

The Mule, Part III



[Opening theme music with voiceovers.]

Han Pritcher

"My rank is Colonel now - under the Mule."

Bayta Darell

"Ebling, doesn't he make you wonder? Do you hear me, Ebling? Doesn't he make you wonder?"

Magnifico Giganticus

"The learned doctor calls for you. He is not well."

Bayta

"Ebling!"

Toran Darell

"Yes, yes. Tell us how to get there, Ebling. Where is it?"

Ebling Mis

"I can tell you."

The Mule

"I am the Mule."

[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, friends, to the third and concluding episode in perhaps my favorite story within the entire Foundation cycle, *The Mule*. Let's recap the story so far. We started on the trading world of Haven II, with the newlyweds Toran and Bayta Darell returning from their wedding on Terminus, where Toran introduces his bride to his father Fran, and his half-brother Randu.

Bayta shows herself to be an intelligent student of political history and to be a believer in the necessity of overthrowing the current leadership of the Foundation, which has become brutal and authoritarian. Randu introduces the specter of the Mule, an enigmatic being that has been rumored to be a general with unusual powers and has been attaining surprising victories over other worlds. It has decided to send the young couple on a working honeymoon to Kalgan, a pleasure planet that has recently come under the Mule's power, to see if they might learn more about the Mule and whether he might possibly become an ally in their fight against the Foundation authorities. Since the victory over Bel Riose and the ensuing collapse of the empire, it has become a truism that the Foundation can't be beaten, but the hope is that they can be shaken up enough for reforms to be put into place.

Meanwhile, we encounter an authoritarian leader of the Foundation, Mayor Indbur interrogating a secret police captain named Han Pritcher in his office. Pritcher is concerned about the Mule, but Indbur orders him to investigate the traders on Haven for not paying their taxes. Pritcher disobeys the order and proceeds directly to Kalgan. There, Bayta and Toran meet an odd fellow on the beach named Magnifico, a court jester who'd run away from the Mule and take him under their protection, hoping that in doing so they can meet his master and pursue their plan to begin an alliance with him. Pritcher meets them at their ship and en route to Terminus, interrogates Magnifico, who tells him that the Mule is a fearsome creature of great strength who can kill at a distance with only his eyes.

On Terminus, we meet Indbur again in discussion with the Foundation's greatest scientist, the psychologist Ebling Mis, who has been investigating Hari Seldon's psychohistorical research and informs Indbur that a Seldon Crisis is coming and that he will be making an appearance soon in the famous Time Vault. Indbur denies the possibility of a crisis, but they are interrupted by a messenger who informs him first that Captain Pritcher and his companions have been held on arrival and Pritcher faces execution for insubordination. Then that the enemy forces of Kalgan have been spotted in Foundation space and have begun hostilities. Next, we traveled briefly to a trader conference on the ribbon world of Radole where talk of the Mule's conquests in battle is raging.

Amid rumors that he had been using a nuclear suppression device to defeat his foes, Randu makes a speech informing them of the urgency of the moment. Back on Terminus, Bayta and Magnifico are taken to the home of Ebling Mis where the clown is to be interrogated. But first he gives an amazing performance on a musical instrument known as the visi-sonor, which works directly on the brain of its audience. Mis and Bayta are spellbound and they arrange for a series of concerts with Magnifico

performing on the device. Not long after, the time has come for Seldon to appear in the Vault and Mayor Indbur is prepared to celebrate the resolution of the latest crisis and intends to clamp down even harder on all resistance from the trader worlds.

Upon its conclusion, all of those present, including all of the principles we have met so far, are shocked when Seldon appears and has no knowledge of the Mule. In the confusion and uproar of this shocking revelation, all nuclear power in Terminus City fails and to the horror of all, the Mule invades, defeating the Foundation totally.

In part II, we went back to Haven under siege by the Mule and witnessed the collapse in morale among the citizenry as evidenced by a bad day at work in a factory where Bayta had taken employment, followed by a discussion in which Randu instructs Ebling Mis to voyage to Trantor to find evidence of the location of the fabled Second Foundation in a desperate attempt to gain outside assistance in overthrowing their new overlord. Meanwhile, on Terminus, we find that Pritcher has contacted an underground cell and takes part in a scheme to assassinate the Mule with a nuclear weapon small enough to be contained in a capsule he will detonate with his teeth.

The plan is foiled when the Mule's forces on Terminus catch wind of the plot and replace the bomb with a harmless substitute that fails to explode. It is revealed the man Pritcher thought was the Mule and the target of his suicidal assassination attempt is actually the former Warlord of Kalgan and is now the Mule's viceroy. He informs Pritcher that the Mule is persuasive and he will now be converted to work for the Mule. Next, we journeyed through space with Toran, Bayta, Magnifico and Ebling Mis on an erratic and dangerous course to Trantor and they are intercepted by a mysterious vessel claiming to be a Filian spacecraft.

Toran and Magnifico are briefly taken on board and the clown claims to have recognized Han Pritcher on board and theorizes the encounter was accidental. Also along the way, news arrives that Haven has fallen to the Mule. Before arriving on Trantor, our friends stop on an odd world named Neotrantor where the remnants of the empire have reconstituted and now rule only twenty worlds. Our friends are entertained by the elderly emperor at a comedic tea ceremony where Bayta finds a way to secure passage to Trantor and admission to the ancient Imperial library there, where Mis hopes to uncover the secrets pointing to the mysterious Second Foundation.

As they are leaving, however, they are waylaid by the Crown Prince and his men and held in constraints, while Magnifico is ordered to play a song on the visi-sonor celebrating the rapacious prince's sick lust for Bayta. The performance turns dark and menacing and the captors are knocked unconscious and our heroes are freed by Magnifico, who later informs Bayta that his performance had actually killed the Crown Prince. That's where we left our story, and we will pick it up shortly upon their arrival to the formerly gleaming imperial capital of Trantor, now fallen into ruins. So we've gone from our opening act, played out upon four worlds and involving a cast of almost a dozen characters down to a single world with only Toran, Bayta, Ebling and Magnifico remaining.

It's a little like one of those horror movies in which the cast gets picked off by the monster one by one, but that's not really Asimov's style. We can assume all the main characters we've met are still alive but have been rendered irrelevant to our story. I'm imagining that Bayta's cynical co-worker Hella has probably become factory manager under the Mule while Randu is in hiding, scheming to overthrow the occupiers. But we never get to hear about any of that. If the crisis is to be resolved, it must be by these four in this one place.

About that place. Trantor has become a haunted world. The power and environmental controls have failed, and it appears from orbit to be a planetary wide expanse of twisted metal. With no groundside. navigation systems operational, it takes some time for the visitors to locate their target. The one area of the planet perpetually exposed to the atmosphere, the imperial gardens and palace, home also to the library that houses the records they seek. It is mostly underground, and there is a flashback that tells of the patriotic students protecting it from destruction under the ravages of the great sack of the planet by Gilmer, the barbarian leader we heard tell of in the last chapter who is, contrary to the demented fantasies of the doddering king of Neotrantor, long since passed from the scene.

Toran sets the ship down close to the library and they are greeted by a small party of farmers. The visitors signal peaceful intentions and a civil welcoming ceremony ensues, including the obligatory cigars for the guests. Bayta shocks the sensibilities of the patriarchal leader of the settlement by accepting and enjoying a cigar along with the others. They are informed that Trantor is emerging as an agricultural world, trading the endless quantity of metal at their disposal for necessities required for their subsistence. In this haunted and destroyed world, their hosts do not interfere with their preparations to begin their mission.

Toran and Bayta take up housekeeping out upon the surface, while Ebling descends into the depths of the library and finds the psychohistorical archives, where he will begin his intensive research. Magnifico takes a liking to Ebling's company, watching book films endlessly nearby, while Mis pours over the documents archived, searching for clues over the coming days and weeks. Ebling rarely leaves his post, and he becomes increasingly sickly and weak. His focus is so intense that Bayta has to remind him to eat and occasionally surface for rest and sunshine. The waiting begins to wear on the young couple as Bayta gets increasingly moody, which begins to bother her husband.

One day he finds her within the foyer of the library and tries to get at what's bugging her.

Toran

"Bayta?"

Bayta

"Yes? You want me, Torie?"

Toran

"Sure I want you. What in space are you sitting there for? You've been acting all wrong since we got to Trantor. What's the matter with you?"

Bayta

"Oh, Torie, stop."

Toran

"Oh Torie, stop. Won't you tell me what's wrong, Bay? Something's bothering you?"

Bayta

"No, nothing is. Torie, if you keep just on nagging and nagging, you'll have me mad. I'm just thinking."

Toran

"Thinking about what?"

Bayta

"About nothing. Well, about the Mule and Haven and the Foundation and everything. About Ebling Mis and whether he'll find anything about the Second Foundation and whether it will help us when he does find it, and a million other things. Are you satisfied?"

Joel

Magnifico enters from outside and interrupts their squabbling.

Magnifico

"My lady."

Bayta

"What is it? Come-"

Joel

She halts mid sentence as she sees a familiar tall figure standing in the doorway. Toran exclaims.

Toran

"Pritcher!"

Bayta

"Captain! How did you find us?"

Joel

Han Pritcher replies, dead of feeling,

Pritcher

"My rank is Colonel now. Under the Mule."

Toran

"Under the Mule! "

Joel

A silence follows while they process this unsettling information. Finally, Bayta fearfully asks,

Bayta

"You are arresting us? You have really gone over to them?"

Joel

Pritcher shakes his head sadly.

Pritcher

"I have not come to arrest you. My instructions make no mention of you. With regard to you, I am free, and I choose to exercise our old friendship, if you will let me."

Joel

While Bayta begins to prepare tea for their unexpected guest, Pritcher explains that it was he who had been on the Filian ship and that he had followed them here. He goes on to tell of how the Mule had used his mutant powers to convert him, and how he had used control of emotion to win his battles.

Bayta

"And you betray your cause and become mule's envoy to Trantor. I see."

Pritcher

"I haven't finished. The mule's gift works in reverse even more effectively. Despair is an emotion at the crucial moment. Key men on the Foundation, key men on Haven despaired. Their worlds fell without too much struggle."

Bayta

"Do you mean to say that the feeling I had in the Time Vault was the Mule juggling my emotional control?"

Pritcher

"Mine too. Everyone's. How was it on Haven? Towards the end?"

Joel

Bayta's expression reveals all. No doubt thinking of Hella and Juddee in the lunchroom. Pritcher goes on to explain that they have no chance because the Mule is too strong and that they should now join him. He has been aware of their every move. Even their apparent success against the Crown Prince on Neotrantor was inconsequential to the Mule's designs.

Bayta

"But by your very statement your own emotions have been tampered with. You've got faith and belief in the Mule. An unnatural, a diseased faith in the Mule. Of what value are your opinions? You've lost all power of objective thought."

Pritcher

"You are wrong. Only my emotions are fixed. My reason is as it always was. It may be influenced in a certain direction by my conditioned emotions but it is not forced. And there are some things I can see more clearly. Now that I am freed of my earlier emotional trend I can see that the Mules program is an intelligent and worthy one. In the time since I have been converted I have followed his career from its start seven years ago. With his mutant mental power, he began by winning over a condottiere and his band. With that and his power, he won a planet."

"With that and his power, he extended his grip until he could tackle the warlord of Kalgan. Each step followed the other logically. With Kalgan in his pocket, he had a first class fleet. And with that and his power he could attack the Foundation. The Foundation is the key. It is the greatest area of industrial concentration in the galaxy. And now that the nuclear techniques of the Foundation are in his hands he is the actual master of the

galaxy. With those techniques and his power he can force the remnants of the empire to acknowledge his rule. And eventually, with the death of the old emperor, who is mad and not long for this world to crown him emperor he will then have the name as well as the fact."

"With that and his power, where is the world in the galaxy that can oppose him? In these last seven years he has established a new empire. In seven years, in other words, he will have accomplished what all Seldon's psychohistory could not have done in less than an additional seven hundred. The galaxy will have peace and order at last. And you could not stop it any more than you could stop a planet's rush with your shoulders."

Joel

Bayta paused and considered this long speech then spoke for all of them.

Bayta

"We are not convinced. If the Mule wishes us to be, let him come here and condition us himself. You fought him until the last moment of your conversion, I imagine, didn't you?"

Pritcher

"I did."

Bayta

"Then allow us the same privilege."

Joel

Pritcher agrees they should have the chance to attempt to fight the inevitable, but expresses his certainty that the Mule will prevail in the end and that there is no real point in their resistance. He asks to see Magnifico and is refused.

Pritcher

"One last thing. Don't think I am not aware of the source of your stubbornness. It is known that you search for the Second Foundation. The Mule, in his time, will take his measures. Nothing will help you. But I knew you in other times. Perhaps there is something in my conscience that urged me to this. At any rate, I tried to help you and remove you from the final danger before it was too late. Goodbye."

Joel

With a final salute, he boarded his vessel and returned from whence he came in a whisper. Bayta despairs.

Bayta

"They even know about the Second Foundation?"

Joel

Ebling Mis has been hard at work in the archives all this time, so Toran and Bayta go to him to share the news of their surprise visitor. They find him in a terrible physical state, apparently wasting away at his desk, slumped over in exhaustion and nearly asleep. He looks up slowly and groggily, croaks out,

Ebling

"Eh? Someone want me?"

Bayta

"Did we wake you? Shall we leave?"

Joel

Mis strains to see their faces in the gloom.

Ebling

"Leave? Who is it? Bayta. No, no, stay. Aren't their chairs? I saw them."

Bayta

"May we talk to you, Doctor?"

Ebling

"Is something wrong?"

Bayta

"Captain Pritcher has been here. Let me talk. Torie. You remember Pritcher, doctor?"

Ebling

"Yes, yes. Tall man, democrat."

Bayta

"Yes, he he's discovered the Mule's mutation. He was here, Doctor, and told us."

Joel

Mis mutters that he knew about the Mule's mutant powers, but had forgotten to tell them. He explains how Seldon's theories could not have predicted a mutant being, that this was the great flaw in the plan. Still, he is sure he is close to a breakthrough in his search for the location of the Second Foundation.

Ebling

"This and more come so easily. I tell you, I wonder sometimes what is going on inside me. I seem to recall the time when so much was a mystery to me, and now things are so clear, problems are absent. I come across what might be one, and somehow inside me I see and understand. And my guesses, my theories seem always to be borne out. There's a drive in me, always onward, so that I can't stop. And I don't want to eat or sleep, but always go on and on and on."

Joel

Mis, still apparently confused and groggy, asks about what's going on around him. He has to be told again about the visit from Pritcher and of what he had informed them.

Bayta

"He's been conditioned by the Mule. He's a colonel now, a Mule's man. He came to advise us to surrender to the Mule, and he told us what you told us."

Ebling

"Then the Mule knows we're here. I must hurry. Where's Magnifico? Isn't he with you?"

Toran

"Magnifico's sleeping. It's past midnight, you know."

Joel

"It is? Then was I sleeping when you came in?"

Bayta

"You were. And you're not going back to work either. You're getting into bed. Come on, Torie, help me. And you stop pushing at me, Ebling, because it's just your luck I don't shove you under the shower. First pull off his shoes, Torie, and tomorrow you come down here and drag him out into the open air before he fades completely away. Look at you, Ebling. You'll be growing cobwebs. Are you hungry?"

Joel

Mis doesn't answer, but expresses his desire for the companionship of the clown.

Ebling

"I want you to send Magnifico down tomorrow."

Bayta

"You'll have me down tomorrow with washed clothes. You're going to take a good bath and then get out and visit the farm and feel a little sun on you."

Ebling

"I won't do it, you hear me? I'm too busy. You want that Second Foundation, don't you?"

Toran

"What about the Second Foundation, Ebling?"

Ebling

"The Foundations were established at a great psychological convention presided over by Hari Seldon. Toran, I have located the published minutes of that convention. Twenty-five fat films. I have already looked through various summaries. Well, well. Do you know that it is very easy to find them from the exact location of the First Foundation? If you know anything at all about psychohistory, it is frequently referred to when you understand the equations. But Toran, nobody mentions the Second Foundation. There has been no reference to it anywhere."

Toran

"It doesn't exist?"

Ebling

"Of course it exists. Who said it didn't? But there is less talk of it. Its significance and all about it are better hidden, better obscured. Don't you see? It's the more important of the two. It's the critical one, the one that counts. And I have got minutes of the Seldon Convention. The Mule hasn't won yet."

Bayta

"Go to sleep."

Joel

They eventually get him to sleep, and the next day he comes outside and enjoys the sun and air for what will turn out to be the last time. Then, after a quick breakfast, he is immediately back at work. Bayta and Toran let him work for a few more days alone with Magnifico. One day Toran goes to the farm for food and Bayta goes to talk with Mis. As she enters, she notices Magnifico is focused intently on Mis while he works.

Bayta

"Magnifico."

Magnifico

"My lady."

Bayta

"Magnifico, Toran has left for the farm and won't be back for a while. Would you be a good boy and go out after him with a message that I'll write for you?"

Magnifico

"Gladly, my lady. My small services are but too eagerly yours for the tiny uses you can put them to."

Joel

After the clown departs, Bayta turns to the scientist and gently begs his attention.

Bayta

"Ebling?"

Ebling

"What is it?"

Joel

He wrinkles his eyes.

Ebling

"Is it you, Bayta? Where's Magnifico?"

Bayta

"I sent him away. I want to be alone with you for a while. I want to talk to you, Ebling. Magnifico isn't bothering you, is he, Ebling? He seems to be down here night and day?"

Ebling

"No, not at all. Why? I don't mind him. He is silent and never disturbs me. Sometimes he carries the films back and forth for me. Seems to know what I want without my speaking. Just let him be."

Bayta

"Very well. But, Ebling, doesn't he make you wonder? Do you hear me, Ebling? Doesn't he make you wonder?"

Ebling

"No. What do you mean?"

Bayta

"I mean that Colonel Pritcher and you both say the Mule can condition the emotions of human beings. But are you sure of it? Isn't Magnifico himself a flaw in the theory? What's wrong with you, Ebling? Magnifico was the Mule's clown. Why wasn't he conditioned to love and faith? Why should he, of all those in contact with the Mule, hate him so?"

Ebling

"But he was conditioned. Certainly. Bay, do you suppose that the Mule treats his clown the way he treats his generals? He needs faith and loyalty in the latter. But in his clown he needs only fear. Didn't you ever notice that Magnifico's continual state of panic is pathological in nature? Do you suppose it is natural for a human being to be as frightened as that all the time? Fear to such an extent becomes comic. It was probably comic to the Mule, and helpful, too, since it obscured what help we might have gotten earlier from Magnifico."

Bayta

"You mean Magnifico's information about the Mule was false?"

Ebling

"It was misleading. It was colored by pathological fear. The Mule is not the physical giant Magnifico thinks he is. More probably an ordinary man outside his mental powers. But if it amused him to appear as superman to poor Magnifico in any case, Magnifico's information is no longer of importance."

Joel

Mis tiredly informs her of how he has discovered that the information about the Second Foundation was buried deeply within Seldon's mathematics. It was never mentioned in formal proceedings. And if he wasn't conversant in the equations, he would never have seen the evidence.

Ebling

"Foundation Number One was a world of physical scientists. It represented a concentration on the dying science of the galaxy under the conditions necessary to make it live again. No psychologists were included. It was a peculiar distortion, and it must have had a purpose. The usual explanation was that Seldon's psychohistory worked best where the individual working units, human beings, had no knowledge of what was coming and could therefore react naturally to all situations. Do you follow me, my dear?"

Bayta

"Yes, Doctor."

Ebling

"Then listen carefully. Foundation Number Two was a world of mental scientists. It was the mirror image of our world. Psychology, not physics, was king. You see?"

Bayta

"I don't."

Ebling

"But think, Bayta. Use your head. Hari Seldon knew that his psychohistory could predict only probabilities and not certainties. There was always a margin of error, and as time passed, that margin increases in geometric progression. Seldon would naturally guard as well as he could against it. Our Foundation was scientifically vigorous. It could conquer armies and weapons. It could pit force against force. But what of the mental attack of a mutant such as the Mule?"

Bayta

"That would be for the psychologists of the Second Foundation."

Ebling

"Yes, certainly."

Bayta

"But they have done nothing so far."

Ebling

"How do you know they haven't?"

Bayta

"I don't. Do you have evidence that they have?"

Ebling

"No. There are many factors I know nothing of. The Second Foundation could not have been established full grown any more than we were. We developed slowly and grew in strength. They must have also. The stars know at what stage their strength is now. Are they strong enough to fight the Mule? Are they aware of the danger in the first place? Have they capable leaders?"

Bayta

"But if they follow Seldon's plan, then the Mule must be beaten by the Second Foundation."

Ebling

"Ah, is it that again? But the Second Foundation was a more difficult job than the first. Its complexity is hugely greater, and consequently, so is its possibility of error. And if the Second Foundation should not beat the Mule, it is bad. Ultimately bad. It is the end, maybe, of the human race as we know it, no? Yes. If the Mule's descendants inherit his mental powers, you see, Homo sapiens could not compete. There would be a new dominant race, a new aristocracy, with Homo sapiens devoted to slave labor as an inferior race. Isn't that so?"

Bayta

"Yes, that is so."

Ebling

"And even if by some chance the Mule did not establish a dynasty, he would still establish a distorted new empire upheld by his personal power. Only it would die. With his death, the galaxy would be left where it was before he came. Except that there would no longer be Foundations around which a real and healthy second empire could coalesce. It would mean thousands of years of barbarism. It would mean no end in sight."

Bayta

"What can we do? Can we warn the Second Foundation?"

Ebling

"We must, or they may go under through ignorance, which we cannot risk. But there is no way of warning them."

Bayta

"No way?"

Ebling

"I don't know where they are located. They are at the other end of the galaxy. But that is all. And there are millions of worlds to choose from."

Bayta

"But Ebling, don't they say?"

Ebling

"No, they don't. Not where I can find it. Yet the secrecy must mean something. There must be a reason. But I wish you'd leave. I have wasted enough time. And it's growing short. It's growing short."

Joel

They are interrupted by the appearance of Magnifico. Bayta leaves him with Mis and returns to the surface to tell Toran the clues that Mis has provided. He isn't any better than her at understanding how close Mis might be to finding what he seeks.

Shortly thereafter, Toran surprises Bayta in her quarters, holding a blaster. She had been carrying it without letting him know. He is immediately suspicious and annoyed.

Toran

"What are you doing with it, Bay?"

Bayta

"Holding it. Is that a crime?"

Toran

"You'll blow your full head off."

Bayta

"Then I'll blow it off. Small loss."

Joel

The awful tension is clearly not helping the domestic harmony of the Darell household at this time. They continue to wait, squabbling frequently and getting no closer to a solution to the crisis. Another week passes before Magnifico appears before them with an urgent message.

Magnifico

"The learned doctor calls for you. He is not well."

Joel

They rush to the library and find Ebling more frail than ever. He appears on the edge of death, but his tired face bears a new expression.

Bayta

"Ebling!"

Ebling

"Let me speak. Let me speak. I am finished. The work I pass on to you. I have kept no notes. The scrap figures I have destroyed. No other must know. All must remain in your minds."

Bayta

"Magnifico, go upstairs."

Ebling

"He won't matter. Let him stay. Stay, Magnifico. I am convinced the Second Foundation can win if it is not caught prematurely by the Mule. It has kept itself secret. The secrecy must be upheld. It has a purpose. You must go there. Your information is vital. May make all the difference. Do you hear me?"

Joel

Toran pleads in near agony.

Toran

"Yes, yes. Tell us how to get there, Ebling. Where is it?"

Joel

Mis spoke so faintly, they all strained to hear his words.

Ebling

"I can tell you."

Joel

In Asimov's chilling words. "He never did. Bayta, face frozen white, lifted her blaster and shot with an echoing clap of noise. From the waist upward Mis was not, and a ragged hole was in the wall behind. From numb fingers, Bayta's blaster dropped to the floor."

In the stunned silence that followed, a tear fell from Bayta's eye, the first she recalled since childhood. Toran's face was clenched in agony and Magnifico's was a lifeless mask of horror. At long last, Toran erupted in a fury at his wife.

Toran

"You're a Mule's woman! Then he got to you."

Joel

Bayta looked up, her face twisted in sardonic amusement.

Bayta

"I, a Mule's woman? That's ironic. It's over, Toran. I can talk now. How much I will survive, I don't know. But I can start talking."

Toran

"Talk about what, Bay? What's there to talk about?"

Bayta

"About the calamity that's followed us. We've remarked about it before. Torie, don't you remember how defeat has always bitten at our heels and never actually managed to nip us? We were on the Foundation and it collapsed while the Independent Traders still fought. But we got out in time to go to Haven when we were on Haven and it collapsed while the others still fought. And again we got out in time. We went to Neotrantor and by now it's undoubtedly joined the Mule."

Joel

Toran, still shaken and mystified implored her to explain as she led the three of them outside the room to avoid the grisly sight before them.

Bayta

"Torie, such things don't happen in real life. You and I are insignificant people. We don't fall from one vortex of politics into another continuously for the space of a year. Unless we carry the vortex with us. Unless we carry the source of infection with us. Now do you see?"

Joel

Toran grabbed his head in his hands, desperate to find understanding. At last he blurted out.

Toran

"You killed Ebling Mis because you believed him to be the focus of infection? He was the Mule?"

Bayta

"Poor Ebling the Mule? Galaxy no, I couldn't have killed him if he were the Mule. He would have detected the emotion accompanying the move and changed it for me to love devotion, adoration, terror, whatever he pleased. No, I killed Ebling because he was not the Mule. I killed him because he knew where the Second Foundation was and in two seconds would have told the Mule the secret."

Joel

Toran spoke haltingly as the words slowly penetrated.

Toran

"Would have told the Mule the secret... Told the Mule..."

Joel

At last he gasped in stunned amazement.

Toran

"Not Magnifico!"

Bayta

"Listen. Do you remember what happened on Neotrantor? Oh, think for yourself, Torie. A man died on Neotrantor. A man died with no one touching him. Isn't that true? Magnifico played on his visi-sonor, and when he was finished, the Crown Prince was dead. Now, isn't that strange? Isn't it queer that a creature afraid of everything, apparently helpless with terror has the capacity to kill at will?"

Toran

"The music and the light effects have a profound emotional effect."

Bayta

"Yes, an emotional effect. A pretty big one. Emotional effects happen to be the Mule's specialty. That, I suppose, can be considered a coincidence. And a creature who can kill by suggestion is so full of fright. Well, the Mule tampered with his mind, supposedly so that can be explained. But Toran, I caught a little of that visi-sonor selection that killed the crown prince. Just a little. But it was enough to give me that same feeling of despair I had in the Time Vault. And on Haven. Toran, I can't mistake that particular feeling."

Toran

"I felt it too. I forgot. I never thought..."

Bayta

"It was then that it first occurred to me. It was just a vague feeling. Intuition, if you'd like. I had nothing to go on. And then Pritcher told us of the Mule and his mutation and it was clear in a moment it was the Mule who had created the despair in the Time Vault. It was Magnifico who had created the despair on Neotrantor. It was the same emotion. Therefore, the Mule and Magnifico were the same person. Doesn't it work out nicely, Torie? Isn't it just like an axiom? In geometry? Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other?"

"The discovery scared me to death. If Magnifico were the Mule, he could know my emotions and cure them for his own purposes. I dared not let him know I avoided him. Luckily, he avoided me also. He was too interested in Ebling Mis. I planned killing Mis before he could talk. I planned it secretly. As secretly as I could. So secretly I didn't dare tell it to myself. If I could have killed the Mule himself but I couldn't take the chance. He would have noticed, and I would have lost everything."

Toran

"It's impossible. Look at the miserable creature. He the Mule? He doesn't even hear what you're saying."

Joel

But when his eyes followed his pointing finger Magnifico was erect and alert his eyes sharp and darkly bright. His voice was without a trace of an accent.

The Mule

"I hear her. My friend, it is merely that I have been sitting here and brooding on the fact that with all my cleverness and forethought I could make a mistake and lose so much. I am the Mule."

Joel

And Bayta and Toran now saw this curious creature they had known as Magnifico had changed dramatically. He was no longer the timid and neurotic frightened victim of a terrible oppressor. He had drawn up to his full height and his bearing was firm.

The Mule

"Seat yourselves. Go ahead. You might as well sprawl out and make yourselves comfortable. The game's over, and I'd like to tell you a story. It's a weakness of mine. I want people to understand me."

Joel

The Mule paced before them and went back to his childhood. He explained how he had grown up ugly and rejected by his family and had no friends. He had struggled to come to grips with his differences and didn't grasp that he was a mutant until he was in his twenties. About then, he had mastered the strange power he could exert over others emotional state. He learned that he could adjust a person's feelings toward him like turning a dial. And once set, the control would remain.

The Mule

"But the consciousness of power came and with it the desire to make up for the miserable position of my earlier life. Maybe you can understand it. Maybe you can try to understand it. It isn't easy to be a freak. To have a mind and an understanding and be a freak. Laughter and cruelty to be different, to be an outsider."

Joel

He came to realize that he could use this power to take revenge upon the people who had mocked him and found that he could continue to use it to gain greater and greater power but always through the work of others who were under his spell. First, by taking control of a pirate he gained an asteroid base then expanded his control until finally he converted the Warlord of Kalgan and controlled a planet and secured the use of its military fleet. He soon realized there was only one remaining obstacle between himself and limitless control of the galaxy - the Foundation. He explained that he would need an agent, someone like Han Pritcher, to expand his control until he had a way of converting the ruling class and expected him to come to Kalgan looking for him.

The Mule

"By a stroke of fortune, I found you instead. I am a telepath, but not a complete one. And, my lady, you were from the Foundation. I was led astray by that. It was not fatal, for Pritcher joined us afterward but it was the starting point of an error that was fatal."

Joel

Toran angrily interjects.

Toran

"Hold on now. You mean that when I outfaced that lieutenant on Kalgan with only a stun pistol and rescued you that you had emotionally controlled me into it? You mean I've been tampered with all along?"

The Mule

"Why not? You don't think it's likely? Ask yourself then. Would you have risked death for a strange grotesque you had never seen before if you had been in your right mind? I imagine you were surprised at events."

Bayta

"Yes, he was. It's quite plain."

Joel

The Mule went on to describe how he had subtly coerced Ebling Mis to provide him with the Visi-sonor. That simplified his project considerably. The device amplified the effect of his power and enabled him to extend his power over large groups of people at once.

Bayta

"Those concerts I've been trying to fit them in. Now I see."

Joel

The Mule explained how Ebling Mis was the jackpot. Because of his intelligence and curiosity he could help him to gain the ultimate control but only if he could use him to find the Second Foundation.

The Mule

"Naturally, I knew that I must find it. And Ebling Mis was the answer. With his mind at high efficiency he might possibly have duplicated the work of Hari Seldon. Partly he did. I drove him to the upper limit. The process was ruthless, but it had to be completed. He was dying at the end, but he lived. He would have lived long enough. Together we three could have gone onward to the Second Foundation. It would have been the last battle but for my mistake."

Joel

Toran was exasperated.

Toran

"Why do you stretch it out so? What was your mistake and have done with your speech?"

The Mule

"Why, your wife was the mistake. Your wife was an unusual person. I have never met her like before in my life. She liked me without my having to juggle her emotions. She was neither repelled by me nor amused by me. She liked me. The Mule explained the mysterious encounter with the Filian ship in space. They were men already under his control and had Han Pritcher as a prisoner when he went on board."

Joel

He quickly converted him and made him a colonel in his forces. When he returned to the Bayta he was able to explain it all away through the use of his power. So it was just as wacky a theory as it sounded when Magnifico voiced it to the crew. But we, the readers, were not under the Mule's power as they were on Neotrantor.

The Mule

"My own foolish emotions betrayed me again. Bayta was not under my control but even So might never have suspected me if I had kept my head about the Crown Prince. His intentions toward Bayta annoyed me. I killed him. It was a foolish gesture. An unobtrusive flight would have served as well."

Bayta

"That's the end of it?"

The Mule

"That's the end."

Bayta

"What now then?"

The Mule

"I'll continue with my program. That I'll find another as adequately brained and trained as Ebling Mis in these degenerate days, I doubt I shall have to search for the Second Foundation otherwise. In a sense you have defeated me."

Joel

Bayta leaped to her feet in triumph.

Bayta

"In a sense? Only in a sense? We have defeated you entirely! All your victories outside the Foundation count for nothing since the galaxy is a barbarian vacuum now. The Foundation itself is only a minor victory since it wasn't meant to stop your variety of crisis. It's the Second Foundation you must beat. The Second Foundation and it's the Second Foundation that will defeat you. Your only chance was to locate it and strike it before it was prepared. You won't do that now. Every minute from now on, they will be readier for you. At this moment... at this moment, the machinery may have started. You'll know when it strikes you and your short term of power will be over, and you'll be just another strutting conqueror flashing quickly and meanly across the bloody face of history. And we've defeated you, Toran and I, and I am satisfied to die."

Joel

But the eyes of the Mule were once again those of the sad clown Magnifico as he responded.

The Mule

"I won't kill you or your husband. It is, after all, impossible for you two to hurt me further. And killing you won't bring back Ebling Mis. My mistakes were my own, and I take responsibility for them. Your husband and yourself may leave. Go in peace for the sake of what I call friendship. And meanwhile, I am still the Mule, the most powerful man in the galaxy. I shall still defeat the Second Foundation."

Joel

But Bayta would have none of it. Calmly and directly, she refuted his claim.

Bayta

"You won't. I have faith in the wisdom of Seldon. Yet you shall be the last ruler of your dynasty as well as the first."

Joel

And with that, the Mule turned and vanished. To brood upon his failure and plot his next move.

[Theme music excerpt signifies the end]

Joel

One has to feel very sorry for poor Toran at the end. He thought all along he was heroically fighting for the liberation of his homeland, little realizing he had been a puppet on a string the entire time. When Ebling Mis was shot, he was hopelessly confused enough to first think his wife was the Mule's agent, then that Ebling had been the Mule. It must have been utterly humiliating to realize that he had never been the tough guy he thought he was, back on that beach in Kalgan standing up to the military forces with bravado and panache.

Or to think that all the time he was helping the others in protecting Magnifico from various forces. He was all the time in the hands of the very nemesis he thought he was fighting. I wondered why Toran was always so underdeveloped as a character. His longest lines are usually a sentence or two. He's never driving the action, but is instead reacting to the real drivers, mostly Magnifico, but also others in the story, like Pritcher before his conversion, but mostly his truly heroic wife. This is because he really stands in for us, the readers, along for the ride in witnessing the action.

Like Toran, we also have been in the hands of a master manipulator throughout the story. His name is Isaac Asimov.

A few words about his first significant female character. He could have ramped up gradually by writing one who is along for the ride throughout and has some important moments. Instead, he made her the focal protagonist and the ultimate heroine of the story. I find Bayta's character arc to be fascinating. She starts off as a recent college graduate with nothing notable in her past beyond getting pretty good grades, and, as we discover later, a predilection for hanging around with wannabe revolutionaries like her eventual husband Toran.

We know now that Toran was converted immediately by the Mule when he meets the couple on the beach, so he doesn't really get much credit for his heroic actions in the story. Pritcher is obviously a trained intelligence operative, so his actions are notable but largely expected. Bayta, however, is over her head almost immediately and admits to it. But she still rises to the moment and is not aided by the Mule's conditioning. Her secret weapon that undoes him is her empathy. Instead of reacting with mockery and scorn to him, she senses a powerful but brutalized soul who deserves her compassion, and this is what undoes the Mule, as he can't help but fall in love with her.

Later, Bayta experiences firsthand the horror in the Time Vault and escapes. We now know why, back to Haven, where she feels the awful power of the Mule's emotion depressor, but rallies her comrades as best she can on the trip to Neotrantor. She gets worn down by the stress of the journey and the constant feelings of despair at the losing streak her side is experiencing. Still, when she and her companions arrive at the shabby neo-imperial palace and have to extract a permission slip from the adult king, she is on her toes and seizes the moment. She lies like a champ, claiming the long dead rebel Gilmer is alive, who she apparently just heard of at that moment and gets exactly what was needed.

Her most impressive accomplishment, however, was in the closing sections on Trantor. She had come to the awful realization that the Mule had been with them all along and had the power to convert or destroy them all if he became aware of her knowledge. She doesn't lean on her husband or Ebling in that moment, but knows it's a burden she carries alone, as she described it to Toran with the Mule as mute witness. "I planned killing Mis before he could talk. I planned it secretly, as secretly as I could, so secretly I didn't dare to tell it to myself."

Incidentally, I had a similar but far less monumental challenge in rereading this chapter 40 years after first experiencing the delicious reveal. At the conclusion, I knew Magnifico was the Mule, but I hid it from myself. Somehow. I refused to think about the story too hard because I wanted so badly to feel that shock of the reveal at the end, and somehow I miraculously succeeded.

Let's talk about the writer who so perfected the art of the reveal in this chapter. I wrote a post on Reddit a year or so ago entitled Isaac Asimov, Mystery Writer, and I'll link to it in the show notes. In it, I make the case that Asimov was at heart a mystery writer and just loved to transplant his mysteries to a futuristic setting. I describe how the robot novels, starting with Caves of Steel, are all essentially Sherlock Holmes stories occurring

thousands of years into the future. Let's take a look at how he used these skills in this chapter. The Mule was right in front of us the whole time. And there were many, many clues, including Toran's mysterious behavior on the beach, Magnifico's mastery of the visi-sonor, his inside information about the Mule and the disinformation he provided about the eyes that could kill, and especially in the way that he and his companions always escaped just in the nick of time and were always at the center of the action.

Asimov used one of the best tricks in the toolbox of any magician, misdirection, to keep our eyes and our thoughts away from the obvious. Magnifico was presented as weak and addled. He claimed to be in flight from his master when we first meet him, and his apparent terror was constantly reinforced. He told of the horrors of the Mule's torture and abuse, of his eyes that could kill, and he screamed in terror whenever it appeared the Mule might be close and ready to take him away. I didn't include all of the clues Asimov provided in this limited retelling, but I assure you they were plentiful.

I remember when I first read the story, having an odd feeling that Toran should be more jealous of Magnifico. It was obvious his wife had strong feelings for him, but he was quite blasé about it. Now we know why. Looking back at previous chapters of our story, we can find plenty of other instances of Asimov using similar tricks. In the *Encyclopedists*, he uses the rivalry with Louis Pirenne as a red herring, so we never catch on to the real nature of the crisis. In *The Mayors* it's the internal politics that distracts us from Hardin's plan with the hyperwave relay on board the captured Imperial warship. In *The Traders*, we're led to believe the story is about ransom and an imperiled secret agent when it's really about high tech extortion.

In *The Merchant Princes*, Hober Mallow is portrayed as a ruthless profiteer willing to toss a priest to a hostile crowd. But it turns out the priest is not at all what he seems to be. Later in *The General*, Lathan Devers and

Ducem Barr race to the heart of the Empire to bribe high Imperial officials in a scheme to undermine the General, who seems poised to destroy the Foundation. But the real action is elsewhere, in the form of the societal and cultural trends calculated by Hari Seldon to prevail regardless of any individual acts of heroism. In all of those stories, Asimov was just getting warmed up.

The Mule is where he hits his stride, and we'll see lots of examples of similar deceptions going forward and highly satisfying resolutions that will more than once elicit a 'why didn't I see that one coming' from the reader. So we close this magnificent volume, *Foundation and Empire*, and in so doing complete our second season of *Seldon Crisis*. Apart from some special episodes to come early in the coming year, we'll begin the final volume, *Second Foundation*. The Mule still threatens to conquer the entire galaxy if he can find this mysterious entity and destroy it. As he is easily done with the first, we will see if Bayta was premature in claiming victory against him had they really defeated him entirely.

What is the Second Foundation, anyway? And why should they be more powerful than the first? We will set foot into these mysteries with the first chapter, *Search by the Mule*, and then meet another amazing heroine in the schoolgirl Arkady Darell, who happens to be Bayta's granddaughter, in *Search by the Foundation*, a story riddled with twists and turns to surprise and delight us. I hope you will continue to join me on the adventure through this wonderful epic, and as always, I thank you for taking the time to listen to my interpretation of these wonderful stories. *Seldon Crisis* is the product of a small but talented group of collaborators.

Jeremy MacKinnon provides the sound design for each episode, along with creating the video versions of these episodes on the YouTube channel linked in the show notes. Mike Topping created the cover art, and my longtime friend and musical collaborator Tom Barnes orchestrated the theme music. I hope I can convince him to create a new variation to

celebrate our third season. The voice of Bayta Darell is Amanda Kreidler and stars in her own podcasts Severed Fate and Dimension Door. One of the best things about a podcast like this is the friends you meet along the way, and I've found an abundance of late.

Nathaniel Goldberg, who appeared in Season One with a discussion on the Philosophy of Foundation, continues to be a source of great feedback and camaraderie, and we may be featuring him again here before long. I appeared recently on Stars End Podcast with their hosts Jon, Dan and Joseph, and hope to join them again at some time on a future show. My friends at the Galactic Empire Discord Server include several I also interact with on Twitter, at the handles @asimovposting and @asimov_empire, Erasmo Acosta and Tobias Cabral, a couple of talented independent Sci-Fi authors, are also among my friends on Twitter. Please Google their names and read their books.

Another couple of accomplished sci-fi writers are Paul Levinson and Cora Buhlert. Cora did a wonderful profile interview about Seldon Crisis on her blog, and the three of us will be doing a video chat about the Apple TV series on Foundation upon its conclusion, which should also be linked from her blog at corabuhlert.com. Lots of good stuff in this episode's show notes. If you would like to support the show, please consider becoming a patron on Patreon. I've started posting original content for patrons only as an inducement to join, and you can do so for as little as a dollar a month.

Other ways to support the show include writing a review on the platform of your choice or just spreading the word to friends. I also love getting email at joel@seldoncrisis.net. Please come back soon for the next episode of Seldon Crisis.

[Closing theme music]