

The Pursuit

Feature Film Treatment

By John Halas

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Logline: In a dystopian future, a teenage girl and her friends get caught up in a vast conspiracy when she defies the wishes of the current government in an attempt to save her mom from incarceration uncover censored past cultures.

Characters:

Manuel Luhon is a senior agent of the Federal Bureau of Language (FBL) and the head of the Enforcement division. Though he is a talented and dedicated investigator, his willingness to serve the totalitarian government that he works for and his workaholic nature ended up costing him his relationship with his ex-wife, Esmeralda, and his daughter, Kiki, who he never actually had the chance to get to know because of the divorce.

Esmeralda Luhon is the ex-wife of Manuel and the mother of their daughter, Kiki. She was once in a committed, happy relationship with Manuel, but their difference in personal politics eventually drove them apart, and they got divorced. She is part of an underground group known as “The Historians,” whose goal is to secretly preserve all the knowledge that the Uni government wants to destroy.

Kiki Luhon is the daughter of Manuel and Esmeralda Luhon. As a result of her parent’s divorce, she was raised by her mother and, until the events of the film, had never met her father. Raised by her mother to not be a “conformist” to Uni Culture, she is inquisitive and tenacious, demonstrating leadership qualities that show she is wise beyond her years. When her mother becomes incarcerated and she is forced to live with her father, she makes it her personal mission to see her mother released from her imprisonment.

Eito is one of Kiki’s best friends. A fellow student of Japanese descent, Eito shares Kiki’s intelligence and tenacity but also has a strong, somewhat sarcastic streak that is right underneath the surface and which sometimes comes out, particularly when he feels that he, or his friends, are being threatened in some shape or fashion.

Raji is another one of Kiki’s best friends. A fellow student of Indian descent, she is a member of Kiki’s “history posse.” While equally as smart as any of the other members of the group, she is somewhat hesitant when it comes to breaking rules or confronting people, as that seems to not be in her nature. This is more than likely the result of being raised by her mother, who is well-meaning but fairly overprotective.

Jonathan is the final member of Kiki’s core group of friends. Of English descent, he is tall and heavyset and seems to always be at least a little bit hungry. Though something of a “scaredy cat” in certain moments, he is the closest thing the group has to “muscle” and seems to be particularly effective in scaring away the bullies at school who bother them for not being conformists.

Agent Ling Huang is one of the junior agents of the FBL who works directly under Manuel’s command. While he is a talented investigator, he is something of a brown-noser and desperately tries to get the attention and approval of Manuel, who is dismissive of him due to

his apparent desperation. When he begins to suspect that Manuel is aiding and abetting a criminal conspiracy, he turns on his supposed “mentor” and tries to have him thrown out of the bureau.

Director Jack Sinclair is the head of the FBL and the mentor of agent Manuel Luhon. A steel-hearted, ruthless man who is only interested in advancing the cause of Uni Culture, he is willing to do whatever is necessary to enforce the law, including interrogating people by the use of brutal force. He has a dark family secret, however, and when that could potentially become exposed, his normally cool façade falls away to reveal the fury hiding beneath it.

Synopsis:

Act One:

Sometime in the future, all cultures and languages have been homogenized into one highly sterile culture and language, called Uni and Basic, respectively. The “purity” of this culture is overseen by the Federal Bureau of Language (FBL). We meet Special Agent Manuel Luhon and his wife, Esmeralda, who has just recently given birth to their new baby daughter, who she has named Kiki. Instead of being excited about the birth of his daughter, however, he is far more excited that he has just been promoted at work by Jack Sinclair, who is the head of the Enforcement Bureau at the FBL. Sometime after the birth of Kiki, Esmeralda becomes tired of Manuel’s workaholic nature and his blind devotion to Uni Culture and asks him to choose between his family and his work. Manuel chooses his work, and the two divorce afterwards, with Esmeralda taking custody of their daughter.

Sixteen years later, Kiki is now an inquisitive, tenacious teenager who, much like her mother, does not believe in conforming to Uni Culture. After her mother asks her if she has her medallion (which she always wears around her chest), the two bemoan the flavorless food they are forced to eat and Kiki leaves their apartment to head to school, meeting up with her friends, Eito, Jonathan, and Raji, along the way. During one of their classes, Kiki gets in trouble for asking questions that mock Uni Culture. Afterwards, she and her friends are mocked by Harrison, who chides them for not being conformists. The group then leaves school and talks about past cultures, which is illegal in this society. Meanwhile, Esmeralda is arrested at one of her hidden libraries by Ling Huang, an undercover FBL agent, and it is revealed that the raid is led by her ex-husband, Manuel though the two do not see one another during the arrest.

Afterwards, Manuel heads back to his office, where an agent from Child Services informs him that, due to his wife’s arrest, he now has legal custody of his child. He goes into an interrogation room and confronts her, where he finds out that she not only failed to legally remove him as the child’s guardian but that the library he found was not the elusive “Grand Library” that he has been searching for. Furious, he leaves the room and berates Agent Huang for calling for the arrest too early. In a foul mood, he heads back to his office to find a Child Services agent and Kiki standing in his office. The agent explains that he has no choice but to take custody, as it would be unseemly if he refused to do so. Realizing that neither one of them

has a choice, Manuel agrees to take legal custody of his daughter and allow her to stay with him.

After heading home with Manuel, Kiki sneaks out of the apartment in an attempt to go find her mother while Manuel is preparing dinner. She stops by the rehab center her mother is imprisoned in, but they will not let her in. She then goes to all of her friends' homes in hopes of a place to stay for the night, but none of their parents are willing to allow her to spend the night. She eventually comes across the Off-Gridders, members of society who have shunned Uni Culture and do not use ID cards or credits, but the man she is following eventually just leads her back to the city, where she is arrested by two police officers, who immediately scan her ID and take her back to Manuel, who thanks the officers for their cooperation regarding the matter.

The next day, Kiki and her friends almost get into a fight with Harrison and his friend Molly, but Eito and Jonathan manage to scare them off. Meanwhile, Manuel is called into the office of Jack, who has now become the Director of the FBL. He explains that he is disappointed in Manuel and that the arrest, even though it shut down a library, is still a failure as far as he is concerned. He tells Manuel to use his daughter to find out more information about where the "Grand Library" is located, and he agrees. After school, Kiki and her friends talk about how Kiki can visit her mom, and her friends suggest that she pretend to befriend her father, as he has the necessary security clearance to gain access to her mother, and Kiki agrees that it is a good plan.

Later that night, Kiki and Manuel have a conversation about the First Citizen (who is analogous to a king in this society, despite his pretenses), and Kiki asks why it is even necessary for them to have a First Citizen or a Federal Bureau of Language, in the first place. Manuel explains that, before all culture was united, the world was constantly in a state of war, and that by having one culture and one language, the world has finally now managed to come to a state of peace. Kiki wholly rejects this notion and goes to her room, refusing to finish her dinner. Afterwards, while Manuel is distracted, she steals his ID card and leaves the apartment, but he quickly realizes what has happened and heads out after her.

Kiki, who is unaware that she is being watched by Agent Huang, heads into the rehab center by using her father's ID, but she is promptly taken into custody by the guards, and Manuel arrives not long after. He has his wife brought into the holding room, and mother and daughter embrace. He tells Esmeralda to tell Kiki that she needs to be focused on being a good "Uni Citizen," and after the conversation is over, he goes into the security records room and deletes any proof that he or Kiki was ever in the rehab center. Agent Huang continues to spy on Manuel and Kiki after they leave the rehab center, and Manuel and Kiki watch the news together in a strained attempt to bond. After she heads to bed, Kiki takes the medallion off and finds that there is a hidden map inside of it.

Act Two:

The next day at school, Kiki shows the map to her friends, which has the words “La Gran Biblioteca” written on it. Realizing that they do not know what the words mean, they make a copy of the map and go to visit Kiki’s aunt, Angela, who tells them that the words are in Spanish, but that she does not speak Spanish, as it has been outlawed for generations. She tells them to go see her friend, Isaiah, who gives them a Spanish-English dictionary, which allows them to translate the words as “The Grand Library.” Isaiah then explains to them that The Grand Library is a place where a group of secretive people, known as “The Historians,” hid away the knowledge of the world so that it could not be destroyed by the Uni government. Even though it is in what is presently Mexico, the teens realize that they have no choice but to travel there if they want to free Kiki’s mom from the rehab center. We find out that Manuel has been trailing the kids for some time, but they manage to ditch him and take a train headed south.

Meanwhile, Huang has a meeting with Jack Sinclair and tells him that he believes Manuel is involved with his wife’s criminal activities and that he should have him arrested. While Jack wants to defend Manuel (albeit for purely selfish reasons), he agrees to look into the matter. Afterwards, Jack and Manuel have a meeting with the First Citizen at his apartment, who convinces Manuel to go undercover to find out where the Grand Library is and to stop the Historians, which Manuel agrees to. Afterwards, Manuel comments to Jack that the First Citizen lived more opulently than he expected, and Jack explains that they can talk more about it after he finishes his mission. Afterwards, Jack and the First Citizen talk about how everyone who has knowledge of the operation, including Manuel, will have to be killed upon its conclusion.

Manuel goes to visit his wife at the rehab center, but when a SWAT Team makes a show of coming to arrest him, Esmeralda agrees to break out of the facility with Manuel, even though she does not trust him. Meanwhile, in Mexico, the kids are befriended by Maria, an elderly Mexican woman, who gives the kids a place to stay for the night and teaches Kiki how to speak Spanish. Concurrently, Manuel and Esmeralda also attempt to head down to Mexico without leaving a log of their travel. Agent Huang is using the FBL to follow both of them in order to try to catch Manuel doing something illegal.

Act Three:

The next day, Maria arranges for a truck driver to take the kids to the city, where they track down an elderly bracelet maker, who also reveals himself to be a Historian. He and his wife feed the children, and they agree to leave for The Grand Library the next day. Meanwhile, Agent Huang is using facial recognition software to try to track down Manuel and Esmeralda, but they don’t show up anywhere. He then decides to have the technician look for Kiki instead of her parents.

The kids eventually make their way to The Grand Library and are welcomed inside by Gustavo, who is the custodian of the facility. Meanwhile, Agent Huang has arrived in Mexico and is interrogating the old bracelet maker about the location of Kiki and her friends, and the next day, Manuel and Esmeralda arrive at The Grand Library. While he is there, Manuel manages to

find a book that is critical of the Uni Culture; Jack Sinclair's ancestors wrote the book. While Huang is torturing the truck driver for the location of The Grand Library, Manuel decides to head back home to confront Sinclair about the contents of the book. As he is about to leave, Ling shows up and gets into a fight with Manuel, during which Ling is mortally wounded.

Manuel and Esmeralda eventually leave the library together seeking to confront Sinclair with the truth, but they are captured upon their arrival back in Capital City. Kiki eventually realizes what has happened and, with the help of her friends and some fellow historians, manages to both break her parents out of the rehab facility by using service worker clothes (and some inside help) and releasing a digital copy of the Sinclair book on the internet, the hard copy of which was seized by Jack during his capture of Manuel. The book goes viral on the internet, however, and Jack shoots one of his internet technicians in a subsequent fit of rage. The group manages to make it back onto a train headed to Mexico undetected due to a mass communications outage that was caused by uploading the book.

In the epilogue, we see that Jack Sinclair is arrested for his multiple crimes and that the Uni Society and the First Citizen both began to crumble after the viral release of the book. In the final scene, we see Manuel, Esmeralda, and Kiki having breakfast together as a family, and Manuel realizes that, for the first time in his life, he is free to make his own choices, and his family affirms that they will be there to help him make the right ones.