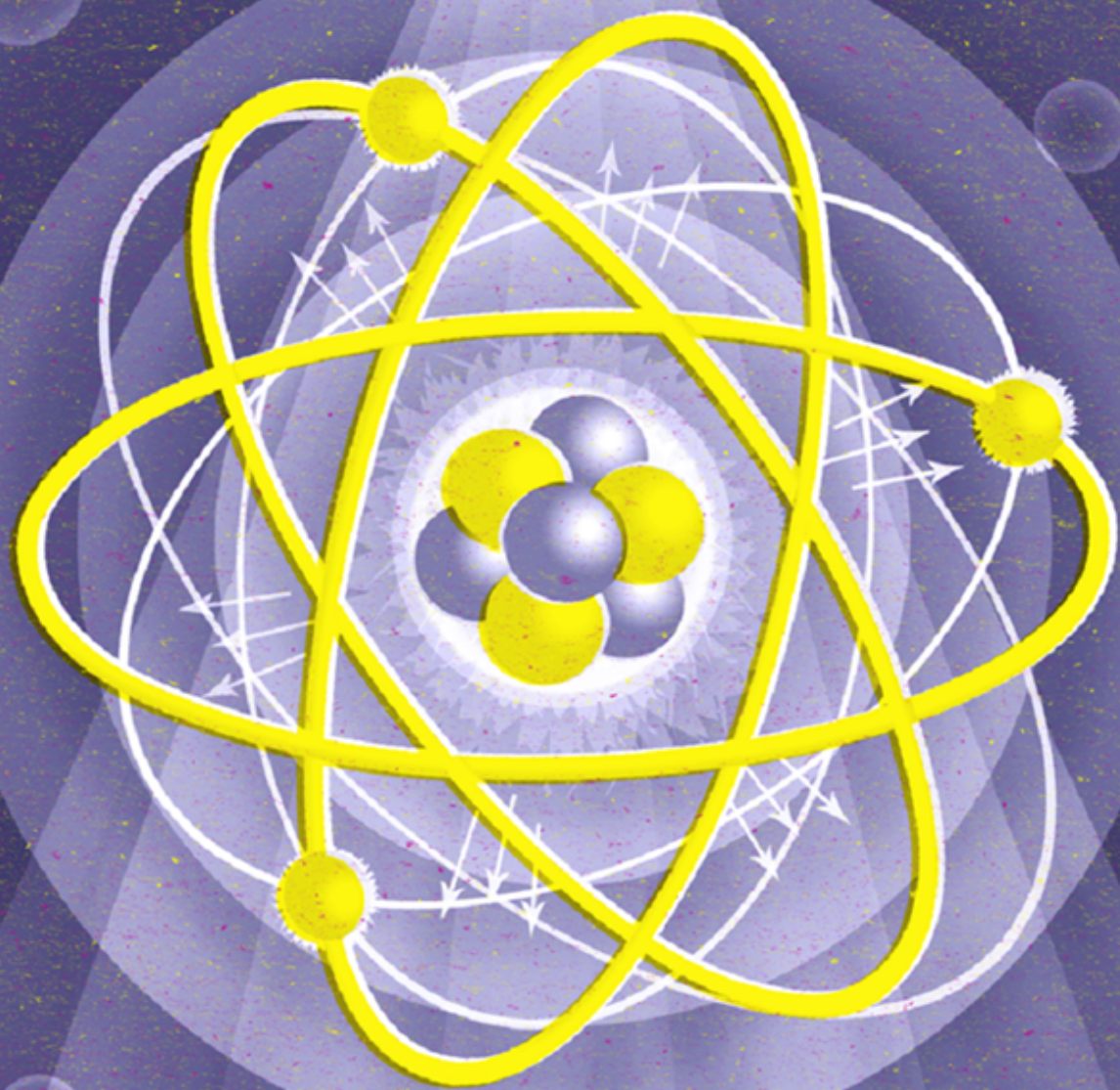


ISAAC  
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**FOUNDATION  
AND EMPIRE**

Isaac Asimov

**Foundation and Empire**

«HarperCollins»

## **Asimov I.**

Foundation and Empire / I. Asimov — «HarperCollins»,

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The Foundation series is Isaac Asimov's iconic masterpiece. Unfolding against the backdrop of a crumbling Galactic Empire, the story of Hari Seldon's two Foundations is a lasting testament to an extraordinary imagination, one whose unprecedented scale shaped science fiction as we know it today. The First Foundation survived two centuries of barbarism as the once-mighty Galactic Empire descended into chaos. Now it must prepare for war against the remnants of the Empire as the Imperial fleet advances on their planet, Terminus. Hari Seldon predicted this war; he even prepared his Foundation for it. But he couldn't foresee the birth of the mutant Mule. In possession of a power which reduces fearsome opposition to devoted slaves, the Mule poses a terrible threat to Seldon's Foundation.

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ISAAC ASIMOV

Foundation and Empire



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## Dedication

*To Mary and Henry for patience and endurance*

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## Prologue

The Galactic Empire was falling.

It was a colossal Empire, stretching across millions of worlds from arm-end to arm-end of the mighty double-spiral that was the Milky Way. Its fall was colossal, too – and a long one, for it had a long way to go.

It had been falling for centuries before one man became really aware of that fall. That man was Hari Seldon, the man who represented the one spark of creative effort left among the gathering decay. He developed and brought to its highest pitch the science of psycho-history.

Psycho-history dealt not with man, but with man-masses. It was the science of mobs; mobs in their billions. It could forecast reactions to stimuli with something of the accuracy that a lesser science could bring to the forecast of a ball. The reaction of one man could be forecast by no known mathematics; the reaction of a billion is something else again.

Hari Seldon plotted the social and economic trends of the time, sighted along the curves and foresaw the continuing and accelerating fall of civilization and the gap of thirty thousand years that must elapse before a struggling new Empire could emerge from the ruins.

It was too late to stop that fall, but not too late to close the gap of barbarism. Seldon established two Foundations at 'opposite ends of the Galaxy' and their location was so designed that in one short millennium events would knit and mesh so as to force out of them a stronger, more permanent, more quickly appearing Second Empire.

*Foundation* (Gnome Press, 1951) has told the story of one of those Foundations during the first two centuries of life.

It began as a settlement of physical scientists on Terminus, a planet at the extreme end of one of the spiral arms of the Galaxy. Separated from the turmoil of the Empire, they worked as compilers of a universal compendium of knowledge, the Encyclopedia Galactica, unaware of the deeper role planned for them by the already-dead Seldon.

As the Empire rotted, the outer regions fell into the hands of independent 'kings'. The Foundation was threatened by them. However, by playing one petty ruler against another, under the leadership of their first mayor, Salvor Hardin, they maintained a precarious independence. As sole possessors of atomic power among worlds which were losing their sciences and falling back on coal and oil, they even established an ascendancy. The Foundation became the 'religious' centre of the neighbouring kingdoms.

Slowly, the Foundation, developed a trading economy as the Encyclopedia receded into the background. Their Traders, dealing in atomic gadgets which not even the Empire in its heyday could have duplicated for compactness, penetrated hundreds of light-years through the Periphery.

Under Hober Mallow, the first of the Foundation's Merchant Princes, they developed the techniques of economic warfare to the point of defeating the Republic of Korell, even though that world was receiving support from one of the outer provinces of what was left of the Empire.

At the end of two hundred years, the Foundation was the most powerful state in the Galaxy, except for the remains of the Empire, which, concentrated in the central third of the Milky Way, still controlled three quarters of the population and wealth of the Universe.

It seemed inevitable that the next danger the Foundation would have to face was the final lash of the dying Empire.

The way must be cleared for the battle of Foundation and Empire.

## Part I

# 1

## *Search for Magicians*

BEL RIOSE ... *In his relatively short career, Riose earned the title of 'The Last of the Imperials' and earned it well. A study of his campaigns reveals him to be the equal of Peurifoy in strategic ability and his superior perhaps in his ability to handle men. That he was born in the days of the decline of Empire made it all but impossible for him to equal Peurifoy's record as a conqueror. Yet he had his chance when, the first of the Empire's generals to do so, he faced the Foundation squarely ...*<sup>1</sup>

### ENCYCLOPEDIA GALACTICA

Bel Riose travelled without escort, which is not what court etiquette prescribes for the head of a fleet stationed in a yet-sullen stellar system on the Marches of the Galactic Empire.

But Bel Riose was young and energetic – energetic enough to be sent as near the end of the universe as possible by an unemotional and calculating court – and curious besides. Strange and improbable tales fancifully-repeated by hundreds and murkily-known to thousands intrigued the last faculty; the possibility of a military venture engaged the other two. The combination was overpowering.

He was out of the dowdy ground-car he had appropriated and at the door of the fading mansion that was his destination. He waited. The photonic eye that spanned the doorway was alive, but when the door opened it was by hand.

Bel Riose smiled at the old man. 'I am Riose—'

'I recognize you.' The old man remained stiffly and unsurprised in his place. 'Your business?'

Riose withdrew a step in a gesture of submission. 'One of peace. If you are Ducem Barr, I ask the favour of conversation.'

Ducem Barr stepped aside and in the interior of the house the walls glowed into life. The general entered into daylight.

He touched the wall of the study, then stared at his fingertips. 'You have this on Siwenna?'

Barr smiled thinly. 'Not elsewhere, I believe. I keep this in repair myself as well as I can. I must apologize for your wait at the door. The automatic device registers the presence of a visitor but will no longer open the door.'

'Your repairs fall short?' The general's voice was faintly mocking.

'Parts are no longer available. If you will sit, sir. You drink tea?'

'On Siwenna? My good sir, it is socially impossible not to drink it here.'

The old patrician retreated noiselessly with a slow bow that was part of the ceremonious legacy left by a *ci-devant* aristocracy of the last century's better days.

Riose looked after his host's departing figure, and his studied urbanity grew a bit uncertain at the edges. His education had been purely military; his experience likewise. He had, as the cliché has it, faced death many times; but always death of a very familiar and tangible nature. Consequently, there is no inconsistency in the fact that the idolized lion of the Twentieth Fleet felt chilled in the suddenly musty atmosphere of an ancient room,

The general recognized the small black ivroid boxes that lined the shelves to be books. Their titles were unfamiliar. He guessed that the large structure at one end of the room was the receiver that transmuted the books into sight-and-sound on demand. He had never seen one in operation; but he had heard of them.

Once he had been told that long before, during the golden ages when the Empire had been co-extensive with the entire Galaxy, nine houses out of every ten had such receivers – and such rows of books.

But there were borders to watch now; books were for old men. And half the stories told about the old days were mythical anyway. More than half.

The tea arrived, and Riose seated himself. Ducem Barr lifted his cup. 'To your honour.'

'Thank you. To yours.'

Ducem Barr said deliberately, 'You are said to be young. Thirty-five?'

'Near enough. Thirty-four.'

'In that case,' said Barr, with soft emphasis, 'I could not begin better than by informing you regretfully that I am not in the possession of love charms, potions, or philtres. Nor am I in the least capable of influencing the favours of any young lady as may appeal to you.'

'I have no need of artificial aids in that respect, sir.' The complacency undeniably present in the general's voice was stirred with amusement. 'Do you receive many requests for such commodities?'

'Enough. Unfortunately, an uninformed public tends to confuse scholarship with magicianry, and love life seems to be that factor which requires the largest quantity of magical tinkering.'

'And so would seem most natural. But I differ. I connect scholarship with nothing but the means of answering difficult questions.'

The Siwennian considered sombrely, 'You may be as wrong as they!'

'That may turn out or not.' The young general set down his cup in its flaring sheath and it refilled. He dropped the offered flavour-capsule into it with a small splash. 'Tell me then, patrician, who are the magicians? The real ones.'

Barr seemed startled at a title long-unused. He said, 'There are no magicians.'

'But people speak of them. Siwenna crawls with the tales of them. There are cults being built about them. There is some strange connection between it and those groups among your countrymen who dream and drivel of ancient days and what they call liberty and autonomy. Eventually the matter might become a danger to the State.'

The old man shook his head. 'Why ask me? Do you smell rebellion, with myself at the head?'

Riose shrugged, 'Never. Never. Oh, it is not a thought completely ridiculous. Your father was an exile in his day; you yourself a patriot and a chauvinist in yours. It is indelicate in me as a guest to mention it, but my business here requires it. And yet a conspiracy now? I doubt it. Siwenna has had the spirit beat out of it these three generations.'

The old man replied with difficulty, 'I shall be as indelicate a host as you a guest. I shall remind you that once a viceroy thought as you did of the spiritless Siwennians. By the orders of that viceroy my father became a fugitive pauper, my brothers martyrs, and my sister a suicide. Yet that viceroy died a death sufficiently horrible at the hands of these same slavish Siwennians.'

'Ah, yes, and there you touch nearly on something I could wish to say. For three years the mysterious death of that viceroy has been no mystery to me. There was a young soldier of his personal guard whose actions were of interest. You were that soldier, but there is no need of details, I think.'

Barr was quiet. 'None. What do you propose?'

'That you answer my questions.'

'Not under threats. I am old, but not yet so old that life means particularly overmuch.'

'My good sir, these are hard times,' said Riose, with meaning, 'and you have children and friends. You have a country for which you have mouthed phrases of love and folly in the past. Come, if I should decide to use force, my aim would not be so poor as to strike you.'

Barr said coldly, 'What do you want?'

Riose held the empty cup as he spoke. 'Patrician, listen to me. These are days when the most successful soldiers are those whose function is to lead the dress parades that wind through the imperial palace grounds on feast days and to escort the sparkling pleasure ships that carry His Imperial Splendour to the summer planets. I ... I am a failure. I am a failure at thirty-four, and I shall stay a failure. Because, you see, I like to fight.'

‘That’s why they sent me here. I’m too troublesome at court. I don’t fit in with the etiquette. I offend the dandies and the lord admirals, but I’m too good a leader of ships and men to be disposed of shortly by being marooned in space. So Siwenna is the substitute. It’s a frontier world; a rebellious and a barren province. It is far away, far enough away to satisfy all.

‘And so I moulder. There are no rebellions to stamp down, and the border viceroys do not revolt lately; at least, not since His Imperial Majesty’s late father of glorious memory made an example of Mountel of Paramay.’

‘A strong Emperor,’ muttered Barr.

‘Yes, and we need more of them. He is my master; remember that. These are his interests I guard.’

Barr shrugged unconcernedly. ‘How does all this relate to the subject?’

‘I’ll show you in two words. The magicians I’ve mentioned come from beyond – out there beyond the frontier guards, where the stars are scattered thinly—’

“‘Where the stars are scattered thinly,’” quoted Barr, “‘And the cold of space seeps in’.”

‘Is that poetry?’ Riose frowned. Verse seemed frivolous at the moment. ‘In any case, they’re from the Periphery – from the only quarter where I am free to fight for the glory of the Emperor.’

‘And thus serve His Imperial Majesty’s interests and satisfy your own love of a good fight.’

‘Exactly. But I must know what I fight; and there you can help.’

‘How do you know?’

Riose nibbled casually at a cakelet. ‘Because for three years I have traced every rumour, every myth, every breath concerning the magicians – and of all the library of information I have gathered, only two isolated facts are unanimously agreed upon, and are hence certainly true. The first is that the magicians come from the edge of the Galaxy opposite Siwenna; the second is that your father once met a magician, alive and actual, and spoke with him.’

The aged Siwennian stared unblinkingly, and Riose continued, ‘You had better tell me what you know—’

Barr said thoughtfully, ‘It would be interesting to tell you certain things. It would be a psychohistoric experiment of my own.’

‘What kind of experiment?’

‘Psycho-historic.’ The old man had an unpleasant edge to his smile. Then, crisply, ‘You’d better have more tea. I’m going to make a bit of a speech.’

He leaned far back into the soft cushions of his chair. The wall-lights had softened to a pink-ivory glow, which mellowed even the soldier’s hard profile.

Ducem Barr began, ‘My own knowledge is the result of two accidents; the accidents of being born the son of my father, and of being born the native of my country. It begins over forty years ago, shortly after the great Massacre, when my father was a fugitive in the forests of the South, while I was a gunner in the viceroy’s personal fleet. This same viceroy, by the way, who had ordered the Massacre, and who died such a cruel death thereafter.’

Barr smiled grimly, and continued, ‘My father was a Patrician of the Empire and a Senator of Siwenna. His name was Onum Barr.’

Riose interrupted impatiently, ‘I know the circumstances of his exile very well. You needn’t elaborate upon it.’

The Siwennian ignored him and proceeded without deflection. ‘During his exile a wanderer came upon him; a merchant from the edge of the Galaxy; a young man who spoke a strange accent, knew nothing of recent Imperial history, and who was protected by an individual force-shield.’

‘An individual force-shield?’ Riose glared. ‘You speak extravagance. What generator could be powerful enough to condense a shield to the size of a single man? By the Great Galaxy, did he carry five thousand myria-tons of atomic power-source about with him on a little wheeled gocart?’

Barr said quietly, 'This is the magician of whom you hear whispers, stories and myths. The name "magician" is not lightly earned. He carried no generator large enough to be seen, but not the heaviest weapon you can carry in your hand would have as much as creased the shield he bore.'

'Is this all the story there is? Are the magicians born of maunderings of an old man broken by suffering and exile?'

'The story of the magicians antedated even my father, sir. And the proof is more concrete. After leaving my father, this merchant that men call a magician visited a Tech-man at the city to which my father had guided him, and there he left a shield-generator of the type he wore. The generator was retrieved by my father after his return from exile upon the execution of the bloody viceroy. It took a long time to find—

'The generator hangs on the wall behind you, sir. It does not work. It never worked but for the first two days; but if you'll look at it, you will see that no one in the Empire ever designed it.'

Bel Riose reached for the belt of linked metal that clung to the curved wall. It came away with a little sucking noise as the tiny adhesion-field broke at the touch of his hand. The ellipsoid at the apex of the belt held his attention. It was the size of a walnut.

'This—' he said.

'Was the generator,' nodded Barr. 'But it *was* the generator. The secret of its workings are beyond discovery now. Sub-electronic investigations have shown it to be fused into a single lump of metal and not all the most careful study of the diffraction patterns have sufficed to distinguish the discrete parts that had existed before fusion.'

'Then your "proof" still lingers on the frothy border of words backed by no concrete evidence.'

Barr shrugged. 'You have demanded my knowledge of me and threatened its extortion by force. If you choose to meet it with scepticism, what is that to me? Do you want me to stop?'

'Go on!' said the general, harshly.

'I continued my father's researches after he died, and then the second accident I mentioned came to help me, for Siwenna was well known to Hari Seldon.'

'And who is Hari Seldon?'

'Hari Seldon was a scientist of the reign of the Emperor, Daluben IV. He was a psycho-historian; the last and greatest of them all. He once visited Siwenna, when Siwenna was a great commercial centre, rich in the arts and sciences.'

'Hmph,' muttered Riose, sourly, 'where is the stagnant planet that does not claim to have been a land of overflowing wealth in older days?'

'The days I speak of are the days of two centuries ago, when the Emperor yet ruled to the uttermost star; when Siwenna was a world of the interior and not a semi-barbarian border province. In those days, Hari Seldon foresaw the decline of Imperial power and the eventual barbarization of the entire Galaxy.'

Riose laughed suddenly. 'He foresaw that? Then he foresaw wrong, my good scientist. I suppose you call yourself that. Why, the Empire is more powerful now than it has been in a millennium. Your old eyes are blinded by the cold bleakness of the border. Come to the inner worlds some day; come to the warmth and the wealth of the centre.'

The old man shook his head sombrely. 'Circulation ceases first at the outer edges. It will take a while yet for the decay to reach the heart. That is, the apparent, obvious-to-all decay, as distinct from the inner decay that is an old story of some fifteen centuries.'

'And so this Hari Seldon foresaw a Galaxy of uniform barbarism,' said Riose, good-humouredly. 'And what then, eh?'

'So he established two foundations at the extreme opposing ends of the Galaxy – Foundations of the best, and the youngest, and the strongest, there to breed, grow, and develop. The worlds on which they were placed were chosen carefully; as were the times and the surroundings. All was arranged in such a way that the future as foreseen by the unalterable mathematics of psycho-history would

involve their early isolation from the main body of Imperial civilization and their gradual growth into the germs of the Second Galactic Empire – cutting an inevitable barbarian interregnum from thirty thousand years to scarcely a single thousand.’

‘And where did you find out all this? You seem to know it in detail.’

‘I don’t and never did,’ said the patrician with composure. ‘It is the painful result of the piecing together of certain evidence discovered by my father and a little more found by myself. The basis is flimsy and the superstructure has been romanticized into existence to fill the huge gaps. But I am convinced that it is essentially true.’

‘You are easily convinced.’

‘Am I? It has taken forty years of research.’

‘Hmph. Forty years! I could settle the question in forty days. In fact, I believe I ought to. It would be – different.’

‘And how would you do that?’

‘In the obvious way. I could become an explorer. I could find this Foundation you speak of and observe with my eyes. You say there are two?’

‘The records speak of two. Supporting evidence has been found only for one, which is understandable, for the other is at the extreme end of the long axis of the Galaxy.’

‘Well, we’ll visit the near one.’ The general was on his feet, adjusting his belt.

‘You know where to go?’ asked Barr.

‘In a way. In the records of the last viceroy but one, he whom you murdered so effectively, there are suspicious tales of outer barbarians. In fact, one of his daughters was given in marriage to a barbarian prince. I’ll find my way.’

He held out a hand. ‘I thank you for your hospitality.’

Ducem Barr touched the hand with his fingers and bowed formally. ‘Your visit was a great honour.’

‘As for the information you gave me,’ continued Bel Riose, ‘I’ll know how to thank you for that when I return.’

Ducem Barr followed his guest submissively to the outer door and said quietly to the disappearing ground-car, ‘And *if* you return.’

## 2

### *The Magicians*

FOUNDATION ... *With forty years of expansion behind them, the Foundation faced the menace of Riose. The epic days of Hardin and Mallow had gone and with them a certain hard daring and resolution ...*

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA GALACTICA

There were four men in the room, and the room was set apart where none could approach. The four men looked at each other quickly, then lengthily at the table that separated them. There were four bottles on the table and as many full glasses, but no one had touched them.

And then the man nearest the door stretched out an arm and drummed a slow, padding rhythm on the table.

He said, 'Are you going to sit and wonder forever? Does it matter who speaks first?'

'Speak you first, then,' said the big man directly opposite. 'You're the one who should be the most worried.'

Sennett Forell chuckled with noiseless nonhumour. 'Because you think I'm the richest. Well— Or is it that you expect me to continue as I have started. I don't suppose you forget that it was my own Trade Fleet that captured this scout ship of theirs.'

'You had the largest fleet,' said a third, 'and the best pilots; which is another way of saying you are the richest. It was a fearful risk; and would have been greater for one of us.'

Sennett Forell chuckled again. 'There is a certain facility in risk-taking that I inherit from my father. After all, the essential point in running a risk is that the returns justify it. As to which, witness the fact that the enemy ship was isolated and captured without loss to ourselves or warning to the others.'

That Forell was a distant collateral relative of the late great Hober Mallow was recognized openly throughout the Foundation. That he was Mallow's illegitimate son was accepted quietly to just as wide an extent.

The fourth man blinked his little eyes stealthily. Words crept out from between thin lips. 'It is nothing to sleep over in fat triumph, this grasping of little ships. Most likely, it will but anger that young man further.'

'You think he needs motives?' questioned Forell, scornfully.

'I do, and this might, or will, save him the vexation of having to manufacture one.' The fourth man spoke slowly, 'Hober Mallow worked otherwise. And Salvor Hardin. They let others take the uncertain paths of force, while they manoeuvred surely and quietly.'

Forell shrugged. 'This ship has proved its value. Motives are cheap and we have sold this one at a profit.' There was the satisfaction of the born Trader in that. He continued, 'The young man is of the old Empire.'

'We knew that,' said the second man, the big one, with rumbling discontent.

'We suspected that,' corrected Forell, softly. 'If a man comes with ships and wealth, with overtures of friendliness, and with offers of trade, it is only sensible to refrain from antagonizing him, until we are certain that the profitable mask is not a face after all. But now—'

There was a faint whining edge to the third man's voice as he spoke. 'We might have been even more careful. We might have found out first. We might have found out before allowing him to leave. It would have been the truest wisdom.'

'That has been discussed and disposed of,' said Forell. He waved the subject aside with a flatly final gesture.

'The government is soft,' complained the third man. 'The mayor is an idiot.'

The fourth man looked at the other three in turn and removed the stub of a cigar from his mouth. He dropped it casually into the slot at his right where it disappeared with a silent flash of disruption.

He said sarcastically, 'I trust the gentleman who last spoke is speaking through habit only. We can afford to remember here that *we* are the government.'

There was a murmur of agreement.

The fourth man's little eyes were on the table. 'Then let us leave government policy alone. This young man ... this stranger might have been a possible customer. There have been cases. All three of you tried to butter him into an advance contract. We have an agreement – a gentleman's agreement – against it, but you tried.'

'So did you,' growled the second man.

'I know it,' said the fourth, calmly.

'Then let's forget what we should have done earlier,' interrupted Forell impatiently, 'and continue with what we should do now. In any case, what if we had imprisoned him, or killed him, what then? We are not certain of his intentions even yet, and at the worst, we could not destroy an Empire by snipping short one man's life. There might be navies upon navies waiting just the other side of his nonreturn.'

'Exactly,' approved the fourth man. 'Now what did you get out of your captured ship? I'm too old for all this talking.'

'It can be told in a few enough words,' said Forell, grimly. 'He's an Imperial general or whatever rank corresponds to that over there. He's a young man who has proved his military brilliance – so I am told – and who is the idol of his men. Quite a romantic career. The stories they tell of him are no doubt half lies, but even so it makes him out to be a type of wonder man.'

'Who are the "they"?' demanded the second man.

'The crew of the captured ship. Look, I have all their statements recorded on micro-film, which I have in a secure place. Later on, if you wish, you can see them. You can talk to the men yourselves, if you think it necessary. I've told you the essentials.'

'How did you get it out of them? How do you know they're telling the truth?'

Forell frowned. 'I wasn't gentle, good sir. I knocked them about, drugged them crazy, and used the Probe unmercifully. They talked. You can believe them.'

'In the old days,' said the third man, with sudden irrelevance, 'they would have used pure psychology. Painless, you know, but very sure. No chance of deceit.'

'Well, there is a good deal they had in the old days,' said Forell, dryly. 'These are the new days.'

'But,' said the fourth man, 'what did he want here, this general, this romantic wonder-man?' There was a dogged, weary persistence about him.

Forell glanced at him sharply. 'You think he confides the details of state policy to his crew? They didn't know. There was nothing to get out of them in that respect, and I tried, Galaxy knows.'

'Which leaves us—'

'To draw our own conclusions, obviously.' Forell's fingers were tapping quietly again. 'The young man is a military leader of the Empire, yet he played the pretence of being a minor princeling of some scattered stars in an odd corner of the Periphery. That alone would assure us that his real motives are such as it would not benefit him to have us know. Combine the nature of his profession with the fact that the Empire has already subsidized one attack upon us in my father's time, and the possibilities become ominous. The first attack failed. I doubt that the Empire owes us love for that.'

'There is nothing in your findings,' questioned the fourth man guardedly, 'which makes for certainty? You are withholding nothing?'

Forell answered levelly, 'I can't withhold anything. From here on there can be no question of business rivalry. Unity is forced upon us.'

'Patriotism?' There was a sneer in the third man's thin voice.

‘Patriotism be damned,’ said Forell quietly. ‘Do you think I give two puffs of atomic emanation for the future Second Empire? Do you think I’d risk a single Trade mission to smooth its path? But – do you suppose Imperial conquest will help my business or yours? If the Empire wins, there will be a sufficient number of yearning carrion crows to crave the rewards of battle.’

‘And we’re the rewards,’ added the fourth man, dryly.

The second man broke his silence suddenly, and shifted his bulk angrily, so that the chair creaked under him. ‘But why talk of that. The Empire can’t win, can it? This is Seldon’s assurance that we will form the Second Empire in the end. This is only another crisis. There have been three before this.’

‘Only another crisis, yes!’ Forell brooded. ‘But in the case of the first two, we had Salvor Hardin to guide us; in the third, there was Hober Mallow. Whom have we now?’

He looked at the others sombrely and continued, ‘Seldon’s rules of psycho-history on which it is so comforting to rely probably have as one of the contributing variables, a certain normal initiative on the part of the people of the Foundation themselves. Seldon’s laws help those who help themselves.’

‘The times make the man,’ said the third man. ‘There’s another proverb for you.’

‘You can’t count on that, not with absolute assurance,’ grunted Forell. ‘Now the way it seems to me is this. If this is the fourth crisis, then Seldon has foreseen it. If he has, then it can be beaten, and there should be a way of doing it.’

‘Now the Empire is stronger than we; it always has been. But this is the first time we are in danger of its direct attack, so that strength becomes terribly menacing. Then if it can be beaten, it must be once again as in all past crises by a method other than pure force. We must find the weak side of its enemy and attack it there.’

‘And what is that weak side?’ asked the fourth man. ‘Do you intend advancing a theory?’

‘No. That is the point I’m leading up to. Our great leaders of the past always saw the weak points of their enemies and aimed at that. But now—’

There was a helplessness in his voice, and for a moment none volunteered a comment.

Then the fourth man said, ‘We need spies.’

Forell turned to him eagerly. ‘Right! I don’t know when the Empire will attack. There may be time.’

‘Hober Mallow himself entered the Imperial dominions,’ suggested the second man.

But Forell shook his head. ‘Nothing so direct. None of us are precisely youthful; and all of us are rusty with red-tape and administrative detail. We need young men that are in the field now—’

‘The independent traders?’ asked the fourth man.

And Forell nodded his head and whispered, ‘If there is yet time—’

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