

The Mule, Part II



[Opening theme music with voiceovers.]

Bayta Darell

"Torie, there's there's no use fighting."

Randu

"Do you feel it then? This miserable sense of defeat?"

Ebling Mis

"To Trantor?"

Han Pritcher

"You were the Warlord of Kalgan?"

Viceroy

"Yes. And now I am the loyal viceroy of the Mule. You see, he is persuasive."

Toran Darell

"We've been detected Bay!"

Bayta

"Detected? By whom?"

[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. At a time in our story when the home team is in a state of shock, the certainty of inevitable galactic dominance by the Foundation had just been suddenly and completely destroyed. Their great prophet and all knowing seer, Hari Seldon, had made a rare appearance in front of all of the gathered dignitaries and notables and essentially soiled the bed.

His predictions weren't just a little off. He could probably be forgiven for getting some of the details wrong. A few centuries into his predicted future, he had been completely and entirely wrong and could never be trusted again. The Mule, who had appeared to be a significant, though temporary annoyance in the grand scheme of things, was now their master. Only a third of the way or so through Seldon's sacred thousand year plan. And the Foundation was kaput. I thought about historical analogies for this, and I'm coming up empty. My first thought was of the sack of Rome by the Visigoths under Alaric in 410 AD.

That had been a shocking fall from greatness indeed, but it's not really a good parallel. The warning signs had been present for many decades. The attacker was well known and even trained and employed by the Eastern Roman Empire previously, and it was part of the gradual dissolution of a great empire that had been powerful for nearly a millennium. The fall of

Terminus would have been more like if some Inuit general had emerged in the Yukon and marched on Washington, DC. And taken over with hardly a fight. I like the comparison with the United States due to the likeness with America's belief in Manifest Destiny and the inevitable greatness of a country starting from a tiny set of colonies. I wonder if Asimov was influenced by this history of the country he had only come to as a young boy.

Back in the Foundation universe, out in the trading worlds, morale had also tanked. No one thought that the Mule was a useful tool they could use to undermine and reform a government that had become undemocratic. It was obvious to all that a single being that no one had even laid eyes on and returned to tell the tale was now the ultimate arbiter of their fate. There continued to be vigorous resistance, but one by one the Trader worlds fell, sometimes through military defeat, sometimes through treachery resulting from the bribery of their leaders.

Many thought only of how to make the most of the inevitable submission to the Mule's authority. Haven, the homeworld of Fran, Randu, Toran, and now Bayta, still stood independent but under siege. A dark mood had overtaken the underground settlement. Bayta had taken a job in a factory as an assembly worker. She had taken on a role like that of the famous Rosie the Riveter symbolizing the spirit of resistance on the home front in World War II. But this Rosie was not a resident of a strengthening economic power, shielded from the horrors of the battlefield and determined to overcome the distant threat whatever the cost.

This one was like a member of the French underground after the fall of Paris. The enemy was on their doorstep, if not yet in their midst, and no foreign ally was strong enough to come to their aid. Still, Bayta persevered through the gathering gloom. She had taken a job leading a team assembling essential products by hand, and it seemed as a good away

as any to forestall complete emotional collapse. She had just completed her morning shift and entered the lunchroom. While scanning the menu of various fungally based and not terribly appetizing choices, she heard the all too common sound of one of her co workers breaking down in tears.

[Sound of someone crying]

Joel

Bayta turned to one of her colleagues sitting nearby.

Bayta

"What's the matter?"

Unnnamed Woman

"She's had a hard day, I guess, and she's worrying about her husband."

Bayta

"Is he on space patrol?"

Unnnamed Woman

"Yes."

Joel

Bayta, who recognized the suffering woman as one of those under her charge, saw her distress and decided that another emotionally distraught worker was unlikely to help the team further that day.

Bayta

"Why don't you go home, Juddee?"

Juddee

"I've been out once this week already."

Bayta

"Then you'll be out twice if you try to stay on. You know you'll just be out three days next week, so going home now amounts to patriotism. Any of you girls work in her department? Well, then, suppose you'd take care of her card. Better go to the washroom first, Juddee, and get the peaches and cream back where it belongs. Go ahead, shue!"

Joel

Another worker opposite Bayta sourly added her opinion.

Hella

"Isn't much any of us can do except cry, is there?"

Joel

Bayta recognized her as one of the more difficult co-workers in her group and wasn't in a mood to put up with her usual cynical attitude.

Bayta

"Can't you think of anything else to do, Hella?"

Hella

"For instance, I think we could make a very nice arrangement with the Mule and stop all this nonsense. But then I don't have the facilities to manage to get out of places quickly when the Mule takes over."

Bayta

"You don't happen to have a brother or husband in the fighting ships, do you?"

Hella

"No. All the more credit I see no reason for the sacrifice of the brothers and husbands of others."

Bayta

"The sacrifice will come, the more surely for surrender."

Hella

"The Foundation surrendered and is at peace. Our men are away, and the galaxy is against us."

Bayta

"I'm afraid it is the first part of the pair that bothers you."

Joel

Hella was one of a small faction of cynics who regularly criticized the futility of resisting the Mule and saw Bayta's position as one designed only to keep people's minds off of the inevitable defeat to come while keeping the barely functioning local economy from collapsing. There was talk of how Bayta was connected with the leaders of the colony by marriage and how she had miraculously escaped the Mule's attack on Terminus. Some enjoyed her company and did their best. Others, like Hella, were constantly pecking away at her attempts to keep the workforce grounded and emotionally capable of doing their jobs.

[Gloomy music]

Joel

It was all starting to wear on Bayta, and she left work that day in an emotional downward spiral. Asimov describes the way the underground city simulated the nocturnal phase of the daily cycle, but it sounds like a metaphor for the city's descent into gloom and dysfunction. "The huge cave lights were being shielded groupwise in the gradual descent towards the darkness that meant sleep for the righteous and hardworking."

It's interesting to reflect on the cultural context in which Asimov was writing this story. The two parts of *The Mule* were published in short story form in November and December of 1945, so World War II had only recently concluded. His memories of life in wartime would have been quite fresh. He had received deferments from active military service due to his scientific pursuits, which were seen to have some value for the war effort from the home front. He'd been assigned to a naval base along with two other giants of Golden Age science fiction; Robert Heinlein and L. Sprague deCamp. They must have had some amazing discussions in those days. I wonder how many science fiction classics might have had their genesis in those laboratories and lunchrooms.

Reflecting back on those recent times, he and Gertrude must have remembered the terrible fear of Hitler's march through Europe and been horrified along with the rest of the world at the discovery of the Nazi death camps at the war's conclusion. As Jews themselves, they would have felt a deep kinship with the horrific suffering of so many victims of that awful war. I imagine Asimov plumbed the depths of those feelings in conjuring the despair felt by the citizenry of Haven while under siege by the apparently unstoppable foe with eyes that could kill at a distance. Desperate days indeed.

When Bayta arrives home, she finds Toran is preparing to ship out unexpectedly. He sees her surprise and concern.

Toran

"Orders, Bay. Randu is holed up with Ebling Mis right now."

Bayta

"And what it's all about?"

Toran

"I don't know. So there you have everything."

Bayta

"Am I going?"

Toran

"I believe so. It will probably be dangerous."

Bayta

"What isn't dangerous?"

Toran

"Exactly."

"Oh yes, and I've already sent for Magnifico, so he's probably coming too."

Bayta

"You mean his concert at the engine factory will have to be canceled?"

Toran

"Obviously."

Bayta

"That's too bad about the concert. The girls at the factory were looking forward to it. Magnifico, too, for that matter. Torie work today was just miserable. Morale doesn't exist. The girls go on crying jags for no particular reason. Those who don't get sick become sullen. Even the little mousey types pout. In my particular section, production isn't a quarter of what it was when I came. And there isn't a day that we have a full roster of workers. Torie, it's so all over Haven. Dropping production, increasing sedition and disaffection. I tell you, there's something wrong. It's that same horrible frustration that hit me in the Time Vault when Seldon deserted us. You felt it yourself. Well, it's back. And we'll never be able to resist the Mule even if we had the material. We lack the heart, the spirit, the will. Torie, there's no use fighting!"

Toran

"Suppose you forget it, baby. I know what you mean, but there's nothing..."

Bayta

"Yes, there's nothing we can do. Everyone says that. And we just sit and wait for the knife to come down."

Joel

In the temporary quarters of the Confederation of Cities on Haven, a similar air of despair and tiredness is affecting the leader of the resistance, Randu, and his chief science advisor, Ebling Mis. Randu turns to him.

Randu

"Do you feel it then, this miserable sense of defeat when Seldon fails us? In other words, our prop disappears, and we've been leaning upon it so long, our muscles are atrophied to where we cannot stand without it."

Joel

But the scientist isn't ready to give in to despair. He thinks the Mule can be beaten. Now that they know they are on their own, they have to rely on their wits and intelligence. They must find a weakness and attack it. Mis is sure the Mule is a mutant and that this is why he was not accounted for in Seldon's calculations. He goes into an in-depth explanation of the nature of mutation.

Ebling

"It's been estimated that several million mutants are born in the Galaxy every day. Of the several million, all but one or two percent can be detected only by means of microscopes and chemistry. Of the one or two percent macro-mutants, that is, those with mutations detectable to the naked eye or naked mind, all but one or two percent are freaks, fit for the amusement centers, the laboratories, and death. Of the few macro-mutants whose differences are to the good, almost all are harmless curiosities, unusual in some single respect, normal – and often subnormal – in most others. You see that, Randu?"

Randu

"I do. But what of the Mule?"

Ebling

"Supposing the Mule to be a mutant then, we can assume that he has some attribute, undoubtedly mental, which can be used to conquer worlds. In other respects, he undoubtedly has his shortcomings, which we must locate. He would not be so secretive, so shy of others' eyes, if these shortcomings were not apparent and fatal, if he's a mutant."

Joel

Mis considers another alternative, that the Mule has access to powers beyond their immediate comprehension. He knows that he has the ability to suppress nuclear technologies as was demonstrated effectively in the shocking incident in Seldon's vault and in the aftermath resulting in the sudden fall of the capital city. What if the Mule also has some weapon capable of suppressing the emotions of his adversaries, of casting a pall of despair over them as they are all experiencing daily? Perhaps this is the secret to how he won his battles against the better armed Foundation ships.

Another interesting aspect of the Mule's military exploits to this point is that the Foundation fell quickly but the Trader ships have held their ground much more effectively. They have lost one battle due to the Mule's energy suppression field but were able to devise a means of countering it and hadn't been defeated in open battle since. If the Mule was using a weapon that attacked the spirit of his adversaries perhaps there is a way they could counter it as well.

Randu brings up another, less mysterious but just as problematic means that the Mule had been using to achieve his aims. He'd been attacking the divisions among the Traders themselves by using their own economic self interest. He had made offers to safeguard the profits and property of some of the wealthiest and they had gone over to him without a fight. The plutocracy, which Lathan Devers and Sennet Forell had spoken in favor of was now their greatest weakness.

It seems, though humanity had advanced 20,000 years and filled the entire galaxy, greed was still as problematic as ever. This is a rather depressing thought to contemplate as we face our own catastrophic environmental crisis caused primarily by the greed of plutocratic fossil fuel companies. Is there any hope of defeating this horrific but entrenched aspect of

humanity in the short time available if it is to still ravage our species twenty millennia from now?

Ebling Mis is disheartened by this mundane reality they currently face.

Ebling

"The plutocrats have always been against us."

Joel

Randu concurs.

Randu

"They always held the power, too. Listen, Ebling. We have reason to believe that the Mule or his tools have already been in contact with powerful men among the independent Traders. At least ten of the twenty-seven trading worlds are known to have gone over to the Mule. Perhaps ten more waver. There are personalities on Haven itself who would not be unhappy over the Mule's domination. It's apparently an insurmountable temptation to give up endangered political power if that will maintain your hold over economic affairs."

Ebling

"You don't think Haven can fight the Mule?"

Joel

Randu understands their only hope now is an act of desperation.

Randu

"I don't think Haven will. I think Haven is waiting to surrender. It's what I called you here to tell you. I want you to leave Haven, Ebling. You are the Foundation's greatest psychologist. The real master psychologists went out with Seldon. But you are the best we have. You are our only chance of defeating the Mule. You can't do that here. You'll have to go to what's left of the empire."

Ebling

"To Trantor?"

Randu

"That's right. What was once the empire is bare bones today, but something must still be at the center. They've got the records there. Ebling, you may learn more of mathematical psychology, perhaps enough to be able to interpret the clown's mind. He will go with you, of course."

Ebling

"I doubt if he'd be willing to, even for fear of the Mule, unless your niece went with him."

Randu

"I know that. Toran and Bayta are leaving with you for that very reason. And, Ebling, there's another, greater purpose. Hari Seldon founded two Foundations three centuries ago, one at each end of the galaxy. You must find that Second Foundation."

Joel

And so the tantalizing bit of info initially revealed by Seldon at the conclusion of *The Psychohistorians* and again in the Vault at the end of the mayors comes back into focus. The Second Foundation. It seems to be the only hope of defeating the Mule, yet no one knows anything about it. It is the terrible responsibility of Ebling Mis to somehow, some way, find the clues in Seldon's work that might reveal their location and to enlist their services. It's possible, perhaps even likely, that they were no longer in existence. Perhaps some variant of Wenus of Anacreon at the opposite end of the galaxy eradicated them long ago. What guarantee might there be of another Salvor Hardin capable of defeating him?

Can one always count on a suitable great man of history to be brought forward by circumstance to rise to the occasion and continue Seldon's plan unabated? We have seen this plan fail once already. How likely is it that the semi-mythical Second Foundation still exists and is capable of helping to defeat their nemesis at the hour of their greatest need, even if it can be found and reached in time? Such is the desperation of the moment and the immense challenge faced by the brightest scientists the Foundation still has available and whom it leans upon desperately in its hour of greatest need. It seems the fate of the entire galaxy rests in the hands of Ebling Mis. But first, he must find his way to the fabled ancient capital of empire, the once gleaming world of Trantor, now in ruins at the center of the galaxy far, far away. The stage is set for our remaining heroes, Mis Torrin Bayta and the sad and pathetic clown Magnifico to voyage to Trantor in hopes of finding the location of the fabled Second Foundation.

[Theme excerpt signifies scene change]

Joel

Meanwhile, on Terminus, four months have passed since Hari Seldon's fall from grace with his shocking failure to predict the accurate state of affairs in the Time Vault in Terminus City. Han Pritcher had been through a lot in the aftermath. The last vision he recalled of that day had been in Asimov's words, "Old Seldon speaking his benevolent words that were so shatteringly wrong, the jumbled confusion, Indbur with his mayoral costume incongruously bright about his pinched, unconscious face the frightened crowds gathering quickly, waiting noiselessly for the inevitable word of surrender. The young man Toran disappearing out of a side door with the Mule's clown dangling over his shoulder."

Pritcher had escaped and sought refuge in the rat holes that were the hideouts of the resistance to the despotic mayoral authorities but the rat holes were empty. "The next day, black alien ships were momentarily visible in the sky, sinking gently into the clustered buildings of the nearby city." Poetic, but I can't help noticing the bad guys in Foundation are always in black ships. Only good guys fly shiny white ones.

After covering a hundred miles on foot, growing a long russet beard, and taking the clothes of a dead factory worker, Pritcher finally finds the democratic underground in a small town shelter. After a triple exchange of passwords, he is warily granted entrance. A major reason the guard is wary is that multiple members of the faction, die-hard loyalists, have mysteriously gone over to the Mule's side.

The leader of the faction advises Pritcher to get a job in a local nuclear arms factory where business appears to be booming as the Mule's war effort has intensified. Pritcher gets the job and apparently this factory has the capability to make micro-sized nuclear weapons. Forget suitcase bombs, these deadly wonders were as small as a pill. And a few months later Pritcher is granted admission to the former Mayor's private garden

with a tiny nuclear bomb beneath his tongue prepared to sacrifice himself for the cause in what he dearly hopes will be the death of the Foundation's great adversary.

He reflected back on the moment he had made his decision in the secret den of the remaining resistance. He'd told the section leader who'd found him the job in the factory.

Pritcher

"It's a fundamental error. You live in the exploded past. For eighty years, our organization has been waiting for the correct historical moment. We've been blinded by Seldon's psychohistory, one of the first propositions of which is that the individual does not count, does not make history and that complex social and economic factors override him, making a puppet out of him. Why not kill the Mule?"

Joel

He had been reminded of Hardin's maxim that "violence is the last refuge of the incompetent," but had informed his conspirators that this was a new situation. The Mule being a mutant, it was he alone that held the key to victory if there could only be a way to get close enough. It turned out there was. One of the resisters was the former Mayor's chamberlain and he knew the security system inside out.

It's now time for Pritcher to execute his plan and he has gained entrance to the Mayor's palace. He has advanced to within a few paces of the doorway where he will have his chance to see the Mule himself before executing them both in an impressively compact mushroom cloud of devastation.

Asimov describes the scene. "In a last insolent gesture, he thundered upon the door, and it opened and let out the blinding light. Captain Pritcher staggered, then caught himself. The solemn man standing in the center of the small room before a suspended fishbowl looked up mildly. His uniform

was somber black, and as he tapped the bowl in an absent gesture, it bobbed quickly, and the feather, finned orange and vermilion fish within darted wildly."

The man said,

Viceroy

"Come in, Captain. You had better spit out the foolish pellet and free yourself for speech. It won't blast."

Joel

Pritcher bites into the lethal pellet, expecting the flash of oblivion that would be his end and he dearly hopes, the eventual salvation of the Foundation. As the waiting man had said, there was no blast. Horrified, he spits it out on his palm and throws it furiously against a wall where it bounces off harmlessly.

Viceroy

"So much for that then. It would have done you no good in any case, Captain. I am not the Mule, and you will have to be satisfied with his viceroy."

Joel

Agonized, Pritcher gasps,

Pritcher

"How did you know?"

Joel

The viceroy explains that all of Pritcher's and his accomplice's careful plans were fully known in advance and that he had been waiting patiently for his arrival. Pritcher, in despair, asks,

Pritcher

"Is it all over?"

Viceroy

"Just begun. Come, Captain. Sit down. Let us leave heroics for the fools who are impressed by it. Captain, you are a capable man. According to the information I have, you were the first on the Foundation to recognize the power of the Mule. Since then, you have interested yourself rather daringly in the Mule's early life. You have been one of those who carried off his clown, who, incidentally, has not yet been found and for which there will yet be full payment. Naturally, your ability is recognized. And the Mule is not one of those who fear the ability of his enemies as long as he can convert it into the ability of a new friend."

Joel

Pritcher is horrified and refuses to consider switching sides, as he has heard so many others have done. He listens as the Viceroy explains the terrible truth.

Viceroy

"The Mule has conquered the Foundation. It is rapidly being turned into an arsenal for accomplishment of his greater aims."

Pritcher

"What greater aims?"

Viceroy

"The conquest of the entire galaxy. The reunion of all the torn worlds into a new empire. The fulfillment, you dull wizard patriot of your Seldon's dream seven hundred years before he hoped to see it. And in the fulfillment, you can help us."

Joel

Pritcher stands determined and says he will never turn against his people. The viceroy shakes his head and explains that though a voluntary recruitment would be desirable, the Mule, who is off doing battle against the Traders, has other means to bring him on board. Captain Pritcher steadfastly insists he will not desert. He insists that the Mule will find it beyond his ability to turn him.

Viceroy

"But he won't. I was not beyond it. You don't recognize me? Come, you were on Kalgan, so you have seen me. I wore a monocle, a fur-lined scarlet robe, a high crowned hat?"

Randu

Pritcher stiffens in dismay.

Pritcher

"You were the warlord of Kalgan?"

Viceroy

"Yes. And now I am the loyal viceroy of the Mule. You see, he is persuasive."

[Theme excerpt indicates scene change]

Viceroy

Back at Haven, Toran successfully maneuvers the Bayta through the blockade set up by the forces of the Mule and makes his first jump into hyperspace. The route to Trantor had been well established and fairly direct, but he doesn't dare to take anything like a traditional path to the galaxy's center. Instead, he sets a constantly shifting course, zigzagging from star to star, sometimes reversing course entirely and taking huge risks by coming out of hyperspace at the very minimum distance from fearsome red giants and blue white stars, then immediately jumping again, he feels confident that his erratic course cannot be followed.

Joel

About a week out from Haven, in a rare stretch of calm, the news arrives via hyperwave that they were all dreading, but knew was inevitable. Their homeworld had fallen, and one of the last neighboring strongholds, Memnon, was on the verge of surrender. Bayta had been in the galley when the bulletin was received. Ebling Mis has the unfortunate duty of informing her.

Ebling

"They've taken Haven."

Bayta

"Already?"

Ebling

"Without a fight. You'd better leave Toran alone. It's not pleasant for him. Suppose we eat without him this once?"

Bayta

"Very well."

Ebling

"Randu suggested it might have been a radiant will depressor. It's what might have done the work on Haven. But then why wasn't it used on Memnon and Iss, which even now fight with such demonic intensity that it's taking half the Foundation fleet, in addition to the Mule's forces, to beat them down? Yes, I recognized Foundation ships in the attack."

Bayta

"The Foundation, then Haven. Disaster seems to follow us without touching. We always seem to get out by a hair. Will it last forever?"

Joel

Ebling Mis was distracted and muttered to himself.

Ebling

"But there's another problem."

Bayta

"Another problem?"

Ebling

"Bayta, you remember the news item that the Mule's clown was not found on Terminus? That it was suspected he had fled to Haven or been carried away there by his original kidnappers? There is an importance attached to him, Bayta, that doesn't fade, and we have not located it yet. Magnifico must know something that is fatal to the Mule. I'm sure of it. "

Joel

Magnifico protests.

Magnifico Giganticus

"Sire, noble lord, indeed I swear it is passed my poor reckoning to penetrate your wants. I have told you what I know to the utter limits. And with your probe you have drawn out of my meager wit that which I knew, but knew not that I knew."

Ebling

"I know. I know it is something small, a hint so small that neither you nor I recognize it for what it is. Yet I must find it - for Memnon and Iss will go soon, and when they do, we are the last remnants, the last droplets of the independent Foundation."

Joel

Their erratic journey continued as the spirits of the crew remained low. The mission they had embarked on, which seemed desperate even then, now felt hopelessly, futile and absurd. Some of the hyperspace jumps Toran insisted upon caused great distress to the crew, and it was leading to some very tense moments. At one point, Bayta looked at a map of their journey and made a sour comment, initiating a furious and ultimately comic wrestling match on the floor, interrupted by a sudden appearance from Magnifico.

Magnifico

"The instruments are behaving queerly, sir. I have not, in the knowledge of my ignorance, touched anything."

Joel

Toran gets up from his tussle with Bayta and rushes to the monitors. He regains composure and calls Bayta over.

Toran

"We've been detected, Bay!"

Bayta

"Detected? By whom?"

Toran

"Galaxy knows, but I imagine by someone with blasters already ranged and trained."

Joel

Moments later, his summation proves correct, as the Bayta is boarded by a party identifying themselves as representatives of the "Autarchy of Filia," a system heretofore unknown to the crew. They provide papers proving their status as an independent trading vessel and are informed that they will be required to pay various fees for crossing through Filian space. Toran reluctantly relinquishes the required funds, and the boarding party is about to return to their ship when one of the boarders points to Magnifico and says that he is wanted for questioning.

Apparently he resembles a local thug who has been wanted for various crimes. He will be needed for questioning on board the Filian vessel. Toran is also asked to accompany him, as there is some issue with one of their engines and they would like to have him take a look. Toran and Magnifico depart and are gone for a short while and then return, and the crew ascends to allow them to leave without further disruption. Bayta forces a laugh.

Bayta

"Don't we rate an escort? Don't we get the usual figurative boot over the border?"

Joel

But Toran had seen something unexpected on board.

Toran

"That was no Filian ship, and we're not leaving for a while. Come in here. That was a Foundation ship, and those were the Mule's men on board."

Joel

Obviously, Toran's information caused a major stir at that tense moment aboard the Bayta. Ebling Mis initially thought it was an impossibility, but on further reflection agreed that it was at least remotely possible. A Foundation ship had trailed them all the way. Bayta, reflecting on the chaotic course they'd charted, thought it couldn't be possible. At one point Mis and Toran disagreed so violently that it looked like they might come to blows.

Toran remained adamant. He knew his engines and the ones he had examined were clearly from the Foundation. Magnifico had been silent all this time, but he now pleaded for their attention.

Magnifico

"I crave your pardon for my interruption, but my poor mind is of a sudden plagued with a queer thought."

Bayta

"Go ahead and speak, Magnifico. We will all listen faithfully. "

Magnifico

"In my stay in their ship, what addled wits I have were bemazed and bemused by a chattering fear that befell men. Of a truth I have a lack of memory of most happened. Many men staring at me, and talk I did not understand. But towards the last, as though a beam of sunlight had dashed through a cloud rift, there was a face I knew, a glimpse the merest glimmer. And yet it glows in my memory ever stronger and brighter."

Toran

"Who was it?"

Magnifico

"That captain who was with us so long a time ago when first you saved me from slavery."

Ebling

"Captain... Han... Pritcher? You're sure of that? Certain sure now?"

Magnifico

"I swear I would uphold the truth of it before the Mule and swear it in his teeth. Though all his power were behind him to deny it."

Joel

Magnifico went on to advance a wild theory that the ship they'd encountered might have been Pritcher's Foundation vessel but not under the Mule's command. He thought that perhaps their old companion had accidentally blundered upon them and suspected and thought that he was the one who had been followed and that he had therefore tried to gain information about them. When he'd heard the description of Magnifico he would have brought them aboard to see if it could be the same crew he had known and spent time with previously. As a secret agent of the Foundation he was probably on some special mission and did not want to reveal his identity or the nature of his mission.

The others thought it extremely unlikely. But perhaps due to the fact that the alternatives were equally or even more unlikely and the earnest and persuasive pleadings of the pathetic clown they came to accept it as the least unlikely of the possible options. Toran fought this interpretation the longest. He'd been determined to destroy the other ship when he'd come to the conclusion it was one that belonged to the hated enemy. Gradually he was persuaded and his eyes darkened with disappointment.

Toran

"For a while, I thought we might have had one of the Mule's ships."

Joel

The crew resumed their apparently forlorn mission to the center of the galaxy and the clues they so desperately sought on the planet that had once stood as the capital of the greatest empire the galaxy had ever known. But first they had another stop to make.

[Theme excerpt signifies scene change]

Joel

There was a world nearby Trantor that had become the home of the remnants of imperial authority and had come to be known as Neotrantor. I'll let Asmov describe it for you.

"But Neotrantor existed. An obscure village of a planet drowned in the shadow of mighty Trantor until a hard throttled royal family racing before the fire and flame of the Great Sack sped to it as its last refuge and held out there barely until the roaring wave of rebellion subsided. There it ruled in ghostly splendor over a cadaverous remnant of Imperium. Twenty agricultural worlds were a galactic empire."

That heart-throttled royal family was headed by a man who had been only twenty-five on arriving but was now in his fading days. He was called Dagobert IX and he still fancied himself the ruler of the galaxy. But his empire now consisted of a mere twenty planets. His son had been raised in privilege and would before long be the tenth in the line of Dagoberts. He was a sullen and angry young man of meager talents but considerable ambition and longed to take the throne and rule over the shadow of the ancient empire.

The chapter on Neotrantor opens with a conspiratorial discussion between a wealthy aristocrat on this world and a clever agent of his, and they are obviously looking forward to the coming change of rulers and aim to take advantage of the instability caused by the strangely effective conqueror at the edge of the galaxy. Somehow they seem to be aware of the visit to their world by the travelers from Haven and know of their mission, which, it seems, is to pay a visit to the Supreme Highness, who had the title of Emperor in the desperate hope that he might legitimize their search for the Second Foundation among the ruins of the ancient capital. Soon after landing on Neotrantor, near the grounds of the new and quite

underwhelming Imperial Palace they are admitted to an audience with the pathetic leader of the Shadow Empire.

They are surprised to find the Emperor in his shabby palace in the act of preparing tea. Rather than pomp and circumstance, it is the emperor himself who greets them with a teapot and cups. The visitors do their best to not reveal their surprise and to treat the doddering king with the utmost of respect so that they may find assistance in their quest. The Emperor greets them with enthusiasm.

Dagobert

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

Joel

Toran attempts to capture the aging ruler's attention.

Toran

"Your Imperial Majesty..."

Dagobert

"Yes?"

Toran

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

Dagobert

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

Toran

"From the Foundation, your Imperial Majesty."

Dagobert

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

Toran

"Sire, I bring no complaints."

Dagobert

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

Joel

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

Ebling

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

Dagobert

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

Joel

Magnifico whispered to Bayta.

Magnifico

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

Joel

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

Bayta

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

Dagobert

"To Trantor?"

Bayta

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

Joel

The old king became suddenly vehement.

Dagobert

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

Joel

Bayta sensed the opportunity and thought quickly.

Bayta

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

Dagobert

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

[Sound of scribbling on paper]

Joel

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

Bayta

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

Dagobert

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

Bayta

"No, Your Imperial Majesty."

Dagobert

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

Joel

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

Toran

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

Joel

And so the visitors retreat, stepping backwards in deference to faux imperial authority through the high double doors of the palace. High comedy, to be replaced by grim tragedy, because in the ante room, twenty men surround the group in a tight circle, and a weapon flashes.

[suspenseful music and a weapon flashes]

Sometime thereafter, Bayta awakens, groggily to hear two of the men speaking. One is evidently the crown prince, as his words are deeply disturbing, for he is lusting after her and intends to take her captive.

Mis and Toran also struggle to consciousness, and the latter strains mightily against the constraints in which they have all been bound. Only Magnifico is calm. His eyes are wide open, as if he had awakened some time previously. He is listening intently to their captor's conversation.

The Prince leers at Bayta and finding Magnifico's visi-sonor among the items obviously stolen from their ship. He demands the clown perform for them "a serenade of love and beauty for our foreign lady here." Magnifico appears reluctant, but takes the instrument in his spindly arms and brushes his hands across the keys.

[Mysterious music from the visi-sonor]

Joel

A rainbow of light appears in the air before them all, and a low drone begins, sweet and sonorous at first, then gathering in force, it becomes dark and menacing. Magnifico's hands rush quickly across the keys, and the sound becomes brassy and dissonant. The visions turn nightmarish. Bayta feels a powerful sense of anguish and despair and briefly recalls the feelings she felt in the Vault when Seldon's predictions clashed with the awful reality of the Mule's sudden invasion. The music and horrific visions rage for several minutes, and when they cease, their captors have fallen unconscious, and the Crown Prince lays sprawled awkwardly upon the floor.

Magnifico releases the others and they make their way speedily to the Bayta. Toran readies the ship for departure, and once in the safety of space and bound for the Imperial Library on Trantor, they can finally relax and reflect upon their perilous adventure upon the planet. Bayta turns to the hero of the moment, the sad clown who had saved them all from a horrible fate, and her from a sadistic monster with nefarious intent.

Bayta

"Magnifico?"

Magnifico

"Yes, my lady?"

Bayta

"What was it you played back there?"

Magnifico

"I'd rather not say. I learned it once. And the visi-sonor is of an effect upon the nervous system most profound. Surely it was an evil thing. And not for your sweet innocence, my lady."

Bayta

"Oh, now, come, Magnifico, I'm not as innocent as that. Don't flatter so. Did I see anything like what they saw?"

Magnifico

"I hope not. I played it for them. Only if you saw it was but the rim of it from afar, and that was enough."

Bayta

"Do you know you knocked the Prince out?"

Joel

The clown's sheepish expression contained just a hint of malice as he answered her.

Magnifico

"I killed him, my lady."

[suspenseful music ends scene]

Joel

It is here that we will pause in our recounting of this tale. The cast of characters has narrowed considerably along the way. Mayor Indbur has been deposed. Captain Pritcher has his own problems. Randu, Fran, and the rest of the resistance upon Haven are now in the Mule's power. The last of the Trader worlds are on the verge of total defeat. The fate of the galaxy is now in the hands of our small party; Ebling Mis, along with Toran and Bayta Darell with the sad clown Magnifico seemingly along for the ride, proceeding to the ruins of Trantor to somehow, some way, find evidence of the location of the semi-mythical entity known as the Second Foundation, and to communicate to them the urgency of their plight.

It seems an impossible quest, and we will take it up again in our next episode. I need to call out an error I've made on repeated occasions on this podcast, one brought to my attention by a listener. I referred to Asimov's editor at Astounding Stories, as Joseph Campbell on at least two occasions. This was a terrible insult to one of the greatest forces in Golden Age science fiction a man with the first name of John, not Joseph. Campbell was a giant in the community of science fiction writers in the mid 20th century, and his influence on Isaac Asimov, and Foundation in particular, was profound.

The author recounts how it was Campbell who originally challenged him to write a novel inspired by the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and that he had further challenged him to introduce a new feature in the plot, a character outside of Seldon's predictions, one not accounted for in the calculations of psychohistory. This character was the Mule. It's no understatement to suggest that without this feature of the story, it may not have become the timeless classic we now enjoy. I apologize deeply for getting John's name wrong, and I thank my listener for bringing this egregious error to my attention.

Why would I have made this mental lapse and substituted Joseph for John? That's an easy one. There was a very important writer by the name of Joseph Campbell, the author of the seminal treatise on mythology, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces," which I had the privilege of reading a couple of decades ago and which left a powerful influence upon me. Joseph Campbell described a repeated motif in many of the world's myths he called the hero's adventure. Quoting from the introduction of the book, Campbell summarizes the motif as follows,

"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder. Fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won. The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." Besides being repeated across the millennia in the form of countless stories in an abundance of far flung human cultures, the mythic cycle has influenced many modern artists and storytellers, most notably George Lucas in the Star Wars saga. But also artists such as the operatic composer and librettist Ricard Wagner and modern musicians from Bob Dylan to the lyricist of many of the rock group the Grateful Dead's rreatest mythic stories, Robert Hunter.

You can see its influence in many of the great science fiction classics of the modern era. It begs the question, could Asimov have been influenced by this mythic pattern in his work? Do we see it in Foundation? The problem in Foundation and its great strength is the scope and time over which it is told. There is no one hero we can track. Throughout the saga, many heroes arise, including Seldon, Hardin, Mallow, Devers and possibly now our present protagonists, Bayta, Toran, and Ebling Miss. They each in turn pass from the scene upon their deaths, as they are only mortal.

Only Seldon, through the enduring force of his psychohistory, remains a powerful force throughout, though we have seen that even his science had its limitations, as it did not foresee the Mule. Thank you again, John

Campbell. Perhaps we could look at it in another way. However, we could choose to see the Foundation, or perhaps psychohistory itself as a character and track its progress through the story as the hero. In the beginning, we saw Seldon's daunting predictions of the empire's collapse as the call to action and the hero is thrust out to the furthest reaches of the galaxy to fight the collapse of civilization in the form of the initial crises it faces its fabulous forces and prevails in victory again and again against Anacreon, Askone, Korell, and eventually the empire itself under the mighty banner of General Bel Riose.

Its mission is to return home in the form of becoming the heart of a new social order. At the conclusion of the predicted thousand years of destruction and eventual rebirth, the Mule has thrown an enormous wrench into the plan. And this is where John Campbell's genius influenced Asimov to defy Joseph Campbell's mythic cycle and create something entirely new. This is one of the reasons Foundation is so great. It took a powerful megatropé, so to speak, and reworked it into something completely different. It subverted our expectations and left us floundering. We have no idea now what to expect.

There is no established overarching story pattern to guide us. We can only wait now for the story to play out and see how Asimov chooses to resolve this ultimate Seldon Crisis. Let me thank my usual friends and collaborators; Tom Barnes for the theme music, Mike Topping for the logo art, and Jeremy MacKinnon for sound design. Let me also thank the wonderful voice of Bayta Darell, Amanda Kreidler, for her work on this episode. If you like her work here, please check out what she does on the Severed Fate and Dimension Door podcasts. If you would like to support the podcast in any way, please consider becoming a patron.

I will be providing original content at my patreon page, along with free Seldon Crisis themed stickers and discounted merch like t shirts and mugs. Eventually. Among my new patrons since the last episode are Merciless

Fur, George R. White, Peter Hunt and Basil Philip. Thank you very much for your support. You can also send me email at joel@seldoncrisis.net or write a review on the platform of your choice. I've received wonderful emails from Felicia Llana, Josep Guallar-Esteve and Joe Mereshek with some great interactions and feedback. I'm going to quote from one other email I received recently because it speaks eloquently to why I created this podcast.

The email is from Lucia Lezama with the subject line of "Praise from a quiet admirer." After informing me of her delight in listening to the segment on the Fall of the Foundation in The Mule Part One, she concludes, "After reading the books more than three times, I'm quite acquainted with the story, yet you made me experience it for the first time again., I had to share the feelings your podcast provoked, as well as my deepest gratitude. Thank you for helping me enjoy this fantastic story again, like it was the first time. This is a magic we normally lose after reading a book, but I'm glad I could find it in Seldon Crisis. I wish you all the best. I hope you continue captivating listeners."

I sincerely hope so too, Lucia, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your beautiful email. New reviews have come in from Doneko, Elizabeth Wilcox, and Atanaska Gabriel, along with wonderful support on Twitter from Stephen Webb, Paul Levinson, Cora Buhlert, Stars End Podcast, AsimovPosting, Martian Diaries, Galactic Empire, Id, Ego & Us podcast, among many others. I love and appreciate all of the wonderful feedback. Please keep it coming. Join me soon for the third and final chapter in its three part series, The Mule, Part III, here on Seldon Crisis.

[Closing theme music]