

I stared down the barrel of the guard's rifle, my hands in the air as if I was impersonating a field goal post. Some way through the Administration's center of operations, they'd finally caught on to a number of their systems being shut down and somehow used that to pinpoint my location. But, –even while a firearm was pointed directly at my nose– I couldn't back down. This infiltration wasn't about me, it was about everyone else.

It was six years ago, but I can picture it so vividly like it was yesterday. The scarlet-red screen on the television displaying those jarring, snow-white words: *Borders closed.*  
*Administration has taken a government position.*

The world was in disarray. Each and every state in the U.S had dissociated from one another, closing their borders. And each state implemented their own set of rules and regulations, essentially stripping away basic human rights so the people couldn't revolt. However, they didn't account for someone like me.

“Julissa, in about ten seconds I need you to run to the door on the right,” Willow's voice came in through my earpiece. She was able to see where I was through the body cam on my chest. “I'm going to use their defensive protocols against them.” Willow was back at home base, controlling things in the background. She used to work for the Administration before she'd been replaced by a mutual friend of the higher-ups. However, she was able to insert a virus into their software, allowing her to access most of their systems from anywhere.

Guards filled the room from a door behind me, boasting their technologically enhanced armor. My hands were pulled behind my back while I was tugged on, pretty much being dragged toward an exit. The longest ten seconds of my life continued while I counted in my head.

*Seven. . .Eight. . .Nine. . .*

Suddenly, tubular jets emerged from the corners of the ceiling, spitting out a putrid, chartreuse smoke that began filling the room and assaulted my nostrils. With the now abrupt confusion all of the guards shared, I managed to free myself from the tight grasp. Turning to my right, I noticed that the metal door that had been closed was now opened. Holding my breath, I sprinted for it, the clunky footsteps of guards following behind me. I slid into the room, the door closing behind me almost immediately.

“Thanks for that, Willow,” I coughed into my earpiece. It felt as if my lungs had been set ablaze by an insane arsonist.

“Stay on your toes,” She responded, “The whole place is on high alert.”

“Noted,” I said, surveying the room I was in. There were multiple wooden desks scattered throughout the large space; computers with unorganized cables placed on them. A large ventilation system drew overhead, branching off into tunnels leading into separate rooms.

I continued through the room toward another metal door, waiting for Willow to open it. Our plan was to get me into the main control room since Willow didn’t have access to it. From there I could open the borders of the state and set the world back on track.

“You’re halfway through,” Willow said, the door in front of me opening. I proceeded into a long corridor, weapons mounted on pegs in the walls. *Is this the armory?* I thought. *Don’t mind if I do.* Reaching out, I fought with a rifle before retrieving it from a peg. With the click of a button the magazine slid out and into my free hand. And to my luck, it was loaded.

The sound of powerful stomps forced my heart to skip a beat. I twirled around, viewing four guards sprinting toward me from the room I’d just left. I frantically inserted the magazine, squeezing the trigger and sending bullets zipping toward them. Unfortunately, their armor was so durable that my efforts were similar to throwing water balloons at a pack of lions.

I lowered the rifle and sprinted in the opposite direction, heart racing faster than my feet were. Everything around me turned to a blur while my eyes fixated on the door at the end of the corridor.

“Sorryyy,” Willow apologized although not sounding sincere. “I forgot to close the door behind you, but the good news is that they have orders to capture you alive, so they’re not going to shoot—” Her words were drowned out by gunfire.

The door in front of me opened as I dashed to my escape, almost losing my balance. Luckily, the guards behind me weren’t the best shot, their bullets barely missing me, one even grazing my skin. I lunged into the room and the door shut behind me, the shrill pings of bullets pelting it bouncing around in my ears.

“Sooo, I listened in on their radios and it turns out they were recently instructed to take you out,” Willow giggled, audibly nervous. I was unable to muster up a response while trying to catch my breath. “Erm, eyes forward, Julissa. You’re not alone.”

I looked ahead to be met with nothing but a dark room filled to the brim with wires, covering the ground like snakes and hanging from the ceiling like vines. Gripping the rifle, I began slowly pacing through the area, wires grabbing onto my shoes.

I paused. Something moved in my peripheral vision. I hastily aimed the rifle in the direction of the movement, but the only thing that remained were swaying wires. Sweat trickled down my forehead while I placed a finger on the trigger.

“Something moved,” I said into my earpiece, aiming at another set of wires. I wouldn’t be able to spot anything out of the ordinary in this pitch black room—the occasional spark from a wire gifting me a minuscule amount of light every few seconds.

“That’s why I told you to pay attention,” Willow said.

A spark jumped out at me from an exposed wire, my rifle almost slipping out of my sweaty hands. I could swear that there were people trotting around in the umbrage, waiting to pounce as if I were prey in the middle of the jungle.

I moved into a bundle of wires as quiet as I could, though my breathing made my location pretty apparent. I froze. Something grabbed my ankle, I felt its fingers claw at my cargo pants. Twisting myself around with my rifle aimed at the ground, my eyes caught a gloved hand retreating into the grounded wires.

The scream couldn't even escape my mouth as I squeezed the trigger, bullets kicking up sparks from the wires. I wasn't met with the agonizing yelp that I expected, instead there was complete silence— I could hear my own blinks. *What was this room?* My mind raced, panicking. *How did that hand reach up from the ground if it's solid?*

Then it hit me. I reached down, hand being engulfed by cables before I latched onto cold metal. Instinctively, I pulled with a grunt, the entrance to a hatch revealing itself. A silver blaze of light emerged, blinding me.

“Nice find!” Willow exclaimed in a bubbly, almost excited voice; she could be livelier than a bucket of kittens given energy drinks. I hopped down the hatch, landing with a huff. I was now in a narrow—my head nearly touched the ceiling—, well-lit corridor, staring at a pale-faced man wearing a black tracksuit and white gloves.

“Don't move!” I yelled, aiming my rifle at the man. He grew stiff as I closed the distance, placing the barrel on his chest. “How do I get to the main control room?”

Not a word escaped the man's lips, but I could see the panic on his face. The widened pupils accompanying the short breaths escaping his nostrils. The realization that you're powerless. *Fear.*

I forced my eyes shut, squeezing the trigger. The *bang* echoed off the walls, almost overpowering the thud of the man's body slumping to the ground. I stepped in a liquid— that of I presumed to be blood— while proceeding down the corridor.

“Julissa. . .” Willow's voice came through, her bubble popped.

“Moving forward,” I said, voice stern.

“Okay.”

“Sorry.” Her voice wasn't returned. Willow hadn't wanted anyone to die; I could tell just from the way her tone shifted. I hadn't wanted to kill anyone, either. In my eyes, I didn't: my hatred for the Administration is what pulled the trigger.

I held back the tears welling up, pushing farther down the corridor. The walls had dented areas with ladders leading up to hatches. It was all like one large mole tunnel, connecting different areas of the building.

“I don't know where any of this leads too,” Willow stated. “You're gonna have to test your luck.” I nodded, feeling stupid immediately after realizing that she couldn't see that. I stopped next to a ladder, grabbing onto it with one hand—my rifle in the other— and climbing upward.

I pushed open the heavy, metal hatch, peeking my head into a room. It was empty, nothing but an image of myself reflecting off the shiny steel walls. Pulling the rest of myself into the room, the hatch shut behind me.

“Louuud,” Willow exasperated, her voice seemingly back to normal.

“Whoops,” I responded standing in the room of nothingness, “What's the point of this room?”

“Dunno. Maybe they just haven’t–” she paused. “Hold on, I found something.” Suddenly, the room began to shake, knocking me off my feet. The wall ahead of me began to retreat into the floor. It was something you’d see in a movie, only I wasn’t an actor and this was real life.

“So coooool!” Willow shrieked with excitement, “Poisonous gas, underground tunnels, and walls that move. What *doesn’t* this place have?” While she was admiring the qualities of the building, I gripped my rifle, looking into the hidden room presenting itself.

Large, steel, computer-like terminals sat under multiple screens mounted on the wall. Two guards stood –rifles in hand– in front of a man sitting at a terminal. Without thought, I squeezed the trigger.

Bullets flew in both directions as they had fired back. I ducked to the side, managing to avoid most of the shots—besides the one that stuck my ankle. I winced at the pain, still firing at the guards.

Their armor protected them from the bullets, however, one of them fell when I sent a bullet piercing through his neck– the only area that the armor’s protection didn’t reach. I rolled forward—something I can’t even justify, all of the adrenaline pumping through me was keeping me going– into the room, getting shot twice in the process: once in the back and once in the shoulder.

I held back a screech, instead looking away from the guard and toward the man at the terminal. I sent three shots toward him, aimed straight for the head. The guard dove, stopping the bullets. However, by some miracle, one of them hit him in the neck. He didn’t get up.

I raised my rifle—for what I hoped was the final time– and shot the remaining man in the head. His body flopped out of his chair and onto the floor, a pool of blood forming around him.

“This is almost over!” Willow exclaimed. “Go to the computer and press a button on the left side, it’s yellow with white text.” I sprinted to the terminal, immediately spotting the button that contrasted against the bland gray. I slammed it with a closed fist.

The screen above lit up, a text bar illuminating the room. *Insert password*, it read.

“I need a password,” I grimaced.

“What?” She questioned. “Hold on, I need to look through the database. I didn’t see any passwords the first time, though.”

I heard the hatch in the room behind me open.

“Hurry!” I yelled.

Suddenly, I felt a warm sensation pierce the back of my head as I fell to the ground.