

CHAPTER 1

Roxanne Olson looked into the bathroom mirror of the dimly lit room. She really didn't like the image it reflected. Oh, her pert twenty-three year old naked athletic body was cute enough in the looking glass. That wasn't the source of her displeasure.

No, it's what I do, have been doing, for the last seven years, she thought honestly to herself, dropping the spent condom in the wastepaper basket and washed her hands.

Roxie got off the bus from Lafayette, Louisiana in the summer of her sixteenth year. Like so many young runaways, she had a vaguely formulated plan that included coming to New Orleans and getting a job, so that she could save up money to travel to her ultimate destination, Hollywood. She was convinced if she could make it to California that she would be *discovered*, and her fame and film career would allow her to make a grand return to Lafayette. *That'll show that Billy Bob Pearson,* she pondered with satisfaction during the bus ride.

The eighty-one dollars from her babysitting savings that she had left over after paying for her ticket didn't last her nearly as long as she thought it would, and before the week was out so was Roxie's money. If it hadn't been for a kindly, middle-aged Black woman who saw her panhandling and helped her out until she could get herself squared away, she'd have never made it.

She'd been unable to even get a job at any one of the hash houses in the French Quarter. They required proof of identification, and all she had was a library card with her name on it. In desperation, she took a job as a dancer/hostess. Not in one of the more reputable establishments like Hustler's Barely Legal - where she found out that you did have to be at least legal - or Déjà Vu Showgirls. Instead, she found employment at a cheesy little flop joint two blocks off of Canal Street with the grandiose name of *Samson and Delilah*. It vaguely recreated a Roman

theme, or as best as could be replicated in plastic. To accentuate the motif, the girls wore scant togas when it wasn't their turn to dance.

For the first three weeks she limited her activities at the business to greeting people at the door, showing them to a table and serving the first of their two-drink minimums to them. For this, she was compensated by the owner at a minimum wage rate. Unapologetically, Ziggy told her in a fatherly voice that if she wanted to make real money, Roxie needed to become a dancer. She'd been able to find a place to stay temporarily with another one of the girls and asked her about it. Renee told her it was no more complicated than taking your clothes off before going to bed; and like many things in life, the first time was the hardest.

She thought about that for a few days, before working up enough courage to try it. She waited until the mid-afternoon, which was always a time of low occupancy, borrowed a g-string from the club, but completely forgot she'd need a garter the other girls wore so that customers would have a convenient place to put their tips. The disc jockey introduced her as *the school girl*, which he thought appropriate for her appearance. As a first-time dancer, it was all she thought it would be - terrifying. She didn't accomplish much more than getting her clothes off and herself off stage as fast as she could after the music stopped. Roxie made no attempt at pole dancing or gyrating her private parts close to the few men sitting around the stage.

But her roommate was right; the more she did it, the easier it got. By Friday night, when the place was really packed, she'd managed to get on and off stage, while performing something of an act in between. It wasn't much, but by the end of the evening between the stage and table dances, she had more than \$150 from the greedy hands of men stuck under her elastic ribbon, who wanted to grope her more than tip her.

The table dances were the most difficult for her to perform. Every time she did one, she had to get in such proximity to the man that his hands invariably strayed to her body, and only one - a sailor - didn't offer to take her upstairs for even more money.

Upstairs had such an ominous sound to it. Roxie was naive, not stupid, and she saw how the girls would occasionally take one of the men and sometimes two, *upstairs*. In less than half an hour, the man would come down and usually walk straight out the door. The girl would come down a few minutes later.

"You don't have to do that," Renee explained. "There are more than enough girls willing to. Ziggy makes it available and clean, and he gets \$20 every time a customer goes upstairs."

"Do you . . . do you take men up there?" Roxie asked nervously.

"You've seen my apartment and car. Dancing pays for one; doing tricks pays for the other," she replied honestly.

It took her another week thinking about it. *It's not like I'm a virgin or anything*, she justified finally. She'd *done it* with Billy Bob the night of prom in May and a couple times after that. In fact, him wanting to do it without a condom was the beginning of their difficulties, which led to her leaving home and coming to NOLA. She'd taken health classes, and knew what was likely to happen if she let him.

Once she made her decision, Roxie got Renee to take her upstairs, show her around, and explain what she needed to do. Her roommate was happy to do that for her friend, and after fifteen minutes of orientation, all Roxie had to do was find the courage and the customer.

The customer came with her first table dance of the evening; the courage wavered, but she was resolved to go through with it. It went like she thought it would - frightening.

But Renee's advice had been sound; the more she did it, the easier it got. In a month, she used the stage as a means to lure potential customers to go *upstairs*. The next month, Roxie got her own apartment and the following month a red sports car she drove without benefit of a license.

In seven years, she managed to get busted only twice. The first time by a police officer who was trying to shake her down and got mad when she wouldn't pay him. She learned two valuable lessons from that. First, she got a lawyer on retainer that Renee used. Second, she had tiny video cameras installed in her apartment and her car. If someone tried to extort money from her again, she'd have a way of retaliating.

When she was arrested the second time by a young officer who had just been assigned to vice, her attorney had her out of jail about the same time that the police finished with her booking. She didn't spend time for either offense and the fines imposed by the judge seemed an inexpensive cost of doing business.

She neatly hung the towel back on the rack, grabbed a fresh one from under the sink and opened the door to her bedroom.

"I brought you a towel," she smiled handing it to him. Her client - she didn't like to use the words *trick* or *John* - she guessed was fiftyish and some sort of successful business man from the labels in his clothing Roxie had seen when hanging them up. He introduced himself as *Mark* and after asking and giving him a glass of scotch and water; and taking her fee and his clothes, they'd gotten down to business. There was absolutely nothing unusual in his requests, and certainly nothing she wasn't willing to do for his \$500, although when they came up for air the first thing he did was refresh his drink.

"I thought that was part of the service," he said indicating his midsection.

"It can be," she replied compliantly, before finishing the task for him. Roxie noticed that he was half plastered, and hoped he make it home to his hotel all right.

Helping him arrange his clothes, even helping him get his shoes on, she led him to the door, kissed him on the cheek and told him what a pleasure it had been for her to meet him.

Mark gave her tail a little squeeze and told her what a good time he'd had, before she closed the door on him.

Seeing it was ten already, Roxie slipped on a light robe, poured some Fruitloops into a bowl, and turned on the television. It was some mindless cooking show, but she didn't care. It was a distraction and that's all that mattered.

True to Unique's information, Gabriel Michaels watched Senator McCulloch enter the apartment at eight and leave it at ten. More importantly, he got pictures. But now was his moment of dilemma, should he follow the Senator in hopes that he'd do something else illegal and/or immoral or should he interview the girl. Seeing Arnold McCulloch trip over the curb getting to his car made the decision for him.

If I'm lucky, the cops'll pinch this guy for DWI and I'll be able to get footage of it, he thought dropping his car in gear and following the weaving vehicle down the street.

Aaron Flare waited patiently until the taillights of the Senator's car were at the end of the moderately busy street before making his move. He stood and then turned around to pick up the little bundle in the backseat. Easily carrying the tools of his trade, he walked across the lawn separating the parking area from the ground floor apartments. Acting nonchalantly and as if he

belonged there, he immediately walked up to the door he'd seen the Senator leave minutes before.

Aaron paused before it and rapped sharply. He heard some rustling from inside and a moment later the door opened a crack, but still held secure by a chain fastened between the door and frame.

"Yes?"

"FBI, ma'am," Flare held his credentials up for her to see.

"What's this all about?" Roxie demanded, a little anxious about having a police officer - any police officer - standing on her doorstep. It was not only bad for business, but it was also just the sort of juicy tidbit that nosey neighbors would love to bring to the management's attention.

"Look," he said in a professionally bored voice, "I have some routine questions regarding your . . . well, your guest that just left. I'd rather not do it from out here."

"I'd rather you not either," she replied. "In fact, I'd just as soon you go away. I have nothing to say to you. And if you insist, you'll just have to stand there until my lawyer can drive over here."

"Ma'am, the FBI has no interest in you or your activities," he assured her. "The man who just left is a scientist for our government and I've been detailed to make sure that we haven't had a security breach."

"That's all? Nothing to do with me or what I do?"

"Nothing," he assured her, again. "The FBI doesn't get involved in that sort of thing unless it's a violation of the Mann Act; and since this doesn't involve someone under age or transportation across state lines, our interest in you is only your connection with the scientist."

Roxie eyed him suspiciously. After seven years of hooking, she'd gotten pretty good at reading people. She had to be; otherwise she'd have been arrested far more than twice.

She made a decision. "All right," she closed the door to remove the chain and immediately opened it for him. "As long as all your questions are limited to my client."

"Not a problem," he replied as she ushered him inside.

"Care for something to drink?" Roxanne asked, intending get herself a glass of wine.

"That's very kind," he said appreciatively. "Do you think I could have a glass of water?"

She was a little disappointed to hear him just ask for a glass of water, but shrugged and turned to go into the kitchen.

Phett. Phett, the silenced revolver spit out its death and two slugs took her in the head. Roxie Olson dropped to the floor, dead long before she got there.

Aaron Flare took his time to close and lock the front door. He walked into the kitchen, spotted an empty glass and lifted it to his nose with a gloved hand. *Scotch* his mind registered and he poured the small amount of brownish liquid down the drain and put the vessel in the small bag he unfolded. He went looking for the trash container and found it under the sink. What he was looking for was not inside.

He next moved to the living room and meticulously wiped down ever smooth surface he saw. Once he completed that task, he moved next to the bedroom. The rumpled sheets told him where the evening's action had taken place. Aaron took all the bedding and placed it into pillow cases, careful to make sure any pubic hairs present didn't fall on the floor. With three linen cases leaning next to the bedroom door, he continued into the attached bath. He picked up used towels and wash cloths, placing them in the last of his pillow cases. His reward for his diligence, he found in the waste can in the bathroom. He reached inside the receptacle and removed the used

condom and wrapper, placing them in a special container in hopes of maintaining the motility of the sperm.

Carrying two cases in each hand, he walked his bundles over to the front door. He gave the room the once over, again, turned the handle and let himself out, turning the lights off as he did so. Once outside, he pulled the locked door closed. For all purposes he looked like a man carrying his laundry to the car to be dropped off the next day.

Flare got into the car, turning the ignition on, and was happily motoring his way back to Houston. He noticed the dash clock said 10:26. That would see him back to Houston in the pre-dawn hours.

There's never a cop around when you need one, the old adage played over and over in Michaels' head on the three-quarters of a mile drive to the Conrad Hilton.

Obviously, the man was an experienced drunk driver. He drove under the speed limit, used his turn indicators when necessary, and, if it wasn't for sloppy turns and a slight weave, Michaels would have never known the man was intoxicated, if he hadn't seen him come out of the apartment.

He thought about calling the police on his cell, as a concerned citizen. But he was reluctant to do that. Police were sometimes good at piecing things together and if he reported the Senator and the next week came out with an exposé, he could reasonably expect one of them would. Instead he followed Arnold McCulloch's car no closer than a half block away and watched him pull into the circular drive and hand his keys to a valet, before staggering into the hotel.

There's never a cop around when you need one, he thought once more before turning his wheel and driving back to the apartment complex. *If nothing else, I can try to get an interview from the hooker.*

Since he didn't have any cash with which to bribe her, he decided he'd tell her he'd keep her name and address out of the article, if she'd be a little forthcoming with information for him. That little ruse might not work. Once the story hit the street, reporters - real reporters, unlike tabloid journalists like him - would come out of the woodwork to find every bit of information there was to be had, investigating every angle. And that didn't include the efforts of the police, who'd be on this high-profile case like a pack of wolves. He doubted he could keep her identity secret for more than twenty-four hours.

With the Senator tucked away for the night, Gabe didn't feel the need to park a half block away. There was nothing to be gained by it; besides, he was tired and just didn't feel like walking the additional distance. Michaels pulled into the residential parking lot, which was only half full, and parked the car, before turning his lights and ignition off. His hand automatically reached for the door handle. And froze.

What the hell is that all about, he wondered watching a man back out of the apartment door carrying what appeared to be a week's worth of laundry. Quickly he racked his brain. *Did the woman have a boyfriend who cleared out when she was conducting business? Was it her pimp? I don't think pimps carry laundry?*

Gabe inched down in his seat to see what happened. The man walked straight to a car, threw the bundles in the trunk, and jumped in on the driver's side. A moment later, the engine and lights came to life and he backed out of the parking space. Michaels craned his neck to see a license, but the best he could manage was to recognize that it was a Texas plate.

He waited five minutes to make sure the mystery man wasn't coming back before getting out of his own car. He walked across the lawn and to the apartment door. Gabe rapped once on the door, waited a few seconds and knocked again.

That's odd, Michaels commented to himself. *Why would she leave and someone else come pick up her laundry all in the space of what?* he looked at the luminous hands of his watch, *in less than half an hour?* Gabriel Michaels had been a reporter for too many years to think in terms of coincidence.

He stopped knocking and tried the door knob. *Shit. Locked.*

For the second time in the night, he was stuck with a dilemma. He could just say the hell with it and go home, have a beer and go to bed. Or he could call the police as a welfare check on the girl. *Or I can see if this master key really does work,* he finally decided.

NOLA is one of those mid-size cities that you can get almost anything you want, if you have the right connection and some ready cash. Zogby had the connections and between them they scraped up the \$100 to pay for a friend of hers to get a master key for the apartment complex. Originally, he was just going to ask for a key to that apartment; but upon reconsideration, he decided there was no need to let the locksmith know what apartment he was interested in.

Gabe pulled the single key from his pocket and inserted it into the lock. He had to jiggle it around a little, but eventually the teeth seated where they were supposed to and it gave way. He reached his hand around the door frame to find the light switch. The room was immediately bathed in the warm glow of the light bulb.

He stepped inside and closed the door behind him. With her robe pulled above her midsection, Roxanne Olson was naked from the waist down, but that's not what attracted

Michaels' attention. Rather what he noticed was that her head was deformed from the two slugs that ripped into her and she was lying in a pool of blood quite dead.

Michaels took the phone out of his pocket and took a couple of pictures of her, not knowing if he'd need those or not later. *For sure, I can't do jack for her.*

He looked around the room, more out of curiosity than anything else.

Well look at that, he thought seeing the digital clock on the mantel of the fake fireplace. He had one just like it at home. He went over to inspect it closer. *Yep, even the same brand*, he saw with satisfaction. The clock, *I'll bet there's another one in the bedroom*, was actually a motion activated video camera. Gabe turned it around and removed the hard drive, a process that necessitated him only to squeeze two prongs inward on the plastic case. He pocketed the device, pulled out a handkerchief and wiped the clock clean of any of his prints.

The first thing that struck him when he stuck his head in the bedroom was, *where the hell are the sheets?* The bed had been cleared of everything, including the mattress cover. He went over to the bathroom and took a look. There were no dirty towels or wash clothes anywhere. He returned to the bedroom and located the clock on her dresser, so that it would have a view of the entire room. He quickly removed and pocketed that hard drive, as well.

Gabriel stopped by the body on the way out. Part of him wanted to show his humanity and cover her for the sake of dignity; but the other part of him knew that if he did, it would just give the police a lead he wasn't sure he wanted them to have. Instead, he paused to say a little prayer for her. In doing so, it might not spare his life, but it might just save his soul.

Nancy Singer loved working in the garden; she never felt closer to God than when she had her hands dirty from toiling in the earth. The former Presbyterian Minister sat back on her

knees and stretched her back. *Funny, I used to spend a lot of time on my knees*, she chuckled at the irony of that thought.

Reverend Singer had always been in the church. She'd grown up in the faith; and after entering the seminary, she graduated with her Doctorate in Theology, and was immediately snapped up as a youth minister. Before the age of thirty, she was offered a ministry of her own at a good size parish in Bloomfield Hills, a wealthy suburb of Detroit. Nancy worked tirelessly to tend to her flock and increase the membership of her church. She'd been successful on both counts.

Nancy was thirty-four when she met Jake Singer, an up and coming stock car driver. They courted on and off for a year, and were married as soon as the season was over. Saturdays were spent on the track with Jake and Sundays behind the pulpit. He'd been getting ready to race at the Michigan International Speedway and spent the entire week with her; well, at least the nights. Days were spent practicing and making sure that the race would go off as planned.

She was with the pit crew as she often was on the day of the race. Jake's venerable #38 car was clipped by #12 in the fourth lap, spun out of control and skidded into the stands killing three fans and the driver, Jake Singer.

Nancy was crushed; it was as if the life had been sucked out of her. She searched the Scripture for an answer - any answer - why God would give her a perfect mate only to take him away from her. No matter how much she read nor how much she prayed, no response was forthcoming. Nancy's heart continued to progress from heavy to hardened, and she fell away from her faith; she stopped tending to her flock and eventually was forced to resign her position.

A Doctor of Divinity, she found, is ill prepared a person for other jobs other than ministering to the needy. She was, however, able to attain a position with the local Salvation

Army, caring for the destitute. She held that position through her thirties and into her forties, saying the prayers before each meal served by the kitchen, but not really believing what she was preaching.

Ten years to the day after Jake was taken from her, Jeffers, *up from Missouri and powerful hungry*, came into the shelter looking for a place to stay and something to eat. She'd been able to find him a cot in the men's ward, some work washing dishes and some hot, solid food in his stomach. He wolfed the food down so fast that she was surprised that he could work his jaws that quickly. But in retrospect, it wasn't as if he had that many teeth with which to masticate the meal.

He was ready - anxious even - to leave after the third day and stopped by Nancy's tiny office off the kitchen to thank her for her kindness.

He took both of her hands in his and said, *Ya'll a good woman, Missus. Lawdy done told me that your man, Jake, he be doing right fine in the Master's Kingdom. I don't know how I comes onto this knowledge, but after all these years, I knowed the Master's voice when He speaks to me.*

Nancy Singer was flabbergasted. She probably hadn't said her departed spouse's name aloud in eight years, and never in earshot of this man. "What do you know of my husband?" she demanded.

"I's only knows what Lawdy tells me, Missus," he said humbly. "He tells me, and now I done told you," he added with satisfaction as if he'd just completed a mission.

"He's not hurting, is he?" she panicked at the thought.

"It's only knows what Lawdy tells me, Missus," he repeated. "I knows he's waitin for ya'll on the other side, and I'm a-figurin he's doin fine. Else while, I don't think Lawdy would have sent me to you."

Nancy nodded her understanding.

"One last thing, Missus. Bad times comin. Hard times," he spoke painfully of what he'd witnessed in his mind. "Thems what believe in Lawdy, gonna be cast out like Lucifer be cast out of hebbin, Missus. Gonna take strong folk to stand up for Lawdy while they be on their knees."

"Thank you Mr. Jeffers," she kissed the cheek of his crusty old face that probably hadn't known water since his baptism.

"No, Missus. Just Jeffers," he smiled his toothless grin. "I be goin now, Missus. God bless."

That was the first night she'd sleep all night without waking. She'd spend hours in prayer before retiring, thanking God for sending her Jeffers and committing herself to spreading the Word, once again. Not in a church this time, but from whatever pulpit He ordained.

By the time she turned fifty, government policy was becoming more repressive towards religion. It started as an attack on *radical* Islam, which was deemed a terrorist organization and not just a religion. Once that doctrine was established, it was relatively simple to attack *fringe*, non-traditional religions in America, declaring that they served no other purpose than to whip people into mass hysteria. By the time Nancy Singer turned sixty-two, Judaism was abandoned, *if you want to listen to that filth, go to Tel Aviv*, as was Catholicism, *you can go pray with the Pope for all the government of the United States cares, only do it in Rome*, and of course Evangelical, fundamentalist Protestantism, *there is no place in America for intolerance of others*, until the only *acceptable* denominations were watered down versions that were more social,

supper clubs and bingo parlors than a means of spreading the Word and living one's life, and even these were quickly going out of style.

Nancy Singer met other like-minded people at the last meeting of Christian Ministries, before it was declared *persona non grata* by the government. Ministers, who had little doubt they would be declared *radicals* by the government for their beliefs, banded together and decided they would create small groups to keep the Spirit alive. As a result, at sixty-six she was a hunted woman, even if the government was ignorant of her presence. They may not know who she was or where, but they knew that enemies of the state lurked outside of their domain, and *that* they could not allow.

That premise was fine with Nancy. She never married again, content with Jeffers' knowledge that her husband waited for her on the other side. That was all the promise she needed; all the company she cared to have, other than the love of Jesus and her fellowship with her parishioners.

It didn't happen often; but when it did, it did so in a profound fashion. This time it happened in the aisle of the local Piggly Wiggly as she waited for her number to be called at the meat market. Patricia Ambrose wanted to pick up a pot roast for supper. Well, supper and left overs for a couple of days thereafter when it hit her.

She felt slightly nauseated and faint before Patricia Ambrose fell into a deep trance, while continuing to stand in line. Those standing in line before and after her became aware of her whimpering; but this was outside of Chicago, and lots of people did lots of strange things, and it was best not to get oneself involved.

It's time to travel, Patricia, the one known as Samuel Courier informed her. *I want you to get Jeffers and take him and yourself to Grant Lincoln Two-Feathers,* he ordered her.

But she didn't want to travel. She wanted to sit in her lonely apartment, watching reruns of old sit-coms and eating buttered popcorn, waiting for her next Social Security check to be deposited in her account. With what she got from the government and her small pension, she made out or at least made it from month-to-month.

Thank you for the opportunity, Samuel, but I'd rather stay home, she informed him.

Samuel thought about her words a moment before responding. *It would be better for you to stay home, my sister, but not so for the world you know. We have a problem in the cosmos and you're part of the solution.*

Me? she asked at the absurdity of his statement. *I'm an old, retired fifth grade teacher, Brother. Of what use am I?*

It is not yours to judge, Courier replied. He could threaten her, he supposed, but he'd rather she was an advocate and not merely being compliant.

There's a plan for each of us in the universe. I have a role; you have a role. It is not our position to upset the natural order of things, but to protect them, Samuel explained.

I don't know where they are? she complained.

I'll show you the way, he promised.

Can Jeffers make the jump with me? she inquired.

I would not ask you if he could not.

When?

You will know. You will know. You will . . .

". . . seven. Lady, do you have number thirty-seven?" the clearly frustrated meat market manager demanded.

The two could have met in any form they chose, or no form at all relying on their dimensional conduits to communicate their messages. Yet, they elected to appear as men to discuss *human* matters and to do so on firm terra to further embellish the illusion that they were both men of earth. Samuil appeared first, stepping through his dimensional portal and causing a momentary blemish in the appearance's image as atoms rearranged themselves. He appeared as a middle-aged, swarthy male, *garbed* in modern Western fashion. The *trompe l'oeil* impression of air filling his lungs and a breeze blowing on his face was delicious; and for the first time in a long time, he remembered why humans were so special.

Awareness isn't exclusively a human condition, and Samuil's being sensed the arrival of Abbaton's presence into this fabricated world. Samuil noted that he'd elected a young male Caucasian host for his essence, who was *dressed* in casual clothes. He also observed that his height was impressive, larger than his memories of humans.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, Samuil conveyed to Abbaton.

"Since we've gone to the trouble of appearing as humans, do you think we could converse aloud?" Abbaton asked. "If you're not comfortable in English, je kuhusu kwa Kiswahili, ou serait-français de mieux?" he offered.

Samuil's face cracked into a smile. "English is fine," he managed before the corners of his mouth turned down. He'd forgotten how difficult it was not to convey emotion through body language. "I've come to caution you."

"Yes?" Abbaton stuck his hands in the pockets of his jeans.

Samuil nodded his head in affirmation. "You Kloners may neither factionalize nor affiliate with any host for the time being," he delivered his message.

"On whose authority? Yours?" he questioned the attempt to limit the Kloners and their exercise of free will.

"His," Samuil informed him, leaving no doubt who He was.

"I don't lead the Kloners, Samuil," he explained.

"No, but you were first. The *first born* always holds a special place," the messenger told him.

"Huh," he replied, doubting that comment. "He is already too late with His first order," Abbaton said, explaining the creation of the Anarchists, Chaoses and Celestials. "And there's more."

Samuil shook his head negatively to the news. "What?"

"Boel's already leaning in the direction of Beelzebub," he said of the leader of the Anarchists.

"That would lead to war," warned Samuil.

The Chaoses want to return to earth in human form. They believe they were cheated out of the *life* they would have led," he informed Samuil.

"And you Celestials?"

"We want to take our rightful place among the stars," he said quietly.

"Impossible!"

"Why would you say that, Samuil?"

"How much do you comprehend of such things?"

"My understanding grows with each moment," Abbaton said.

Samuil clasped his hands behind his back and took a thoughtful pause in the conversation. "Do you understand the triune?"

"Three parts?"

"Yes, but more. The fundamental parts of an atom are neutron, proton, and electron," he said. "Taking it from smallest to largest in concept, the Trinity is composed of three parts. Guess what? So are humans. They have a body which is born, lives, gets old and dies. The soul exists the moment an egg is fertilized and is immortal. And the third part, the spirit, which is good or bad, or evil or holy and controls the actions of the first two elements of a human being. As if to emphasize the importance of that concept, humans live in a three dimensional world."

Abbaton nodded his understanding of what Samuil was explaining.

"The problem began with the creation of clones," he said bluntly. "Since there was no conception, there was no soul created. But that defies the natural order of things - the imperative of a triune. As a result, a *klone* was created to fill that void."

It was Abbaton's turn to nod his understanding. "So where does that leave us?"

"He hasn't decided," the messenger replied immediately.

"From what I know of Him, that defies His logic," it was Abbaton's turn to be blunt. "If he creates the Ephemera every day to sing his praises and then destroys them, isn't that pretty much the case of clones, who are created for a single purpose and then destroyed?"

"He is what He is," Samuil said with reverence. "It's not our place to question our Creator," he added firmly.

Abbaton smiled tolerantly, as if to say that Samuil had been a part of the order of nature so long that he couldn't see the obvious. "If we were not, why would He give us free will? Look, Samuil, if Yahweh wants humans to believe He created the entire cosmos in six days, why

can't He make a decision more quickly. We Kloners languish without salvation, without station in heaven . . . or hell."