

The Merchant Princes



[Theme music with voiceovers.]

Jorane Sutt

"You're a trader and one of the best. You've been to Korell, and you know the Korellians. That's where you've got to go."

Hober Mallow

"Who let this man in without orders from me?"

Jord Parma

"As you are children of the Spirit, and in the name of that Spirit, protect me from them!"

Mallow

"Jael, they're getting ships from the empire itself. It's still there you know. It may be gone here in the periphery, but in the galactic center, it's still very much alive."

[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

Hello, friends of the greatest science fiction epic of all time. Welcome back to Seldon Crisis, my personal journey through Isaac Asimov's Foundation series. Today we have a pretty big episode to go through, so I'm probably going to have to be a little more lean on the summary and the dialogue. Just as a reminder. It's really tough trying to decide what Asimov dialogue to include, and most painfully, what to leave out. I urge everyone to read the actual books for yourself if you haven't, or reread them if you have. I'm reading through everything for the second time within a year and find the pleasure only increases with repetition.

As you may recall, in our last episode, "The Traders," we focused on one particular event involving a single planetary system on the outskirts of the periphery, beyond the four kingdoms, which the Foundation had successfully brought under their control through the useful fantasy of the Galactic Spirit. We only had a few major characters to track the trader Ponyets, his primary adversary in the Councillor Pherl, and a couple of lesser importance to the plot in the persons of the Grand Master of Askone and Gorof, the Foundation agent Ponyets had to find a way to spring from captivity. Today's episode is going to cover a lot more ground and involve many more people. There are at least ten major characters, and the action will take place on three different worlds and some in space.

Before describing each scene, I'll introduce you to the players involved, starting with two of the most important characters of this episode, Jorane Sutt and Hober Mallow. We find the two of them in Sutt's office on

Terminus, where Sutt has called Mallow in for an important assignment. The first thing to notice is that the political dynamics have shifted since the days of Hardin. Sutt is clearly an important figure, though he's not the Mayor, his title is Secretary of Education, and he has considerable sway with the Mayor, who actually has very little impact on the action this time around.

Our chief protagonist, Hober Mallow, is a trader born on Smyrno, one of the original four kingdoms, and has been naturalized as a citizen of the Foundation. We will see that his origin is still a hindrance to his mobility in Foundation society. But you will also note that Mallow is not one to be easily hindered. Sutt begins the discussion by suggesting that he suspects another Seldon Crisis may be upon them. Three Foundation ships have recently failed to report back from missions to the Korellian Republic, another fringe territory clearly not under Foundation control. Such suspects that they may have been destroyed or captured, which implies the Korellians could have nuclear weapons.

Otherwise the Foundation ships could not have been outgunned. Mallow is told that the last word received in all three cases consisted of routine reports. He asks Sutt,

Mallow

"What did Korell say?"

Sutt

"There was no way of asking. The Foundation's greatest asset throughout the periphery is its reputation of power. Do you think we can lose three ships and ask for them?"

Joel

Mallow wants to know what he wants of him, and Sutt makes his proposal more in the form of a veiled command, as clearly he holds considerable power. He wants to know if Korell has nuclear weapons, where is it getting them? It's too far fetched to think they could have the scientific acumen to have built them themselves. So the more likely alternative is that an act of treason has been committed. Some dissident group within the Foundation has provided the Korellians with the weapons or the know how to create them. Here we get our first intimation that Mallow's off world birth makes him suspect. Sutt implies the likelihood that Mallow's ancestral family was hurt by the redistribution of lands initiated by Sef Sermak, a name from two episodes back who apparently had a lingering impact on Foundation history. After all, despite losing out politically to the great Salvor Hardin. Mallow is appalled at this insinuation.

Mallow

"No, by Black Space, no! My grandfather was a poor son of a spacer who died heaving coal at starvation wages before the Foundation took over. I owe nothing to the old regime, but I was born on Smyrno, and I'm not ashamed of either Smyrno or Smyrnians by the galaxy. Your sly little hints of treason aren't going to panic me into licking Foundation spittle. And now you can either give your orders or make your accusations. I don't care which."

Sutt

"My good Master Trader. I don't care an electron whether your grandfather was King of Smyrno or the greatest pauper on the planet. I recited that rigmarole about your birth and ancestry to show that I'm not interested in them. Evidently, you missed the point. Let's go back now. You're a Smyrnian. You know the Outlanders. Also, you're a trader and one of the best. You've been to Korell and you know the Korellians. That's where you've got to go. "

Joel

Mallow is to go to Korell with his eyes open and is pointedly reminded that two of the missing ships had Smyrnian crews. He is to depart in six days.

Now the scene shifts to Sutt's apartment, where we meet with another character of high rank, Publis Manlio. He is the latest High Priest of the Foundation's pseudo-religious order and doubles as Foreign Secretary. Apparently, former Ambassador Poly Verisof's double position from the Mayors has now been elevated to have even greater standing.

Manlio has a lot of importance to Foundation politics, but not much direct involvement in this story. The purpose of this short discussion is to set some context of how the Galactic Spirit scam is starting to lose its mojo, and also to reveal what Sutt's real motive is in sending Mallow to Korell. He wants to learn more about the nuclear threat, to be sure, but he also wants to find reason to reduce the standing of people like Mallow. He is convinced that such outlanders are gaining too much power through the wealth they are accumulating as traders. He wants and hopes to find Mallow guilty of something that can allow him to curtail his power.

The plan they are hatching is to eventually promote Manlio to the Mayoralty itself. The real power would presumably still rest in the capable hands of one Jorane Sutt. How will they find Mallow guilty of this treachery

they require? They'll need to be watching him closely. Which brings us to our next player, one who will have plenty of direct involvement in the proceedings.

Our next scene has us in Mallow's more humble apartment. Apparently, he's not super wealthy, as his relatively humble abode is contrasted with such more opulent digs. It could also be that Mallow spends most of his time in space and on various worlds as a trader and doesn't invest in a big house in the capital city. Mallow is entertaining a guest, a fellow trader by the name of Jaim Twer, who he'd met briefly some years earlier at a trading convention. Twer has a political secret to share.

Twer

"Jorane Sutt plans to resign from the government!"

Joel

He doesn't explain how he knows this, but he wants to enlist Mallow in a scheme to use the ensuing political instability to advance the rights of fellow traders. He thinks this is a chance to make the Foundation more democratic at a time it is slipping into a more authoritarian mode. Mallow is sympathetic with his ideals, but has to disappoint him.

Mallow

"Uh-uh. Sorry, Twer. I'm leaving next week on business. You'll have to get someone else."

Twer

"Business? What kind of business?"

Mallow

"Very super secret. Trole-A priority. All that, you know. Had a talk with the Mayor's own secretary."

Joel

Twer is aghast. He calls Sutt a snake and says that he's just finding a way to get rid of the trader for his own reasons. Mallow thinks otherwise.

Mallow

"If it's a trick, I'll be back someday for the reckoning. If it isn't your snake, Sutt is playing into our hands. Listen, there's a Seldon Crisis coming up."

Joel

Twer's reaction surprises Mallow. He looks utterly mystified.

Twer

"What's a Seldon Crisis?"

Joel

Mallow, incredulous, has to explain the history of Seldon's appearances in the Time Vault at moments of greatest peril - those we've witnessed twice earlier - of which, somehow, Twer is completely and bafflingly ignorant. Perhaps, as we see often in the early stories of the epic, which had been published in serial form. Asimov is just using this as an occasion to educate his readers who may not know the full context of Foundation lore?

Twer is curious about Mallow's secret mission.

Twer

"Are you on the track of anything?"

Mallow

"No."

Twer

"You have definite plans?"

Mallow

"Not the faintest inkling of one. Remember, as the great Salvor Hardin once said, 'To succeed, planning alone is insufficient. One must improvise as well.' I'll improvise."

Joel

Then, out of the blue, Mallow decides to offer Twer to join him on the trip. Twer demures, but is eventually convinced to come along. Mallow seems pleased and tells him to show up at the docks tomorrow ready to board his vessel, the 'Far Star.'

Now the scene shifts far away from Terminus and well into Mallow's mission, the heart of our story. Mallow's ship has arrived on Korell, and a curious stalemate has arisen. For two weeks they had been escorted in by a hostile but rather unimpressive koterie of battered and underpowered guardian vessels with absolutely no hint of nuclear weaponry. They'd been waiting a week in the decrepit and decaying spaceport of the Korellian capital. The sheen of the prosperity of Terminus and the worlds it controlled was entirely lacking here, only the remnants of the old empire's presence long departed and clearly not reinforced or well maintained.

The crew is restless and tense. Jaim Twer is also becoming frustrated and waits for the ship's captain to take some sort of action. Mallow, however, remains patient and even seems pleased with the prospects for trading with this world. He can see that they are in urgent need of the technology the Foundation can provide, but the rumor is that they are fanatically opposed to outside influence. It is an authoritarian state, and the Commдор, as the leader is called, feels that his power can only be threatened by outside influences.

Twer is skittish and feels they are in a position of high risk. With guards around the base and ships overhead, what is to keep their hosts from bombing the ship to pieces at any moment? Mallow reminds him that they've had a week to act and have done nothing.

Mallow and Twer discuss the likelihood that the Korellians could be waiting for reinforcements to arrive, possibly nuclear powered. Mallow is unconvinced that the enemy has nuclear weapons but is not entirely sure that they don't. He suspects even if they do have them, they would not attempt to interfere with an official envoy of the Foundation, as that might bring down upon them the might of their better armed adversaries. The waiting continues.

Suddenly, a visiplate alights and a sergeant appears with a message the crew has admitted a Foundation missionary in full priestly garb!

Mallow is livid. This expressly goes against his orders that no one is to leave or be admitted without his advance permission. He orders the crew to battle stations and orders the priest to be brought to him. He orders Tor to go and assemble the officers and bring them to him.

Asimov writes a couple of curious lines of description here. "There was a five minute hiatus in which Mallow kicked open the doors to the lavatories, looked behind the bar, pulled the draperies across the thick windows for half a minute. He left the room altogether, and when he returned, he was humming abstractedly."

The men file in, and the captain speaks quietly but firmly.

Mallow

"First, who let this man in without orders from me?"

Joel

The watch sergeant claims it was a mutual decision, as it was clear that the priest was one of their own. Mallow angrily upgrades him and orders him, relieved of supervisory duties for a week. Twer objects to punishing the man, and Mallow simply ignores the interruption. Another officer complains about the seven days of no action and says, discipline can't be maintained under these conditions. Mallow will have none of it.

Mallow

"There's no merit in discipline under ideal circumstances. I'll have it in the face of death, or it's useless. Where's this missionary? Get him here, in front of me."

Joel

The priest appears in the scarlet robes of his order and appears to be unwell. When questioned as to his name he responds by babbling incoherently about the Galactic Spirit until Mallow shuts him up. Twer interferes again and insists that the priest be taken away for rest and treatment, which only makes Mallow more angry. He insists on knowing the priest's name, whereupon the missionary goes into a lengthy introduction.

Parma

"As you are enlightened men, save me from the heathen. Save me from these brutes and darkened ones who raven after me and would afflict the Galactic Spirit with their crimes. I am Jord Parma of the Anacreonian worlds, educated at the Foundation, the Foundation itself my children! I am a Priest of the Spirit, educated into all the mysteries who have come here where the inner voice called me. I have suffered at the hands of the unenlightened. As you are Children of the Spirit, and in the name of that Spirit, protect me from them!"

Joel

A voice breaks in from the communications speaker, enemy units have been sighted approaching the ship. Several thousands have suddenly appeared in the form of a Korellian mob. They fill the previously vacant spaceport, and one figure comes slowly forward. Mallow demands to know what they want, and the answer comes back that the mob is demanding the priest be turned over to them. It's Twer's turn for anger.

Twer

"Mallow, you're bound to hold on to this man. There's no way of maintaining decency and honor otherwise. He's of the Foundation, and after all, he is a priest. These savages outside. Do you hear me?"

Mallow

"I hear you, Twer. I've got more to do here than guard missionaries. I'll do, sir, what I please, and by Seldon and all the galaxy, if you try to stop me, I'll tear out your stinking windpipe. Don't get in my way, Twer, or it will be the last of you."

Joel

Mallow reminds the priest that he is here against the law of the Korellian Republic. He has no authority to protect him from the crowd. Mallow makes the extremely unpopular decision to abandon the priest to the mob, so unpopular that he feels it necessary to draw his blaster and hold it menacingly. Should anyone feel obliged to counter his commands. Guards are ordered to remove the priest, who screeches in terror.

As he is dragged off he raises his arms and rigid fingers spear upward and the voluminous sleeves of his garment fall away to reveal thin, veined arms. There is a momentary tiny flash of light that comes and goes in a breath. The missionary's voice pours out as he struggles in the two-fold grasp.

Parma

"Cursed be the traitor who abandons his fellow man to evil and to death. Deafened be the ears that are deaf to the pleadings of the helpless. Blind be the eyes that are blind to innocence. Blackened forever be the soul that consorts with blackness."

Joel

Twer clamps his hands over his ears, unable to bear witness to the man's suffering. Mallow calmly puts away his blaster and orders his men back to their stations. He takes Twer into his private room and orders him to sit.

Mallow

"Twer, I'm disappointed. Your three years in politics seem to have gotten you out of trader habits. Remember, I may be a democrat back at the Foundation, but there's nothing short of tyranny that can run my ship the way I want it run. I never had to pull a blaster on my men before and wouldn't have had to now if you hadn't gotten out of line. You have no official position, but you're here on my invitation, and I'll extend you every courtesy - in private. However, from now on, in the presence of my officers or men, I'm 'sir' and not 'Mallow.' And when I give an order, you'll jump faster than a third class recruit just for luck, or I'll have you handcuffed in the sub-level even faster. Understand?"

Joel

Twer mumbles an apology and says he couldn't stand to see an innocent man said to his death. Mallow is of a different disposition. He suspects something smells bad about this affair. The priest and the giant crowd suddenly came from nowhere, and the nearest city is hundreds of miles away.

He suspects that the priest was sent to them as bait. If they'd harbored him, they'd have been guilty of violating Korell's sovereignty, an act of war.

Perhaps it was all a setup to push Mallow into doing something worthy of declaring them unwelcome and ordered to return to their home planet, or worse. As he is explaining all this to Tor, an official document is received, teleported direct from the capital on the Commdor's own stationery.

Mallow

"So my idea was far fetched, was it? Half an hour after we hand back the missionary, we get a very polite invitation to the Commdor's august presence after seven days of previous waiting, I think we passed a test."

Joel

Shortly afterward, Hober Mallow, alone, is led into the presence of the man who rules the ostensibly free people of Korell who refer to him as, "Asper the well-beloved." He's not a particularly impressive figure with poorly laundered garments and gray hair which loops limply upon his shoulders. He attempts to impress upon Mallow how Korell is similar to Foundation in that they are both republics and that he shares the desire for peace and friendship between their peoples. Though he claims to be loved, his grounds are guarded and fortified strongly which would seem to indicate the love is less than universal for his personage.

Mallow describes the traits they must no doubt share, such as a desire for the well being of their people, and that he enjoys the opportunity to discuss ways that they may use their respect and friendship for the mutual benefit brought about by unrestricted trade.

Mallow

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

Joel

The Commdor voices his concern.

Asper

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

Joel

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

Asper

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

Joel

I love that underwear line. But Mallow responds that this is not at all what he suggests.

Mallow

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

Joel

Asper is suspicious.

Asper

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

Mallow

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

Asper

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

Mallow

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

Joel

Mallow asks permission to give a small demonstration. He asks for a young woman, and one of the Commдор's girls is brought in. Yes, you heard that right. A woman. In Foundation, no less! Mallow presents her with a flat linked chain and snaps it in place about her waist. He shows her a control to activate it. From her waist emerges a streaming luminescence of shifting color that draws itself upward over her head in a flashing coronet of liquid fire. In Asimov's words, "As if someone had torn the aurora borealis out of the sky and molded it to a cloak."

The girl steps to a mirror and stares in fascination. Mallow hands her a necklace of dull pebbles, and when she puts it on, each individual bead erupts in flames of crimson and gold, and the girl is filled with awe and delight.

Asper wants to know how it is done, but Mallow tells him he'd have to defer to his technical experts for the explanation and graciously presents it as a gift to the Commidora. He goes on to explain that the women will doubtlessly pay high prices for the honor of wearing such jewelry, and that this can be provided in such a way as to earn high and sustained profits for both of them. He describes a wealth of gadgets and devices that will similarly be in high demand compact appliances, tools that never wear out, lighting fixtures, etc. He gives a sales pitch that would have impressed Limmar Ponyets. The commodore is overwhelmed.

Seizing the moment, Mallow tells him that he could retool his factories, explaining that he has devices that could cut production costs to a tiny fraction of what they are currently, but would need to gain access to one of his foundries to put on an adequate demonstration. The Commdor readily agrees to invite him and a few of his crewmen to a steel foundry in the city the following day. But first they will dine and celebrate their friendship. Mallow is escorted back to his ship.

We now turn to a brief interlude involving the first couple of Korell, Commdor Asper and Commidora Lycia. Asimov was apparently so smitten by including the brief encounter with a female character that he followed it up with a whole, if somewhat brief, chapter in which another appears in a very prominent role. You will observe that Lycia is not exactly madly in love with her husband. In fact, it is clear that she detests him. It's apparently a forced match for political reasons, as she is the daughter of a high empire official, which works to Asper's favour, though it doesn't appear to guarantee domestic bliss.

We meet the royal couple in the midst of what seems to be a typical exchange. The Commidora is staring at her husband with unveiled contempt.

Lycia

"Oh, I see you are very friendly with these barbarians. Perhaps that is why I'm not to be permitted to attend your conversation. Perhaps your little wheezing soul is plotting to turn against my father."

Asper

"Not at all."

Lycia

"Yes, I'd like to believe you, wouldn't I? If ever a poor woman was sacrificed for policy to an unsavory marriage, it was myself. I could have picked a more proper man from the alleys and mud heaps of my native world."

Asper

"Perhaps you would enjoy returning to your native world, except that to retain as a souvenir that portion of you with which I am best acquainted, I could have your tongue cut out first. And as a final improving touch to your beauty, your ears and the tip of your nose as well."

Lycia

"You wouldn't dare, you little pug dog. My father would pulverize your toy nation to meteoric dust. In fact, he might do it in any case if I told him you are treating with these barbarians."

Asper

"Well, there's no need for threats. You are free to question the man yourself tonight. Meanwhile, Madame, keep your wagging tongue still!"

Joel

The Commdor ends the conversation by demonstrating the gift Mallow had provided and telling Lycia she may wear it to the banquet. Such a loving couple!

It will be a while before we meet a female character with a little more substance than those we've been briefly introduced to here. The main idea is to show what a weak willed worm Asper is, that he can be bossed around by a mere woman.

Now we turn to an even more brief exchange on board the Far Star between Mallow and Jaim Twer as they are preparing to tour the factory

with the Commdor. Twer thinks that Mallow has suspicions about this visit and what they might find. Could there be trouble?

Mallow

"Trouble? No. Quite the opposite, in fact. I'm in the position of throwing my full weight against a door and finding it a jar at the same time. We're getting into this steel foundry too easily."

Twer

"You suspect a trap?"

Mallow

"Oh, for Seldon's sake, don't be melodramatic. It's just that the easy entrance means that there will be nothing to see."

Joel

Mallow's mission is to find evidence of nuclear power, and Twer seems sure that they have none or there would be signs of it already. Mallow thinks it might only be in the foundries if it was just starting up, but obviously not if they are being granted entrance.

A royal ground car approaches, and Mallow's party prepares for their visit. They bring along a few gadgets to show off for the provincial rubes. Soon afterward, at the factory, Mallow pulls out his gadgets and puts on another great sales demo. He demonstrates some nuclear shears which can cut neatly through solid steel without disturbing the tabletop upon which they are used. He displays further tools and tricks that show how the factory will be able to reduce its cost dramatically and produce highly refined materials.

At one point, he demonstrates the amazing capability of cutting pipe and reconnecting it without evidence that it was ever separated. It's a

real industrial magic show. The Commdor and his men crowd around in excitement and examine the materials produced. As Mallow is continuing his patter, he momentarily comes to a stop. He's just seen something that brought excitement to his chest while the base of his stomach went tingly and cold. I'll let Asimov describe this because the prose is just magical.

"The Commdor's own bodyguards, in the confusion, had struggled to the front line and Mallow, for the first time, was near enough to see their unfamiliar hand weapons in detail. They were nuclear! There was no mistaking it; an explosive projectile weapon with a barrel like that was impossible. But that wasn't the big point. That wasn't the point at all. The butts of those weapons had, deeply etched upon them, in worn gold plating, the Spaceship-and-Sun, the same Spaceship-and-Sun that was stamped on every one of the great volumes of the original encyclopedia that the Foundation had begun and not yet finished. The same Spaceship-and-Sun that had blazened the banner of the Galactic Empire through millennia."

Mallow continues with his sales demo and manages to cover his excitement. He now has what he came to find. He knows where the Korellians have attained the technology capable of defeating Foundation ships. There's been no word from the Empire for a century and a half, but he has now seen proof that it still exists deep in the Galactic Center and is re-emerging way out here in the periphery. He smiles and brings the demonstration to a close.

Later, after two days in space aboard the Far Star, Mallow turns over command of the ship to his lieutenant with detailed instructions and a time capsule to store encrypted information until a particular date and time whereupon it will be revealed. The temporary captain is to take the Far Star to a specific planet and wait for two months. If at the end of that interval Mallow has not returned, they are to return to Terminus with the

time capsule as the report. A short time later, a lifeboat departs from the side of the Far Star.

It's interesting how nautical the terminology is throughout these stories. Nowadays, we would typically refer to it as a shuttlecraft. Star Trek, Star Wars, Battlestar Galactica and other modern space operas have definitely updated the jargon. The concepts, though, are straight out of the golden age of science fiction.

Some time later, Mallow appears at the decaying home of an old man named Onum Barr on the planet of Siwenna, a bit closer in towards the Galactic core. He enters with his blaster on hip and a personal force field, which the old man notices but doesn't mention.

Barr is quite old and has become disillusioned. He gives Mallow a history lesson of the terrible things he has endured over his lifetime. In his prime, he was a patrician and a provincial senator. The Empire was fading, and the viceroy from Siwenna was a contender for the throne. This particular viceroy attempted a coup, and when he went to face the admiral of the Empire's fleet, the people of Siwenna revolted against him and drove him off to where he leads the remnants of his forces in piracy among the red stars.

When the admiral took Siwenna, he longed for the honor of conquest and the rights of pillage, so he had the rebellious people put to the nuclear blast. Onum Barr had six sons and a daughter, and only one son survived - he's not sure about the daughter actually. The one surviving son serves the old viceroy under an assumed name.

Barr mentions that he had noticed Mallow's blaster and force field. He knows of force fields, but only those that require enormous generators. He tells Mallow of stories of, "Magicians at the edge of the galaxy, magicians who glowed in the darkness, who flew unaided through the air, and whom

weapons could not touch." Mallow doesn't confirm or deny that he is one of these magicians.

Mallow asks if Siwenna still has nuclear power and is told they do, but only a few "tech men" know how to operate the stations. He asks where he can find one, and Barr gives him directions. He gives Mallow his passport, saying that the description isn't a close match, but that he can flourish it and get by. He tells him to speak little due to his barbarous tongue. Mallow thanks Barr for his help and takes his leave, but secretly makes a return trip. In the morning, Barr finds a cache of provisions in his garden that taste reasonably good and last a long time.

Mallow's next visit is to a tech man, one who is graced with one of the more detailed descriptions Asimov provides. "The tech man was short, and his skin glistened with well kept plumpness. His hair was a fringe, and his skull shone through pinkly. The rings on his fingers were thick and heavy, his clothes were scented, and he was the first man Mallow had met on the planet who hadn't looked hungry."

I'm noticing Asimov has a thing about body size. Both Harden and Mallow were described as large men. The tech man, a clearly negative character, is short. We'll have to look for this going forward.

Mallow uses some interesting tricks to gain his intended look at a nuclear facility. First, he had sent some gewgaw in advance, presumably some small gift. The tech man disparages it and immediately assumes from Mallow's costume that he is a "Siwennese dog." Apparently, the tech man is of the off world caste that conquered the planet. When offered more gifts beyond the gewgaw stage, the tech man cops a serious attitude, and presumes, Mallow intends to bribe him to be admitted into his august clan.

Tech Man

"You think because you dogs of Siwenna - and probably your strangerhood is assumed for safety's sake - are being daily punished for your rebellion, that you can escape what you deserve by throwing over yourselves the privileges and protections of the tech man's guild."

Joel

He goes on to threaten to kill the much larger Mallow with his plump hands, to which Hober smiles inwardly.

Mallow

"Your wisdom. You are wrong on three counts. First, I am not a creature of the viceroy come to test your loyalty. Second, my gift is something the Emperor himself, in all his splendor, does not and will never possess. Third, what I wish in return is very little; a nothing; a mere breath."

Joel

Next, Mallow asks the tech man to shoot him with his blaster. Yes - to unload a lethal blast into his chest. The tech man is a little surprised, but doesn't hesitate to try, and to his surprise and disappointment, fails, as Mallow has his nuclear force field in place, he shows him the tiny, knobbed chain that produces the field, which totally blows the tech man's mind because he doesn't really understand tech that well at all. He tests it on his own hand with his blaster set to a very low setting, and it works as advertised.

He wants to know why he can't just kill Mallow now and then notices the pearly illumination of Mallow's field. Of course, he had a second one in his pocket. Lastly, the trader casually tells the tech moron he can keep the shield and a blaster designed to penetrate it in return for a visit to have a look at one of his vaunted nuclear facilities. The tech bro is seduced entirely, and he invites Mallow to accompany him.

He leads the off-worlder through a series of underground passages until they enter the silent, ozone tinged atmosphere of the powerhouse. Mallow says nothing and touches nothing until they return, whereupon he asks his host what he would do if anything were to break down, and the tech man, predictably, has no answer. He claims that this isn't possible and rudely demands Mallow leave, now that he has given him the promised tour. Two days later, Hober is back on the far star which departs the planet, and two days after that, the tech man's shield goes dead, "And for all his puzzling and cursing, never glowed again."

Now we come to a longer and quite important chapter, which is the preliminary to the showpiece chapter to follow, the trial of Hober Mallow. What could he possibly be put on trial for? Listen and you shall see.

Some time has passed, and Mallow is home on Terminus, an upgraded abode to his humble lodgings when our story began. He's relaxing with his friend Ankor Jael. One thing that links the two of them in friendship is a mutual dislike of Mallow's old friend Jorane Sutt. It seems Jael had recently lost a cabinet seat due to Sutt's machinations. Mallow wants to run for council in order to oppose their mutual antagonist.

First, they discuss the drawback that Mallow is a Smyrnian. There's no legal bar, but apparently sufficient prejudice exists to make his rise to the Mayoralty difficult, though Mallow thinks his newfound riches will help overcome this drawback. As they are discussing their strategy, none other than Jorane Sutt himself appears at the door, and Mallow tells Jael to withdraw quietly to a back room and to listen in on their conversation.

Sutt makes his entrance and makes no pretense of disguising his disdain for Mallow. After some testy preliminaries, Sutt tells Mallow that his report from the mission to Korell was incomplete.

Mallow

"I gave it to you months ago. You were satisfied then."

Sutt

"Yes, but since then, your activities have been significant. We know a good deal of what you're doing, Mallow. We know exactly how many factories you're putting up; in what a hurry you're doing it; and how much it's costing you. And there's this palace you have which sets you back considerably more than my annual salary. And a swath you've been cutting, a very considerable and expensive swath, through the upper layers of Foundation society."

Joel

Sutt wants to know where Mallow is getting the money for his upgraded accommodations, and Mallow says that it is entirely legitimate. He set up trading relations with Korell and has been bringing back wrought iron and chromite in exchange for various trinkets. He was told to keep his eyes open - which he did - and saw no evidence of nuclear weaponry apart from the imperial blasters in the Commdor's bodyguard, which he dutifully reported.

Sutt

"It is the general custom of all traders to advance the religion with their trade."

Mallow

"I adhere to law and not to custom."

Sutt

"There are times when custom can be the higher law."

Joel

Sutt makes a dig at Mallow's Smyrnian roots and then explains the importance of the use of religion to control the periphery, as was intended by Hari Seldon in his great plan for the galaxy to return to a new empire within a thousand years and avoid thirty millennia of needless suffering. Mallow reminds him of how this policy is no longer working, and reminds him of the case of Askone of twenty years back, how the feudal kingdoms want nothing of the Foundation's spiritual mumbo-jumbo anymore.

Mallow

"There isn't a ruler in the periphery now that wouldn't sooner cut his own throat than let a priest of the Foundation enter the territory. I don't propose to force Korell or any other world to accept something I know they don't want. No, Sutt. If nuclear power makes them dangerous, a sincere friendship through trade will be many times better than an insecure overlordship based on the hated supremacy of a foreign spiritual power, which, once it weakens ever so slightly, can only fall entirely and leave nothing substantial behind except an immortal fear and hate."

Joel

Sutt concedes his point, but doesn't back down from his political convictions. He attempts to bribe Mallow.

Sutt

"You could have a council seat."

Mallow

"I'll have that anyway, without and despite you."

Joel

Sutt is enraged and comes to his real point. He threatens to put Mallow on trial for the murder of the Anacreonian priest that he had abandoned on Korell if Mallow does not accede to his views in regard to the reintroduction of Foundation religion in his trading practices.

Sutt

"You abandoned a subject of the Foundation to torture and death at the hands of an alien mob, Mallow, and you have only five seconds to prevent the punishment. Do you? For myself, I'd rather you decided to bluff it out. You'd be safer as a destroyed enemy than as a doubtfully converted friend."

Mallow

"You have your wish."

Joel

Sutt departs and Jael comes back into the room, having overheard the entire discussion. He thinks that, though Sutt seems fixated on the policy of the use of spiritual power, he understands that the practice is now bankrupt. He is convinced that Sutt has ulterior motives, that he wants to use the Galactic Spirit to his own ends, to marshal a new movement against perceived heresy (no one expects the Galactic Inquisition). He brings up another old Hardin quote; "A nuclear blaster is a good weapon, but it can point both ways."

Mallow

"All right, Jael, then get me in that council and I'll fight him."

Joel

But Jael is concerned about the story of abandoning the priests and asks if it is true. Mallow says yes, but it's irrelevant. He has the law on his side. He's sure that he will prevail in a trial. In Jael's words,

Jael

"No, Mallow, you've missed it. I told you he played dirty. He's not out to convict you; he knows he can't do that. But he is out to ruin your standing with the people. You heard what he said. Custom is higher than law, at times. You could walk out of the trial scot free, but if the people think you threw a priest to the dogs, your popularity is gone. They'll admit you did the legal thing, even the sensible thing. But just the same, you'll have been, in their eyes, a cowardly dog, an unfeeling brute, a hard-hearted monster. And you would never get elected to the council. You might even lose your rating as Master Trader by having your citizenship voted away from you. You're not native born, you know. What more do you think Sutt can want? So, my boy, I'll stand by you, but I can't help. You're on the spot - dead center."

Joel

A few days or weeks pass, and now we get to the real fun. The trial of Hober Mallow. Asimov loves a good trial scene and has no less than three in the core Foundation epic, one of which we saw in the very first episode with the trial of Hari Seldon. Here the setup is clear. Mallow is being charged with murder, a case the prosecution expects to lose, but their real hope is that the public will charge him with indifference to the likely torture and death of an innocent man, a priest at that, of their beloved Foundation. Sutt's plan is nothing less than character assassination, and for that he's sure it's a slam dunk case.

For three days, the prosecution has made their case, and the courtroom is surrounded by an angry rabble, while inside, the tension has been raised to

a fever pitch. Ankor Jael, acting as Mallow's defender, has barely succeeded in threading his way through the crowd in time for the day's session to begin, and has brought along something Mallow specifically requested.

The time has come for the defendant to speak in his defense, and Mallow begins by restating the prosecution's version of the initial meetings he had with Jorane Sutt and Jain Twer, whereupon Twer was recruited to join his expedition. He agrees with the particulars as described, but adds some important context. He had assumed from the start that Sutt was trying to get something on him, and had his guard up as soon as he was instructed to go to Korell to keep his eyes open for evidence of nuclear weaponry. The significant piece of evidence he adds is from his subsequent discussion with Twer. He was suspicious of the fact that Twer claimed to have been a trader for three years, and yet Mallow had never heard of his activities, which seemed unusual, as it was his business to know what his competition was up to. The thing that didn't add up for Mallow, however, was that Twer had never heard of a Seldon Crisis.

Mallow

"Who here can honestly state that any man with a lay education can possibly be ignorant of the nature of a Seldon Crisis? There is only one type of education upon the Foundation that excludes all mention of the planned history of Seldon and deals only with the man himself as a semi-mythical wizard. I knew at that instant that Jain Twer had never been a trader. I knew then that he was in holy orders and perhaps a full fledged priest, and doubtless, that for the three years he had pretended to head a political party of the traders, he had been a bought man of Jorane Sutt. A known enemy is relatively safe. I invited Twer to come with me. He accepted."

Joel

He then calls the jury's attention to the moment the priest arrived on board the Far Star. He tells them of his suspicions regarding Twer at that moment and how he had sent him away for a few minutes to gather the officers. Recall now Mallow's mysterious activities. During these few minutes. He explains that during that time he had set up holographic recording equipment of the room where he would be interrogating the priest. The special evidence Ankor Jael had brought to the trial was none other than this very recording, which Mallow then requested permission to play for the jury.

Asimov describes the scene. "There was the missionary, confused and battered, standing between the lieutenant and the sergeant. Mallow's image waited silently, and then men filed in, Twer bringing up the rear. The conversation played itself out word for word. The sergeant was disciplined, and the missionary was questioned. The mob appeared, their growl could be heard, and the revered Jord Parma made his wild appeal. Mallow drew his gun, and the missionary, as he was dragged away, lifted his arms in a mad, final curse, and a tiny flash of light came and went. The scene ended with the officers frozen at the horror of the situation, while Twer clamped shaking hands over his ears, and Mallow calmly put his gun away."

Mallow lets the hubbub in the gallery die down, then instructs Jael to replay the last few seconds of the recording and tells him to freeze a frame. Near the end, when the priest had raised his arms for his mad final curse. Jael does so and zooms in on one of those arms and that tiny flash of light. The jury and all of those watching, within and without the courtroom, could see the distinct letters "KSP" on the priest's arm. Mallow explains that he had flooded the room with ultraviolet light, which had revealed the bogus priest's true identity.

Mallow

"Perhaps some of you may have already guessed what KSP. Stands for. Jord Parma knew his priestly lingo well and did his job magnificently. Where he had learned it and how, I cannot say, but KSP stands for Korellian Secret Police."

Joel

The trial concludes with the jury and the crowd firmly swung around to Mallow's side. As he leaves the courtroom, he is hoisted onto the shoulders of supporters to the sound of chants of "Long Live Mallow! Long Live Mallow! Long Live Mallow!" In the aftermath, Mallow controls the mob and strikes quickly. He has Jorane Sutt and High Priest Publis Manlio arrested for inciting the priesthood of the outer planets to take sides in the factional quarrels of the Foundation. He intends to run for Mayor and High Priest as well.

Mallow explains to Jael that the moment of crisis has not yet arrived, but will quite soon. Jael asks,

Jael

"What's it going to be, Korell after all?"

Mallow

"Of course. They'll declare war eventually, though I'm betting it'll take another pair of years."

Jael

"With nuclear ships?"

Mallow

"What do you think? Those three merchant ships we lost in their space sector weren't knocked over with compressed air pistols. Jael, they're getting ships from the Empire itself. Don't open your mouth like a fool. I said the Empire, it's still there, you know. It may be gone here in the periphery, but in the galactic center it's still very much alive. And one false move means that it itself may be on our neck. That's why I must be Mayor and high priest. I'm the only man who knows how to fight the crisis."

Jael

"How? What are you going to do?"

Mallow

"Nothing. When I'm boss of this Foundation. I'm going to do nothing. 100% of nothing. And that is the secret of this crisis."

Joel

We return to a scene on the planet Korell. Years have passed, and we are in the chambers of our old friends, the loving first couple of Korell, the Commdor and Commdora. They are having a loving chat about their peaceful intentions toward the Foundation now that the new trade agreements are in place. Yeah, right. They are at each other's throats, as usual.

The Commdora scornfully informs her husband that she is aware of his newfound intention to attack Foundation using the nuclear ships gifted from her father, who, it now appears clear, is none other than the latest leader of the declining Galactic Empire. She's wondering why her husband has waited so long to stamp out this puny foe, and assumes it is because he can't bear to part with the loss of profits he has been reaping from the trinkets the traders under Mallow have been supplying.

Commdor Asper asks where is the sixth nuclear vessel he's been waiting for the past year, and his beloved Commdora Lycia reminds him that he could have easily destroyed Foundation already.

Lycia

"But one - just one - can blast that Foundation into stinking rubble. Just one! One to sweep their little pygmy boats out of space."

Asper

"I couldn't attack their planet even with a dozen."

Lycia

"And how long would their planet hold out with their trade ruined and their cargoes of toys and trinkets destroyed?"

Asper

"Those toys and trinkets mean money. A good deal of money."

Lycia

"But if you had the Foundation itself, would you not have all it contained? And if you had my father's respect and gratitude, would you not have more than ever the Foundation could give you? It's been three years more since that barbarian came with his magic sideshow. It's long enough."

Asper

"My dear. I am growing old. I am weary. I lack the resilience to withstand your rattling mouth. You say you know that I have decided. Well, I have. It is over, and there is war between Korell and the Foundation."

Joel

As his wife triumphantly departs, having been granted her wish, the Commdor secretly dreams of the time he can control the periphery without her father's help, and he can be rid of her forever.

A very brief scene follows - a mere interlude. Somewhere in the depths of space, a Foundation vessel, the "Dark Nebula," spots a horrifying specter in their visiplane. It is not just a ship, but, "A whale to the Dark Nebula's minnow. And on its side is the Spaceship-and-Sun of the Empire." The tiny ship frantically prepares to fight or flee if it can, and sends warning to Terminus for help. The war has begun.

Quick side note. One reason that Asimov's Foundation could never be translated faithfully for a modern TV or cinema audience is that he never really describes battle scenes. They are always offstage. Aficionados of ancient Greek tragedy will note that this was a characteristic of these plays as well. Violent acts are always behind closed doors, and they are described by their effective impact in the dialogue of those affected by these events. Modern audiences get off on witnessing the blood flowing and the ships exploding. I find Asimov's approach, like that of the Greeks, to often be more artful. I do admit, though, that I do enjoy a good artful space battle now and then as well.

The final chapter has arrived, essentially an epilogue, though a highly significant one for the Foundation, and sets up the coming chapters in which the Empire can no longer be avoided due to its distance and declining strength.

After three years of war, which is mostly a stalemate, as Foundation ships retreat from battle and take occasional losses, the Korellian Republic surrenders unconditionally. Mallow had seen in the encounter with the rude but simple minded tech man on Siwenna that the massive

power stations driving the declining economies of the periphery were in critical need of spare parts sent from the Empire, and that the smaller, distant worlds had lost the capacity to innovate and create their own technologies. His trade policies had encouraged Korell and other similar worlds to become dependent on the high tech gadgets only the Foundation could produce. They had become gradually enslaved by their dependence, and it was only a matter of time until a nation cut off from trade, such as the Korellian Republic, would be forced to capitulate. That time had arrived, and Mallow had become a true merchant prince. There was no further need for the sham religion that the Foundation had depended upon until now. Trade alone and pure economic control was sufficient to sustain and gradually expand their power and influence.

I will quote the final exchange between Hober Mallow and his deputy Ankor Jael. Upon receiving notice of surrender, Jael asks,

Jael

"Then what of the future?"

Joel

Mallow responds,

Mallow

"What business of mine is the future? No doubt Seldon has foreseen it and prepared against it. There will be other crises in the time to come when money power has become as dead a force as religion is now. Let my successors solve those new problems as I have solved the one of today."

Joel

And this is how the fifth and concluding story of the first novel, *Foundation*, comes to an end. It is interesting to note the contrast between the worldviews of the protagonists of the first and final chapters. Hari Seldon was an all-knowing visionary with a deep understanding of the mechanics of future history. With that came an agonized empathy for the suffering of the unknown future individuals who would follow him and be subjected to the horrors of the breakdown of the civilization he had enjoyed.

Mallow, as seen in his fierce final statement most of all, was a man of the moment. He had strategic vision, to be sure, but he seemed to have an understanding that how the future played out was not dependent on his actions or those of any other individuals, but were more or less scripted by the divine hand of psychohistory as mapped out by the great Hari Seldon. One almost gets a sense he is resentful of the great master's foresight and the awareness of fate which he, as a lone individual acting in present time, was barred from knowing. In Mallow's words, "what business of mine is the future? No doubt Seldon has foreseen it and prepared against it." He could almost be seen as erupting in frustration at the captivity within the pages of the epic drafted by the true master, who had not just invented the future in which he lived, but his very identity, that master being none other than Isaac Asimov.

Let us quickly recap the story thus far within this great epic. We have seen the *Foundation* grow from a concept envisioned by Hari Seldon in his final years of life at the galactic capital on Trantor to a thriving economic power on the distant fringe of the galaxy with considerable technological capabilities. At the galactic core, the old empire is in the act of collapsing, innovation has ceased, and the nuclear infrastructure that powered it is a relic of what it once was. But it still has immense power at its disposal, and

it is becoming aware of the new threat that has arisen out of Hari Seldon's dream. A conflict on a terrifying scale appears to be inevitable.

A couple of quick thoughts before we go. First, I want to take you back to the very beginning of this story, when Jorane Sutt recruited Mallow for his mission to Korell, and especially to the subsequent discussion between Mallow and Jain Twer, who we now know was planted by Sutt to spy upon and find evidence against the trader, an effort that was doomed by Mallow's cleverness. Remember that his big clue was that Twer didn't know what a Seldon Crisis was? I wondered when I read it the first time how I had missed this clue that was right there in the dialogue. How did I not see that Tor was a spy?

For this I have to credit Asimov for pulling a nifty trick on all of us. Each chapter in the story since the first has included a recapitulation of the context of Hari Seldon's plan, how psychohistory works and brought the reader up to speed so they could understand how things work in the greater story of Foundation. This was necessary because each chapter was originally published in serial form in *Astounding Stories*, a monthly magazine.

It's a little like the sections at the beginning of popular TV series when we get last week on *The Expanse* or *Picard* or *Game of Thrones* or whatever. Binge watchers tend to jump over these recapitulations because they don't need them. When a serial publication is novelized, we get a similar situation. We come to know how psychohistory works and what a Seldon Crisis is, so we might be tempted to skim over these repetitious bits. What a perfect place, then, for Asimov to hide the crucial piece of evidence that reveals Twer to be a spy.

Of course, Asimov knew that some of his original readers might not have read the earlier stories and may have needed the recapitulation, so he might not have been thinking this. Or maybe he knew that faithful readers

would be most likely to pick up on the patterns that reveal the secrets he wants to reveal at the appropriate time. I'm fine with giving some credit to the master storyteller. Well played, Isaac!

Last thought. In our previous episode, I shared mixed feelings about the protagonist, the trader Limmar Ponyets, likening him to an Internet spam artist and extorting the avaricious Grand Master's counselor Pherl through shaming him in something like a ransomware scam. I'm not sure that Mallow is much better. To be honest, he kind of strikes me as the Jeff Bezos of his time, whereas Hardin was more of a Steve Jobs kind of character, making a religion based on gadgets. Ever seen an Apple product release event? We should remember that these characters were created in an era in which wondrous new technologies, free trade, capitalism itself were unquestionably great things. It was tantamount to heresy to question the religion of capitalism, and for many, not much has changed.

On top of that, Asimov was an emigrant from Russia as a toddler, but still an emigrant. The Cold War was in its infancy, and we should not be surprised to see its values placed upon a pedestal. This will be interesting to revisit when we get to the volumes written several decades later, after some of the downsides of the western victories against communism had become a little more evident. Our next episode will introduce the first chapter of "Foundation and Empire," the second novel in the core trilogy entitled "The General." Unlike the first novel, consisting of five, essentially short stories, the two main chapters of Foundation and Empire are of novella length. It will be necessary to break them up at least into a couple of episodes each.

You will be meeting many fascinating and iconic characters to come, including the Empire's last great General Bel Riose, and another hero of the plucky Foundation in Lathan Devers. You will also meet one character obliquely mentioned in the episode just recounted, but I'll leave that person unidentified for now. Join us soon for Seldon Crisis, The General, part I, but before playing the theme music, I want to mention some of the

delightful feedback I've received, starting with some reviews that have just made my days and weeks of late. First, I'll go up north ways and read a very nice review from EpicEnthusiast in Canada under the headline of "Engaging, Informative Fun." I do want the podcast to be all of those things.

EpicEnthusiast

"I'm three episodes in and having a ton of fun. I'm, an Asimov newbie, confessed to never having heard of the famous trilogy and finding this podcast a great gateway drug. The pod is providing the perfect balance of storytelling and of context to Asimov, his writing, and the times in which he lived. Occasional well chosen asides by the host just add to the cleverness of it all. On the production side of things, the pod is first rate all the way. Superb audio, polished post production, even a great soundtrack. Can't wait for the next episode to arrive and will be paying this pod my highest compliment by afterwards reading Asimov's books."

Joel

I love that one because I really hope to pull in some new Asimov fans and it seems that my Canadian listener qualifies. Thanks for that great review, EpicEnthusiast! Stay tuned because the best is yet to come. A little farther off, we have Filippo.b90 from Italy claiming

Filippo.b90

"This is a masterpiece. Before starting to listen to this podcast, I was a bit of a skeptic. Indeed, I am a true lover of Foundation as well as every piece of art written by Asimov, and emphasizing his work is not a piece of cake. This podcast achieves the most important task. It is able to give you an outstanding recap of every key part of Foundation. Again, it is a masterpiece and the narrator is absolutely perfect for his role. Thank you for your work!"

Joel

And thank you, Filippo, for your very kind review. From closer to home comes this awesome review from AlienFire in the US who calls it "Such a great show!"

AlienFire

"With the coming "Foundation" series on Apple TV Plus, I have been going back to reread Isaac Asimov's classic Foundation series of novels. Starting with the original novel. Joel does such a great job of not only giving some background information on Asimov and the novels themselves, but he expertly distills the different parts of the book in a succinct and meaningful and entertaining way. He does this through narration as well as voicing the different characters in the book with the most relevant sequences. I've been doing podcasting myself for years and I know just how much work goes into what he is producing here. If you're a fan of Asimov's series or even a fan in general of great science fiction, or if you are just curious about what Foundation is all about, then definitely check this out! Highly recommend!"

Joel

Thanks, AlienFire. I do hope the Apple TV+ show provides a new stream of listeners. I really want to thank you for your feedback on the character voicing. When I started writing the first episodes, I really wasn't sure this would work. The comments I received from you and several other listeners make me feel pretty confident that this was a good approach. I have to say it's an awful lot of fun for me too.

There are other ways people can give me feedback and I'll share one of my favorite emails I received at joel@seldongcrisis.net from Dave Rutan:

Dave Rutan

"I love this podcast! The insights you give into the writings of my favorite author give me something interesting to listen to every other Saturday. Thank you for this effort."

Joel

I just love that one because it makes me realize that there are listeners like Dave out there who have made it part of their routine to catch the show regularly when it comes out, and it gives me encouragement to keep it coming on schedule every couple weeks. Lastly, I've gotten a lot of nice feedback through the main way I promote the show, which is through my Twitter account at the handle @JoelGMcKinnon. DDouglas tweeted,

DDouglas

"A must listen podcast for any fan of Asimov or any Sci-fi fan who's new to Asimov's Foundation. Well-read and full of helpful commentary."

Joel

#1 Pizza Snail tweets,

#1 Pizza Snail

"I just finished the first episode, and it was the best 38 minutes I've spent this week. The style of storytelling and sharing of personal experience helped me relive the first time I read Foundation. Looking forward to even more!"

Joel

Lastly, Joana Santos in Portugal tweets,

Joana Santos

"For all Asimov fans that, like me, have a hard time memorizing all the characters in the Foundation series, here's a cool podcast to check."

Joel

Really happy to hear from everyone, and thanks so much for giving me your impressions. Time to wrap things up for season one of Seldon Crisis. The first episode of the second season will probably be several weeks off, but I have a special treat to fill the gap. In a couple of weeks, I'll be stepping away from the narrative and doing an interview with Nathaniel Goldberg, a philosophy professor who has been studying Asimov for decades and has a class in which he does a comparative analysis of Foundation with Plato's Republic. That should be a lot of fun, so please check it out. Until then, enjoy whatever season you find in your part of planet Earth until we can get back to exploring the deep future of humanity in the coming episodes of Seldon Crisis.

[Closing theme music]