

Legerdemain

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Summary

In this vignette we see what the Illusive Man has been up to--and it is not good.

Aite: Cerberus Controlled Territory—Hermes Base

“Dr. Archer.” The Illusive Man remarked as he entered the central control center for the Cerberus research installation, accompanied by his aide, Agent Brooks, and two others: a Romulan wearing the uniform of the Tal-Shiar and a human wearing the blue and gold uniform of one of the many Mirror Terran Empires. “You said that you’ve had some interesting breakthroughs in your message.”

“Indeed I have, Sir.” The scientist replied deferentially. “The technology and aid our new friends have provided us...” he inclined his head respectfully at the two extra-universal agents accompanying his employer, “in combination with that of our own technology and...of course... that of the Reapers...has allowed us to make several advances. If you’d like, I’d be happy to show them to you.”

“Are they all at this facility?” The Tal’Shiar operative inquired.

Dr. Archer answered, “Hermes Station is more of a central command and control hub. The real work is done at our satellite facilities.”

“Which are?” The Terran asked as Archer called up a map on the monitor.

“Research involving the geth is carried out at Prometheus Station.” The scientist explained, “Work involving advanced artificial intelligence is carried out at Atlas Station. And Vulcan station, besides being our power source, is where we’re carrying out our special projects.”

“But Atlas Station is where the main project you’ve been working on is located.” Dr. Lawson indicated.

“Correct.” Dr. Archer responded with a frown, “Project David. As you are aware, we had difficulties recently with that program that could have proved catastrophic, but the introduction of the technology from our new friends after Shepard dealt with the crisis seems to have solved those issues.”

“Let’s see what you have.” The Illusive Man requested. “I am most interested in seeing your results.”

The project director acknowledged with a gesture towards the exit. “We’ll have to take a Hammerhead because of the terrain and the distance between the facilities. If you’ll accompany me, we can begin our tour with Prometheus station. I think you will find what we have been working there on fascinating.”

“I’m sure we will.” The Illusive Man replied, “Lead the way.”

Prometheus Station

“What is that?” A Mirror Universe Terran asked, pointing to a crashed ship as he and the others debarked from their vehicle.

Dr. Archer proudly declared, “That is a geth ship damaged by fire from our planetary defenses. It landed here shortly after we had set up Vulcan Station. We very quickly set up a defense perimeter but, thankfully, we encountered no resistance from the geth.”

“Why not?” The Terran officer inquired with a raised eyebrow. “What brought them offline?”

“Their central control node was damaged in the crash and then later destroyed by Shepard and her team.” Archer replied as he and his guests

entered the geth ship, passing by several scientists wearing Cerberus uniforms as well as strategically positioned armed guards. "As you know, there is no stable government on Aite." The head scientist explained, "So...besides a hefty combat force, we also have several defense turrets as well as other defenses."

"Understandable." The Tal'Shiar officer replied with a nod of his head, "And that cannon?" He asked, pointing to a large weapon, recently damaged, standing in front of the ship.

"A geth cannon." Archer explained, "Currently offline. Shepard damaged it when she dealt with the...situation...we recently faced. It's still undergoing repairs."

"It probably requires a link to the geth consciousness." Dr. Lawson noted.

"That's what we think as well." Archer affirmed, "But, as you'll see when you look at our main project, we're beginning to make progress towards not just contacting the geth, but also controlling them."

"If we can safely control the geth..." Dr. Lawson mused, "that would make for a powerful weapon in our arsenal."

"Certainly it would." The Terran officer agreed before cautioning. "Provided there is no chance of these geth turning on us as they did once before with their original masters."

"That possibility would have to be eliminated." The Illusive Man agreed, "I assume you have some ideas on this, Dr. Archer?"

"I do." The scientist responded, "You'll understand better once you've seen what we have accomplished at Atlas Station."

"Very well." The Illusive Man nodded his head, "Then that will be our next stop."

"If I might suggest..." Dr. Archer tentatively suggested, "Perhaps we should go to Vulcan Station first. Our two newest subjects should be ready for you to evaluate and it is on the way."

"All right." The Cerberus director agreed, "Take us to Vulcan Station. Let's see what you have accomplished with Mr. Hock's gifts."

"Yes." The Tal'Shiar operative concurred, "I am most interested in how you've tied in our conditioning program with the other technologies."

Vulcan Station

Pointing at the two individuals being held in restraints on medical couches, the Illusive Man commented, "I recognize Mr. Taylor. I assume the woman on the table next to him is Ms. Goto?"

"Yes, Sir." Dr. Archer clarified, "The restraints are still necessary for now, but their resistance is weakening."

"So the conditioning is taken effect?" The Terran inquired.

Nodding his head, Archer confirmed, "Yes. A combination of positive and negative reinforcement along with drugs and implants provided by you..." Dr. Archer inclined his head in the direction first at the Terran and then the Romulan, "is breaking down their resistance. They should be receiving their final programming soon."

Nodding his head in satisfaction, Dr. Lawson commented, "You've taken the work done on Subjects Zero and Grunt and have improved on it."

"I'd like to think so." Dr. Archer replied, "The use of Reaper indoctrination techniques in combination with Borg, Romulan, and Terran technology and the knowledge gleaned as regards the Thorian spores has given me a chance to carry out experiments I could only imagine doing before."

"I assume this means that they will be ready to carry out their missions soon." The Illusive Man concluded.

"They will be ready to go when you give the word." Dr. Archer vowed.

"Excellent." The Tal'Shiar agent replied.

"Indeed." The Illusive Man acknowledged, "I am most impressed by your work. But now..." The Cerberus director urged, "I'd like to see what you've been doing at Atlas Station."

"If you'd please..." Dr. Archer gestured towards the garage containing the Hammerhead, "We can go immediately to the facility. I think you will be most satisfied with what we have accomplished."

Atlas Station

"This way, please." Dr. Archer inclined his head at a door, gesturing for his guests to join him. "This is where we are working on 'Project David.'

"Project David?" The Terran queried, "Is there a reason why you chose that particular name?"

"Yes." Dr. Archer responded, looking away briefly before continuing, this time with a slight hitch to his voice. "David was...is...my younger brother."

Entering the lab, the Illusive Man's interest, along with that of his companions, was drawn immediately towards the center where what was once a human male—now as much machine as being—was suspended in a tank filled with a green fluid. "David, I presume?"

"Yes." Dr. Archer confessed guiltily as the hapless test subject droned on in a voice that was half human—half machine.

"The square root of 76 is 8.7177. Asari...species 50310...prime target for assimilation. Turian...species 53048...prime target for assimilation. Caution...avoid system 940 Zulu. The Ancients will not be pleased."

"Who are these Ancients?" The Illusive Man inquired, arching an eyebrow.

"Yes." Both the Tal'Shiar operative and the Terran officer echoed, "We're most curious about who they are? Preservers? Changelings? Something else entirely?"

Shaking his head, Dr. Archer replied, "Much of what David says is rambling. It's hard to determine what is or is not relevant."

"Hmmm..." The Tal'Shiar agent mused as he walked around the tank, carefully appraising the occupant suspended within. "Remarkable. The fusion of Borg and Reaper tech, combined with that of the Thorian and genetic manipulation makes it difficult to say what's organic and what isn't."

"This is a most remarkable achievement." Dr. Lawson agreed, "So...what you been able to accomplish with Project David?"

"David was an idiot savant." Archer declared, "A mathematical genius—all instinct. I discovered that he could communicate with the geth on more than just a verbal level."

"He's able to network with them...and control them" The Terran finished.

"More or less." Archer affirmed. "While at the present time he is unable to control the geth, he can influence their collective towards a course of action. I'm hoping that with the addition of the Borg and Reaper implants...as well as the genetic manipulation technology you have so thoughtfully provided, we will be able to actually control and use the geth for our own purposes very soon."

"Didn't he nearly go rogue a short time ago?" The Terran inquired.

"Indeed he did." Archer acknowledged, "However, thanks to the technology you have provided, we were able to narrowly avert his effort to break free and now he is firmly under our control."

"There are no risks of future...breakdowns?" The Illusive Man questioned pointedly.

"Absolutely none, Sir." Archer replied, "I guarantee it. David is completely under our control."

"Good." The Illusive Man nodded his head in apparent satisfaction. "Everything appears to be in order here. How are the subjects from ETAP performing?"

"Very well, Sir." Dr. Archer replied as he guided his guests into a training facility. "As you can see, our test subjects have been adapting to their new implants and software. Right now, our primary limitation is lack of test subjects."

"That will be rectified very shortly." The Illusive Man stated confidently. "We anticipate a wealth of...volunteers...very shortly."

"What of that other ship?" Dr. Archer asked, "The *Gallena*?"

"Don't worry about Avesti." The Tal'Shiar operative replied with an evil smirk. "We have a warm reception planned for her should she or those like her decide to interfere."

"You and Henry will both have your test subjects." The Illusive Man vowed before admonishing, "Just get results."

"You'll get them, Sir." Dr. Archer promised.

"Good enough." The Illusive Man again nodded in approval. "Henry...gentlemen...shall we be off? We have much that still needs doing."

"Agreed." The Tal'Shiar operative replied, "We should be receiving data soon from the Nexus Station projects. That should prove most illuminating."

As the Cerberus Director and his team left the facility to return to their vehicle, the Illusive Man whispered to his aide walking beside him. "Contact Mr. Leng and tell him to be ready to move. Big things are in the air, Agent Brooks. Things are about to change—for all of us."

As they walked out of the lab, none of them noticed the hapless being in the tank. If they had, they might have spotted the tears running down his cheeks as he murmured plaintively, *"Release me...the square root of 23 is...I'm scared..."*

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