

Victory Inevitable

[From a novel.]

“Exactly.” Barr grew serious. “It never penetrated earlier, but once it was over and I could . . . well . . . look at the answers in the back of the book, the problem became simple. We can see, now, that the social background of the Empire makes wars of conquest impossible for it. Under weak Emperors, it is torn apart by generals competing for a worthless and surely death-bringing throne. Under strong Emperors, the Empire is frozen into a paralytic rigor in which disintegration apparently ceases for the moment, but only at the sacrifice of all possible growth.” [1]

Forell growled bluntly through strong puffs, “You’re not clear, Lord Barr.” [2]

Barr smiled slowly. “I suppose so. It’s the difficulty of not being trained in psychohistory. Words are a pretty fuzzy substitute for math-

ematical equations. But let's see now—" [3]

Barr considered, while Forell relaxed, back to railing, and Devers looked into the velvet sky and thought wonderingly of Trantor. [4]

Then Barr said, "You see, sir, you—and Devers—and everyone, no doubt, had the idea that beating the Empire meant first prying apart the Emperor and his general. You, and Devers, and everyone else were right—right all the time, as far as the principle of internal disunion was concerned. [5]

"You were wrong, however, in thinking that this internal split was something to be brought about by individual acts, by inspirations of the moment. You tried bribery and lies. You appealed to ambition and to fear. But you got nothing for all your pains. In fact, appearances were worse after each attempt. [6]

"And through all this wild threshing up of tiny ripples, the Seldon tidal wave continued onward, quietly—but quite irresistibly." [7]

Ducem Barr turned away, and looked over the railing at the lights of a rejoicing city. He said, "There was a dead hand pushing all of

us; the mighty general and the great Emperor; my world and your world—the dead hand of Hari Seldon. He knew that a man like Riose would have to fail, since it was his success that brought failure; and the greater the success, the surer the failure.” [8]

Forell said dryly, “I can’t say you’re getting clearer.” [9]

“A moment,” continued Barr earnestly. “Look at the situation. A weak general could never have endangered us, obviously. A strong general during the time of a weak Emperor would never have endangered us, either; for he would have turned his arms towards a much more fruitful target. Events have shown that three-fourths of the Emperors of the last two centuries were rebel generals and rebel viceroys before they were Emperors.” [10]

“So it is only the combination of strong Emperor and strong general that can harm the Foundation; for a strong Emperor cannot be dethroned easily, and a strong general is forced to turn outwards, past the frontiers.” [11]

“*But*, what keeps the Emperor strong? What kept Cleon strong? It’s obvious. He is

strong, because he permits no strong subjects. A courtier who becomes too rich, or a general who becomes too popular is dangerous. All the recent history of the Empire proves that to any Emperor intelligent enough to be strong. [12]

“Riose won victories, so the Emperor grew suspicious. All the atmosphere of the times forced him to be suspicious. Did Riöse refuse a bribe? Very suspicious; ulterior motives. Did his most trusted courtier suddenly favor Riöse? Very suspicious; ulterior motives. It wasn’t the individual acts that were suspicious. Anything else would have done—which is why our individual plots were unnecessary and rather futile. It was the *success* of Riöse that was suspicious. So he was recalled, and accused, condemned, murdered. The Foundation wins again. [13]

“Look, there is not a conceivable combination of events that does not result in the Foundation winning. It was inevitable; whatever Riöse did, whatever we did.” [14]

The Foundation magnate nodded ponderously. “So! But what if the Emperor and the general had been the same person. Hey? What then? That’s a case you didn’t cover, so you

haven't proved your point yet." [15]

Barr shrugged. "I can't *prove* anything; I haven't the mathematics. But I appeal to your reason. With an Empire in which every aristocrat, every strong man, every pirate can aspire to the Throne—and, as history shows, often successfully—what would happen to even a strong Emperor who preoccupied himself with foreign wars at the extreme end of the Galaxy? How long would he have to remain away from the capital before somebody raised the standards of civil war and forced him home? The social environment of the Empire would make that time short. [16]

"I once told Riose that not all the Empire's strength could swerve the dead hand of Hari Seldon." [17]