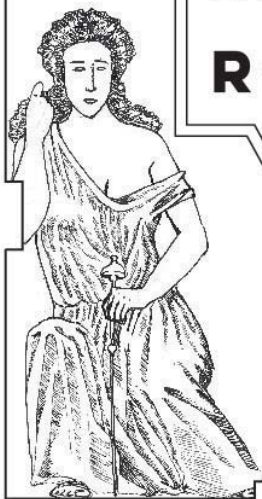


**THE ALTERNATIVE HISTORY
OF THE
DECLINE AND FALL
OF THE
ROMAN EMPIRE**

M. D. MISSAIEL



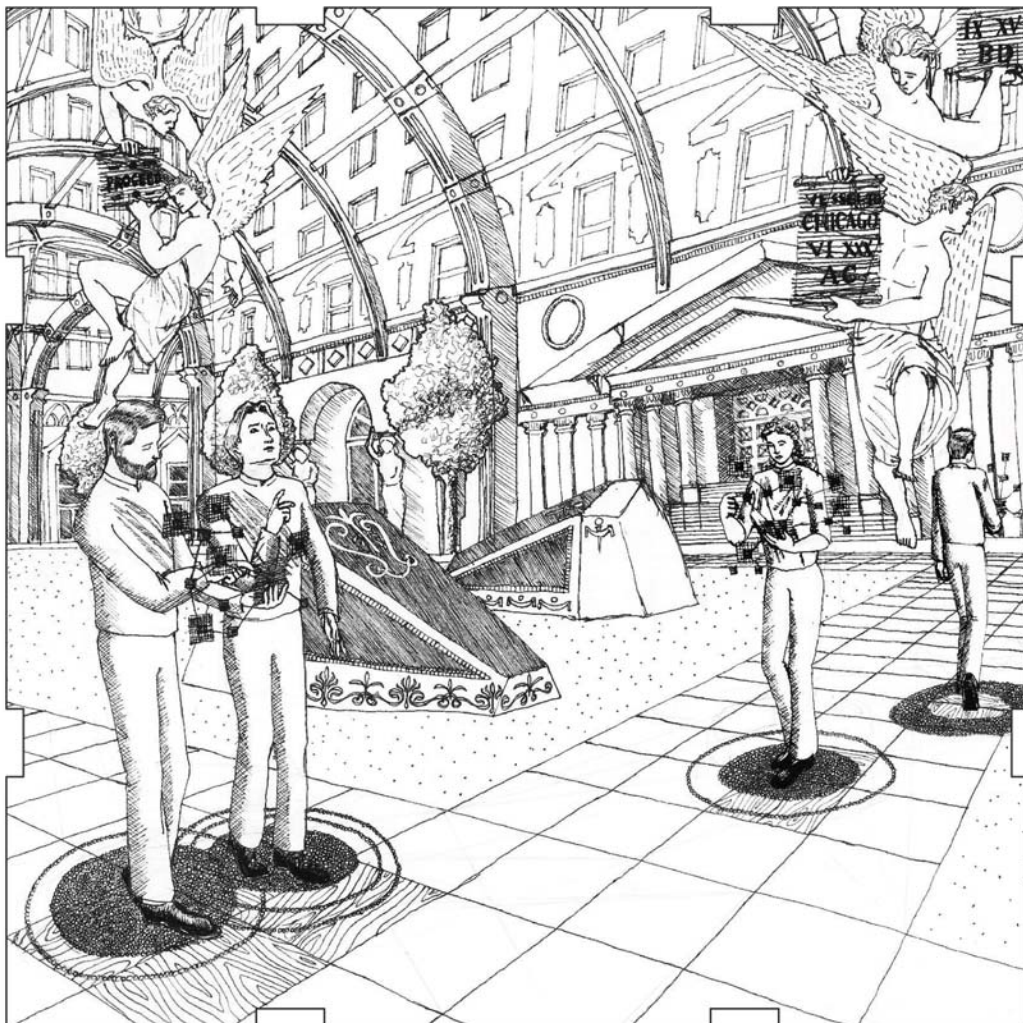


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“As victors, the Third Triumvirate were expected to follow in the tradition of their predecessors in victory, to annihilate their defeated opponents, to fight each other for the throne, and for the sole ruler to establish a dynasty of privileged princes and madmen. History was expected to repeat itself. But they instead united for the greater good, established the New Roman Republic on democratic ideals, and set a precedent for enlightened governance. Instead of the status quo, their legacy broke the cycle and set history on a new trajectory.”

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“I stepped inside the Mayflower, regrettably alone with no others to experience my odyssey with me or even witness the storm of my coming and going. You may not have seen it, but I was gone for a while and had a rough landing there and back. I had hardly started to walk around and almost took out my phone to view the augmented interiors when the door locked behind me, and the vessel started rocking and twisting beyond control or balance. I was on the ground and in panic until, after several minutes of what looked and felt like a whirlwind, the vessel finally settled, and the door unlocked again. I hurried outside to try and find you all but was most astounded to find myself not on the Wharf in this exhibit surrounded by you all and by extravagantly clad guests, but on a different port.

“I felt I was either concussed, disoriented, or dreaming as I walked outside onto that strange port, of a strange city, lined with strange ships, and populated by strange people, almost futuristic but I could not be sure. The city skyline had the tallest skyscrapers I have ever seen, but they were not simple steel and glass skyscrapers, rather adorned with the most ornate Baroque sculptures and Classical columns. The ships had three rows of oars like this ancient Roman trireme, but they also seemed to have the capability to fly and to dive, as some ships would land in the dock from the air, and some would dive in the water. The oars could transform into wings to



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function as a plane, or they could retract to function as a submarine. The people wore almost identical clothing, a shirt and pants, with a toga-like sash over one shoulder for men or both shoulders for women, but their suits were technologically enhanced to project holograms upon pushing certain spots or to communicate with other technology and even architecture. As people moved, statues moved in response, doors opened, vehicles molded to their bodies for safety, and rooms equipped with dynamic floors and signs would also respond to people's movement. I stumbled upon a mirror where I examined myself. I looked very different with longer lighter hair, hazel eyes, and a straighter nose. I was wearing a similar suit to what other people wore, in mostly black with hints of red. When I pressed different spots on my sleeves, different maps, headlines, and activities appeared in projected holograms.

"In this bizarre Greco-Roman-futuristic world, my bemused mind was riddled with too many questions to think clearly. By instinct, I reached for my phone inside my pocket, but instead of my phone I undug a strange device with "Frank" inscribed on it. Given that it had no buttons or screen and given the nature of most technology I had seen so far, I presumed it was a holographic device, but I could not be sure how to use it. I started walking, sometimes running, wandering until I would hopefully wake up. However, instead of waking up, I kept



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walking, sometimes running, always questioning and theorizing on what had just happened, where I was, what year this was, and what became of my own world. Having tried and failed to wake up from what I thought was a dream, I decided to walk back to the port in an attempt to board the Mayflower and come back to my family and my job. On the way back, I noticed and admired the seemingly impossible architecture. It was snowing when I was at the docks earlier, but inside the city the snow stopped at the glass roof that covered all the streets. It was warm underneath the glass roof, creating a climate-controlled exterior space, lined with trees and fountains that even further moderate the temperature and enhance the aesthetic of the civic space. Rows of decorative sculptures doubled as structural support for the glass roof. The buildings themselves were intricately adorned with colorful, detailed pediments, domes, and dynamic gravity-defying statues. I arrived at the dock and noticed the rotating Hermes statues were floating atop high columns, holding holographic screens with the ship schedule on display. As I was observing this artistic and technological marvel of a cityscape, I admired that this advanced technology enhanced the arts, unlike most typical science-fiction cities that depicted a future of hyper-advanced technology, with a minimalist soul-less aesthetic. As I was walking back toward the Mayflower, in hopes to escape this strange yet intriguing



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world and return to my own, I was stopped by a stranger who was confident he knew me.

“ ‘Frank!’ he called me by the name I saw inscribed on my pocket hologram. He was a slightly older bearded man dressed in the same suit as me but with hints of dark green instead of red. I thought we were to meet at Chez Chavez in the city. No matter, let’s walk there together. Are we ready for the meeting with the Consul?’

“I had to use my quick judgment and decide whether to find my way home as planned or to accompany this stranger in this new quest. I was part compelled by social and personal decorum not to abandon this strange man’s conversation, and I was part curious to discover more of that new world, adventure, and identity, so I decided to keep up the pretense of this new identity and accompany him. Curious as I was, I would proceed with caution because while I was growing comfortable in this hyper-advanced world, it was still unfamiliar, and I still wanted to come home. I followed him until we went to a bistro restaurant, with a holographic sign saying ‘Chez Chavez’. We walked up to a table in the back yard and took a seat as chairs pulled themselves up behind us. A waitress came and took our order, and upon my partner’s recommendation I ordered a venison steak topped with mashed seaweed, I suppose their



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equivalent of surf and turf. She then asked me to pick a deer from the yard. Used to hunting, I was impressed by the idea of picking your own deer like you would lobster. But as I found out they do not kill the deer, but only extract enough genetic data to generate an authentic steak. The process of extraction, generation, and cooking all took under ten minutes, and our plates were ready.

“As we were eating, my partner perused his pocket hologram to prepare for our anticipated meeting, and I watched the way he used his device, and I maneuvered my own device the same way. Upon accessing the hologram, I scoured the digital documents I had in store to learn more about my new identity as Frank. This compact device included mostly work documents and travel itineraries, as well as my personal identification and financial items.

“Frank L. Sittingbull

“L.F. Government

“Traveling Emissary

“Age: 28

“Birthplace: Chicago

“Current Project: Materials Offset



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“Objective: To legislate a universal policy to generate more resources and materials than we use, thus ensuring sustainable use and preventing depletion of resources.

“Itinerary:

“Day One: Kick-Off: Liberia

“Day Two: Europe: Britain, Rome

“Day Three: Meso-Eurasia: Persia

“Day Four: East Asia: Japan, China

“Day Five: Africa: Ethiopia, Nubia, Egypt

“Day Six: Newfound World: Mexico

“Day Seven: Concord: Chronus

“There were more items in the documents than I could quickly read before my partner, whose name I learned was Henry Speaksall, motioned me to follow him to our ride. There was still a bit of venison on my dish that I packaged to-go hoping to keep it in the car, and then I followed Speaksall to a fully furnished driver-less coach that would transport us to our meeting with the Consul. Before I could verbalize the questions of what time we were expected or how far away the destination was, we were already there. This coach sped through at least



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several miles in what must have been under three minutes, and we landed in a grand courtyard. Surprisingly the ride on the coach did not give me the motion-sickness or the dizziness I would expect of that speed. The objects and streets outside the coach window were not discernable with how fast we went, but it was a rather smooth ride with no turbulence or sharp turns. As we de-boarded the coach, Speaksall and I were greeted by ushers who would lead us inside the Grand House, where the Consul lived and governed, showing us to a room where we waited for the Consul. From the outermost gardens to the innermost offices, I noticed every corner of the Grand House was the epitome of grandeur, furnished in impressive art and technology. Floor patterns, wall paintings, and sculptures were all intricately detailed and, like the dynamic architecture I had seen in the city, moved and changed shape in response to our movement.

“ ‘Gentlemen,’ said a man of authority whom I could only assume was Consul O’Barry, ‘Pleased to welcome you back.’

“ ‘Mr. Consul,’ said my partner, ‘Our pleasure to be back. We are ready to convene.’

“We were led to his office and immediately proceeded with the conversation regarding the Mission, but the conversation was largely between Consul O’Barry and Speaksall, as I knew



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too little to contribute.

“ ‘The paperwork for your mission has already been completed, gentlemen,’ said the Consul, ‘but how do we ensure success for Materials Offset when Materials Replenished fell short?’

“ ‘With all our international audiences,’ Speaksall responded, ‘we will together reflect on the reasons Materials Replenished failed, so we together prevent history from repeating itself. We have also incorporated an incentive program that encourages businesses and citizens to participate, as well as strengthened restrictions and plugged loopholes to prevent the hijacking of the Materials Offset initiative by special interest groups. It is unfortunate that humanity is naturally partial to short-term indulgence over long-term benefit. Therefore, the general public requires incentives to take small steps, and special interests require restrictions to remove their powerful influence.’

“ ‘Luckily you will have the support of many enlightened governments that prioritize long-term benefit. I have already spoken with leaders from all continents and planets, many of whom pledged their vote for this initiative, but some are still skeptical, some opposed, and some less than informed.’

“ ‘We will recruit their support as well. But besides its global



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benefit, we especially need to apply this here at home. This great country of ours is the most prosperous of any place in the world of any time in history, which also means our citizens currently consume and pollute the most of any place in the world, of any time in history.'

" 'We certainly will apply this at home. We lead the world by example and principle, and that is the source of our global power, not oppressive and manipulative influence. We shall start to implement upon your prompt return. Best of tides, gentlemen!'

"After bidding the Consul farewell, we were ushered out of the Grand House, and we boarded the coach that we left parked outside. This coach would be our means of lodging and transport for the seven-day expedition. Speaksall set the coordinates for England, our first destination, and pushed a lever to collapse two of the wardrobe compartments into beds. Before we let the coach drive and sail us to our anticipated audience, we decided to spend the night resting before the journey starting the next day. Speaksall went to sleep, but I was too incensed with curiosity to fall asleep. Instead of fatigue and overwhelm, being on this journey and being assigned a seemingly great responsibility compelled me to learn everything I could. As I was eating my left-over steak, I unlocked the



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holographic device I had in my pocket, which they called the Pharos, and located all the documents required for this expedition. The very thorough files contained the detailed proposal, the countries to visit, the talking points for every country, the speech for every region, the research behind the talking points. Speaksall was right to rest, for this expedition promises a laborious mission, apparently filled with diplomatic ties to affirm, heads of state to meet, and international audiences to address. The more I read about our mission, the more I appreciated the progress that world had made, that they could advocate for such a sustainable solution worldwide. That they not only used resources responsibly but were attempting to regenerate resources at a higher rate than consumption. I was no less anxious to come home to my wife and to my job, but I was ever more intrigued and still had too many questions about where I was and what took me there.