

# **Foundation Study Guide**

## **Foundation by Isaac Asimov**

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# Plot Summary

The Foundation is the first part of a science fiction trilogy by the American writer Issac Asimov. It begins with the Psychohistorian, Hari Seldon predicting the Galactic Empire will crumble and people will suffer thousands of years of poverty. To help reduce the period of suffering, Seldon convinces the state to sponsor a scientific community on the planet Terminus. The scientific community grows into the Foundation, controlling peace through religion and the development of nuclear power.

The story begins with Gaal Dornick visiting the planet Trantor for the first time. He catches a taxi to his hotel, not realizing someone is following him. At the hotel Gaal buys tickets to the observation deck. On the deck, he meets Jerril and they talk about the wonders of Trantor. Gaal mentions he has come to work as a mathematician for Hari Seldon and the tone of the conversation changes. Jerril says Seldon has predicted disaster and Gaal should be careful of him. Gaal excuses himself and goes back up to his room. To his surprise, Seldon is sitting on his bed. Gaal questions Seldon on his prediction and Hari Seldon shows Gaal exactly how he came to predict the disaster.

Both men are arrested and put on trial. However, Seldon is quick witted enough to get the better of the prosecution and the next day they are brought in to see the Emperor. The Emperor tells Seldon he has a choice between death and exile. If Seldon decides to take the exile, the government will fund his project. Seldon takes the exile, but later Gaal discovers Seldon and his scientific community have been preparing for the exile for months.

Salvor Hardin visits Terminus leader Lewis Pirene. He tells Pirene Terminus is in danger from attack by Anacreon and they have no way to protect themselves. However, Pirene sees little danger and tells Hardin that an envoy from Anacreon is coming in the next few days. When the envoy arrives, he tells the scientists Anacreon want to build a military base on Terminus. The Terminus leaders say no, but a few weeks later Anacreon offers an ultimatum. Terminus either allows them to build a base on the planet or they will attack. Pirene thinks they have nothing to worry about because the empire will protect them. However, knowing the Empire is in no position to provide protection, Hardin arranges to overthrow the Terminus government.

Thirty years after his take over, Hardin now faces his own problems. The empire has divided into independent states, leaving Terminus open to attack from a variety of positions. The young politician Sermak visits Hardin and tells him they need to attack first and if he does not he will lead a revolt. The next day Poly Verisoff visits Hardin and tells him Anacreon has found an abandoned nuclear ship and they want the Foundation to restore it to its original glory. However, either way, he is afraid Anacreon will attack the Foundation. Hardin travels to Anacreon to attend a coronation. Upon arrival the leader of Anacreon, Weinis, tells him the nuclear ship is on its way to destroy the Foundation. Hardin says that is exactly what he thought Weinis would do and he has arranged for the Foundation priests to tell the people of Anacreon their leader is attacking the center of their religion and therefore committing sacrilege. At that the point, lights go out and an



advisor runs into the chamber to tell Weinis people have surrounded the palace walls, asking for Hardin's release. To make matters worse, Weinis's son appears on the vidphone and under the instruction of a priest tells his father he is to be arrested.

The Foundation asks the trader Limar Ponyet to go to Askonce and free Foundation agent and fellow trader Eskel Gorov. Trading in Askonce is illegal and the Askonce government have put Gorov on death row. Ponyet meets Gorov in his cell. Gorov tells him the only way Ponyet can free him is by giving the Askonce leader gold. He continues to tell Ponyet he came to Askonce to introduce nuclear gadgets to the planet and therefore sowing the seed for religious control. Ponyet leaves Gorov and makes a transmuter that turns iron into gold. He takes it to the nobleman Pherl and says it will help him to buy his way to power. Pherl accepts the device, but tells Ponyet he will pay for it after one week and if Ponyet does not agree he will have him killed. Unfortunately for Pherl, Ponyet records the conversation, implicating Pherl in the sale. From here he forces more nuclear gadgets on him, beginning Askonce's dependence on the Foundation.

Jorane Sutt persuades the Master Trader Horbor Mallow to go to Korell and check out their nuclear capacity. After insisting on choosing his own crew, including the politician Jaime Twer, he hovers over Korell, waiting for an invitation to the Commdor's palace. On the 7th day, the crew takes a priest aboard the ship. Immediately Korellian battleships approach, saying if they do not hand back the priest they will attack. Much to the crew's dismay, Mallow accepts the terms and moments later receives an invitation from the Commdor. At the Commdor's palace he gives the Commdor a demonstration of a nuclear belt that he says women will find so beautiful his popularity will soar. In return for a shipment of the belts, Mallow wants to see the Commdor's steel foundry.

Mallow's trading with Korrell raises Sutt's suspicions and he puts him on public trial. However, Mallow successfully proves to the court Sutt purposely led Mallow into danger. With the people now behind him, Mallow buys himself into power and strives to become high priest and mayor.



# The Psychohistorians

## The Psychohistorians Summary

Gaal Dornick is on a space ship traveling to a planet called Trantor. Asimov describes him as a country boy who has recently completed a doctorate in mathematics and is going to Trantor to work on the Seldon Project. When the reader enters the story Dornick is in the viewing room looking out at the stars, getting brighter as the ship nears the planet. A spaceship official comes up to the room and tells people they must go downstairs and prepare for landing. Gaal asks to stay and view the ship's approach, but the official says the sun is likely to blind him. Disappointed, Gaal follows the others below deck.

In Trantor Gaal asks a supervisor the best place to stay and the supervisor hands him a ticket to a hotel called Luxor. Gaal leaves to find a taxi and an unknown man follows him. Gaal finds a taxi and the driver flies him to the Luxor hotel.

At the hotel Gaal immediately wants to go on a tour of the city, but unfortunately the tickets have sold out. Instead, the receptionist sells him a ticket to the observation tower at the top of the hotel. Gaal takes an elevator. Inside the gravity falls to 0 and Gaal floats to the top. Unlike the others, he had not read the sign that says you must keep your feet under the bar. Finally, on the roof he looks out onto a view that has neither a visible horizon nor ground. He can see only towers of metal in all directions. Gaal talks to a man called Jerril. Gaal tells Jerril the building must be half a mile above ground level, however Jerril says this is not the case, they started a mile beneath the surface and they are now standing 500 feet high above ground level. Gaal mentions he has come to work on Hari Seldon's project and Jerril tells him Seldon project predicts disaster. This comment confuses Gaal and he decides to go back to his room. Inside his room, Hari Seldon is sitting on his bed.

Seldon tells Gaal Jerril works as an agent of the commission of public safety and followed Gaal to the hotel. He continues to say they are investigating him because he has predicted in 300 years times a disaster will befall the empire. Seldon is what Asimov calls a psycho historian and he takes a calculator out of his pocket to show Gaal how he came to make his prediction. He inputs the conditions of the empire at present and then adds such factors as economic depression, assassinations and revolt. The calculator shows there is a 92% chance that in 300 years time the Empire will be completely destroyed. He tells Gaal to meet him tomorrow at the university and leaves the room.

Gaal does not get to visit the university because he is put under detention by the commission of public safety. In their Office, they ask Gaal what he knows about Seldon and the destruction of Trantor. Gaal says he only arrived on the planet yesterday and knows nothing apart from what Hari Seldon showed him in his hotel room. Finally, the commission allows him to see his lawyer, Lors Avakini. Avakini pulls a tape recorder from his bag, saying the commission can hear their conversation via sky beams, but his



tape can block their signal. He tells Gaal, Seldon visited his hotel room to encourage the arrest and that they have arrested him as well. However, it is nothing to worry about because there is a 99% chance it will end well and a 77% chance Gaal will benefit greatly from the outcome.

The next day the commission puts Gaal and Seldon on trial. Seldon answers all his questions honestly and repeats the claim that in 300 years time the Empire will be destroyed. There are cries of treason and the commission puts it to Seldon that he is making these claims to destroy the public's confidence in the government. Seldon denies the claim. The commission asks if anyone can change Seldon's prediction. Seldon says with great difficulty and only with the help of the Empire's huge population. The aim of his project and the 100,000 scientists he has hired, is to reduce the extent of destruction. In particular, he is interested in lessening the mass poverty humans will suffer in the thousands of years between the fall of the empire and the rise of the next one. To achieve his aim the project is to develop an encyclopedia that will help future generations build on his knowledge.

The judge adjourns the trial and the next day the commission takes Gaal and Dr. Seldon to visit the Emperor. The emperor asks Dr. Seldon why he should not execute him. Seldon replies firstly because the Emperor knows it is true and secondly because if the Emperor killed him the empire would fall in 50 and not 300 years. Seldon is not necessarily essential to the cause, but his scientists will make his findings public knowledge and the ensuing panic would quicken the empire's fall. In the end, the Emperor gives Dr. Seldon a choice between either death, or exile on the planet Terminus. Dr. Seldon chooses exile.

At the university, an army captain approaches Dr. Seldon and Gaal. He tells them they have 6 months to leave for Terminus. In Seldon's office, Seldon tells Gaal he has been planning and preparing for the exile for months and in fact the idea behind encouraging the arrest was to force the exile.

## **The Psychohistorians Analysis**

The first part starts with a tone at odds with the remainder of the novel and serves to indicate the great change that befalls the Galactic Empire. Firstly, the opening chapters are fast paced and less episodic than the rest of the book. It starts with Gaal traveling to Trantor by spaceship. When he gets to the airport, someone follows him to his hotel. Here he goes to the top of the building to get a better view of the city. This is one of the few times Asimov describes his world. Firstly, he talks about the zero gravity in the elevator and secondly when Gaal gets to the top of the building Asimov describes the horizon or lack of horizon and how the city is built of metal. This contributes to a relaxed atmosphere that changes as soon as Asimov introduces Hari Seldon.

From this point of view, Asimov divides the Foundation into a series of episodes that serve to express the novel's political ideas. In this chapter, the authorities take Seldon to court where he explains the importance of his encyclopedia and then in the next scene



he meets the Emperor and arranges his banishment to Terminus. From this the reader can see setting up a strong nation is a timely process that involves making concessions as well as forcing what you want.



# The Encyclopedists

## The Encyclopedists Summary

On the planet of Terminus Lewis Pirene is working hard at his desk. The scientists and scholars have now been on the planet for 50 years writing as much information as they can about the downfall of the Empire, including full volumes, supplements and articles. A man called Salvor Hardin enters the room. He knows Pirene does not like anyone disturbing him so he sits and waits, flipping a coin. Finally, Pirene notices him and asks what Hardin wants. Hardin asks if he has heard the news. Apparently, he says, the Royal Governor of the Prefect of Anacrea has assumed the title of king. Pirene cannot see how this affects them and Salvor has to point out that it means they are cut off from the rest of the empire and therefore dangerous. Terminus is at a risk because it has no real form of protection and Salvor doubts if the empire can provide them with any. Pirene tells him a special envoy is coming from Anacrea in 2 weeks.

Two weeks later Salvor Hardin meets the special envoy Anselm Haut Rodric and takes him to Pirene. After dinner Pirene, Hardin and Haut discuss business. Haut tells him Terminus is endangered by the government of the planet Symrnu. Anacrea and Symrnu have just finished fighting a war and Terminus provides a strategic position for both planets. However, Haut says Anacrea is willing to provide protection for Terminus in the form of a military base, which the people of Terminus will pay for in taxes. Pirene explains the state sponsors Terminus and therefore it is tax-free. Haut says they will have to pay for the base in land.

Hardin is at a meeting with the board of the trustees, chaired by Pirene. Pirene understands that Anacrea is proving troublesome, but says in two weeks time Lord Dorwin, chancellor of the empire, is coming to visit. Pirene's attitude upsets Hardin and he asks how he expects the empire to protect Terminus when they are thousands of parsecs away. Terminus he says is vulnerable from attack and the scholars need to understand this, put away their writing and face the reality of what could be a war. At this point Fara stands up and says it is not long before the planet celebrates 50 years of existence. On this day, they are opening Hari Seldon's tomb and inside there, he is likely to deliver a message telling them what to do next.

Lord Dorwin arrives at Terminus. He seems more interested in the encyclopedia than discussions about any potential conflict, but Pirene is happy to indulge him. However, Hardin wants to know some facts. He asks Dorwin about Anacrea and he says it is a terrible, barbaric planet. That maybe so, says Hardin, but it also has all it needs for warfare. In reply, Dorwin turns his attention back to the encyclopedia.

Hardin is at his second meeting of the board of trustees, however he has a feeling the board have had other meetings they have not invited him to. He thinks they have invited him this time because the King of Anacrea has given them an ultimatum. Either you give us what they want or we take it by force. Pirene is still convinced the empire will





protect them, but Hardin says they are in no position to act as protection. If they were, Ancrea would not of gained independence and they would not be having these problems. Lord Dorwin may have given him his reassurance, but Hardin says he recorded Dorwin's conversations and noticed he purposely and cleverly avoided saying anything concrete. Fara repeats his claim that everything they need to know lies in the vault, however Hardin is angry and questions even the relevance of any message Seldon could send. If he knew they were going to face such difficulties why did he make sure the emperor placed them on Terminus. Have they not noticed that since Seldon's death there are no first class psychologists on the planet that could make similar predictions, and why? Hardin says it is because Seldon wanted these problems to happen.

Hardin talks to Yohan Lee. They are planning to take over the board and get themselves in the position where they can give the orders. Hardin tells Lee the board of trustees deserves respect for their work on the encyclopedia, but as rulers of a nation they are incompetent and a danger to Terminus's independence. He claims he has to work fast because the Anaereoins are landing in two days time.

Hardin and the trustees are in the vault. The lights go dim and an old man in a wheelchair appears. He says his name is Hari Seldon. He recorded the message just before his death because they need to know that the encyclopedia is a fraud. He set it up to encourage the move to Terminus and extract an imperial charter from the emperor. From here he says they will face a series of crises, but it should all lead to one path, which in the long term will reduce human suffering.

## **The Encyclopedists Analysis**

In this chapter, Asimov examines the shifting of political power and how it is important to understand when to make a move and when to keep control. Here the Encyclopedists are blind to the fact they are vulnerable to attack. They think that the empire is still there to protect them when it is rapidly losing its power. Hardin recognizes this and decides the time is right to overthrow the council and become leader.

That he does not take over straightaway shows his great political mind. He works on setting up an environment right for rebellion. Firstly, he secretly gains control of 60% of the planet's newspapers using it to express his opinion and turn public opinion against the Encyclopedists. Secondly, he goes to great extremes to understand the enemy and the declining empire—for example he records Dorwin's conversation. Thirdly, he undermines the Encyclopedists confidence with his superior political knowledge. By the end of the section, Salvor Hardin has guided the Foundation through its first crisis and onto its next phase.



# The Mayors

## The Mayors Summary

Salvor Hardin and Yohan Lee talk about their successful take over of Terminus 30 years earlier. Since then, various planets have gained their independence from the Empire and have become potentially dangerous. Now Hardin can no longer guarantee protection for Terminus, some of the younger members of the government are getting restless. Hardin is currently waiting for a visit from a young group of dissidents. They arrive headed by a young man named Sermak. He criticizes Hardin's foreign policy, saying he is making Terminus's defenses weak whilst strengthening the defense of other nations. He respects that Hardin has fought hard to get Terminus into a strong position but he has gone as far as he can go and should resign. If he does not, Sermak threatens revolt. Hardin sits him down and says that when he took over Terminus was on the verge of war with Anacean and probable destruction. However, by talking to the other kingdoms and pointing out what Anacean was trying to do he put a stop to it. He began to provide each Kingdom with nuclear power and, using the fact the public saw their scientific methods as mystical, created a religion, encouraging people to come to Terminus and train to become priests. Sermak claims these priests could easily sell Terminus to their own country, but Hardin says he is underestimating the complexity of science and it would take even the strongest minds to learn in a lifetime what Terminus had developed over 80 years. Sermak leaves the office and Hardin tells Lee to put him under surveillance.

The high priest Poly Verisof visits Hardin for the first time in three years to talk about the current situation in Anacreon. He says two weeks ago the Anacreon's navy found an old abandoned battle cruiser capable of blowing up a planet. Verisof says Weines, the leader of Anacreon, plans to ask Terminus to renew the ship to its former glory. However, it is likely it is a catch 22 situation because if they do not rebuild the ship they run the risk of Weines's wrath. If they do rebuild it, Weines has the potential to destroy Terminus in one blow. Hardin says he will rebuild the ship if only for the reason it buys him more thinking time.

Leopold I, King of Anacreon, comes back from Nayak hunting to find his uncle Weinis waiting for him. Weinis confirms Verisof's fears and says they have given Terminus the ship to fix, but whether they fix it or not Weinis will still declare war. It is likely when Leopold comes into power in a few weeks time the war will already be underway. Leopold does not like the idea, but Weinis plays to his nephew's ego and says if they defeat the Foundation they defeat everything that goes with it, including the all powerful religion. Therefore, the King, already seen as a minor god, will become the only god. However, Leopold says, even if the religion is fake the people still believe it and they may see war against the Foundation as blasphemous. When his uncle leaves, Leopold states he is afraid of him, but it does not matter because when he is king he will execute both Weinis and his two sons.



Lewis Bort visits Sermak's house. He tells Sermak the rebel party could be a lost cause. He has been to Anacreon and he seen how powerful Hardin's religion is and how strongly the people believe in it. He has made sure Leopold is some sort of minor god so no one can overthrow him. War may be the only choice Weinis has to gain power. At this point Lori Norast enters with a newspaper. The main headline states Hardin is going to Anacreon and to see the King's coronation. They all agree this amounts to treason.

Hardin and Lee are driving through heavy snow in order to get to Anacreon without any fuss. Hardin know if he left in good weather and when the Terminus public would expect him to leave, he could face serious difficulties. Already in parliament, Sermak has labeled him in a traitor. However, Lee tells him he faces more serious repercussions if they think he is sneaking away and if Hardin faced them it would calm the situation. Hardin says the 80th anniversary of the Foundation is coming up in a few weeks, meaning people may expect Seldon to speak again. He may or may not speak, but Hardin tells Lee to put out an announcement that he will, which should postpone any action until after the anniversary.

At the King's coronation, Weinis approaches Hardin and invites him to his private chambers. After exchanging pleasantries Weinis drops the bombshell that nuclear ships are on their way to Terminus to annihilate the Foundation. Hardin says if he is declaring war he should let Hardin go back to Terminus and tell his people, but Weinis tells him he is not going anywhere. However, Hardin already guessed Weinis's plans and he has organized the priests to tell the Anacreon masses about the unprovoked and sacrilegious act their leader is committing against the Foundation. Hardin says Weinis knows how powerful the religion is and there is no doubt it will work. A nervous Weinis tells Hardin he is bluffing, but at that moment, on the strike of midnight, all the power in the palace dies. Outside, the city's population surrounds the palace walls. One of Weinis's aides runs in to say the high priest Poly Verisof is ordering the release of Hardin and for Weinis to turn back his nuclear ships. Weinis tells Hardin he will order the army to attack the priests and Hardin asks how he is going to contact them with all the power down. Weinis says whatever happens he refuses to stop the ship. Hardin tells him not to worry because he fixed the nuclear ship in his own way. Ever heard of hyper wave relay he asks?

The action moves to the Anacreon ship on its way to destroy Terminus. The ship's captain tells the priest Theo Aporat that the ship is going to destroy the Foundation. Aporat says he will not be part of such sacrilege. Over the ship's speakers he tells the crew he is taking over the ship in the name of the Galactic Spirit. He says a curse and as soon as he finishes the power on the ship dies. Weinis's son Prince Lefker orders his men to arrest Theo, but the priest persuades the men to seize Lefker instead. Theo takes Lefker to the communications room where he orders him to get in contact with his father and repeat his words.

In Weinis's chamber, Lefkin appears on the televisor. He tells his father the navy refuses to destroy the Foundation and they are returning to Anacreon. When they return, the priests will imprison Weinis and put him before an ecclesiastical court. If he refuses, the navy will bomb the palace. Lefkin disappears from the screen and immediately Hardin



turns on his nuclear shield. Turning to Weinis, he tells him a fable about a wolf and a horse. He says the wolf wanted to eat the horse so the horse turned to man for help. The man was happy to help because the wolf was just as much an enemy to him as to the horse, however he told the horse he would only do it if the horse rode him to the wolf. The horse of course accepted the terms, but after the man killed the wolf, the horse asked for his freedom back and the man said no. Hardin relates the story to how his religion gave Weinis divine as well as nuclear power, but the priesthood took orders from the Foundation and not from him. In other words, Weinis can kill the wolf, but he cannot get rid of the man. Weinis jumps up and orders his men to shoot. When they refuse he shoots at Hardin himself, but Hardin's nuclear shield neutralizes the gun's rays. Defeated Weinis turns the gun on himself.

Salvor Hardin and the government are inside a time vault waiting for the appearance of Hari Seldon. Lee tells Hardin if Seldon does not appear, Sermak will gain power. However, as soon as he has spoken the lights go down and Seldon's image appears. He tells them by now they should have reached their second crisis, but this is just the beginning and they still have 920 years of work ahead of them.

## The Mayors Analysis

In this section, Asimov shows the importance of ideology. Hardin develops a solid political structure through the trade of nuclear power. In the process, he discovers the masses think that the Foundation's ability to create nuclear power is mystical. He then uses this to set up a religion that controls the masses and puts the Foundation in a powerful position. Weines try to destroy the Foundation, but he comes against mass opinion, which proves stronger than he thought possible. This shows the strength of the Seldon Plan. His calculations can only produce accurate results when it predicts the behavior of a mass group. Hardin uses this idea to entice the Galaxy's masses on to his side, knowing by doing so their behavior is more predictable and therefore they become easier to control.

However, Asimov foreshadows problems with Hardin's approach by showing a rebellion forming within his own government. The reader may not see Sermak take over, but there is a feeling the Foundation needs a new change to take it through to its next phase. In fact, the section ends similarly to the previous section Asimov suggested Hardin was about to take over from Encyclopedists. While in that section Hardin was discussing his takeover with Yohan Lee, here Hardin spies Sermak having an animated conversation with his right hand man Lewis Bort.



# The Traders

## The Traders Summary

While having a shower on his space ship, Limar Ponyet receives a phone call. Three hours later, another ship pulls alongside and his fellow trader Lee Gorm walks on board. He hands Ponyet a small shining sphere that only Ponyet can open. Inside is a letter that falls apart as soon as Ponyet finishes reading it. Ponyet tells Gorm he has to go to Askonce because they have imprisoned a trader. Gorm is angry because imprisoning a trader is against the law, but Ponyet reminds him it is also against Askonce law to promote your own political beliefs and this is why the trader is in prison. Askonce is a closed area and everyone knows selling goods is prohibited. Gorm asks who it is, but Ponyet tells him he cannot impart that information. When Gorm leaves Ponyet thinks about the prisoner, Eskel Gorov. He is not a trader, but an agent of the Foundation.

Ponyet takes a few weeks to get to Gorov because of the Askonce's extreme bureaucracy, but finally he arrives at the throne of the Grandmaster. The Grandmaster says Gorov's appearance in Askonce was no mistake. He knew the laws and there is no doubt in his mind he came to trade. For that he faces the death penalty. Ponyet asks if there is an alternative and the Grandmaster asks if the Foundation is rich. Only, Ponyet says, in nuclear power. The Grandmaster says that is no good to his country. As Ponyet knows Askonce has its own religion and does not trust the nuclear components the Foundation so liberally provides other nations. Ponyet moves on to ask if he can see the prisoner. Again, the Grandmaster is adamant this cannot happen, however Ponyet, noticing the Grandmaster's pious mentality, says he wants to prepare Gorov's soul for the afterlife.

Ponyet enters Gorov's cell. Gorov tells Ponyet they have to be careful because it is likely someone is listening in to their conversation, but Ponyet says he can relax because he is wearing a field distorter. The two men talk about what the Grandmaster wants in return for releasing Gorov. Gorov says the only thing he ever wants is gold and if Ponyet tells the Grandmaster he stands a chance of getting some, then at the very least it will buy Gorov more time. When Ponyet gets the gold, they can both leave Askonce together. However, he surprises his friend by telling him he will have to come back to Askonce because his mission is to sell them something nuclear. The idea is to trade with a nobleman who, in theory, will find the gadget so indispensable he will persuade Askonce to change their anti-nuclear laws. When this happens, the Foundation can place Askonce under religious control.

Ponyet goes back to see the Grandmaster with the idea to trade a nuclear device for Gorov's freedom. However, as soon as the Grandmaster sees the device, he tells Ponyet to get the evil thing away from him. Ponyet gently describes that, far from being an evil machine, his nuclear device can turn iron into gold. Ponyet realizes what he is saying sounds ridiculous, but noticing he has the Grandmaster's attention he asks to demonstrate the device on one of his advisers' iron buckles. He turns the iron buckle



into gold and hands it to the Grandmaster. The Grandmaster is still not sure and repeats that the use of any nuclear device is against their religious practices. However, Ponyet is a great salesman and explains to the Grandmaster that he can put the gold to pious use. For example with the help of gold, the Grandmaster can please the Gods by improving Askconce's religious monuments. To complete the sale, Ponyet tells the Grandmaster he can hold him hostage for 30 days, enough time to see that the machine works. The Grandmaster and his advisers all agree this is a sound plan.

Ponyet meets Pherl, one of the Grandmaster's closest advisers. Ponyet has come to see him with the object of selling him his nuclear device and thus turning him against the Grandmaster. He begins by telling Pherl that he knows the Grandmaster is coming to the his end of his reign and it is unfortunate Pherl is not a member of the Grandmaster's tribe and therefore unable to take over as leader. All this despite the fact Pherl is from just as noble a family. However, he says if Pherl buys the device, he could buy himself into power. Pherl tells him he will buy the machine, but to make sure it is okay, he will not pay for another week. Ponyet says he cannot do that and he needs the money now. Pherl reminds him by just offering to sell the machine he has incurred the death penalty, and so unless he wants to die, he will do as he says.

On the 30th day, the Grandmaster releases Gorov. Ponyet explains to Gorov about the nuclear transmuter, but Gorov is not impressed. He says that is not what the Foundation was hoping to sell and in the long term, it will have little or no effect. However, Ponyet explains that he also sold a device to Pherl along with other gadgets. Pherl had to buy them because he had recorded his voice accepting the sale. Pherl is in fear of his life and will now do exactly what Ponyet wants.

## The Traders Analysis

In this chapter, the reader can see that the religion is losing its power and the Foundation now needs the traders to spread their word. For example, here Ponyets sells Askconce nuclear power by providing important people with what either they want or what they need to progress. The Grandmaster is only interested in gold. At the same time Asimov presents him as a pious man and so Ponyet shows his salesman's instincts by claiming if he buys the nuclear device he can use the gold to develop the planet's religious shrines. Later on, he visits Pherl and sells him the machine by saying he can use it to buy himself into power.

However, the traders do not possess the subtlety of the mayors or encyclopedists and their straightforward approach shows the Foundation for what it is. Here the reader can see the Foundation is not necessary a force of good, but one that has a clear objective. They can control other planets because they have built their own planet and ideologies around a solid structure that has allowed and even encouraged change. From this respect, the Foundation would not have survived if the Traders came earlier because people would have seen through who they were. Ponyet can sell Pherl nuclear devices now because he has the structure of a powerful planet behind him.



# The Merchant Princes

## The Merchant Princes Summary

The leader of the foundation, Jorane Sutt meets with the Master Trader Hober Mallow. Sutt says they are coming to another Seldon crisis and the likelihood is it will be a nuclear war. Their most dangerous enemy is the Korellian Republic and in recent months, three traders have disappeared whilst flying through the area. Not only are these disappearances unexplained, but also the ships were armed with nuclear devices. Furthermore, the Korellian Republic has not shown any interest in the Foundation's ability to provide them with the nuclear power and this could mean they arming themselves privately. Sutt asks Mallow to go to the planet as a trader, but with his eyes wide open. Mallow agrees.

Mallow speaks to Jaim Twer, the trader representative of the council. Twer used to be a trader himself, but in recent years has turned to politics. Mallow asks Twer why Sutt chose him to make the trip and Twer agrees that it is strange and perhaps Sutt is trying to get rid of him. Mallow says whatever Sutt's reason, he will take the risk and go. Nevertheless, he says he will choose his own crew and insists Twer comes with him.

Mallow's ship has been hovering over Korell for the last 7 days. Jaim Twer questions Mallow's reasoning and says they are sitting targets. Mallow says he has no choice. He keeps requesting a meeting with the Korellian Republic, but is getting no response. Yes, he is putting his crew into a dangerous position, but they all knew that from the start and for that reason he cannot afford to weaken first. At that moment, the voice of the crew's sergeant comes over the speaker. He tells Mallow the crew has taken on board a Foundation priest. Mallow is not happy and he immediately orders his men to their stations and calls the sergeant to one side. He tells him he has no right to accept someone onto the ship without his permission. The sergeant says the Korellians wanted to kill him and surely Mallow can understand that they cannot allow that to happen to a priest of the Foundation. Mallow asks to see the priest. His name is Jord Parmar and shows every sign of having lost his mind. One of Mallow's men tells him enemy ships are now approaching and they will attack unless Mallow gives them back their prisoner. Mallow tells his men to give the priest over, but Twer is not happy. He tells Mallow he cannot allow a Foundation priest to die. If he does he does he will have to face the consequences back in Terminus, because to commit such an act is sacrilegious. Mallow says he will not be told what to do on his own ship. The priest risked his own life by coming to a country he knew would not accept him and now it is only right that he faces the consequences of his actions and not the members of the ship. Once the priest is gone, Mallow receives an invitation from the Commdor.

Horber Mallow meets with Commdor Asper. Asper tells Mallow his only goal as leader is to maintain peace and for that his people call him beloved, a name he would like to keep. Mallow says he is not necessarily interested in peace. His business is trade and as a trader, he wants the ability to sell what he wants within the Korellian Republic.



Asper replies that free trade would also be the perfect solution for him as well, but he refuses to do it on the terms of the Foundation. Mallow tells him there is a way for him to get free trade and keep his popularity. If Asper were to find a young woman for him to demonstrate on, he could show exactly what he means. Within moments, Asper finds a young lady and Mallow puts a chain around her waist. He then tells the young woman to turn up the knob on the the chain's buckle. A circle of light surrounds her and Mallow then places a pebble necklace around the girl's neck. Within a shield of light, the girl's aura shifts between crimson and gold. Mallow tells Asper that women would pay lots of money for such commodities. At the same time, Asper's popularity would sharply increase.

Mallow swaps the belt for a look around Asper's steel foundry. He sees nothing of any importance until he gets a close look at one of the bodyguard's guns. The gun, though tough and old, looks like it is run on nuclear power and even more interesting it has a spaceship and sun sign etched into its handle, the old sign of the empire.

Leaving his lieutenant in charge, Mallow makes a dangerous trip to Siwenna. He first meets an old man and ex-politician in a desolate part of the nation. Mallow tells the old man he is going to the capital to check if they have nuclear power. The old man shows him the direction he needs to go and gives Mallow his passport. He tells Mallow to speak as little as possible because his accent could hinder his progress with border control. In Siwenna Mallow meets a techman. The previous day Mallow sent him a gift and he asks the man if he received it. The tech man thinks Mallow is a viceroy and reacts angrily. Thinking he is testing his loyalty to the nation, he asks why he should not just shoot him down. Mallow says he could easily shoot him down and probably become a hero in the process, however if he does, he cannot have his shield. For the first time the techman notices a nuclear shield surrounding Mallow's body and he drops his gun. What, he asks, does Mallow want in return for the shield. In return, he wants to see the nuclear generators. The tech man says that is forbidden and emperor would kill them both. Mallow replies that if he does not show him the generator he will die anyway.

The tech-man takes Mallow to the generator. Mallow asks if the tech man could fix the generator if it broke down and the tech man says they were built for eternity and will never break down. What if I shot it with my blaster asks Mallow. The Techman asks Mallow to leave and with a bow, Mallow does exactly as he is asked.

Mallow is relaxing in his new house with his friend Anker Jael. They are talking about the possibility of Mallow getting a council seat. Jael thinks this is unlikely because Mallow is a Smyrnian. It is not against law for a Smyrnian to be in the council, but he has no doubt prejudice will prevail. At that moment, Jorane Sutt comes to the house and Mallow tells Jael to go to another room and listen in on their conversation. Sutt asks Mallow to state his terms and Mallow says he does not know what Sutt is talking about. Sutt tells him the Korellian report was incomplete and now Mallow suddenly has enough money to build factories and buy a palace. Where did he get it from he asks? Sutt does not expect an answer, but Mallow, proving he has nothing to hide, tells him he got the money legitimately from selling goods to the Commdor. Sutt reminds him it is custom for a trader to sell only if it enhances the Foundation, but Mallow says it is the custom, but





not the law. That maybe so, Sutt replies, but that sort of selling has the potential of destroying everything the Foundation has worked for. Sutt again asks what are Sallow's terms. Do you want a council seat? Sallow says he can get a seat on his own. Do you want  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the profits? Again, Sallow says no. As a last resort, Sutt threatens him with imprisonment for murdering a Foundation priest and then he leaves. Jael comes back in and tells Mallow, Sutt is not out to convict him, but to ruin him.

It is the fourth day of Mallow's trial and it is not going well. However, today is Mallow's turn to talk and he has come prepared. He admits to the court everything the prosecution has said, in theory, is correct. He did, in theory, send a priest to his death, but in reality, he firstly had solid reasons for doing it and secondly, Sutt set up the whole scenario. For example, Twer was never a trader, but a priest and hired by Sutt to keep an eye on him. This is important in the fact that that it renders his testimonial the previous day useless because Twer was not the reluctant witness he made out, but a paid one. Furthermore, Mallow has a visual recording of the events that lead up to the ejection of Jord Parmar from his spaceship. He puts on the recording and tells the court the prosecution presented events exactly like they happened. However, much of the information lacked substance, for example they left out any details of Jord's past life. They will not give the information because Jord is a fraud. Mallow pauses the recording and enlarges the picture so the court can see a tattoo on Jord's hand. The tattoo says K.S.P, standing for Korellian Secret Police.

With the people now on his side, Mallow decides to arrest Sutt with endangering the state. He says before Seldon comes along with a new crisis he needs to obtain the positions of both high priest and mayor. Jael says that will not stop Korrell from attacking. Mallow says he does not intend to stop them and that is the secret of Seldon's next crisis.

## The Merchant Princes Analysis

In this chapter, Asimov connects consumerism with individuality. Religion is now on the downslide and it is mentioned in this chapter that other planets are now wary of the Foundation because of what happened in the previous section with Askonce. In this environment the Foundation requires a strong and highly independent trader like Mallow to come to the forefront.

He is different from the major characters because he is not a native of the Foundation, but was born on Smyrno. Asimov expresses Mallow's difference by showing he is interested in nothing except how to advance himself both financially and politically. For example, he accepts Sutt's mission, even though he knows Sutt wants to get rid of him, because he is confident once he is there he can still sell Commdor his goods. Unlike in the previous section where Ponyet encouraged people to buy goods for the good of society, here they are no more than fashion accessories. However, the environment is right for Mallow to make a lot of money and he uses the money to buy his way into power.

Like all the other main characters, Mallow knows how to play the political game and everything is done firstly for a reason and secondly with caution. He accepts Sutt's mission in the knowledge Sutt wants to get rid of him, but at the same time knows that this knowledge puts him in a stronger position.



# Characters

## Salvor Hardin

Salvor Hardin is the main character of the novel and appears in both the Encyclopedists and the Majors. Hardin is part of the first generation to be born and solely brought up on Terminus and as such has a fierce sense of patriotism. Initially he trained as a psychologist, but his sound political knowledge allows him to take the position of mayor at 31. As mayor, he is determined not to be just a figurehead and fights the Encyclopedists for control of the government. However, his need for control is not necessary just about power, but to evolve the Foundation beyond just a scientific institution and into an important planet in its own right. He argues this is essential in order to prevent other planets from destroying the Foundation.

However, despite Hardin's desire to overthrow the council and protect Terminus, his approach is more psychological than violent. By the time the books moves to the third part, Hardin has gained control of the Galaxy through a religious system based around the trading of nuclear power. Few leaders dare to challenge him because the religion is deep in the minds of the people and they fear revolt. All the leaders know the religion is fake. Hardin gets around them by firstly guaranteeing them with a constant supply of nuclear power and secondly presenting the leader to their people as minor gods. In order to deliver this message he invites priests from around the world to train at the Foundation.

At the beginning of the Mayors, 30 years after he overthrew the Encyclopedists, his reign comes under threat from the young politician Sermak. Sermak believes religion has served its purpose, but with the independence of an increasing number of planets, the Foundation is again vulnerable to attack. However, Hardin proves the power of his methods when he convincingly defeats the Ancreon leader Weinis. He does this by presenting Weinis's attack on the Foundation as a blasphemous act, creating such anger among Weinis's own people that Weinis would rather kill himself than face their anger. It such moments that presents Hardin as the Foundation's second greatest leader after Hari Seldon.

## Hober Mallow

Maller is a master trader and appears in the last part of the book. He is not a native of the Foundation and was born on the planet of Smyrno. Despite this Mallow has no real affiliation with anyone and his goal, or his religion as he calls it, is to make money. This ambition puts him at odds with the Foundation council. They see the role of a trader as to promote the Foundation's religious control through the trading of nuclear equipment and Mallow as the figurehead of an organisation is becoming far too powerful. In order to put an end to his rise, the Foundation's Jorane Sutt asks him to visit Korell, hoping he will not come back. However Mallow is a man of the world and quickly figures out what



Sutt is trying to do. He visits Korell and does what Sutt asks him to do, but in the process establishes his trade in an empire once notoriously anti-trade and grows rich. However he spends the money carefully. Mallow builds factories, a palace and develops strong friendships within the council. Before long he is expressing a desire to gain a council seat. Unfortunately Sutt is not happy and puts Mallow on trial for the murder of a priest. At a public hearing hearing, Mallow admits everything Sutt accuses him of is true, but with the use of video evidence he proves that Sutt set him up and the priest was actually a member of the Korellian secret police. Upon hearing this the public begin chanting Mallow's name and his position as man of the people is complete. It is not clear whether Mallow claims the power he wanted, but his victory marks a change in the Foundation and the rise of what becomes known as the Merchant Princes.

## Limar Ponyets

Limar Ponyets is a trader from the Foundation. When the Foundation agent Eskel Gorov is imprisoned on Askonce the government asks him to help rescue him. Ponyets is not happy because it means he will struggle to keep to his quota, but Gorov is his friend and so he decides to go. When he is allowed to meet Gorov in his cell, Gorov tells him the only way the Grandmaster will release him is if Ponyets gives him gold. Ponyets builds a transmuter that changes iron to gold and with his considerable sales technique manages to sell it to the government. Furthermore he sells more nuclear devices to the government official Pherl, a deal that goes against the planet anti-trading laws. However, Ponyet uses this to his advantage by secretly recording his conversation with Pherl and threatening to take the recording to the Grandmaster if he does not buy more goods. In the end, not only does Ponyets keep to his quota, but he also fulfils the Foundation's goal of getting nuclear devices into Askonce and thereby implementing the first step towards controlling the planet.

## Hari Seldon

Hari Seldon is the founder of the Foundation. He is a psychohistorian who by taking into account human behavior calculates the downfall of the empire. He states the empire's downfall is inevitable and there is nothing anything any can do. As a humanist, however, he can reduce the human suffering from 30,000 years to a thousand years if future generations move along the plan he has set out. The first step of the plan is to create a home for scientists on the empty planet Terminus. He achieves this by encouraging his own arrest and thus setting up a meeting with the Emperor. The Emperor gives him a choice between execution and banishment upon Terminus. With banishment, he has the chance to set up a government scientific community whose job it is to implement Seldon's plan.

At the beginning of the second part, Seldon has been dead for 50 years, but his plan dominates Galaxy politics. No one dares to deviate from the plan until Seldon appears on a video telling him or her what to do next. He says he only began the Encyclopedia to persuade the Emperor to set up the Foundation on Terminus and now it is time to



move on. The second time he appears he tells the Foundation that religion is not enough to keep control of the Galaxy.

## Weinis

Weines tries to destroy the Foundation with a nuclear ship. However Asimov presents Weinis as a hot-headed individual who rarely thinks things through carefully. He tries to take everything by force and underestimates the power the Foundation's religion has over his own people. With the prospect of going to jail for treason, he ends up killing himself.

## Pherl

Pherl is the closest advisor to the Grandmaster on the planet of Askonce. He is from a noble family, but one that can never take control of Askonce. Limar Ponyets uses this fact to sell him his transmuter with the idea that Pherl can buy himself power. In the end Ponyet blackmails Pherl into buying more nuclear gadgets, starting the process of bringing Askonce under the Foundation's religious control.

## Jaim Twer

Sutt hires Twer to keep a close eye on Mallow.

## Jorane Sutt

Sutt is Mallow's main adversary and leader of the Foundation. Jael in particular describes him as a brilliant politician, however Mallow gets the better of him when it is discovered he purposely put Mallow's life in danger. The aim was of course to get rid of Mallow and stem the increase in power of the master traders.

## Gaal Dornick

Dornick visits Trantor to work for Hari Seldon as a mathematician. To his surprise Seldon uses him to get a trial and encourage the emperor to exile the scientific community to Terminus.

## Yohan Lee

Lee is Salvor's right hand man. He helps to overthrow the encyclopedists.



## Prince Lefkov

Lefkov is the son Weinis and the leader of the navy ship on its way to destroy the Foundation. Eventually a priest forces him to turn around the ship and then address his father, saying he will be tried for treachery.

## King Leopold I

King Leopold I is the 15 year old nephew of Weinis. The Foundation's religious control is so much that Leopold is seen as a minor god and therefore Weinis in particular cannot overthrow him without causing problems. On the day of Leopold's coronation Weinis tries to destroy the Foundation, but Hardin thwarts him.

## Commdor Asper Argo

The Commdor is known to his people as the Beloved due to his apparent love of peace. However it is suggested that his turbulent relationship with his wife and father is reason enough for Mallow to sit back and wait for things to happen.

## Lewis Pirenne

Pirenne is an Encyclopedist and leader of the Foundation who cannot see beyond writing the encyclopedia. Salvor Hardin overhauls him.

## Theo Aporat

Aporat is the priest aboard the nuclear ship on its way to destroy the foundation. Once he realizes the mission he uses the power of religion to get the crew on his side and arrest Prince Lefkov.

## Sermak

Sermak tries to lead a rebel party against Salvor Hardin. However Hardin's policy of religious control proves too strong for him.

## Eskel Gorov

The Grandmaster imprisons Eskel Gorov when he tries to trade in Askonce. However Gorov is not a real trader, but an agent of the Foundation. His mission is to find a nobleman and sell him nuclear devices with the aim that the nobleman will help change his nation's anti-trading laws and eventually get Askonce under the religious control of the Foundation. In the end his mission is achieved by Gotov's friend Limar Ponyets.



## **The Grandmaster**

The Grandmaster is leader of Askonce.

## **The Emperor**

At the beginning of the book the Emperor gives Hari Seldon the choose between death and exile on Terminus.

## **Jord Palmer**

Jord is the priest Mallow ejects from his ship. Jorane Sutt tries to persuade a court Mallow murdered him when actually the Priest is a member of the Korellian Secret Police.

## **Ankor Jael**

Jael is a politician who helps Mallow to defeat Jorane Sutt.



## Objects/Places

### Trantor

Capital of the first galactic empire.

### Terminus

Originally uninhabited, it becomes home to the Foundation.

### Anacreon

A newly independent kingdom that shuns the religious control of the Foundation. However, Salvor Hardin manages to gain control when Anacreon tries to attack Terminus.

### The Time Vault

The place Hari Seldon delivers his messages.

### The Encyclopedia

The Foundation writes an encyclopedia with the purpose of building up enough information to help future generations succeed in shaping the future.

### Korell

The capital of the Republic of Korell. Sutt sends Hobert Mallow to Korell to find out if they have nuclear weapons.

### Askone

Askone is another galactic planet that shuns the Foundation's policy of religious control. It is not until Limar Ponyets sells Pherl some nuclear devices that the Foundation manages to conquer the planet.

### The Old Imperial Cruiser

Weinis finds an Old Imperial Cruiser with the power to destroy a planet and forces the Foundation to restore it to its original glory. He then tries to use the Cruiser to destroy





the Foundation, but the Foundation fixed the cruiser in their own way and Weinis is thwarted.

## **The Transmuter**

Ponyets improvises a transmuter from some junk in his ship in order to create gold for the Grandmaster of Askone.

## **Weinis's Private Chambers**

Hardin and Weinis confront each other in Weinis's private chambers. Hardin wins and Weinis shoots himself.

## **Far Star**

Hober Mallow's space ship.



# Themes

## Religion and Ideology

Salvor Hardin overthrows the Encyclopedists because they are blind to the fact they are vulnerable to attack. At the same time, Hardin's policy is to prevent war and the destruction of the Foundation and the one way he can do that is by taking control of the Galaxy's masses. There are probably many ways available to him, but in the end, he falls upon religious control.

This is not necessarily the method Hardin would have chosen, but one chosen by the people, who see the Foundation's scientific methods as a higher and mystical power. Hardin uses this to spread an ideology that works entirely to benefit the Foundation and the continuation of the Seldon Plan. He develops a priesthood making himself high priest. The priests are not all from the Foundation, but come from all across the Galaxy to train at the Terminus University. When they graduate, they return to their own countries to develop the nuclear technology supplied by the Foundation. It is by supplying the other planets with nuclear components that Hardin keeps the leaders quiet.

The Galaxy leaders know Hardin has built his religion on false pretenses, but they have become so dependent on nuclear power they cannot afford to revolt. Furthermore, if they did revolt they face the wrath of their own people who would see such actions as sacrilegious.

Asimov shows this in the third section when the Anacreon leader, Weinis tries to destroy the Foundation. He begins his assault by forcing Hardin to rebuild an old nuclear warship. Hardin knows Weinis wants to use the ship to destroy the Foundation so he fixes it in his own way. He then tells the Priests of Wienis's intentions and lets them spread the word around the Galaxy. When Weinis's ship gets to the Foundation, a priest on board uses religion to turn the crew against the Captain. Back on Anacreon, the city's population surrounds the palace walls. Furthermore, only the Foundation knows how the nuclear power works, and Hardin's ability to switch the power on and off at key moments suggests the wrath of God. Weinis has no choice but to give in.

## Political Maneuvering

Each of the main characters work the political system to get what they want and move the Seldon plan to its next stage. Firstly, Hari Seldon arranges it so his new mathematician Gaal is arrested. Gaal's arrest is followed by Seldon's arrest. At the trial Seldon's explanation of why he thinks the Empire will not exist in 300 years time leads to an adjournment and a meeting with the Emperor. The Emperor banishes Seldon and his scientists to the planet of Terminus, but provides them with the funding to set up a scientific foundation.



Secondly, Salvor Hardin knows the Foundation is vulnerable to attack from newly independent planets, but cannot make the Foundation council see the potential crisis. Therefore, instead of wasting his time trying to persuade them, he goes about turning popular opinion against them. He secretly gains 60% of the planet's newspapers and uses them to turn the tide of opinion against the Encyclopedists and express his political ideas. Once the environment is right, he overthrows the government and takes complete control. Here he begins to set up a political structure that aims to spread the Foundation's influence and make it difficult for anyone to revolt. He allows Anacreon to build a nuclear base on Terminus and develops an environment where everyone is dependent on a nuclear power only Terminus can create. He further safeguards the Foundation's control of the Galaxy's masses through a religion based around their scientific methods.

From here, the remaining two main characters work from the structure Hardin has set up, delivering the Foundation's ideology through the promotion of a consumerist lifestyle. Firstly, Limar Ponyets blackmails the Askonce leaders with the promise of gold, and then Mallow earns his fortune from selling goods to a Korrell nobleman and using the money to buy his way into power.

## Coping with Disaster

Hari Seldon predicts the complete fall of the galactic empire in 300 years time and then 30,000 years of poverty and war before the rise of the next one. The aim of the Foundation is to reduce the period of suffering to only a thousand years or less. However, this is not a simple process and takes place in phases, each one aiming to overcome a crisis. After a crisis, the Foundation then evolves onto the next phase.

In the first phase, Seldon uses the Encyclopedists to set up the Foundation and create an environment dependent on scientific knowledge. However, their complete dedication to the encyclopedia blinds them to political matters and leaves them vulnerable to attack. From here, Hardin takes over and moves the Foundation into its second phase, preventing attack through introducing nuclear power and setting up a religion based around science.

However, leaders get tired of the Foundation's influence and try to destroy the planet. Hardin guides the Foundation through the crisis, but it becomes clear that religious control is not enough

In the third phase, Limar Ponyets introduces the virtues of consumerism. Again, this aims to promote nuclear power and religious control, but its promotion of individuality and materialism creates a cynical public. When Hober Mallow comes into the story, religious belief is falling away and the importance of trade and traders comes to the forefront. Mallow takes advantage of this environment to make his fortune selling material items to the world leaders and buys his way into power. Mallow feels that only by letting matters take their own course can they get through the next crisis.

# Style

## Point of View

In general, the point of view is omnipresent and Asimov tells the story through a series of characters. However, this point of view is not necessarily reliable because all the characters work towards presenting the Foundation as a promoter of good. Even bad characters such as Weinis are so bad, with a lust only for power, that they serve to highlight the importance of the Foundation. In this respect the reader is likely to support the four main characters, who though not inherently good, are keeping to a plan that Seldon has implemented for the good of humanity. However, there are also people working towards Seldon's goals who become so involved in the importance of their task that they refuse to move on. In this respect, Asimov gears the point of view to favor the younger generation and therefore promotes the importance of a continuously evolving society.

However, its unreliability comes into question when the reader begins to question how accurate are Seldon's predictions? In this respect, it cannot be easy for the other leaders to allow their people to blindly follow a religion, particularly as it ignores their planet's own ideology and traditions. Yet, Asimov often presents the leaders that go against the Foundation as either fools or evil dictators. He does this to show the Foundation as a source of good and perhaps to promote his own political beliefs. However, if Asimov presented it more objectively, the reader might get a very different perspective. In fact, from another point of view, a reader could see the Foundation as an oppressive dictatorship blinded by its own self-importance.

## Setting

The Foundation looks at the disintegration of an empire over hundreds of years and as such the Galaxy's landscape is continuously changing. The novel begins with a series of planets that make up the Galactic Empire with Trantor as the capital. Seldon then founds the uninhabited planet Terminus and with government funding sets up a scientific Foundation. In the second part, Smyrno and Anacreon become independent states and a short war breaks out between them. In the aftermath, Anacreon insists on building a military base on Terminus in order to provide protection and maintain the peace. Terminus allows them to build the base, but on their own terms. Before long, they are providing power for most of the Galaxy and as a result Terminus becomes the most powerful planet. However, the Empire continues to break up and independent states continue to cause problems, as they look either to keep their independence, or to become the center of a new empire. Anacreon tries to destroy the Foundation with a nuclear ship, Askonce insists on anti-trading laws and their own religious practices, and Foundation leaders think Korrell is developing its own nuclear weapons. However, the Foundation takes control of all three and the reader can see the beginnings of another Empire with the Foundation at its center.



## Language and Meaning

Asimov wastes little time describing any of the planets or interiors of rooms and expresses most of what happens through dialogue. For example, the reader only knows the politicians sit in rooms and discuss important issues. They know little of their background. For example, the reader knows Salvor Hardin is a great politician, but they do not know if he has a family, a mistress or if he has any private life whatsoever. Similarly, the action, like a play, constantly takes place in one room and the reader never discovers what Terminus looks like. They may have an idea that it is a small, but very rich planet, but there is no physical description.

In some ways, this method works because it allows Asimov to concentrate on expressing his scientific and political ideas within an exciting plot. As long as he keeps the plot moving, he can deflect attention from the lack of characterization. He gets away with not describing the planets by indicating they have some links with real countries. For example, the reader could attribute the Foundation's ability to keep peace to Switzerland and therefore relate things they know about Switzerland to the Foundation. The reader may relate the Foundation to a different country, but Asimov creates enough cultural similarities for the reader to be able to make a variety of comparisons.

## Structure

Asimov divides the Foundation into five parts: the Psychohistorians, the Encyclopedists, the Mayors, the Traders and the Merchant Princes. He designs each part to cover a phase in the development of the Foundation. In the first part, Hari Seldon forces the Emperor to fund a scientific base on the planet Terminus. On the planet scientists write an encyclopedia aimed to help the next generation cope better with Seldon's predicted disaster. However, their dedication to the Encyclopedia blinds them to their vulnerability from attack and the second part details Hardin's overthrow of the Encyclopedists and his development of a sound political structure. The third part continues with Hardin's reign, covering how well his system works to prevent war. However, there is also an atmosphere of discontent among younger political leaders, which suggests the Foundation needs to change again to make progress. Asimov covers this change in the fourth part when Ponyet's innovative trading methods prove the power of consumerism. In the fifth part, religious control is deteriorating and the environment is right for a Master Trader like Hober Mallow to move in and buy his way to the top.

In general, each part is plot driven and the characters are one-dimensional. Each chapter is like a single episode taking part in one setting and revolving around a dialogue that serves to express the character's political beliefs rather than any information about their private lives. In fact the reader knows very little of any character's background. By doing this, Asimov leaves himself free to communicate his ideas within the structure of an exciting plot.



## Quotes

"It was childish to feel disappointed, but childishness comes almost as naturally to a man as to a child, and there was a lump in Gaal's throat. He had never seen Trantor spread out in all its incredibility, as large as life, and he hadn't expected to have to wait," p. 10.

"The elevator was of the new sort that ran by gravitic repulsion. Gaal entered and others flowed in behind him. The operator closed a contact. For a moment, Gaal felt suspended in space as gravity switched to zero, and then he had weight again in small measure as the elevator accelerated upward. Deceleration followed and his feet left the floor. He squawked against his will," p. 15.

"Subjective matter of opinion, Gaal. If you're born in a cubicle and grow up in a corridor, and work in a cell, and vacation in a crowded sun-room, then coming up into the open with nothing but sky over you might just give you a nervous breakdown. They make the children come up here once a year, after they're five. I don't know if it does any good," p. 17.

"Oh, yes. There is probability of 1.7% that I will be executed, but of course that will not stop the project," p. 23.

"Pirenne banged his hand on the chair with sudden violence. "Let me speak, Hardin. Your eminence, I don't care a rusty half-credit coin for Anacreon, Smyrno, or all your local politics and petty wars. I tell you this is a State-supported tax-free institution," p. 57.

"Encyclopedias don't win wars," p. 58.

"Your bunch here is a perfect example of what's been wrong with the entire Galaxy for thousands of years. What kind of science is it to be stuck out here for centuries classifying the work of scientists of the last millennium? Have you ever thought of working onward, extending their knowledge and improving upon it? No! You're quite happy to stagnate. The whole Galaxy is, and has been for Space knows how long," p. 64.

"Violence," came the retort, "is the last refuge of the incompetent. But I certainly don't intend to lay down the welcome mat and brush off the best furniture for their use," p. 73.

"The Encyclopedia Foundation, to begin with, is a fraud, and always has been!" p. 82.

"We must—because the future isn't nebulous. It's been calculated out by Seldon and charted. Each successive crisis in our history is mapped and each depends in a measure on the successful conclusion of the ones previous. This is only the second crisis and Space knows what effect even a trifling," p. 96.



"Hardin replied lightly. "Yes, the cruiser I myself ordered repaired—but in my own way. Tell me, Wienis, have you ever heard of a hyperwave relay? No, I see you haven't. Well, in about two minutes you'll find out what one can do," p. 127.

"Never let your sense of morals prevent you from doing what is right!" p. 140.

"But what if the gold turns out to be impure?"  
Ponyets allowed himself a dark humor in return. "When the judgment of that impurity depends upon those who are most interested in finding it pure?" p. 155.

"Go on. If you have more to say, get it out.' Mallow never made the mistake of being overpolite to a Foundation man. He might be an Outlander, but a man's a man for all that," p. 165.

"Mallow said icily, 'I can. There's no merit in discipline under ideal circumstances. I'll have it in the face of death, or it's useless. Where's this missionary? Get him here in front of me,'" p. 178.

"First, I am not a creature of the viceroy come to test your loyalty. Second, my gift is something the Emperor himself in all his splendor does not and will never possess. Third, what I wish in return is very little; a nothing; a mere breath," p. 201.



## Topics for Discussion

How do you think the Foundation sets itself up to cope with Seldon's crises?

Why does it matter that Mallow is not a native of the Foundation? Why does his rise mark a big turning point for the Foundation?

Do you think the Foundation is doing good or do you think it is oppressing the traditions of other planets? Can the other planets really be expected to believe in the Seldon Plan?

How much of Asimov's book do you think can be related to the political environment in the 1940s and 1950s?

Do you think the lack of characterization has a detrimental effect on the book's quality?

How does the Foundation allow change? Does this give them a significant advantage against their enemies?

How do the four main characters play the system to get what they want?