scrambles into a hiding position behind a dumpster, peering out.

Meerah emerges from the garage and gives a quick look around. She pulls the door down, snaps the combination padlock shut, and hurries away down the empty street, not looking back.

Once Meerah is out of sight, Cara darts to the garage door. She examines the padlock, then pulls a bobby pin from her hair. With practiced confidence, she fiddles with the combination lock for a moment.

A satisfying CLICK -- the lock springs open.

Cara glances around one last time, then slips inside, pulling the door down behind her.

Pitch black. Cara fumbles along the wall.

A switch CLICKS. A long neon tube FLICKERS violently, then settles into a steady, sterile hum, illuminating the space.

Cara slowly takes in the room. It's still a cluttered but organized creative chaos.

Her eyes land on the desk. A stack of papers catches her attention. She walks over, picks up the top sheet. It's one of Meerah's drawings: a large grid filled with a complex, colorful pattern of squares. Her "square-design."

Cara frowns, confused. What is this for?

Her gaze slowly lifts from the paper and lands on a metal shelving unit behind the desk.

On it sit three Rubik's Cubes.

Cara freezes for a moment. The pattern on the sides of the cubes matches the style of the drawing in her hand.

She drops the paper on the desk and lunges for the shelf. She grabs a cube. Turns it over.

And there it is. The message.

"BREAK ME!"

Cara's breath catches. Her eyes dart to the second cube. She snatches it down. Turns it over. Same message.

She rips the third cube from the shelf as well. The same.

The realization hits her like a physical blow. She stumbles back, slumping into the worn-out office chair behind the desk.

With wild, unfocused eyes, she scans the desk. Stapled A4 documents are scattered on and around the keyboard.

She sets the cubes down. Picks up the top document.

CLOSE ON - DOCUMENT (MC1)

It's an IB essay. The title:

"CAS Reflections That Actually Work: A Template and Idea Bank"

The author's name: Meerah Clark.

BACK TO SCENE

Cara lets it fall. Snatches the next one.

CLOSE ON - DOCUMENT (MC2)

Another essay. Title:

"The EE Survival Guide: From Research Question to Final Word Count"

Author: Meerah Clark.

BACK TO SCENE

Cara discards it. Grabs a third.

CLOSE ON - DOCUMENT (MCX)

Title: "IB Command Terms, Translated: What 'Evaluate' vs. 'Analyze' Really Means"

But here, the name "Meerah Clark" is crossed out. Scrawled above it in hurried script: "The IB Kid."

BACK TO SCENE

Cara shoots up from her chair, lunging for a document further away on the desk.

CLOSE ON - DOCUMENT (IBK1)

Title: "The Unwritten Rules of the IA: A Subject-by-Subject Breakdown"

The author is now "The IB Kid," typed and printed.

BACK TO SCENE

Cara throws it aside. Snatches another. She checks the header then tosses it away. Her hands frantically sweep across the desk, pushing aside other documents.

Then she stops. Her eyes lock on one last document. She picks it up.

CLOSE ON - DOCUMENT (IBK2)

Title: "Approaches to Learning -- A Guide in the Language of Today's Students"

CARA (O.S.)  
Approaches to Learning. Etcetera.

And next to it, the author's printed name:

CARA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
The IB Kid.

BACK TO SCENE

Cara carefully puts the document down, picking up the Rubik's Cube again. She inspects it closely. A flicker of realization in her eyes.

FLASHBACK:

Cara holds out the cube to Meerah.

CARA  
Look. Here is this cube --

MEERAH  
(surprised)  
-- Where did you get this?

END FLASHBACK.

96

INT. GARAGE WORKSHOP - NIGHT

96

CLOSE ON - RUBIK'S CUBE

From behind the Rubik's Cube, Cara's stunned face appears. Now she gets it.

She lowers the cube and buries her face in her free hand for a moment.

When she finally lowers her hand, her expression has hardened into pure determination. She keeps the cube and scoops up a thick stack of "IB Kid" documents from the desk. She rushes to the light switch, slaps it off. The neon bulb dies. Pitch black. The heavy garage door RUMBLES open, then SLAMS shut.

Silence.

97

INT. TONGWEN SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

97

Meerah is alone in the classroom. She sits at her desk, peacefully working on a complex math problem, humming quietly. Just then --

BOOM! -- A Rubik's Cube, one she made, lands on her notebook, right in front of her nose. Startled, Meerah stares at the cube. Her IB essays start raining down on her desk too.

Meerah looks up. Ian, Josh, Cara, and Celeste are standing before her.

CARA  
(to Meerah)  
Good morning, sunshine!

MEERAH  
Hello...

CARA  
I don't even know where to start.

IAN  
The surprise of the year tricked us all.

CARA  
Any explanation whatsoever?

Meerah remains silent, ashamed.

CARA (CONT'D)  
Why didn't you tell me about this?  
Why all the secrets, Meerah? I'm your sister.

(CONTINUED)

IAN

Did you enjoy watching us run  
around like idiots?

MEERAH

Of course not!

JOSH

Is this some kind of game to you?

CARA

Can you imagine how much time,  
energy --

IAN

-- and stress!

CARA

... and stress we could have saved  
if you had just been honest about  
this?

MEERAH

I... I didn't want to be the center  
of attention. I just wanted to help  
everyone.

(beat)

Grandalf, too.

CELESTE

Did you hear that your Grandalf was  
officially declared a false prophet  
by the secret agency yesterday and  
got arrested?

MEERAH

Oh, no! I didn't hear. My God...

IAN

Or maybe you were part of it? Did  
you plan it together?

MEERAH

Of course not!

CARA

Ian, for Christ's sake!

Ian raises his palms apologetically.

CARA (CONT'D)

(to Meerah)

Meerah. Joking aside. Do I need to  
worry that they might be coming for  
my little sister too?

MEERAH

You shouldn't! They shouldn't! I only made these Rubik's Cubes for him on order. All I knew was that he was using them to promote himself, in a playful way, but the idea was to help students who don't understand the IB philosophy.

JOSH

Yeah, well. As it turns out, he was really just trying to help his own bank account.

MEERAH

Oh. I'm so sorry...

CARA

"Order." So he obviously paid you for these cubes, right?

MEERAH

(eyes downcast)

Yes, he did.

CARA

Then at least I hope you made some decent money from this. By the way, why is money so important to a fourth-grader?

MEERAH

Well... Um... Um...

CARA

Why?

MEERAH

Um... Because... I want to collect all the LaBubu figures.

(beat)

But unfortunately, you can't tell which kind is in which box.

IAN

Oh, come on!

JOSH

Oooh, my Lord!

CARA

That's just insane! And you even lied to Mom for this.

MEERAH

I didn't lie! I really was working on an IB project, it's just... not exactly a school one.

Cara shakes her head, the others are also shocked.

CARA

I can't believe this. But you know what? It doesn't matter anymore. What matters are these essays. Did you really write them? "IB Kid."

MEERAH

(eyes downcast)

Yes.

IAN

CELESTE

Tssssss...

Wow.

JOSH

Your name is like a superhero's.

Cara gives Josh a gentle, disapproving shove.

Celeste picks up a document from the desk.

CELESTE

You know, we've looked at these. And the thing is, we can actually understand them.

MEERAH

That's fantasic! That was my goal!

CARA

Listen! We still have a few days to submit everything to the university. If you could help us. That would be... huge! And then all is forgiven.

MEERAH

Of course! What's the problem?

The four seniors stare at each other in stunned disbelief.

CELESTE

What's the problem? The same as it's always been! The language! We couldn't fill out these documents because we don't get the questions. Why do you understand it? How did you decode it?

Meerah tries to tidy up her desk a bit.

MEERAH

It's actually not as complicated as it seems. It's like math. You just have to substitute certain elements with other elements.

A beat of silence. The four seniors stare at her, concentrating hard, but still utterly confused.

MEERAH (CONT'D)

Okay, look. In math, you substitute variables and numbers, right? In the case of the IB, you need to replace their unique, peculiar words and phrases with normal words. The ones people actually use.

The confusion of racing thoughts on their faces.

JOSH

For example?

MEERAH

Well, to use a simple example, if you hear the word "principled," which isn't really used much outside of IB circles, you need to think of "disciplined" or even more simply, "well-behaving" instead. Or something like that.

JOSH

Hm.

MEERAH

But let me give you a tougher one! For example, "international mindedness". Another one you only ever hear at IB meetings. About as often as you hear "polar bear" in Africa. So, you substitute that with "respect for other cultures" or simply "respecting other people". And just like that, no problem. If you follow this method, then the IB language becomes a tool, instead of a barrier.

A beat. Everyone is deep in thought.

CELESTE

That's it?

MEERAH

That's it!

Ian recoils as the realization hits him. He clutches his face.

IAN

Mother of God!

JOSH

But why do they even do this?

CELESTE

That doesn't matter right now!  
(to Meerah)  
Listen! Now we get the principle,  
but we're still not out of the  
woods, since they have thousands of  
phrases like these.

MEERAH

Yes, I know. And...

Meerah pulls a 200-page A4 stack from her bag.

MEERAH (CONT'D)

... and so I've been developing  
this dictionary. "IB Language Made  
Easy". This is what I'm calling it.

CLOSE ON - DOCUMENT

Title: "IB Language Made Easy"  
Author: "The IB Kid"

BACK TO SCENE

Celeste and Cara exchange a stunned look. Cara gently places her fingers on the top of the stack, as if it were a sacred text.

CARA

You... you did all this?

CELESTE

Wow.

Ian, jaw dropped, flips through the pages at the corner of the document, as if counting a huge stack of cash.

IAN

But this is...

MEERAH

Yes, I know, it's pretty long. But you'll find almost everything in here. Look!

She opens the dictionary, pointing out examples as she explains her work. The girls crouch down to her level, hanging on her every word.

We pull back to the corner of the classroom. Meerah's explaining voice fades.

He quickly turns around. His eyes lock onto the displaced lid. He sprints to the barrel. With trembling hands, he carefully lifts the lid.

Inside, a plant sways gently. It's unlike anything on Earth, seeming to pulse with a faint, internal light. Farmer's jaw goes slack.

WHOOSH! In an instant, the plant shoots straight up, growing six meters in the blink of an eye. It unfolds into a bizarre, beautiful structure of impossible angles and geometric leaves, glowing faintly in the daylight.

Farmer screams and falls backward onto the dusty ground. His phone, slipping out of his hand, flies backward as well.

For a moment, he just stares up at the magnificent, alien plant, his face a mask of pure shock. Then, the shock melts away, replaced by a wave of pure joy.

He scrambles on the ground, forgetting to stand.

FARMER  
(euphoric)  
Where's my phone? Where's my phone?

He crawls to his mobile, grabs it.

Propping himself up on his elbows, he frantically taps at the screen. He falls back onto the ground, rolls onto his back, holding the phone to his ear.

He pants with excitement, waiting.

A beat.

FARMER (CONT'D)  
My son! Josh! Eureka! Eureka! We  
did it! Yes! We did it!

Ian at his desk, a machine of pure focus. His eyes are glued to the screen, fingers flying across the keyboard as he powers through the applications. Meerah's dictionary lies open beside him.

Without breaking his concentration for a second, he raises his left hand, palm held open, waiting.

We slide left to reveal Josh at the adjacent desk, a mirror image of quick work, focused intensity.

Josh notices the hand out of the corner of his eye. He mirrors Ian's gesture and gives him a satisfying HIGH-FIVE.

They both continue their work without missing a beat.

102 INT. CARA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

102

Cara is on her hands and knees, cheerfully scrubbing the kitchen floor. She hums cheerfully, full of restless energy.

Suddenly, she stops. A thought strikes her.

With a playful grin, she slides under the kitchen table.

And there it is. Her secret workstation. Her laptop is open and glowing, surrounded by application forms and Meerah's dictionary.

She types a few quick sentences, cross-references a term, types again, nods, satisfied.

Just as quickly, she slides back out and resumes her vigorous scrubbing, the cheerful humming never ceasing.

103 INT. GYM - DAY

103

Celeste is running on a treadmill. The console in front of her has become a makeshift desk, precariously piled with her laptop and application forms.

She puts on a burst of speed, a determined sprint that brings her to the very front of the moving belt.

Leaning forward, she types furiously on her laptop, her body perfectly balanced while her legs keep pumping.

Finished with that section, she snatches a paper form with her left hand and a pen with her right.

She holds the paper up and, while still running, starts filling it out in mid-air. With a final, triumphant flourish of the pen, she considers the document complete.

Without a second thought, she simply drops the paper onto the belt beneath her feet. The treadmill instantly whisks it away, shooting it out behind her.

A satisfied smile flashes across her face.

She speeds up and snatches the next form. She writes something on that as well. Done. Another completed paper shoots off the back of the treadmill.

A third one immediately follows suit.

104 INT. CROWDED CITY BUS - MOVING - DAY

104

The bus is packed with commuters, it rocks and sways as it lurches through traffic.

Ian stands, sandwiched between passengers. He clutches a document in one hand, a pen in the other, scanning desperately for any flat surface to write on. There is none.

His eyes land on an OLD MAN (80s) standing directly in front of him. They lock eyes for a moment.

Ian makes a polite but urgent circular motion with his finger, targeting the Old Man.

The Old Man stares back without any sign of comprehension.

Ian repeats the gesture, slower and more didactically, mouthing the words "turn around".

The Old Man slowly turns, presenting his back to Ian.

Ian immediately presses the document against the man's jacket and scribbles down a few words.

The bus SCREECHES to a halt.

Ian quickly retrieves his paper. The Old Man slowly turns back around, his face shows no expression.

IAN  
(to the Old Man)  
Thank you!

Ian fights his way off the bus.

ON SCREEN - EMAIL

"TO: madeline.corbett@ibo.au.org

SUBJECT: University Application - Requested Documents - Josh Park

BODY: Dear Ms. Madeline Corbett,

Please find attached the requested documents as a supplement to my university application.

Sincerely, Josh Park"

The page scrolls down to the attachments, which are the followings.

"IB\_Transcript\_ParkJ\_2025.pdf  
TOK\_Essay\_Final\_Park.docx  
EE\_Physics\_Park\_Final.pdf  
CAS\_Portfolio\_ParkJ.zip  
EE\_Abstract\_Align\_ParkJ\_2025.pdf  
CAS\_Hours\_Verify\_ParkJ\_Final.pdf  
TOK\_Exhibition\_CRS\_ParkJ\_Submission.docx  
PG\_Forecast\_ECI\_ParkJ\_Q4\_2025.xlsx  
IA\_CrossRef\_Physics\_ParkJ.xlsx  
AcadHonesty\_Affidavit\_ParkJ\_Signed.pdf  
Uni\_Req\_Matrix\_DarwinU\_ParkJ.xlsx  
LP\_Impact\_Analysis\_ParkJ\_FinalDraft.docx  
GlobalContext\_Log\_ParkJ\_Full.docx  
HL\_SL\_Equivalency\_ParkJ\_Official.pdf  
Interdisc\_Synergy\_Portfolio\_ParkJ.pptx  
RiskTaker\_Evidence\_Package\_ParkJ.zip  
Metacog\_Narrative\_ParkJ\_Q4.docx  
CrossCult\_Audit\_ParkJ\_SelfEval.pdf  
Holistic\_Profile\_Synth\_ParkJ\_Final.pptx"

The cursor moves, hovering over the [SEND] button for one tense beat.

CLICK.

BACK TO SCENE

Josh leans back in his chair and sighs. He throws his hands up in a wide, "that's it" gesture.

He then pumps both fists into the air like a champion.

JOSH

Yes!

Ian, at a library computer, does a tight, triumphant double-fist pump.

IAN

Yes!

Cara is still with her computer and documents under the kitchen table.

She rolls onto her back to get enough room, thrusts her fists triumphantly upwards, but her knuckles CRACK hard against the underside of the table.

CARA

Yea -- Ow! Ow!

108 INT. GYM - DAY

108

Celeste, still on the moving treadmill with her computer and documents, throws her hands up in victory.

CELESTE

Yeeeah!

In her excitement, she stops running. The moving belt does not.

It unceremoniously flings her backwards, and she disappears out of frame with a yelp.

109 EXT. DARWIN IB UNIVERSITY - DAY

109

The vast, crystal-clear Australian sky. We descend smoothly to reveal the sprawling, modern but still classic campus of DARWIN IB UNIVERSITY. Sleek glass buildings, lush green lawns, and palm trees dot the landscape.

110 EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - SPORTS FIELD - DAY

110

Students in crisp, light-colored university uniforms stroll along pathways, hugging books, booklets, notebooks. Others sit on the bleachers of the sports field, chatting and laughing.

111 INT. UNIVERSITY STUDENT CLUB - DAY

111

Cara is on a stage. She's in full performance mode: dazzling dress, perfect makeup. She stands center stage, gripping a microphone, pouring her heart out into a song. It's a top hit from "KPop Demon Hunters".

Colorful strobe lights flash around her. The stage is bathed in dramatic, concert-style lighting.

She hits the final note, her eyes closed in passion. The music stops. A sparse, scattered APPLAUSE begins. Cara looks up to the audience.

The venue is medium-size student hall, like a coffee shop with small dining tables. The sun hits the room, some discreet lights are also on. A sparse audience of SIX STUDENTS sits in two groups, smiling, clapping genuinely.

STUDENT #1

Wohoo!

STUDENT #2

Wonderful!

Cara smiles back to the small, kind crowd and takes a graceful bow.

112

EXT. UNIVERSITY SPORTS TRACK - DAY

112

A track race. Ian is in the lead, smiling, surging toward the finish line, the audience CHEERS for him, growing louder with every stride.

He breaks through the finish line tape --

The cheering abruptly stops. Immediate silence.

Ian, panting, laughing with victory, slows to a stop. He turns to the crowd.

The audience members' faces have hardened, turning dead serious, stripped of any expression -- eyes locked on Ian. They step toward him -- closer and closer.

A look of pure horror dawns on Ian's face. He starts to back away.

IAN

Oh, no! Not again!

Just as panic takes hold, the entire crowd suddenly erupts into a massive cheer and laughter. Their deadpan faces break into wide smiles. They mob Ian in a joyous chaos of clapping hands, cheering voices, and congratulatory taps on the shoulder.

113

EXT. UNIVERSITY CRICKET FIELD - DAY

113

Josh, decked out in a full, pristine BASEBALL uniform, stands at a crease in front of the wickets. He takes a few powerful practice swings with a baseball bat, ready for the battle. Then --

He gets confused. He stops, lowering his bat.

Another university student, SENIOR (20) in a crisp, white cricket uniform approaches him with a determined stride.

Senior stops directly in front of Josh, his face a stern, unreadable mask.

He extends his left hand towards the right edge of the frame.

From just off-screen, another HAND enters the frame from the right, holding a metal bucket.

Senior takes the bucket. In one swift motion, he SNATCHES the baseball bat from the stunned Josh and CLANGS it into the bucket with great emphasis. His eyes are glued to Josh the whole time.

Senior lowers the bucket and extends his right hand towards the left edge of the frame.

(CONTINUED)

Another off-screen HAND enters the frame from the left, holding a standard cricket bat.

Senior takes the cricket bat and steps even closer to Josh. With a sharp, deliberate movement, he THRUSTS the cricket bat against Josh's chest.

Josh gasps, forced to grab and hug the bat to keep his balance.

Senior holds his gaze for a beat, ensuring the "transfer" is complete. Satisfied, he turns on his heel and walks away, carrying the bucket with Josh's baseball bat inside.

Stunned and confused, Josh stares after him for a moment, squinting. He slowly brings the cricket bat up, examining it with total bewilderment, as if it's an alien artifact.

He swings it towards the departed Senior and yells.

JOSH

Hey! What the heck is this? We are gonna cook something or what?

Celeste sits alone at a sunny outdoor table. A massive smoothie in one hand, a thick IB book in the other. A towering stack of eight more IB-related and philosophy-related books sits on the table beside her. She reads with great focus.

A tall and handsome student, GREGORY (20), slides quickly into the chair on her left. He leans forward, propping his chin in his hands, staring at her with a mesmerized smile.

Celeste glances up for a second, her eyes become widely open. She retreats back into her book, her eyes keep their awkward state. She continues sipping her smoothie and reading.

Gregory speaks in a low, confident drawl, his eyes half-lidded. A man completely at ease.

GREGORY

Hi.

Celeste looks up again, clearly flustered.

CELESTE

Hi.

Gregory leans in a little closer, his smile widening.

GREGORY

If I ordered a juice just like that, would you think I'm a copycat, or I just have excellent taste?

CELESTE

I'd think you were thirsty.

Gregory lets out a genuine laugh.

GREGORY

Alright. And if I was eating burnt marshmallows, then would you think I was hungry?

CELESTE

Yes, I would.

Gregory leans back in his chair, a wide, amused grin on his face.

GREGORY

I gotta hit the books more. Get a mind that sharp.

Celeste glances at him again, but says nothing. Pokerface. She continues sipping and reading.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

(leaning closer)

And what would you think of me, if I read the very same books you do?

Celeste suddenly springs out of her chair, gathering her entire fortress of books into her arms. She leans over the table, closer to him.

CELESTE

Then I would think you like IB more than me.

She turns on her heel and walks away.

Gregory is left stunned. His face shows he needs to process the answer.

A packed auditorium with middle and high school students. Every single one is laser-focused on the stage. They also take notes diligently to their notebooks. Some students use laptops. Their fingers fly across the keyboards.

On stage, next to a lectern, stands Meera. On the lectern, beside her laptop, sits one of her signature Rubik's Cubes, perfectly solved. Toward us the message of the cube is shown: "BREAK ME".

Behind Meera, a large screen displays her presentation. The title reads:

"Approaches to Learning -- A Guide in the Language of Today's Students."

The slide is a complex and colorful infographic, designed to look both professional and approachable. At its center is a large circular diagram, a "decoder ring". It consists of two concentric rings: the OUTER RING is segmented with complex IB terminology ("Inquirer", "Metacognition", "Feedforward", etc.), while the INNER RING provides the simple, everyday-language translation for each term ("Discoverer", "Understand how you think", "Feedback", etc.). Lines connect this central hub to smaller "satellite" circular diagrams, each one acting as a mini-translator for a single concept, with the complex IB phrase on the left and its simple translation on the right.

Meera gestures to the screen with a long, telescopic pointer, explaining the concept with a focused passion.

The audience's focus is unbroken. The frantic scribbling of notes continues.

We glide low across a concrete floor, moving towards a large RAT wrestling with a walnut. Just as we get close, it CRACKS the shell open.

The nutmeat is black, rotten. The rat sniffs the inside... then recoils in disgust. It rat scurries away, leaving the worthless prize behind.

We begin to rise.

Ahead, on a stark metal bunk, sits Grandalf, dressed in a drab prison jumpsuit. He sits cross-legged, silent, motionless, eyes closed in meditation.

The JANGLE of keys, then a heavy, metallic CHUNK as the cell door is unlocked and groans open.

A prison guard, GUARD (52) stands there, holding a metal food tray.

GUARD  
Billy! Dinnertime!

Guard crouches, sliding the tray onto the floor. He straightens up, seeing Grandalf's still meditative pose.

A smirk plays on his lips. He plants his hands on his hips, a triumphant stance.

GUARD (CONT'D)

Don't be sad, Billy. Remember? The result is not important. Only the learning progress matters.

Grandalf doesn't stir, his eyes remain closed.

GRANDALF

Can you please shut it? I'm trying to connect to my inner self.

GUARD

Yeah, unfortunately, it's not like outside. Here, reflection time is not optional.

Guard lets out a booming laugh.

Grandalf's composure finally breaks. His eyes snap open as he drops his meditative pose, glaring at the Guard for breaking the spell.

Pleased with himself, the guard turns, slams the cell door shut with another resounding CLANG, and locks it.

Grandalf is left staring at the solid steel door.

As Guard's FOOTSTEPS recede down the hall, his voice echoes.

GUARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Hey, Mark, print out another reflection sheet for our guy!

He bursts out with a cynical laugh.

In the heavy silence that follows, Grandalf's focus shifts. He slowly turns his head and looks DIRECTLY INTO CAMERA. His frown shows he's not happy.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.