

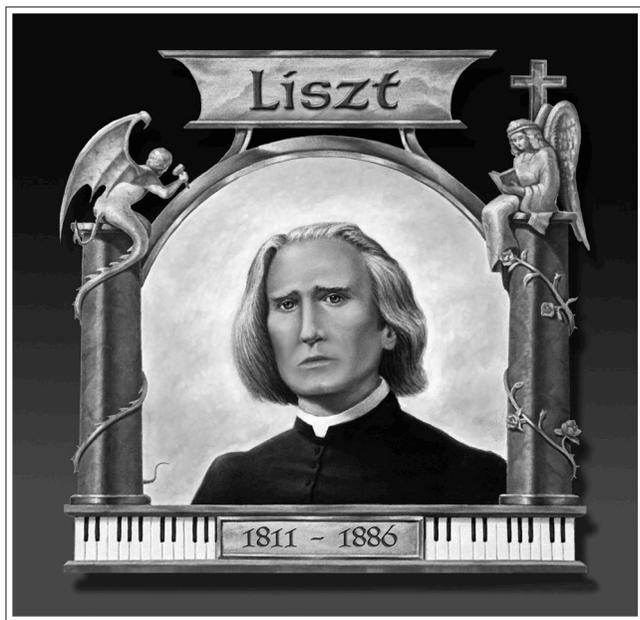
LISZT'S

DANTE SYMPHONY

A HISTORICAL THRILLER ABOUT
THE ARTS & DECEPTIVE ARTS

RICH DiSILVIO

LISZT'S
DANTE SYMPHONY



Liszt Memorial by Rich DiSilvio

THE AUTHOR

Rich DiSilvio is an author of both fiction and nonfiction. He has written books, historical articles and commentaries for magazines and online resources. His passion for art, music, history and architecture has yielded contributions in each discipline in his professional career, however, in *Liszt's Dante Symphony*, DiSilvio combines all these elements in a historical thriller that features a stellar cast of great characters from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This novel follows the release of his historical treatise on Western civilization, *The Winds of Time*.

DiSilvio's work in the music and entertainment industries includes commentaries on the great composers (such as the top-rated Franz Liszt Site), and the *Pantheon of Composers* porcelain collection, which he conceived and created for the Metropolitan Opera. The collection retailed throughout the USA and Europe.

His artwork and new media projects have graced the album covers and animated advertisements for numerous super-groups and celebrities, including, Elton John, Engelbert Humperdinck, Pink Floyd, Yes, The Moody Blues, Cher, Madonna, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Miles Davis, The Rolling Stones, Jethro Tull, Eric Clapton and many more.

He has also worked on projects for historical documentaries, including "Killing Hitler- The True Story of the Valkyrie Plot", The War Zone series, James Cameron's "The Lost Tomb of Jesus", "Return to Kirkuk" and many others.

Rich lives in New York with his wife Eileen and has four children.

This book is a work of historical fiction, and as such contains both factual and fictional characters, places, and incidents. An attempt to clarify some of the historical characters has been made at the end of this work, yet not every detail has been covered, as it would take a book to properly address and separate all the facts from creative fiction that occur throughout this integrated work. However, most information about the historical characters and events herein have been as factual as possible, with the obvious exception of those directly related to the fictional characters or storylines of the Altar Eagles and the *Dante Symphony* cipher.

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Published © 2011 by DV Books of Digital Vista, Inc.

Printed in the USA.

Cover art and interior book layout by © Rich DiSilvio.

Illustrations of Dante's Inferno on Contents page by Gustave Doré.

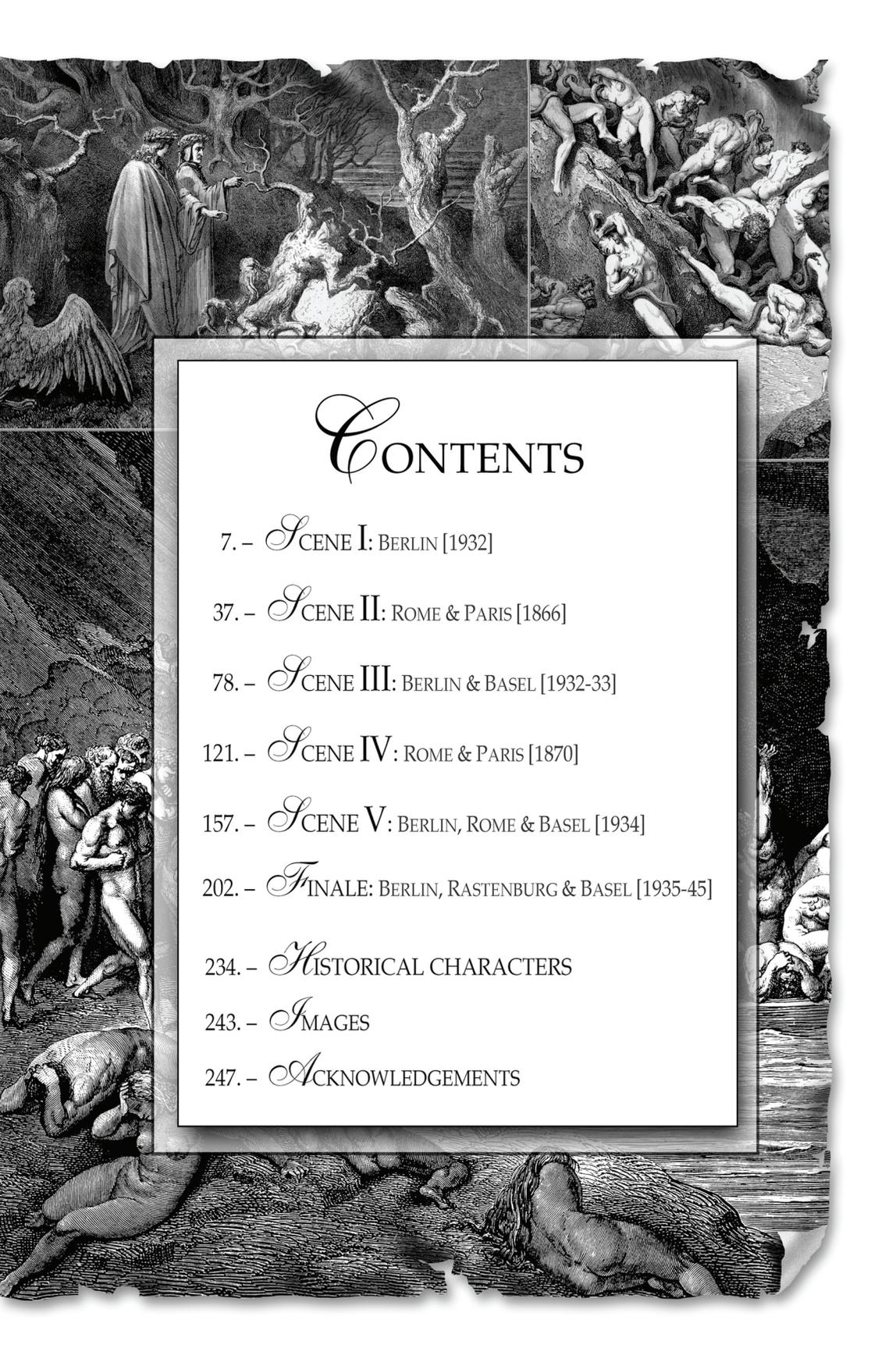
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ISBN-13: 978-0-9817625-3-1

DV BOOKS
Digital Vista, Inc.
New York, USA

www.richdisilvio.com



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THANK YOU

for your interest in reading this excerpt.

I hope you enjoy it.

Rich DiSilvio

SCENE I: BERLIN [1932]

All Hell broke loose!

With a sweep of the baton, a cataclysmic wave of bone-chilling riffs soon vilified the stately chamber. Diabolical dissonances erupted as rolls of tympanic thunder clashed with the ominous tolling of a gong. Tubas and trombones belched and blasted brimstone and fire, while the searing clashes of cymbals pierced eardrums like shards of glass. In the pit, violins and violas squealed and sighed, as they sang of tortured souls forever doomed to freeze or fry. These are the pitiless souls who lived their lives unwisely. These are the sinful souls that met their ultimate fate. These are the forlorn souls that shall forever suffer in Satan’s sadistic cyclone of Hell. The Lord has had his say and Satan would now and forever have his way.

The *Inferno* movement of Franz Liszt’s *Dante Symphony* was now in full fury, evoking the horrors so eloquently committed to words by Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy*.

Convulsing on the podium, Felix Weingartner—a disciple of Liszt’s—looked possessed as he led the Berlin Philharmonic into the very bowels of Hell.

Sitting in the front row, with adrenaline pumping and clenched fists violently rocking to the rapacious rhythm, was Germany’s rising death star, Adolf Hitler.

To Hitler’s right sat his new Aryan beauty, Eva Braun. She had recently replaced his former lover, and half-niece, Geli Raubal. Ten months earlier the young and defiled Geli had committed suicide, suffering her own Hell. In three months, Eva, too, will attempt suicide by shooting herself

because of her new lover, yet will miraculously survive that attempt—she will try again. Hitler was toxic; and as time would tell, anything he touched would wither and die or be set ablaze. Either way, all would be reduced to ashes.

Seated to Hitler's left was his long-time friend and muse, Winifred Wagner, widow of Siegfried Wagner and daughter-in-law of the famed German opera composer Richard Wagner. In fact, it is Winifred who supplied Hitler with the paper on which to write his bigoted book of bile, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*). At the time, Hitler had been incarcerated in a Munich prison for a failed coup d'état known as the Beer Hall Putsch, and Winifred made sure Adolf kept busy, and diabolically busy his scheming mind was.

But that was eight years ago. It is now July 18, 1932, and Winifred invited Hitler to Berlin to celebrate the seventh anniversary of the world premiere of his hateful and quasi-fallacious book. Hitler's struggle has led him to a position that anyone of sound mind found unfathomable, however, the downtrodden middle and lower classes now seemed to adore him. The shrewd Nazi leader zealously exalted his followers' superior bloodline, thus brainwashing his Aryan calves to become wolves—eager to spill innocent blood in their racial quest for hegemony, a blood lust that began a century earlier.

Winifred was delighted to have Hitler sitting at her side again, yet not particularly thrilled about his new bauble. It wasn't that Eva was a raving beauty. In fact, Winifred felt she surpassed her in the looks department. But Eva was fifteen years younger; and no woman can beat the clock, especially since Eva was vivacious and physically equipped to offer pleasures that the cultured Winifred could no longer match, or even cared to. Yet, despite her aging deficit, Winifred still managed to exude an air of confidence over

her young rival, knowing that her famous father-in-law had seduced Hitler like few others could, and certainly far more than any other composer. Richard Wagner may have died six years before Hitler was even born, but his dramatic operas captured Adolf's imagination so powerfully that he even adopted Wagner's *Rienzi Overture* for his Nazi Party's anthem. And to Winifred's credit, she quite calculatingly knew that today's performance featured the *Rienzi Overture*, followed by two other Wagner overtures, consuming the first half of the program.

Winifred always made sure Adolf received ample doses of her father-in-laws *musikdroge*, yet she was somewhat hesitant about today's matinée concert. In fact, even before taking their seats, as she and Eva escorted the Nazi leader down the aisle, she balked, "Adolf, darling, please remember, if you wish to leave after the first half of the concert, I'm all for it."

Hitler gazed up from reading the playbill. "We shall see. Granted, we have rarely listened to the dribble of foreign composers in the past, but some of Liszt's works do seem commendable. And I just read here that Liszt dedicated this piece to your great father-in-law."

A smirk etched Winifred's face. "That's true, but you must know that the *Dante Symphony* met with catcalls when it premiered, and at subsequent performances. So why waste our time with Hungarian goulash when we have a feast of Germany's most brilliant delicacies being served up first?"

Amused, Hitler chuckled. "True, my dear Winifred. Very true! But, this piece actually piques my curiosity. Quite frankly, I'm curious to hear Liszt's interpretation of Dante's *Inferno*."

With a touch of jealousy, Eva grasped Adolf's arm, as she located their seats. "Here we are!" Then looking at

Winifred, she added, "And I agree with Adolf. I think Liszt's symphony looks like it might be interesting. And besides, weren't the two composers friends?"

Winifred nodded haughtily. "Yes, Eva, of course they were friends. My father-in-law married Liszt's daughter Cosima, for Christ's sake! Everyone knows that, but—"

Hitler interjected, "No need to get cross, Winifred. Eva is right—you Wagners are bound by blood to the Liszt clan. So, even though Liszt is not of superior Aryan stock, we might wish to hear the Gypsy out."

As the three took their seats, Winifred grimaced. "Adolf, we may be bound by blood, but I know how much you esteem German art. As we've discussed many times, it resides far above the trifling nonsense that often fills these chambers. Except for Beethoven, Bach or Bruckner, there really are very few composers worth listening to these days. And—"

Hitler nodded. "Naturally, but—"

Winifred continued undaunted, "you must know, Adolf, that there have been unsavory rumors about our dear Richard—namely that he plagiarized Liszt's advanced chromatic harmonies. And those vile rumors have not subsided; rather, they have gained more press and attention over the years. It's infuriating! Not to mention insulting to our great master, nay, to Germany's ultimate master. So, I simply suggest that we demonstrate to our fellow citizens that we abhor such nonsense by making our exit very pronounced and, in turn, newsworthy. As you know, Adolf, your actions do carry tremendous weight these days, and the German people *will* follow your wise example."

Hitler smiled affectionately. "Winifred, you always were an astute and most treasured voice of reason, but let's just do the musically prudent thing, and play it by ear."

To Winifred's utter dismay, Hitler had not only opted to stay for Liszt's symphony but, worst yet, he was now emotionally and physically reveling in the verve and venom spewing from the vast assortment of instruments. Winifred's consternation was written on her face as she thought: *My Lord. Could these be the actual instruments of the Devil? How could Liszt conjure up such hideous evil?*

Winifred's eyes began to roll left and right, frantically seeking reassurance; is Adolf succumbing to Liszt's perplexingly faithful rendition of Dante's fiery *Inferno*? She had to know. Impulsively, she reached over and tenderly touched his leg.

Her timing couldn't have been worse. With Hitler caught up in pounding his thighs to the tempo of the ominous climax, it was like disturbing a deranged caveman in the midst of bashing in the skull of a wild animal, or in Hitler's case, the skull of a loathsome Jew or Pole. He glared at Winifred with crazed eyes. His clenched fists, still giving his lap a deadly pounding, suddenly stopped, as the cataclysmic coda of the *Inferno* movement ended with its five hammering deathblows.

Hitler was emotionally charged, but now physically drained, as beads of sweat trickled down the side of his face. His wild and possessed eyes finally lost their red glow as they focused on Winifred's pleasant features, soothing the beast.

With the orchestra now paused, the sudden silence allowed him to regain his senses, as he said above a whisper, "My God, Winifred, I must say, that was absolutely invigorating! Brutal! Nasty! Malevolent! Simply magnificent!"

Winifred's soft complexion turned steely cold. She felt betrayed. Adolf's reaction seemed bombastic, just like Liszt's

Inferno. She seldom, if ever, seen him so charged. She remained speechless.

Meanwhile, a distinguished-looking young man leaned forward to whisper over Hitler's shoulder, "If you think the *Inferno* movement was spectacular, just wait until you hear Liszt's final *Magnificat*."

Surprised, Hitler swung around. "Son, I surely doubt it could ever surpass this movement. After all, of the three parts of Dante's *Comedy*, the *Inferno* is the only one professors and the public talk about, and rightfully so. No one cares about struggling do-gooders or the illusions of Paradise, my dear boy. In the real world, evil always mesmerizes the masses, like moths drawn to a flame. Look at the newspapers. Publishers and the public thrive on it."

Winifred's eyes twinkled. She had just recalled an anecdote about what Wagner said when Liszt presented him with the first draft of the *Dante Symphony*. She leaned toward Hitler, half anxious, half teasing, "Adolf, I think you should know, this piece doesn't even have a *Paradise* movement."

Hitler turned back to her, perplexed. "What do you mean no *Paradise* movement? Dante's *Divine Comedy* ends with it."

Winifred smiled. "Yes, I know, but Richard had told Franz that no human being is capable of writing music that depicts Heaven. So Liszt only wrote a *Purgatory* movement and then ended the work with a musical arrangement of the *Magnificat* prayer. Therefore, Liszt's work falls short. It's flawed."

The young gentleman smiled, as he whispered back, "Yes, but although some critics say the absence of a *Paradise* movement destroys the balance of this work, I must say, once you hear Liszt's *Magnificat* you'll be most satisfied. In fact, you'll probably be transported to Heaven."

Hitler rolled his eyes, as Winifred pompously lifted up her nose and turned toward the stage.

Meanwhile, Weingartner had been waiting irritably for their rude murmurs to cease. Remaining erect, with his back still facing the irreverent ones, he raised his baton—the *Purgatory* movement then commenced.

Following faithfully Dante’s immortal allegory, Liszt deftly portrays Dante’s ascent from the lowest circle of Hell, eventually rising to the surface to view the peaceful, healing waters of redemption. The music is soft and serene, and then evokes the arduous travels of souls striving for atonement. This leads straight into the glorious *Magnificat*. Although not Paradise, Liszt offers the mortal listener a spiritually moving glimpse of the luminous transcendence awaiting those granted access into God’s Heavenly Paradise.

Evidently, Hitler found Liszt’s *Purgatory* just as insufferable as the ludicrous concept of Purgatory itself, and the staunch atheist almost dozed off. Now, with the equally insufferable “Christian” coda rising up, with the aid of a chorus, no less, Hitler’s patience was tested almost beyond his limits. Although initially shocked by the heavenly voices that appeared out of nowhere, since Liszt ingeniously called for the chorus to remain hidden to heighten the spiritual revelation, Hitler soon began squirming in his seat and then irritably scanned his playbill. He flipped through the pages, but only grew more restless. His beady eyes rolled up to scan the ceiling, veered over to the ornate bas-reliefs, and then ran back down along the fluted pilasters until they reached the audience again. All he saw was a stupid throng of brainless pigeons all being spiritually seduced by a chorus of Christian claptrap. Oh, how he had grown to hate the absurdities of religion over his years of struggle. In fact, just before entering the hall, Hitler had told Winifred of his

intentions once he seized full control of Germany—he would abolish monasteries and confiscate their property.

Driven to distraction, Hitler's wandering eyes suddenly behold a peculiar sight: amid the stagnant sea of mediocrity, he sees an elderly gentleman with thick, grayish-black hair and olive-colored skin, wearing a herringbone suit. It wasn't so much the man's appearance that captured Hitler's attention, but rather his mystifying behavior. The man's head was turned sideways with his right ear toward the orchestra; but stranger still, he appeared to be writing in a notebook nestled on his lap. Intrigued, Hitler's eyes instinctively zeroed in closer. The mysterious fellow was clearly straining to listen intently to every note of the music, yet he continued scribbling, without even looking down at his hand to guide it. Perplexed, Hitler searched his mind for an explanation, *Well, he's certainly not drawing anyone. And he doesn't appear to be deaf. How peculiar. Whatever could he be—?*

Just then, Hitler's thoughts were diverted when the audience erupted with a thunderous round of applause, further fueled by enthusiastic shouts of, "*Bravo!*" The *Magnificat's* gloriously triumphant coda had ended.

Hitler, however, sat morosely fixed, with a cold, blank stare chiseled on his face. It was now clear to Winifred that Liszt's Christian *Magnificat* did not resonate with her Adolf. Filled with internal delight, a subtle grin cracked her porcelain skin. Meanwhile, Eva, the bubbly young sprite, seemed not even to have comprehended the profound piece of art that had just transpired.

All the while, Hitler remained outwardly stiff but inwardly fluid. Thoughts of the mysterious old scribbler quickly faded as a far more serious issue flooded his troubled mind. How could his fellow Germans be so lacking in artistic taste? Sure, he thought the *Inferno* movement was

absolutely terrifying and oddly sublime—although he loathed the fact that a non-Aryan trumped even Wagner. But he couldn't grasp what they saw in Liszt's insufferable *Purgatory* or in the childish Christian notion of longing for a vaporous illusion called Paradise. Hitler had grand visions for his beloved Deutschland, and the Christian religion not only posed a roadblock to his ultimate mission of winning the upcoming election and one day seizing full control, but it also deflected their idolizing worship toward God, when it should have been aimed at the Nazi Party and, of course, at its infallible leader.

Rising from their seats, Eva and Winifred each leaned toward their man of the hour. Waking Adolf out of his rankling reverie, the two prideful peacocks helped their Nazi idol to his feet, and then tepidly applauded Weingartner's conducting—more so for performing the illustrious works of their Germanic God Richard Wagner than for the Hungarian gypsy-warlock Franz Liszt.

With the maestro now off-stage, the audience dutifully retook their seats. Then, with a mild round of applause, they signaled for his return. Taking the stage once more, Felix bowed and mounted the podium. With but the subtlest wave of the baton, he engaged a most beautiful encore, rendering the audience spellbound. The enchanting piece was soft and luring—so much so, that even Hitler seemed transported to another realm. Upon its magical conclusion, the audience burst into an enthusiastic roar of appreciation.

As Hitler and his two companions rose once again, he turned to Winifred. "Winnie, what was the name of that piece?"

Winifred was startled, just like a young schoolgirl caught daydreaming by a questioning teacher—especially since her Adolf had called her by the old pet name, *Winnie*.

She demurred, "Actually, Adolf, I'm not sure. I wish Siegfried were still alive, he certainly would know."

"Well, surely it must be one of Wagner's?"

Winifred remained quasi-paralyzed. "Well, uh, actually, Adolf...it might be...but, uh—"

Without hesitation, the young Eva seized the moment. "Yes, it *must* be. I know I've heard it somewhere before. It must have been at a Wagnerfest, somewhere."

Hitler glanced at her and smiled. "Yes, I'm sure of it. It was most beautiful. A true picture of perfection, one that only a true master of sound like Wagner could paint."

Overhearing their conversation, the young gentleman behind them once again leaned forward. "Excuse me, but you're all mistaken. That, too, was by Franz Liszt. It was the symphonic poem *Orpheus*."

The two women cringed, as Hitler's face reddened.

Unwittingly, the young man went on to describe the piece, lauding how beautifully Liszt had captured the ancient legend of Orpheus, the greatest of all musicians and poets—capable of charming even the rocks and trees—who used his sublime art as a seductive lure to lift and elevate mankind.

Hitler's humiliation, however, had now turned to smoldering disgust. He was in no mood to hear of a Hungarian, or a Greek, elevating mankind and civilization with his sublime art. That task could only be accomplished by Germans of good blood, and with Hitler's blood now rushing through his veins and radiating racial disgust, the young man prudently recognized the red-faced warning signs, turned away, and sheepishly slipped into the shifting crowd.

As the audience shuffled toward the open exits, Hitler, quite unexpectedly, caught a glimpse of the old scribbler in

the herringbone suit. He was standing alone in a dark recess chiseled into the chamber wall. Suddenly the elderly man turned and looked Hitler straight in the eye. Then, quite unexpectedly, his hand rose, wielding a pistol, and took aim. Hitler's eyes bulged—*he* was the target!

Somewhere in the crowd, a woman screamed, "Gun! That man has a gun!"

Two shots rang out, as the pistol belched smoke and fire. Hitler heard the bullets whiz by his left ear, as well as the two thuds behind him where they buried themselves in the plaster wall. Seeing the man take aim again, Hitler veered to the left and grabbed Eva to pull her down. Three more wild, rapid shots rang out, as Winifred still stood in shock. Reaching over, Hitler pulled her down and used his hands to shield both women's heads.

As screams echoed throughout the chamber, Hitler peered over the top of his bullet-pierced seat and located the chiseled alcove. To his relief, the firing stopped, but he noticed that the recess was an emergency exit, and the thick metal door was now ajar. The mysterious old man, however, was gone.



Meanwhile, five miles away from the Berlin Opera House, the preeminent physicist, Albert Einstein, stands at the front door of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physical Chemistry and Elektrochemistry. It is the home of some of the greatest scientific minds of the day, including its illustrious president, Max Planck, and the Nobel Prize laureate for chemistry, Fritz Haber.

The Kaiser Institute had been built twenty-one years earlier in 1911 and featured a modest but dignified façade. Quite aptly, it also featured a turret with a tapered roof that

mimicked the Kaiser's characteristic Pickelhaube. The Institute had been built with the express purpose of promoting scientific research, and the project even received funding from several foreign entities, including the Rockefeller Foundation.

The fifty-three-year-old Einstein, with his classic wild hair and mustache, radiated anticipation as he awaited the arrival of the Institute's newest team member.

Walking up to give him a warm greeting was the strappingly built and rather handsome mathematician Angelo Di Purezza Jr. Standing at about five feet ten inches, Angelo had a well-defined jaw with cleft chin, and a thick mane of jet-black, wavy hair. He had gotten into a strict regiment of exercising, having first been influenced by his father and then more recently by the world's most popular muscleman, Angelo Sciliano, who changed his name to Charles Atlas. "Albert, my friend, it's so good to see you again. I do hope you managed to make room for me?"

"I most certainly did. I'm pleased to have you back, Angelo. Your brief visit last year wasn't nearly enough time for you to learn much about our facility here."

Angelo smiled. "Yes, but those few hours with you and Max were enough to win anyone's approval, and I'm elated to be accepted. I just hope this time my visit is for good."

Einstein shrugged his shoulders. "Well, we all have to follow our gut instincts, and leaving Italy because of *Il Duce* is a wise move, but—" Einstein cautiously looked around, and then whispered, "Germany is equally unstable these days. No one knows what direction the government is heading, and I sense it is *not* good, once again."

"No matter," Angelo said confidently, "perhaps we can change that. Besides, I am now fifty-two and procrastinated long enough. After working in Pisa and then Bologna for a total of thirty-two years, it seemed fitting that 1932 would be a perfect year to make a move. On top of that, as you know,

my dear wife left me for another man." Angelo sighed. "Hell, I can't really blame her, as there never was any chemistry between us—other than our lab work—" Albert smiled at the witticism, as Angelo continued, "so fate has a way of redirecting a person's life." Expanding his chest, he added with gusto, "It's time to focus on positive things, Albert, and that I'm here with some of the brightest minds on earth seems to confirm that."

Einstein smirked as he grasped him under the arm and escorted him into the vacant lobby. It was furnished with rich, walnut paneled walls, ornate bronze wall sconces, several oil paintings, and two red pleated couches. "Listen, Angelo, brilliant scientists are not always the wisest people."

Angelo's head jerked backward. "What do you mean?"

Einstein leaned close. "You must know that I have been quite vocal about promoting my pacifistic beliefs."

"Why, yes, your *Manifesto* in 1914 created a stir, but—"

But, let me tell you," Einstein interjected, "there are many great minds, right here in this building, that have mindlessly and shamelessly sold their souls for the benefit of the state to create horrible weapons of unthinkable destruction. And my old, former friend Fritz Haber just so happens to be the most honored and heinous of the lot. He developed—"

"Ah!" a deep, raspy Germanic voice rang out. "Talking behind my back again, ay, Albert?"

Einstein spun around quickly, his face pale. "Oh, hello, Fritz. No, no, I was just telling Angelo that—"

"Never mind," Fritz snickered. "We here all know you're a passive pussy cat." Fritz Haber was an imposing figure. He was stocky with a thick mustache, sported round clip-on glasses, and was bald. Looking at Angelo with his enlarged round eyes, he asked, "And whom do we have here?"

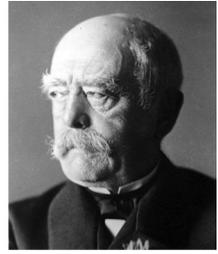
Before Einstein could answer, Angelo assertively pronounced, "I am Angelo Di Purezza Jr."



Napoleon III



Kaiser Wilhelm II



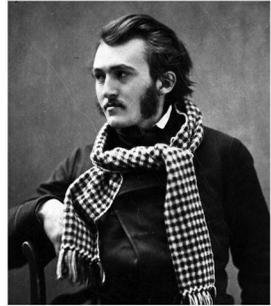
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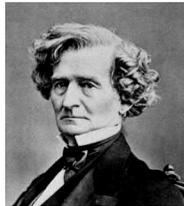
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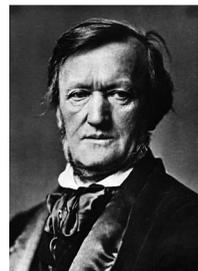
Gioachino Rossini



Hans von Bülow



Cosima Liszt, von Bülow, Wagner



Richard Wagner



Albert Einstein & Elsa



Pope Pius IX



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Wolfsschanze barrack after the bomb



Hitler & Eva at the Berghof



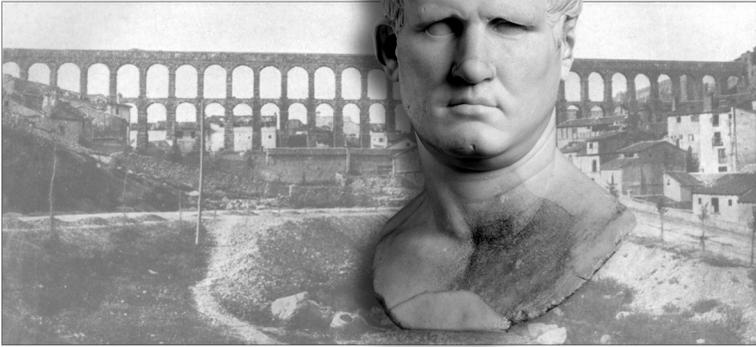
Bonaparte Crossing the Alps
by Jacques-Louis David



Diana Bathing by François Boucher

MARCUS AGRIPPA

63 BC – 12 BC



Works by CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH



Graveyard under Snow



The Cross in the Mountains



Wanderer above the Sea of Fog



The Sea Of Ice

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