

Wizards

Kalamazoo College Baccalaureate Address, June 15, 2013
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Graduates, I'm Jaakan. I have been asked to speak to you tonight on the topic of Lux Esto, on what it means to me to be light. However, I would like to table that topic for a moment and talk to you about what is really on my mind tonight.

Wizards.

For me, at baccalaureate and especially at graduation, it's hard not to think about Wizards, primarily because so many of my colleagues are dressed up like wizards tonight. It is not every day here at "K" that so many of the people I work with put on velvet hats with tassels and carry scepters around. This is unique. For those of you out there who secretly wished you had attended Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry, and I know there is at least one of you; this weekend is, sadly, as close as you will ever get.

Now, officially, these colorful robes and capes are known as "regalia." They have an extremely long historical precedent rooted in the earliest institutes of higher learning in Medieval Europe. Do you know what else Medieval Europe had? If you guessed wizards, we are on the same page. However, originally "wizard" was just another word for a philosopher or someone who was very wise. It wasn't until the dark ages, when the very idea of philosophical thinking seemed like pure magic, that the term became synonymous with sorcery.

So it is fair to say, everyone up here tonight *is* dressed up like a wizard. And although I am speaking in the philosopher, wizened thinker, old world sense of the word, you can still blur the line even in these enlightened times. The President looks very distinguished in her regalia, but I could also totally see her battling a minotaur with a lightning bolt. That would look great airbrushed on the side of a conversion van. I can't say I'm not jealous.

So wizards are smart. They are philosophers. They are teachers. Many of the great magical wizards of literature and film fill these roles as well. The

fact that they can disappear and conjure fire is often secondary to their role as a guide and mentor. I would like to talk about three of my favorites. Now, if I haven't already, this is where I may lose some of you, but hang tight. I promise we will talk about Lux Esto in a minute.

So, three of my favorite wizards are: Obi Wan Kenobi, Gandalf the Grey, and Albus Percival Wulfric, Brian, Dumbledore. These three guys share a lot in common; cool beards, cool robes, spiritual guide to a young hero on a quest to save the world. All three. But that's not the similarity I want to talk about. The thing that makes all three of these guys matter to me, and the thing that makes them matter to what I am going to say to you tonight is this.

SPOILER ALERT

At some point in all three of their respective stories....They....All....Die. My sincerest apologies if you haven't read that chapter yet. But they don't just die do they? They let themselves be killed. They sacrifice themselves, right in front of our heroes eyes. And it's not even close to the end is it? The Ring of Power is miles from Mount Doom. The Death Star plans have yet to be delivered safely to Alderaan. No less than five Horcruxes are yet to be found and destroyed.

These guys show up, invite our heroes on a perilous quest, task them with saving the world from darkness, get to the hard part, and check out.

If this sounds somehow familiar to you, it should. It is what we are going to do to you *tomorrow*.

Why then? How? With so much at stake, why would these powerful sorcerers let themselves be destroyed? How can *WE* send you out into the dark and dangerous world by yourselves? We do so by arming you *against* the darkness. Darkness is an adversary as old as myth. It is richly symbolic of the unknown and the frightening. Each hero of these three stories fights against it; A Dark Lord, Dark wizards, The Dark and the shadow, the Dark side of the Force. It is no surprise then, that our heroes are equipped by their wizard guides with the power of light, both in metaphor, and *literally* with weapons that glow. Sting, the elvish blade that shines when enemies are near, the light of Earendil, your father's light-saber, LUMOS MAXIMA, a blinding flash from a magic wand. You get Lux Esto.

Latin words!?! Seems cheap compared to a glowing sword. Now may be a good time to remind you that those are make believe. Magic wands are an attractive fantasy, but that is where they remain. You get Lux Esto. Its what we have to give you.

They are words, but then again they are *NOT!* Lux Esto is the motto of Kalamazoo College... *YOUR college!* It is our pledge, our intention, our governance and our legacy; two words that carry with them and with you, the promise of this 180 year old institution...the idea that you can set out against the unknown future with the experiences earned here over four years....and find your way. Strip away the cynicism and Lux Esto, to me, is the idea that this place and time changed you, challenged you to think, and gave you the courage.....to grow up.

Because dark and difficult times lie ahead. Living a life you can be proud of isn't quite the same as taking the Ring into Mordor, or defeating Voldemort, or blowing up the Death Star, but to me it's as good as. These modern myths can provide us with a powerful analogue with which we can frame our own struggles. They offer us hope in the face of the unknowable. You see, one final thing my three favorite wizards share is an inability, *even* with all of their magical powers, to see the future clearly. When they leave our heroes they let go on faith, as we do to you.

Tomorrow, you too will put on robes and we will write your names into the history of this place. Your teachers and mentors, dressed as wizards, will line up on the hill side by side and you will pass through them on your way out into the darkness, armed with whatever light these four years have stirred in you. We will applaud.....and we will say goodbye.