

PREP

"NEW KID"

PILOT SCRIPT

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PROLOGUE

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Close on IAN TRAYNOR, fifteen, athletic. He dodges and ducks with ease as a bigger boy, DEX, tries to hit him.

Other kids crowd around to watch the fight, including ANDREW, a bespectacled kid nursing a bloody lip given to him by the bully.

DEX

Who asked you to jump in, Traynor?  
It's not your fight!

Ian slaps away Dex's blows.

IAN

It is when you pick on my friends.

Dex throws another punch that Ian eludes.

IAN

Last warning, Dex. Only one  
getting hurt here is you.

This infuriates Dex who charges Ian again.

DEX

Stand still!

Ian sidesteps, grabs Dex's arm and forces it up behind his back. Dex is restrained and not in serious pain, as long as he doesn't struggle. Like any bully, he cries out in fear at suddenly finding himself helpless. Some of the kids watching look uncomfortable.

DEX

(screams in fear)  
Let go! Let go!

IAN  
Sure. As soon as you apologize to Andrew for knocking him down and calling him those nasty names.

DEX  
(Blurts out)  
I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

Even Andrew, the kid who was bullied, starts to show concern.

ANDREW  
It's okay, Ian.

PRINCIPAL  
Traynor!

The SCHOOL PRINCIPAL hurries in, separating the two boys.

PRINCIPAL  
Get your hands off him!

IAN  
I didn't start it. Dex was hitting...

PRINCIPAL  
No. That's it. You're done.

CUT TO:

IAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A nice middle class suburban home.

MICHAEL (O.S.)  
Suspension. Wonderful. How many times have we warned you, Ian? How many?

INT. IAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUING

Conflict around the family dinner table. Ian is locked in an argument with his parents, father MICHAEL and mother LYDIA, both in their late thirties.

IAN  
Dad, Dex is the worst bully in school. Everyone knows it.

LYDIA

That doesn't mean you and that temper of yours have to charge in swinging...again.

IAN

So I'm supposed to watch him push around other kids and do nothing.

Michael tries to reason with his son. One gets the idea they've had arguments like this before - a lot.

MICHAEL

You tell a teacher, or you tell us. You don't unload on a boy who can't defend himself.

IAN

Dex is tough enough.

MICHAEL

Not against you. Remember Johnny Alcott?

IAN

I didn't mean to break his arm. It was a tournament.

Ian is stung as an old wound is reopened. Lydia cautions Michael.

LYDIA

That wasn't Ian's fault, Michael.

MICHAEL

No, it was ours for allowing him to take karate.

IAN

I quit competition and paid Johnny's hospital bill out of my college fund. What more could I do??

MICHAEL

You could think before lashing out. You know the saying, "discretion is the better part of valor."

IAN

Meaning it's okay to turn tail and run.

MICHAEL  
 Meaning there's almost always  
 another option to fighting.

IAN  
 Really? 'Cause it seems that's all  
 we do around here.

Ian bolts from the table and storms out of the kitchen.

INT. IAN'S ROOM

Basic teen boy's room, sport hero and video game posters on the walls. Ian sits at his desk and plays an on-line role-playing fight game like World of Warcraft called HORDE RAIDERS. He deftly dispatches one attacker after another. It's as if Ian can sense each movement of the character before they make it. Ian hears voices of other players over his headset. We see the names of several players on the screen: Orcslayer (Ian's name) Shadow Knight, Dawn Magus and Echoll19

HEADSET VOICE #1  
 (male, young)  
 Hey, Slayer. Leave some for the  
 rest of us.

IAN  
 (into headset)  
 Keep up, Shadow Knight.

HEADSET VOICE #2  
 (female, young)  
 I have a freezing spell that  
 will...

IAN  
 Miles ahead of you, Magus.

A flick of his wrist and Ian has dispatched the remaining ogres on the screen.

HEADSET VOICE #3  
 You're very skilled, Slayer.

IAN  
 Thanks...  
 (checks screen name)  
 Echoll19.

HEADSET VOICE #2  
 Yeah. He never lets us play.

IAN  
Maybe tomorrow, Magus.

HEADSET VOICE #2  
I'll believe it when I see it.  
C'mon, Shadow Knight. Let's count  
our treasure.

IAN  
Haven't seen you in the game  
before, Echo.

ECHO  
No one sees an echo, Ian.

IAN  
How do you know my name? Do you go  
to my school?

ECHO  
(evading the question)  
You're a terrific player. I'm  
looking forward to our next  
encounter.

IAN  
Whenever. I'm here every night.

ECHO  
Are you sad about that?

IAN  
Being stuck in jerkwater suburbia?  
My only physical outlet on-line  
fantasy games? What gave you that  
idea?

ECHO  
Things change.

IAN  
Not soon enough for me.

Echo's name vanishes from Ian's screen.

Ian starts to play the game again. He cranks the volume.  
From off-screen comes the voice of his dad:

MICHAEL (O.S.)  
You want to turn that down?

IAN  
Not really.

MICHAEL (O.S.)  
Ian...headphones, please?

Ian plugs in his headset and resumes playing. Beneath the sounds of battle, a strange electronic BUZZING SOUND is building. Ian tries to turn down the volume but the buzzing sound gets louder. It seems to have a calming effect on Ian. His eyelids flutter and he falls asleep.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY - CLOSE ON IAN

Asleep in a strange bed. In the distance a BELL RINGS.

DON (OFF)  
Hey. First bell.

Ian stirs, waking up.

ZACK (OFF)  
Better motivate.

Ian's eyes open.

IAN'S POV - ROOMMATES

Looking down at Ian are three big guys his age or a couple years older. They are DON, RAY and ZACK. They are well-dressed in identical school uniforms -- ties, jackets, big toothy smiles. Unnerving.

ZACK  
You'll miss breakfast.

DON  
And that would suck.

RAY  
Dining hall's closed until lunch.

IAN

Bolts from the bed, shocked at the sight of these strangers.

IAN  
How'd you get in my room?

The guys react with good-natured disbelief. Who is this screwy kid?

RAY

Your room? Try our room, noob.

Ian looks around and for the first time it sinks in that he is not in his own home. He leaps to the window and looks out.

IAN'S POV - SCHOOL GROUNDS

We see the well-manicured grounds and stately dormitories of what appears to be an exclusive private school.

Ian turns away from the window, his mind spinning.

IAN

Where am I?

END PROLOGUE

PREP

NEW KID

ACT ONE

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Ian is still desperately looking for answers about his new surroundings. Zack, Don and Ray react in a very matter of fact way to Ian's questions. They give him lots of information, but nothing he can really understand.

IAN

This place...

ZACK

I know. Tower Prep School.  
Awesome, huh?

RAY

Many apply. Only the lucky few  
make it.

DON

Tower's got a great academic  
program. Challenging, intense.

Zack is fiddling with a strange-looking piece of equipment, something like a lacrosse stick.

ZACK

Our Buffer team's undefeated. You  
play?

IAN

What? No...who are you?

DON

I'm Don. That's Ray and the big  
guy is Zack. First bell rang. You  
don't have much time, Ian.

IAN

How do you know my name?

Ray points to a closet door. Ian's name is on it.

RAY

Nice to have a new roommate.

RAY

We've been a man short since  
Phillips did the forest run. Or  
tried to.

Ian looks where Ray is pointing. He sees one of four closets set into the dorm room wall, one of which bears his name. To say Ian is having a hard time taking this in is an understatement.

IAN

But my mom and dad never...

Ian turns back to question his roommates.

IAN

Who brought me here?

The three guys share mystified shrugs.

DON

Don't know. We came back from  
study hall last night and there you  
were, fast asleep.

ZACK

About that -- you might want to ask  
Doctor to fit you for a snore  
guard. Kinda loud.

Ian is reeling, he can't fathom any of this.

IAN

Doesn't make sense.

DON

Nothing does, until you've been to  
orientation.

IAN

What's that?

Don hands Ian some notes jotted down on a slip of paper.

DON

Figured you'd be lost the first  
day. Just follow this.

IAN

Okay, but what...

Another BELL SOUNDS.

ZACK  
Last bell. Going to be late.

IAN  
Late for what?

Don, Ray and Zack shoulder their backpacks and head out the door.

DON  
See you at Orientation. We'll save  
you a place.

The three boys exit, leaving the confused Ian alone in the room.

Ian steps to his closet, opens it. Inside are several uniforms identical to his roommates. Ian pushes them aside and finds a few of his things on a shelf, including his iPod and cell phone. He quickly dials his home number. He hears the line pick up.

IAN  
Mom?! It's Ian! Hello?

ECHO (V.O.)  
I'm sorry, Ian. You are out of  
carrier range.

Ian recognizes the voice from the night before.

IAN  
Wait...Echo?

ECHO (V.O.)  
Have a nice day.

The voice clicks off. Ian pushes more buttons, tries to get a dial tone.

IAN  
Hello? Hello!

But the phone is dead. Ian tosses the phone back in the closet. He takes a shirt and pants from the hangers and quickly starts to throw them on.

EXT. DORMITORY - DAY - CONTINUING

Ian, hastily dressed in a shirt and pants, exits the dorm room.

He walks slowly around the school grounds, very much the outsider. Through Ian's eyes we get the first glimpses of this strange place.

It is indeed a private school and a very unique one. Definitely NOT Hogwarts, but a stately, somewhat austere campus reeking with tradition, old money and secrets.

Beyond the school and dormitories can be seen high trees. The school seems to have been set down in the middle of a vast forest -- somewhere.

In the center of the school grounds is a gathering area, and nearby, a high flagpole. Flying from the top is a flag with a stylized Tower on it. Beneath the Tower is written what appears to be the school motto: *Excellentia per obsequium* - Latin for "Excellence through obedience." One small but disturbing detail, there is no state or country flag flying from the pole.

As Ian takes this all in, he hears that familiar voice again, this time over a PA system:

ECHO (V.O.)  
All new students, Orientation  
begins in fifteen minutes. Don't  
be late.

Ian stops a passing GIRL STUDENT.

IAN  
That voice, where's it coming from?

GIRL STUDENT  
What, Echo?

IAN  
Yes! Echo! Where is she?

GIRL STUDENT  
Reception.

She points to a building.

GIRL STUDENT  
Over there.

IAN  
Thanks.

As he heads for the building, the girl adds:

GIRL STUDENT  
You're out of uniform.

## INT. RECEPTION BUILDING - CONTINUING

Ian enters the building. Fairly sterile, not much there. Ian notes a sign on the wall: RECEPTIONIST. He rounds a corner to find an open window, the kind that would house a receptionist in a doctor's or lawyer's office. He looks in the window.

IAN

I'm looking for Echo?

But the receptionist booth is empty. That is, there is no human receptionist there. There is however, a sophisticated computer installed in the booth. Above it are monitors that show most of the school. This appears to be a security system that keeps watch over the students at all times. On the side of the computer console in raised letters is the computer's name - ECHO 119.

ECHO (V.O.)

All new students, Orientation  
begins in thirteen minutes. Don't  
be late.

Ian reels away from the window, confusion giving way to fear. He hurries toward another door leading out of the reception building.

## INT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - CONTINUING

Not much of this office is revealed now. A silhouetted figure, THE HEADMASTER, watches Ian on a security monitor. On screen the boy exits Reception and heads down what looks to be the main road into the school. Headmaster's gaze is impassive, hard to read.

## EXT. SCHOOL - ON IAN

He turns a bend in the road and comes to an enormous FENCE. No openings of any sort on it, not even a gate with a visible lock. A huge barrier preventing escape in any direction.

Ian backs away, his heart sinking.

IAN

Oh. This is bad.

Ian pulls out the paper Don gave him. He notes the directions and hurries off.

EXT. CAMPUS - CIRCULAR BUILDING - DAY

Ian hurries up to this odd-looking building. He consults his directions, then enters.

INT. CIRCULAR BUILDING - CONTINUING

Ian goes down a dark hallway. A strange muted ROARING SOUND is heard rising in the distance. The only door in the hallway appears before Ian. He checks his notes again and pushes through the doors.

INT. BUFFER ARENA

Instantly Ian is assaulted by a blast of bright STROBE LIGHTS and PULSING SOUNDS.

LEADER (O.S.)

Move!

A HELMETED FIGURE streaks in on skates, crashes into Ian and sends him flying.

Then, MORE FIGURES crash into him from all sides. The figures wear padded suits, in line skates and carry swing hook-like clubs. Several of the figures swing their clubs at him.

Ian rolls away and comes up fighting. He decks several of the figures, flips and kicks a few more.

The most imposing of the figures, clearly the leader, launches himself at Ian. This guy can really fight. Ian quickly finds himself on the defensive. More helmeted figures run to back up their leader. They swarm over Ian and take him down -- hard.

FADE OUT

END ACT ONE

PREP

"NEW KID"

ACT TWO

INT. BUFFER ARENA - SAME AS BEFORE

On Ian, on the floor and looking for a way to fight the strange figures that attacking him. His hand grabs a fallen buffer stick. He swings it, knocking a few of the attackers away.

The leader of the figures slaps the stick out of Ian's hand.

LEADER

Drop it!

The leader takes off his helmet. He is Ian's age, African-American, bald, and at the moment, angry. This is CAL RICE, the captain of the buffer team.

CAL

You better have a real good reason  
for attacking my team!

IAN

They jumped me!

Ian takes a swing at Cal. Remarkably, Cal ducks it. Just then the team COACH runs up. Late thirties, early forties. BIG. You don't screw with this guy.

COACH

Hey! That's all, Rice.

CAL

Okay, Coach.

Cal turns, deliberately hooking Ian with his buffer stick, tripping him. Ian hits the floor to the amusement of the team.

Coach pulls Ian up.

COACH

Got a name, tough guy?

IAN  
Ian Traynor.

Coach nods, understanding.

COACH  
Figures. Every year some clueless  
noob gets sent down here to have  
his butt kicked by the Buffer team.  
(to Ian)  
You're being hazed, Traynor.

The other players, including Cal, LAUGH at Ian.

COACH  
You want Orientation. The building  
by the flag pole.

IAN  
Thanks. One more thing...

All traces of the cocky hothead are gone now. Ian is just a  
scared kid in need of answers.

IAN  
What is this place?

Coach studies Ian for a second, possibly pitying him. But  
all he says is:

COACH  
Orientation. Building by the flag  
pole.

Coach turns back to the players.

COACH  
Break's over. Take your sides.

Cal returns to his teammates. Ian heads out the arena door,  
more confused than ever.

EXT. ORIENTATION HALL - DAY

Ian's roommates Don, Ray and Zack are idling in front of the  
Orientation building. Ian runs up and angrily confronts Don.

IAN  
Hey!

DON  
You're out of uniform.

IAN  
 Why'd you send me to that, whatever  
 that place was?

DON  
 Just a joke.

IAN  
 Yeah. Not funny.

Ian tries to enter the hall. His roommates block him.

RAY  
 You can't go in once Orientation's  
 started.

IAN  
 I'll catch up.

ZACK  
 It's against the rules.

IAN  
 I'm done listening to you guys.

Ian shoves Zack into Don and Ray. The roommates are caught off guard and Ian is able to duck inside.

INT. ORIENTATION HALL - CONTINUING

Ian enters the darkened hall. Inside he sees perhaps a dozen uniformed STUDENTS sitting at small cubicles. The students watch different images of school life as they listen to a muted speech over ear buds. Each student seems to be listening to something different. This was the last thing the surprised Ian expected. He doesn't know what to think.

DON (OFF)  
 He's in there.

An older student, a MONITOR by her different uniform, hurries over. She's taller than Ian, and tough.

MONITOR  
 What's the problem?

IAN  
 I was going to Orientation, but...

MONITOR

Orientation's closed. Headmaster heard you've been making trouble. He wants to see you.

The monitor roughly pulls Ian outside, causing him to bump into some passing students. One of them is a girl, fifteen, very pretty.

IAN

Sorry.

And suddenly C.J. turns back to her friends, contemptuously dismissing Ian.

C.J.

I can't stand kids who won't get with the Program.

IAN

Hey, I don't even want to be here.

MONITOR

Headmaster. Now.

Ian is pulled away by the Monitor. Don, Ray and Zack exchange grins as they head out.

INT. HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - DAY

The most arresting feature of this book-lined office is the large 3D relief MAP of the school laid out like a train diorama on a table. It shows the school from all angles, as well as the surrounding woods, but nothing beyond that.

Ian sits uncomfortably in front of THE HEADMASTER, a pleasant-looking man anywhere between his late thirties and early fifties. Headmaster reads from a file.

HEADMASTER

Ian Traynor. Fifteen. Attributes, intelligence, loyalty, courage. Flaws, stubbornness and a quick temper. Psychological profile reveals a sensitive core -- still misses the dog he lost three years ago.

IAN

Where did you get that?

HEADMASTER  
 (continuing reading)  
 Excels at all sports particularly  
 those requiring team strategy.  
 (to Ian)  
 I think you might enjoy our Buffer  
 team.

IAN  
 I met the captain. No.

HEADMASTER  
 Too bad.  
 (continues reading)  
 Despite excellent leadership  
 potential, subject prefers to go  
 his own way.

The Headmaster puts the file down, smiles at Ian.

HEADMASTER  
 You're an interesting young man,  
 Ian. I hope we'll be friends.

Ian regards him skeptically.

IAN  
 Am I under arrest?

HEADMASTER  
 Of course not.

IAN  
 In some kind of reform school?  
 Juvenile hall?

HEADMASTER  
 No.

IAN  
 Then what is this place?

HEADMASTER  
 The important question is, who are  
 you?

IAN  
 Excuse me?

HEADMASTER  
 Ian, how long would you have lasted  
 at your old school? You were  
 already suspended.

(MORE)

HEADMASTER (cont'd)  
One more incident and you'd have been expelled. Then what? Off to another school and another incident? A boy like you was not meant to drift through a system geared for ordinary minds with ordinary ambitions.

IAN  
I'm no one special.

HEADMASTER  
I don't think you believe that. Why did you take on that bully the other day?

IAN  
He went after my friend.

HEADMASTER  
Real reason?

Ian doesn't answer, but he seems to be holding back. Headmaster fills in the blank.

HEADMASTER  
He was a challenge. As much as you wanted to help your friend, I think you wanted to test yourself even more.

Headmaster points to the relief map.

HEADMASTER  
Tower Prep was created expressly for students like you. Young people who believed they are out of step with the rest of the world, when in reality everyone else is lagging behind.

Ian looks at the map, trying to find a familiar landmark.

IAN  
And Tower Prep is where, exactly?

HEADMASTER  
Where you are geographically is not as important as where you are mentally. As a student here you'll follow an intensive program to master what we call your unique potential.

IAN

I don't believe any of this.

HEADMASTER

The program is challenging, but I think it's the kind of test you've been looking for. Certainly more satisfying than getting top score at Horde Raiders.

Ian's gaze falls on the nameplate on the Headmaster's desk. It reads simply HEADMASTER, nothing else.

IAN

Headmaster, is that it? No other name?

HEADMASTER

Staff members are addressed by their titles; Math, Science, I know you already met Coach. Keeps everything simple yet respectful. Any other questions?

IAN

One big one...

Headmaster makes an astute guess.

HEADMASTER

Yes. Your parents know where you are.

Ian shakes his head in disbelief.

IAN

They couldn't have been happy about this.

Headmaster levies the final words he'll say on the subject.

HEADMASTER

I didn't say they were happy, I said they know where you are.

An emotional punch in the gut for Ian. He has no comeback for this.

EXT. SCHOOL CAMPUS

Ian walks the campus in the company of the older student Monitor. She has opened up a bit to Ian, but reveals no useful information.

MONITOR

The program saved my life. Sure, it took a while to get used to, but now I see I'm so much better off here than I was at home.

IAN

And where was home again?

MONITOR

The faculty doesn't like us talking about our time before the school. Helps us stay focused.

IAN

(dryly)  
Right. On our "unique potential."

MONITOR

You're getting it.

Just then a wild-eyed RED-HAIRED KID runs up to Ian. The kid seems unhinged, desperate.

RED

Hey! Hey, new kid! Listen to me!

The Monitor frowns, having encountered situations like this before.

MONITOR

Oh, boy. We got a snapper.

The red-haired kid grabs Ian.

RED

They'll force you to follow the program. Don't do it.

The Monitor moves to intercede. She means business.

MONITOR

Back off. One warning.

As the Monitor reaches to grab Red, the boy grabs the Monitor and flips her. Ian is so stunned he can't react at first. Suddenly Red is clutching at him again.

RED  
Don't give in. We can beat them.  
We can get out. I know the way!

IAN  
Where is it?

Red suddenly regards Ian with suspicion.

RED  
Oh wait, that's what I'd expect you  
to say.

Ian gets creeped out as the strange boy recoils from him.

RED  
(laughs)  
I see it now. You're with them,  
aren't you? Another trick. It  
won't work!

Ian reaches out to calm the kid.

IAN  
What are you...

RED  
Stay away!

Red shoves Ian down. The hysterical redhead dashes off.

RED  
Stay away!

Ian watches as Red runs toward the woods beyond the edge of the school. The Monitor stands and helps up Ian, who looks in the direction of the fleeing boy.

IAN  
That happen a lot?

MONITOR  
Couple times a year. Maybe more  
around the holidays. Kids get  
homesick, y'know?

IAN  
(pointed)  
I know.  
(MORE)

IAN (cont'd)  
 (nods toward the woods)  
 Now what, they sic the dogs on him?

MONITOR  
 No dogs.

Ian follows the Monitor toward the school buildings. He doesn't get far before he hears a distant SIREN-LIKE SCREECH rising from the woods. The sound is alien and unnerving, a human screech mixed with an electronic wail. It comes from the same direction taken by the fleeing kid. The siren is followed by A SCREAM, then silence.

Ian looks back at the Monitor, his eyes wide with fear. The Monitor just motions impatiently.

MONITOR  
 You're missing science.

INT. CLASSROOM

Ian enters a large circular CLASSROOM. It resembles a futuristic version of a modern college lecture hall.

The teacher, known only as SCIENCE, white, late forties, rattles off biology facts a mile a minute. Pictures of small carnivores flash on a screen around Science as he talks. All the students in the hall are imputing data to their laptops as fast as Science can spew them out.

As Science drones on, Ian looks for an unobtrusive place where he can sit unnoticed. There is none.

SCIENCE  
 ...Of which *D. Maculatus* is only one example. Owing to convergent evolution, many members of the family *Dasuridae* share characteristics with their placental counterparts, including the *Procyonidae*, the *Mustelidae*...

Science abruptly breaks off and addresses Ian. All the students turn to stare at him.

SCIENCE  
 You're late, Mr. Traynor. Please take your seat.

Ian sees that his seat is in the dead-center of the classroom. Even more unsettling, his name is on his desk. Cheeks burning, Ian edges down the aisle to his seat, painfully aware every pair of eyes is on him.

A thin, geeky kid, GABRIEL FLORES, makes a comment as Ian edges by.

GABE

And the one thought going through his head right now, "God, I hope I don't fart."

The other kids erupt with laughter. Ian shoots Gabe a murderous look. Gabe shrugs and smiles. Class clown, whatcha gonna do?

Science glares coldly at Gabe.

SCIENCE

Disruptive and inappropriate as always, Mr. Flores. Since zoology bores you, please engage us with your analysis of muon-catalyzed fusion.

Gabe starts to give a slow, rambling answer, all the while playing for time.

GABE

(stalling)

Yes...those would be the positively charged deuterons and tritons that fuse with what is known in physics circles as the negatively charged munons, which as we all know, create...

The BELL RINGS, signalling the end of the class.

SCIENCE

Too bad, Mr. Flores. There's the bell.

GABE

(mouths quietly)

Yes!

Then Science adds:

SCIENCE

That gives you extra time to study before finishing your answer tomorrow.

GABE

(downcast)

Ugh...

Science gathers his things to go. Ian stands to exit, but all the other students sit where they are. Science exits, passing another teacher coming in. The name card on the desk automatically switches to the name MATH. Math looks up to see Ian standing up by himself, confused.

MATH

Sit down, Mr. Traynor. I won't keep you too long.

More laughter from the students.

MATH

Now then, fractals.

Ian sits as Math launches into a long discourse on fractals, the numbers flashing quickly on the screen behind him.

Ian looks down to see a small folded piece of paper on his desk. It wasn't there a moment before. Ian opens the note and reads it.

CLOSE ON NOTE

One revealing sentence, hastily scribbled. It reads: I'M SCARED, TOO.

ON IAN

Glancing around to find the sender of the note. He looks from face to face, but each of the students has their head down as they intently type into their computers.

Ian slips the paper into his pocket. He tries, with little success, to focus on the lecture.

INT. IAN'S ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Ian enters after his first day of class. He is not happy to find his roommates sprawled on his bed playing cards. Even worse, they are playing for the few personal items taken from Ian's closet.

IAN

Oh, hell no.

The bullies again play it sort of friendly.

ZACK

Ian. How was your first day?

Ian barely contains his anger. He wants to pummel the three smirking assholes.

IAN  
Well, Zack. It really kinda sucked.

DON  
Always does.

RAY  
Never gets better, either.

DON  
Not when you live with us.

ZACK  
Might want to call mommy and daddy and have them pick you up.  
(smirks)  
Oh, right. Can't.

Don puts down a winning hand.

DON  
I'll take the iPod.

IAN  
Hey!

Ian moves to grab the iPod, but Ray tosses it to Don. Don misses it on purpose and the iPod hits the wall and breaks.

RAY  
Piece of crap anyway.

And that's it. Before Ray can move, Ian has him off the bed, face down on the floor. Instantly Zack and Don are on their feet, facing off against Ian. There is something almost militaristic about the way they have positioned themselves.

DON  
(serious threat)  
You're sure?

ZACK  
(even more serious)  
Please be sure.

After a tense moment, Ian realizes now's not the time.

IAN

Take it. It's yours. All of it.  
I've had it with you, with that  
psycho in the castle, with this  
whole damn nut house. I'm out.

Ian exits, fed up. Grins all around from the bullies.

EXT. DORMATORY - EVENING

Ian walks away from the dorms, across the common and toward  
the trees ringing the forest. It's starting to get dark.  
Ian rants to himself as he walks.

IAN

No fence here, just trees. Easy.  
No problem. I trip an alarm, I'll  
just keep running. Keep running  
until I find something. There's  
always something.

Ian enters the forest. So far nothing happens.

IAN

This is America. It's never more  
than a five minute walk to the  
nearest mall, or some place with a  
pay phone.

Just then Ian notices the trees have taken on a labyrinth-  
like quality. He turns back, but he seems to have instantly  
lost his way. The school grounds and common can no longer be  
seen from where he is, a stark contrast to just a few seconds  
before.

Ian runs back the way he came only to encounter more trees.  
He runs down another trail that dead ends into a thick  
cluster of thorn bushes.

IAN

No way.

Ian starts back up the trail but again finds himself in  
another unfamiliar part of the forest. Even worse, it is  
starting to get dark.

Then it starts -- Ian becomes aware of a rustling noise, as  
if creatures were moving through the trees around him. Then  
he hears another sound - low crackles like radio static. Ian  
runs off his fears mounting.

Ian hears the rustling again, closer this time, and the static, now louder. He cranes his neck to look through the trees. He sees something and grows cold.

IAN'S POV - GNOMES

A number of black-clad, inhuman CREATURES are slowly moving through the trees. Their heads are hidden under helmets. The only discernible features are their glowing red eyes. The creatures (called GNOMES by the students) communicate in unintelligible static-like WHISPERS.

One of the Gnomes looks up, its eyes seemingly scanning the surrounding woods.

ON IAN

Terrified, pressing himself hard against the ground, hoping against all odds to remain unseen.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The Gnomes continue to scan the area. Satisfied no one is there, they move back the way they came.

ON IAN

Looking out fearfully from his hiding place. Once he is sure the Gnomes have left, he cautiously moves out. Taking pains to remain silent, he hurries back through the woods.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - CONTINUING

Ian finds a trail and takes it. He runs through the trees and almost pitches over the edge of a cliff. He jumps back just in time. Far below is water, wide and black, possibly a lake, possibly the ocean. It seems to go on forever. Off Ian's scared expression, we...

END ACT TWO

PREP

"NEW KID"

ACT THREE

EXT. FOREST RAIL - BY CLIFF - NIGHT

Ian cautiously backs away from the edge of the cliff. For a second or two it looks like he might slide over the rim. Then, regaining his footing, he turns and heads back into the forest.

INT. FOREST - CONTINUING

Ian traces his steps, trying to find his way out of the forest. In the distance he see tiny bobbing RED LIGHTS, the eyes of the Gnomes as they search in a clearing.

Ian turns and moves quickly down another path. He is careful to not make a sound as he hurries away from the direction taken by the Gnomes. Just then he reacts to the sound of hushed voices coming down the trail.

C.J. (O.S.)  
(whispered)  
Which way?

Ian leaps off the trail and hides behind a tree. He peeks out to see THREE KIDS coming his way. They are C.J., the pretty girl who sneered at him in the orientation line, Gabe Flores, the class clown, and a Japanese girl, a stranger to Ian. We will learn her name is SUKI. She consults a small hand-held electronic device, like an iPhone. On it is a digital map of the forest. Suki has to hold her hand over the device to keep it from giving off too much light.

SUKI  
Down here, I think.

C.J. Whispers to Gabe, who has fallen behind.

C.J.  
Keep up, Flores!

Gabe hurries to join them. He is breathing hard.

GABE

I wasn't made for this. Wise-cracking my way out of a fight, I can do that. Scaling walls to freedom, not so much.

SUKI

Shh! They'll hear us!

GABE

If they're even out there.

Suddenly C.J. hears something.

C.J.

Wait! We're not alone!

Ian jumps out of hiding. The other three nearly freak, but Ian gestures for them to be quiet.

IAN

Shh!

He gestures for them to follow him. After a moment of hesitation, the other three follow him.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - CONTINUING

Ian leads the three kids back to where he last saw the Gnomes. Sure enough, they are still in the clearing just ahead. Ian gives a hand signal to indicate how many there are. The reaction of the other kids shows they were not prepared to deal with that many. It's clear if they had continued that way, they would have been caught. Ian nods to the others and they follow him away from the Gnomes.

One the kids are a safe distance from the creatures, Ian breaks the silence.

IAN

What is this place? Tower prep?

SUKI

We don't know.

C.J.

We're not even sure if the teachers know.

GABE  
They can spew trivia about  
Musashi's Book of Five Rings or  
the Punic Wars, but ask them where  
we are and they get lockjaw.

SUKI  
And we've all asked.

GABE  
You can forget learning anything  
from the Proges.

IAN  
Proges?

C.J.  
The kids who mindlessly buy the  
Headmaster's spiel. We're  
different, we have potential...

IAN  
Heard that.

C.J.  
Those kids are too deep into the  
Program to ask questions.

SUKI  
Or too scared.

GABE  
Finally the three of us decided to  
risk the forest run. Planned it  
for months.

IAN  
Like that kid my roommates said I  
replaced, Phillips. What happened  
to him?

Gabe shrugs.

GABE  
The Gnomes got him, most likely.

IAN  
The things in the woods?

GABE  
We call them Gnomes because if we  
really thought about what they  
might be, we'd start screaming.

IAN  
What are they? Guards?

SUKI  
Possibly. No one's ever come back  
to say.

GABE  
Fun school, huh?

IAN  
Like something out of a nightmare.  
But with those things on patrol,  
we're probably better off back  
there.

Suki is still reluctant to call it off. She shows off her phone.

SUKI  
Took me weeks to rework my touch  
phone into a GPS. If we don't go  
now, we won't get another chance.

C.J.  
Maybe we can circle back.

IAN  
Do you know how these Gnomes  
maneuver? Do they attack together,  
or split up? How do they  
communicate? What are their  
weaknesses? Anyone know?

The kids silence says they don't know.

IAN  
You've got to do this right.

Ian grows more focused as his father's words come back to him.

IAN (CONT'D)  
Can't just lash out. Until we know  
what we're dealing with, we're  
better off watching and waiting.

A moment of indecision from the three other kids. Suki finally nods, giving in. C.J. steps forward. She offers her hand to Ian.

C.J.  
Candice Judge. I prefer C.J.

She nods toward the other kids.

C.J.

I think you remember Gabe Flores  
from class.

GABE

Hey. Sorry about the fart joke.

IAN

(still a bit pissed)  
Forget it.

C.J.

And that's the brains of our group,  
Suki Sato.

Ian finally starts to believe he is among friends. He smiles  
for the first time that day.

IAN

Ian Traynor.

INT. FOREST - NIGHT A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ian has convinced the others. They are all trekking back  
through the dark woods toward the school, Suki in the lead,  
consulting her map.

IAN

...I'm talking on line to that Echo  
voice, then I heard this buzzing on  
my headphones, then I woke up here.

C.J. has heard variations on this story.

C.J.

A girl in my dorm said she heard  
Echo's voice on her cell phone  
before she passed out. Same deal.

Gabe chimes in with his story.

GABE

I was listening to my music pod  
when I passed out. Next morning I  
was in uniform, listening to a  
lecture on Pre-Columbian history in  
German. And the weird thing was,  
by the end of class, I was actually  
starting to understand it.

Ian looks curiously to Suki.

SUKI

My parents had a big fight before I came. I never knew what it was about. I just turned on our big screen TV and tried to drown out their screaming. Then I heard the buzzing.

Ian takes the iPhone-like device from her. On the phone is a brand name - SATO. Ian makes the connection.

IAN

Suki Sato, as in Sato Electronics?

A source of embarrassment for Suki.

SUKI

Yeah, kind of.

C.J. fills Ian in on her history.

C.J.

I don't have any memories of my life before TowerSchool. As far as I know, I've always been here.

IAN

If this is your home, why were you trying to escape?

C.J.

Maybe I'll start to remember the life I had before school. There's got to be more than just TowerPrep and The Program.

IAN

And yet you dumped on me for not following it.

C.J.

We had the break planned for a long time. I didn't want anyone to suspect.

IAN

Escapes, masked goons, my old school was never like this.

GABE

That's because most of us at our little day care center are what you'd call, "special." Not short bus special, but "I can do some weird thing really well" special.

IAN

Not that I'm buying into this, but can you give me a for instance?

GABE

Suki?

Suki pauses and says in a perfect imitation of Ian's voice:

SUKI

(in Ian's voice)

Not that I'm buying into this, but can you give me a for instance?

Ian is impressed, and sort of scared.

IAN

Okay, that's weird.

SUKI

(as C.J.)

I can do that with anyone I've ever heard, even once...

(as Gabe)

And with the right clothes and moves, I can pass myself off as the real thing, until I drop the disguise...

(as herself)

...and become me again. Whoever that is.

IAN

And you?

C.J.

You know the expression, "I can read you like a book"? Everyone communicates through facial tics, quick breaths, nervous eyelash flickers. It's like a second language to me.

IAN

Seriously?

C.J.  
 From the second you walked in the  
 classroom, I knew you were scared.  
 I wanted to let you know you  
 weren't alone.

IAN  
 (realizing)  
 You sent me that note. So what  
 signals am I sending now?

Ceej looks at him intently.

C.J.  
 Tense muscles, darting  
 eyes...little creped out. Kind of  
 angry. And...

Ian suddenly turns away from her, not wanting her to go  
 deeper.

C.J.  
 I'm sure your folks miss you, too.

A moment of reflection for Suki, Gabe and Ian. It's the  
 elephant in the room.

SUKI  
 I like to think mine do.

GABE  
 Same here.

IAN  
 (quiet)  
 We fought last night. I never got  
 to say...  
 (to Suki)  
 How much farther?

Suki consults her map.

SUKI  
 Half mile. That way.

Gabe is anxious to impress Ian.

GABE  
 Want to know what I can do?

IAN  
Does it involve flight,  
teleportation or any other way to  
get us home?

GABE  
Uh, no.

IAN  
I'll pass.

C.J.  
What about you?

IAN  
I got nothing.

C.J.  
Really? No flashes of second  
sight, sudden busts of strength...

C.J. senses a shift in Ian.

C.J.  
Something, though. I felt it when  
you dropped your eyes.

IAN  
That's creepy.

C.J.  
But I'm not wrong.

Ian decides to open up. He tells C.J. What he's never told  
another soul.

IAN  
I've always felt like I was a half  
step in front of the rest of the  
world. Like I can see things just  
before they happen, and react a  
second faster than...

And with that, he throws C.J. To the ground. Before the  
startled Suki and Gabe can react, Ian is leaping forward and  
firing a powerful kick into the mid-section of an attacking  
GNOME. The Gnome hits the ground, then quickly springs back  
up onto its feet. The crackling static coming from its  
"face" instantly rises into a wailing SIREN. It is the exact  
same semi-electronic, semi-human sound Ian heard after the  
red-haired kid vanished into the woods.

Across the forest answering SIRENS are heard. They seem to be moving closer to the kids at a fast pace. Off the kids terrified expressions, we...

END ACT THREE

PREP

"NEW KID"

ACT FOUR

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The bizarre Gnomes race through the forest, their frightening sirens rising. They move like a coordinated strike team, vaulting over downed trees and thick bushes. Think storm troopers mixed with ninjas.

ON IAN AND KIDS

Ian stands in front of the others, trying to fend off the first Gnome attacker. The figure is taller than Ian, but Ian moves faster. As the Gnome reaches to grab him, Ian sidesteps, grabs the Gnome and sends him spinning into the side of a tree.

IAN  
(to other kids)  
Run!

They all dash off through the forest.

As the kids run, the red lights of the other Gnomes sweep the woods behind them. The red lights glance off them and the Gnomes sirens grow louder. Suki makes a decision.

SUKI  
I got this.

She starts to break off from the others. C.J. moves to stop her.

C.J.  
Suki! No!

But Suki darts around C.J., not about to be stopped.

SUKI  
Whatever you hear, keep going!

Suki dashes off to side. She runs back a short way, then hides in the trees. She calls out:

SUKI  
 (in Ian's voice)  
 This way, guys!  
 (in C.J.'s voice)  
 Head to the clearing!

ON GNOMES

The first Gnome has rejoined the others. They hear Suki calling in different voices.

SUKI (O.S.)  
 (in C.J.'s voice)  
 Everyone stay together!

ON SUKI

She scrambles up a rock and calls out:

SUKI  
 (in Gabe's voice)  
 I'm right behind you!

BACK TO GNOMES

The lead Gnome directs a few of the Gnomes to follow the voices. They run off in search of the voice.

BACK TO SUKI

Smiling, she slides off the rock and runs ahead, luring the pursuing Gnomes away.

SUKI  
 (in Ian's voice)  
 We're home free!

Suddenly Suki reacts with fear to something she sees ahead. She quickly throws herself off the trail and hides.

A brand new SECOND COMPANY of even MORE Gnomes, also alerted by Suki's voices, runs in, just missing Suki. This second company meets up with the first company. The two company Leaders communicate in low STATIC CRACKLES.

In a nearby ditch, a scared Suki tries to make herself as small as possible.

SUKI  
 (quietly, her own voice)  
 Oh great, there's more.

After a few seconds, the two companies of Gnomes move off as one united larger company.

The second they leave, Suki leaps to her feet and runs to find her friends.

ON IAN, GABE AND C.J.

Racing through the woods. Ian calls back to the others:

IAN  
 How far is it?

GABE  
 Just over the hill.

Ian breaks away.

IAN  
 Go on. I'm going back for Suki.

But Suki is hot on their heels.

SUKI  
 I'm here. The Gnomes are coming on  
 all sides.

And suddenly the forest is swept with red lights from the advancing Gnomes' eyes. The creatures push in from both sides, the kids caught between them.

Ian is ready to fly at the Gnomes, but Gabe steps forward.

GABE  
 My turn. Finally.

Gabe starts to speak with confidence to the Gnomes. His tone is easy-going, trustworthy. A master manipulator just before he takes you for everything you've got. The Gnomes stay where they are, not attacking, just waiting. Their sirens have faded to a low whine, barely audible.

GABE  
 Guys, how are ya? Look, there's  
 obviously been a misunderstanding.  
 We took a wrong turn after study  
 hall, chased a sick raccoon into  
 the woods, call it what you want...

Gabe gestures for the other kids to start walking. They do. They head slowly into the trees and Gabe starts backing away after them.

GABE (CONT'D)  
 ...mistakes were made. I'm the  
 first one to admit it.

ON IAN AND C.J.

Edging toward the trees.

IAN  
 (whispers)  
 Does this really work?

C.J.  
 (whispers)  
 I dunno how he does it, but yeah.  
 Gabe can talk his way out of  
 anything.

BACK TO GABE AND GNOMES

Gabe is inching away from the Gnomes who are still hovering nearby, not attacking, but not withdrawing, either. The Gnomes closest to Gabe relax slightly, standing at ease as they listen to him talk.

GABE  
 That said, there's no reason to go  
 screaming through the forest, we'll  
 just head on back to campus, and  
 you can fly back to the batcave, or  
 wherever you guys hole up. That  
 cool?

The lead Gnome notices several of his "men" relaxing their fighting stances. A burst of sharp STATIC from the Leader's "mouth" snaps the other Gnomes back to attention. The Leader raises his "voice" to a SHRIEKING SIREN again and the other Gnomes do the same. The Gnomes quickly dart forward to cut off Ian, C.J. and Suki from escaping.

As the Gnomes push the four in closer, the SIRENS take on the strange BUZZING SOUND that he first heard over his headphones.

Suki, C.J. And Gabe start to fall under the spell of the strange droning sound.

They lose their fear and start to weave back and forth, as if they are falling into trances. Ian shakes them awake.

IAN  
(to others )  
Don't listen!

The kids snap out of it and quickly slap their hands over their ears.

Ian launches himself at the lead Gnome. Though Ian is much smaller, he manages to tackle the Gnome. The other Gnomes quickly move to close in. Ian manages to shout to C.J.:

IAN  
Run! Trust me!

C.J. nods back. She and the other kids dash up the hill toward the school.

ON IAN

For the first time we really see Ian cut loose. It isn't that he's an immensely strong fighter, but an amazingly fast and agile one. Imposing as the Gnomes are, they are too slow to grab him. Ian ducks between their legs, dodges away from their blows, and when he connects, he connects HARD. Every time a Gnome pauses to get its bearings, that's when Ian strikes. Not wasting his fists on the Gnome's hard helmets, he concentrates with kicks to their mid-sections. Seeing him bravely take on the Gnomes, we understand why Ian rose so quickly in his karate class. As he deftly hobbles his attackers one after the other, we also understand why his folks took him out.

Staggering the Gnomes for the moment, Ian runs off after his friends.

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - NIGHT

Gabe, Suki and C.J. have come to the edge of the forest. Before them is the school common and beyond that, the dormitories. But to the kids dismay, a series of low infrared SENSOR LIGHTS are sweeping over the grounds. The lights sweep down in one direction, withdraw for a few seconds, then swing back in a new direction. There appears to be no way to get across in time without being it by one of the beams.

SUKI  
We're too late. Security is on.

Ian runs up to the kids. He sees the lights and guesses their purpose.

IAN  
Do you know the way across?

C.J.  
(shakes head)  
We weren't planning on coming back.

C.J. glances toward the woods.

C.J.  
Now we can't.

GABE  
We're screwed.

Ian studies the sweep of the lights for a second.

IAN  
Hold on. There's a pattern to the lights.

GABE  
You're crazy. It's all random.

IAN  
No. I can see it. Not sure how, but I can. You can make it across if you stay together and do as I say.

Ian studies the lights again, then nods.

IAN  
Get ready...

They wait until the lights finish their sweep.

IAN  
Three steps ahead. Go.

Suki, Gabe and Ceej step out onto the common.

IAN  
Two steps to the left.

The kids follow his commands.

IAN  
One step right. Stop.

They do it perfectly.

IAN  
Ten steps ahead. Duck!

The kids duck low as the beam sweeps over her head. Suki barely makes it.

QUICK REACTIONS on C.J., Suki and Gabe, looking worried. They stay stock still as the light sweeps back and forth above them. It passes and they straighten.

IAN  
Twenty feet ahead. Stop, wait and jump.

The kids run ahead, stop and leap as the beam sweeps under them at ankle level. At the end Gabe trips instead of jumps, and comes down at a weird angle. He bends his body in an uncomfortable but funny-looking way to elude the last of the beams. Suki and Ceej reach back to yank him out of the path of the last beam. The kids collapse breathing hard but safe on the other side.

ON IAN

He is just starting across when one of the Gnomes darts out from the forest and jumps him.

ON OTHER KIDS

On the other side, the kids see this and react with alarm. C.J. starts back, but Ian gestures for her to stop.

IAN  
Stay there!

The kids are concerned for Ian but unable to do anything except watch.

BACK TO IAN AND THE GNOME

Really going at it. The Gnome grabs Ian by both arms and starts up its eerie wail again. The creature's "face" is very close to Ian's. He bends and twists but can't get away from it.

IAN  
That's really starting to piss me off!

Ian head-butts the creature, then fires his fist into the Gnome's "mouth." There is a crackle of static and the siren shorts out.

Its power source seemingly corrupted, the Gnome collapses. Ian bends over the strange figure. We and Ian get a good look at the thing. It is dressed in a close-fitting black suit, with thick-soled boots that make it seem taller. Ian takes hold of the helmet and pulls it off. He sees the face beneath it and swallows hard.

Staring blankly up at Ian is the dazed face of the frantic red-haired kid that ran up to him earlier that day. The kid is still breathing, but it seems like his brain has shut down. What the hell?

Ian looks up to see distant flickering red lights in the forest, drawing closer. He picks up the Gnome's shattered helmet and runs with it.

ON SCHOOL COMMON

Ian runs onto the lawn. Moving deftly, he eludes the sweep of the infrared lights and joins his friends on the other side.

GABE

(points to the helmet)  
You're some awesome fighter.

IAN

I just charge in swinging.

The kids head for their dorms.

INT. BOY'S DORM

Don, Ray and Zack head toward the dorm's communal bathroom. The guys are wearing robes and carrying towels. A few other boys move quickly out of their way, showing these are guys most of the rest of the school fears. One of the boys can't get out of their way fast enough. Don nods to him in the smug way a bully has of acknowledging a kid worth scaring but not beating up.

DON

(sneers)  
Howard.

The nervous boy smiles, anxious to placate them.

HOWARD

Hey guys. Hear you got a new roommate.

The trio exchange glances, shake their heads "no" and grin. Ignoring Howard, they continue into the bathroom.

HOWARD

Oh well, that's cool. See ya.

INT. BATHROOM

The boys are taking a shower. Their robes and towels hang on nearby hooks.

RAY

Think Traynor made it as far as the cliffs?

DON

I'll bet the Gnomes grabbed him by the first tree.

Suddenly Ian, seen only from the back or in quick glimpses, dashes in and swipes their things. Don looks up and catches and fleeting glimpse.

DON

Hey! Traynor!

The guys run out of the shower.

ZACK

Oh man, you are dead!

The naked bullies race out of the bathroom too angry to be embarrassed.

EXT. DORM - NIGHT - CONTINUING

Ian, seen from the back, wearing a jacket, races onto the lawn and drops off the robes before bolting away. The bullies charge after him. The second they hit the lawn, the infrared security beams flash over them, triggering the alarm. Tensor lights mounted on top of the dorm flash down on them. All the room doors open as the boys look out to see who got nailed.

Remarkably Ian himself looks out of his room. The bullies see him, can't believe it. They just saw him run the other way, right?

RAY

Traynor?!

Ian shakes his head, seemingly disgusted with his roommates behavior.

IAN

Keep it down, guys. I'm trying to study.

Gabe knocks on the dorm door marked DORM MASTER.

GABE

Excuse me, Sir. Ugly naked dudes dancing on the common.

The teacher called MATH steps out.

GABE

Kind of cool in a grotesque way, but really just creeping everyone out. Thought you should know.

Math catches sight of the trio, wet and naked in the security lights. He can't suppress a smile.

MATH

Oh good. And out after curfew, too. Mr. Blonsky, please cover yourself.

The shamefaced Zack does so.

MATH

I'm sure Headmaster will have something to say about this. Step into my apartment while I call him.

The angry bullies grab their robes.

Math notes Ian grinning at the bullies embarrassment.

MATH

Everything copacetic, Mr. Traynor?

IAN

No complaints, Sir.

Math gives Ian a look that says he might know more than Ian is telling about the incident, and he doesn't think that's a bad thing. C.J. approaches Ian's room as the sullen bullies file past.

IAN  
 (to C.J.)  
 You picking up anything besides  
 embarrassment and the desire to  
 inflict pain?

Ceej looks at the bullies.

C.J.  
 I can feel Zack tearing up. Going  
 to lose it.

The Dorm Master's door closes.

ZACK (O.S.)  
 (sobs)

Ceej gives Ian a "told ja" look. Suki enters, taking off  
 Ian's jacket.

SUKI  
 I think this is yours.

IAN  
 Thanks. It looked good on you.

A shy smile from Suki.

They are rejoined by Gabe. He nods to Ian:

GABE  
 Well. Do we show him?

IAN  
 What?

The other three are obviously in on some secret. Ceej and  
 Suki are in agreement.

C.J.  
 It's okay.

They move off casually in the direction of the classrooms.  
 As this is all within the campus, there are no alarms here.  
 Ian, curious, follows them.

EXT. OLD SCIENCE BUILDING - NIGHT

Establish the dark old building at the edge of the campus.  
 Ian quietly follows Gabe, Ceej and Suki to the old building.

INT. OLD SCIENCE BUILDING STORE ROOM - CONTINUING

It is a treasure trove of old Frankenstein-like equipment, skeletons in cases, dusty taxidermy animals, creepy things in liquid-filled jars and other scientific paraphernalia of forgotten times. A centerpiece of the room is an old telescope, mounted to look up through the ceiling.

Ian enters with the others and looks around. He smiles, intrigued with the surroundings.

C.J.

This is where we met to plan the escape. It's the only place on campus that's completely private.

IAN

Very cool.

GABE

It's got that old Skull and Bones Secret Society charm. The best reason a kid should go to prep school.

Suki has moved to the old telescope.

SUKI

This used to be the old observatory.

Ian scrambles up next to her.

IAN

I'm good with astronomy. Let me get a fix on the stars and I can figure out where we are.

Suki moves to stop him.

SUKI

We've all looked though it, but...

C.J.

Let him look, Suki. It's better he knew.

Ian looks through the telescope.

IAN

This isn't right.

After a second, he looks up, stunned.

IAN  
 The stars, everything's out of  
 place.  
 (a sobering realization)  
 Are we even in the United States?

The other kids shrug.

GABE  
 You've seen the flagpole. There's  
 no state flag, no country. Only  
 the school.

Ian is downhearted. He hadn't counted on this.

IAN  
 Didn't think home was so far away.

C.J.  
 How long kids have been brought  
 here, and what they were trained  
 for is anyone's guess.

SUKI  
 We still don't know why we're here,  
 Or how we're supposed to develop  
 our "potential."

IAN  
 (determined)  
 We'll worry about that once we're  
 gone.

The other kids listen to Ian with growing respect. He's what the three desperate kids have needed all along, a leader with a plan.

IAN  
 We'll do like C.J. and pretend to  
 be good little Proges. Each night,  
 we'll meet here and map out a real  
 escape plan.

SUKI  
 I'm all for that but...

C.J.  
 What?

Suki brings up that elephant again. Neither Suki, Ian nor Gabe has wanted to deal with this.

SUKI

You're different, Ceej, you've been here all along. But the three of us...our parents knew about this. They sent us here. If we go back, what do we go back to? What will we have if they reject us?

After a second, Ian voices the answer that is in all their hearts:

IAN

Each other.

Ian puts his hand out. The other three take it. As they look into each others eyes, a bond is forged between the four. Unbreakable, until escape or death do we part.

PREP

"NEW KID"

EPILOGUE

INT. IAN'S ROOM - MORNING

Close quick shots of Ian taking out his uniform, tying his tie and slipping on his jacket.

EXT. IAN'S ROOM - CONTINUING

It is the next day, just before the home room bell rings. Ian steps out of his room completely dressed in the school uniform. His tie is straight, his jacket is neat, not a detail is out of place. With books in hand, he sets off for the classroom. He appears to be just another model TowerPrep student. From some unseen PA system comes the voice of Echo, presumably welcoming any new students that were dropped off during the night.

ECHO (V.O.)

All new students, orientation  
begins in fifteen minutes. Don't  
be late.

On his way to class, Ian crosses paths with Headmaster.

HEADMASTER

Mr. Traynor. Math says there was  
an incident with your roommates  
last night.

IAN

Guys just being guys I guess,  
whooping it up naked on the lawn,  
setting off the security system  
just for fun.

HEADMASTER

You saw nothing unusual?

IAN

I did mention they were naked?

Headmaster frowns. Ian continues:

IAN  
I was inside studying. Ask anyone.

HEADMASTER  
I did.

Headmaster notes Ian's appearance.

HEADMASTER  
Good to see you in full uniform.

IAN  
I can't understand the Program if  
I'm not part of it.

Headmaster studies Ian, trying to decide if the boy is on the level.

HEADMASTER  
You'll find that's the best way to  
succeed here.

IAN  
Well, you were right when you said  
I like a challenge.

Ian nods as he moves away from Headmaster.

ON HEADMASTER

A few students run by him, attracting his attention. Headmaster walks after the excited students, curious to see that has grabbed their attentions. The kids are headed for the center of the school common, and the flagpole.

EXT. SCHOOL - CLOSE ON FLAGPOLE

At the top of the flagpole, in place of the flag, hangs the broken helmet Ian took off the defeated Gnome the night before.

PAN DOWN from the top of the pole to show the students looking up at it in wonder.

STUDENT #1  
Is it really a Gnome?

STUDENT #2  
No one's ever seen them.

STUDENT #3

You mean no one's seen them and  
come back.

STUDENT #1

Someone did.

As Headmaster approaches, the students quickly scatter and go  
about their business. Headmaster is joined by Math. They  
both look at the helmet.

MATH

First time that's happened.

HEADMASTER

We'll make it the last.

MATH

Shall I implement disciplinary  
procedure?

HEADMASTER

No reason to punish the entire  
student body for a message sent by  
one person. If we ignore it,  
they'll become over-confident,  
careless. We'll catch him next  
time.

MATH

You're sure it's a "him?"

HEADMASTER

I have some ideas.

Math speaks quietly and personally to Headmaster.

MATH

Not every student can deal with  
what we do here, Penemue. Some of  
them break.

HEADMASTER

The strong ones must follow the  
Program without question. It's the  
only way they can deal with the  
outside world.

Headmaster looks back the helmet on the flag pole.

HEADMASTER

Or themselves.

Headmaster exits, leaving Math to lower the helmet.

A short distance away, Gabe watches the action at the flagpole, then turns and passes by Ian. They don't speak, but Gabe touches his nose, a signal to Ian. Ian responds with a touch to his ear.

Ian continues on past C.J. They also share a signal of silent communication.

Nearby Don, Ray and Zack watch Ian. The signals are lost on them, but their sullen expressions say they don't like or trust Ian one bit.

As the bullies move off, Suki is revealed sitting on a bench. She is seemingly playing with her picture phone. To anyone else, it looks just like a basic phone, but Suki is giving it a once-over with a small screwdriver.

CLOSER ON PICTURE PHONE

The simple graphics suddenly scramble, becoming a swirling electronic jumble. Suki frowns and tries to fix it. Just then, the graphics reform into words. The message on the screen reads:

SUKI - I KNOW THE WAY OUT. TRUST ME - ECHO

Suki's eyes widen in shock. She quickly sticks the phone in her backpack and runs off to find Ian and the others.

FADE OUT

END EPISODE

