

So give me **REASON**, to prove me **WRONG**, to wash this **MEMORY** clean, let the thoughts cross, the distance in your eyes, give me **REASON**, to fill this **HOLE**, ignite the space between, let it be enough to reach the **TRUTH** that lies, across this **NEW DIVIDE- New Divide, Linkin Park**.

The Conversion Bureau: Guardian Chronicles

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Based on Blaze's Fan-fic The Conversion Bureau

[Tags: **Mild-Grim dark**, **Violence**, **Mild-Language**, **Adventure**]

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Episode 3: Reasons Are My Own

"OW! OW! OW! YEOW!" the obnoxious screaming of the young doctor echoed loudly though the empty hallway.

A hundred thugs kicking his ass would not amount to such agony, his hazel eyes were half lidded as he gritted his teeth. Where on earth did this woman get her medical training? Vietnam? Wherever it was, David would love to have a word with the lunatic that gave her the passing grade.

"Oh Jesus Christ David, stop being such a baby! I'm just applying the Nanozel and if you so much as fidget one more time, so help me God I will put you in a strait jacket!" said the woman before him, her hands holding onto his head ever so firmly.

Her soft, almost angelic hands were most certainly not made for nurture or healing, at least those were the very thoughts going through the young doctor's mind. She held a metallic spray gun in her hand, the bright light from the hospital ceiling glistened of the chrome finish. She brushed aside his hair with an effort to get to the horrific gash on the back of his head.

"What's the damage doc?" David inquired, his eyes looking back with a sense of nervousness made apparent in his voice.

His question was met with gaze caught somewhere between empathy and vexation, scoffing a little as if regretting the thug for not having put the young man out of his misery.

“WHAT IS THAT SUPPOSE TO MEAN!?” David blurted in annoyance at the sound of the scoff.

“You’ll live, now hold still, this might sting a little” she said, giving the device a shake or two before shoving the gun into the wound without any tender remorse.

David swore he could have woken the entire hospital at that very moment but he bit down hard on his lip, muzzling himself but with rather poor effort. His fingernails dug so hard into the leather surface of the examiner’s bed where he sat that he could have ripped it to pieces. A rather nasty odor caught between burnt flesh and plastic filled the air, followed by a chill, almost charring sensation coursing through David’s scalp the moment the metallic device began injecting a thick transparent fluid over the surface of the gash.

“There, now that wasn’t so bad now was it?” said the woman with a hint of sarcasm in her voice, resting the spray gun on the metallic tray next to her.

The young doctor grumbled silently, mouthing her words in a childish attempt at mockery. His gaze shifted to the dim reflection in the clear plexiglass which separated the room from the hallway, proceeding to run his fingers nonchalantly over the band-aids plastered over his right cheek, his forehead and right across the bridge of his nose as if in reminiscence.

His memories returned him to that dusky, lurid alley. The feeling of Austin’s vicious fists striking blow after blow, the feeling of his knuckles coming in contact with his cheek as his neck snapped from side to side. The ghastly, disgorging feeling from his stomach caving from the impact as if his guts would tangle themselves in knots, to top that off would be the introduction of the cold hard surface of hardened glass to the back of his head. The young doctor should thank his lucky stars to the fact he was nowhere near a hospital bed having a respirator pumping air into his lungs.

“So, are you going to tell me, or do I have to ask?”

His gaze shifted to the doctor from before who appeared to be busy stretching the latex gloves off her hands. If David had to guess, the woman who appeared draped in her standard issue lab coat worn over her business casual attire she was in her late forties. More precisely, she was Doctor Leslie, the Dean of the hospital where he worked, the one woman duly respected/feared by every being that so much as walks the very halls she governed.

David would not say she administered/ruled over the hospital with an iron fist but she always had this nasty compulsion to nitpick on the young doctor. As long as he could remember, through every exam, every diagnostic, every surgery, every second of his every waking moment

involved Leslie watching him like a hawk on a prey.

He had tried time and time again to make sense of it but found no comprehension to why she would shadow him at every twist and turn, especially back when he first started working in the establishment. She would scream, yell even go ballistic on him every time he made a mistake, aggressively correcting every error. David did not reject her efforts to point him in the right direction however at times he forced himself to beat down the urge to turn in his resignation letter and demanded a transfer.

The young doctor watched her nervously brush aside her long wavy auburn hair, her piercing, almost cold emerald green eyes looking right into his own. David swallowed hard, his hands clasped together as he twirled his thumbs, pondering on the right words to string together or risks having his balls being removed with a hack saw for his stupidity.

“Well, er... you see Dr Leslie, what happened was a series of rather complicated and unfortunate set of circumstances which inevitably led to...” stammered David, a cold sweat running down his neck.

“You decided to play hero and got your ass handed to you” Dr Leslie’s words slashed right through his pathetic facade like a hot knife through butter. The woman folded her arms and narrowed her gaze.

David shrugged, realizing the gig was up, shifted his eyes away from her. “Yes...” he said. At that moment very moment, David felt his entire head violently snap to the right. A hot burning, piercing sensation streaked across his left cheek in an impression of a ladies’ palm.

Leslie stared, the flames of anger burned in her green eyes, ignoring the throbbing after feeling in her palm. “David, I have no idea how many shots you took at your cousins’ place tonight, and frankly I don’t WANT to know but what the God’s name were you thinking!?” she snarled.

David rubbed his cheek, the pain coursing through the left side of his face. Complete and utter shock had made him unable to gather his thoughts, his words for a simple apology let alone an argument.

“They were armed, dangerous and insane, the worst possible concoction for a human beings! You could have gotten yourself killed!” she said angrily.

“I had to...” said David, a sense of remorse in his eyes. Leslie scoffed, rolling her eyes in complete disbelief, outraged by his reply.

“You had to? You had to, that is the best you can come up with? If you are trying to weasel your way out with a lie, the least you can do is put more eff-“

"I have said plenty of things before Dr Leslie, but lying is possibly the last thing on my mind right now" interrupted David, miffed by her statement.

"Then for God's sake explain to me the logic of going all Bruce Wayne on them instead of calling the authorities, you know like any sane person would have done!" she replied, her temper flaring.

"And then what!? Just stand there and watch those shit licking bastards make winter boots out of them!? It would have taken those cops five whole minutes to get there and if I hadn't-" David said, his voice bordering on anger.

"Watch your language young man, I will not have you speaking in such a manner, especially not in my hospital" Leslie interrupted sternly.

David clenched his teeth, his fists beginning to curl. "You know what Dr Leslie. I couldn't care less of what you think. I did the one thing that any person with a real set of balls would have done, the right thing!" he said, hazel eyes narrowed in animosity.

"The right thing!? The right thing, why you confoundedstupidfoolishidiotic little-" said Leslie, her face contorting from her rather futile effort to keep her composure.

"And since when did you start caring!? Who sold my freedom and made you my Lord and master!? You're a woman who can walk out of a dying patient's room with a straight face and when I come walking through that door all busted up, you have the sudden urge to mommy me? You know what? You're a freaking hypocrite!" snarled David.

That was the last straw, her eyes narrowed, her nostrils flared and in a heartbeat she raised her hand again ready to return five fingers worth for that impudent remark. David flinched at the very sight of her potentially harmful gesture, his hands flinging over his head as he braced for the impact, only to be met with none.

His hazel eyes shifted upwards to meet her own, realizing a glimmer of sadness within those emerald hues. Leslie lowered her hand, sighing as if someone had ran a blade right through her heart and David felt he may have taken a step too far with the harshness of his words.

"David, that..." she said suddenly, catching the young man's attention.

"That was the last thing Auron said to me before he left," she said, her gaze shifting away from the young man.

David felt the raging fire within begin to dissipate, replaced with slow burning embers

dimmed by the guilt that gripped at his heart. Auron, was her son, from what he could deduce and pieced together from the various stories and rumors exchanged as bridge table conversation, he was a young Marine who served in the United States Army.

Once a strapping, courageous and decorated soldier, Leslie never spoke much about him. The main reason being she was crushed by the fact he walked out on her to join the armed forces without her blessing. There was trifle to almost no news from the young man until about a year ago, when a mother's worst fear had been realized as she received news that her son had been killed on active duty. After the funeral, Leslie did not set foot anywhere near a ward or a patient for almost a month.

David shrugged at his ill conceived impressions. He had become stereotypically accustomed to labeling the older doctor as a heartless swine without a shred of conscience not to mention incapable of sensitivity or sympathy. He remembered how the hospital staff would constantly and maliciously speak about her, David has lost count of the amount of gossip exchanged behind these walls but none of them were ever of any decency.

"I'm sorry..." David said. It took a moment for the woman to regain her composure; she ran her fingers through her hair, forcing a rather dry chuckle. "You know, he was probably right" she said, moving away from the young doctor.

She leaned her back against the medical cabinet, the cold soulless chill from the chrome surface crept through the surface of her skin through the likes of her clothing. "I was never truly there for him, all the long hours at the hospital, my husband away in some foreign land with a name I couldn't even pronounce. Even as a child, I always felt there was a divide growing between us. But there was something about him, sometime I failed well, refused to see"

David clasped his hands together, resting it on his lap.

"He had always wanted to be a hero, even when he was just a child he dreamt of following in his father's footsteps and joining the army. He would jump for joy every time one of those cheesy Chuck Norris flicks light up the holovision. Commandos, guns, uniforms, the desire to defend the weak and punish the corrupt fascinated him to no end..." she said, smiling ever so weakly

Leslie shrugged, "But when my husband was killed in Afghanistan, I forbade Auron from pursuing his dream. He implored and pleaded but I was bent, a part of me hoped that he would understand and just forget about it. But my decision did nothing but widen rift between the both of us and typical of me to be so blinded by my commitment to my career that I couldn't foresee the consequences of my actions"

The young doctor was silent as a sense of remorse took expression on his face. It was then, Leslie's gaze shifted back to the young doctor, the same glint of sadness within those emerald hues.

“David, my harshness may have given you plenty of wrong impressions over the past few years and I apologize. But I see a lot of Auron in you, from your dedication, your courage, even your die-hard commitment to your beliefs mirrored him to the very core” she added, pausing for a moment as she choked a little on her words.

“But I didn’t lose my son to the world David, no, I lost my son the moment he walked out of that door and it was due to my carelessness and indifference. If I would give anything to hold him in my arms once again and tell him how sorry I was and that I love him so” she said, her hand lifting to shroud her eyes from the brimming tears, biting hard on her lip.

“I understand Dr Leslie...” David said, his gaze rested gently upon the woman before him.

Leslie took a deep breath, blinking the tears away from her redness in her eyes. “I’ve lost the people I loved because I lacked the courage to hold onto the things I should have cared about. And David, you’ve become such an important part of my life that I’d be damned if I’d lose you too” she said.

The young doctor gave a soft smile “Dr Leslie, your son and your husband were heroes. In a way, like my grandfather, I can only hope to live up to such a legacy. You should be proud them” he said.

The woman returned his words with a smile of her own. “I am, Heaven knows I am” she said.

David nodded “I’m deeply sorry for what I said. But Dr Leslie, I may not be Auron but I deeply appreciate your concern for my well being. I have to agree...” he said, rubbing the back of his head.

“What I did was rather stupid...”

“But it was the right thing” Leslie said all of a sudden making David’s eyes widened in surprise.

Leslie shrugged as she tucked her hands into the pockets of her lab coat “You were right David, I was just too caught up in my emotions to admit it but you were right” she said, hues of bright emerald shifting to the glass wall to her right.

David raised a curious eyebrow before following suit and there behind the transparent surface he saw the filly and the colt from before. Their bodies though bandaged and mended, the eyes of the young lime green filly lit up the moment she caught sight of the young doctor, beaming brightly she waved her hoof back and forth. The brown colt smiled, nodding his head as a sign of acknowledgement and gratitude. The young doctor gave a hearty grin, lifting his hand in return.

Delia, the young nurse smiled warmly in his direction before signaling to the two Ponies to follow behind her. After all it was hospital protocol to run some final tests to ensure they were healthy enough to leave the hospital. He chuckled to himself, remembering her face stricken with horror the moment he walked through those glass doors looking like a hobo half beaten to death with a silliest of grins plastered on his own.

"They owe you their lives David, if you hadn't done what you did, I believe the consequences would have been truly horrific" Leslie added. David smirked mischievously at the mention of those words.

"Whoa, doc, are you getting soft on me? First the confession and now this?" he said.

"Don't get me wrong you snot nose brat, I still think you are a stupid dolt for having to resort to such a boorish decision" she snapped, her eyes narrowed for a brief moment making David cringe in regret for his tease. "But..."

Leslie gave a soft smile "It was indeed the right thing, stupid, but right". David merely chuckled at her comment. "Besides, at least you didn't kill them" the doctor added all of a sudden.

Her words made the young doctor freeze, feeling the same chill surging down the entire length of his spine as if his blood had gone stone cold. Almost as if she expected such a reaction, Leslie shifted her gaze to the likes of David's hands. "I didn't want to raise this before, I realized your hands were trembling from the moment you walked in" she said.

David lifted his hands and sure enough, his very fingers were shaking, almost devoid of feeling. "Must probably be the adrenaline" he said with a nervous chuckle.

But he knew better, he remembers, he remembered everything. From the bone breaking blows, the feeling of a blade plunged into a man, slicing through flesh and bone. The smooth bumps of cold steel clutched within his hand and the flames of Hell that erupted within him, his baleful eyes looking down on a pathetic creature he no longer deemed human.

He remembered every detail from the sheer desire to bludgeon and batter, to hack, slice and fillet, to snuff the very light from its eyes and indulge in the ecstasy of satisfaction, knowing that justice has been served.

David wrapped his arms around him, clutching his leather coat tightly around him. "Is it just me, or has it gotten really cold in here? heh heh" he said, trying to force a laugh.

It was freezing in there, the cold sweat and the air-conditioning made his body shiver to the core. The image of dead men that lay before him looped in his mind, the warmth of blood

trickling down the side of his face, his wide open eyes and a psychopathic grin that would match that of the Devil's own.

The rod was in his hand, he would have done it, he would have finished it, and there was no pause, no hesitation and not even a shred of remorse. His heart raced, his breaths quickened, he wanted them dead, he wanted them to pay for what they did and that was that.

"So... cold..." he muttered under his breath. It was then he felt a pair of arms wrapping around him in a warm embrace, holding him close to her body with such warmth it began to soothe his racing heart. "Sssh, it's okay" Leslie's voice brought a sense of comfort to the young doctor and little by little, he eased his grip on his coat. His eyes slipped to a close as he rested his forehead on the woman's shoulder.

"Leslie, I almost killed a man..." he muttered silently. "I know, but last I checked David, self defense is not murder" she said, running her fingers through his hair before looking gently into his eyes.

"You did what you had to do to survive and I believe anyone would have done the same" she said.

"He was down, helpless and venerable, he was begging for his life but I didn't care. I just wanted... I just wanted him to pay" the young doctor said, burying his face in his hand.

Leslie shrugged, gently taking his hands in her own, caressing them gently "David, listen to me, you were angry and you know that anger will always lead to regret. But I believe that God was looking over you tonight, it takes a lot in a man to take a life of another but even more to make him stop,"

She smiled warmly before caressing his cheek with her right hand, looking warmly into his eyes. "You are not a killer David, you never were and I have faith that you never will be. We may not be perfect, we have our moments of weaknesses and the burning desire to surrender to temptation will always haunt us. All part of being human"

"Human..." David muttered, swearing he could hear it echo within the depths of his mind. The doctor patted him gently on his shoulder

"Yes, human. Anger may have possessed you at the end but it wasn't anger that made you march down that alley. It wasn't anger that drove you to take on those men well aware that the odds were stacked against you and it most certainly wasn't anger that saved those Ponies from a fate worse than death" said Leslie.

A warm smile grew softly on her face. "It wasn't anger David, it was courage and it was in your courage that you found the strength to be more than you can be. Many years from now

they will tell their foals, and their foals will tell their foals of the brave man, the brave human who risked everything to save them,”

David smiled softly in return as he leaned into the pleasantness of her touch. “Thank you Dr Leslie, I guess I needed to hear that” the young doctor said.

“Never forget, now if you would excuse me, I have to get this place cleaned up before the next shift. Honestly, next time you decide to get in a brawl be sure to call ahead, I have better things to do than to put you back together again,” she said before returning to the medical cabinets behind her, returning some of the medical equipment to their rightful places.

David chuckled at the fact that she was back to her old self in ten seconds flat. The young doctor stood to ponder on her words, a part of him remained in pure disbelief that so much had happened in merely a few hours.

One moment he was caught in a heated debate regarding his personal perspectives and beliefs, lost in uncertainty and caught between an internal strife and the next thing he knew, he was in a fight for his life and for Ponies at that. Maybe Miguel was right after all, it certainly rose to question how much faith the man had placed on him, almost as if he knew all along what David would have done and all he needed was a little nudge.

“So am I to assume that you would be handing in your resignation letter tomorrow?” asked Dr Leslie. David’s eyes snapped back to the doctor, widening in complete bewilderment for it had caught him completely off guard.

“Re... re... resignation? What? Why? Is it because of...? It can’t be... Dr Leslie I...” David stammered nervously only to be hushed by the woman’s chuckle.

“Relax, no, I am not firing you, just making my thoughts known” she said, turning to face the young doctor. David raised a curious eyebrow “I’m afraid I don’t follow” he said.

“In addition to trembling like a leaf David, you have been fondling with something in your pocket for a good while now. If I had to guess, it would have to be the name card belonging to that of a Mr Estrada” she said.

The young man’s was surprised at her supposed assumption. “How did you-?” he asked, perplexed. “He called me several hours before arriving, quite the gentleman, polite and proper enough as to seek my permission before visiting my staff” she replied.

David raised a curious eyebrow “And you weren’t curious at the very least?”

“I have to admit, I was more suspicious than curious. A man of such power strutting around a hospital is never a good sign but when I saw him walk out of your office his intentions became

as clear as day. David, I will not try to deter your decision as I did Auron, but I will leave you with a word of advice” Leslie said, a sense of determination in her voice.

“You have done so much good behind these walls, as a doctor you’ve performed admirably above and beyond the call of duty. But maybe, just maybe, you can do so much more good out there”

David listened attentively, a sense caught between admiration and respect resonated with every beat of his heart. “Dr Leslie, does that mean...” he asked.

The woman smiled, moving closer to him, she gave him a pat on his shoulder. “Go, I’ll hold down the hospital in your place, I’ll put in more hours, I’ll chug down jugs of coffee, I’ll do something but promise me that I’ll never see you wheeled in through those glass doors in a body bag”

The young doctor breathed a sigh of relieve, his lips curling into a determined grin “Body bag? Just who do you think I am?” he said.

Leslie chuckled “Good, now go home and get some shut eye. You’re going to need it, meanwhile I’ve got a hospital to run” said the doctor as she headed for the door. “And David...” she paused as the glass panel before her slid open.

David’s attention shifted in her direction. “Don’t ever think that your life is worth but a penny on the sidewalk. There will always be people who care about you” said Leslie, smiling one more time before making her way into the hallway.

The young man smiled softly at the thought, people who care about him? How could he be so foolish to believe that he had been alone all this time? Mikey? Delia? Leslie? They all had their concerns for his well being and he was too blinded by his misconceptions to see. Still, Leslie’s words continue to play on his mind, playing back word by word brought a sense of easiness to his conflicting soul.

The young man reached into his pocket, removing the same name card he had received earlier today. It felt soggy and limp in his hand due to his little scuffle in the rain, but the name etched in silver were still as bright as day. Good? Was this Miguel’s intention? David remained skeptical about his possible contributions to the organization, to V.A.N.G.A.R.D.

However, he had Leslie’s blessing, he had lived up to Miguel’s faith, and maybe they were right all along the time has come. David clutched the card tightly in his hand “Hero huh?” he said softly to himself.

“Alright people, here we are, the Conversion Bureau” said the bus driver as the large vehicle pulled up by the curb. The streets were bustling with the sounds of traffic. The loud voices filled the air with conversation, yelling even a hint of cursing between the drivers caught in frustration at the long queue before them. They grumbled, growled, roaring their electric engines in with such callow effort to make known their irritation, desperate to enter the compound as if their very lives depended on it

A sea of people navigating their way through the stalled cars, each and every one of them hauled and hoisted luggage of different shapes and sizes all headed in the exact same direction, which was the capacious building on the far end of what appears to be a massive car park. It was immense; ten times the size of the hospital where he worked with added resemblance and the glass dome behind it was truly a sight to behold. Smiles, laughter, eyes wide open and their hands trembled with excitement from girls, boys, grown men and women even families, they were all looking forward to their new lives, their new beginning.

The young doctor stepped off the bus, still dressed in his white lab coat although this time well groomed and definitely well rested, a brown leather suitcase case clasped in his hand. His eyes squinted by a bit, before pushing up on his glasses before searching for his destination. It was no easy task, judging by from the lack of address conveniently missing from the card.

In the office, the man merely stated The Conversion Bureau, so here he was. His brown tie glided freely in the soft breeze as he made his way into the crowd, his ears could not help but tune to the bridge conversation exchanged in the background.

He derived the amount of mixed feeling from their words, having spoken of pegasi, unicorns, magic, how excited they were, what they hope to be after the ponification, some so much as expressed their suspicions, their uncertainties.

Details were not the young doctor's concern, their reasons and their perspectives were their own, and right now arriving at his destination outweighs all the rest. He brushed shoulders with one too many, the compound was crowded beyond belief, hundreds, maybe even a thousand people were here and the sun had only risen for several hours.

David shrugged, feeling suffocated in the crowd but just about then, eyes of bright hazel shifted to yet another building to the left of the compound bearing a peculiar resemblance to City Hall. He raised a curious eyebrow to the fact no one was headed in that direction, was it an administrative building? Or was it something so much more?

His attention caught sight of several armed personnel, dressed in full riot gear and automatic weapons clutched tightly within their hands making their rounds around the compound. Curious, very curious.

"Alright everyone, be careful and be conscious of the people around you at all times. We don't want anyone getting hurt now!" came a voice not too far from the young doctor.

David shifted his attention to a young man also draped in riot gear however unlike the others he bore no firearm, only a nightstick that hung from his side.

The young doctor hurried to the guard "Excuse me, I have a question" he inquired. The guard however met his question nonchalantly "Yeah, yeah, the Centre is over there. Just keep moving" he said.

David was a little taken back by the man's reply "Sir, I'm not here for the camp. I'm here for-", "However he was rudely interrupted yet again.

"I know you're here for a new life and all that shebang, sir I've heard it all before, the first building at the end of the line. You can't miss it now move along" said the guard before returning his attention to the crowd.

The young doctor rolled his eyes in frustration, tapping the guard on his shoulder his eyes narrowed in an effort to show he meant business. "I'm here to see Mr Estrada" he said, his voice cold and direct.

The guard's eyes widened for a moment then all of a sudden, he choked, a large stupid grin grew on his face as if he had just caught wind of the most ridiculous thing on the face of the earth. In a blink of an eye, he erupted in a hail of laughter "Hahahahaha!! Mr, Mr, Es- hahaha! Oh my God, hahaha!!!"

David's face contorted, lost in confusion from the guard's reaction. "Hey Billy! You gotta hear this! This guy... this guy Bwa ha ha ha ha ha!!!" the guard laughed, suffocating himself with his own amusement as he called out to a nearby guard.

"What is it Ronald? Caught your weenie in the zippa gain?" asked the nearby guard.

"Hell no! This guy, he, he wants to see Mr Estrada!" the guard blurted out and suddenly, out of nowhere the other guard gave that exact stupid grin and immediately burst into fits of laughter. "HAHAHA! Holy shite! That's a good one! Hahahahah!!!"

David was completely and utterly unamused by this juvenile prattle. Did he say something stupid or were they making a mockery out of him because they were bored to tears? His teeth grinded in irritation, his hands began curling into fists although he remained level headed enough to retain his composure.

"Excuse me, help me out here cause I'm a little lost but what exactly do you find so amusing?" he asked, trying so hard not to pelt these aggravating morons with every insult ever conceived.

The guard took a moment to calm himself, wiping the tears from his eyes before addressing the young doctor.

"I don't know what you've been smoking man, but no one and I mean NO ONE gets in to see Mr Estrada. Just what were you thin-"the guard said, only to be cut off the moment David shoved Miguel's card in his face.

Almost instantly, the very expression on his face warped into that of dread. His baby blue eyes widened, swallowing hard as he desperately loosened his collar. David shifted his gaze to his impudent friend in the back who apparently abandoned his comrade and retreated back to his duties in silent prayer that David was not the kind of man who would hold a grudge.

"My apologies, perhaps I wasn't clear the first time around. Please allow me to repeat myself, my name is David Stone, 'Doctor' David Stone and I am here to see Mr Estrada at his request... saavy?" David said, giving the guard a rather nasty glare.

"Oh, the... the... then why didn't you say so Mr, I mean Doctor Stone, please, follow me" the guard stammered, desperately trying to hide his blunder as he led the young man away from the crowd.

The guard took him down a path, cutting through what appears to be a garden shrouded in the trees that grew overhead in the direction of the colossal building from before. The young man's hazel eyes studied his surroundings carefully, noticing a questionable amount of video cameras at every corner, directed at every crook and cranny.

David clutched his bag tightly, his muscles tensed in suspicion and possible paranoia, there should be a reason for all this security and a part of him wished he could remain oblivious to the obvious answer.

"We're here..." he said as they stopped at a small metal door located at the bottom of a large wall. David shifted his gaze upwards to the spikes and barb wire suspended twenty feet above ground, the place began to feel more and more like a prison of sorts.

The guard knocked twice on the metal door, the metallic clanging echoed with every tap. No sooner, the intercom came to life.

"Yes?" came the voice, blurred and distorted by the intercom. "It's Ronald, I'm with Mr. Estrada's guest" he said, putting a strange emphasis on the word 'guest'. "One of them?" the intercom asked. "Positive" Ronald replied hesitantly.

With a loud buzz, the creaking hinges could have made a man grit his teeth in agony as the door swung open. David's eyes narrowed suspiciously a little at the little exchange the guard had with his comrade on the other side of the intercom. One of them? What was that suppose to

mean? Ronald stepped inside, signaling the young doctor to follow.

The young doctor nodded before following suit, his leather loafers touched the surface of asphalt on the other side of the wall, there he laid eyes on the building before him, and it certainly was larger up close.

“This way” Ronald said as he made his way toward the building. David’s continued to follow the guard; it was not long before they arrived. Hazel hues shifted upwards, admiring the architecture done with the essence of an unusual mixture of baroque and modern influences.

A monstrous door measuring twenty feet lay open before them, from the hinges to the plating were laid with solid gold. David’s gaze settled upon the words carved in stone along the arch of the doorway.

“Candor dat viribus alas” David repeated to himself. “Know what that means?” Ronald said suddenly with a cheeky grin on his face, returning David’s attention back to the man.

“It means-“

“Sincerity gives wings to strength” David answered, making the guard scowl in return, destroying his one attempt at showing off. David chuckled, “I took Latin for four years back in medical school” he said.

Ronald gave a dry chuckle “Ah, a doctor. I see Mr Estrada got a smart one this time around. Let’s just hope your brains rub off on the rest of them eh?” he said.

This time? Rest of them? It was no mystery that Miguel would have recruited others before him but contemplating on a number let alone their characters were possibly the last thing on his mind. V.A.N.G.A.R.D was a team shrouded in mystery and abstruseness, their purpose and their mission remained a conundrum to the outside world.

David has expressed the night before, he had merely the general idea pieced together vague information borne of rumors and loose sources of information. What was V.A.N.G.A.R.D? What did they do? The young doctor had a feeling he was about to find out.

The guard continued to lead the way, right through a massive hall, with ceilings that tower over the polished marble floor and the wooden walls carved from the finest of woods adorned the hallways. “Hey Genine” said Ronald, waving to an African American woman behind a reception desk, tapping feverishly on her computer stopping only for a moment to wave a hand in acknowledgement.

Their footsteps echoed through the hall, silence crept at every corner intense enough for even that of a pin drop to be heard from where they stood. David’s eyes wandered from the

paintings hanging idly on the walls, to the Latin inscriptions carved in solid gold mounted on the walls that adorned the hallways.

It certainly did not take them long before they arrived at the end of the hallway to a total of six elevators, three on each side. David paused, catching his reflection on the polished golden doors. The young doctor felt his grip tighten around the leather briefcase, for the first time feeling a sense of nervousness gripping at his gut.

With the sound of a bell echoed down the hallways as the golden doors slid open, revealing an interior laid with thick plexi glass on every side. David took a deep breath before stepping inside, though he paused when the guard did not.

“Aren’t you-?” David asked. “I’m sorry Dr Stone, my jurisdiction only extends as far as this elevator. From here on out, you’re on your own. By the way, Mr Estrada’s office is on the seventh floor” he said.

David nodded “By the way, thanks, Ronald isn’t it?” the young doctor inquired. The guard smiled in return “Yes sir, looks like I’ll be seeing you around. Good luck and Godspeed” he said as the doors slid to a close. “You’re gonna need it”.

The young doctor felt a lump in his throat, swallowing hard before shifting his gaze to the myriad of numbers on the side. “Good afternoon, welcome to the Conversion Bureau, my name is J.A.D.E, please speak your designated floor” came a voice from the control panel, making the young doctor jump for a moment.

“Oh, um, level seven... please” David answered. “Level seven, Director Estrada’s office, affirmative” said the voice as the elevator began to descend.

He felt unnerved at the creeping shadows within the small confines of the elevator, cast from the bright lights lighting the path on their downward cascade to the unknown. The farther they went, his uneasiness began to intensify and soon doubt began playing on his conscience and he knew it would only be time before he started second guessing his decisions.

Maybe it was all just a bad idea, maybe he should just quit while he was ahead and go back home, perhaps Leslie might consider giving him his job back, maybe-

Suddenly, the entire elevator illuminated with a bright light, chasing away the darkness and the shadows within. Turning around to the transparent plexiglass behind him, his eyes widened in awe. “What the...”

The young doctor was left speechless in awe, a large smile taking shape on his face. It was incredible, unbelievable, a massive citadel beneath The Conversion Bureau. No, this WAS the Conversion Bureau in all its glory. Hazel hues shifted from the bright ivory walls and polished

walkways, humans, people on hovering platforms, Segways zipping through the busy lines on their way to their destination.

David had lost count of the amount of people walking the hallways, even the halls beneath his feet. People in lab coats, riot gear, he was at a complete loss for words. Never would he have conceived the picture of the Bureau as it was now. It was then, the elevator came to a stop, the doors sliding open behind him.

“Seventh floor, Director Estrada’s office, thank you and have a pleasant day” said the voice. David nodded before leaving the elevator behind, finding himself on a small hallway, walls as white as ivory with a maroon carpet adorning the floor. He raised a curious eyebrow when he heard voices at the end of the hallway, behind two large doors made of solid oak.

“Why do you continue to side with those... things?” David’s gaze began to narrow, allowing his curiosity to get the better of him, he quickened his pace in the direction of the doors, noticing one of them had been left slightly ajar.

“Those things are called Ponies Lady Bianca, and I implore you to address them as such” David immediately recognize Miguel’s voice and another which was far less pleasing.

It felt dry, cold and incredibly sinister, painting a rather menacing imagine in David’s mind, his eyes narrowed a little more as he pressed his back against one of the doors in an attempt to getting a better idea of what was going on.

He heard the mystery person scoff “Listen to yourself, you’ve played patsy to them for so long you might as well be Celestia’s pet” she added.

“I admit the Princess and I are on the best of terms, which is indeed far more than I can say for you. That little stunt you pulled off with her majesty, wasn’t exactly the smartest” said Miguel

“I merely said what needed to be said, for millennia the human race had risen against all odds to become the prime being on planet once ravaged by uncultured savages and beasts. I will tell you now Miguel, I will not stand idly and watch as civilizations dwindle to nothingness” she said.

“What you did Bianca, was deliberately threaten and insulted the sovereign heads of Equestria like an uncultured terrorist. May I remind you that we, humans have been on thin ice with all of Ponykind. I have spent weeks, months trying to mend political ties with the Royal house and salvage whatever good impression we may have left before and I most definitely shall not and will not tolerate a repeat performance!” Miguel said sternly.

Bianca? That was definitely an unfamiliar name but David ignored delving deeper for the time being for he was more interested in the conversation at hand. He may not have seen her face but he already harbored an immediate sense of detestation judging by the tone of her voice

not to mention her rather repugnant choices of words.

"You are as blind as you are foolish. Equestria is a place of untapped resources, lush forests, mountains, fertile land ready to be colonized and maybe even industrialized. But not every human desire to be turned into Pixar rejects to be allowed in" the woman added.

"THOSE were Equestria's conditions. Humans must be Ponified to be granted access for two very good reasons. One, because the magical barrier is toxic to humans, prolonged exposure will result in an unspeakable and agonizing end. Second of all, would be people like you" Miguel said.

"People like me Miguel?" she asked, taking apparent offence of the statement.

"I did not stutter when I said that, I said people like you. It is selfish, greed driven, money worshipping capitalists like you who has been directly responsible for the sorry state of the world today" Miguel snapped. David shook his fist silently in cheer.

"How DARE you! Do you have any idea who I-" she snarled

"I am well aware who you are, Lady Bianca Luchist Saltza, I know of your stature and I know of your wealth. I know of your present and I most definitely know of your past. A word of advice, I wouldn't flaunt that about with such pride if I were you" Miguel said, his voice cold and direct.

The lady merely chuckled dryly "Now I see you for who you truly are Miguel. As I try to salvage the remnants of the human race, you seek to align yourself with the enemy. Tell me, how does it feel to betray your own race?" she inquired

There was a short silence in the room, the tension grew thick enough to slice with a knife and the young doctor grew uneasy. "Then allow me to answer your question with one of my own. Tell me what concerns you more? Civilization fading into the sands of time, or is it the pain of watching your multimillion dollar empire go up in smoke?" asked Miguel.

"It must be gut wrenching, knowing that all your hard work and sacrifices had gone to waste and there is nothing you could do about it, but watch" Miguel said. David smirked, moving closer to the edge of the door, desperately trying to catch the woman's reply.

"Now you listen Miguel, and if I were you, I would heed my words well. The human race will continue, it will strive and it will survive and I intend to make sure of that. Even if I have to play judge, jury and executioner" she stated, her voice baneful and grim.

"Am I to assume that as a threat?" Miguel inquired his voice as cold and intimidating.

She chuckled dryly yet again "Miguel, Miguel, you should know by now that I am not in

the business of 'making' threats. Consider it a propitious advice" she added

"Then allow me to share with you some 'propitious' advice of my own. If you should do anything that would threaten the safety of Equestria and that of the United States of America, I will do everything in my power to take you down. You and your alleged compatriots will be tried for treason and I believe you know too well the fate which awaits those who would walk the path of Judas" Miguel said.

David barely caught several words, something about treason and threats. Allowing his curiosity to get the better of him yet again, he leaned a little closer against the oak door only to hear the inevitable creaking that was soon to come. "Uh oh" he said, eyes wide open before the doors gave way.

"AIEEEE!" the young man shrieked as he fell through the doorway, stumbling face first into the polished marble floor like a dimwitted klutz, catching the attention of both Miguel and the mystery woman.

"Dr Stone, so nice for you to join us" Miguel said, a sudden perkiness in his voice before reverting his attention to the woman before him. "My apologies, but I believe my ten o'clock is here. If you don't mind, perhaps you could show yourself out" he said.

The woman's eyes narrowed in a look caught between disgust and anger. "This isn't over Miguel" she said.

Miguel clasped his hands together before resting his chin on the crevice of his knuckle. "For your sake, I hope it is. Good day Lady Bianca,"

The woman glared furiously at the man before making her way her way out, David finally had a figure to match that malicious voice from before. His hazel eyes caught a fair lady, brushing her her long chest length blond hair aside as she pushed up irritably on her rounded pair of glasses.

She was dressed in a beige uniform, possibly military with a long beige leather overcoat draped over her shoulders, quite unusual attire for a lady but the young doctor posed no question. As she approached the young man, she gave him a rather nasty and condescending glare before striding past him without so much as a second glance. David corrected his glasses before climbing to his feet before proceeding to straighten his white coat.

"I have to admit Dr Stone, my original expectation actually involved a few days, not several hours. Why the sudden change of mind?" Miguel asked from behind his large wooden desk.

David chuckled "Let's just say it was more a change of heart" he replied.

Miguel nodded “Uh huh, and I suppose the four men brutally assaulted, stabbed and bludgeoned in that dark alley had nothing to do with it. I would ask where and how had you acquired those injuries but that would be most redundant and time is a resource I cannot afford to squander”

David swore he could have jumped right out of his skin at Miguel’s comment. “How did you? How, when... why? And?”

“Calm yourself Dr Stone, I’m not here to have you arrested or read you your rights. Let’s just say the only reason you’re not behind bars as of now is because we take HLF assaults very seriously, and believe me, the NYPD are very, very grateful for this ‘mysterious vigilante’” Miguel said, his fingers moving in gesture as he displayed a rather confident grin.

David rested his hand on his chest in an effort to steady his racing heart. “You know, as much as you pride yourself on being in the know, I do not appreciate being spied upon” the young doctor, clearly unamused.

“We live in difficult times Dr Stone, I believe I said that before. Information allows us to remain a step ahead of criminals, anarchists, and supremacists. I do apologize for the constant surveillance, but I needed to know if I could trust you” Miguel said, his eyes retaining their serious glint from before.

David wanted to retaliate to his statement but was halted by Miguel’s words. “But you lived up to my faith and most importantly my expectations. I need not remind you that those Ponies owe you their lives, we will have them transported back to Equestria in due time and we will see to it that those ‘fine gentlemen’ receive their just rewards” he said.

The young man remained silent for a moment, his hands curled into fists as he addressed the man before him “Can I say something Mr Estrada?” he asked. Miguel raised an eyebrow “Please do Dr Stone” he replied.

“Let us get one thing straight here, it is you who came to me and not the other way around. As much as you believe in me, I still have my doubts” said David.

“Doubts?” Miguel inquired. “More like questions, like this place, V.A.N.G.A.R.D and everything else. Does the public know the Bureau has a high tech facility built right beneath their feet? Just what do you seek to gain from all of this?” David asked.

Miguel merely smiled determinedly “I think you already know the answer to that question” he said. “Mr Estrada, please stop jumping to assum-,” David said.

“Peace” interrupted Miguel. At that moment, all the words the young doctor had evaporated to nothing, once again he found himself at a rather verbal disadvantage. Realizing David was

silent, the man continued.

"I know you have many questions Dr Stone, and believe me when I say no one understands that better than I do. When I first took over the Bureau, my directions and my consciences were unclear, my duties focused primarily on maintaining the peace between Ponies and the human race. Then came the HLF..." he said, his eyes bore a glint of dismay.

"I believe you remember the New York riot several months ago in front of the Brooklyn Conversion Centre don't you? Followed by the bombing of the one in San Francisco" Miguel inquired.

David was silent in thought, remembering the details from the horrible events. A moment of lawlessness broke out into mass turmoil as the streets erupted in anarchy with supporters of the HLF storming the gates of the Bureau and the Conversion Centre.

They mauled and injured anyone they deemed a pony lover and took on S.W.A.T dressed in full riot gear without hesitation or doubt. It took three days before law enforcement finally suppressed the supposed uprising although found no tangible evidence linking the leader of the New York HLF chapter leader to the crime.

The bombing however was a little vaguer to the young man but he knew that the damage and casualties were colossal and horrendous all the same, both to humans and ponies. David shrugged, pushing his glasses further up the bridge of his nose.

"Dr Stone, I have nothing against the human race. But I have seen humanity and the evil they have come to be and I will not lie to you when at times I find myself unable to comprehend, tolerate or even forgive. But I know there is more to mankind than this" he said, his gaze returning to that of the young doctor.

"We are capable of compassion, love and understanding. Though I have grown accustomed to the darker side of man and their fiendish nature, at times I find myself face to face with people who prove me wrong" said Miguel. "And pray tell, just where are these alleged people?" David inquired.

Miguel smiled "Right next door" he said. David recalled the Conversion Centre from before, all those people, their smiles, joy, he remembered everything.

"I believe I have told you before, I dreamed of a world without conflict and the only way we can achieve that is to find peace between both our races. Ponification is all but an option, the rest is up to us" Miguel said.

David remained just a little skeptical "And you expect the world to suddenly shed their hatred and embrace your ideas of peace and harmony overnight?" the young doctor asked.

Miguel chuckled softly. "If only the world were that simple. No, not entirely, but I believe that day will come eventually. Till then, both mankind and Ponykind will need someone to protect and defend them from those who would mean them harm. This is where we come in" he said.

"V.A.N.G.A.R.D, I know" David said half heartedly. Miguel gave a small determined grin "Tell you what Dr Stone..." he said.

The man reached from behind his desk, removing what appears to be a black leather wallet of some kind. With a swift motion, he glided it over the smooth, polished surface of his table, coming to a stop barely an inch to the edge. The young doctor stared in bewilderment and confusion at the object before him. His eyebrow raised, he reached for the case as he cautiously proceeded to open it, exposing whatever it was on the inside.

David's eyes widened at the sight of a badge. He studied the identification card laminated behind a thin layer of plastic, bearing his photograph, his personal information with the words 'The Conversion Bureau' written in gold. The however bore a golden shield, the young doctor ran his fingers over the thin blue lines illuminated with an azure glow with within the crevices of the carvings before moving over to letters V.A.N.G.A.R.D borne with valor.

"Give yourself a week, one week. Get accustomed to the facility and familiarize yourself with your colleagues. You will be working very closely with them and from here on out, they will be with your friends, your allies, and most importantly, your family. Put your trust in them and they will never, ever let you down" said Miguel

"However, by then, if you still believe the Bureau isn't for you, that V.A.N.G.A.R.D is not and will never be your calling, all you have to do is turn in your badge and walk right out that front door. That is my solemn promise to you" he added.

David closed the black wallet-like case before removing it from the surface of the table. He nodded to himself as if in thought, clutching it firmly in his hand before shifting his gaze to the man before him. "No questions asked?" he asked.

Miguel smiled in assurance "No questions asked. Well, if everything has been made clear and there is nothing left to be rectified, you may report to the fifth floor" he said.

The young doctor nodded yet again, picking up his leather suitcase from the floor before making his way to the doorway. However he stopped for a brief moment, shifting back to Miguel as if he had just remembered something he had been dying to ask. "One more thing Mr Estrada" David said.

Miguel raised his eyebrow, his attention returned to the young doctor. "Yes, Dr Stone?"

he asked. "It has been weighing on my mind for a good while now but back in my office you said I came at a rather high recommendation. I would like to know who-" said David.

"That... would be me" came a rather familiar voice.

Immediately, David's blood went stone cold, petrified with the same exact tingle running down the entire length of his spine. "I know that voice" he said, immediately shifting his gaze to the person behind him.

"Hello David, it's been a while"

(To be continued...)