

# If Not For the Fall...

by Mike Combs

[mikecombs@aol.com](mailto:mikecombs@aol.com)

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Establishing shot of Dallas, TX. Cut to a hotel. Interior. Notaro, a brown-skinned man of North African origins is working on a home-made bomb. He sets the timer for 2:30 PM. He leaves, but does not take the bomb with him.

He climbs into a car and drives off. Now he is on a highway heading out of town. He picks up a car phone and presses an auto-dial button.

Voice on phone: Times City Desk, Simpson.

Notaro: Do not talk, listen. This message will not be repeated, and I will not answer any questions. This is a representative of the Fighters for Economic Equality. Our requests have been denied for the last time. We did not even ask you for money. We only asked for food, fuel, and minerals. You contemptuously refused us. While your people wallow in wealth, our people starve by the millions. Know this: The FBI lackeys of the sting operation were not the only ones with which we negotiated for the purchase of nuclear materials. Write it in your paper that on this day we make you pay for your selfishness in blood.

Voice on phone: I'd like to get some further statements from...

Notaro has hung up the phone. He glances at the dashboard clock. It says 2:01 PM. He looks back at the road. The speedometer goes from 71 MPH to 77. Shortly, he is being followed by a police car with flashing lights. Notaro pulls over. 1st Officer asks him for his license, telling him he was doing 78 MPH. 1st Officer takes license back to the squad car. We spend a few seconds on Notaro, as he nervously looks in his rear-view mirror at the policemen.

Cut to interior of squad car.

Voice on radio: Hang on guys, the Chief wants to talk to you.

Chief: Men, this character may possibly be linked to that plutonium sting. We don't have anything to hold him on, but I'm going to get with the FBI to see if they have anything we can use as an excuse to take him in. Stall.

2nd Officer: (To 1st Officer) These license checks can take a long time, can't they?

1st Officer: Oh yeah. Anywhere to fifteen minutes or more.

They sit, watching the suspect.

A lapse dissolve to Notaro. He keeps looking down nervously at the clock. It says 2:21 PM. Cut to interior of squad car.

2nd Officer: I don't know, he looks awful jittery. I'm afraid he's fixin' to

bolt.

1st Officer leaves the squad car and walks over to Notaro's car.

Notaro: (Angrily) Officer, please, I am late for a very important appointment!

The clock says 2:22 PM.

1st Officer: Just hang on a second. First we gotta...

Notaro turns the ignition and punches the accelerator.

1st Officer: Hey!

1st Officer draws his gun, but does not fire. He dashes back to the squad car and takes off in pursuit.

The chase is very high-speed. Notaro passes cars rapidly, honking when his path is blocked. The police stay with him. The clock reads 2:29 PM.

Notaro looks in his rear-view mirror. Shot from Notaro's point of view. In the mirror we see the pursuing squad car. Suddenly, on the cityline behind the squad car there is a brilliant, sun-like burst of light.

Shot of city. It is a nuclear detonation. Shot of Notaro. He is brilliantly back-lit, but there is also an intense light burning directly into his eyes from the rear-view mirror. He cries out and throws up one arm.

The squad car swerves in reaction to the brilliant light, but continues coming after Notaro. Shot from Notaro's point of view. There is a throbbing, yellow after-image in the center of the field of view. We can see a bit of the windshield and dashboard around the edges of the after-image, but little else. The point of view bobs about wildly. We see Notaro wiping at his tearing eyes, trying to see where he's going.

The car goes off the side of the road, up a hill, and then crashes into the side of an overpass. The car catches fire almost immediately and rolls back down the hill a short distance.

A crane shot starts out on the burning car, then lifts up to reveal the cityline, which is also burning. The squad car has stopped, and the officers have stepped out, but they are looking back at the city, not at the car. The sound only now reaches us: a sudden blast which subsides into a continuous roar which rolls like thunder. Fade.

Roll title and beginning credits.

Miniature special effects shot. Scene begins in space. The point of view starts out centered on the Earth. Pan. As the pan approaches ninety degrees we begin to see a thin, arcing line which apparently encircles the Earth. As we pan further, the line is resolved into an endless stretch of innumerable space habitats. They are all linked together and arranged in connected, counter-rotating pairs. The habitats are shaped like short, stubby cold capsules, with a large parabolic mirror on one end shaped something like the reflector on an old-style flash camera. Each habitat points in the same direction with its mirror to the sun, gathering and focusing the sunlight into the interior.

The point of view begins moving rapidly down the row of space habitats, to impress upon the audience the staggering number of them. We slow, approach one of the habitats, and enter.

In the interior we see a vast, curving landscape of green fields, hills, lakes, and cities. It's an inside-out world which uses centrifugal force for artificial gravity. In the center of the habitat, a parabolic mirror reflects the light brought in from the outside throughout the interior, forming a dazzling, realistic, artificial

sun. The cloud deck is shaped in a cylinder around the spin axis. The point of view dives down below this curving cloud deck, flies over the curving landscape beneath it for a short while, and then approaches a university building.

Interior of the building. A female student is looking out the window at the landscape of the habitat. We are inside a classroom where students are mostly seated, awaiting the entrance of their teacher. By contrast with the outer-space setting, neither the design of the room nor the clothing of the students are "spacey" or "futuristic". It looks little different from a university classroom of the 20th century, although there are odd touches here and there: indications of a culture different from our own.

Dr. Tammerott enters, carrying a small briefcase. Tammerott is in his thirties, jovial, energetic, enthusiastic, and typically upbeat.

Class: (In unison, a bit on the jokey side) Good morning, Dr. Tammerott!

Tammerott: (Good naturedly) Good morning, class. Did everyone enjoy the summer?

Class: (Various ad-lib responses)

Tammerott: Well, let's get right down to it. (Sits on the edge of his desk) OK. We spent all of last semester on pre-Fall civilization. We'll be spending this semester on the events leading up to the Fall, and the Second Dark Ages. But first, it might be a good idea to do a quick review of the final decades leading up to the Fall.

A viewscreen lights up behind him. Again: Nothing terribly futuristic, nothing the size of a wall, just a modest big-screen similar what can be found on today's TV sets. As Tammerott speaks, videos play on this screen illustrating the events being described.

Tammerott: Let's start with the 1950's. The Second World War was over. Technology had been advanced considerably by that war, and the global economies were doing very well. Now remember that those economies were powered by fossil fuels pulled from out of the Earth.

It was a time of growing affluence. There was a belief in the concept of continuous progress, with no end in sight. The standard of living was going up, and there was no reason to think that it wouldn't continue to go up forever.

Then came the 1960's. Suddenly there was a new concept, that of limits to growth. There was a sudden realization that the energy and material resources of the Earth were finite after all. A new level of environmental consciousness arose. And more ominously: a distrust of science and technology.

I have a colleague who recently wrote a paper on this very subject. He made one comment that I thought was very profound. If we had emerged from the 60's with a new attitude of caution towards technology, the kind where each new technological option is critically examined by a well-educated populace for both risks and benefits, and a decision is reached based on the trade-offs between the two, then we would have left the 60's with a better attitude than the one we entered it with. But that wasn't the case. The new attitude was an uncritical, knee-jerk, philosophy that if it was technology, it was going to hurt more people than it was going to help. There was no acknowledgment of even the possibility of a technological solution to any of the Earth's problems.

The promoters of this philosophy did not seem to appreciate that technology was an intrinsic part of our humanity. They did not view the development of industrial civilization as a natural part of the evolution of life on Earth; it was instead viewed as a monkey-wrench thrown into a smoothly functioning organic machine. Now in their defense, it is true that human civilization was putting extraordinary stresses on the ecosphere of the Earth at this time in history. But they never seemed to realize that this was merely a situation of technology enabling humanity to become too successful.

Now we are to the 1970's. At the same time that men are walking on the moon, the public is asking why the money isn't being spent to solve all of our problems here on Earth first.

(A slight twitter of laughter goes through the classroom)

Tammerott: Now, now. They didn't have the benefit of hindsight that we do. (Continuing) Also, there were the first discussions of something called an energy crisis.

The 1980's and 90's saw increasing paranoia and a turning away from scientific and rational modes of thought. If you look at the movies and TV shows of the era, you see that large corporations were identified as the source of all evil in the world. Not that they were doing all that well for themselves at the time. This was around the same time that the global economies went into a downturn from which they never recovered. By 1999, even the robust capitalist economies were severely depressed. The rickety socialist ones had by that time already collapsed outright.

The turn of the millennium was marked by an explosion of fanatical cults, most of them of the "end of the world" variety. Larger and larger populations squeeze into the limited living space of Earth, resulting in greater social tensions.

A long time before humanity could burn up the last of the fossil fuels, we had burned up all of the easy-to-get-at energy resources. In the 1930's and 40's the good oil well sites were those where the oil was literally bubbling up out of the ground. Coal was being scraped up practically from the surface. The 21st century saw submersible oil platforms a mile beneath the mid-ocean and coal mining shafts over a mile deep. Well before the point there were no fossil fuels left at all, there were none left that anyone could afford to retrieve. There was not only a new energy crisis, but also a shortage of petroleum-derived substances like plastics and fertilizers.

The world turned to nuclear fission, because fusion still eluded us. But so much fossil fuel had already been burned by this time that the greenhouse effect had altered the climate, and all of the old coastal cities were underwater. Concern for the environment vanished as everyone did whatever it took to maintain their accustomed lifestyle.

The poor nations became poorer. The rich nations jealously guarded their rapidly dwindling wealth. International tensions rose. Disputes intensified. Some nations, frustrated with the inequities and convinced that they had nothing left to lose, tried to use nuclear blackmail to get their way. There were so many nuclear devices left over from the excesses of the Cold War that it was not difficult for anyone to get their hands on them. Some were home-made from the fissionable material which resulted from the expansion of the nuclear industry. Entire cities vanished instantly in blazes of atomic fire.

Social structure broke down as resource depletion intensified. This was what has now come to be known as the Great Fall of Mankind. Our technological level regressed to a state roughly equivalent to that of the Middle Ages, only we were in much worse shape for advancement than we were the first time around. All of the easily retrieved resources of coal, oil, metals and timber were gone.

Now, with what is often called the "crystal clarity of hindsight", it is easy for us to criticize our ancestors for allowing the Great Fall to happen. Why didn't they just apply their brains and their hands to solving their problems? But you've got to remember that these people didn't know what we know today. They didn't know how to build solar power satellites so that they could harness the power of the sun in space to run their civilization in a way that was not environmentally destructive. They didn't know how to mine the moon and the asteroids so that they could quit ripping what they needed out of the skin of the Earth. They didn't know how to build space habitats in high orbit so that increases in population could be accommodated by an increase in the available living area.

Humanity languished in this Second Dark Age for a long time. (Brightening) But we're all sitting here now, so you know the story has a happy ending. Mankind slowly re-accumulated the lost knowledge. He once again ventured forth into space, and, using the mineral wealth of the moon and Earth-approaching asteroids, combined with the limitless energy of the sun in space, created the material wealth which surrounds us now. Wealth which has made the original dream of unending progress and a capless elevation in the standard of living once again a part of our culture.

OK, pop question: How many human beings are alive right now?

At least two or three students raise their hand.

Tammerott: Ascon!

Ascon: Five hundred and... (Rolling eyes upward) forty three billion.

Tammerott: (Twisting with mock frustration) Ooohhh...you were so close! That was almost the right answer. But you know what you forgot to do? You forgot to add the people living on Earth! Ah!

Ascon rolls his eyes with a "Oh, yeah, right." expression on his face.

Tammerott: Five hundred and forty three billion is the correct number for the people living in space habitats. But there are another two billion who still live on Earth. So you have to say five hundred and forty five billion total.

Two billion people walking around on that same big ball. Now, imagine seven billion human beings crowded into that same amount of space. Now you begin to see the nature of the problem. There were over seven billion people on the Earth immediately prior to the Great Fall. Now, granted, the Earth is a tremendously big ball, so this was by no means "standing room only". But think of the environmental pressures of this many people pursuing energy, natural resources, and a decent place to live.

There was a lot of talk back then about the "over-population problem". What they didn't seem to realize was that over-population wasn't the disease, it was the symptom. The disease was poverty. They never seemed to appreciate that if they could only have lifted the poorer nations of the world up to the living standards enjoyed by the developed nations, then the so-called

"over-population problem" would have solved itself. But if anyone did give a thought to elevating the undeveloped nations to a decent standard of living, they assumed that humanity was limited to only the energy and material resources of the Earth, and thus dismissed the goal as impossible. But of course these economic disparities were the root cause of much of the political unrest which made the social fabric unravel in the end.

**A student raises her hand.**

Tammerott: Yes, Hunas?

Hunas: Earlier you said that people at the end of the twentieth century didn't know how to mine space or build Solar Power Satellites. But surely they must have had the technological capability. I mean, you told us that they sent men to the moon in 1969; they knew how to mine and smelt ores and build large structures like supertankers. Why couldn't they have expanded out into space?

Tammerott: That's a real good question, one that has puzzled myself. You are absolutely right, it was not a matter of not having the technology. We estimate that they could have colonized space any time from the late 1970's onward. Why they didn't is one of the great riddles of history. Part of it, I think, relates to what I said earlier about the rejection of technology. The problem was never perceived as technology making the human race too successful, technology was considered the root cause of all of the problems. Obviously something which is the cause of all your problems in the first place can't be part of your solution.

Another thing (which I have written a couple of papers on) is this: If you look at the science fiction of the era, you note that it all deals with living on other Earth-like planets in other solar systems. The idea of living on anything other than a planet seems to have been outside the scope of their imagination. You know, it's like: I was born on a planet, I have lived all my life on a planet, I will die on a planet. Therefore, in the distant future people will live on...other planets! Now Hollywood had no problem stocking the galaxy with hundreds of Earthlike worlds. But our astronomers now estimate that not one solar system out of ten thousand might have a planet close enough in composition and environment to Earth to make it suitable for settlement. But even finding another Earth right next door would have only postponed the inevitable until the population doubled again. Towards the end, that was happening roughly every thirty years.

They could not conceive of a practical means of expanding into space. The idea of building and living in artificial habitats seems never to have occurred to them. They could not see any connection between space and the solution to their global problems. And so their civilization fell.

**Sometime later, Tammerott is entering his office. A man in his early forties, carrying a briefcase, is waiting nearby. He walks up to Tammerott.**

Ossmuer: Dr. Tammerott?

Tammerott: Yes sir?

Ossmuer: I'm Rihah Ossmuer of the Earth Archeological Foundation. Can I speak to you a moment?

Tammerott: Are you a digger? Or do you just raise money for the Foundation?

Ossmuer: (Smiling) I'm a digger.

Tammerott: In that case, come on in and take a seat.

Tammerott's office is decorated with various aged artifacts from the 20th century.

Tammerott: What can I do for you today?

Ossmuer: We've recently begun new digs in the center of Dallas. It's only been in the last couple of decades that the radioactivity has died down sufficiently to make it safe to enter. Due to the radiation, there has been no looting there since before the Fall, and the vegetation encroachment is only about twenty year's worth. So the ruins are fairly well-preserved there.

We've made an interesting discovery in the sub-basement of a mostly-intact building we've found. (Pulls a photograph out of briefcase, hesitates) Since you're a historian specializing in the 20th century, I assume you can read English?

Tammerott: Read it, and speak it, too. Although I have a colleague in the Dead Languages Department who informs me that I speak it with a decidedly modern accent.

Ossmuer hands over the photo. It shows a dust-covered door with a sign over it.

Ossmuer: Can you read that?

Tammerott: Yes. (Grows excited) It says "CD-ROM Library"! (Looks up) Laser disks!

Ossmuer: And there are. Hundreds of them. Only one problem. None of the hardware works anymore. We've managed to build a computer that's sufficiently compatible, and have programmed it to emulate the operating system needed. There's just one more thing we require...

Tammerott: (Grinning with delight) You don't have a working laser disk reader!

Ossmuer: Right. And...

Tammerott: And I do. Recovered it during last year's Paris dig. We have it actually working, although we've only got two readable 20th century disks in our whole Antiquities Collection.

Ossmuer: Right. So we were wanting to borrow it for...

Tammerott: Oh, no you don't.

Ossmuer: Excuse me?

Tammerott: That's not what you want to do. What you want to do is to invite me along on your next expedition. Then I can bring my laser disk reader along with me.

Ossmuer: (Can't help but smile a little) So that's the deal?

Tammerott: You bet. Hey, you can never have enough pre-Fall historians along on an dig. I'll be useful to you. This is the greatest archeological find of the century. There's no way I'm missing out on this.

Ossmuer: All right. When do you finish up here?

Tammerott: Oh I can leave today. Callor can take over my classes until I get back.

Ossmuer: OK. Meet you at the spacedock in three hours.

Miniature special effects shot. An slim, delta-winged aerospace plane is docked at the habitat. The following dialog plays over effects shots of the shuttle undocking, backing away from the habitat, maneuvering around, and passing by many different habitats.

Tammerott: You know, this little gadget is a real marvel of pre-Fall technology. For example, the buffer inside it is 1 MEG. Now that's twice as much memory as there is in that businessman's laptop computer over there. And this wasn't a computer, just a peripheral that you plug into a computer. The computer it hooked up to could have had 8, maybe as much as 16 MEG of memory. There's no denying that pre-Fall civilization was more advanced than our own where integrated circuits are concerned. If we were to be honest, we'd have to question if our micro-circuit technology would be as advanced as it is today if it weren't for guys like you and I digging IC's up out of the ground.

Ossmuer: Now that brings up an interesting question. As an expert on the 20th century, how would you compare our current level of advancement?

Tammerott: Well, it's a mixture. Certainly our knowledge of astronomy and particle physics is well in advance of anything which existed before the Fall. But as we were saying, we are only just now starting to catch up in the area of computers. And another thing: they did something called genetic engineering. They had a program called The Human Genome Project: nothing less ambitious than a complete cataloging all human chromosomes. We probably won't be in a position to start anything like that for several decades.

But, if we average everything out, I'd say that right now, we are as advanced as they were in the late-late 20th century. Say the 1990's.

As this last line is being spoken, the aerospace plane is passing by a particularly large, particularly impressive space habitat. The craft then fires its engines and begins moving off in the direction of Earth.

FX budget permitting, we have shots of the aerospace plane passing over a rather beautiful city of the future.

Lapse dissolve to...

Table-top-miniature special effects shot. We see crumbling buildings, and ruined streets. Weeds sprout through the decayed asphalt and cement such that the landscape looks as much a jungle as a city.

An odd-looking wheeled vehicle enters the shot, rolling down the shattered street. It clammers over piles of the concrete which has fallen from the buildings over the years.

Interior of the vehicle. Tammerott and Ossmuer are passengers. The driver is Calleda, a woman in her late twenties. They rock back and forth as the vehicle navigates the difficult terrain.

Table-top-miniature special effects shot. The vehicle pulls up to a rather large mound of pulverized concrete and then brakes to a halt.

Interior.

Calledda: This is as far as we can go in the vehicle. We're on foot from this point onward.

Calledda leaves the driver's seat and moves over to a storage locker. Tammerott sticks his CD-ROM drive into a backpack and slings it over his shoulder. Calledda pulls three sleek, yet strange-looking electric rifles out of the locker, hands one to Tammerott, and then one to Ossmuer.

Tammerott: Hey, Calledda. (Holds up rifle) What do I need this for?

Calledda: You'll want to have it, trust me.

Forced-perspective special effects shot. In the foreground we see the miniature rubble pile with the vehicle sitting in front of it. Behind these miniature elements, the trio descend the far slope of the pile of broken concrete and set off away from the camera.

The three march along. Tammerott sidles up to Ossmuer.

Tammerott: Ossmuer! Who the heck do we have to fear in this god-forsaken city?

Ossmuer: There are...tribes...that live on the edges of the city. After the nuclear blast, this entire county was declared a forbidden area. But the radiation on the very edges of the city was low enough to still permit life. Certain...groups...who did not desire contact with the rest of the world settled in the outskirts. But since they've noticed us coming into the center of the city, they've slowly gotten over their fear of ground zero. They get bolder every day.

Tammerott: A tribe of people, cut off from human civilization since before the Fall! What a fantastic story! I have some anthropologist friends who would probably like to live among them, and learn about them.

Ossmuer: (Shaking head) You wouldn't want to "live among" these people.

The threesome continue, penetrating deeper into the city. Gradually, they all come to realize they are being watched from behind the ruined storefronts and scattered piles of rubble. We have several shots of crouching figures, dressed in hooded rags, scurrying from one observation point to the next as they keep up with the three intruders.

Finally, a procession of about twenty of the hooded figures walks out from behind the corner of a building ahead. Our trio comes to a halt. The mob advances to about thirty feet ahead of the three and stop. They are filthy. None are older than 40. One is lame, another has a grotesque harelip. Many are armed with crossbows. Several hold thick bundles of ancient, crumbling paper which they clutch to their breasts protectively. One holds a banner which has a picture drawn in charcoal. It is a sketch of a man whose face is obscured by a wind-breaker hood, 20th century sunglasses, and a mustache.

Tammerott: (To the other two) The Unacult! Dammit, why didn't you tell me they were Unacultists?

One, who is apparently the leader, takes two steps forward.

Leader: You will be permitted to go no farther.

Ossmuer: We have no desire to hurt you, or any of your people. But we are in this city for a purpose. Please stand aside.

Leader: We know what your purpose here is! You seek to uncover the old

knowledge. The forbidden knowledge! We will not allow this.

Tammerott: We only seek to know our ancestors better, so that we may understand ourselves better.

Leader: You lie! You want the old technology. The technology which poisoned the world, and robbed man of his freedom. You seek a return to the old ways, ways we have renounced for all humanity.

Ossmuer: There's more to the world than just this nuclear-blasted city! There is more than just Earth, there's an entire solar system. You've been living in this place for so many generations that you've forgotten. You should see the world outside! You would consider it a paradise, a utopia!

Leader: We know of your world. We simply choose not to be a part of it. We have lived here, uncontaminated by your *science* and your *knowledge*, living as man was meant to live. Living as prescribed in The Manifesto. (Gestures to one of the rotting bundles of paper held by a follower) As it was laid down before the Fall by He Who Could Not Be Caught, He Who Avenged in the Name of Nature, He Who Laid Waste to the World That Was.

Tammerott: (Increasingly angry) Your history is seriously flawed. They finally did catch the Unabomber in the end. And another thing: that bastard didn't lay waste to civilization! Civilization fell apart all by itself because of too many people chasing after too few resources! All the Unabomber ever succeeded in doing was blowing the arms off of secretaries!!

Calledda: (Aside) Good. Blasphemy. That's going to help us out.

The leader's face is even darker than before.

Leader: You will not pass. We would sooner destroy you and all your heathen world and all of your decadent heavens than permit it.

The Unacultists begin to move in a threatening manner, raising their crossbows. The trio bring their electric rifles to bear.

Calledda: Don't do it!

A cultist fires his crossbow. The arrow whizzes between Tammerott and Ossmuer's head. The three simultaneously begin firing back and diving for cover. The electric rifles make a curious sound: the sound of bullets slicing air without the crack of gunpowder, and fire brilliant tracers as well as bullets.

The mob begins to scatter. Ossmuer, Calledda, and Tammerott fire from behind their cover. Many arrows fly by them. Ossmuer suffers a glancing blow to one elbow, but his injury is more an abrasion than a penetration. On the other hand, the rifles have a devastating effect on the Unacultists. By the time half a dozen have fallen, the rest begin their retreat. Within seconds, they are gone. Ossmuer, Calledda, and Tammerott slowly begin to relax, untense, and look a bit weary.

Lapse dissolve. The trio are again trudging up the shattered streets. Ossmuer has a bandage on his arm. They all come to a building and enter. Each turns on a flashlight.

Ossmuer: Say, before we go on down, I want to show you one other archeological discovery we made here.

Ossmuer leads the party over to one side of the foyer of the building, still within sight of the entrance and

the broken windows. Tammerott looks down past the camera and gasps with astonishment.

Table-top-miniature special effect shot. We see the opposite corner of the room. There is a gridline of strings set up, along with some cards with numbers on them. In the midst of this grid, the shifting flashlights reveal about half a dozen skeletons. They are grotesquely disfigured. Some have extra limbs which are small and underdeveloped. Others are twisted into bizarre, inhuman curves.

Ossmuer: This is the last generation to live in the heart of the city. Judging from their deformities, we doubt this tribe had survived much beyond three or four generations.

Tammerott kneels and reaches down out of camera range and comes back with an upper skull. Although there are only three eye sockets, the skull has the appearance of two skulls fused together into one at the top, with two pairs of nasal openings and two separate upper jaws. Tammerott shudders briefly, and then carefully places the skull back down where it was.

Calledda: At the point of their extinction, we place them at roughly a Neanderthal level of development.

The group proceeds onward, descending a series of stairs and arriving at the door seen in the photograph earlier. They enter. Ossmuer switches on a portable generator which sits in one corner. Worklights light up. A computer is set up on a modern table in the middle of the room. Along one wall is an ancient shelf with a couple of hundred CD-ROM "jewelry cases".

Tammerott pulls his CD-ROM drive out of his backpack, plugs it in, and hooks it up to the computer. Calledda seats herself at the computer and begins working on it.

Ossmuer: Alright, Dr. Tammerott. The honor is yours. Of all the mysteries of the 20th Century, which would you like to see solved first?

Tammerott: (After thinking a second or two) In the 1970's America launched two space probes called Voyager. They actually left the solar system. There were golden phonograph records mounted on the side of each probe against the possibility of them being found by an alien civilization. Each record was a collection of the sights, sounds, and music of the 20th century. A lot of my colleagues and I sure would like to know the exact heading of those probes, so we could retrieve them for study. At the speeds they're going, they wouldn't see another solar system for tens of thousands of years anyway. They might as well serve to help us understand pre-fall civilization better.

Ossmuer: OK. (Turns to the shelf) So we want "Space". Under the English letter "S". Here we are.

Ossmuer pulls out a CD and removes it from the case, handling it like crown jewels. He inserts it into the drive with high anticipation. The computer screen fills with a directory. All three cheer and laugh. Ossmuer pumps his fists in triumph. Tammerott hunches down beside Calledda.

Tammerott: OK, the name of the probes were Voyagers One and Two...

Calledda: Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. What's this?

Calledda is pointing to the directory on the screen. There is a long, alphabetized listing of subjects that begin with the word "space". Calledda's finger is below "space settlement".

Calledda: I don't know what they're teaching in history class now, Professor, but I was taught that pre-Fall civilization *had* no conception of space

settlement.

Tammerott: (Off balance for just a second, but then recovering) Well, Calledda, when a 20th century reference says "space settlement", it doesn't mean the same thing as our modern usage of the phrase. I know it says "space", but you'd probably find that it refers to the building of cities on the moon, attempts to terraform Mars or Venus. That sort of thing.

Calledda: Let's find out.

She moves the cursor to this selection and presses "Enter". The screen begins to fill with text and pictures. The camera's point of view shifts behind the computer, with Tammerott, Ossmuer, and Calledda facing in the direction of the camera.

Calledda: My God. It's all here. Geosynchronous Solar Power Satellites. Lunar mines. Capturing asteroids into high Earth orbit for resources. Artificial, closed-ecology habitats in space.

Ossmuer: Every cornerstone of our modern civilization. It's all right here. (Pause) What happened?

Calledda: These ideas came into theoretical discussion in the 1970's. But I can't find any indication that actual work on the concepts ever started. Discussion seems to trail off as you get closer to the end of the millennium.

Tammerott moves away from the computer and looks off to one side, dazed.

Ossmuer: It's something I've seen in history again and again. Sometimes it seems like good ideas can be brought up before the world is really ready for them. They then languish for decades or centuries until the human race is ready to rediscover and use them.

Calledda: If only these ideas had fallen on more fertile ground and taken root! If we had expanded into space back then, civilization probably would never have fallen. If not for the Fall, where would we be at right now?

Ossmuer: Oh, we would've been to the starship stage by now. The first starships would probably have left the solar system around the year...10,200, say. That means right now we would be getting radio messages back from other star systems almost 250 light years away. God. How much time humanity has squandered.

Ossmuer turns to look back at Tammerott, who looks emotionally devastated.

Ossmuer: Tammerott! Are you gonna be OK? (Pause) Are you crying, man?

Tammerott: I'm crying for all of the lost generations of Mankind. Millenniums of human beings suffering in a Second Dark Age that was unnecessary. An age of untold misery that could have been prevented if only we'd had the faith in ourselves to solve our problems.

I've been teaching my students a lie all these years. I told them that 20th century man lacked the imagination to save himself. It isn't true. He had the imagination. He just lacked the will.

Miniature special effects shot. Exterior view of the same space habitat we saw before.

Interior. Tammerott is in his office. He is dictating into a microphone.

Tammerott: The laser disks of the library in Dallas continue to provide new insights into the nature of the civilization which existed before the Great Fall. But will they ever help us to understand the crisis of confidence which led to that fall? Can we hope to understand what makes a society fail to acknowledge the possibility of a solution to its problems, even when the solutions are known? How does a global culture fall into the fatalistic mindset that nothing is worth doing anymore? How can human beings gifted with brains and hands denigrate the value of knowledge and technology?

I find myself thinking again and again of all the wasted human lives that came and passed on during that long, long night of the Second Dark Ages. Of the vast human potential squandered.

Even before the Fall, they used to say "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it". It is our hope that by examining the philosophies of those who allowed failure on a planetary scale, we can be vigilant against those attitudes when they creep into our own culture.

Dr. J. L. Tammerott,

April 13th, 10,698 Anno Domini

Turns off microphone and sets it down.

Tammerott: (Softly) What a waste of time.

Fade out.

Roll end credits.

**The End**

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