

## Search by the Mule, Part II



[Opening theme music with voiceovers.]

**Han Pritcher**

"That's right. You are under arrest."

**Bail Channis**

"Why?"

**Pritcher**

"For treason to the First Citizen of the Union."

**The Mule**

"Thank you for nothing. Bandy no compliments with me. Have you come to add your brain splinter to that of yonder cracked pillar of your realm?"

"Too late, too late! Now I see it."

**First Speaker**

"And now you don't."

[Theme music plays out.]

## **Joel McKinnon**

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, to Seldon Crisis for the conclusion of the search by the Mule for his hated and elusive foe, the mysterious Second Foundation. In our last episode, we saw a convergence of forces, including the Mule's latest search party in the form of our old friend Han Pritcher, now a general fully under the control of the Mule, a rising but unconverted star upon the Mule's new homeworld, Bail Channis, and the hidden entities known only as numbered speakers upon the small and frigid planet of Rossem, under the control of the oligarchy of Tazenda. Channis had been convinced that Tazenda was the mysterious site inhabited by the Second Foundation, and Pritcher had apparently become convinced that he might be right.

You'll recall that when we had left our two voyagers upon Rossem, Pritcher had just secretly received word from the ship that someone was arriving. Was it the Mule or his people? The Second Foundation or someone else entirely. All we know for sure is that Pritcher was uncharacteristically happy, glad that, "The farce would soon be at an end," whatever that might mean.

I want to call your attention to a new pattern in Asimov's storytelling that we saw evidenced in the grand story of the Mule. In the beginning, there were a host of characters and events with locations spread across many worlds throughout the galaxy. We had traders upon Haven II, the newlyweds Bayta and Toran, Captain Han Pritcher and the fastidious autocrat Indbur on Terminus, along with the temperamental scientist Ebling Mis and of course, the mysterious Magnifico, upon the pleasure

world of Kalgan. As the story progressed, the stage became smaller. After the fall of Foundation, most of the action centered on the core foursome of Bayta, Toran, Magnifico, and Ebling Mis, with just a few extra characters and most of the action occurring on Haven and in space. Finally, it came down to the same four in a single location; the old Imperial Library on Trantor, where a shot from Bayta's blaster revealed the true identity of the Mule.

Likewise, here in our current adventure, the action has become similarly constricted. We will find that much of what follows involves only two characters; the Mule-controlled Pritcher and the possibly overconfident Channis, and will almost entirely be restricted to a single room. Like the fluid in a stream being channeled into a narrow defile and erupting forcefully through its narrow course, Asimov heightens the tension by forcing the story through a tighter and tighter opening until something has to give. Let's join our story now, in the small apartment the natives of Rossem have provided to their guests. Channis appears as relaxed as always and speculates upon the situation and its implications. Pritcher has not revealed anything about the news that has transformed his mood, and the young Channis has not evidently noticed anything different about him.

Channis asks Pritcher,

**Channis**

"Suppose you were a Second Foundationer. What would you do? Suppose you had an idea of our purpose here. How would you handle us?"

**Joel McKinnon**

Pritcher sounds bored.

**Pritcher**

"Conversion, of course."

**Channis**

"Like the Mule? Would we know if they had converted us, I wonder? And what if they were simply psychologists, but very clever ones?"

**Pritcher**

"In that case, they'd have killed us rather quickly."

**Joel McKinnon**

Channis thinks that the Second Foundationers are likely well aware of who they are and are playing a bluff. Perhaps they're waiting to get more information about their intentions. Perhaps they're worried about the Mule and are leery of acting too soon. He thinks they'll soon be hearing from a representative of this mysterious group who will likely try to strike a deal with them.

**Channis**

"And then we'll make a deal."

**Pritcher**

"I don't think so"

**Channis**

"Because you think it'll double-cross the Mule? It won't."

**Pritcher**

"No, the Mule could handle your double-crosses, any you could invent. But I still don't think so."

**Channis**

"Because you think then we couldn't double-cross the Foundationers?"

"Perhaps not, but that's not the reason."

**Joel**

Bail Channis' glance lowers to find Pritcher cradling a blaster aimed at his heart.

**Channis**

"You mean that's the reason."

**Pritcher**

"That's right. You are under arrest."

**Channis**

"Why?"

**Pritcher**

"For treason to the First Citizen of the Union."

**Joel**

Channis is perplexed and demands to know what Pritcher's basis is in making such a wild accusation. He's sure his partner on this journey has completely gone mad. Pritcher forces him to stand while the lethal blaster digs into his ribs and the older man explains his reasoning.

**Pritcher**

"What the Mule wanted was to find the Second Foundation. He had failed, and I had failed. And the secret that neither of us can find is a well hidden one. So there was one outstanding possibility left, and that was to find a seeker who already knew the hiding place."

**Channis**

"Is that I?"

**Pritcher**

"Apparently it was. I didn't know then, of course, but though my mind must be slowing, it still points in the right direction. How easily we found Stars End! How miraculously you examined the correct field region of the lens from among an infinite number of possibilities, and having done so, how nicely we observe just the correct point for observation! You clumsy fool! Did you so underestimate me that no combination of impossible fortuities struck you as being too much for me to swallow?"

**Joel**

He goes on to explain that the only possibility is that Channis is in the pay of the Second Foundation. The Mule had obviously known this and used Channis to reveal the location of his foe. Channis wondered why, if that were the case, he wouldn't lead them anywhere but to the real location. Pritcher answers that the ship, with its nuclear weaponry, would provide the physically weak Second Foundation with much needed defensive power. Channis scoffs at this simplistic theory stating that one ship would be of very little help against the power of the Mule. Pritcher responds,

**Pritcher**

"You will have the opportunity to explain that to the Mule."

**Channis**

"We're going back to Kalgan?"

**Pritcher**

"On the contrary, we're staying here, and the Mule will join us in 15 minutes, more or less. Do you think he hasn't followed us? My sharp-witted, nimble-minded lump of self-admiration? You have played the decoy well in reverse. You may not have led our victims to us, but you certainly have led us to our victims."

**Joel**

Channis has one question that he thinks might just break through against his determined foe.

**Channis**

"You think the Mule followed us because of the hypertracer on the communication circuit?"

**Joel**

Pritcher says nothing in response, but Channis thinks the blaster might have wavered for a moment.

**Channis**

"You don't look surprised, but I don't waste time doubting that you feel surprised. Yes, I knew about it. And now having shown you that I knew of something you didn't think I did, I'll tell you something you don't know that I know you don't."

**Pritcher**

"You allow yourself too many preliminaries, Channis. I should think your sense of invention was more smoothly greased."

**Channis**

"There's an invention to this. There have been traders, of course, or enemy agents, if you prefer that term but the Mule knew of that in a rather curious way. It seems, you see, that some of his Converted men had been tampered with."

**Joel**

"The blaster did waver that time. Unmistakably."

Channis reminds Pritcher that this was why he had been selected for the mission; because he was unconverted and therefore not a target for the Second Foundation's tampering. He insinuates that Pritcher may not be entirely untampered with himself. He knows that Pritcher has been having doubts on this score. Pritcher angrily denies any concerns.

**Pritcher**

"If I were against the Mule, I'd know it."

**Channis**

"You mean you feel loyal to the Mule? Perhaps loyalty wasn't tampered with. Too easily detectable, the Mule said. But how how you feel mentally? Sluggish since you started this trip? Have you always felt normal? Or have you felt strange sometimes as though you weren't quite yourself?"

**Pritcher**

"What are you trying to say?"

**Channis**

"I say that you've been tampered with. You've been handled. You didn't see the Mule install that hypertracer. You didn't see anyone do it. You just found it there and assumed it was the Mule. And ever since, you've been assuming he was following us. Sure, the wrist receiver you're wearing contacts the ship on a wavelength mine isn't good for. Do you think I didn't know that? But it's not the Mule that's coming toward us from out there. It's not the Mule."



## Joel

Pritcher is stunned. How could it not be the Mule? He was sure he had all of this figured out. But Channis had planted doubts in his mind. He had been feeling sluggish and out of step. Perhaps it was true that he'd been under Second Foundation control since the trip began and was oblivious to the fact Channis pressed his offensive by decrying the illogic of the Mule planting the hypertracer. He could have simply extracted the location from his mind! He tells Pritcher that it is he that the Second Foundation is seeking because of how much he knows.

With growing horror, Pritcher begins to feel that Channis' story is all too plausible. He feels dazed, tormented and numb to the core. He sees Channis's hand extended and sees his own hand holding the blaster and lowering it from its target. He realizes he is going to hand it to the man whom, moments before, he had placed under arrest. I'll allow the master to paint this picture himself.

"And as the muscles of his arm were on the point of contracting in the proper manner to do so, the door opened not hastily behind him, and he turned. There are, perhaps, men in the galaxy who can be confused for one another even by men at their peaceful leisure. Correspondingly, there may be conditions of mind when even unlikely pairs may be misrecognized. But the Mule rises above any combination of the two factors."

Never could the train of two different people's mental condition be more thoroughly and convincingly derailed and instantly reversed. Pritcher felt a thrill of ecstasy rush through his veins. He had been momentarily convinced that all he had thought he had known was false and that this brash young man had exceeded him and that his talents had been drained to nothingness. Suddenly, the Mule's arrival had restored his vigor instantly and he knew he was right in every particular. He thrilled in the company of his beloved master.

Consider Channis, however. All along he had been supremely confident. He knew, or thought he knew, where the Second Foundation must be. He was sure that it was they who had placed the hypertracer on board and that they were following closely in his wake. He was sure all he needed to do was await their arrival and that when the door opened, each of his suspicions would be confirmed. He could be forgiven if he had collapsed in confusion and terror at this moment, instead of his savior at the door, it was the enemy of all he loved with the power to destroy him in an instant. How would he respond?

The Mule instructs Pritcher to hold on to his blaster and inquires of Channis what he had been theorizing regarding the agency of whomever had placed the hypertracer on board the ship.

Channis, to his credit, remains apparently unperturbed.

### **Channis**

"Yes, but mistakes, apparently, sir. It has been my opinion that the tracer was put there by someone in the pay of the Second Foundation and that we had been led here for some purpose of theirs, which I was prepared to counter. I was under the further impression that the general was more or less in their hands."

### **The Mule**

"You sound as if you think so no longer."

### **Channis**

"I'm afraid not, or it would not have been you at the door."

**Joel**

The Mule removes several layers of protective clothing and sits down to review the situation, informing Channis that they can now speak in privacy as he has prepared their environment to ensure none would approach and intervene.

The young man seems hardly abashed by the turn of affairs.

**Channis**

"Why privacy? Is someone going to serve tea and bring out the dancing girls?"

**Joel**

The Mule begins to query Channis on his theory about how the tracer had appeared on board. Had he considered how his mistaken notion had occurred to him? Channis responds that it must have been the Second Foundation that had put such ideas in his head. Had it not occurred to him that these mysterious entities would have no need for a hypertracer if they could place such ideas in his head? Had he been in error at judging his intellect of sufficient capacity to lead the mission that he had been entrusted with? Channis realizes now the direction of the Mule's queries.

**Channis**

"The only answer is a question, sir. Are you joining General Pritcher in accusing me of being a traitor?"

**The Mule**

"You have a defense in case I am?"

**Channis**

"Only the one I presented to the General. If I were a traitor and knew the whereabouts of the Second Foundation, you could convert me and learn the knowledge directly. If you felt it necessary to trace me, then I hadn't the knowledge beforehand and wasn't a traitor. So I answer your paradox with another."

**The Mule**

"Then your conclusion?"

**Channis**

"That I am not a traitor."

**The Mule**

"To which I must agree, since your argument is irrefutable."

**Channis**

"Then may I ask why you had us secretly followed?"

**Joel**

The Mule explains that there is a third alternative, but before continuing to elucidate this, asks Pritcher for his blaster. His reasoning is ostensibly that Pritcher no longer has any need for it, as they are fully protected by his powers.

**The Mule**

"There is no danger of attack on us any longer. None from in here and none from out there. None, in fact, even from the Second Foundation. Thanks to you, Channis."

## **Joel**

Asimov pauses now to describe the tableau. "The room was lit in the usual Rossemian fashion of electrically heated wire. A single bulb was suspended from the ceiling, and in its dim yellow glow, the three cast their individual shadows." Once again, the author describes the primitiveness of a scenario we take for granted in our day to day lives. I presume that imperial lighting standards are ordinarily far too advanced to actually cast shadows. The real purpose of this description, however, is to draw into vivid contrast the positions of the three men in the room and ratchet up the tension even further. Something extraordinary is clearly about to be revealed, something that will upend our understanding once again and reset the course of this story.

## **The Mule**

"Since I felt it necessary to trace Channis, it was obvious I expect to gain something thereby. Since he went to the Second Foundation with a startling speed and directness, we can reasonably assume that that's what I was expecting to happen. Since I did not gain the knowledge from him directly, something must have been preventing me. Those are the facts. Channis, of course, knows the answer. So do I. Do you see it, Pritcher?"

## **Pritcher**

"No, sir."

## **The Mule**

"Then I'll explain. Only one kind of man can know both the location of the Second Foundation and prevent me from learning it. Channis, I'm afraid you're a Second Foundationer yourself."

## **Joel**

Channis remains calm.

## **Channis**

"What is your direct evidence? Deduction has proven wrong twice today."

## **Joel**

The Mule takes us back to the beginning of our story. He reminds us that he had known of tampering, of some of his converted agents, and that the source of this tampering must be the Second Foundation. It had to be someone who was unconverted and fairly close to the center of things. A member of Kalganian society who'd been rising in importance and was welcomed into its higher circles. Channis fit the bill well. Recall also the action the Mule had taken to threaten his selected appointee. He'd flooded his mind with a powerful sense of grief to let him know of what he was capable. It appears that he was doing something more. He was testing his mind, looking for a moment of resistance, and he had found it.

## **The Mule**

"No one could have resisted me, even for that tiny instant without control similar to mine."

## **Channis**

"Well, then? Now what?"

## **The Mule**

"And now you die - as a Second Foundationer. Quite necessary, as I believe you realize."

[Suspenseful music]

## Joel

Channis is now, to put it lightly, in a very difficult position. He is, for the second time today, staring into the muzzle of a blaster. This time, however, the person holding it is invulnerable to the kind of manipulation which he had so evidently used upon the hapless General Pritcher. There would be perhaps a few seconds to act before the Mule's finger closed upon the contact, which would surely obliterate him. So he acts once again, and this time an extended passage from Asimov.

"What the Mule realized in that same tiny space of time was that the emotional potential of Channis's brain had surged suddenly upwards without his own mind feeling any impact. And that simultaneously, a flood of pure, thrilling hatred cascaded upon him from an unexpected direction. It was that new emotional element that jerked his thumb off the contact. Nothing else could have done it, and almost together with his change of action, came complete realization of the new situation. It was a tableau that endured far less than the significance adhering to it should require from a dramatic standpoint."

"There was the Mule, thumb off the blaster, staring intently upon Channis. There was Channis, taut, not quite daring to breathe yet. And there was Pritcher, convulsed in his chair every muscle at a spasmodic breaking point, every tendon writhing in an effort to hurl forward, his face twisted at last out of schooled woodenness into an unrecognizable death mask of horrid hate, and his eyes only and entirely and supremely upon the Mule."

We again are in the realm of a higher level of human communication, not dependent upon the elaborate syntax we current humans employ to meet our needs. Channis and the Mule are like the speakers of the Second Foundation we met in our last episode, capable of communicating without words, and there is no need to indulge in them now. We will pretend, however, for our own understanding that words are exchanged so as to

describe the content of the information traded between the powerful antagonists in that harshly lit room.

### **Channis**

"You're between two fires. First citizen. You can't control two minds simultaneously, not when one of them is mine. So you have your choice. Pritcher is free of your conversion now. I've snapped the bonds. He's the old Pritcher, the one who tried to kill you once, the one who thinks you're the enemy of all that is free and right and holy, and he's the one besides, who knows that you've debased him to helpless adulation for five years. I'm holding him back now by suppressing his will, but if you kill me, that ends, and in considerably less time than you could shift your blaster or even your will, he will kill you."

### **Joel**

The Mule does not move.

### **Channis**

"If you turn to place him under control, to kill him, to do anything, you won't ever be quick enough to turn again to stop me."

### **Joel**

The Mule, once again, does not move, but sighs and drops his blaster and kicks it out of reach. Channis releases Pritcher from his control, and he immediately crumples into unconsciousness.

### **The Mule**

"He'll be normal when he awakes."



## **Joel**

Channis has evidently met the moment and spared his own life. But in this extreme moment, he also detects evidence that the Mule's state of mind is not one of resignation and defeat, but that he tastes imminent victory.

Channis is a mere human being, trained to develop the latent capabilities of a man of the Second Foundation, but just a man. The Mule is something more. Yes, he is human, but a mutant. He'd had no need for special training. He was born with the immense power to control the emotions of those he encountered and could hold this power even at a great distance. Channis is overmatched, and he knows it. He still holds out feeble hope that his allies might intervene, despite the Mule's assurances that the space is entirely secure. He has to buy time!

## **Channis**

"Since it is decided and not denied by myself after our little duel over Pritcher, that I am a Second Foundationer, suppose you tell me why I came to Tazenda."

## **The Mule**

"Oh, no. I am not Pritcher. I need make no explanations to you. You had what you thought were reasons. Whatever they were, your actions suited me, and so I inquire no further."

## **Channis**

"Yet there must be such gaps in your conception of the story. Is Tazenda the Second Foundation you expected to find? Pritcher spoke much of your other attempt at finding it and of your psychologist's tool, Ebling Mis. He babbled a bit sometimes under my slight encouragement. Think back on Ebling Mis, First Citizen."

## **The Mule**

"Why should I?"

## **Joel**

Channis senses the Mule's diminishing anxiety and knows he needs to replace it, and quickly. He reminds the Mule that Mis had expressed astonishment of the true location of the Second Foundation and that they must be warned.

## **Channis**

"Ebling Mis died. The Second Foundation was not warned. And yet the Second Foundation exists."

## **The Mule**

"But apparently the Second Foundation was warned. Else how and why did one Bail Channis arrive on Kalgan to handle my men and to assume the rather thankless task of outwitting me. The warning came too late, that is all."

## **Joel**

Channis summons an outpouring of pity and directs it towards the conqueror of the galaxy before him.

## **Channis**

"Then you don't even know what the Second Foundation is or anything of the deeper meaning of all that has been going on."

## **Joel**

The Mule is taken off guard. To feel pity from this overmatched human was not his expectation. Why need he be pitied? His hostility mounts, but he feels a need for full understanding of the situation.

## **The Mule**

"Amuse yourself, then. What of the Second Foundation?"

## **Joel**

Channis reminds the Mule of the nature of his foe. It is not like the first, which he had conquered so easily. He describes the context under which Hari Seldon had famously created his two Foundations, and to what purpose. Civilization in the galaxy had fallen into a death spiral marked by authoritarianism and decay. The first Foundation had reinvigorated its technological capabilities, but the second had a different agenda.

## **Channis**

"He never created a finished product. Finished products are for decadent minds. His was an evolving mechanism, and the Second Foundation was the instrument of that evolution. We, First Citizen of your Temporary Union of Worlds, we are the guardians of Seldon's Plan, only we!"

## **The Mule**

"Are you trying to talk yourself into courage, or are you trying to impress me? For the Second Foundation, Seldon's Plan, the Second Empire all that impresses me not the least nor touches any spring of compassion, sympathy, responsibility, nor any other source of emotional aid you may be trying to tap in me. And in any case, poor fool, speak of the Second Foundation in the past tense, for it is destroyed."

## **Joel**

And now it appears to the Mule that Channis feels his strength of will and resistance beginning to crumble. The mutant's confidence rises to a fever pitch as he advances upon Channis, who falls back in dismay. The Mule's voice rises to a crescendo as he delivers the news that he is sure will destroy the spirit of this lone representative of the Second Foundation.

## **The Mule**

"My ships were launched against Tazenda twelve hours ago, and they are quite, quite through with their mission. Tazenda is laid in ruins. Its centers of population are wiped out. There was no resistance. The Second Foundation no longer exists, Channis, and I, the queer, ugly weakling, am the ruler of the Galaxy."

## **Channis**

"No- No-"

## **The Mule**

"Yes- Yes- And if you are the last one alive, and you may be, that will not be for long either."

## **Joel**

And with this last, the Mule bores into the deepest recesses of his victim's mind to feel the terror that he must feel - and stops. There is something wrong. Is Channis faking it?

## **The Mule**

"Have I calculated rightly, Channis? Have I outwitted your men of the Second Foundation? Tazenda is destroyed, Channis. Tremendously destroyed; so why is your despair pretense? Where is the reality? I must have reality and truth! Talk, Channis, Talk. Have I penetrated, then, not deeply enough? Does the danger still exist? Talk, Channis. Where have I done wrong?"

## **Joel**

Channis desperately resists the pull of the Mule's force, determined not to reveal his knowledge, but it is not possible. In horror, he finds himself unable to maintain any pretense and the truth escapes his lips.

**Channis**

"Seldon founded the Second Foundation here. Here, as I said. I told no lie. The psychologists arrived and took control of the native population."

**The Mule**

"Of Tazenda? It is Tazenda I have destroyed. You know what I want. Give it to me."

**Channis**

"Not Tazenda. I said Second Foundationers might not be those apparently in power. Tazenda is the figurehead- Rossem- Rossem- Rossem is the world-"

**The Mule**

"And you thought to fool me."

**Channis**

"You were fooled."

**The Mule**

"But not long enough for you and yours. I am in communication with my fleet. And after Tazenda can come Rossem. But first-"

**Joel**

The full strength of the mutant's power bears down upon Channis and he feels the last of his resistance crumble. He feels the imminent loss of his people and grieves desperately and feels the shame of being the agent of their destruction. There had never been hope of standing up against this awesome force.

In the author's words, "Channis felt the excruciating darkness rise against him and the automatic lift of his arm to his tortured eyes could not ward

it off. It was a darkness that throttled. And as he felt his torn, wounded mind reeling backwards, backwards into the everlasting black there was that final picture of the triumphant Mule - laughing matchstick - that long, fleshy nose quivering with laughter."

Channis sinks in despair as a crack like a lightning flash sears into his brain and he crumples with what must be his last thought of total failure. But he realizes in surprise that he is still alive. Something has changed in the room, something fundamentally new. There is someone standing in the doorway, the First Speaker of the Second Foundation!

The Mule remains, furious and smiling viciously.

### **The Mule**

"Then another comes to greet me."

### **Joel**

He pauses as he extends his mind outward, searching.

### **The Mule**

"You are alone."

### **First Speaker**

"I am thoroughly alone. It is necessary that I be alone since it was I who miscalculated your future five years ago. There would be a certain satisfaction to me in correcting that matter without aid. Unfortunately, I did not count on the strength of your Field of Emotional Repulsion that surrounded this place. It took me long to penetrate. I congratulate you upon the skill with which it was constructed."

## **The Mule**

"Thank you for nothing, Bandy no compliments with me. Have you come to add your brain splinter to that of yonder cracked pillar of your realm?"

## **First Speaker**

"Why the man that you call Bail Channis performed his mission well, the more so since he was not your mental equal by far. I can see, of course, that you have mistreated him, yet it may be that we may restore him fully even yet. He is a brave man, sir. He volunteered for this mission although we were able to predict mathematically the huge chance of damage to his mind - a more fearful alternative than that of mere physical crippling."

## **Joel**

The Mule gleefully asks if he is aware of the destruction of Tazenda. The First Speaker responds sadly in the affirmative - that it could not be prevented. He takes responsibility due to his lack of foresight. He then takes a diversion to explain what he knows of the Mule's capabilities that were not adequately foreseen.

He explains that emotional contact between humans is a latent capability that is expressed through the understanding of facial expression but was once much more fully developed as it is in animals that chiefly communicate without language. It was the development of language, in fact, that caused this capability to atrophy over time until humans relied upon it almost exclusively. The members of the Second Foundation had recultivated this skill to a high degree and the Mule's mutation had made him the instinctual master of it without the need for training.

He goes on to explain that what he had failed to foresee was the effect that this capability would have upon its unwitting recipient. That he would become like "the seeing man in the company of the blind" and that an ensuing megalomania was likely. He had underestimated the extent of his

powers and also the extent of his physical shortcomings and how these would lead inevitably to an intensely psychopathic paranoia as well.

### **First Speaker**

"It is myself that bears the responsibility for having missed all that. For I was the leader of the Second Foundation when you captured Kalgan, when you destroyed the First Foundation, we found out- but too late- and for that fault millions have died on Tazenda."

### **The Mule**

"And you will correct things now? What will you do? Fatten me? Restore me to a masculine vigor? Take away from my past the long childhood in an alien environment? Do you regret my sufferings? Do you regret my unhappiness? I have no sorrow for what I did in my necessity. Let the galaxy protect itself as best it can since it stirred not a wit for my protection when I needed it."

### **First Speaker**

"Your emotions are, of course, only the children of your background and are not to be condemned, merely changed. The destruction of Tazenda was unavoidable. The alternative would have been a much greater destruction. Generally, throughout the galaxy over a period of centuries we did our best in our limited way. We withdrew as many men from Tazenda as we could. We decentralized the rest of the world. Unfortunately, our measures were of necessity far from adequate. It left many millions to die. Do you not regret that?"

### **The Mule**

"Not at all - any more than I regret the hundred thousand that must die on Rossem in not more than six hours."



**First Speaker**

"On Rossem?"

**Joel**

Channis had been silent, spellbound and crippled by his futile battle with the Mule. But he now recovers sufficiently to wail his despair.

**Channis**

"Sir, I have failed completely. He forced it from me not ten minutes before your arrival. I could not resist him and I offer no excuses. He knows Tazenda is not the Second Foundation. He knows that Rossem is."

**Joel**

The Mule smiles in victory. He informs the First Speaker that he will now call upon his fleet to complete the task that he had begun upon Tazenda to annihilate all life upon this pitiful planet as well. He has already given the fleet the order, and within six hours the accursed Second Foundation will be gone forever.

**The Mule**

"What do you say, Second Foundationer? What weapon have you against my mind, which is as strong as yours at least, and against my ships, which are stronger than anything you have ever dreamed of possessing."

**First Speaker**

"What have I? Why, nothing - except a little grain - such a little grain of knowledge that even yet you do not possess."

**The Mule**

"Speak quickly, speak inventively. For squirm as you might, you won't squirm out of this."

## **Joel**

But the First Speaker had no need to squirm. He explains how Channis had been trained carefully and sent on his mission to Kalgan to provide the lure to be extracted from his mind and sent to the false location of the Second Foundation upon Tazenda. To be lured into a trap so logically presented to him and that it would be known he would follow it willfully.

## **The Mule**

"Correct. And it was a momentary victory for your side, but there was still time for me to worm the truth from your man Channis and still wisdom in me to realize that such a truth might exist."

## **First Speaker**

"And on our side, oh, not quite sufficiently subtle one, was the realization that you might go that one step further, and so Bail Channis was prepared for you."

## **Joel**

The First Speaker calmly reveals the rest of his carefully conceived plan. Bail Channis was a brave volunteer and before being sent to Kalgan, had consented to a significant form of psychological surgery that resulted in the implantation of a very firm certitude that Rossem was indeed the actual location of the Second Foundation.

With a start, the Mule becomes cognizant of the incredible claim to which the speaker is alluding.

## **The Mule**

"You dare to tell me that Rossem also is not the Second Foundation?"

## **Joel**

And suddenly, Channis is freed by the First Speaker from the crippling bondage imposed upon him by the Mule. He leaps to his feet and lets out an incredulous cry.

## **Channis**

"You mean Rossem is not the Second Foundation?"

## **First Speaker**

"You see, First Citizen, Channis is as upset as you are. Of course, Rossem is not the Second Foundation. Are we mad men, then, to lead you, our greatest, most powerful, most dangerous enemy to our own world? Oh, no! Let your fleet bombard Rossem, First Citizen, if you must have it so. Let them destroy all they can. For at most, they can only kill Channis and myself. And that will leave you in a situation improved not in the least."

"For the Second Foundation's expedition to Rossem, which had been here for three years and has functioned temporarily as Elders in this village, embarked yesterday and are returning to Kalgan. They will evade your fleet, of course, and they will arrive in Kalgan at least a day before you can. Which is why I tell you all this. Unless I countermand my orders, when you return, you will find a revolting Empire, a disintegrated realm, and only the men with you in your fleet here will be loyal to you. They will be hopelessly outnumbered. And moreover, the men of the Second Foundation will be with your home fleet and will see to it that you reconvert no one. Your empire is done, mutant."

## **Joel**

Once again, like in the moment of despair in the ruins of Trantor, the Mule realizes he has made a serious and fatal error. This time, there would be no opportunity of recovery. He lowers his head in abject despair.

## **The Mule**

"Yes. Too late- Too late- Now I see it."

## **First Speaker**

"Now you see it. And now you don't."

## **Joel**

In that moment of despair, the First Speaker had eliminated the threat that had haunted him in the five years since the Mule had first appeared upon the scene. He had quickly entered the Mule's mind and done some nifty and definitive rearranging. The Mule would remember nothing of any of this and would become his docile and willing collaborator in restoring the galaxy as the First Speaker saw fit.

After the Mule and the equally forgetful Han Pritcher have departed for Kalgan, the First Speaker answers a question from the battered Bale Channis.

## **Channis**

"He won't ever remember?"

## **Joel**

"Never. He retains his mental powers and his empire, but his motivations are now entirely different. The notion of a Second Foundation is a blank to him, and he is a man of peace. He will be a far happier man henceforward, too, for the few years of life left him by his maladjusted physique. And then, after he is dead, Seldon's plan will go on - somehow."

[Theme excerpt signifies the story's conclusion.]

And so it ends. Channis will return to the true location of the Second Foundation with the First Speaker and be nursed back to health and his

false conviction that Rossem was the location would be undone. We, the readers are still completely in the dark. We only know a number of locations that are incorrect, just as the speakers in their infinite wisdom prefer.

This is, I think you will agree, a story highly enjoyable in many respects, but a dark one. As was mentioned previously, we meet a much darker version of the Mule than we knew five years previously. The Mule at that time, despite his awesome power in easily conquering the Foundation, was largely a sympathetic figure in the guise of Magnifico, and even after his true identity was revealed, after all, he had allowed Bayta and Toran to escape unharmed, despite them stealing his chance to extract the Second Foundation's location from poor Ebling Mis. We shouldn't be too surprised by getting a closer look at his dark side, however. He had, after all, pushed the poor scientist to the edge of death without compassion.

But in this story, we meet a true monster. He is a genocidal maniac who casually ends the lives of millions of Tazendans in his zeal to destroy the Second Foundation, and would have eliminated all of the innocent peasants of Rossem as well if the First Speaker had not stopped him. And what are we to think of the morality of the Second Foundation now? They had manipulated the Mule into committing his genocide without significant qualms. Despite the First Speaker's statement of regret. Oopsy. Forgot you were a maniac and we'll have to let you destroy an entire planet in order to entrap and defeat you. Easy come, easy go.

It's not the first time we've seen Asimov reveal his willingness to engage in realpolitik and sacrifice innocent lives for the greater good. Hari Seldon must have foreseen the devastation of Siwenna, but made no plans to prevent it. Hober Mallow was willing to let a presumably deadly war with nuclear powered warships run its course as part of his solution of the problem of Korrell. Lathan Devers was a casual butcher who messily ended the lives of two essentially innocent characters in *The General* for no

ultimate reason at all. Asimov had lived through a pretty dark era with World War II raging in the background while he pursued his literary career out of harm's way. Great horrors had transpired and were reported daily, including the greatest of all, the Holocaust that resulted in the deaths of so many millions of his ethnic brethren. He could be forgiven for feeling a bit numb to the depths of human suffering. We in the modern era really have no idea what that background imprints upon one.

I feel the saddest, however, for our dear old friend Han Pritcher. I kept wanting him to break free from his emotional imprisonment so desperately and become the free thinking democrat of old. When Channis released him for a moment to pour out his hatred for the Mule, I wanted him to be free forever, but it was not to be. He was ultimately imprisoned not by the Mule, but by the requirements of Asimov's storyline, which offered him no opportunity to regain his former freedom. He will remain one of the most tragic victims of this tale, if only because we knew him so well, unlike the nameless innocents of Tazenda. Pritcher will appear no more in our story, and the same can be said for the brave young Bail Channis, whose further exploits will go unwritten. When we meet again to continue this story, a whole new cast of characters will be with us, including a couple of prominent female ones, for another delightful change of pace.

Thanks again for listening to my version of this wonderful tale. I wish to thank the usual contributors Tom Barnes for the theme music, Jeremy MacKinnon for the sound design and Mike Topping for the podcast art now available on t-shirts and stickers. Contact me at [joel@seldonscrisis.net](mailto:joel@seldonscrisis.net) or on Twitter @JoelGMcKinnon if you would like to order any. I'd also love to hear your feedback on the podcast and always appreciate reviews. If you would like to help to support my efforts, please consider becoming a patron on Patreon. Details, as always, are in the show notes.

We will return soon with a whole new chapter in this great adventure when a precocious teenage girl becomes involved in the high stakes drama involving another rising threat from Kalgan and the efforts of the Foundation to thwart its designs while searching for the ever elusive hidden cult of psychohistorian mentalics in "Search by the Foundation, part I," here on Seldon Crisis!

[Closing theme music.]