

Assimilation

a tale of the far future by David Wingrove

The Governor turned in his high-backed chair and looked out through the open French windows and across the green. There was the solid thwack of willow against leather and a ripple of applause as the two ungainly batsmen took a single. On the far side of the green there was brief movement beside the scoreboard as the slates were changed. 108 for 4 it read now. The Governor smiled then turned back, facing his aide.

"They're doing well. Moving Davenport-Adams up the batting order has made all the difference, don't you think?"

"Indisputably," the aide replied, his face-mask twitching. He stood there on the far side of the great oak and walnut desk, straight-backed, waiting, a leather-bound folder beneath his arm.

The Governor leaned back in his chair and smoothed the ends of his waxed moustache. "You know, George, there are some who think that the real purpose of the game is to contain one's opponent, to prevent him from playing, but I've always argued that one should take the game to him, aggressively and with style."

The aide smiled weakly. He had heard it all a hundred times. "Undoubtedly, sir. But this other matter..."

The Governor sat forward slightly, nodding his long, high-domed head. "Ah yes, the matter of the trader. Damned awkward, what?"

"Damned awkward, sir."

"He's here now, I take it, wanting to see me."

"That is so, Excellency. However, I thought there were one or two things you ought to know before you saw him. For instance, we have now had the opportunity to examine his ship."

"Good. And?"

The aide looked down briefly. It was only in circumstances like this that one found out the limits of one's superiors. The Governor was a good, solid man, there was no doubting that, but when it came to responding to a situation of this kind...

He looked up. "It's a standard bulk cargo trader. A very old model, so I'm told. Sub-light speed. There are one or two minor embellishments but basically nothing unexpected. There's an old-fashioned cloning cabinet, for instance, the genetic material of that matches the blood sample we took from the trader. All pretty much as one might expect from a barbarian race."

"I see. And what do you think he wants?"

"To trade, sir."

The Governor sat back, considering, the long fingers of one hand

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