Containment Breach

A freeform larp by Thomas White and Rafael Quinterio

Situation

By the time the alarms went off at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, it was already too late. For the civilians milling in and out of the inauspicious ground floor of the building, it seemed as if nothing had gone wrong. But in the research labs deep underneath the ground, surveillance cameras played witness to the horrifying vision of Professor Minho and the rest of his colleagues dying as a deadly neurotoxin flooded the entire facility.

Guards from other agencies have been scrambled. They are told only that they are to avoid alerting civilians, and that the last thing the cameras saw was a few mobile infiltration units, looking just like human beings, preparing to escape into the wider world.

Overview

Containment Breach is a minimal prep larp for any number of players above three, with larger groups being even better up to the point of practicality. It is intended to simulate the dynamics of panic and communication issues as plans collapse and contingencies are put into place, and otherwise to be primarily a fun and strategic experience. The game will take an hour, not including set up and briefing time.

Materials and Preparation

This game will require at least one administrator. Before the game, the administrator needs to set up a Facebook account (and according email address) so that there will be enough for the anticipated amount of players playing guards or administrators. The game also requires all players to have access to a smartphone. For those who don't, find one for them to borrow.

One large public structure is required for the play space. It must have clear boundaries as to what is inside and outside, and ideally there would be public traffic in and out of the structure throughout. It should have a number of entrances slightly smaller than the number of guards. (For example, if there are four guards, the building should have fewer than four distinct exits.) Libraries, cafeterias, (ideally free) museums and similar buildings are ideal, especially if they near a public outdoor space like a square or a park.

One other location, reasonably close to the main structure and along lines the general public travel, should also be set up as the destination for the AI. An administrator should wait there throughout the game to confirm the success of the players. This location should be one where the environment contains non-players as well as players.

To Play

Administrators break players into two groups, **guards** and **artificial intelligences (AI).** Depending on the group side, administrators should aim to have approximately twice as many guards as AI. It is critical that these groups should not see each on the day of prior to starting the game. Both groups are taken off to the side and explained their situation.

To the Guards

Guards are taken to a meeting spot outside the building. They are told:

- During playtime, they are to use only the accounts created for them to communicate with other guards. At this time, tell each player their email and password and let them log in. For ease of identification, they should all take a quick profile picture.
- Their objective: prevent the AI from escaping! If any AI makes it to the destination zone and stays there for sixty seconds, they have escaped into the world and the administrators will end the game.
- If they recognize an AI, lightly touch them and say a key word, ("override"), the AI will be disabled temporarily. It will return to the building.
- They may not enter the play building, for fear that the AI will activate chemical weapons inside the building as well and hurt the civilians. They are to avoid alerting civilians.
- Occasionally one of them may get texts from the security system analysts with physical descriptions of the AI. These may only reach some group members.
- If no AI escape for 60 minutes, backup will arrive and the game will end.

To the AI

AI are taken to the starting location, anywhere inside the play building. They are told:

- Their objective is to make it out of the building and to the escape zone, where they must stay for sixty seconds, as timed by the administrator in the area.
- If a guard recognizes them, touches them and says the keyword "override", they have been deactivated and must return to the building.
- The guards may not enter the play building.
- Each guard will be texted occasional physical descriptions of the AI.
- If no AI escapes in 60 minutes, backup will arrive and kill them. Then the game ends.
- Each AI is given the usernames and passwords of every single guard. They may choose how to use this information.

To the Administrator(s)

If there is one administrator, they should remain at the exit zone. If there are several another should be stationed inside the building.

The administrator at the exit zone should time AIs staying in the zone and make sure that they stay there for sixty seconds. They should work to not pay undue attention to any AI to avoid alerting guards.

If there is only one administrator, they should begin texting simple physical descriptions of some of the AIs to randomly chosen guards, ideally those tied to clothing, such as ("wearing a red hoodie") or "a UCSD shirt and jeans"). Avoid descriptions that could easily be confused with many people, such as "wearing a ponytail", but leave open some possibility for AI to take jackets on and off or find civilians with similar characteristics.

As the game progresses, the descriptions should grow increasingly detailed to put time pressure on the AIs. If there are several administrators, they can stay inside the building and send appearance updates.