

# ***EVERYTHING BUT HONOR***

***By***

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Dr. Thomas Placide, a black American-born physicist, decided to murder Brigadier General David E. Twiggs, and he realized that it had to be done in December of 1860. He made this decision at the Berlin Olympics of 1936. Jesse Owens had just triumphed over the world's best runners in the two-hundred-meter dash. The physicist jumped up and cheered for the American victory, while his companion applauded politely. Yaakov Fein was one of the most influential scientists in the German Empire, but he was no chauvinist. After the race, Owens was presented to Prince Friedrich. The papers later reported that the prince had apologized for the absence of the seventy-seven-year-old Kaiser, and Owens had replied, "I'm sure the most powerful man in the world has more important things to do than watch six young men in their underwear run halfway around a circle." The quotation may have been the product of some journalist's imagination, but it became so identified with Jesse Owens that there was no point in arguing about it.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Placide settled back in his seat and looked at his program, getting himself ready for the next event. "You must be proud of him," said Fein. "A fellow Negro."

"I *am* proud of him," Placide said. "A fellow American."

"But you are a naturalized German citizen now, Thomas. You should cheer for the German runners."

Placide only shrugged.

Fein went on. "It's a hopeful sign that a Negro has finally won a place on the American Olympic team."

Placide showed some annoyance. "In America, Negroes have equal rights these days."

"Separate, but equal," said Fein. "

The black man turned to him. "They aren't slaves anymore, if that's what you're implying. The German Empire has this fatuous paternal concern for all the downtrodden people in the world. Maybe you haven't noticed it, but the rest of the world is getting pretty damn tired of your meddling."

"We believe in using our influence for everyone's benefit."

That seemed to irritate Placide even more. "Every time some Klan bigot burns a cross in Mississippi, you Germans—"

Fein smiled. "*We* Germans, you mean," he said.

Placide frowned. "All right, we Germans send over a goddamn 'peacekeeping force' for the next nine months."

Fein patted the air between them. "Calm down, Thomas," he said, "you're being far too sensitive."

"Let's just watch the track and field events, and forget the social criticism."

"All right with me," said Fein. They dropped the subject for the moment, but Placide was sure that it would come up again soon.

Two years later, in November 1938, Dr. Placide was selected to make the first full-scale operational test of the Cage. He liked to think it was because of his contribution to the project. His journey through time would be through the courtesy of the Placide-Born-Dirac Effect, and neither Max Born nor Paul Dirac expressed any enthusiasm for the chance to act as guinea pig. In Berlin and Gottingen, there was a great deal of argument over just what the Placide-Born-Dirac Effect was, and the more conservative theorists wanted to limit the experiments to making beer steins and rodents disappear, which Placide and Fein had been doing for over a year.

“My point,” said Placide at a conference of leading physicists in Gottingen, “is that after all this successful study, it’s time for someone to hop in the Cage and find out what’s happening, once and for all.”

“I think it’s certainly time to take the next step,” said Werner Heisenberg.

“I agree,” said Erwin Schrodinger.

Dirac rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “Nevertheless,” he said, “it’s much too soon to talk about human subjects.”

“Are you seriously suggesting we risk a human life on the basis of our ill-fated and unproven theories?” asked Albert Einstein.

Zach Marquand shrugged. “It would be a chance to clear up all the foggy rhetoric about paradoxes,” he said.

Edward La Martine just stood to one side, sullenly shaking his head. He obviously thought Placide’s suggestion was unsound, if not altogether insane.

“We have four in favor of using a human subject in the Cage, and four against,” said Fein. He took a deep breath and let it out as a sigh. “I’m the project director, and I suppose it’s my responsibility to settle this matter. God help me if I choose wrong. I say we go ahead and expand the scope of the experiment.”

Placide looked relieved. “Let me volunteer, then,” he said.

“Typical American recklessness,” said La Martine in a sour voice.

“You mean,” said Placide, “that you’ll be happy if I’m the one in the Cage. Not as a reward for my work, of course, but because if anybody’s alternate history is going to be screwed up, better it be America’s than Germany’s.”

La Martine just spread his hands and said nothing.

“Then I volunteer to go along,” said Fein. “As copilot.”

“There’s nothing for a copilot to do,” said Placide. Even then, it may have been that Fein didn’t have complete faith in Placide’s motives.

Placide had his own agenda, after all, but he kept it secret from the others.

“Why don’t you travel back a week or so,” suggested Bonn. “Then you can take a photograph or find some other proof to validate the experiment, and return immediately to Gottingen and time  $T_0$ .”

“In for a penny, in for a pound,” said Placide. “I’d like to choose my own destination, and possibly solve a little historical problem while I have the chance.” The Cage would never have existed without him, and so it didn’t take him long to persuade the others. Placide and Fein worked with Marquand and his team

for nine more weeks learning to calibrate the Cage. In the meantime, Placide studied everything he could find about General Twiggs, and he carefully hid his true plan from the Europeans.

Placide should have known that his first attempt would not go smoothly, but as far as he could see, his plan was foolproof. His reasoning was simple: His primary goal—greater even than testing the operation of the Cage—was to relieve the barbaric conditions forced on American blacks following the Confederate Insurrection of 1861.

Although he'd quit the land of his birth, he still felt an unbreakable bond between himself and others of his race, who could never escape the oppression as he had. A white friend of his father had enabled Placide to attend Yale University, where he'd studied math, and physics. During the middle 1930s, after he joined the great community of experimental scientists working in the German Empire, he began to see how he might accomplish something far more important than adding a new quibble to the study of particle physics.

The Cage—*his* Cage, as he sometimes thought of it—gave him the opportunity to make a vital contribution. His unhappy experiences as a child and a young man in the United States supplied him with sufficient motive. All he lacked was the means, and this he found through historical research as painstaking as his scientific work with Dirac and Born.

To Placide, Brigadier General David Emanuel Twiggs seemed to be one of those anonymous yet crucial players in the long game of history. In 1860 he was the military commander of the Department of Texas. Although few students of the Confederate Insurrection would even recognize his name, Twiggs nevertheless had a moment, the briefest moment, when he determined the course of future events. Placide had come to realize that Twiggs was his target. Twiggs could be used to liberate American blacks from all the racist hardships and injustices of the twentieth century.

Leaving  $T_0$ , the Cage brought Placide and Yaakov Fein to San Antonio on December 24, 1860. Fein agreed to guard the Cage, which had come to rest in a wintry field about three miles from Twiggs's headquarters. Fein, of course, had no idea that Placide had anything in mind other than a quick scouting trip into this city of the past.

Placide began walking. From nearby he could hear the lowing of cattle, gathered now in shadowed groups beneath the arching limbs of live oaks. He climbed down a hill into a shallow valley of moonlit junipers and red cedar. The air smelled clean and sharp, although this Christmas Eve in Texas was not as cold as the February he'd left behind in Germany. Frosty grass crunched underfoot; as he passed through the weeds, their rough seeds clung to his trouser legs.

His exhilaration at his safe arrival in another time was tempered almost immediately by anxiety over the danger he was in. If anyone stopped and questioned him, he would have an impossible time explaining himself. At best, he would be taken for a freed slave, and as such he could expect little if any help from the local citizens. Worse was the fact that he had no proper identification and no money, and thus he would certainly appear to be a runaway.

Placide had put himself in a grave and desperate situation. If he failed and was captured, his only hope would be Fein, but Fein was a German with little knowledge of this period in American history, did not have much faith in the other man's ability to rescue him, if it came to that. It might happen that no one would ever learn of Placide's sacrifice. He was thinking of the black generations yet unborn, and not his colleagues in Gottingen. He was in a unique position to do something remarkable for his oppressed people.

As it happened, Placide was not detained or captured. He made his way through the barren, cold night to the general's quarters. Twiggs was already in bed, and there was a young soldier standing sentry duty outside the door. Placide shook his head ruefully. Here was the first serious hitch in his plans. He was going to have to do something about that guard.

It wasn't so difficult to gain entry. Placide needed only to nod at the young man, grab him, and drive a knife into his chest. The soldier made a soft, gurgling cry and slumped heavily in Placide's grasp. Placide let the body fall silently to the floor. He paused a moment, listening for any sign of alarm, but all was still. Oddly, he felt no sense of guilt for what he'd done. In a way, the world of 1860 didn't seem truly real to him. It was as if the man he'd killed had never really existed, although the corporal's dark blood had stained Placide's trousers convincingly.

Placide went quietly through the door and stood over General Twiggs's bed, looking down at him. He was old, seventy or so, with long white hair and a dense white beard. He looked like a Biblical patriarch, sleeping peacefully. Placide was surprised to discover that it was not in him simply to kill the old man in his sleep. Placide wasn't sure if he was too cruel or too weak for that. He woke Twiggs, pressing one hand over the general's mouth to keep him silent.

"Don't make a sound," Placide said as Twiggs struggled to sit up. "I must speak with you. I'll remove my hand if you promise not to call out for help. That will do you no good, in any event." Twiggs nodded slowly, his eyes wide.

Placide took his hand away. Twiggs gasped and tried to speak, but for a moment he could only wheeze. "Who are you?" he asked at last.

"That's not important. You must understand that your life is in my hands. Will you answer my questions?"

Twiggs was no fool. He knew better than to bluster or threaten. He nodded again. Dressed in his bedclothes, he was a wrinkled, feeble figure; but Placide suppressed his pity for the old man. Twiggs was a Southerner by birth and a secessionist by inclination. "You are in command here," Placide said.

"Yes," said the general. "If you think that after breaking into my room, you can get me to arrange for you to escape—"

Placide raised a hand curtly, cutting him off. "If for some reason you stepped down, who would assume command in your place?"

Twiggs's brow furrowed, but otherwise he showed no outward sign of fear. "I suppose it would be Lieutenant Colonel Lee," he said.

"You mean Robert E. Lee?"

"Of the First Cavalry," said Twiggs.

Placide was relieved to hear the answer. Some months before, while Twiggs had been away from San Antonio, he had named Lee acting commander of the Department of Texas. If Twiggs were forced to retire, Lee would take over again until the War Department made its own permanent appointment.

"Now let me propose a hypothetical situation," said Placide. "Suppose Texas decides to secede from the Union—"

"So you've burst your way in here and ruined my sleep to argue politics?" Twiggs demanded angrily. "And what have you done to the young man on guard duty?"

Placide slapped Twiggs hard across the face. "Suppose Texas decides to secede from the Union," he repeated calmly. "What would your position be?"

The general raised a trembling hand to his cheek. His expression was furious, and Placide caught the first hint of fear in his eyes. "Texas will secede," Twiggs said softly. "Any fool can read that. I've already written to Washington, but the War Department has so far chosen not to send me any definite instructions."

"What will you do when the secessionist rebels demand your surrender?"

Twiggs's gaze left Placide's face and stared blankly toward the far wall. "I will surrender," he said finally. "I have not the means to carry on a civil war in Texas."

A gunshot would have roused the entire garrison. Placide cut the old man's throat with his knife, then searched the room for items to take back with him to show Fein and the others. Finally, he made his escape back into the silent night of the past. Outside, it was very strange to smell bread baking not far away, as if all was well, as if something impossible had not just happened.

"There," he told himself, "you have changed history." It remained to be seen if he'd changed it for the better.

When Placide met Fein later that night, he suggested that they not return directly to 1938 and Gottingen. Fein was dubious. "The more time we spend here," he argued, "the more chance there is that someone will see us. We may cause an alteration in the flow of events. That could be disastrous."

Placide swallowed a mouthful of brandy he'd taken from Twiggs's headquarters building. The liquor had a harsh, sweet taste, but it gave the illusion of warmth. He offered the brandy to his companion. "Yaakov," he said, shivering in the cold night wind, "it's already too late."

Fein's brows narrowed. "What are you talking about?" He declined to sample the general's brandy.

Placide shrugged. "Just that I've already inserted myself into the past. I had a conversation with General Twiggs."

"Don't you know what that means?" cried Fein. He was furious. "We may return to the present and find God only knows what!"

"I couldn't help it," said Placide. "I was discovered. I was arrested and taken to the commanding officer. I had to do some fancy talking or you would never have seen me again."

"God help us," murmured Fein. The two men looked at each other for a moment. There was no sound but the lonely creaking of bare tree limbs, and the rustle of dead leaves blowing along the ground.

"Look," said Placide, "why don't we jump ahead to, say, February, and find out if anything's different. In case of some kind of disaster, we can always reappear a few minutes before  $T_0$  and prevent ourselves from making this trip."

"I don't know," said the German. "That might leave two of you and two of me in the present."

"Let's worry about that only if we have to. Right now we've got to find out if my little interview had any permanent effect." Fein watched him closely, but said nothing more.

The two men entered the Cage, and Placide reset the controls to take them forward a few weeks. He knew that on February 16, 1861, Texas state troops would surround the government buildings in San Antonio. Twiggs would give in quickly to demands that he turn over all the arms and equipment to the militia. Of course, Placide had prevented that from happening with his single bold stroke. In effect, he'd put Robert E. Lee in command of the Department of Texas. Lee was a Virginian, but he had publicly stated he would have no part in a revolution against the Union. Placide had acted to change his mind.

They reappeared in San Antonio on the twentieth of February. Once more, Fein guarded the Cage while Placide went into town. The air was warmer, and smelled of wood smoke. He heard the ragged cries of birds, and once he saw a large black winged shape detach itself from the ground and fly into a cottonwood that was beginning to show new yellow-green leaves. For a while, everything seemed peaceful.

The town, however, was in a frenzied state of confusion. Bands of armed rebels patrolled the streets. Gunshots frequently split the air. The younger men wore the wide-eyed, fierce looks of inexperienced warriors looking forward to their first battle. The older men and women were grim and worried, obviously in fear that the conflict that had threatened so long in the abstract had come at last.

Placide stood in a narrow alley between two shops, afraid to push himself into the throngs of shouting people in the street. Finally, as both his curiosity and fear for his own safety increased, he stopped a well-dressed, elderly white man. "Pardon me, sir," he said, trying to sound calm, "my master has sent me for news."

The older man drew himself up, unhappy at being accosted in the street by an unfamiliar slave. "Tell your master that our boys have driven the Federals out," he said.

"That news will ease his pain," said Placide. He was galled to have to pretend to be a slave, but he had no other choice. "And Lee?"

"The rascal is dead, killed in the fight." The man was so pleased to be able to report that fact, he actually slapped the black man's shoulder.

Placide was stunned by the news; he'd hoped to persuade Lee to become a general for the South. He watched the man turn and go on about his business, and he knew that it was time to go about his own. His plan had not failed; it had but succeeded too well.

When they returned to T<sub>0</sub>, Placide and Fein discovered that the present was just as they'd left it, that their excursion in time had not changed the past, but rather created a new alternate reality. Still, some of their colleagues were furious.

"What the hell were you thinking of?" demanded La Martine. He'd been fascinated by the theoretical aspects of their work, but fearful of practical applications.

Now Fein was convinced that the Cage was too dangerous to use, at least until the Placide-Born-Dirac Effect was better understood.

Placide knew that if he hoped to try again in the past, he'd have to win La Martine and Fein over. "Look," he said, "we're all curious about what happens when a change is made in the past."

"You were tampering!" cried La Martine. "As it turned out, you had no permanent effect—"

"So I don't understand why you're so upset."

“—but there was the possibility that you might have changed this world disastrously, for all of us. You had no right to attempt such a thing!”

“Sending beer steins into the past might have had disastrous results, too, Eduard,” said Heisenberg thoughtfully. “Yet you had no qualms about that.”

“Making inanimate objects vanish is hardly equal to interviewing historical figures in their bedrooms,” said Paul Dirac indignantly.

Placide had told the others that he’d merely discussed politics with General Twiggs. It hadn’t seemed profitable at the time to mention that he’d killed the old man. “You know how I feel about the Legislated Equality programs in the United States.”

Dirac gave him a weary look and nodded.

“Before returning here to  $T_0$ , Yaakov and I jumped from 1861 to 1895, where we bought a history of that new timeline.” Placide held up the book. “Here are the effects of our visit. I thought by going back before the Confederate Insurrection and starting things off on a different course, I could keep the Equality programs and the Liberty Boroughs and all the other abuses from ever happening. I persuaded Twiggs to retire, because I knew Robert E. Lee wouldn’t surrender the garrison at San Antonio. His sense of duty and honor wouldn’t allow it. He’d resist, and there would be a violent confrontation. The war would begin there in Texas, rather than two months later at Fort Sumter.”

“So?” asked Heisenberg.

“So Lee would learn firsthand that the war could not be avoided, and that the needs of the Confederacy were immediate and desperate. I was certain that history would unfold differently from there on. I wanted Lee to turn down Lincoln’s invitation to command the Union Army. In our world, his military brilliance brought the rebellion under control in little more than eighteen months. Now, though, we’d created a new timeline, one in which Lee would not be the Great Traitor, but rather the great genius of the Southern cause.”

“But you were wrong, Thomas,” said Fein. “Without Lee to lead it, the Union *still* defeated the Confederacy. All you succeeded in doing was extending the bloody conflict another year while the North searched for able military leadership.”

Placide shrugged. “A minor miscalculation,” he said.

“You’re personally responsible for the death of Robert E. Lee, man!” said La Martine.

Placide was startled. “What do you mean? Robert E. Lee’s been dead for almost seventy years. He died peacefully in the White House, not yet halfway through his term as president.”

“Yes,” said Marquand, “in *our* timeline that’s what happened. But you went into another universe and interfered. Lee’s blood is on your hands.”

Placide suddenly saw the absurd point Marquand was trying to make. “Zach,” he said, “we went into a world that doesn’t exist. It was a fantasy world. That Robert E. Lee didn’t really live, and he didn’t really die. He was no more than a possibility, a quantum quirk.”

“We’re talking about people, Thomas,” said Schrodinger, “not particles.”

“Particles come into and go out of existence all the time,” Placide protested. “Just the same way, the people and events in that timeline were only local expressions of the wave function. You’re letting

emotion twist your thinking.”

Fein frowned at him. “Thomas, I want you to prepare a report as quickly as you can. We’re all going to have to think very hard about this. You’ve shown us that there are moral questions involved with this project that none of us foresaw.”

“Yaakov, I wish you’d—”

“And I’m not going to permit anyone to use the Cage again until we establish some philosophical ground rules.” Fein gave Placide a long, appraising look, then turned and left the room. Placide glanced at the book they’d brought back, the history of America in the timeline they now called Universe<sub>2</sub>. He was very eager to get back to his quarters and read of the elaborate and unpredictable results of what he’d done.

Placide made another trip into the past, this one unauthorized and in secret. He didn’t know what Fein would do if he found out that Placide had ignored his prohibition, but to be truthful, Placide didn’t care. He had more important matters to worry about. It was his belief—and both Schrodinger and Marquand agreed with him—that a second experiment would take him to an 1861 untouched by his previous meddling. If their many-worlds hypothesis had any validity, it was statistically unlikely that Placide would find himself back in Universe<sub>2</sub>. He could make a clean start in Universe<sub>3</sub>, profiting from his regrettable mistakes.

His destination this second time was the District of Columbia, on the morning of April 18, 1861. He was dressed in clothes that would attract little attention in the past, and he took with him a small sum of U.S. money in gold and silver that he’d purchased through numismatic shops in Berlin. Upon his arrival, Placide left the Cage outside of town, as he’d done in Texas. He walked some distance in the chilly air of early spring. He intended to find a hotel where he might hire a carriage, but this was more difficult than he’d imagined. He was, after all, a black man and a stranger, on some inscrutable errand of his own. Whenever he approached an innkeeper or carriage driver with his gold coins, he was told either that none of the vehicles were in proper repair, or that they had all been reserved to other parties. He understood their meaning well enough.

Placide made his way along Pennsylvania Avenue to Blair House, almost directly across the street from the Executive Mansion. He gave a little involuntary shiver when he realized that inside the White House, at that moment, Abraham Lincoln was hearing firsthand reports of the events at Fort Sumter, and preparing his order to blockade the Confederate ports. Placide was tempted to abandon his subtle plan and instead seek an interview with the president himself. What advice and warnings he could give Lincoln, if he would only listen...

That was the problem, of course: Getting these strong-willed men to pay attention. Placide knew that he could help them save thousands of lives, and at the same time build a future free of the oppression their shortsightedness would lead to. His influence, of course, would be greater if he were white, but there was no point in making idle wishes. He would do the best he could.

A carriage pulled up in front of Blair House just as he arrived. He knew the man who stepped down from it must be Robert E. Lee, although he didn’t look much like the photographs Placide was familiar with. Lee was wearing the blue uniform of the U.S. Army, and he carried the wide-brimmed hat of a cavalry officer in one hand. He had yet to grow his famous gray beard. He was taller, too, with broad shoulders and a strict posture and military bearing that gave him an imposing appearance. His manner was calm and poised, although he was on his way to a momentous meeting.



Lee paused a moment, perhaps collecting himself, before turning toward the entrance of the grand house. Placide hurried up to him—"General Lee," he said.

Lee smiled. "You flatter me," he said. "I presently hold the rank of colonel." He waited patiently, apparently thinking that Placide was bringing him a message of some kind.

Placide was struck by Lee's gentle manner. There was intelligence in his eyes, but not the haggard, haunted look that would come later. In the few years remaining to him after the Insurrection, Lee always carried with him the painful knowledge that he had been, after all, the fatal betrayer of his homeland.

"I have some important information for you, sir," Placide said. Now that he was before the man, the physicist was unsure how to proceed. After all, Lee wasn't The Great Traitor yet, not in this timeline. Placide had prevented him from becoming the savior of the Union in Universe<sub>2</sub>, but he'd learned only that Lee dead was no better than Lee as Yankee. "May I have a moment of your time?"

Lee pursed his lips. "I have an appointment at this address, sir, and I am obliged by both courtesy and duty to respect it."

"I know," said Placide, "and I won't keep you long. When you go inside, Francis Preston Blair is going to offer you command of the Union Army, on behalf of President Lincoln. I know that you intend to accept; but if you do, sir, you will be damning future generations of American Negroes to lives of degradation and suffering. They will harbor a rage that will grow until our nation is torn by violence more terrible than this quarrel over secession. I beg you to reconsider."

Lee did not reply at once. He studied Placide's face for a long moment. "May I inquire, sir," he said quietly, "how you come to be in possession of this information?"

Placide took out his wallet and removed a fifty-dollar bill—currency from the United States of his world, of his time. He handed it to Lee. The cavalry officer examined it in silence, first the back, with the picture of the Capitol Building, then the front, with his own portrait. "Sir, what is this?" he asked.

"Paper money," said Placide.

Lee turned the bill over and over in his hands. "Is it a bank note?"

"Legal tender printed by the federal government, and backed by government gold reserves."

"I've never seen a note like it before," said Lee dubiously.

Placide showed him the small legend beside Lee's picture. "It was issued in 1932," he said.

Lee took a deep breath and let it out. Then he gave the money back to Placide. "Mr. Blair is an elderly man, and I do him no honor by my tardiness. I beg you to excuse me."

"General Lee," Placide pleaded, "if you accept Lincoln's offer, you must lead an invading army onto the soil of Virginia, your home. How can you raise your sword against your own family and friends? You must allow me to explain. I showed you the bill because you'd think me a madman unless I presented some evidence."

"Evidence only of the skill of your engraver," said Lee. "I did not find the portrait flattering, and I did not find the item in question amusing."

As earnestly as he could, Placide explained to him that he'd come through time to let Lee know of the terrible consequences of his decision to defend the Union. "I can tell you that with you in command, the

Army of the Potomac will withstand the first thrusts of the Confederate forces.”

“Indeed, sir,” said Lee with a little smile.

“And then you will sweep down to force the evacuation of Richmond. You will coordinate your army’s movements with those of McClellan in the west, and divide the South into helpless fragments. In the meantime, the navy will blockade the ports along the Atlantic, the Gulf Coast, and the Mississippi River.”

“Your predictions make the difficulties seem not so very daunting, after all.”

Placide paid no attention to Lee’s skepticism. “The Confederacy’s only true victory will come at Petersburg, and only because of the incompetence of one of your subordinates, General Ambrose Burnside. Finally, on October 17, 1862, P. G. T. Beauregard will surrender the Army of Northern Virginia to you at Dry Pond, Georgia, northeast of Atlanta.”

“And tell me, sir,” said Lee, “will the Union thereafter be restored?”

“Yes,” said Placide, “the Union will be restored, but in terrible circumstances.” Placide described to him the fight over Reconciliation, and how the radical Republicans would seek to punish the Southern states. “All that will hold the country together in those furious months will be your strength of will as president,” Placide told him.

Lee shook his head. “I am certain now that you offer me dreams and not prophecy. I cannot conceive of any circumstance that would persuade me to undertake that office. I have neither the temperament nor the wisdom.”

“The Democrats will come to you, as a war hero and as a Southerner. You’ll be the natural choice to oversee the process of Reconciliation. Congress will battle you, but your resolve will be as strong as Lincoln’s. You’ll prevent the plundering of the South.”

“I am glad to hear this, but I wonder why you wish me then to decline the offer that awaits me inside. Would you see the South torn apart in peace to more horrible effect than in war?”

Placide felt a tremendous sympathy for this man, and he had to fight the urge to tell him all that would happen. In Placide’s own world, Lee would die in 1870. Vice President Salmon P. Chase would then be sworn in, and the long, cruel struggle of the black would resume. Before his death, Lee would prepare a document emancipating all the slaves in the South; but on taking office Chase would find it convenient to set this initiative aside. The issue would still be the self-determination of the states. Chase would let progress on civil rights hang in abeyance rather than antagonize the newly reconstituted Congress. Not until 1878, during the Custer administration, would slavery be officially abolished.

“Please try to understand,” said Placide, “what seems like victory for you and for the Union will be, for the Negro population, the beginning of a dreadful spiral down into a social and economic abyss.”

“I’m not certain that I take your meaning, sir,” said Colonel Lee.

“I mean only that your concern for the slaves will blind you to the long-range effects of what Congress will propose. And after you’ve left the White House”—Placide still could not tell Lee how brief his tenure would be—“your successors will pervert your programs to trap the Negroes in misery. Even in my time, seventy-five years after the Insurrection, many Negroes believe that life as a slave must have been better than what they endure. As wretched as the condition of slavery is, the American Negro of 1938 has little more of freedom or opportunity or hope.”

Lee was bemused by Placide’s vehemence. “If I entertain your argument, sir, I am left with the feeling

that all my actions will be futile, particularly those guided most strongly by my conscience.”

“Millions of Negroes are forced to live in squalid slums the government calls Liberty Boroughs, segregated from the prosperous white communities,” Placide told him. “We suffer under the Legislated Equality programs, and—”

Lee raised a hand, cutting him off. “I beg your pardon, sir,” he said. “I am grateful to have your opinion, but I can tarry here no longer.” He gave Placide a nod and strode up to the front door of Blair House.

Placide didn’t know how effective his appeal had been. He was heartened to see, however, that as Lee turned away, his expression was solemn and thoughtful.

In his own timeline, Placide had read that Lee, as general-in-chief of the Union Army, resisted the president’s frequent pleas to attack the Confederate units across the Potomac in Virginia. “You must do something soon,” Lincoln demanded late in July 1861. “The army consists to a large degree of ninety-day recruits who volunteered after the attack on Fort Sumter. The period of enlistment has almost expired. When it does, those young men will leave the ranks and go back to their families, unless they are given something to inspire them to remain. You must use them to strike a strong and decisive blow.”

Lee remained firm. “Our soldiers are simply not ready,” he said. “The volunteers are poorly trained and poorly outfitted. It would be little more than murder to take such an unprepared mob into battle.”

“A victory would encourage our soldiers and open the way to the capture of Richmond.”

Lee saw it differently. “A defeat,” he argued, “would open the way for the enemy to capture Washington.”

As the weeks went by, Lincoln continued to put pressure on Lee to act, even threatening to strip the general-in-chief of his command. But Lee would not be bullied. When the ninety-day period came to an end, most of the recruits reenlisted out of respect and admiration for Lee himself, and not the Federal cause. Lee used the time to deploy his troops with care and precision. He instructed his subordinates to hinder any advance of the Confederate army, but to fall back slowly rather than engage. Finally, on September 1, Lee reported to the president and his Cabinet that he was satisfied. Two weeks later, at Occoquan, Virginia, Lee defeated a numerically superior Confederate force under the command of General Beauregard. Aided by Generals Irwin McDowell and Benjamin Butler, Lee prevented the Southern corps from crossing the Potomac into Maryland and then encircling Washington.

The Battle of Occoquan was the smashing victory that Lincoln had hoped for. With one stroke, Lee crushed the dreams of the Confederacy. At Occoquan, he seized the offensive and never relinquished it for a moment during the rest of the war. The remainder of the eighteen-month struggle in the east saw little more than Beauregard’s courageous though vain efforts to delay, with his clever skirmishes and retreats, the unavoidable outcome. Inevitably, however, he was to have his most difficult meeting with Lee at Folkston’s Dining Room in Dry Pond. Beauregard, The Napoleon in Gray, was as noble in defeat as Lee was gracious in victory. The two men had been friends when they’d served together in Mexico. They would be friends again when Lee was president and Beauregard governor of Louisiana.

All of this was a matter of record, but Placide knew just how easily the record could be erased.

Placide felt a mixture of hope and anxiety while he waited in the street outside Blair House. If Lee

emerged as a Union general, if he became again the Great Traitor, Placide planned to return to  $T_0$  and abandon this timeline. He would then have to hit on a more forceful method of persuading Lee—in Universe<sub>4</sub>. If, however, Placide had read Lee's expression correctly, then he planned to spend quite some time in Universe<sub>3</sub>, making short jumps forward through time to follow the course of the Insurrection. With the invincible Robert E. Lee as the defender of the Confederacy's fortunes, the fate of the South would certainly be different.

Placide opened to the first page of the journal he intended to keep during his experiment. He wrote his first entry:

Universe<sub>3</sub>  
April 18, 1861  
Outside Blair House, Washington

If things turn out as I hope, I will remain in this newly made world, studying it and perhaps learning something of value to take back with me to  $T_0$ . I will adopt this alternative timeline as my own, and love these people regardless of their sins, for have I not created them? Perhaps that sounds mad, but there has not yet been time enough to evaluate properly this unlooked-for benefit of my work. But surely I am a god to these people, having called them out of nothing, with the power to send their history off in whichever direction I choose. The God of Abraham created but the universe of  $T_0$ , and I have already created two more. How many others will I call into being before I achieve my purpose? General Lee comes now, with the fate of Universe<sub>3</sub> in his hands.

It was September 16, 1861, and the air should have been thick with drifting clouds of gunsmoke, the acrid breath of massed rifles; but the autumn breeze carried only the tang of burning firewood from a farmhouse nearby. There should have been the menacing, booming shocks of the field artillery, and the ragged cries of wounded men; but there was only stillness. The roads near Occoquan, Virginia, should have been jammed with wild-eyed, charging infantry, and the urgent mounted messengers of the generals; but only Thomas Placide disturbed the quiet countryside.

It was a grim, gloomy day in late summer, and black clouds threatened low overhead. It had not yet begun to rain, but a storm seemed imminent. Thunder cracked and rolled, and Placide grimaced. He did not like to be out in this kind of weather. He was cheered only by the knowledge that he had truly persuaded Robert E. Lee that a mechanism for the salvation of American blacks had been set in motion. All that now remained was the job of supervision, to make certain that Placide's careful scheme did not falter as this world's divergent history unfolded.

He shook his head. He wouldn't have guessed that this was the kind of day Lee would choose for his first major test as a general in the Confederate Army. Placide hurried down a rutted, dusty lane, to the white-painted frame farmhouse, hoping to meet someone who could direct him to the battlefield.

The house was surrounded by a bare yard and a gap-toothed fence. Placide went through the yawning gate and climbed three steps to the porch. He heard nothing from within the house. He rapped loudly. A moment later, a distracted white woman opened the door, gave Placide a critical look, and shut the door again. "Ma'am?" called Placide. "Will you help me, ma'am?"

The door opened again, and he was looking at a tall, burly, frowning man. "We got nothin' for you," said the farmer.

"I just need some directions from y'all," said Placide. He reminded himself that once again he needed to behave modestly.

“Directions we can afford, I guess,” said the farmer.

Placide nodded gratefully. “I’ve got to find my way to the battle, and quickly.”

The white man closed one eye and stared at him for a few seconds. “Battle?” he asked.

“I’ve got news for General Lee.”

“You his boy?”

Placide felt a flush of anger, but he stifled it. “No, sir, I’m a free man of color. But I’ve got news for General Lee.”

“What’s this about a battle? There been no soldiers around here except when they come by in July. On their way to Manassas.”

“Manassas? Where’s that?”

The farmer gave him another close look. “Where the battle was. Bull Run. It was Beauregard and Joe Johnston that licked the Yankees at Bull Run. Your boss was busy fetchin’ coffee cups for Jeffy Davis down in Richmond.”

Placide wondered at how quickly men and events had found their new course. “General Lee is obliged to follow the wishes of President Davis,” he said...

The farmer gave a derisive laugh. “While Granny Lee was doin’ just that, one Sunday afternoon the blue boys come out of Washington, thinkin’ they was goin’ to whup Beauregard and send him on home. Then Joe Johnston showed up to help him out, and before you know it the damn Yankees are runnin’ ever which way, goin’ back to cry on Lincoln’s shoulder.”

Placide took all this in. “Well, sir,” he said, “I guess they told me wrong when they said he’d come up here.”

“Your General Lee ain’t never been within fifty mile of here. As far as I know, he’s somewheres off in the west, diddlin’ around in the mountains.”

“I thank you, sir. I suppose I’d just better get back to Richmond myself. Someone’s made some kind of mistake.”

The farmer laughed. “I’m lookin’ right at him.” He turned away and closed the door. Placide found that his hands were clenched into tight fists. He let out his breath slowly and forced himself to relax. He walked back out through the farmer’s gate and headed back the way he’d come. He wanted to get back to the Cage before the heavy rain began.

Although he hated having to play the role of fool, Placide was elated by the news. He’d prevented the crushing Confederate defeat at Occoquan from occurring in Universe<sub>3</sub>. There had been a mighty rebel victory that had not happened in Placide’s timeline, and it had happened even without Robert E. Lee. With Lee yet on the verge of fulfilling his destiny, Placide could almost see the glory of the greater victories yet to come. He found himself smiling broadly as the first huge raindrops spatted about him in the dust.

Universe<sub>3</sub>

October 17, 1862

Dry Pond, Georgia

For the second time, I've come to watch an event that has vanished from history. I suspected that would be the case, yet I jumped here from Occoquan anyway. Hearing the news of the Battle of Bull Run, I was of the opinion that I had wholly altered the course of the Insurrection. It would be unlikely in the extreme that its ending should now fall out just as it had in my own timeline, on the same day, at the same place, and for the same reasons. Still, I had to be certain.

In the deficient universe of my origin, Beauregard's surrender took place in the salon of Folkston's Dining Hall. I was not foolish enough to enter that white establishment by the front door. Rather, I went around to the rear of the building. There I won the sympathy of the kitchen slaves with a glib story of fear and desperation. They kindly gave me a good meal, some clothing more appropriate than my own, and a sum of money in both Confederate scrip and silver.

Of course, no one here has heard rumors of the approach of triumphant Union Army. Everyone agrees that the fighting continues far to the north of Maryland, and far to the west of Mississippi. Yaakov was right: I have given this world a fiercer, longer conflict. In Universe <sub>3</sub>, this is no mere Confederate Insurrection. This is civil war.

And how is the struggle going? My new friends have caught me up on the thirteen months I missed, jumping here from Occoquan: George McClellan is Lincoln's general-in-chief. (I am certain he is no Lee, and will hardly present an obstacle to Confederate triumph.) There was a Southern victory at Ball's Bluff, Virginia, and a battle at Shiloh, in Tennessee, that wasn't much of a victory for the Federals or much of a defeat for the South. Lee defended Richmond against McClellan, and then, damn it! Lee and Stonewall Jackson beat up the Yankees at Bull Run a second time! That gave Marse Robert confidence to try to invade the North by heading up through Maryland—just as Beauregard tried in my own timeline. And just like Beauregard, Lee was stopped. He was stalled at Antietam Creek because a set of his campaign orders was lost and later discovered by Union soldiers.

If there is a turn for the worse, and if I must abandon Universe <sub>3</sub>, I may begin again as I did at Blair House; but this time, I will remove in advance that careless officer at Antietam. "In for a penny, in for a pound." It was not enough, it seems, to have won Robert E. Lee to my cause. I find that I must continue to supervise and guide this entire war.

How astonished Dirac and the others will be when I return to T<sub>0</sub>! I will seem to have aged several years in a single moment.

How sad I will be to leave a world I am perfecting, to return to a world I can no longer love.

Placide locked his door and went downstairs to dinner. The Negro rooming house was on Rampart Street, on the edge of the Vieux Carre. Placide had grown up in New Orleans, but that had been in the early years of the twentieth century. Here it was 1864, and the city was very different. There were still steamboats working on the river and bales of cotton piled high on the wharves. He thought that somewhere in this quaint version of New Orleans, his own grandparents -were growing up. He could visit them, if he chose to. The idea made him a little queasy.

A young quadroon woman waved to him. "Monsieur Placide," she called, "won't you sit beside me this evening?"

"I'd be delighted," he said. Her name was Lisette, and she'd been the mistress of the son of a prosperous businessman who lived above Canal Street in the American Sector. It was common for a young white man of means to select a light-skinned girl like Lisette and establish her in a small house of her own on Rampart or Burgundy streets. It was her misfortune that the boy's interest had waned, and he no longer supported her. Now she was looking for a new friend—a new white friend. The quadroon

beauty disdained forming attachments to black men. When she'd called to Placide, she was just practicing her social graces.

"You always have so much interesting gossip," she said.

Placide sighed and held her chair for her, then seated himself. "I wonder what Mrs. Le Moyne has for us tonight," he said.

Mrs. Le Moyne came into the dining room and gave Placide a dour look. "I will serve y'all what I always serve," she said. "And that is, sir, what little the damn Yankees haven't taken for themselves or spoiled."

Placide rose slightly from his seat and gave her a little bow. "You work miracles, madame," he said.

"I'm sure, sir, that you wish I could," said Mrs. Le Moyne. She went back out into the kitchen.

"Isn't she a charmer?" whispered Lisette.

Another of the tenants sat down across the table from them. He was a surgeon's assistant in the black community. Placide thought the man always seemed to know too much of everyone else's business. "Will you be leaving us again soon, Mr. Placide?" he asked.

"Yes," said Placide. "Tomorrow."

"Where are you going?" asked Lisette. "Don't the Yankees stop you from traveling?"

Placide shrugged. "I don't worry about them."

The black man across the table laughed. "Then you must be the only person in New Orleans who doesn't."

"How long will you be gone?" asked Lisette.

"Maybe a month or two," said Placide. "Maybe longer." He thought of the Cage, safe upstairs in his room. The War of Southern Independence was proceeding differently than he'd planned. Lee's final northward thrust had been turned back at Gettysburg. The Confederate nation now had little hope of victory, but it still fought grimly on. Oddly, though, Placide was not wholly dissatisfied. What mattered was that Lincoln had been driven to a point of urgency. Politics might yet achieve for blacks what military might had not.

Almost a year before, desperate to rally continued support for his war effort, Lincoln had issued what he called an Emancipation Proclamation. In Placide's timeline, with Lee leading the Federal forces to quick victory in 1862, Lincoln was never pressed to make such a concession. And in Universe<sub>2</sub>, with Lee killed before the Insurrection even began, Lincoln considered freeing the slaves but put the idea aside when victory proved imminent in 1863.

Only here in Universe<sub>3</sub>, in the spring of 1864, with Lee in a grim and determined struggle to hold off defeat as long as possible, could Placide see some hope that American blacks might avoid the horror of what President James G. Elaine had so sanctimoniously called Parallel Development.

"Mr. Placide," said Lisette sweetly, "would you bring me back something pretty from your travels? I'd be ever so grateful." She gave him a dazzling smile.

He was neither flattered nor fooled. He thought that with luck he'd bring her freedom and dignity, although he was sure she'd much rather have a new dress from New York. He only smiled back at the

young woman, then turned his attention to the food Mrs. Le Moyne was carrying in from the kitchen.

Universe<sub>3</sub>

March 22, 1884

New Orleans, Louisiana

Shock has followed shock: Even with Lee at last general-in-chief, the Confederate hopes ended in 1865. It's as if God Almighty has decreed that it must happen just so in all worlds, all timelines, across the breadth of the manifold realities. Evidently the South cannot win, with Lee or without him. There are economic, social, and political reasons too vast for me to correct with so simple a plan.

Today, in a raging downpour, I witnessed the dedication of a handsome, brooding bronze statue of General Lee. The monument stands upon a column seventy feet above the traffic of St. Charles Avenue. Lee gazes resolutely northward, as if grimly contemplating the designs not only of the Union Army, but also of the subtle and guileful Yankee mind. It is a statue I have seen before, although in the world of my childhood the model was P. G. T. Beauregard, and not Robert E. Lee. I knew the area as Beauregard Place; here it has been newly named Lee Circle. In this timeline, of course, Lee is not the Great Traitor. He is idolized as a hero and the defender of the Southern way of life, despite the fact that it was his defeat that ended both the war and what is already being spoken of as the "Old South." To me (and possibly to me alone), he is the Great Failure.

I see that I must begin again. If Lee is to be successful in Universe<sub>4</sub>, I must take a greater hand in arranging things. Perhaps Lincoln should die in 1862. Perhaps Jefferson Davis should also be removed, or at least be firmly persuaded to leave Beauregard with his command and to make better and timelier use of Lee's abilities. I have the leisure to consider these matters, as I intend to make a few more jumps to evaluate the fate of the Negroes in this timeline before I return at last to T<sub>0</sub>.

On one hand, this world doesn't know either the corruption of the Custer and Elaine administrations, or the abuses of Chase's program of Reconciliation. On the other hand, it has suffered through the different though no less odious crookedness of Ulysses Grant's two terms. I wonder where Grant came from. If he played any important part at all in the universe of my origin, I never read any reference to it. Yet here he emerged as a shrewd tactician, a victor, and a president. More important to me, though, is that he oversaw most of Reconstruction and permitted the wholesale rape of the South.

Reconstruction was a grotesque injustice inflicted on a conquered population. In my world, the brief Confederate Insurrection and Lee's vigilance as president prevented Congress from exacting such harsh penalties on the South. Even the ancient Romans knew better than to impose tyrannical conditions on a defeated people.

Here in Universe<sub>3</sub>, almost twenty years after the war's end, I see continued evidence of the South's rage and indignation. The Southern attitude, shaped by the war and by Reconstruction, is a desperate desire to cling to what little yet remains of the old ways and the old life. There have been many attempts to circumvent the will of the Yankee, even to reviving slavery under new guises. This is, all in all, a bitter, unhealthy society.

And yet I will remain in this timeline a little while longer. I plan to look around 1884 for another few days, and then jump to 1938 and Gottingen, just a week or so before T<sub>0</sub>, so that I will remain in Universe<sub>3</sub>. I'm very curious to see what changes my experiment makes in the rest of the world after seventy-five years.

Despite the problems here, it is a more hopeful world for the Negro. Amendments to the U.S. Constitution have abolished slavery, guaranteed civil rights, and given Negroes the right to vote. Southern state legislatures have seated many Negroes, and some Negroes have been elected to office as high as



lieutenant governor or been sent to Washington as senators and district representatives. In my timeline, slavery wasn't abolished until 1878, while in 1939 most Southern Negroes still can't vote, let alone run for office.

The version here of Elaine's Parallel Development is segregation, which is not so absolute and despotic, but is still highly offensive. In the New Orleans of my world, Negroes may live only in specially zoned Liberty Boroughs, which are crowded, undeveloped neighborhoods with virtually no communication or trade with each other or with the white community. Negroes here are permitted by law to take up residence wherever they choose, although in actual practice it is impossible for Negroes to find homes in many white areas.

In Universe<sub>3</sub>, Negroes may travel freely within the city and throughout the South. They may not always be made welcome, of course, but no official restrictions are placed on their movements. In the America I abandoned, a Negro must still carry an endorsement book, which records his assigned Liberty Borough and prevents him from traveling beyond it without a special permit. At any time the state government may move individuals or groups of Negroes from one Liberty Borough to another, sometimes without warning, explanation, or recourse. There are many more similar provisions of the Blaine program, and most of them are happily absent from this timeline.

At the close of the war, the South lay ruined and bankrupt. My experiment ended in tragedies I did not foresee and that have no counterpart in my world. The burning of Atlanta, Sherman's march of devastation from that city's ashes to the Atlantic coast, and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln all occurred as a result of what I set in motion. The war went on three and a half years longer than in my timeline, where some one hundred thousand soldiers died in the Confederate Insurrection. In Universe<sub>3</sub>, more than *six* hundred thousand perished in the Civil War.

That nameless army guard outside General Twiggs's quarters did not seem real to me at the time. Why has it taken vast mountains of dead soldiers to make me see the full extent of what I've done? Nevertheless, I believe now that although the cost has been high, I have succeeded in my dream of improving the lot of my people, at least to a small degree. I am confident that the end has truly justified the means.

Placide jumped to 1938, to T<sub>0</sub> minus seven days. He felt like a trespasser. It gave him an eerie feeling to walk around the university town of Gottingen, knowing that there was very likely a duplicate of himself nearby, one who had lived his whole life in Universe<sub>3</sub>.

There were important differences between the two timelines. Some of the streets and buildings here had new names, clothing styles were oddly altered, and there were unfamiliar flags and signs wherever he looked. The degree of change depended on how much influence the United States had in this alternate reality. After the Confederate Insurrection in his own timeline, the North and South hadn't joined together strongly enough to make America an international power comparable to England, France, Germany, or Russia. Placide could not predict how in Universe<sub>3</sub> the bloodier Civil War might have affected that situation.

He climbed the steps of the laboratory, which in his own world had been in the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute; the building was now called the Max Planck Institute. He found what had been his own office, but a stranger's name was now on the door. As he walked down the darkened hallway reading notices and posters, he met the building's elderly porter. Placide was cheered that, despite all, some things remained the same. "Good afternoon, Peter," he said.

The old man cocked his head and studied him. "May I help you?" he asked. His tone was suspicious.

“Don’t you know me?”

Peter shook his head. “We don’t see many black men here.”

Whatever other changes had been made in Universe<sub>3</sub>, Placide evidently had not pursued his studies in the German Empire. “I’m looking for a few of my colleagues,” he said.

Peter raised his eyebrows.

“Werner Heisenberg,” said Placide.

“Ah, Dr. Heisenberg’s no longer here. He’s gone to Berlin, to the other Max Planck Institute.”

“Well, then, how about Dr. Schrodinger?”

“He went to Austria. That’s where he’s from, you know. But I think I’ve heard that since then he’s gone on to England.”

“Paul Dirac?”

“He’s at Cambridge now.”

Placide wondered if this scattering of his colleagues meant that the discoveries they’d made together had not been made in this world. “La Marline and Marquand?”

“I’m sorry, but there’s never been anyone here by those names in the years I’ve worked here.”

That made Placide uncomfortable. “Yaakov Fein?”

Peter’s expression grew even more cautious. “Who are these men?” he asked.

“Albert Einstein?”

“Gone to live in America.”

“Tell me about Max Born. Max must still be here.”

“He’s now at the University of Edinburgh. He’s a British subject.”

Placide felt gripped by a cold despair. He suspected that there was no Placide-Born-Dirac Effect in Universe<sub>3</sub>, and no Cage, either. “These men were friends of mine,” he said. “Do you mind if I look around here for a little while? I planned to come work here myself once.”

Peter gave him a dubious look, but nodded his head. “I guess it will be all right, if you don’t disturb anything.”

“I won’t.” The old porter left him alone in the dusty, drafty corridor.

A quarter of an hour later, while Placide was inspecting some primitive laboratory equipment, two men in the uniform of the town’s police approached him. “Will you come with us, sir?” one said.

“Why should I?” asked Placide.

“We must establish your identity. Please show us your papers.”

He’d been afraid this might happen. He knew he could be in serious trouble now. “I’m a German

citizen,” he said.

It was obvious that the policemen didn't believe him. “If that's true,” said the second officer, “we'll get this cleared up quickly at headquarters.” There was nothing else for Placide to do but go along.

Some time later he was led to a jail cell. He'd had no identification, and none of his references existed in this timeline or could be produced to vouch for him. As the jailer clanged the cell door shut he said, “Make yourself comfortable, Dr. Placide. I'm sure there's been some misunderstanding. In the meantime, you'll just have to make the best of it here.”

Placide nodded. The jailer went away, leaving him in the small, dim cell with another prisoner. “How good of you to drop in,” said the other man. Placide lay on his hard bunk and stared sullenly at the ceiling. The air was stale, and there was a heavy smell of urine and vomit.

“My name is Schindler,” said his cellmate. “I'm a thief, but not a very good one.”

“Apparently,” murmured Placide.

Schindler laughed. “What got you nicked?”

“No identification.”

“That's a hanging offense in this town, friend. Where are you from?”

“The United States, originally. But I've lived in Germany for a few years.”

Schindler whistled tunelessly for a little while. “What do you do in Germany?” he asked at last.

“I'm a scientist,” said Placide. “Particle physics, quantum mechanics. Nothing that would interest the average person.”

“Jewish physics,” said Schindler, laughing again. “Einstein and that gang, right?”

“Yes,” said Placide, puzzled.

“No wonder you're locked up.”

“What do you mean, Jewish physics?”

“The government's official policy is that sort of thing isn't politically correct.”

“Politically correct?” cried Placide. “Science is science, truth is truth!”

“And the National Socialists decide which is which.”

They talked for some time, and Schindler gave him a great deal to think about. After a while, Placide told the good-humored thief about the Cage and his adventures traveling from one universe to another. Schindler was skeptical, but he stopped short of calling Placide a liar. The two men compared what they knew of recent history in their divergent worlds.

Here in Universe<sub>3</sub>, the United States had taken part in the Great War, and the German Empire had come to an end. In response to the Depression, and growing out of Germany's bitterness after the war, a party of fascists came to power in Berlin. Many talented people, liberals and Jews and other persecuted groups, fled Germany soon after that.

“You shouldn’t admit that you even knew those people,” advised Schindler. “You won’t do yourself any good.”

“What can they do to me?”

Schindler laid a finger alongside his nose and spoke in a hushed voice. “They can send you to the camps,” he said.

“What kind of camps?”

“The kind of place where your friend Einstein might have been sent. Where lots of brilliant but racially inferior scientists are hauling boulders around until they drop dead.” He gave Placide a meaningful look.

It was too crazy for Placide to believe, but still he began making plans to escape. When he was out, he’d use the Cage to get out of this stifling reality as quickly as he could. In the meantime, he hoped that the mechanism of the German government would operate efficiently.

Weeks later he was granted a hearing. He sat in a small room at a wooden table, while several strangers testified that he was insane. Peter the porter was brought in. He identified Placide as the man who’d wandered into the laboratory and asked after the decadent physicists. Schindler reported everything Placide had told him, and added his own embellishments. Quite obviously, he’d been put in the cell with Placide as an informer.

Placide himself was not permitted to testify. He was judged insane. The American embassy could find no record of him in New Orleans; the examining board ironically chose to believe only one item of Placide’s story, that he was a naturalized German. Therefore, it had the authority to remand him to a clinic for the mentally disturbed in Brandenburg. After the hearing, he was locked up again, along with Schindler.

“You goddamn spy!” cried Placide. His voice echoed in the cold stone cell.

Schindler shrugged. “Everyone is a spy these days,” he said. “I’m sorry you’re upset. Let me make it up to you. I’ll give you some advice: Be careful when you get to Brandenburg.” He lay down on his narrow wooden bunk and turned away from Placide.

“What are you talking about?”

Schindler took out a penknife and began chipping at the mortar between two blocks in the wall. “I mean, that clinic isn’t what it appears to be. The Brandenburg Clinic is a euthanasia center, friend. So when you go in, just take a deep breath and try to hold it as long as you can.”

Schindler’s knife was making a rasping, gritty sound. Placide stared at his back. “I’m being sent to a mental health clinic.”

“Carbon monoxide,” said Schindler, turning to face him. “That’s the only treatment they use. Look, you say you helped the Negroes of your country, but see what you’ve let loose in the world instead! When they drag you into that narrow room, think about that. Think about all the other people who are going to follow you to the gas, and decide if it was worth it.”

Placide shut his eyes tightly. “Of course it was worth it,” he said fiercely. “All that I’ve discovered. All that I’ve accomplished. I only regret that I won’t be able to go back to  $T_0$  and report to the others. Then I’d go back to 1860 and try again, correct my mistakes. Even if it took me two or three more attempts, I’d succeed eventually. And then I could move on to another time, another problem. We could create a committee to guide similar experiments all through history, relieving suffering and oppression wherever we chose.”

Schindler jammed his penknife into the wooden frame of the bunk. “You *are* insane, Placide, do you know that? You haven’t learned a goddamn thing. You’d charge right ahead if you could, and who knows what new horrors you’d instigate? You’ve got a rare talent for making good times hard, and hard times worse.”

“I have one chance,” Placide murmured thoughtfully, not hearing Schindler’s words at all. “*Another* Thomas Placide, from another parallel reality, may be aware of my trouble here. He may be searching for me this very minute. I have to hang onto that hope. I must have faith.”

Schindler laughed as if he’d never heard anything so funny in his life.

And while Nazi guards patrolled the hallway beyond the cell’s iron-barred door, Placide began planning what he would do when he was released, and where he would go, and on whom he’d revenge himself.