

The doors opened, and Alex followed Tristan out.

"Where to?" his Samalian asked, firing through the crowd.

"Three lefts, then two rights. Fourth door on the right." Alex raised his voice to speak over the screaming researchers. "I wish you'd grabbed Jacoby's gun. I'm not wasting the few knives I have on these people."

"I wish I'd thought to bring explosives. Blowing up the lifts would buy us time." Tristan shifted to a run.

They made the fifth turn when the alarm sounded. "Clock's now officially ticking," Alex said, the corridor empty of people. "I've released programs to confuse the provenance. It's going to buy us a few minutes, but not much longer than that." A flash of light in his direction, then the guard was peppered with shots.

Alex used the authorization card to open the door, and handed it to Tristan before heading for the array's terminal.

"I'm in position," Tristan called.

Alex typed, looking through the code. "Shouldn't take me too long." He found his entry point. "Talk to me." It obliged, which didn't mean it cooperated.

"Alex, how much longer?" Tristan asked, sounding like he was far away.

Alex pulled his attention out of the coercion, but continued typing. "They loaded this thing with a lot more antibodies than I expected. It's going to be a bit longer." The system laughed at him. "Oh you just wait, we'll see who's laughing in a few minutes."

"I don't know that you have that kind of time, Alex." Tristan sounded far again, now that Alex was focus on the system, but calm, which was normal. But the warning meant he needed to hurry.

He dove into the coercion and everything else fell away. He set on hijacking the immune system; co-opting that would speed things up afterward. Unfortunately, he wasn't the first person to think of this method. He had been in school when he'd first tried it, so there were a lot of measures he had to fight through to make it happen.

The floor trembled, as did the terminal. An explosion in the distance, he realized, and immediately chased the concern away. He couldn't afford the distraction.