

The Psychohistorians



[Opening theme music with voiceovers]

Gaal Dornick

"He referred to you as Raven Seldon."

Hari Seldon

"Did he say why?"

Dornick

"He said you predict disaster."

Seldon

"I do."

Linge Chen

"Doctor Seldon. You disturb the piece of the Emperor's Realm."

Seldon

"I am Hari Seldon."

[Theme music plays out]

Joel

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 a state of Isaac Asimov.

Hello. I want to start this podcast with a little story which goes back almost half a century to a small town public library, where a shy, socially awkward kid was holed up in his comfort zone – surrounded by shelves loaded with books. On this particular day he was looking for something new to read, so he browsed the Science Fiction section until his eyes fell on a rather thick volume bearing the title of Isaac Asimov's Foundation.

He'd read some Asimov before, mostly short stories about robots – with positronic brains that were programmed with a fail-safe set of laws that kept the mortal humans in their midst out of trouble, the so-called three laws of robotics. Asimov had written a bunch of short stories and a couple of short novels about these robots and how they found various ways of getting around the limitations of their programming. Great stories and he loved them all.

This book, though, wasn't about robots. It was about humans and deep time and to this particular kid that made it really fascinating. The story was set many thousands of years in the future and humans had by this time conquered the entire galaxy and settled billions of worlds. The great civilization they had formed and sustained for so long, however, was on the brink of imminent collapse into anarchy and boundless suffering. It was an irresistible setup. He began to read and stayed inside that world for a long, long time. It could be said that he never totally left it, for when the final page had been turned he was a different person, with a new understanding of the possible future of humanity. Foundation became a core part of his identity.

You might have figured it out by now, but yeah – I was that kid. It's only recently, many decades later, that I did something long overdue. You see, Asimov wrote his trilogy as a young man himself, in his twenties, and when it was complete he set it aside and wrote on a bunch of other topics, including a lot of highly accessible science books, and a few on other topics of interest. If you wanted to get caught up on almost anything – physics, astronomy, the history of the Bible, Shakespeare – chances were Asimov had you covered. The guy just loved to write and couldn't stop writing about anything that came to mind.

Asimov mostly took a break from science fiction from his late thirties to his early sixties. During that time, many people discovered Foundation as I had and fell in love with it. In 1966 it won the prestigious Hugo award for Best All-time Science-Fiction Series. A groundswell began to develop to urge Asimov to continue the story, which many felt to be incomplete. Asimov himself was surprised at how popular the series was because he hadn't earned much from it due to the terms of the publication contract. When he found out there was a way he could continue the story and actually make some good income from it, he took it up again almost thirty years after completing the original trilogy. Over the final decade of his life, he wrote two sequels, and then added two prequels as well. The final series came to seven novels. In order of publication, there's the core trilogy consisting of Foundation, Foundation and Empire, and Second Foundation, followed by the two sequels Foundation's Edge and Foundation and Earth, and lastly the prequels Prelude to Foundation and Forward the Foundation.

Many critics of the series feel that the original trilogy was magnificent, but that the sequels and prequels were written mainly to earn their author income – and are not really essential or up to the same level of quality as the originals. I profoundly disagree. I believe that Asimov's skills as a writer and his knowledge of science, technology, and human sociology had only

advanced in the intervening decades. The later works are great stories as well, and together with the original trilogy constitute an amazing epic totally worthy of binge reading. The long quarantine summer of 2020 gave me the chance to do just that and by the time I'd finished I wondered what took me so long.

Speaking of which, I guess it's time to explain my approach. First, Asimov loved plot twists, so I won't be revealing these in advance. I'll assume that some of my audience is unfamiliar with the story, so will avoid spoilers. Each episode of Seldon Crisis - and you'll understand that title soon enough - will cover a story within the greater epic. There are five such stories in the first novel, entitled *Foundation*, and the first of these is *The Psychohistorians*. As the epic progresses, the stories get longer and longer, and the sequels and prequels are of full novel length. I'll break those up as seems appropriate when I get there. You might wonder why not cover them in the chronological order starting with the prequels? It is tempting, but there are a couple of good reasons to do the prequels last. First, Asimov kind of ruins some plot twists in the final volume, *Foundation and Earth*, within the storyline of the prequels and I don't want to deprive anyone of those. Another - and probably better reason - is that the prequels were written so much later than the core trilogy that they just feel more modern, so going from that back to the 40's style of *Foundation* would feel a little off.

A greater question, I suppose, is why do this at all? Shouldn't I just urge you all to read the books as I did, or to listen to audiobook versions if you prefer that format? That's exactly what I do suggest, as there is no substitute for encountering Asimov's words as he wrote them. If you've already read the books I hope you can still get some enjoyment from this series, because I won't just be doing a simple reading. This will be my personal journey through *Foundation*, and will reflect the effect it has had

upon me and some of the ideas it has stimulated, as well as some analysis of the implications for we humans of the 21st century.

A note on the perspective in time and place of this story. It's not a fantasy universe long ago and far away, nor is it an alternative timeline or parallel universe. It is a portrayal of one man's imagining of a possible human future, set many thousands of years from now in our own Milky Way galaxy. Before considering the events of the story, let's briefly look back at where we've come from.

About ten thousand years ago, Homo Sapiens was the last surviving hominin from the many varieties of humanity that had once emerged from the depths of Africa and spread across the globe in search of more habitable climes. Most lived in small tribes and wandered the land, following the migrations of the animals they preyed upon and supplementing their diet by gathering whatever edible plants they could find. They were just beginning to gather into larger villages and experiment with the beginnings of agriculture and domestication of animals. Their physical traits were like ours and their brains were about the same capacity and capability of modern humans. The healthiest lived for most of a century, though the ravages of disease and the hardship of life kept the average lifespan comparatively short. Over the course of thousands of years these adventurous peoples succeeded in spreading to every land mass on Earth and developed technologies that enabled them to live in relative comfort in every conceivable climate and terrain. Their medicines and science enabled them to reach a standard of living undreamed of by their hunter-gatherer forebears.

Now let us cast our eyes to the imagined future, doubling the timespan discussed. In a score of millennia, these vigorous people had leapt out of their cradle and crossed first the great interplanetary distances, settled amongst the distant worlds orbiting their Sun, engineered these hostile worlds for their maximum comfort, then developed technologies capable

of transcending the ultimate barrier to their progress, the speed of light. With the ability to hop from star to star as quickly as a relatively short jaunt to the nearby worlds they had already tamed, they rapidly spread throughout the galaxy. By the time our story begins, twenty thousand years have passed and a great galactic empire has stood for a dozen millennia, with its capital system near the galaxy's center, and trade routes established to all of the millions of planets inhabited by the once humble Homo Sapiens.

Here we come to one of the aspects of Asimov's vision I find most interesting, for these people were not only much like you and me in their physical and mental capabilities, but lived for essentially the same timespan, typically eighty years or so. You will find that they also have a culture much like the one Asimov inhabited in the mid-twentieth century. They smoke cigars, read newspapers, live in noisy cities, and everything of any importance is done by men. Women are hardly mentioned – in fact for quite a while into the initial stories they are almost invisible. Like the socially awkward young man holed up in that public library in his teens, Isaac didn't know much about women and wasn't ready to make them a major part of his story. Eventually, as you will see, he rectified that shortcoming – but get used to this being a story featuring exclusively male actors for the first several episodes.

Enough with the preamble, let's dive in.

On the planet Synnax close to the center of the galaxy, a young man named Gaal Dornick has just acquired his PhD in Mathematics (you see, even the academic structure has remained relatively unchanged from the author's time). He has been summoned to Trantor, the capital of the empire, a world populated by forty billion humans and covered almost entirely in gleaming metal. He's landed an amazing gig out of college – a chance to work with the renowned master mathematician Hari Seldon, father of the science of psychohistory, a means of predicting with astonishing precision the future

of humanity across a great gulf of time. The young man has only been in space once before, on a research mission to the moon that orbits his planet. Now he will travel through deep space beyond the speed of light for the first time, and see the most famous known planet and meet the most highly regarded master of his field.

A short time into his journey, Gaal experiences his first hyperspace jump, a trifling jar, almost unnoticed save for the entirely different arrangement of stars now seen from the viewing lounge on the great starship. The star of Trantor is pointed out to him, barely outshining the vast field of luminance from the high density of stars near the galactic core. He visits the lounge frequently as the star grows brighter, and is greatly disappointed when told that the lounge will close for the arrival and descent to the planet's surface. He had looked forward to seeing Trantor from orbit, but is informed that the geometry of approach forbids it for the health and safety of the passengers, and is advised to take a tour of the planet upon his arrival.

The atmospheric descent is accompanied by a medley of industrial sounds, conjuring an early twentieth century steamship coming into port, perhaps like the one that the author had journeyed upon when coming to America as a young boy. A gentle thump informs Gaal that he has arrived upon Trantor. He proceeds through the huge and bustling terminal and fails to note a fellow traveler following his every move as he hails a taxi for the nearest hotel. He boards the air car which takes off in a rapid ascent and arcs and swoops through one of a plethora of tunnels, then emerges and swiftly glides to a halt at his hotel. He realizes that for the entire flight he has never once glimpsed the sky.

After his arrival, Gaal asks about a planetary tour, but is informed he is too late to take one on this particular day and is instead directed to an elevator that can take him to a viewing platform above the planet's surface. He eagerly buys a ticket for the lift and gets on board. The elevator is

one of the newer gravitic models, and rockets him with his companions gracefully and silently upward. He experiences an unexpected period of reduced weight as it approaches its destination and drifts upward helplessly, emitting a confused yelp in the process.

The elevator operator (of course it needs one) says:

Operator

"Tuck your feet under the railing. Can't you read the sign?"

Joel

He then notices that each of his fellow passengers has done so to keep this from occurring. A friendly stranger pulls him down and soon the elevator arrives at the platform.

Gaal is fascinated – but a little disappointed – at the view from the top. He looks out over an ocean of metal as far as the eye can see. He's heard that Trantor's land surface is entirely covered, except for the one hundred square miles of the Imperial Palace and grounds, with its famous gardens of natural soil, trees and flowers.

The friendly gentleman from the lift joins him and introduces himself.

Jerrill

"Hello. The name's Jerrill. What brings you to Trantor?"

Joel

Gaal answers:

Gaal Dornick

"I'm here to work with Dr. Seldon."

Jerrill

Raven Seldon?

Joel

Gaal has never heard the great scientist referred to by this name, and is informed that Seldon is known as the guy who predicts catastrophe for Trantor and the Empire. Somewhat surprisingly, Gaal was unaware of this fact. He will soon learn much more about Seldon's reputation as a prophet of doom. In fact, he does not have long to wait at all. Upon arriving back in his hotel room, he is in for a bit of a surprise, as there is a stranger waiting for him. An old man who walks with a limp, but whose eyes are bright and blue.

Gaal is alarmed.

Dornick

What are you doing here?

Seldon

"I am Hari Seldon."

Joel

Gaal's next shock is when Seldon informs him that the apparently friendly stranger on the observation platform was actually a spy from the Commission of Public Safety. This is the council of oligarchs in which the true power of the empire resides, the emperor himself being nothing more than a figurehead. Seldon inquires into what they discussed upon the platform.

Dornick

"He referred to you as Raven Seldon."

Seldon

"Did he say why?"

Dornick

"He said you predict disaster."

Seldon

"I do."

Joel

Gaal is confused, so Seldon gives him a lesson on the true implications of his theory. First, he asks his impression of Trantor and Gaal tells him that it is "glorious." Seldon wastes little time in proving that appearances can be deceiving. Employing a small, well-worn device from his pocket resembling a scientific calculator, he begins punching in a series of equations and parameters while Gaal observes intently. In short order he demonstrates mathematically that Trantor will fall within three centuries - to 92.5% accuracy!

Here, I must digress briefly to explain how this amazing predictive science supposedly works. Asimov had been trained as a chemist and was very familiar with the laws of thermodynamics. In the observation of the behavior of gases, it was not necessary to know the precise behaviour of individual molecules to know that making certain changes to the aggregate of these molecules - say heating the containing vessel for a given length of time to a given temperature - the pressure within the chamber could be predicted with a high degree of precision.

Likewise, in psychohistory, if a large enough quantity of 'molecules,' that is people, were studied and their behavior was modeled to a sufficient degree, predictions could be made to a high degree of certainty regarding the future state of the aggregate of these individuals. One could not

make precise predictions of a particular individual's path any more than one could determine the path of a particular particle of gas in the heated vessel. Another interesting aspect of the theory, which will have consequences as the story unfolds, is that the predictive power of the theory depends on the ignorance of the individuals to the predictions that have been made. Digression complete – back to our story.

After Seldon's proof of the coming calamity for Trantor and the Empire, he departs and says he will continue the discussion on the following day. Gaal attempts to get some sleep, and in the morning he is dismayed to discover that his door is locked from the outside and he can't leave!

Shortly thereafter, some well-dressed strangers arrive and politely, but firmly request that he accompany them. It is apparent that for some unknown reason he is being detained. The strangers question him on his reasons for coming to Trantor and working with Seldon. What does he know of his plans? What secret instructions has he been given. Gaal protests his innocence while claiming that he is just a mathematician.

One of the questioners calmly asks when Trantor will be destroyed. Gaal tries to avoid the question, but it becomes apparent to him that the commission had been listening in on his conversation with Seldon the previous evening. He realizes there is no point in avoiding the truth.

Dornick

"Hari Seldon is of the opinion that Trantor would be destroyed within three centuries."

Joel

The questioner asks:

Questioner

"He proved it mathematically?"

Dornick

"Yes he did!"

Questioner

"You maintain the mathematics to be valid, I suppose."

Dornick

"If Dr. Seldon vouches for it, it is valid."

Questioner

"Then we will return."

Joel

Some time later, another stranger opens the door and introduces himself as Lors Avakim. Gaal indignantly demands a lawyer while Avakim calmly sets up a small device and switches it on. He tells Gaal that he is the lawyer Seldon has provided and that they can now speak privately, but that the security forces of the Commission of Public Safety will soon discover the device.

Here we get a bit of a contradiction to what was said previously about psychohistory's inability to predict exact events pertaining to particular individuals. Avakim informs Gaal that Seldon suspected strongly that Gaal would be arrested and will be shortly standing trial before the Commission.

Avakim explains:

Lors Avakim

"I've been sent here for no other purpose than to assure you that you need not fear. It will end well; almost certainly so for the project; and with reasonable probability for you."

Dornick

"What are the figures?"

Avakim

"For the project, over 99.9%."

Dornick

"And for myself?"

Avakim

"I am instructed that this probability is 77.2%."

Joel

Gaal is not entirely assured by this.

Dornick

"Then I've got better than one chance in five of being sentenced to prison or to death!"

Avakim

"The last is under one percent."

Dornick

"Indeed, calculations upon one man mean nothing. You send Dr. Seldon to me."

Avakim

"Unfortunately, I cannot. Dr. Seldon is himself arrested."

Joel

Suddenly the door is thrown open and a guard comes in and picks up Avakim's gadget and puts it in his pocket. The lawyer protests that he needs the instrument and is told that he will be provided with one that does not cast a static field. Avakim informs the guard that, in this case, his interview is complete and promptly departs.

And now, my friends, we arrive at the crux of this chapter – the trial of Hari Seldon. Our young protagonist would also be on trial, but this is just a literary device, to provide a distinct perspective and a ringside seat to the deliberations upon the great master's fate.

We are at the opening of the third day of the trial, and it appears nothing truly substantial has transpired to this point. We are about to see what the case is against Seldon. Though Avakim is present, it is only Hari Seldon himself who speaks in his defense. Gaal is a silent observer.

The forces of the prosecution are the Commission of Public Safety themselves; five individuals whom Asimov describes as wearing scarlet and gold uniforms and shining, close-fitting plastic caps that are the sign of judicial function. They are headed by the Chief Commissioner, one Linge Chen, the true apex of power in the Empire. He rarely speaks, but ceremoniously bangs the gavel when required. The prosecutor is only described as the Commission's Advocate.

The initial thrust of the advocate's questioning is to probe Seldon on the size of his organization. Seldon claims it consists of only fifty mathematicians. When it is pointed out that the addition of Gaal Dornick brings the total to fifty-one, the advocate presses on what other ways the

accused may be misleading him. When confronted with the knowledge that Seldon's organization contains nearly 100,000 individuals, Seldon equivocates, stating that this number includes women and children (obviously not that important in the mind of Seldon - or Asimov apparently).

The advocate's argument is that such a large force is highly suspicious and, in light of the nature of Seldon's dire prophecies, potentially dangerous to those in power. When asked to confirm the argument that earned Seldon his nickname of Raven, he does not hesitate.

Seldon

"Trantor will lie in ruins within the next three centuries."

Joel

This bold statement is met by gasps and cries of treason, but Seldon remains unperturbed. He is asked how this could possibly be true when Trantor shows no evidence of lack of strength and has stood unassailable for twelve thousand years? In response, Seldon analogizes the empire to a rotten tree that has all the appearance of strength, but snaps in the gales of a strong wind and collapses to the ground.

Seldon

"The storm whistles through the branches of the Empire even now. Listen with the ears of psychohistory and you will hear the creaking."

Joel

Seldon claims he is not cheerful about this prediction, but that the mathematics leave no doubt as to the future that will unfold.

Seldon

"Even if the Empire were admitted to be a bad thing (an admission I do not make), the state of anarchy which would follow its fall would be worse. It is that state of anarchy which my project is pledged to fight. The fall of Empire, gentlemen, is a massive thing, however, and not easily fought. It is dictated by a rising bureaucracy, a receding initiative, a freezing of caste, a damming of curiosity – a hundred other factors. It has been going on, as I have said, for centuries, and it is too majestic and massive a movement to stop."

"The Empire will vanish and all its good with it. Its accumulated knowledge will decay and the order it has imposed will vanish. Interstellar wars will be endless; interstellar trade will decay; population will decline; worlds will lose touch with the main body of the galaxy – and so matters will remain."

Joel

When accused of trying to bring about chaos and take advantage for his own purposes, Seldon proclaims that this is not the case; that he is concerned only with preventing a period of anarchy which psychohistory predicts will last for thirty thousand years. His project is intended to reduce this horrific stretch of time to a mere millennium, thereby saving humanity from twenty-nine thousand years of misery and suffering.

Seldon explains that he can achieve this by gathering all the knowledge held by the human race and cataloging it in a great Encyclopedia Galactica which can be distributed throughout the galaxy. With that, the session adjourns and Hari turns smiling to Gaal and asks

Seldon

"How did you like the show?"

Dornick

"You stole it. But what will happen now?"

Seldon

"They'll adjourn the trial and try to come to a private agreement with me."

Dornick

"How do you know?"

Seldon

"I'll be honest. I don't know, It depends on the Chief Commissioner. I have studied him for years. I have tried to analyze his workings, but you know how risky it is to introduce the vagaries of an individual in the psychohistorical equations. Yet I have hopes."

Joel

I think this passage shows that Seldon, and by implication the author himself, is much more than a master mathematician. He is a brilliant sociologist, showing a keen understanding of human nature. To me, this is one of the best aspects of this great drama. It is about what makes people behave the way that they do and how the knowledge of human psychology can help to understand and guide the future.

The next day, the various bureaucrats and onlookers are no longer present. It is just Seldon and Dornick alone with the five Commissioners. The two accused are offered cigars from a box of iridescent plastic which has the appearance of water, endlessly flowing. The eyes were fooled into seeing the motion although the fingers reported it to be hard and dry. Clearly, Asimov as a chemist in the 1940's foresaw plastic as a big deal with the potential for some quite futuristic properties.

High Commissioner Linge Chen, up until this point entirely quiet, says:

Chen

"I will speak."

Joel

Asimov beautifully describes this moment, The other commissioners sat back in their chairs, prepared to listen. A silence formed about Chen into which he might drop his words.

Chen

"Dr. Seldon, you disturb the peace of the Emperor's realm. None of the quadrillions living now will be living a century from now. Why, then, should we concern ourselves with events of three centuries distance?"

Joel

Seldon responds:

Seldon

"I shall not be alive half a decade hence, and yet it is of overpowering concern to me. Call it idealism. Call it an identification of myself with that mystical generalization to which we refer by the term "humanity.""

Chen

"I do not wish to take the trouble to understand mysticism. Can you tell me why I may not rid myself of you, and of an uncomfortable and unnecessary three-century future which I will never see by having you executed tonight?"

Seldon

"A week ago, you might have done so and perhaps retained a one in ten probability of yourself remaining alive at year's end. Today, the one in ten probability is scarcely one in ten thousand."

Joel

Seldon goes on to explain that psychohistory predicts that his own violent death would precipitate a loss of stability, thereby hastening the inevitable collapse.

Chen pretends to be unmoved by what he calls 'childish threats,' but his next action belies his confidence. He proposes an alternative, asking first if Seldon's project needs to be completed on Trantor?

Seldon protests:

Seldon

"Trantor, my lord, possesses the Imperial Library, as well as the scholarly resources of the University of Trantor."

Chen

"And yet, if you were located elsewhere; let us say upon a planet where the hurry and distractions of a metropolis will not interfere with scholastic musings; where your men may devote themselves entirely and single-mindedly to their work – might that not have advantages?"

Seldon

"We will need time to arrange such a trip. There are twenty thousand families involved."

Chen

"You will be given time."

Joel

Seldon is given a mere five minutes to choose between the commissioner's magnanimous offering and the presumably less attractive alternative of being put to death. He dramatically allows that time to tick down to the final moments before announcing his choice.

Seldon

"I accept exile."

Joel

Gaal is shaken by the conclusion of the trial and presumes it is a bitter defeat for Seldon. After they've boarded a taxi, he asks the great mathematician

Dornick

"Was what you told the Commissioner true? Would your execution have really hastened the Fall?"

Seldon

"I never lie about psychohistorical findings. Nor would it have availed me in this case. Chen knew I spoke the truth. He is a very clever politician and politicians by the very nature of their work must have an instinctive feeling for the truths of psychohistory."

Dornick

"Then need you have accepted exile?"

Joel

Seldon is silent.

They return to Seldon's office at the University which is on the Imperial grounds, the only part of Trantor open to the sky. The university buildings

are a blaze of light, not a dull steel gray like those elsewhere on Trantor but almost ivory in color. You can see here a glimpse into the mind of Asimov and his love for science and academia. He describes the University as almost akin to a heavenly ideal.

Seldon and Gaal are greeted by guards who inform them that Seldon and his project are now under martial law and that they have only six months to prepare for departure.

Gaal is stunned.

Dornick

"Why, what can be done in six months? This is but slower murder!"

Joel

Seldon again says nothing.

Once into his office, he relaxes and explains. He has arranged a spy-proof bubble for his private needs. Any detection devices pick up a dummy signal, consisting of a conversation constructed at random out of a vast stock of various tones and voices.

Gaal has once again underestimated the master psychohistorian. Six months will be plenty of time, Seldon tells him, because his team has been planning for the exile to Terminus for two and a half years. They couldn't be sure of the planet that Chen would select, but they knew it was highly likely and planned accordingly. Terminus would be perfect for their plans. There, on an uninhabited world, they would have an officially protected refuge where they could work without rousing fears of ever endangering Imperial safety.

Gaal is still confused and has many questions, but Seldon reveals little. In time, his machinations will become clear – if not to Gaal – then to the

reader who ventures forth into succeeding volumes of this great epic. Suffice it to say for now that the stage is set for the grand project of preserving humanity from an endless dark age. Gaal Dornick and Hari Seldon now leave the scene of our story. When we return, Gaal will be forgotten and never mentioned again. Try not to get too attached to the individual characters as we continue forward as most will be but brief players upon our stage. Hari Seldon, however, as the father of psychohistory and the creator of the Foundation, will imprint his stamp throughout the ages.

Just a few final thoughts before we wrap up. I am deeply struck by Seldon's great sense of empathy for the innumerable hoards of humans whom he will never know, but whose potential suffering he feels so duty-bound to prevent through his understanding of the powers of psychohistory. He – and in a sense I am really describing the author of this great work, Asimov himself – is entirely unselfish in this regard. His love for a harmonious and ordered social structure shine out through the pages of this chapter, and for many more to come. The exchange between the security-obsessed Linge Chen and the great humanitarian Hari Seldon brings to mind much of the current conflict of ideals regarding the dangers imminently facing humanity for succeeding generations, especially in regard to the inevitable consequences of climate change. In the story, Chen cares little about those who will live beyond his time, as many of the richest and most powerful in our time seem only concerned for the quarterly results that will drive up the balance of their bank accounts. Meanwhile, our own long range thinkers, climate modelers and enlightened futurists with conscience, anticipate the potential calamities and horrendous suffering of coming generations and work tirelessly to make clear what is at risk for our descendents as they try to move policy in more beneficial directions.

In Asimov's time there was not much awareness of the threat to the environment via climate change, so if he was anticipating this he was

truly far ahead of his time. He was very aware, however, of the dangers of the nuclear age and was writing in the aftermath of two horrendous and brutal world wars. His humanitarian impulses must have been aroused by concerns for what could befall an apparently vigorous and stable society, especially if its leaders were hubristically unconvinced of any possibility of eventual collapse. His knowledge of history, particularly the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and the sufferings of the dark age that followed, would have affected his thinking and driven the direction of the epic upon which he was only beginning to embark.

Perhaps this is a little too presumptuous of the author's intentions. Maybe Asimov was not himself the prophet of doom crying in the wilderness he created in the person of his literary protagonist. Maybe he just saw the makings of a great story and couldn't resist writing it. For that, we can be very grateful.

So ends the first chapter of *Foundation* and the table is set for the adventures to come as Seldon's prophecy is tested against the realities faced by an enormous Empire rotting from within, and the brave efforts of his tiny group of scientists determined to forestall catastrophe. Our next episode will take us fifty years forward and millions of miles away from Trantor to the tiny, frontier world of Terminus. There, the small colony is threatened with their first of many existential challenges. As the Empire loses strength and cohesion, powerful planetary systems towards the galactic fringe throw off foreign control and threaten the independence of Hari Seldon's nascent project. This creates the first of many grave predicaments that give this podcast its name. We are about to encounter our first real Seldon Crisis.

Please join me soon for Episode 2, *The Encyclopedists*.