

## Thinking Long Term



[Opening theme music.]

### **Joel McKinnon**

Hello, dear listeners of Seldon Crisis. Thanks as always, for downloading and listening. Things have been crazy of late. In the long gap since our last episode, much has transpired, and much of it has been a little unwelcome. About a month ago, a good friend and I went on our usual winter backcountry skiing and camping adventure. I had targeted a beautiful little bowl high on Mount Lassen in California as our destination, a deceptively short ski in less than three miles from the parking lot to our intended campsite. We'd been in the habit of much longer entries, but this one was quite steep in comparison to our usual.

## Joel

We rented snowshoes for a change from our usual practice of skiing in, which was a good call, and took our homemade sleds with us to haul supplies, which turned out to be a big mistake. The grade and terrain was such that we found it nearly impossible to pull the sleds and had to abandon them halfway up, take the bulk of our weight on our backs the rest of the way to the campsite, then return for our lightened sleds and return to camp. Instead of a three mile journey of a few hours, it was more like 8 miles in total and took the whole day to accomplish the project. Fully exhausted, we slept well in the tent and had a nice day, ski around the bowl the next day, then had to get everything back out, which may have been even harder than getting it in.

The problem with going downhill with loaded sleds is they tend to run ahead of you, which completely compromises any attempt to ski or even snowshoe. The end result was complete exhaustion. Upon reaching home, I hoped to get a good night's sleep, rest up a couple of days, and then get back to a vigorous schedule of daily bike rides and lots of podcasting. Covid had other plans for me. My friend and I both tested positive the next morning. I spent the full week almost entirely in bed with a vicious breakthrough infection, racking, cough, fever and headache, and unrelenting fatigue.

We were both fully vaccine boosted, and wore masks almost everywhere we mixed with others, but somehow the virus still found us. Now another several weeks have passed. I've gotten back to reasonably good health, but I still can't entirely shake this cough that hits me on and off. Be careful out there, friends. Don't get Covid if you can help it. As bad as the Covid was, it's the War in Ukraine that's really hit me hard lately. My wife is from St. Petersburg and has mixed Russian and Ukrainian ancestry. She still has family back home, and she's been deeply affected and will continue to be for some time.

We also have a lot of Russian and Ukrainian friends. We don't know anyone who sides with Putin in this. I find myself endlessly distracted by this conflict and want it desperately to end. But not without liberating the Ukrainian people from such horribly unjustified aggression. I've also been deeply concerned about Putin's possible use of nukes. If he gets desperate enough, and he will get more and more desperate, it makes it quite hard to focus on producing content for the podcast, and I hope you can forgive me for my distractions. Let me get on to something a little less "woe is me."

Longtime listeners may recall that in our very first episode I talked about one of the main things that drew me to Foundation, being the scope of deep time. I'd always been fascinated by the ancient human story, and this was a story that extended it well into the distant future. It turns out that there is an organization based just down the road from me in San Francisco that shares a similar fascination the Long Now Foundation. Their stated mission is to foster long term thinking, and they have some unique projects oriented to that goal. One is a 10,000 year clock that is being built inside a mountain in Texas.

It is designed to ring a unique chime once every day for that great duration, and the journey by foot to reach it is intended to be akin to a religious pilgrimage. Another is the Rosetta Project, intended to catalog 1500 human languages to preserve them for distant posterity. One of the most intriguing projects for our subject is the Manual for Civilization, a library of essential human knowledge to be compiled for future humans that may need to rebuild civilization after some terrible calamity. Does this sound familiar to anyone? The Encyclopedia Galactica, perhaps? It should not be a surprise that Asmov's Foundation is among the works included.

What I've found most valuable in the immediate sense, however, is the archive of Long Now talks that are available on one of two podcasts and many in video format on their website at [longnow.org](http://longnow.org). I've listened to

at least a dozen of them and wrote a long blog post about many of my favorites, which you can find at [seldoncrisis.net](http://seldoncrisis.net). I'm going to mention two of them in a little more detail and encourage everyone to at least check out these two, both of which are available from the website in video format.

David Grinspoon is a planetary scientist I've been following on Twitter for several years, ever since reading an amazing book he wrote entitled "Earth in Human Hands." It truly blew my mind as it discusses the history of not just all of humanity, but the history of the universe dating back to the Big Bang, with particular emphasis on geologic time and the unique epoch we are encountering that we are entering that many have become referred to as the Anthropocene. This has varying definitions, but the gist of it is that it is the period of time in which humanity has become a planetary force on this planet. Some say it should start with the nuclear age or the Industrial Revolution, or even go way back to when humanity learned how to grow plants for food and tame wild animals for our benefit 8000 years ago. Grinspoon argues that this became the time that humanity began to significantly change the planet, but unintentionally, he likens our species to a toddler bolting about a room knocking things over or the classical bull in a china shop.

His thesis is that it's not a realistic option to stop changing the planet. Indeed, the planet has a tendency to change on its own and has done so regularly during the course of its history, and that many of these changes are not conducive to our long term survival. He argues for a new era in which humans learn to intentionally manage the environment of the planet, hence the title Earth in Human Hands. We've already begun by learning how to keep the ozone from depleting via international agreement, and inevitably we'll have to do more actions to manage the growing threat of climate change.

He goes further to suggest that the Anthropocene epoch could just be the start of a new eon. the Sapiozoic. He also suggests that this might

be something we should look for in our analyses of exoplanets, to look for those that show signs of being managed somehow. If a planet is warmer than it should be, or cooler, or the atmospheric chemistry can't be explained by natural processes, perhaps a civilization is managing it and it has entered its Sapiozoic eon. The book is wonderful, but the talk is a nice, hour-long summary of the main ideas and has a brilliant Q&A session afterwards with Stuart Brand.

I failed to mention that all Long Now talks end with a Q&A session, and the questions are almost always incredibly thoughtful and evoke wonderful responses. These are like Ted talks taken to a much higher level, and almost always leave my mind reeling with exciting possibilities and new ideas. I actually got to see one talk live in San Francisco by a guy you've heard a lot about on this podcast, Sci-Fi writer Kim Stanley Robinson. It was thrilling and engaging from start to finish. He talks quite about his recent climate novel, "The Ministry for the Future," which I heartily recommend for every thinking human on this planet.

It's set in the very near future and covers about three decades in which climate change threatens to completely upend the world order and kick off a massive extinction event. Though it starts with twelve of the most horrific pages I've read anywhere, it's ultimately an optimistic vision of how humanity could navigate its way through this gauntlet to a relatively stable and sustainable environment and a much brighter future. Robinson also talks about his recent time at the COP 26 climate conference and presents an insider's perspective on the way such things work and how and why they are also quite limited in what they can achieve.

Since this was only a little more than a month ago and the war in Ukraine had already begun, he explains his perspective on geopolitics and the problem of petrostates, of which Russia is only one example, and how they are essentially fated to be transformed dramatically as part of the new climate order, and how an entirely new form of international economics

will be required to make this a reality. Honestly, KSR is one of the smartest humans I've ever come across and have actually had the pleasure of befriending him through our time in the Mars Society. I spoke with him briefly before the talk and boldly asked if he'd consider being a guest on the podcast. He agreed to do it as long as I could wait until late next year or early in 2023, which I had no problem agreeing to immediately.

I guess that means I have to get back to podcasting in earnest and continue to do so for some time. He'll be an absolutely awesome guest. There will be links in the show notes to the Long Now website and the talks I've discussed, so please check them out and share your reactions to them before wrapping up. Today, I want to call attention to another indie podcast I've recently discovered of interest to anyone who loves Sci-Fi cinema called Science Fiction Remnant. I listened to their take on possibly my favorite movie of all time, Stanley Kubrick's 2001 A Space Odyssey, and the discussion was fabulous.

The main host presented his own interpretation of the enigmatic message of the ending, which I find distinctly plausible. They also have episodes covering a lot of my favorite Sci-Fi flicks, and I'll definitely be checking out a bunch of them. Stay tuned after the closing theme for a brief promo for the podcast. So what of the long awaited "Search by the Foundation, part I?" I'm working on it, and it's going to be well worth the wait, I promise. There are more characters in this one than even the original Mule episodes, and I'll be featuring several new voices apart from my own.

We'll have a new voice playing Arkady, our old friend Amanda will be back to play Lady Callia, and another new voice will step in as Homer Munn. It's possible I might have someone else play Lord Stettin, and of course there will be a lot of me as well. Hang in there, and a lot of great new episodes will be forthcoming. I hope to never again have circumstances that create such a long gap, but life can obviously be unpredictable, as I have found from the last couple of months. Oh, one more thing. I was recently a guest on

an episode of Rehydrate, which is a literary discussion podcast, and they just recently covered Foundation trilogy, and oh man, they're so good.

They really get into depth on a lot of the interesting stuff going on in those. And there's three hosts and I got to join them, and we talked about we had an interesting format where we picked our favorite quotes and we went through, and we would read off our favorite quotes from the book and then discuss them, and we get into some pretty cool analysis. So I definitely suggest you check that out. It's called Rehydrate, and I will put a note for that, put a link in the show notes. So see you soon with more new episodes of Seldon Crisis.

[Closing theme music]

[Promo for Science Fiction Remnant podcast]