

Westphalia, a German kingdom, the eighteenth century.

You are here...for now at least. But keep your passport handy.

Meet Candide. He's a pretty optimistic guy. And why shouldn't he be? As the illegitimate nephew of Baron Thunder-ten-Tronckh, he gets to live in a beautiful castle. He also gets to sit in on daily lessons with a philosopher named Dr. Pangloss whose personal motto is that all things happen for the best, and this world is, in fact, the best of all possible worlds.

But, most importantly, Candide gets to spend his days with the baron's daughter, Cunegonde, on whom he has a walloping crush.

Candide's sunny outlook is put to the test, however, when he and Cunegonde announce their plans to marry, and Cunegonde's brother, Maximilian, kicks Candide out of the palace. (Tough break, Candide.)

Wandering aimlessly through the Westphalian countryside, Candide stumbles upon a foreign army. No sooner is he forced to enlist than the army attacks Westphalia and Candide finds himself at war with his former homeland. Candide witnesses a terrible battle fought in the name of nationalism and glory (on both sides). Horrified, confused, and not knowing what's become of Cunegonde and the rest of the Baron's family, Candide flees amidst the chaos.

Heartbroken, Candide searches for Cunegonde across the war-torn landscape and eventually meets a beggar with a tin nose. Surprise! It's Dr. Pangloss, who likewise escaped from the Baron's castle, only to find his body ravaged by syphilis transmitted to him by Cunegonde's maid, Paquette.

Reunited, Candide and Pangloss team up with a generous Anabaptist (basically, a guy who doesn't believe in baptizing infants...a heretic in the eyes of European Protestants and Catholics but, to Candide's surprise, a decent sort of fellow) and decide to set sail for...

Lisbon, Portugal

But along the way, a storm hits, and the Anabaptist is drowned (again...genuinely sad). Even more terrible? Almost exactly as Candide and Pangloss arrive on the Portuguese shore, a volcano erupts, and the resulting earthquake all but destroys the city of Lisbon, killing tens of thousands of people (once again, extremely sad and also immensely disturbing, especially seeing as it actually happened on November 1, 1755).

Candide and Pangloss are promptly arrested by the Lisbon branch of the Spanish Inquisition, which is looking for scapegoats to blame for the catastrophe. The two men are brought to an auto-da-fé (aw-toh-duh-FEY), a public execution ceremony in which heretics are tried and executed. Pangloss is hanged, but Candide manages to get by with only a beating. (Ain't he the lucky one?)

Shockingly, though, it's not all bad news for Candide.

Thanks to a happy twist of fate, Cunegonde has survived the Westphalian war! And now her beauty and charm have landed her in...

Paris, France

Here she splits her time (and affection) between a wealthy Jewish gentleman and the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris. She's a bit upset she's had to sacrifice her "virtue" for a few trinkets and a nice place to live, but not upset enough to say goodbye to her current living situation.

So... Cunegonde seems set for life in Paris. That is until, by an insane coincidence,

Candide arrives.

Overjoyed to discover neither one of them has actually died, the two decide to pick up where they left off, but are interrupted by Cunegonde's two suitors (yikes). A violent confrontation ensues, and Candide stabs both men to death (double yikes). With the police now on their tail, Candide and Cunegonde escape with the help of a friendly old lady, known simply as "the Old Lady." The three make their way to...

Cádiz, Spain

But their stay doesn't last long.

All of their possessions are stolen, the French police begin to close in, and Candide needs to make yet another escape.

Miraculously, Candide is suddenly offered a position fighting for Jesuits (missionary Catholics) in South America. He jumps at the chance and, along with Cunegonde and the Old Lady, embarks for the New World.

Phew.

Let's take a breather for intermission. Go get a snack. We'll be here when you get back.

Okay. The theater lights are flashing.

Ready to return to the death-defying (and sometimes absurdly ridiculous) adventures of Candide? Sounds good. When we last left our hero, he was headed for...

Montevideo, Uruguay

Candide, Cunegonde, and the Old Lady reach Montevideo. But hold onto your hats, kids, because guess who's there, too? Maximilian and Paquette (yup, they survived the Westphalian war as well).

Maximilian and Paquette end up at a Jesuit camp deep in the jungle, while Cunegonde gets a marriage proposal from the Governor of Montevideo, and poor Candide is forced to flee once again, as he's managed to annoy the Spanish/Uruguayan police, too.

Candide employs a local named Cacambo as his companion, and the two venture through the wilderness until they uncover a Jesuit camp. (You guessed it; it's the same camp where Maximilian and Paquette have been hiding out.) Instantly recognizing one another, Candide and Maximilian quickly fall back on old habits. Candide explains he still wishes to marry Cunegonde, and Maximilian still refuses to give his blessing. The two begin to fight, and, somewhat predictably, Candide ends up stabbing Maximilian and needing to flee. (If you're thinking the body count is getting a little out of control, you're right.)

Tired? Confused? Need yet another break? Here: Have an INEXPLICABLE time-jump!

Years pass and Candide and Cacambo are still lost in the South American jungle while Cunegonde and the Old Lady remain at the governor's house. Soon Candide and Cacambo's travels bring them to...

Eldorado

(If you've never heard of it, don't worry. It's completely made up.)

Yet despite the fact that Eldorado is a near-perfect paradise with gold and jewels to spare, Candide can't get his mind off Cunegonde. Taking a gift of several golden sheep (yes, they have those in Eldorado), Candide heads for the coast, suggesting Cacambo bring one of the sheep to Montevideo and trade it for Cunegonde's freedom. The men split up and Candide arrives in...

Surinam, a Dutch colony

Candide comes up with a plan to meet Cunegonde in Venice (because...why not?) and purchases a ship to cross the Atlantic. Only problem? The ship merchant is a total villain—she sells Candide a vessel that can barely float.

Will Candide ever make it to Venice? Will he and Cunegonde ever be reunited for good? And will our hero be able to maintain his positive attitude after all that's happened to him?

Could be. Anything is possible in this “best of all possible worlds.”