

Galactic Empire (Asimov)

The **Galactic Empire** is an interstellar empire featured in Isaac Asimov's *Robot*, *Galactic Empire*, and *Foundation* series. The Empire is spread across the Milky Way galaxy and consists of almost 25 million planets^[1] ^[2] settled exclusively by humans. For over 12 millennia the seat of imperial authority was located on the ecumenopolis of Trantor, whose population exceeded 40 billion,^[3] until it was sacked in the year 12,328. The official symbol of the empire is the Spaceship-and-Sun. Cleon II was the last Emperor to hold significant authority.^[4] The fall of the empire, modelled on the fall of the Roman Empire, is the subject of many of Asimov's novels.

Background

Asimov created the fictional Galactic Empire in the early 1940s based upon the Roman Empire, as a proposal to John W. Campbell, after reading Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* when he was working at the Philadelphia Navy Yard with Robert Heinlein. The concept evolved through short stories and novellas in *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine during the 1940s, culminating in the publication of the *Foundation* stories as a trilogy of books in the early 1950s.^[5]^[6]

As of 827 G.E. (Galactic Era, the number of years after its founding), the Galactic Empire comprises millions of inhabited worlds with 500 quadrillion residents.^[7] According to the *Foundation* series chronology established in the late 1990s, it comes into existence approximately 10,000 CE, year one of the Galactic Era. (The establishment of the Empire was originally 34,500 CE, according to Asimov's unofficial unpublished early 1950s chronology.) The Galactic Empire was made possible by the ability of humans to travel through hyperspace. The space navy of the Galactic Empire is called the "Imperial Navy".^[8] The empire's capital, named Trantor, is the closest habitable planet to the center of the galaxy, and the novels in the *Foundation* trilogy describe its fall, over a period of centuries, and a period of anarchy and decay, a parallel to the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the Dark Ages.

Asimov posits that two foundations are instituted to restore the empire to its former glory. Through the use of psychohistory, a future science hypothesized by Asimov, a scientist on Trantor named Hari Seldon in about 12,000 Galactic Era predicts the fall of the empire, and institutes the two foundations.^[6]^[9]

The Periphery

The Periphery is a fictional location in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series and refers to the outer rims of the Galactic Empire, including planets such as Anacreon and Santanni. Imperial control is weakest in the periphery, as planet governors there frequently possess their own fleets. Santanni revolts during *Forward the Foundation*. About 50 years after the First Foundation is established on Terminus, the emperor will grant the periphery autonomy. This effectively removes them completely from Imperial control, making the dissolution of the Empire far more apparent than it had been before.

In the years preceding the fall of Trantor, the periphery became any area outside the Empire. As this area became larger the Empire became less and less great.

As the Empire decreased in size and power, the stagnation that would ultimately cause the collapse of the Empire increased.

Emperors

A complete list of Galactic emperors and their dynasties does not exist; however, a number of names and their rule are known:

Galactic Empire
<i>Foundation series, Galactic Empire series, and Robot series</i>
location
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<div>At its height, the Galactic Empire spanned the entire Milky Way galaxy</div>
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Dynasty	Emperor	Description
Kamble	Frankenn the First	First Emperor of the Galactic Empire, crowned in Year 0 of the Galactic Era, around 11,584 AD.
	Aburamis	Emperor responsible for the laws known as "Law Codes of Aburamis" which included forbidding the denigration of public officers of the Empire
	Stannell II	Boy-Emperor who ordered that Emperor's insignia be raised in Earth's Council Chamber at Washenn. He was insane and was removed by assassination after two years of reign.
	Edard I	Stannell II's successor. He took back the order after the assassination, which ended in revolt, but he couldn't stop the unrest which had spread through the Empire, the seeds of its fall.
	Kandar V	Emperor who constructed a huge island on Alpha, designated "New Earth", after effort to help Earth recover was abandoned, and arranged for the last inhabitants of Earth to be transported there in 900 GE. The colony survived until at least 498 FE.
Dacians		A dynasty of Emperors who ruled in the early 7,000s GE. Some of their descendants became the Mayors of the Wye sector of Trantor.
	Loris VI	Emperor who developed the use of the Previous Inclosure strategy in the 10,000s GE.
Wyan		A dynasty of Emperors who ruled around the 11,500s GE.
	Ammenetik the Great	The Emperor who built the Imperial Palace used until at least 195 FE.
Agis	Agis VI	Emperor who kept order in a prosperous Empire with a firm but non-tyrannical hand. He was also known for failing to control the news function of the Imperial Library.
	Manowell	Known as Bloody Emperor Manowell.
Entun	Stanel VI	Father of Cleon I. His Chief of Staff was Eto Demerzel (R. Daneel Olivaw). Fortunate enough to escape the roughly one-in-two chances of assassination faced by the last century of Galactic Emperors.
Entun	Cleon I	The last Emperor of the Entun dynasty, born 11,988 GE, died 12,038. He was Emperor when Hari Seldon first arrived on Trantor. He succeeded to the Imperial throne in 12,010 GE at the age of twenty-two following the death of his father. Cleon was an amiable man, eager to treat others as his equals yet not capable of conversing comfortably. Arguably, the most significant event of Cleon's rule occurred in 12,020 GE, when the young mathematician Hari Seldon came to Trantor and revealed that Psychohistory was a theoretical possibility. Cleon I's reign represented a curious interval of quiet between troubled times, due to the skills of R. Daneel Olivaw, under the guise of his Chief of Staff, Eto Demerzel. Demerzel became aware that Seldon could possibly develop a mathematical method for predicting future history, and he (indirectly) informed the Emperor, who took an immediate interest in the matter. While Cleon was content to use Seldon as a source of self-fulfilling prophecies—a tool to prevent unrest—Demerzel had come to believe that the Empire itself was dying, and that only an honest investigation could prevent its fall or at least minimize that fall's effects. Therefore, Demerzel took steps to promote Seldon's development of his infant science. After Demerzel's retirement, Cleon appointed Seldon to be his new Chief of Staff, a position now termed First Minister. Seldon exerted himself to the fullest, employing pragmatic measures to halt anti-Imperial conspiracies while simultaneously developing psychohistory into a system capable of making solid predictions. Unfortunately, Cleon's personal ineptitude became his downfall. Wishing to thank a gardener, Mandell Gruber, for his part in thwarting an assassination attempt on Dr. Seldon, he promoted Gruber to Chief Gardener over the Imperial Palace grounds. Gruber, not wishing to abandon his lifestyle, overcame his timidity and shot the Emperor.
		Interregnum between 12,038 and 12,058 GE. The chaotic upset which followed Cleon's assassination saw the rise of a Military Junta and Hari Seldon's retirement from overt politics.
	Agis XIV	Emperor who came to the throne after the fall of the Military Junta in 12,058 GE. Third cousin, on his mother's side, to Cleon I. Liked to be called the "Citizen Emperor" and befriended Hari Seldon although failed to use his meagre resources to assist the Psychohistory Project. A weak emperor with no actual power; controlled by the parliament. It's been said that he was crowned against his will and agreed because he was the only one that could inherit the crown from Cleon.
	Daluben IV	Puppet Emperor of Linge Chen during the time of the Seldon Trial on Trantor in 12,067 or -2 FE.
	Stannell VII	Ruler of the Normannic Sector. Last good ruler of the Provinces, under whom Siwenna almost achieved its ancient prosperity. Died in 104 FE.
	Ricker the Usurper	Ruled around 150 FE. Overthrown by Cleon II's father.
	Cleon II	Commonly called 'The Great'. The last strong Emperor of the First Empire, ruling from 155 to 203 FE, he is important for the political and artistic renaissance that took place during his long reign. The great-grandson of a pirate ruler, he had three sons. During his later years he suffered from a painful and undiagnosed ailment. In 195 FE, he declared war against the First Foundation in Terminus, of which his Privy Secretary Ammel Brodrig informed him after learning about Riöse's actions. Brodrig informed his Emperor that Riöse was in the Lemul Cluster, that he was one of the "popular generals", and that his soldiers were entirely under his command. Cleon later recalled Riöse and Brodrig, ending the Fourth Seldon Crisis. He died in 203 FE but was remembered until at least 498 FE.
	Dagobert VIII	One of the last Emperors of the Galactic Empire. Fled Trantor to Delicass, renamed Neotrantor, which was about three parsecs away, during the Great Sack by the rebel Gilmer in 255 FE.
	Dagobert IX	One of the last emperors of the Galactic Empire (it is unlikely he was the last, since that would have required him to live to the age of approximately 120). He fled the Great Sack of Trantor along with his family. When visited upon by Ebling Mis, Toran and Bayta Darell, and the Mule in 295 FE, Dagobert IX was old and detached from reality, still reminiscing about imperial times long gone. Nevertheless, after he gave permission to Ebling Mis to use the Great Library of Trantor, he made a dignified impression as befits a Galactic emperor. His son, the crown prince Dagobert, tried to conspire under the influence of the corrupt governor Jord Commason. The crown prince was killed by the Mule with the help of a Visi-sonor.

Consensus cosmogony

Asimov's Galactic Empire was the first example after Olaf Stapledon's 1937 science fiction novel *Star Maker* of one of the eight stages of a "consensus cosmogony". This is also called the *Science Fiction Cosmology*, identified by Donald A. Wollheim in the 1950s. Science fiction writers needed only hint at this cosmogony in their stories for experienced SF readers to slot into their perception of future history and envisage the background to the tale, without the writers needing to expend time and space explicitly explaining it. These stages are:^[10]

- The initial exploration, colonization, and exploitation of the solar system*, including plots modeled on the American War of Independence where the human colonies on Mars, Venus, or other planets declare independence from Earth
- The first flights to the stars*, with plots similar to those of the preceding stage
- The rise of a galactic empire*, and possible contact, either friendly or hostile, with empires of alien species (in Asimov's Galactic Empire, only one intelligent nonhuman race is found; it leaves the galaxy in "Blind Alley")
- The Galactic Empire at its height*, with exploration occurring at its Rim
- The Decline and Fall of the Galactic Empire*, as explored by Asimov and later other authors
- The Galactic Dark Ages*, an interregnum with worlds reverting to barbarism, as also partially explored by Asimov
- The Galactic Renaissance*, where a new democratic Galactic Civilization arises, including the restoration of civilization to and communication with worlds that were isolated during the Fall—this stage was called by Stapledon the *Galactic Community of Worlds*, was called by Asimov the *Foundation Federation*, and is most commonly called by most authors the *Galactic Federation*
- The Challenge to God*, an effort to solve the last secrets of the universe by transcending matter and morphing into beings of pure energy, the end of time, and the investigation of the beginnings of new universes—Stapledon covers this in the last part of *Star Maker* and Asimov covers it in his short story “The Last Question”.

Trantor

Trantor is a fictional planet depicted as the capital of the first Galactic Empire. Trantor was first mentioned in Asimov's short

Trantor

- | <i>Foundation universe</i> location | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Created by | <u>Isaac Asimov</u> |
| Genre | Science fiction
space opera |
| In-universe information | |
| Type | Planet |
| Race(s) | Humans |
| Locations | Imperial Palace,
Galactic Library,
Streeling
University, 800
administrative
sectors |
| Characters | Hari Seldon, Cleon
I, Cleon II, Preem
Palver, Arkady
Darrell |

from the planet's core directly into electric power by sinking extremely long rods into the inner core of the planet (the three other major sources of electric power were hydroelectric dams on the underground rivers, fusion energy, and solar energy from Trantor's sun, both from rooftop solar arrays and from solar energy satellites orbiting Trantor that beamed microwave energy to the surface); 'heatsinkers' were generally looked down upon by other Dahllites, though they were better paid than anyone in Dahl due to their difficult working conditions. Naturally, most Dahllites hated the Empire and its soldiers (colloquially labelled 'sunbadgers'). Dahllites were black-haired, and fairly short; males wore large, thick mustaches, considered a sign of virility, and all carried knives (considered to be primitive weapons). Rather than using 'Mr.', 'Mrs.', or 'Dr.', as forms of address, Dahllites always used 'Master' and 'Mistress' (never 'Doctor'). Known Dahllites: Yugo Amaryl, Mother Rittah, Raych Seldon, Jirad and Casilia Tisalver.

- **Billibotton**—A slum in Dahl, on the lower level. This was where Mother Rittah lived, and where Hari Seldon and Dors Venabili met their future adoptive son, Raych Seldon. Billibotton was (in)famous for its complete lawlessness. Without the help of Dors, Seldon never would have left it alive.
- **Ery**—The sector in which Wanda Seldon and Stettin Palver met Bor Alurin.
- **Imperial**—The sector in which the Imperial Palace and the Galactic Library lie. When Seldon first visited Trantor to deliver his speech at the Decennial Convention, fashion in the sector called for bold, bright colors and wearing hats without chinstraps.
- **Mandanov**
- **Millimaru**—The sector Raych claimed to be (and maybe was) born in when he infiltrated the Joranumite movement.
- **Mycogen**— As Asimov explains in *Prelude to Foundation*,^[22] their name is formed from the Greek stems *myco-* (meaning 'yeast' or other types of fungi) and *-gen* (meaning 'maker' or 'producer'), which matches the description of Mycogen as specialized in breeding and exporting yeast, or "microfood", to other portions of Trantor. It kept the best for itself; the food eaten by Seldon in Mycogen was the best he had ever had on Trantor. Mycogenians were descendants of the ancient Spacer world *Aurora* (also mentioned in *The Naked Sun*) and lamented the loss of their ancient homeworld and culture, including robots. They lived by a strict religion they considered to be 'history'. The scripture of the Mycogenians mentions *Aurora*, robots, and other topics, and during the events of *Prelude to Foundation* Hari Seldon found a long-inactive robot, which was revered by the Mycogenians. The 'high priest' was the leader of the council of elders, the government of Mycogen. During an adolescent rite of passage, all Mycogenians were completely depilated, so they could differentiate between themselves and non-Mycogenians. Because hair is considered so repulsive, most Mycogenians are repelled by its appearance and rare foreign visitors must wear skincaps at all times. The sight and feel of hair was considered similar to pornography by Mycogenians. By tradition they usually wear a cloak called a 'kirtle'; men always wear a white kirtle, women a gray one. Mycogenian names are organised by 'cohort', and individuals are numbered as part of a series. Known Mycogenians: Mycelium 72, Raindrop 43, Raindrop 45, Sunmaster 14, Skystrip 2.^[26]
- **Nevrask**— One of the last sectors to hold out against Gilmer during the Great Sack
- **North Damiano**— A sector with a prominent University, involved in co-operative Nephelometry with Streeling University. North Damiano University operates Jet-downs equipped with sensory electronics.
- **Streeling**—At the time Hari Seldon first arrived on Trantor, fashions in Streeling were not quite so boldly colorful as in the Imperial Sector. It was the site of Streeling University,^[27] a prestigious university noted for being almost completely out of the hands of the Empire. It later gained fame for housing Hari Seldon and his "Seldon Psychohistory Project".
- **Wye**—The hereditary Mayoralty of the sector of Wye are the descendants of the ancient Dacian Dynasty of Emperors. Located by the South Pole, Wye exercised a good deal of political power, because it was the site where excess heat across the planet was released. If it shut down those systems, the heat would build up and destroy Trantor. During the time of Seldon's flight, Wye was preparing an army for a coup. This action was stopped by Eto Demerzel, and the military of Wye disbanded. Known Wyans: Mayor Mannix IV, Mayor Rashelle I.
- **Ziggoreth**— A sector with a prominent University. Ziggoreth University is involved in co-operative Nephelometric research with Streeling University, and operates Jet-downs equipped with sensory electronics.

Retroactive continuity

- In the original Foundation Trilogy, there is no indication of Trantor being divided among wildly diverse cultures; likewise, the surface is described as covered with towers rather than domes. Its depiction in *Prelude to Foundation* and *Forward the Foundation* may be considered another example of retconning.
- Although some have been confused by the apparent conflict between Trantorian self-sufficiency in terms of food supply in *Prelude* and the subsequent characterization in *Encyclopedia Galactica* of the planet as dependent upon twenty agricultural worlds for food, there is no conflict. *Prelude* depicts an earlier period of Imperial history, and as subsequently explained in *Foundation's Fear*, the food situation on Trantor changed precisely because its subterranean farms were shut down in the wake of the abortive tik-tok rebellion. That book directly establishes that it was this decision that made Trantor dependent on the produce of twenty agricultural worlds—ironically, the same worlds over which Neotrantor would hold its last, feeble sway.

Other authors and Asimov's universe

Bondanella (listed in Further reading) analyzes Asimov's Galactic Empire as an example of the influence of the myth and history of the Roman Empire upon modern fiction. Asimov himself wrote two non-fiction books on the subject of the Roman Empire, aimed at the mass market and young readerships, *The Roman Republic* in 1966 and *The Roman Empire* in 1967, reflecting the positive view of the Roman Empire that then prevailed in the US, as it was considered the prototype of the rising American Empire.

After the cinematic release of the first *Star Wars* trilogy, another parallel to the Roman Empire that presents the negative view of the empire that became widely prevalent in late 20th and early 21st century popular culture as a result of the negative view of the American Empire resulting from the Vietnam War, Asimov revisited his Galactic Empire and wrote further novels in the *Foundation* series.

Other writers to have been influenced by the Roman Empire include, of course, those who have written novels set in Asimov's universe of the Galactic Empire, such as David Brin's *Foundation's Triumph*, and Robert Silverberg, who wrote of an alternative universe in which the Roman Empire never fell, and who edited *Far Horizons* (listed in Further reading) which contains several examples of Asimov's influence upon science fiction. Brian Herbert's and Kevin J. Anderson's *Dune: House Atreides* (1999) is, similarly, a Greek parallel to ancient Rome.^[28]

Other works to have been influenced by Asimov's Empire include Donald Kingsbury's *Psychohistorical Crisis*, whose galactic empire, and the scholar-empire that succeeds it, are clearly based upon Asimov's Galactic Empire and the Foundations, even though Kingsbury was not granted permission to set his work directly in Asimov's universe. Seed calls this work "perhaps the most remarkable homage that any SF writer has received from another SF writer".^[29]

Asimov's Galactic Empire, its decline, fall, and rebirth, in particular, is characterized by Perelman as a simple repetition of the history of Western Civilization (as it was understood then) from the fall of the Roman Empire to the 20th century, borrowing freely from Toynbee, and a validation of postwar American culture of the 1940s and 1950s, with the Second Galactic Empire being "definitely suburban".^[30]

Other writers to explore the cycles of civilisations in their works include James Blish, who studied the works of Oswald Spengler and whose novel *Cities in Flight* (which includes 4 novels: *They Shall Have Stars*, *A Life for the Stars*, *Earthman Come Home*, and *The Triumph of Time*) portray the rise and fall of the galaxy as an inevitable cycle, of which (unlike in other dystopian SF stories of the 1940s and 1950s) the use of machine technology is merely a symptom not the actual cause, and culminate, as in Wollheim's eighth stage, with the end of the universe and the birth of a new one.^{[6][31]}

Colin Manlove characterizes Asimov's description of the Galactic Empire, its people, its culture, its history, and its planets, laid out in the *Foundation* novels as an aesthetic monotony: "persons are usually seen as typical rather than special, even as clichés ... the mutant Mule [...] is not given a personality, he is merely a powerful anomaly ... Nor do we hear much of landscapes, apart from Trantor and one sea-scape ... we do not know how one planet differs from another, as, say, Ursula K. Le Guin differentiates the desert Anarres from the lush twin Urras ... Nor are we given details of battles, lingering accounts of love, different customs of civilisations. There are no animals, only man. ... Thought-processes and conversations largely fill the trilogy, and nearly all these are confined to finding things out and with gaining

power."^[32]^[33]

Inspired by Trantor

There have been some serious attempts to illustrate a planet like Trantor in the *Star Wars* films by George Lucas, the first being Coruscant. Coruscant is a planet-covering open-air city, while Trantor's buildings are all subterranean or under domes^[34] due to worsening weather conditions.^[35] Asimov's Trantor thus differs from Coruscant in that Trantor is more practically adapted to inclement weather, although weather control devices are used on both planets.

The planet Helior in Harry Harrison's *Bill, the Galactic Hero* satirises Trantor, highlighting the problems of atmosphere, waste disposal and navigating about a world-sized city.^[36]

In the *Runaway* series of adventure games, Trantor is home planet of this universe's alien species. However, no connection besides the name are made to the original.

"TrantorCon 23309"^[37] was proposed by Larry Niven at Worldcon in 1976.

The *Warhammer 40,000* sources mention dead cities upon the quarantine planet of *Proxima Trantor*.

Weber's World, the administration planet of the United Planets in the Legion of Super-Heroes's time, is an ecumenopolis and said to be in the Trantor system.^[38]

In the Bobiverse series, one of the human colony planets is named Trantor by Howard, in an explicitly stated homage to the Foundation series (though the planet is initially misspelled by an official who did not recognise the reference).

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