

## **The General, Part II**



[Opening theme music with voiceovers.]

### **Lathan Devers**

"I'm a good trader, but all trades go in both directions."

### **Bel Riose**

"What is the general after? Why is he fighting this war? 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."

### **Sgt. Luc**

"You've killed the general!"

### **Police Lieutenant**

"I am a lieutenant of the Imperial Police. You are under arrest."

[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.

## Joel

Welcome back to Seldon Crisis. Before recapping part one of the General, I want to talk a little bit about themes thus far in Foundation, going back to the beginning. When Gal Dornick arrived on Trantor to meet with the raven Hari Seldon, father of psychohistory, Asimov has established a few overarching themes. The main one, it seems, is the arc of human progress and civilization the consolidation of tribes into nations, nations into planetary governments, planets into federations, until the entire galaxy is united under one unifying authority. Then the inevitable decay of that structure into rebellion balkanization, eventually widespread anarchy accompanied by massive human suffering.

Foundation begins at the point of imminent collapse, when all seems stable on the surface, but the seeds of the fall have established deep roots, and no human force will be able to extricate them. Another important theme is the advantage of science and knowledge over the quest for raw power, as seen in the nascent Foundation's ability to defeat its stronger enemies, and is the overriding theme of the Seldon Plan. A coherent vision for the future of humanity, illuminated by the acquired knowledge of the 12,000 years of galactic advancement and stability can reduce the horrific interregnum following collapse from 30,000 years to a single millennium.

And the resulting new empire will presumably be stronger as a result and possibly provide new possibilities for human flourishing. I want to talk about a third theme, however, that lies at the heart of much of Asimov's writing, and particularly throughout this epic. That is, the ever recurring tendency for humans to achieve their objectives through deception, and is echoed by the author's apparent delight in deceiving the reader through various plot twists and unexpected revelations. This theme will become stronger the longer we proceed through this story, and I promise some enormous surprises lie ahead in our journey. I have long maintained that Asimov was a mystery writer at heart.

He wrote many short mystery stories, loved Agatha Christie's mystery novels, and worshipped her great fictional detective Hercule Poirotte, while being surprisingly critical of the most famous writer of mysteries, sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and his heroic tandem of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. He enjoyed their exploits enough to be a longtime member of the Baker Street Irregulars, a Holmes inspired social club, however, and created a similar mystery solving couple in Elijah Baley and Daneel Olivah in the robots series. We will see that while the previous episode was largely about one man's lust for military glory and determination to defeat an enemy worthy of his talents, the current episode will revel in the will to deceive. And the method of attaining such deception is the seductive power of bribery, both with technology, as we have seen since the days of Limmar Ponyets and Hober Mallow, and with the more traditional means of bribery via exchange of money and the promise of power and privilege.

So let us recall now that in our last episode, the General Part I, the Foundation faced its most serious Seldon Crisis of any thus far. An ambitious Imperial general by the name of Bel Riose was bent on the complete annihilation of the nest of magicians he had heard rumors about on the periphery of the galaxy. He had gone so far as to visit Terminus itself to verify these rumors, and had become aware of the famous Seldon Plan, which foretold the downfall of the Empire and the eventual return under the power of this small but ambitious enclave of scientists and traders. Bel Riose had paid a visit to Ducem Barr, the son of Onum Barr, from "The Merchant Princes" on the planet of Siwenna, where he was cordially yet somewhat coldly, greeted with tea and tales of galactic intrigue, assassination of an evil Imperial viceroy, and a lesson on the implications of psychohistory and the Seldon Plan.

Later, we eavesdropped upon a tense conversation among some traders of the Foundation, including one by the name of Senett Forel, who was the son of Hober Mallow. They decided to send a spy to try to disrupt

the general's plans to defeat them with overwhelming Imperial force. Riose captured the spy, a swashbuckling rogue named Lathan Devers, and together he and Ducem Barr plotted to undermine the General's invasion from within. As we ended the last episode, things looked grim for the Foundation, as an envoy of the Empire named Brodrig had joined Riose at the front to bless the invasion with full Imperial backing.

We now join Riose and Brodrig in a garden upon the planet Wanda, somewhere near the front, as they discuss Riose's progress. Brodrig is annoyed with Riose's continuing requests for additional ships that are in high demand. It is clear that the Empire's capability is declining, and it is no small matter to support the general's military endeavor. He wants to know why Riose is so cautious and in need of greater quantity of ships to attack such a meager foe. The general explains the difference between boldness and blindness.

### **Bel Riose**

"There is a place for a decisive gamble when you know your enemy and can calculate the risks, at least roughly. But to move at all against an unknown enemy is blindness in itself. You might as well ask why the same man sprints safely across an obstacle course in the day and falls over the furniture in his room at night."

### **Joel**

His boldness is further hampered by the decaying technical systems on aging vessels at his command and the lack of qualified personnel to service them. Brodrig reminds him men of that type cannot be spared.

### **Brodrig**

"General, surely there must be some man of your vast province who understands nucleics?"

## **Bel Riose**

"Were there such a one, I would have him heal the limping invalid motors that power two of my small fleet of ships. Two ships of my meager ten that cannot fight a major battle for lack of sufficient power supply. One fifth of my force condemned to the carrion activity of consolidating positions behind the lines. "

## **Brodrig**

"Your position is not unique in that respect, General. The emperor has similar troubles."

## **Joel**

Riose brings up an additional frustration. His psychic probe is not working against Devers. He has tested it against his own men and found it works. But it gets nothing from Devers. Ducem Barr has given him a nonsense explanation of how the brains of men of the Foundation might make them invulnerable to it in some way.

Brodrig, perhaps suspecting some deception, insists on speaking to the Siwennan privately. We now revisit our two captive heroes, Ducem Barr and Lathen Devers, in their private chamber under Imperial Guard. The man guarding them is a good natured, working class sort of soldier by the name of Sergeant Luc. He comes from a farming planet and his main characteristics are a good natured simplicity of thought while being devoted to the chain of command, as seen through his love for the General, and a normal human tendency to be vulnerable to small acts of bribery that don't seem to him like they could do any harm.

Lathan Devers has obviously attempted to exploit that weakness. Luc has arrived with a book film captured from one of the "Pig Pen worlds" the General has captured. He's trading it in gratitude for a previous gift from Devers, a nuclear freezer his wife enjoys using. After sharing his

joyful knowledge that the General's military strategy of an enclosure is nearly complete, he departs, leaving the two men to examine their latest find. Barr reads the title, "The Garden of Summer," and begins to read it contentedly. But Devers is agitated.

**Lathan Devers**

"Listening to this old time literature isn't doing me any good. You heard what the Sergeant said."

**Bel Riose**

"Yes, I did. What of it?"

**Lathan Devers**

"The offensive will start and we sit here."

**Ducem Barr**

"Where do you want me to sit?"

**Lathan Devers**

"You know what I mean. There's no use just waiting."

**Ducem Barr**

"Isn't there? You told me a good deal of Foundation history in the last month, and it seems that the great leaders of past crises did precious little more than sit and wait."

**Lathan Devers**

"Ah, bah, but they knew where they were going, didn't they?"

### **Ducem Barr**

"I suppose they said they did when it was over. And for all I know, maybe they did. But there's no proof that things would not have worked out as well or better if they had not known where they were going. The deeper economic and sociological forces aren't directed by individual men."

### **Joel**

Again we see that Barr is trustful of the Seldon Plan and its inevitable success. Devers is not nearly so trustful. He is a man of action and brings up the only option that seems available, that of eliminating Riose through assassination. Barr explains that it would do little good. Brodrig is the real threat, as he could produce a hundred ships if necessary. He goes into a little backstory on Brodrig. He's a low born rascal who has, by unfailing flattery tickled the whims of the emperor. He's well hated by the court aristocracy, vermin themselves because he can lay claim to neither family nor humility.

### **Ducem Barr**

"He is the emperor's advisor in all things, and the emperor's too, in the worst things. He is faithless by choice but loyal by necessity. There is not a man in the empire as subtle in villainy or as crude in his pleasures, and they say there is no way to the emperor's favor but through him and no way to his but through infamy."

### **Joel**

They discuss possible ways they could get to Brodrig and maybe bribe him, but Barr insists it would cost too much and Brodrig wouldn't stay bribed. Then Sergeant Luc reappears and has some big news. Brodrig is coming to interrogate them.

He is clearly terrified of the envoy and has heard stories of his cruelty and capriciousness. Luc speaks in fearful tones. They say he has men with blast

guns who follow him everywhere, and when he wants pleasure, he just tells them to blast down anyone they meet. And they do, and he laughs. He adds that Brodrig hates the general and would like to kill him, but that the general is too good and wise to be worried about such a threat. He knows his soldiers will defend him to the death. Luc departs, taking Barr to his quarters, and shortly thereafter Brodrig arrives, flanked by two armed guards.

Asimov describes the envoy as follows, "The privy secretary had little of the look of the lost soul about him just then. If the space fiend had bought him, he had left no visible mark of possession. Rather, might Brodrig have been considered a breath of court fashion come to enliven the hard, bare ugliness of an army base? The stiff, tight lines of his sheened and immaculate costume gave him the illusion of height from the very top of which his cold, emotionless eyes stared down the declivity of a long nose at the trader. He brought his ivory stick to the ground before him and leaned upon it daintily."

Brodrig seems to expect Devers will attempt to use his gadgets to gain favor and tells him he has no interest in them. He finds a chair and sits imperiously while denying Devers the same honor.

### **Brodrig**

"You will stand in the presence of a peer of the realm."

### **Lathan Devers**

"If you're not interested in my stock and trade, what am I here for, sir?"



## **Joel**

Brodrig ignores the question and begins his interrogation. He asks if Devers is really a citizen of this barbarian world, causing all of this frenzy, and was he really captured, as Riose claims? Devers only nods silently. Brodrig explains what he is after.

He wants information about what Bel Riose's real aims are in wasting imperial resources, in chasing after this, "fleabite world." At the edge of the galaxy. He lets Devers know of his knowledge of the supposed failure of the psychic probe to penetrate his mind, but is sure this is proof that Riose is lying. He has brought a more effective probe, the first major bribe of our story. Brodrig pulls out a wad of intricately designed paper rectangles and asks Devers if he knows what it is.

## **Lathan Devers**

"It looks like cash."

## **Brodrig**

"Cash it is. And the best of the empire, for it is backed by my estates, which are more extensive than the Emperor's own. A hundred thousand credits, all here between your fingers."

## **Lathan Devers**

"Yours for what? Sir, I'm a good trader, but all trades go in both directions."

## **Brodrig**

"For what? For the truth. What is the general after? Why is he fighting this war?"

## **Joel**

Devers tells him what Riose's true objective is, the Empire itself. Brodrig is bored by this and tells him it's obvious. He wants to know how Riose intends to take over the empire by defeating this tiny world on the edge of the galaxy. Devers explains that the answer lies in Foundation technology, which will enable Riose to transmute the elements iron to iridium, which will give him the power to control the economy and take the throne within two years.

He claims to have discovered these technological secrets at the cost of a death sentence awaiting him if he returns to Foundation space. Ah, the legacy of Limmar Ponyets from our fourth episode. The fascination with alchemical transmutation was a staple of the historical tales that Asimov studied in detail and loved so much, he couldn't help inserting it as a plot point in multiple tales within this great epic. Brodrig then reveals a state secret that the Empire has offered a hundred tons of iridium a year to make peace, and that the general has refused the offer. He now knows why.

Riose will have all of that and more when he controls Foundation technology. He happily throws the money at Devers, who eagerly scrambles to pick it up. Before leaving, he adds a hint of the sadism that has made him infamous.

## **Brodrig**

"One reminder, trader. My playmates with the guns here have neither middle ears, tongues, education, nor intelligence. They can neither hear, speak, write, nor even make sense of a psychic probe, but they are very experts at interesting executions. I have bought you, man, at 100,000 credits. You will be good and worthy merchandise. Should you forget that you are bought at any time and attempt to, say, repeat our conversation to Riose, you will be executed, but executed my way."

**Joel**

Devers is returned to his quarters, and in response to Barr's obvious question, he replies,

"No, that's the queerest part of it. He bribed me."

[theme music segment indicating scene change]

**Joel**

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 Foundation swarm like senseless bees and fight like madmen. 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."

**Joel**

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 at his own request.

**Lathan Devers**

"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.

[crashing sound]

**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.

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

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.

**Sgt. Luc**

"You've killed the general!"

[Luc screams as he yells and charges at Devers]

## 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. Devers knew his ship could outrun the others, and so it did. Where they were to go and to what effect was not presently known. But it was now apparent that Devers' made up story about the Foundation's ability to transmute elements at will had convinced Brodrig to throw in his lot with the general."

Once clear of Riose's base and the pursuing craft, Devers tries to contact the Association of Independent Traders and gets a tiny signal which is then lost. But he receives just enough of a response to get the horrifying news. Riose had been telling the truth. The Foundation had offered a huge tribute to the empire, and it had been refused. Interestingly, the specifics of the battle news was that there was "fighting in the outer sons of Loris." Devers explains to Barr that Loris was one of the original Four Kingdoms, along with Anacreon and Smyrno. I don't think the fourth was ever named, unless I'm just forgetting it, which is quite possible. I'll leave this a challenge to my listeners. Perhaps somebody remembers a fourth kingdom being mentioned at some point in the story.

Anyway, the importance of this news is that this meant that the Empire was now on the doorstep of Terminus itself. The awful conclusion of the conflict now appears inevitable and imminent, and there was nothing to be done about it. Devers is crushed by the news and lashes out at Barr for his lack of concern. He is, after all, only a Siwennan and has no friends in Foundation space at imminent risk of annihilation. Barr counters that he has already suffered grievous loss, much like his father long ago.

He has two sons and a nephew who have been forced to stay on Siwenna under Riose's power and that his escape with Devers now means their death. He tells Devers of the meeting at the beginning of our last episode, when Riose had mentioned a cult centering around rumors of magicians on the edge of the galaxy.

### **Ducem Barr**

"It is not quite a cult, you see, it is 40 years now that Siwenna has been gripped in the same unbearable vice that threatens your world. Five revolts have been ground out. Then I discovered the ancient records of Hari Seldon. And now this cult waits. It waits for the coming of the magicians, and for that day it is ready. My sons are leaders of those who wait. It is that secret which is in my mind and which the probe must never touch. And so they must die as hostages. For the alternative is their death as rebels and half of Siwenna with them. You see, I had no choice. And I am no outsider."

### **Joel**

Barr makes an important point. He is a believer in Seldon's prophecy and in the inevitability of eventual Foundation victory, as unlikely as it now seems. The problem, however, is that Seldon's plan says nothing about the fate of Siwenna.

And it now appears that all hope is lost for the successful uprising he and his family have so long desired. Devers laments that Barr hadn't cracked Riose's skull, only wounded him. But Barr says that wouldn't have helped matters in the least, because Brodrig is worse.



**Ducem Barr**

"All Siwenna would have been my hostage. Brodrig has proven his worth long since. There exists a world which five years ago lost one male in every ten and simply for failure to meet outstanding taxes. This same Brodrig was the tax collector. No, Riose may live. His punishments are mercy in comparison. But six months... six months in the enemy base with nothing to show for it. Nothing to show for it."

**Joel**

Barr now remembers there may be something after all. He fishes a small sphere from his pocket and puts it on the table. Devers snatches it.

**Lathan Devers**

"What is it?"

**Ducem Barr**

"The message capsule. The one that Riose received just before I jacked him. Does that count as something?"

**Joel**

After a shower, Barr returns to find Devers hard at work at his lab bench, investigating the spherical device. He asks if Devers can open it without the proper credentials.

**Lathan Devers**

"If I can't, I'll resign from the association and never skipper a ship for what's left of my life. I've got a three way electronic analysis of the interior now and I've got little jiggers that the Empire never heard of, especially made for jimmy and capsules. I've been a burglar before this, you know. A trader has to be something of everything."

## **Joel**

More shades of Limmar Ponyets (I'm never going to let you forget that name, you know). Eventually, of course, Devers succeeds in opening the capsule and contemptuously observes that the medium is permanent. A Foundation message would be designed to oxidize into dust seconds after reading, just like the one that you-know-who received back at the beginning of "The Traders."

The message was brief and apparently routine. "From Amil Brodrig, Envoy Extraordinary of His Imperial Majesty, Privy Secretary of the Council and Peer of the Realm to Bel Riose, Military Governor of Siwenna, General of the Imperial Forces and Peer of the Realm. I greet you. Planet number 1120 no longer resists the plans of offense as outlined. Continue smoothly, the enemy weakens visibly, and the ultimate ends in view will surely be gained." Barr is dejected and bitterly unhappy, as the message appears to be worthless for their purposes, it contains no essential information of any possible use to the Foundation.

All appears to be lost. Devers, however, sees something that Barr is missing. He asks him to read again the final words and asks what he might have meant by "the ultimate ends in view?"

## **Ducem Barr**

"The conquest of the Foundation. Well?"

## **Lathan Devers**

"Yes. And maybe he means the conquest of the Empire? You know he believes that to be the ultimate end. "

## **Ducem Barr**

"And if he does?"

**Lathan Devers**

"If he does, why? Watch then, and I'll show you."

**Joel**

"With one finger, the lavishly monogrammed sheet of message parchment was thrust back into its slot. With a soft twang, it disappeared, and the globe was a smooth, unbroken hole again. Somewhere inside was the tiny oiled whirl of the controls as they lost their setting by random movements."

**Lathan Devers**

"Now, there is no way of opening this capsule without knowledge of Riose's personal characteristic, is there?"

**Ducem Barr**

"To the empire. No."

**Lathan Devers**

"Then the evidence it contains is unknown to us and absolutely authentic."

**Joel**

Devers explains to the incredulous Barr that they now have direct evidence of Brodrig's treachery, and that if they can get it to the Emperor, he will no doubt suspect that both Riose and Brodrig are conspiring to overthrow him and will likely recall the fleet. Barr thinks it's impossible for them to reach Trantor as they don't even know where they are.

But Devers reminds him that his is a Foundation ship, well armed, and that they have personal shields on board that the Empire never found. They also have the funds that Brodrig generously provided to them in his bribe. All they have to do is find the nearest planet, buy the charts they need, and off to Trantor to hopefully end the war before it's too late. It's been many episodes since we last visited the Imperial capital of

Trantor, with its gleaming metal enclosing a world of 40 billion inhabitants. You may remember the description of it that Asimov provided in "The Psychohistorians" when Gaal Dornick first arrived.

I refer you to the text of "The General" in "Foundation and Empire" to hear a recapitulation and elaboration upon this description. Suffice it to say that the mission that Devers and Barr have embarked upon to not only safely land on the planet, but to find their way through the complex bureaucratic thicket of a government designed to rule an entire galaxy and get their message into the hands of the emperor seems an impossible task. Somehow they make their way to the planet's surface and what do you suppose is the first thing they do once they have gained the relative safety of the planet's enclosure? Why, they buy a newspaper, of course!

It is the Trantor Imperial News, the official news organ of the Imperial government. I have to quote this description of the operation of this journalistic enterprise because a mere 70 years or so after its publication, it is so anachronistically hilarious. "In the back of the newsroom there was the soft clicking noise of additional editions being printed in long distance sympathy with the busy machines at the Imperial News offices 10,000 miles away by corridor 6000 by air machine just as 10 million sets of copies were being likewise printed at that moment in 10 million other newsrooms all over the planet." It's funny how none of the brilliantly imaginative minds of science fiction writers of the golden age of science fiction conceived of anything remotely like the Internet we take for granted today.

The bold and dauntless Devers is out of his element. He has no idea how they will cut through the throng of humanity that encircles the emperor. Barr assures him that there is a way, but it will involve a host of bribes of lower level officials and that he has the knowledge and understanding of Imperial culture to do the talking and spread their funds appropriately. But they are up against an enormously difficult task.

To make matters worse, the newspaper gives an account of a battle in which the Foundation forces were wiped out. Bel Riose has captured Loris and is now on the doorstep of Terminus. Devers is despondent, but Barr assures him that this is standard wartime propaganda, probably hugely overstated. Devers says they will have to work fast, but Barr gives him a dose of unappetizing reality.

### **Ducem Barr**

"You can't go fast on Trantor. If you try, you'll end up at the point of an atom blaster, most likely."

### **Lathan Devers**

"How long will it take?"

### **Ducem Barr**

"A month, if we're lucky. A month and our hundred thousand credits, if even that will suffice, and that is providing the emperor does not take it into his head in the meantime to travel to the summer planets where he sees no petitioners at all."

### **Joel**

After getting dinner, our two plucky heroes get to work at their epic task of bribery. And for quite a while all goes well. Barr eloquently explains their needs, is denied, then obliquely refers to the compensation for the target's efforts on their behalf. Bills are quietly exchanged and they advance unhindered to the next level of obstacles in their path. Eventually, however, they reach a point at which the bribes do not attain their desired result.

They are speaking to the Home Commissioner of the Outer Provinces.

**Police Lieutenant**

"But the emperor is indisposed. Gentlemen, it is really useless to take the matter to my superior. His Imperial Majesty has seen no one in a week."

**Ducem Barr**

"He will see us. It is but a question of seeing a member of the staff of the Privy Secretary."

**Joel**

Barr's request is coldly denied. So the time has come for the requisite bribe. The Commissioner appears to play his role, accepting the bills and counting them slowly. When he appears to Bach, Barr asks him if the sum is inadequate.

**Police Lieutenant**

"On the contrary, it is more than adequate to return to what I was saying. It is the Emperor himself who has become interested in your case. Is it not true, sirs, that you have recently been guests of General Riose? Is it not true that you have escaped from the midst of his army with, to put it mildly, astonishing ease? Is it not true that you possess a small fortune in bills backed by Lord Brodrig's estates? In short, is it not true that you are a pair of spies and assassins sent here to well, you shall tell us yourself. Who paid you, and for what. Do you know? I deny the right of a petty commissioner to accuse us of crimes."

**Ducem Barr**

"We will leave."

## **Police Lieutenant**

"You will not leave. You need answer no question now. That will be reserved for a later and more forceful time. Nor am I a commissioner. I am a lieutenant of the Imperial Police. You are under arrest."

## **Joel**

Barr and Devers now face an implacable foe in whose hand now appears a highly lethal blast gun pointed in their direction. Devers slowly begins to retrieve his own concealed weapon, at which the policeman smiles and closes the contacts. "The blasting line of force struck Devers' chest in an accurate blaze of destruction that bounced harmlessly off his personal shield in sparkling spicules of light. Devers shot in turn and the Lieutenant's head fell from off an upper torso that had disappeared. It was still smiling as it lay in the jag of sunshine, which entered through the new made hole in the wall. It was through the back entrance that they left,."

## **Lathan Devers**

"Quickly, to the ship. They'll have the alarm out in no time. It's another plan that's backfired. I could swear the space fiend himself is against me!"

## **Joel**

This is the point in the story that most strains credulity to me, for the two clearly identified murderers of an imperial police officer are somehow successful in fleeing the scene of the carnage resulting from their clumsy attempt at a bribe and making their way to Devers' ship and then successfully elude, pursuing craft and dangerously leap into hyperspace without proper preparations and calculations, resulting in Barr nearly losing consciousness.

Somehow Devers had found it possible and reasonable to buy another newspaper along the way. If this segment was written today, all you would have to say is they checked the hyperspace news. But we must

abide with the limitations of mid 20th century ignorance of modern telecommunications capabilities. Only when Devers and Barr had gained the safety of hyperspace do they pause to look at the large block headline on the front page of the Imperial News.

**Ducem Barr**

"Recalled and Arrested, Riose and Brodrig."

**Lathan Devers**

"Why?"

**Ducem Barr**

"Story doesn't say. But what does it matter? The war with the Foundation is over and at this moment, Sowena is revolting. Read the story and see. We'll stop in some of the provinces and find out the later details. If you don't mind, I'll go to sleep now."

**Joel**

Another delicious quote from Asimov concludes the chapter so evocative of Golden Age science fiction prose. "In grasshopper jumps of increasing magnitude the trade ship was spanning the galaxy in its return to the Foundation." So what in the great galaxy happened to cause this happy outcome for the Foundation? I will allow you, the listener, to read the concluding chapter for yourself to define the details. But in essence, the conclusion was always inevitable.

Devers and Barr's wild exploits accomplished absolutely nothing except for enriching a few corrupt officials of the Imperial government and depleting one unfortunate officer of his head. As Barr should have known and claimed to be confident of from the start, Hari Seldon's calculations had ascertained that the Foundation would prevail. In the end, Barr in



retrospect realized his folly and explains to Senett Forrel, the son of the great Hober Mallow, how the victory came to be.

### **Ducem Barr**

"You see, sir, you and Devers and everyone no doubt had the idea that beating the Empire meant first prying apart the emperor and his general. You and Devers and everyone else were right. Right all the time as far as the principle of internal disunion was concerned. You were wrong, however, in thinking that this internal split was something to be brought about by individual acts by inspirations of the moment. You tried bribery and lies. You appealed to ambition and to fear but you got nothing for all your pains. In fact, appearances were worse after each attempt. And through all this wild threshing up of tiny ripples the sudden tidal wave continued onward quietly but quite irresistibly."

### **Joel**

I find it funny that Ducem Barr, the man who impulsively clubs Bel Riose over the head with a bust of Cleon II, would have the nerve to criticize inspirations of the moment. He also had quite a direct hand in the bribery and lies he mocks. I suppose we can forgive him a few inconsistencies knowing of the horrific losses to his family that could have made his behavior a little erratic. Barr explains to the still confused Forel,

## **Ducem Barr**

"A weak general could never have endangered us. Obviously, a strong general during the time of a weak emperor would never have endangered us either, for he would have turned his arms towards a much more fruitful target. Events have shown that three fourth of the emperors of the last two centuries were rebel generals and rebel viceroys before they were emperors. So it is only the combination of a strong emperor and a strong general that can harm the Foundation, for a strong emperor cannot be dethroned easily, and a strong general is forced to turn outwards, past the frontiers."

## **Joel**

This passage again shows the value of the young Asimov's enthusiastic studies of history. In reading Gibbons' "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," he would have seen this pattern repeated again and again. It would seem that this is an inescapable path, in the decline of a powerful empire, and Asimov simply reenacted it in humanity's distant future. I am further intrigued, however, by the implications this presents in the greater story arc of Foundation.

In some ways, the clash of the dead hand of Hari Seldon and the living will of Bel Riose is the perfect encapsulation of the essence of psychohistorical determinism, one that has been hinted at throughout the stories leading up to this climactic confrontation, but never so thoroughly explored as it is here. Where can Asimov possibly go from here? Shouldn't this effectively be the end of the story? Seldon knew the future from the power of his science, as has been proved conclusively. Now, why should we even read on? I can imagine Asimov wondering what he could write now that would keep the reader's attention.

They're not going to keep falling for this over and over, are they?  
Remember that Asimov's editor at Astounding Stories, Joseph [John]

Campbell was a huge influence on the path of his writing and had suggested the premise of the story to him from the beginning. Campbell knew well of what a successful epic was made and would likely have seen the blind alley that Asimov was painting himself into. There is a clue of the crack in the door that the writer could wedge open within the lines I just quoted from Ducem Barr. "It is only the combination of a strong emperor and strong general that can harm the Foundation."

This empire, the one that had improbably ruled the galaxy for 12,000 years, is on the clear path to oblivion. The Foundation and the reader who aligns his or her sympathies with them will no longer fear their declining power. Their complete collapse, as Seldon foresaw, is now inevitable. What new villain can possibly take its place without an empire? How can there ever be a strong emperor and strong general to seriously threaten them? Perhaps not an emperor or a general in a traditional sense, but an individual of unforeseen capability could fulfill this role to be both a powerful driver of raw force to envelop planets and submit them to his will, and a masterful administrator of the worlds under his command. Someone or something entirely unforeseen by Hari Seldon, an X factor that lies outside of his all encompassing equations. We are soon to meet this factor in our next episode.

Let me turn very briefly to the last bit of dialogue in this chapter, a few lines of which might not seem important and which I might very well have overlooked if it weren't for the attention drawn to them by my friend and loyal listener of the podcast, Erasmo Acosta. Forel, Barr and Devers are rejoicing in the newfound freedom of the Foundation in the wake of their stunning victory.

Forel is jubilant.

**Senett Forel**

"Good, then, you imply the emperor can never threaten us again?"

**Ducem Barr**

"It seems to be so. Frankly, Cleon may not live out the year, and there's going to be a disputed succession almost as a matter of course, which might mean the last civil war for the Empire."

**Senett Forel**

"Then there are no more enemies?"

**Ducem Barr**

"There's a second Foundation."

**Senett Forel**

"At the other end of the galaxy. Not for centuries!"

**Ducem Barr**

Devers interjects.

"There are internal enemies, perhaps?"

**Senett Forel**

"Are there? Who, for instance?"

**Lathan Devers**

"People, for instance, who might like to spread the wealth a little bit and keep it from concentrating too much out of the hands that work for it. See what I mean?"

## **Ducem Barr**

This is fascinating. Devers has always struck me as an independent sort, a man who loves his lone work among the stars, but hardly a plutocratic fat cat. Here he seems to be implying that a new enemy of the Foundation will be the common people who may seek to benefit from the efforts of people like him in trading and accumulating wealth for themselves as they serve the greater interests. The final line of the chapter is, "Slowly Forel's gaze lost its contempt and grew one with the anger of Devers' own." Notably, Barr doesn't join in this sentiment, and I find I am glad of this.

## **Joel**

I enjoyed Devers' manic intensity and swashbuckling attitude throughout the story, but don't think he would make for the kind of enlightened leadership as I would wish to live under. Barr, by contrast, was described as a patrician. This would imply he was a nobleman who would be expected to defend the concerns of the ruling class. We have seen, however, that his behavior, at times admittedly erratic, was largely selfless. We don't know much about Forel, except that he was a powerful figure among the traders. Perhaps this is why he shares Devers' anger at the idea of the little guy getting his fair share of the goods he has acquired through his commercial exploits.

The point of all this, and I suspect that of Asimov's rather enigmatically phrased concluding dialogue, is that there is another threat to the Foundation from within, in the form of societal change, potentially unfriendly to the leaders of the Foundation. We should expect to see this become a greater factor as the story unfolds. I'll conclude this episode by noting that Asimov is becoming a better and better writer as he goes where he started, with caricatures like Ling Chen and Wenus of Anacreon and benign despots like Hardin and Mallow, he is now beginning to develop some real depth in his characters. Devers is fun but a little shady.

Barr is noble but somewhat erratic. Riose is a determined soldier with grandiose aims, but has a somewhat congenial nature. At least he was until Cleon recalled him and presumably treated him and Brodrig in similar manner to how the unfortunate police commissioner was treated at the hands of Devers' blaster. Of course, our beloved author still has some flaws, most notably in the absence of female characters of any depth or genuine importance to the story. That is about to change, however. Look forward to the next episode, The Mule, Part One, for an excellent example of this change. For any women in the audience, you are about to finally have a representative of your gender impact this story in a profound way. I must say, this is a long overdue development.

Let me thank the usual suspects; Tom Barnes for the wonderful theme music orchestration, Jeremy MacKinnon for sound design, Mike Topping for our beautiful podcast artwork, and my wonderful listeners without whom this podcast would not exist. I thank each and every one of you and look forward to joining you in our upcoming episodes. My only complaint is that not enough of you email me at [joel@seldoncrisis.net](mailto:joel@seldoncrisis.net) or tag me on Twitter @joelgmckinnon. I adore engagement, so please let me know what you think of the show. Until next time, when together we meet on Seldon Crisis with the Mule part One.

[theme music plays out]