

Holiday Sampler: Some Favorite Scenes



[Opening theme music.]

Joel McKinnon

Welcome back, my friends, for a little Holiday Special. We technically have only one more episode remaining in season two, featuring an another guest appearance, this time an expert on another of Isaac Asimov's favorite topics history. That episode, featuring TCA Achintya will be released a week from today. We'll be getting back to story episodes with the following episode in January, "The Search by the Mule, Part I." If you'll excuse my indulgence today I'd like to feature my favorite story scenes from the first two seasons. This should be an interesting exercise for a couple of reasons. First, we'll get to sample, in a short time, an amazing assortment of characters drawn by the master Asimov, from the immortal Hari Seldon to the heroic Bayta Darell in some of their most iconic moments throughout these first two books of the trilogy, from "The Psychohistorians" to "The Mule."

Joel

Secondly, and I'm a little leery of this aspect, I get to see how varied my production values and delivery have been over the past nine months since beginning this project. I'm hoping that the delivery gets smoother and more polished as we go through these scenes, but we will see, won't we? Let's begin then, with the most tense moment in *The Psychohistorians*. It's the concluding day of Hari Seldon's trial, and this time he goes up against the most powerful figure in the galaxy. Ling Chen wants nothing more than to get rid of Hari Seldon as expeditiously as possible. Seldon has to find a way to maneuver Chen into giving him what he so desperately needs, not just to spare his life, but to pave the way for the launching of the Foundation itself.

High Commissioner Ling Chen, up until this point entirely quiet, says,

Ling Chen

"I will speak."

Joel

Asimov beautifully describes this moment. "The other commissioners sat back in their chairs, prepared to listen. A silence formed about Chen into which he might drop his words."

Ling Chen

"Dr. Seldon, you disturb the peace of the Emperor's realm. None of the quadrillions living now will be living a century from now. Why then should we concern ourselves with the events of three centuries distance?"

Hari Seldon

"I shall not be alive half a decade hence, and yet it is of overpowering concern to me. Call it idealism. Call it an identification of myself with that mystical generalization to which we refer by the term humanity."

Ling Chen

"I do not wish to take the trouble to understand mysticism. Can you tell me why I may not rid myself of you and of an uncomfortable and unnecessary three century future which I will never see by having you executed tonight?"

Hari Seldon

"A week ago, you might have done so and perhaps retained a one in ten probability of yourself remaining alive at year's end. Today, the one in ten probability is scarcely one in 10,000."

Joel

Seldon goes on to explain that psychohistory predicts that his own violent death would precipitate a loss of stability, thereby hastening the inevitable collapse. Chen pretends to be unmoved by what he calls childish threats. But his next action belies his confidence. He proposes an alternative, asking first if Seldon's project needs to be completed on Trantor. Seldon protests.

Hari Seldon

"Trantor, my Lord, possesses the Imperial Library as well as the scholarly resources of the University of Trantor."

Ling Chen

"And yet, if you were located elsewhere, let us say, upon a planet where the hurry and distractions of a metropolis will not interfere with scholastic musings, where your men may devote themselves entirely and single-mindedly to their work, might not that have advantages?"

Hari Seldon

"We will need time to arrange such a trip. There are 20,000 families involved."

Ling Chen

"You will be given time."

Joel

Seldon is given a mere five minutes to choose between the Commissioner's magnanimous offering and the presumably less attractive alternative of being put to death. He dramatically allows that time to tick down to the final moments before announcing his choice.

Hari Seldon

"I accept exile."

Joel

As you may recall, Seldon's exile is nothing less than the birth of the great successor to the Empire, and he has achieved exactly what he desired.

Now we jump through hyperspace and time to the distant frontier planet of Terminus, where the Foundation has just begun its project to compile the most significant knowledge of humanity into a great Encyclopedia Galactica, to be spread throughout the galaxy to form the seeds of eventual Renaissance when the Empire inevitably falls according to Seldon's psychohistorical predictions. I chose this little snippet of the

story because I so love a particular character who really got treated very badly in the recently concluded first season of Apple TV's adaptation of the epic. There were a lot of things I loved about the show, but I was very disappointed in their treatment of the wonderful Lord Dorwin.

There was no speech impediment and not a hint of his snuff box. I shall bring you a bit of the Lord now, but first should remind you of the context. The Board of Regents, led by Louis Pirenne, who cares only about the Encyclopedia project, has been shaken by a visit from an envoy from their expansionist neighbor, Anachreon. They've been effectively given an ultimatum to submit to providing tribute to this world in the form of landed estates for their nobility. They're now being visited by a representative of the distant Empire and hope to persuade him of the value of their enterprise and hope they will be given protection.

The young mayor of Terminus City, Salvor Hardin, understands the pinch they're in and is looking for an escape strategy. The day arrives shortly for the arrival of Lord Dorwin, the Emperor's representative, and he is quite a character. He actually gets a fair amount of physical description from Asimov, "Long hair, curled intricately and quite obviously artificially, to which were added a pair of fluffy blonde sideburns which he fondled affectionately." Besides the picture we get, Dorwin has a nearly constant habit of taking snuff, which he constantly offers without any real desire to share and pinches it from his elaborately carved snuff box at frequent intervals. He also has a speech impediment which results in the inability to say his ours.

I think this is all to portray him as a decadent dandy, probably inbred and not particularly intelligent. Hardin takes an immediate dislike to him. He finds Dorwin with Pirenne, reviewing the work completed thus far by the Foundation and fawning over it.

Lord Dorwin

"A gweat achievement to this encyclopedia of yoahs, Hahdin. A feat indeed to rank with the most majestic accomplishments of all time."

Joel

Pirenne preens while Hardin moves to discuss the threat from Anacreon. Darwin is uninterested and thinks they are not a concern, as they are thoroughly "bawbewous," to which Hardin replies that they have all the elementary requirements for warfare and all the fundamental necessities for destruction.

Then an interesting digression. Darwin has a pet interest in archaeology and the "origin question." This is in reference to an odd fact regarding the historical knowledge of the galaxy in regard to the spread of humanity. There is general consensus that the human species originated on a single planet, but none on exactly where this planet was, other than that it was likely in the Sirius sector. Among the candidates, though apparently not a leading one, is the Sol system. Darwin is himself intrigued at the possibility that the actual origin was in the Arcturan system. He's a big fan of one archaeologist with that view and has read his works extensively written some 800 years previously. Hardin asks why Dorwin doesn't go there himself to investigate. Dorwin is surprised.

Lord Dorwin

"How insuffewably cwude it would be to go to Ahctowus oah to Sol, foah instance, and blundah about when the Old Mastahs have covehed the gwound so much moah effectually than we could possibly hope to do."

Joel

I see, responds Hardin. One can almost imagine his eyes rolling.

It later becomes evident that Lord Dorwin had effectively said nothing of value in this exchange or during his entire visit, and Hardin would be left to his own devices in finding a way out, the obvious solution which Seldon alluded to in his return at the episode's conclusion. To use Anacreon's neighbor kingdoms' joint fear of their growing power to create an alliance against them. A major component of this strategy is revealed in the following episode, the faux religion led by the High Priest and Ambassador Poly Verisof. As we rejoin Hardin and the Foundation upon Terminus, thirty years have passed, and Anacreon is more powerful than ever. They are led by the evil and ambitious regent Wienis, who has plans to destroy Terminus through the use of an imperial battleship that has fortuitously fallen into his hands.

We join Hardin and Wienis on the occasion of the coronation of the Crown Prince Lepold on Anacreon. Salvor has been invited to Anacreon for the coronation with the purpose of his humiliation and likely murder at its conclusion. He doesn't seem particularly fazed by the precarity of his situation. However, the regent Wienis arrives and finds Hardin, asking him why he appears unimpressed.

Salvor Hardin

"I am not bored. Your Highness, this is all extremely interesting. We have no comparable spectacles on Terminus, you know."

Wienis

"No doubt. But would you care to step into my private chambers where we can speak at greater length and with considerably more privacy?"

Salvor Hardin

"Certainly."

Joel

In Wienis's chambers, he offers his honored guest a glass of Locris wine, a precious libation aged for two centuries, since before the Zeonian Rebellion. Hardin accepts and proposes a toast,

Salvor Hardin

"To Leopold I, King of Anacreon!"

Weinis

"Soon to be Emperor of the Periphery, and further, who knows? The galaxy may someday be reunited."

Salvor Hardin

"Undoubtedly. By Anacreon?"

Weinis

"Why not? With the help of the Foundation, our scientific superiority over the rest of the Periphery would be indisputable."

Salvor Hardin

"I must remind you that the Foundation is bound to help any nation that requests scientific aid. And due to the high idealism of our government and the great moral purpose of our founder, Hari Seldon, we are unable to play favorites."

Weinis

"The Galactic Spirit, to use the popular cant, helps those who help themselves. I quite understand that, left to itself, the Foundation would never cooperate."

Joel

Hardin reminds his host that the Foundation has recently restored a great battle cruiser for the kingdom, had they not? Wienis notes that this gesture may have been initiated due to the fear of Anacreon's great military power and the open threat of war had Terminus not been so accommodating. Now we reach the crux of this faux diplomatic dance. Wienis illustrates their differences. Hardin is a man of peace, while he is a man of "direct action." He mocks Hardin's famous platitude, saying that violence in this case is not the final refuge of one who is quite competent and prepared to employ it for his own ends. To demonstrate who is the competent one, Wienis reveals that it is Hardin who has made mistakes in evaluating the situation, that the chamber they are now in is guarded by five of his men, instructed to shoot to kill if he were attempt to leave he as a captive.

Salvor Hardin

"I have no immediate desire to leave. Do you then, fear me so much?"

Weinis

"I don't fear you at all. But this may serve to impress you with my determination. Shall we call it a gesture?"

Joel

Hardin remains unperturbed, and Wienis seems determined to get a reaction from him. He tells him that Terminus is now wholly undefended. Hardin reminds him that they have nothing to fear and they serve all alike. Wienis mocks his pacifism and the fact that he gave away a great warship. He explains, evidently expecting a horrified reaction that the fleet is already en route to Terminus and that he, Hardin, is now a prisoner of war. Hardin tells his captor that he is disappointed. That he had expected the moment of coronation to be the proper time to set the fleet in motion.

Salvor Hardin

"Evidently, you wanted to start the war while you were still regent. It would have been more dramatic the other way."

Weinis

"What in space are you talking about?"

Salvor Hardin

"Don't you understand? I had set my counterstroke for midnight."

Joel

Weinis accuses Hardin of bluffing, but is informed that at midnight the planet Anacreon goes under the interdict.

Weinis

"The interdict?"

Salvor Hardin

"Yes. If you don't understand, I might explain that every priest in Anacreon is going on strike unless I countermand the order. But I can't while I'm being held incommunicado. Nor do I wish to, even if I weren't. Do you realize, Your Highness, that an attack on the Foundation is nothing short of sacrilege of the highest order?"

Joel

He informs Wienis that the priests all over Anacrion have been exhorting their followers, that the sacred Foundation is under attack, and that they must rise up in their defense. He tells Wienis that it is now only four minutes to midnight, so he should go back to watch the events unfold, while he pours himself another glass of Locris wine and sits back perfectly indifferent.

Wienis rushes out of the room in fury. In the great ballroom, Lepold sits upon his nuclear powered throne with a dazzling royal aura surrounding him. It raises a few inches from the floor and glides silently toward the window, where he is to be crowned before the adoring masses... or so he expects. At the stroke of midnight, the aura vanishes, and the throne crashes to the floor. All the lights go out. Wienis shrieks over the din in confusion and screams for the guards to get the flares intended to be used later for the royal procession through the streets of the city.

As the Great Hall becomes illuminated, he urges calm and proclaims that power will swiftly be restored. Seconds later, he is informed that the palace has been surrounded by an angry mob led by High Priest Verisof, demanding the cessation of hostilities against the Foundation and the release of Mayor Hardin from his captivity. Wienis rushes to the throne and grabs the confused King and drags him back to the private chamber, where Hardin awaits, calmly reading by the "pearly light of the pocket nucleo bulb at his side." Hardin greets the new king with a gentle smile.

Salvor Hardin

"Good morning, Your Majesty. I congratulate you on your coronation."

Weinis

"Hardin, order your priests back to their jobs!"

Joel

But the tables have now turned, and it is Hardin who holds all the cards. He has arranged for the power across the planet to be cut, and Wienis is now incapable of sending orders of any kind. The only power available is in the temples, and the only televisor working is the one in this very chamber, and it is set only to receive. Wienis has become unhinged and desperate, but he is still sure of victory because,

Weinis

"You can stop the power on Anacreon, but you can't stop my fleet. They're on their way, Hardin, with the great cruiser you yourself ordered repaired at the head."

Salvor Hardin

"Yes, the cruiser I myself ordered repaired, but in my own way. Tell me, Wienis, have you ever heard of a hyperwave relay? No. I see that you haven't. Well, in about two minutes you'll find out what one can do."

Joel

As you'll recall, Hardin had everything well under control, as Wienis's great flagship en route to Terminus had a couple of secret weapons on board, a piece of hardware known as a hyperwave relay, and another priest of the Foundation who knew how to take advantage of its use by Hardin at the critical moment. Wienis eventually turned out to be the one to lose his life at the conclusion of this dramatic event, in gory fashion by his own hand, and Hardin won a great political victory for the Foundation, which secured their path to establishing control over the entire periphery.

Now we go on a little side adventure some decades later, featuring a dashing rogue trader named Limmar Ponyets. He's been tasked with a big job, to secure the release from captivity of a Foundation special agent who has antagonized a backward, authoritarian kingdom by trying to sell nucleic gadgets to which they are religiously opposed. Ponyets is brought before the Grand Master of this world and has to somehow buy time for his companion. While he schemes a way to spring him. He has brought along a contraption of some sort to show off for the court. The Grand Master is suspicious.

Grand Master

"What is it?"

Limmar Ponyets

"This is a small device I have constructed myself."

Grand Master

"That is obvious, but it is not the information I want. Is it one of the black magic abominations of your world?"

Limmar Ponyets

"It is nuclear in nature, but none of you need touch it or have anything to do with it. It is for myself alone, and if it contains abominations, I take the foulness of it upon myself."

Joel

The grandmaster is near the breaking point, already shaking his cane and muttering invocations. But a red mustached counselor whispers in his ear and Ponyets is allowed to continue.

Grand Master

"And what is the connection of this instrument of evil and the gold that you seem to think may save your countryman's life?"

Limmar Ponyets

"With this machine, I can turn the iron you discard into gold of the finest quality. It is the only device known to man that will take iron, the ugly iron, your veneration, that props up the chair you sit in and the walls of this building, and change it to shining, heavy, yellow gold."

Joel

The old man warns Ponyets that this capability has been promised before and the failure always proves fatal.

Grand Master

"Men have been fools who have claimed the ability they have paid for their prying sacrilege."

Joel

Ponyets asks for an object small enough to fit in the chamber, and one of the guards supplies some iron buckles from his uniform. The trader places them carefully into the device and closes the lid. Ten minutes of malevolent crackling and the smell of ozone pass, and Ponyets opens the chamber. The buckles are gold!

Limmar Ponyets

"Gentlemen, this is pure gold. Gold through and through. You may subject it to every known physical and chemical test if you wish to prove the point. It cannot be identified from naturally occurring gold in any way. Any iron can be so treated. Rust will not interfere, nor will a moderate amount of alloying metals."

Joel

The red mustached counselor speaks for the first time.

Pherl

"Your veneration, the gold is from a poisoned source."

Joel

Ponyets ignores the counselor and speaks directly to the Grand Master.

Limmar Ponyets

"A rose can grow from the mud, your veneration. In your dealings with your neighbors, you buy material of all imaginable variety without inquiring as to where they get it, whether from an orthodox machine blessed by your benign ancestors or from some space spawned outrage. Come. I don't offer the machine. I offer the gold."

Joel

The Traders is an oddball among the stories of the first novel in that there is no existential crisis affecting the Foundation. And it almost seems like a one-off adventure that could have been its own short story completely unrelated to the larger flow of events. I had a lot of fun with it nevertheless, and particularly enjoyed voicing the Grand Master and his falsetto voiced counselor, who we later learn goes by the name of Pherl. Ponyets finds a very sneaky way to engage the counselor in what turns out to be the path to his own destruction and the release of the special agent along with the incidental enrichment of Ponyets.

In our next episode, we're back in more familiar territory on Terminus in "The Merchant Princes". We are introduced to another savvy trader in Hober Mallow, and this story covers an awful lot of ground, including three planets, a lot of action on board Mallow's ship, the Far Star, and involves a multitude of characters. As we join this scene, Mallow has been sent to another authoritarian world that of the so called Republic of Korell, headed by an intriguing leader by the name of Commdor Asper, the Well Beloved. I find him interesting in that he is not as stereotypically evil as Wienis or the Grandmaster of Askone, but has some depth of character.

He's a bedraggled figure who seems always tired and weary, not least by the incessant nagging of his avaricious wife. He also seems to have some understanding of the politics of the Foundation and is hip to the tricks they use with their false religion and aggressive trade practices. In the

scene that follows, Mallow is alone with Asper and is attempting to find an angle to secure the leader's cooperation in his mission to develop a trading relationship with Korell. We know this is only a part of his larger mission to learn more about Korell and their possible uses of nuclear weaponry which may have something to do with the distant empire.

Hober Mallow

"You must see that it would be of benefit to both of us. There are things you have that we want, and things we have that you want. It asks only in exchange to bring increased prosperity. An enlightened ruler such as yourself, a friend of the people, I might say a member of the people needs no elaboration on that theme. I won't insult your intelligence by offering any."

Joel

The Commdor voices his concern.

Commdor Asper

"Your people have always been so unreasonable. I am in favor of all the trade our economy can support, but not on your terms. I am not sole master here. I am only the servant of public opinion. My people will not take commerce which carries with it a compulsory religion."

Joel

When Mallow asks why religion would be considered compulsory he is reminded of the case of Askone, an allusion to events that followed upon the apparently one-off escapade of Limmar Ponyets in the last chapter which had occurred twenty years previously.

Commdor Asper

"First they were sold some of your goods and then your people asked for complete freedom of missionary effort in order that the goods might be run properly, that temples of health be set up. There was then the establishment of religious schools, autonomous rights for all officers of the religion, and with what result? Askone is now an integral member of the Foundation system and the Grand Master cannot call his underwear his own. Oh, no! Oh no! The dignity of independent people could never suffer it."

Joel

But Mallow responds that this is not at all what he suggests.

Hober Mallow

"I'm a Master Trader. Money is my religion. All this mysticism and hocus-pocus of the missionaries annoy me and I'm glad you refuse to countenance it. It makes you more my type of man."

Joel

Asper is suspicious.

Commdor Asper

"But man, you have told me only half. You have told me what the catch is not. Now tell me what it is."

Hober Mallow

"The only catch, Commdor, is that you're going to be burdened with an immense quantity of riches."

Commdor Asper

"Indeed? But what could I want with riches? The true wealth is the love of one's people. I have that."

Hober Mallow

"You can have both, for it is possible to gather gold with one hand and love with the other."

Joel

In a nutshell, the story ends with Mallow's triumph over Korell and his ascension to a position of power as the first of the merchant princes using trade and diplomacy to establish hegemony over the Periphery on behalf of the Foundation. Strong hints of the empire are uncovered in the clash with Korell and a number of hints on the conflict to come.

We open season two a couple generations later and Mallow's descendants are under imminent threat from the empire itself. An aspiring general by the name of Bel Riose has become convinced that the conquest of the distant Foundation is his path to glory. He has captured an elderly patrician by the name of Ducem Barr, the son of a figure who appeared briefly in *The Merchant Princes* on the planet of Siwenna by the name of Onum Barr. The scene which follows is the heart of a discussion between the general and the patrician which forms the philosophical heart of this story the battle between the deterministic societal forces underlying psychohistory and the determined free will of a great man of history.

Riose demands, even pleads for Barr to help him by assessing the strengths and likely strategy and tactics of the Foundation. But Barr insists he knows nothing of value.

Ducem Barr

"Such help as I could give you means nothing, so I will make you free of it in the face of your strenuous demand."

Bel Riose

"I will be the judge of its meaning."

Ducem Barr

"No, I am serious. Not all the might of the Empire could avail to crush this pygmy world."

Bel Riose

"Why do you say the Empire cannot defeat this small enemy?"

Joel

Barr's answer is, of course, psychohistory. Seldon had predicted, based on solid mathematical calculations, that the Empire would fall and the Foundation would one day stand in its place. Barr is a true believer, despite the appearances that the puny Foundation has no chance whatsoever against the still powerful Empire. Wounded as it may appear to be upon close inspection. Riose is indignant.

Bel Riose

"You mean that this art of his predicts that I would attack the Foundation and lose such and such a battle for such and such a reason? You are trying to say that I am a silly robot following a predetermined course into destruction?"

Ducem Barr

"No, I have already said that the science had nothing to do with individual actions. It is the vaster background that has been foreseen."

Bel Riose

"Then we stand clasped tightly in the forcing hand of the goddess of historical necessity."

Ducem Barr

"Of psychohistorical necessity."

Bel Riose

"And if I exercise my prerogative of free will, if I choose to attack next year or not to attack at all, how pliable is the goddess, how resourceful?"

Ducem Barr

"Attack now or never, with a single ship or all the force in the Empire, by military force or economic pressure, by candid declaration of war or by treacherous ambush. Do whatever you wish in your fullest exercise of free will. You will still lose."

Bel Riose

"Because of Harry Seldon's dead hand?"

Ducem Barr

"Because of the dead hand of the mathematics of human behavior that can neither be stopped, swerved, nor delayed."

Joel

Riose pauses for a moment, staring into the implacable face of the old patrician, then announces his course.

Bel Riose

"I'll take that challenge. It's a dead hand against a living will."

Joel

As we get into the second part of this story, Bel Riose seems well on his way to proving his argument. His forces have captured a trading ship, captained by the swashbuckling Lathan Devers and thrown him into captivity with Barr. Riose has allied with the merciless Imperial envoy Brodrig and developed a sure strategy for defeat of the outgunned Foundation. Devers and Barr have befriended a guard by the name of Sergeant Luc through the use of the usual Foundation tactic of bribery, another running theme of this story. I've chosen this segment in which Luc meets his unfortunate end largely because of the introduction of a new element in Seldon crisis, audio production. My son Jeremy was enlisted to provide sound design to underscore key moments of the stories, and he uses it to excellent effect in this scene.

General Bel Riose has been hard at work on his war for two months and is short tempered and irritable. He has ordered Sergeant Luc to bring the two prisoners to his quarters and then to stand guard outside so he can speak to them privately. He informs them that their precious Foundation is clearly losing, despite fighting valiantly for each planet within their influence. While he speaks, Barr idly examines a crystalline bust of Cleon II on a nearby table.

Bel Riose

"Your Seldon is losing. To be sure, he battles well, for these men of the Foundations swarm like senseless bees and fight like mad men. Every planet is defended viciously and once taken, every planet heaves so with rebellion. It is as much trouble to hold as to conquer. But they are taken and they are held. Your Seldon is losing."

Ducem Barr

"But he has not yet lost."

Bel Riose

"The Foundation itself retains less optimism. They offer me millions in order that I may not put this Seldon to the final test."

This is clearly an allusion to the state secret which Brodrig had privately shared with Devers. Apparently, it is too juicy a bit of knowledge to not be shared by all who hear it. Riose also adds another news item that Brodrig has been made second in command.

Lathan Devers

"At his own request at his own request, Boss? How come? Are you coming to like the fellow?"

Bel Riose

"No, I can't say that I do. It's just that he bought the office at what I consider a fair and adequate price."

Joel

When asked what price, they are informed that it was the delivery of the needed reinforcements, five beautiful and highly lethal warships, which will make the conclusion of the war inevitable in short order. The emperor included his congratulations and promised to send more reinforcements if needed. Devers is shaken and can't hide his horror at the knowledge that the Foundation is lost. Riose pounces. He accuses Devers of being a committed partisan of the enemy despite his apparent good behavior. Devers denies it, but Riose has grown tired of the obvious deception.

Bel Riose

"You were caught easily. You surrendered at first blow with a burnt out shield. You're quite ready to desert your world, and that without a price. Interesting, all this, isn't it?"

Lathan Devers

"I crave to be on the winning side, boss. I'm a sensible man. You called me that yourself."

Bel Riose

"Granted. Yet no trader since has been captured. No trade ship but has had the speed to escape at choice. No trade ship, but has had a screen that could take all the beating a light cruiser could give it should it choose to fight. And no trader but has fought to death when occasion warranted. Traders have been traced as the leaders and instigators of the guerrilla warfare on occupied planets and of the flying raids in occupied space. Are you the only sensible man, then? You neither fight nor flee, but turn traitor without urging. You are unique. Amazingly unique, in fact, suspiciously unique."

Joel

He threatens to use the psychic probe once again, but before doing so insists that Devers and Barr remove their bracelets, which he has clearly discerned are the tools with which they have been keeping their secrets hidden from him. As he is about to use the probe to reveal the duplicity of his prisoners, a receiver on his desk glows and a message capsule clicks into the slot. He steps behind his desk and bends over to retrieve the message. Barr quietly raises the bust of Cleon II that he had been examining and in a quick and graceful motion brings it down upon Riose's head with a crash.

[Sounds of the crashing bust]

Joel

Devers is shocked at his friend's sudden transformation into a demon of action.

Ducem Barr

"Out, quickly!"

Joel

He seizes the general's blaster from his inert body. The two men hastily exit the chamber and command the stunned Sergeant Luc to lead them to the trader's ship, with Riose's captured blaster digging into his back. Upon their arrival at the airlock, Devers turns to the furious Luc.

Lathan Devers

"Stand where you are, Luc. You've been a decent man and we're not going to kill you."

Joel

He might have been well to stand and do as he was told, but the ever loyal sergeant had seen Riose's monogram on the blaster.

Sergeant Luc

"You've killed the general!"

[Luc charges Devers and yells incoherently]

Joel

In Asimov's words, "With a wild, incoherent yell, he charged blindly upon the blasting fury of the gun and collapsed in blasted ruin. The trade ship was rising above the dead planet before the signal lights began their eerie blink, and against the creamy cobweb of the great lens in the sky, which was the galaxy other black forms rose."

Sergeant Luc's wild charge and incoherent yell had to be voiced, and it fell upon me to produce it. At one point I sat in front of my computer and yelled incoherently a dozen times or so in various fashions to get a good choice of takes. For Jeremy to choose the best one, I had to find a moment when the house was empty or my wife would have thought I was having a serious breakdown of some kind. I enjoyed *The General* quite a lot, but found one thing kind of odd. The second part has lots of action besides the previous scene, it being followed by Devers and Barr rushing to Trantor and going on a spree of bribery in a frantic attempt to get the ear of the emperor to convince him of the treachery of his general and Brodrig and culminating in another violent scene similar to the one we just witnessed. It seems odd because it was also ultimately unnecessary, and Barr had explained as much in the preceding segment. Psychohistory had determined the outcome in advance, so all they really had to do was wait for the inevitable victory. It did make for a fun story, though.

Now we begin my favorite group of episodes in the entire series thus far, the three parts of "The Mule." For part I, I could have chosen one of several vignettes, including Magnifico's first visi-sonor performance, one of several Han Pritcher, Ebling Mis, or Mayor Indbur scenes, or of course, the epic fall of Terminus in the Time Vault. Instead, I chose the scene I had dreamed of doing from the beginning of the project the meeting of Bayta and Toran with Magnifico, the Mule's supposed clown on the beach at Kalgan. That was the scene I most recalled from the first time I had

read the story in my teens, and it was a pure joy to introduce the most fascinating character in the epic.

Now we return to the young lovers on their honeymoon, basking in the sun on the famous beaches at Kalgan. They're enjoying themselves somewhat, but, like the author, would prefer to be working, which in this case means making contact with the mysterious figure who has quietly overtaken this world. They've made no progress whatsoever in that regard. Down the beach a little way, they see a curious interaction. A thin and gangly acrobat is doing a handstand for the crowd's amusement. A beach guard tries to make him move off, and the clown takes one hand, places his thumb to his nose while still upside down, the guard is enraged and approaches, only to be kicked forcefully in the gut by the clown, who then runs off, protected by the crowd cackling with delight.

[Crowd laughing]

Joel

Bayta sees him approaching and says,

Bayta Darell

"He's a queer fellow."

Joel

When the entertainer gets closer, they get a better look at him, in Asimov's words, "The clown was close enough now to be seen clearly. His thin face drew together in front into a nose of generous planes and fleshy tip that seemed all but prehensile. His long, lean limbs and spidery body, accentuated by his costume, moved easily and with grace, but with just a suggestion of having been thrown together at random. To look was to smile."

The clown comes directly to Bayta and earnestly proclaims,

Magnifico

"Were I to use the wits the good spirits gave me, then I would say, this lady cannot exist. For what sane man would hold a dream to be reality? Yet rather would I not be sane and lend belief to charmed enchanted eyes."

Bayta Darell

"Wow!"

Joel

Toran laughs.

Toran Darell

"Oh, you enchantress. Go ahead, Bay. That deserves a five credit piece. Let him have it."

Magnifico

"No, my lady, mistake me not. I spoke not for money at all, but for bright eyes and sweet face."

Joel

Toran, maybe just a little peeved, says,

Toran Darell

"Will five credits cure your trouble?"

Bayta Darell

"Let me talk to him, Torie. There's no use being annoyed at his silly way of speaking. That's just his dialect, and our speech is probably as strange to him."

Joel

Speaking to the clown, she asks sweetly.

Bayta Darell

"What is your trouble? You're not worried about the guard, are you? He won't bother you."

Magnifico

"Oh, no, not he. He's but a windlet that blows the dust about my ankles. There is another that I flee and he is a storm that sweeps the worlds aside and throws them plunging at each other. A week ago, I ran away and have slept in the city streets and hid in city crowds. I've looked in many faces for help in need. I find it here! I find it here!"

Joel

Part I ended with the dramatic fall of the Foundation to the Mule and the tumultuous appearance by Seldon in the Time Vault when he got everything horribly wrong. Part II begins with the brutally depressing aftermath. We have the lunchroom scene on Haven with Bayta and three other women, all expertly voiced by Amanda Kreidler, expressing the horror and despair of the citizenry. It was tempting to feature this scene. Instead, I chose one near the end of the episode when our heroes are entertained by Emperor Dagobert IX, the doddering head of state of the pathetic remnant of Empire on Neotrantor.

Asimov doesn't get much opportunity to express his sense of humor in this particular story, but this vignette is one in which he allows himself a moment of release. Note the quick wit of Bayta in this exchange.

Dagobert IX

"This is a great pleasure for me, my dears. It is a moment away from ceremony and quarters. I have not had the opportunity for welcoming visitors from my outer provinces for a time now. My son takes care of these details now that I am older. You haven't met my son. A fine boy. Headstrong, perhaps, but then, he's young. Do you care for a flavor capsule? No?"

Joel

Toran attempts to capture the aging ruler's attention.

Toran Darell

"Your Imperial Majesty?"

Dagobert IX

"Yes?"

Toran Darell

"Your Imperial Majesty. It has not been our intention to intrude upon you."

Dagobert IX

"Nonsense. There is no intrusion tonight. There will be the official reception, but until then, we are free. Let's see. Where did you say you were from? It seems a long time since we had an official reception. You said you were from the province of Anacreon?"

Toran Darell

"From the Foundation, your Imperial Majesty."

Dagobert IX

"Yes, the Foundation, I remember now. I had it located. It is in the province of Anacreon. I have never been there. My doctor forbids extensive traveling. I don't recall any recent reports from my viceroy at Anacreon. How are conditions there, sire?"

Toran Darell

"I bring no complaints."

Dagobert IX

"That is gratifying. I will commend my viceroy."

Joel

Ebling Miss had been silent thus far but sought to cut to the chase.

Ebling Mis

"Sire, we have been told that it will require your permission for us to visit the Imperial University library on Trantor."

Dagobert IX

"Trantor? Trantor?" [pause] "Trantor... I remember now. I'm making plans now to return there with a flood of ships at my back. You shall come with me. Together we will destroy the rebel Gilmer. Together we shall restore the Empire!"

Joel

Magnifico whispered to Bayta.

Magnifico

"Is this really an emperor? For somehow I thought emperors were greater and wiser than ordinary men."

Joel

Bayta signaled the clown to hush then decided to play upon the man's vanity.

Bayta Darell

"If Your Imperial Majesty would but sign an order permitting us to go to Trantor, it would avail greatly to the common cause."

Dagobert IX

"To Trantor?"

Bayta Darell

"Sire, the Viceroy of Anacreon, in whose name we speak, sends word that Gilmer is yet alive."

Joel

The old king became suddenly vehement.

Dagobert IX

"Alive? Alive where? It will be war!"

Joel

Bayta sensed the opportunity and thought quickly.

Bayta Darell

"Your Imperial Majesty, it must not yet be known. His whereabouts are uncertain. The Viceroy sends us to acquaint you of the fact, and it is only on Trantor that we may find his hiding place once discovered."

Dagobert IX

"Yes, yes, he must be found." [rings bell] "My servants do not come. I cannot wait for them. Gilmer will yet learn the power of his Emperor." [scribbles on paper] "Where was it you say you came from? Anacreon. What are the conditions there? Is the name of the Emperor powerful?"

Joel

Bayta, quietly overjoyed at the success of her gambit, quickly secured the message while continuing to butter up the doddering fool.

Bayta Darell

"Your Imperial Majesty is beloved by all the people. Your love for them is widely known."

Dagobert IX

"I shall have to visit my good people of Anacreon, but my doctor says... I don't remember what he says... but were you saying something of Gilmer?"

Bayta Darell

"No, Your Imperial Majesty."

Dagobert IX

"He shall not advance further. Go back and tell your people that Trantor shall hold! My father leads the fleet now, and the rebel vermin Gilmer shall freeze in space with his regicidal rabble! What was I saying?"

Joel

Toran, aware that they now had the security of passage they sought, decided to gracefully end the audience.

Toran Darell

"Your Imperial Majesty has been kind to us, but the time allotted for an audience is over."

Joel

In our final scene, the intrepid travelers have arrived at the ruins of the capital on Trantor. Ebling Mis has been furiously attempting to discern the location of the Second Foundation among the psychohistorical archives in what remains of the Imperial Library, while Bayta and Toran have been growing more and more anxious and despondent, and Magnifico has taken on a suspicious fascination with Ebling's work in the library. Bayta has taken to carrying a blaster in her purse, which her husband finds rather annoying. Ebling Miss isn't just working hard, he seems ready to drop dead from exhaustion, or perhaps of another cause entirely.

Toran has just been peevishly nagging his wife about her new habit of concealing a deadly weapon for no obvious reason. When they are interrupted by Magnifico.

Magnifico

"The learned doctor calls for you. He is not well."

Joel

They rush to the library and find Ebling more frail than ever. He appears on the edge of death, but his tired face bears a new expression.

Bayta Darell

"Ebling!"

Ebling Mis

"Let me speak. Let me speak. I am finished. The work I pass on to you. I have kept no notes. The scrap figures I have destroyed. No other must know. All must remain in your minds."

Bayta Darell

"Magnifico, go upstairs."

Ebling Mis

"He won't matter. Let him stay. Stay, Magnifico. I am convinced the Second Foundation can win if it is not caught prematurely by the Mule. It has kept itself secret. The secrecy must be upheld. It has a purpose. You must go there. Your information is vital. May make all the difference. Do you hear me?"

Joel

Torn pleads in near agony.

Toran Darell

"Yes, yes! Tell us how to get there, Ebling. Where is it?"

Joel

Mis spoke so faintly, they all strained to hear his words.

Ebling Mis

"I can tell you."

Joel

In Asimov's chilling words. "He never did. Bayta, face frozen white, lifted her blaster and shot with an echoing clap of noise. From the waist upward, Mis was not, and a ragged hole was in the wall behind. From numb fingers, Bayta's blaster dropped to the floor."

[Sound of blaster fire and blaster falling]

Joel

If you only have time to listen, or dare I ask, re-listen to any episodes in season one and two, I suggest the three episodes of The Mule. In my opinion, it's Asimov's greatest story within the entire epic, among so many great ones. Of course, it's even better to read it, and I envy anyone who still has the pleasure awaiting them. That's all for this week, and I want to thank all the people who helped me produce these episodes. First, let me call out Mike Topping, the designer of the Seldon Crisis logo, which you can now get on stickers, mugs and t-shirts.

Secondly, the producer and arranger of the great theme music, Tom Barnes. The sound design, as well as video clips featured on the Seldon Crisis YouTube page, are the work of Jeremy MacKinnon and the voice of Bayta Darell and her lunch room companions and hopefully many more female characters to come, was the work of Amanda Kreidler, who is also featured on the Severed Fate and Dimension Door podcasts. Lastly, I want to thank all my listeners and especially the ones who have reached out via Twitter and in email to provide your feedback. This podcast is a lot of fun to do, but it's even more fun when I know people are listening.

If you like what you hear, or even if you don't, please reach out and let me know. My email address is joel@seldoncristis.net, and I'm frequently on Twitter @JoelGMcKinnon. Also, if you want to help me produce the

podcast, consider becoming a patron for as little as a dollar a month and get access to exclusive content and special deals on merch. Please enjoy the rest of your holidays and the New Year ahead, and stay tuned for "History and Foundation," here on Seldon Crisis.

[Closing theme music]