

Search by the Mule, Part I



[Opening theme music with voiceovers.]

The Mule

"If only he had lived another minute. He was on the point of telling me where the Second Foundation was."

Han Pritcher

"You're trying to tell me that-"

Bail Channis

"I'm not trying. That is Tazenda... Star's End."

Fifth Speaker

"I have word from the First Speaker."

Third Speaker

"Intersection point?"

Fifth Speaker

"Yes! May we live to see the dawn!"

[Theme music plays out.]

Joel

Before beginning this episode of Seldon Crisis. Please be advised that this is an independently created podcast and is not meant to be a substitute for reading the books, nor is it affiliated with the family or estate of Isaac Asimov.

Welcome back, friends. After a long hiatus filled with some very special guest episodes and essays for the genuine article, Isaac Asimov's Foundation. Today we start season three of Seldon Crisis, corresponding with the novel "Second Foundation." The first section of this third volume of the original trilogy begins a few years after the conclusion of the Mule, where we will test out Bayta's bold prediction upon being informed by the Mule that, "In a sense, you have defeated me."

Bayta's answer, you might recall, began with the declaration, "In a sense? We have defeated you entirely!" It seemed a little overly bombastic considering the position of the Foundation at the time completely conquered by the Mule's forces which had occupied their former capital of Terminus City and replaced the pathetic last of the Mayor Indburs with a viceroy who'd, once, as the warlord of the pleasure planet of Kalgan, had ambitions to rule the galaxy himself. Now, the Mule had taken his place in the Imperial Palace on that vacation world where, as First Citizen of the Union of Worlds, he alone occupied its vast and luxurious halls, while his armies, led by those he had converted to his cause, effortlessly maintained his power.

He was not a happy conqueror, however, as Bayta had surmised. The Mule's inability to find the mysterious Second Foundation was eating at him. He had come so close. A few words from the great psychologist Ebling Miss from knowing the location of his hidden enemy, only to have his victory stolen by a surprise blaster shot from the woman under whose spell he had mysteriously fallen in the five years since that fateful

moment. He'd sent the former captain Han Pritcher, now bearing the title of General, out on numerous missions to get more information about the Foundation. Reputedly run by men with metallic powers like his own, Pritcher had repeatedly returned without any new clues.

Perhaps the Second Foundation didn't exist at all. Perhaps it would be best to assume that was the case and continue the quest to rule the entire galaxy until evidence of its existence might appear at some point. No, he must know the truth. He had a new strategy in mind that might bear fruit at last. He summoned the loyal, but so far ineffective General Pritcher to an audience in his ghostly and cavernous palace for a private audience to reveal his new approach. The artificially loyal Pritcher takes his seat without formality, and the Mule begins with an air of disappointment.

The Mule

"Your final report reached me yesterday. I can't deny that I find it somewhat depressing, Pritcher. "

Joel

Pritcher speaks somberly and dispassionately.

Han Pritcher

"Yes, I imagine so. But I don't see to what other conclusions I could have come. There just isn't any Second Foundation, sir."

Joel

The Mule, reminded of the moment of his greatest error, spits out in disgust.

The Mule

"If only he had lived another minute. He was on the point of telling me where the Second Foundation was. He knew, I'm telling you. I need not have retreated. I need not have waited and waited. So much time lost. Five years gone for nothing."

Han Pritcher

"Secrecy as deep as this is past possibility without non existence as well."

The Mule

"No. It does exist. There is going to be a slight change in tactics. You will have to go out once again - one last time. But with another in joint command."

Joel

Pritcher looked surprised.

Han Pritcher

"Who, sir?"

The Mule

"There's a young man here in Kalgan, Bail Channis."

Han Pritcher

"I've never heard of him, sir. "

The Mule

"No, I imagine not. But he's got an agile mind, he's ambitious, and he's not converted."

Joel

With this introductory conversation, Asimov reveals a major theme of this chapter - the limits and utility of control. You might recall that when we first met Captain Pritcher, he was a highly effective intelligence operative for the Foundation, but that he had an unorthodox and often problematic style in the eyes of his superiors. He just wasn't particularly good at taking orders. He was one of the first to recognize the danger of the Mule because he had a habit of thinking unconventionally and saw the patterns of the Mule's activities clearly from the outset, though, Mayor Indbur's agenda had been to clamp down on the traders on Haven who were refusing to pay their taxes. Pritcher had been explicitly ordered there, but ignored his orders and went to Kalgan instead, where he met Toran, Bayta and Magnifico for the first time.

Now he had become the ultimate order follower. The Mule had implanted within him an unbreakable devotion, which was the antithesis of what had made him so effective as an intelligence operative. We'll see throughout this chapter that Pritcher understands this at a deeper level, and it frustrates him terribly and undermines his ability to serve the Mule as he clearly desires. He's really one of the most tragic figures Asimov has created in the series.

Bail Channis is another story entirely. He's a charming and handsome rising star in Kalgan society and more than a bit of a smart-ass. As the Mule said, he's not converted, but he is ambitious, and the Mule thinks he might be more useful to his purposes due to his freedom of thought. After dismissing Pritcher, Channis finds himself face to face with the new master of the galaxy and doesn't appear to be intimidated in the least. He wastes no time in letting the Mule know that he is eager to get involved.

Bail Channis

"There are those that say a renewal of the galactic offensive is being planned. It has a hope with me that such is true and that I might play an appropriate part."

Joel

The Mule asks,

The Mule

"Then you think there is a Second Foundation?"

Bail Channis

"Why not? It would make things so much more interesting."

The Mule

"And you find interest in it as well?"

Bail Channis

"Certainly. In the very mystery of it!"

Joel

Rumors had been circulating for some time regarding this mysterious Second Foundation for which the Mule had been searching. With no hard facts available, the rumors had ramped up to a fever pitch that this mysterious group had developed extraordinary mental capabilities that they may even have become pure mind and have the capacity to do terrible things at a great distance. The people knew of the Mule's awesome power and any group that had remained free of his control must be frightfully advanced. The Mule wanted to know if Channis was in this camp.

The Mule

"Do you subscribe to this mind power notion?"

Joel

Channis laughed.

Bail Channis

"Galaxy, no! Do you think creatures like that would stay on their own planet? No, sir. I think the Second Foundation remains hidden because it is weaker than we think."

The Mule

"In that case, I can explain myself very easily. How would you like to head an expedition to locate the Second Foundation? I intend to unite the galaxy now and reach Seldon's thousand year goal in three hundred. One Foundation - the world of physical scientists - is still flourishing under me. Under the prosperity and order of the Union, these atomic weapons they have developed are capable of dealing with anything in the Galaxy - except perhaps the Second Foundation. So I must know more about it. General Pritcher is of the definite opinion that it does not exist at all. I know otherwise."

Bail Channis

"How do you know, sir?"

The Mule

"Because minds under my control have been interfered with. Delicately, subtly. Not so subtly that I couldn't notice. And these interferences are increasing and hitting valuable men at important times. Do you wonder now that a certain discretion has kept me motionless these years? That is your importance? General Pritcher is the best man left me, so he is no longer safe. Of course, he does not know that. But you are unconverted and therefore not instantly detectable as a Mule's man. You may fool the Second Foundation longer than one of my own men would. Perhaps just sufficiently longer."

Channis smiled broadly.

Bail Channis

"I'm delighted at the chance."

The Mule

"Yes. Apparently it occurs to you that you will perform a unique service worthy of a unique reward, perhaps even that of being my successor. Quite so. But there are unique punishments too, you know. My emotional gymnastics are not confined to the creation of loyalty alone."

Joel

The Mule decides that the time has come to give Channis just a glimpse of his powers and let him know the downside of any potential disloyalty.

Asimov describes the demonstration, "And the little smile on his thin lips was grim as Channis leapt out of his seat in horror. For just an instant, just one flashing instant, Channis had felt the pang of an overwhelming grief close over him. It had slammed down with a physical pain that had blackened his mind unbearably and then lifted. Now nothing was left but the strong wash of anger."

The Mule

"Anger won't help. Yes, you're covering it up now, aren't you? But I can see it. So just remember that sort of business can be made much more intense and kept up. I've killed men by emotional control, and there's no death crueller. That's all."

Joel

We see at once that this version of the Mule is darker than the one we'd known previously as poor Magnifico, a largely sympathetic character. Despite his awesome powers, this Mule, after five years of failure to gain significant advantage over a hidden enemy, is not above the use of sadistic torture to achieve his aims.

The Mule dismisses Channis, and the preparations are begun for his joint mission with Pritcher to find the Second Foundation once and for all. We couldn't imagine an odder couple than the sad veteran General Pritcher, firmly under the yoke of the Mule's emotional control, and the swaggering and ambitious young Channis, free to think as he pleases and now well aware of the dark consequences should his mission not be successful.

[Theme excerpt to indicate scene change.]

Joel

To this point in our story, the Second Foundation has been little more than a rumor based upon a few words uttered by Hari Seldon and the information Ebling Miss had uncovered in the psychohistorical archives in the ruined Imperial Library on Trantor. Mis had been sure they existed and had apparently discovered their physical location in the galaxy, but had been prevented from revealing it to anyone. They did indeed exist, and now we will meet them for the first time. They are not super beings, as the wild rumors suggested, but ordinary humans., schooled deeply in the mathematics of psychohistory.

They had also cultivated certain skills unavailable to most human beings... the ability to penetrate and shape the emotions and thoughts of others in their immediate environment. Not the ability to read minds at will, but to sense meaning from the smallest clues. We will listen in on a conference in an unknown locale of several of these beings identified only as numbered speakers.

Asimov describes their methods of communication. "Speech, as known to us, was unnecessary. A fragment of a sentence amounted almost to a long winded redundancy a gesture, a grunt, the curve of a facial line, even a significantly timed pause yielded informational juice. The liberty is taken, therefore, of freely translating a small portion of the conference into the extremely specific word combinations necessary to minds oriented from childhood to a physical science philosophy, even at the risk of losing the more delicate nuances."

The First Speaker begins by emitting the thoughts,

First Speaker

"It is apparently quite definite now as to what stopped the Mule in his first mad rush. Apparently, he almost located us by means of the artificially heightened brain energy of what they call a psychologist on the First Foundation. This psychologist was killed just before he could communicate his discovery to the Mule."

Joel

The Fifth Speaker's mind begins to emanate a report,

Fifth Speaker

"It is certain that the situation was mishandled. We are, of course, highly vulnerable under mass attack, particularly an attack led by such a mental phenomenon as the Mule. We have spent considerable time analyzing the forces that stopped him. We know, of course, what was driving him on so in the first place. The internal ramifications of his physical deformity and mental uniqueness are obvious to all of us. Our agents are certain that it was a girl that killed the Mule's psychologist, a girl for whom the Mule felt trust out of sentiment and whom he therefore did not control mentally simply because she liked him. Since that event, we have held the Mule off by unorthodox methods with which we daily risk Seldon's entire scheme of history. That is all."

Joel

The First Speaker responds in a similar mode.

First Speaker

"The situation is then highly unstable, with Seldon's original scheme bent to the fracture point, and I must emphasize that we have blundered badly in this whole matter in our horrible lack of foresight. We are faced with an irreversible breakdown of the plan. Time is passing us by. I think there is only one solution left us, and even that is risky. We must allow the Mule to find us. In a sense I repeat, in a sense."

[Theme excerpt signifies scene change]

Joel

Channis and Pritcher are on board the general's vessel and prepared for departure. All that awaits is a proper destination. The Mule had suggested they start again with the sight of his humiliation at the hands of Bayta and Toran on Trantor. But Pritcher said that there was nothing further to be gained there, that it had been sucked dry. Channis has been pondering this problem and decides to share his conjectures.

Bail Channis

"Pritcher, it's too far a coincidence."

"I'm not aware of the subject of conversation."

Channis, with an ebullient wave, said,

"Oh well then, drag up a chair, old man, and let's get into it. I've been going over your notes. I find them excellent."

Han Pritcher

"How pleasant that you do."

Joel

You can tell these guys are just going to get along wonderfully. Channis continues,

Bail Channis

"Well, you're from the First Foundation, which I'm not. The implications are probably obvious to you. We must find a world which rules by virtue of mental skills and yet which is very backward scientifically. Well, then, what of the Oligarchy of Tazenda?"

Joel

Pritcher thought briefly.

Han Pritcher

"Tazenda? Oh, I think I know it. They're not in the periphery are they? It seems to me they're fully a third of the way towards the center of the galaxy. Yes. What of that?"

Bail Channis

"The Second Foundation was established at Star's End."

Joel

Channis was referring to a couple of cryptic notes attributed to Hari Seldon in his appearances in the Time Vault that had always been thought to mean that the Second Foundation was as far away from Terminus as possible while still being in the same galaxy. This had been the region of space Pritcher had visited at length and combed futilely for some hint of the mysterious location alluded to by Seldon. Pritcher shook his head.

Han Pritcher

"No such region in the galaxy has ever been located."

Joel

But Channis is undeterred.

Bail Channis

"Because it was a local name suppressed later for greater secrecy or maybe one invented for the purpose by Seldon and his group. Yet there's some relationship between Star's End and Tazenda, don't you think?"

Joel

Now, Asimov introduces a bit of futuristic technology that, from the vantage point of the 1940s, would have seemed truly fantastic, but is pretty much a standard trope in the latest Sci-Fi films and television series in which a beautiful and sophisticated map of the galaxy can spring into view and be manipulated by various hand gestures. He calls his version "the lens," and I'll share a little of his description.

"The lens was perhaps the newest feature of the interstellar cruisers of the day. Actually, it was a complicated calculating machine which could throw on a screen a reproduction of the night sky as seen from any given point of the galaxy."

It's not even described as 3D, but it is the processing power that would have seemed unfathomable to an audience that had never experienced the power of computers. Channis does a few manipulations of the view on screen and Pritcher becomes impatient.

"What is it you're trying to show me?"

Bail Channis

"The map will explain it. Do you see the dark nebula? Watch it. I'm going to expand the image. This has been called "The Mouth" by the inhabitants of that region of space. And that is significant because it is only from the Trantorian orientation that it looks like a mouth."

Joel

Channis made further manipulations within the lens that gave Pritcher the illusion of motion. Stars whipping past the dark nebula expanding only until one faint star became visible on screen which Channis centered in the view... Stars End.

Bail Channis

"The fabric of the nebula is thin there and the light of that one star finds its way through in just that one direction to shine on Trantor."

Han Pritcher

"You're trying to tell me that-"

Bail Channis

"I'm not trying. That is Tazenda, Star's End. Tazenda is an oligarchy. It rules 27 inhabited planets. It's not advanced scientifically. And most of all, it is an obscure world that has adhered to a strict neutrality in the local politics of that stellar region and is not expansionist. I think we ought to see it."

Joel

Pritcher is peeved that Channis seems capable of the kind of original thinking that once made him so effective. His first thought, though, is to communicate this idea to his master.

Han Pritcher

"Have you informed the Mule of this?"

Bail Channis

"No. Nor shall we. We're in space now, about to make the first hop."

Han Pritcher

"By whose order?"

Bail Channis

"By my order, General. While I was engaging you here, you probably felt no acceleration because it came at the moment I was expanding the field of the lens. And you undoubtedly imagined it to be an illusion of the apparent star motion."

Joel

Wow. Pritcher's ship sure is quiet, or conversion has made him not only slow witted, but hard of hearing as well. Maybe the manipulations of the lens come with cool sound effects that mask the sounds from the engine room. Another little problem with this scenario is the G forces involved. Pritcher's ship begins to look pretty darn amazing. Okay, I'll stop quibbling. It's sci-fi after all.

Pritcher is again quite troubled by Channis's capabilities and quick intelligence and wonders again what price he has paid in his conversion and continuing devotion to the Mule. But the thought passes quickly, and he makes a point to congratulate Channis while asserting his need to be kept informed.

"Well done. However, you will consult me in the future before making decisions of this nature."

Channis's attention is caught by a flickering signal on the ship's control dashboard.

"That's the engine room. They warmed up on five minutes notice, and I asked them to let me know if there was any trouble. Want to hold the fort? Upon entering the engine room, Channis finds the chief engineer holding an electronic device and explains that it is a hypertracer designed to track a ship's progress as it navigates a route through hyperspace and relays the ship's coordinates and route to someone tracking its location.

He had found it exactly where Channis had privately told him to look for it and is instructed to return it to where he'd found it and to forget the incident. Channis returns to the con, and we learn more about the lens. It is a compact device that can. "pinpoint accurately 100 million separate stars in exact relationship to each other." Through spectroscopic analysis, it could identify each star precisely. This shows again Asimov's knowledge of recent advances in sciences and his chemistry background, and how he could quickly grasp the implications of these new capabilities in writing a compelling story.

Channis finds Pritcher in his quarters preparing for bed and informs him they'll soon be at Tazenda. Channis asks Pritcher's impression of a historical film he'd recommended with some background on Tazenda.

Han Pritcher

"All right. They have good rulers and bad. They've conquered a few planets, won some battles, lost a few. There is nothing distinctive about them. I don't think much of your theory, Channis."

Bail Channis

"But you've missed a few points. Didn't you notice that they never formed coalitions? They always remained completely outside the politics of this corner of the star swarm. As you say, they conquered a few planets, but then they stopped, and that without any startling defeat of consequence. It's just as if they spread out enough to protect themselves, but not enough to attract attention.

Han Pritcher

"Very well. I have no objection to landing. At the worst, a little lost time."

Bail Channis

"Oh, no. At the worst, complete defeat. If it is the Second Foundation, remember it would be a world of space knows how many Mules."

Han Pritcher

"What do you plan to do?"

Bail Channis

"Land on some minor subject planet. Find out as much as we can about Tazenda first, then improvise from that."

Han Pritcher

"All right. No objection, if you don't mind. Now I would like the light out."

Joel

Once in bed for the night, Pritcher lays awake thinking about Tazenda and if Channis could be right, that it was the home of the Second Foundation. He recalls the Mule's description of the final words of Ebling Miss. "It was as if astonishment had overwhelmed Mis. It was as though something about the Second Foundation had surpassed all his expectations, had driven in a direction completely different from what he might have assumed. If I could only have read his thoughts rather than his emotions. Yet the emotions were plain, and above everything else was this vast surprise."

Pritcher thinks again about Channis and his confident excitement about this apparently mundane world they are approaching, and realizes it could fit the facts if this is indeed the surprising home of the Second Foundation, he also thinks about the hypertracer he'd hidden and how it still remained in place when he'd recently checked. He eventually drifts off to sleep, content in the knowledge that his beloved master would be aware of their every move.

[Theme excerpt signifies scene change.]

Joel

We return to the unknown location where the speakers of the Second Foundation are taking a break before another formal strategy and planning session. They are conversing, in a sense, on the high stakes of the coming encounter for which they are preparing.

Again, they aren't speaking these words so much as flashing quick thoughts and body language immediately discernible to each other. But Asimov presents it as conversation as follows.

First Speaker

"So the Mule is on his way."

Third Speaker

"It's what I hear too. Risky. Mighty risky!"

First Speaker

"Not if affairs adhere to the functions set up."

Fifth Speaker

"The Mule is not an ordinary man, and it is difficult to manipulate his chosen instruments without detection by him. The controlled minds are difficult to touch. They say he's caught on to a few cases."

First Speaker

"Yes. I don't see how that can be avoided."

Fifth Speaker

"Uncontrolled minds are easier, but so few are in positions of authority under him."

Joel

Channis had selected for their landing a backward world under control of the oligarchy of Tazenda called Rossem. The planet had a brutally cold climate, and most of the inhabitants were peasant farmers scratching out meager living. It had a forest belt with trees known for producing a high quality wood prized throughout the sector, which the Rossemites traded for food and other essential goods that could not be produced locally. Channis was hoping that from this vantage point he and Pritcher could learn more about Tazenda and assess the likelihood of his theory that it was the home of the Second Foundation.

We are introduced to a peasant family to get a taste for the lifestyle of the inhabitants. They're not worthy of a lot of attention, to be honest. One thing that's somewhat interesting is that their main mode of transport is what appears to be old style motor cars run on liquid fuel and ride on tires. This shows how comparatively backward the planet is. I like the idea that a civilization essentially on the level of our current times, is viewed as practically medieval from the vantage point of the far future of even this fallen empire. It reminds me of Salvor Hardin's comment when told of the lack of nuclear technology on Anacreon, "Back to iron and coal are they?"

On Rossem, a peasant named Narovri and his wife, only referred to as the old woman, witness the descent of Pritcher and Channis' ship. Narovri senses that it might be an opportunity to provide what little hospitality he and his family can to hopefully gain leverage with the Elders, as the nearby village leaders are called. We step forward now to a meager dinner at the home of Narovri and the old woman and their teenage son. Pritcher is anxious, while Channis seems disconcertingly at ease. He seems to have a talent for annoying Pritcher just with his easy going personality.

They are told by the Rossemites of an imminent visit from the Elders, and Channis tells Narovri that he will speak well of their hospitality when the Elders arrive. When the dinner is concluded, Pritcher privately vents his annoyance to Channis.

Han Pritcher

"I am not particularly fond of this meeting of the Elders. Have you any thoughts on the subject?"

Bail Channis

"No. What worries you?"

Han Pritcher

"It seems we have better things to do than to become conspicuous here."

Joel

Channis explains that it is necessary for them to draw some attention, but that it is better to do so here on this backward world where the representatives of the Second Foundation would likely be very few and easier to handle. On Tazenda itself. They could easily be overwhelmed by the mentality capabilities of a large number of Second Foundationers and lose any chance of gaining advantage over them.

The Elders arrive, and there are three of them. One bows respectfully and invites the visitors to a large gathering of Elders in the village meeting hall on the following day. Channis agrees readily, and Pritcher decides to suspend his misgivings for the moment.

[Theme excerpt indicates scene change]

Joel

We return very briefly to the view from the perspective of their quarry, the mysterious Second Foundation. A meeting has concluded, and he is alone, gazing at the night sky. He is pondering the great challenge before them. Until now, they have interacted with a few of the Mule's converted followers, but he knows the time comes soon when they will have to engage with the great mutant directly. He is not at all sure they are ready. There has been a lot of doubt and questioning about how they will engage him when the time comes. A great sense of foreboding and uncertainty dominates in the small community of speakers.

Back on Rossem, the meeting with the Elders has begun. Channis and Pritcher find them to be an odd lot, mostly old and quiet, dignified in

their behavior. They seem to be slow thinkers, however, pausing for considerable lengths before speaking. They have a ceremonial dinner with little real nourishment and go through various formalities, then break for an informal session at which they gather around the visitors and proceed to ask an abundance of questions. They ask about what it is like to operate a spaceship, how other worlds vary in climate, how often they shave, and many other questions that Pritcher, as the older, is expected to handle and does with growing ease.

After some time, Channis grows impatient and attempts to turn the questions to the Elders so as to finally get some much needed information.

Bail Channis

"Good sirs, you must answer us for a while, for we are strangers and would be very much interested to know all we can of Tazenda."

Joel

The Elders fall silent and appear anxious at the comment until Pritcher interjects.

Han Pritcher

"My companion asks this in friendliness, for the fame of Tazenda fills the galaxy and we, of course, shall inform the Governor of the loyalty and love of the Elders of Rossem. We do not know in our far part of the universe much of the past history of the Lords of Tazenda. We presume. They have ruled benevolently here for a long time."

Joel

The Elders inform them that there has been a long period of peace, but that men on other worlds who have betrayed the authority of Tazenda have been swiftly punished. It appears that there is little spirit of rebellion here upon Rossem. The general tone is one of a wish to avoid trouble and be at peace. The Elders speak of a Governor, and Pritcher asks if a meeting with him can be arranged. There is suddenly an element of bewilderment among the Elders. One of the leaders among the Elders speaks.

Elder

"Why did you not know the Governor will be here tomorrow? He has expected you. It has been a great honor for us. We hope earnestly that you will report to him satisfactorily as to our loyalty to him."

Joel

Pritcher hides his alarm.

Han Pritcher

"Expected us? Why?"

Elder

"It is now a week since we've been waiting for you."

Joel

After the meeting, Channis and Pritcher are shown to their unexpectedly decent lodgings in advance of the meeting with the Governor and finally have a chance to privately discuss their situation. Pritcher is agitated.

Han Pritcher

"We seem to be anticipated."

Bail Channis

"Yes."

Han Pritcher

"Just that? You have no contribution of greater pith to make. We come here and find that the Governor expects us. Presumably we shall find from the Governor that Tazenda itself expects us. Of what value, then, is our entire mission?"

Bail Channis

"To expect us is one thing. To know who we are and what we came for is another."

Han Pritcher

"Do you expect to conceal these things from men of the Second Foundation?"

Bail Channis

"Perhaps. Why not? Are you ready to throw your hand in? Suppose our ship was detected. In space. Is it unusual for a realm to maintain frontier observation posts? Even if we were ordinary strangers, we would be of interest."

Han Pritcher

"Sufficient interest for a governor to come to us rather than the reverse?"

Bail Channis

"We'll have to meet that problem later. Let's see what this governor is like."

Joel

Channis explains that he is more sure than ever that Tazenda must be the Second Foundation. The attitude of the Elders towards their ruling world shows an unnatural subservience that he thinks can only be the result of mentalic manipulation.

Bail Channis

"The proper mental attitudes are so inserted into their minds that I am certain that not a Tazendian soldier exists on the planet. Don't you see all this?"

Han Pritcher

"I'll see perhaps when I see the governor. And what, by the way, if our mentalities are handled?"

Bail Channis

"You should be accustomed to that."

Joel

This touches a nerve with Pritcher, who is not pleased at being reminded of his control by the Mule. The men speak no more that day.

In the evening, after Channis has fallen asleep, Pritcher contacts the ship secretly by a means unknown to Channis, and has a brief exchange with someone on board. He asks if any communications have been received and is told that none have arrived, but they wait. As always in the cold and uncertainty of the night, Pritcher's anxieties surface once more. He wonders if the Mule was correct in his concern that his conversion had robbed him of his edge and that he is no longer capable of independent thought and action. He is too tired to dwell on it for long and eventually falls asleep.

The next day the governor arrives, driven by a chauffeur, and we are treated to a brief description of his ground car. "The ground car itself was of lush design, but to Pritcher it appeared inefficient. It turned clumsily more than once. It apparently balked at what might have been a too rapid change of gears. It was obvious at once from its design that it ran on chemical and not on atomic fuel."

The arrival of the governor provokes intense anxiety in Pritcher, and apparently none at all in Channis, which, as usual, disturbed him greatly. He reflects with great effort on the time before he was converted and tries to imagine how he could once have tried to assassinate his master. He only knew now that he would never lose his loyalty and devotion to the Mule, and heartily resents Channis' comparative freedom of thought. He also dreads the encounter with the governor and wonders what might happen if he is a Second Founder and tampers with his mind. Would he even have the capacity to resist?

Asimov describes Pritcher's memory of his conversion by the Mule. "There had been no sensation the first time. There had been no pain, no mental jar, not even a feeling of discontinuity. He had always loved the Mule. If there had ever been a time long before, as long before as five short years when he had thought he hadn't loved him, that he had hated him, that was just a horrid illusion. The thought of that illusion embarrassed him."

The meeting with the governor is uneventful, save for some momentary tension when he asks to see their ship and Channis informs him that it is undergoing repairs and won't be available for a couple of days. Eventually the governor relents and, appearing to be satisfied with the audience, departs.

Then we have a fascinating interlude in which Pritcher alone looks inward for the evidence of tampering. He performs a test in which he proclaims internally the Second Foundation must be discovered and destroyed, and

then gauges his feelings. All he could feel was the hate that he shared with the Mule for their mutual foe. He then tries substituting "the Mule" for "the Second Foundation" and finds himself unable to even begin to voice the statement. He feels by this that there is no evidence he has been tampered with by the governor. His loyalty remains steadfast.

While Channis is preoccupied elsewhere, Pritcher again contacts the ship privately and asks his secretive question. The answer comes swiftly, and this time it was exactly what he was waiting to hear. He masks his joy and betrays nothing externally to Channis, but knows that the farce is nearly at an end.

[Mysterious music signifies scene change.]

Once more we visit with our mysterious Second Foundation friends in their unknown locale. A pair of speakers are passing on a road, perhaps going to or from their meeting chamber. One speaker leans close to the other to share some private information of which she is clearly concerned.

Fifth Speaker

"I have word from the First Speaker."

Third Speaker

"Intersection point?"

Fifth Speaker

"Yes! May we live to see the dawn!"

[Theme music excerpt signifies conclusion.]

Joel

And that, my friends, is where we must leave things for now. There are multiple perspectives at play and a lot of moving parts. The Mule on Kalgan would appear to be carefully observing the progress of Channis and Pritcher, or at least knows their location. His two operatives have made contact with the natives of Rossem, and possibly even with a representative of the Tazenda authorities. There has been no outward appearance that their mission had been compromised, apart from the unexplained awareness their hosts had of their arrival beforehand. Channis and Pritcher seem to have competing secret agendas, and the latter has just been privately informed of some mysterious news that has elevated his typically dour outlook. Meanwhile, our friends of the Second Foundation seem to believe something big is about to happen, something they seem not to be entirely prepared for.

I want to prepare you and entice you to come back for the conclusion of this story. Thus far, this has been mostly lead up to something very consequential in the continuing history of the galaxy as predicted by the Seldon Plan. The Mule's power is entrenched and ambitious, and the Second Foundation appears unready to confront it. We don't know what to make of the agendas of Channis and Pritcher, particularly the latter's skullduggery with his covert communications with someone on board the vessel that brought them to Rossem. Why is he suddenly so uncharacteristically cheerful?

Most mysteriously, we still do not know where the Second Foundation is located. Are they, as Channis seems sure, upon Tazenda, and are they aware of the two operatives of the Mule who are apparently closing in on their great secret that Bayta had preserved with her shocking action that ended the life of Ebling Mis in the previous chapter? By now you should be aware that in reading Asimov, things are rarely as they seem, and the only sure thing is that you will be surprised by the conclusion. The

remaining activity of this chapter involves very few participants and only a single location. It covers a very brief stretch of time, but includes a series of intense moments and stunning twists with enormously consequential actions. Our concluding episode of Search by the Mule will reveal all.

I want to call attention to a new podcast I just discovered called Rehydrate. It's a show hosted by three hosts who read books together and give their impressions and analysis on them section by section as they are discovering them. They've previously covered Liu Cixin's "Remembrance of Earth's Past" trilogy, also known as "The Three Body Problem," and are now covering Asimov's Foundation trilogy, including more voices and perspectives with interviews with translators, experts, and just other fans of the books.

I just listened to two of their episodes covering the events of the Mule, and my favorite thing about it is that they allowed themselves to discover the big twist at the end without being spoiled in advance. It was really fun to hear them anticipating the later part of the story with lots of ideas and mistaken assumptions, just as one should experience an Asimov story and then hear their delightful reactions upon discovering the shocking conclusion. It just so happens that they are covering the exact same part of the books as I am currently, with their treatment of Second Foundation just coming out along with mine. I love the growing community of Asimov aficionados in the podcasting world!

Thanks as always to my collaborators on this adventure Jeremy MacKinnon for the sound design, Amanda Kreidler with the voice of the Fifth Speaker of the Second Foundation, and Mike Topping for the Seldon Crisis cover art now available on stickers and t-shirts. Careful listeners might have noticed something else that's changed. Season three features a new variation on our theme music, courtesy of Tom Barnes. I'll let the new theme play out in full at the end of the episode for your enjoyment. I also want to thank my wonderful patrons and all the loyal listeners of this

podcast. Please keep interacting with me via email at joel@seldoncrisis.net and on Twitter @JoelGMcKinnon.

In our next interim episode, I'll be sharing the stage with two gentlemen I've come to know through their writings on some fascinating topics related to the future of humanity. One guest is an author of several works of independent Sci-Fi set in an alternative human future in which humanoid robots and a dramatic cast of characters interact on Earth and on a thriving settlement on Mars. We'll discuss his book "New Eyes," which I hope to encourage others to read. A second guest is the author of the incredibly visionary and ambitious "K3+," a novel which only covers the next billion years of humanity in our galaxy and features a protagonist born in our current times and who witnesses the entire journey. The conversation should be a lot of fun.

Join me in our next episode, "Indie Sci-fi with Tobias Cabral and Erasmo Acosta," here on Seldon Crisis!

[Closing theme music.]