FOR SALE: One soul, slightly used.

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"We suffer because we are human. We are imperfect creatures, Absidy. It's in our nature to create and to destroy. And you assume that human beings are the only creatures that God cares about. He's too busy to watch us all of the time and we keep screwing it up while he is busy somewhere else. Look at what we've done to this planet over the years. Some species of plants and animals die out naturally because newer species are more successful at competing for food and living space. Others have become extinct because of changes in the planet or because of natural disasters. Dinosaurs, for example, may have died out because the climate became cooler, maybe because an asteroid collided with the earth and caused a big cloud of dust that blocked out the sun. In today's world, however, species mostly become extinct or are threatened with extinction because of humans. Humans hunt animals, destroy their habitats, and introduce other animals that prey upon the endangered animals or compete for their resources. Let's face it: We're just not perfect, and if we're not perfect, neither is God."

"So you've concluded that an imperfect God created the Earth and that we are his children, Ella? That's not very scientific."

"I don't see it quite that way, Absidy. Take the idea of genius, for example. Like Mozart. How did a five year old child come to compose music? I'm an evolutionist. I don't believe that God created the Earth or human beings. I think that there is a kind of wave-like life force. Some of us

are touched by that force more than others.”

“That’s very Star Wars.” Absidy laughed.

“Are you making fun of me, Mr. Blanks? Maybe that’s what George Lucas believed when he wrote the script, or perhaps something like that. I don’t believe in ”the force“, but I do believe that this gravity-like wave exists,” Ella replied.

“Yeah, and that’s why cancer and other diseases like AIDS kill millions of people every year, and why the Nazis killed eleven million Jews and Poles during the holocaust, and why women in Africa have their limbs chopped off after being raped. They happened to be at the bottom of your wave when it washed over the Earth.”

Ella grew silent, and as Absidy watched, her eyes began to glow. Her voice deepened:

“I am that I am. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the sum of all that ever was and all that ever will be. I am part of each and every one of you, and you are part of me.”

"Ah, Ella? Are you in there? Who is speaking?

“Ella is here with me, Absidy. She’s more convenient than the tablet at the moment.”

“What should I call you? Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?”

“My my. He isn’t as bright as I thought, Ella. No Absidy, I don’t mind at all. That’s why I’m here speaking through Ella. I don’t have a name, but for the sake of convenience you can call me Al or Alfie while I’m here. What’s on your mind, son?”

“Okay. I assume that you are who or what we here on Earth refer to as God. But if that’s the case it often seems like you don’t care about us. Take diseases like the great influenza pandemics that killed hundreds of millions of us? Or cancer or AIDS for example. Where were you when all of those people suffered and died? Why do you stand by and watch genocides like the Holocaust or Dafur or Rwanda? Why do you let such things happen to us?”

Alfie leaned forward, resting her chin in her hands. She shook her head slowly. “Absidy, what makes you think that I have nothing else to do with my time but watch over you people? Do you know how many stars there are out there? How many planets? How many civilizations? There are thousands of millions of Earth-like planets in this galaxy alone. Think about that for a moment. Imagine how many there are in the universe. And because I am the sum of all that there is, I’m a very busy entity. And besides, you forget that I am eternal, I may have reasons to do things that you can never understand. Moreover, you forget that you are all part of me -- the good as well as the bad. You get the God that you deserve. You have to take a little responsibility here. I’m as much as an effect of what you do as I am the cause of it.”

“That’s a pretty convenient out,” said Absidy. How do we know that you simply aren’t paying attention?"

Alfie glared ominously. “Don’t push it, Absidy.”

“Okay, okay. How about religions? That seems like an appropriate line of questions.”

“Fine. Ask me anything you’d like to know.”

“Why are there so many religions, Alfie? And which one is right?”

“Now we’re getting somewhere. It’s the reason that I dropped the tablet on your beach and why I’m talking to you now. I gave you religions to help you make sense of your lives and to give you hope. Let’s face it -- your miserable lives are short. You need to have religions so that you won’t be so obsessed with death. They also serve practical ends, like the Jewish kosher laws.”

“Right,” Absidy answered. “Most of the kosher laws made sense. The first humans knew little about food preparation. They were poisoning themselves. Undercooked pork can kill us. But some of the kosher laws have no connection with health. Why aren’t Jews allowed to eat camels or rabbits or shellfish?”

“As with undercooked pork, most improperly cooked shellfish can be dangerous,” Alfie replied, “and I didn’t want the Jews to eat camels because they were more valuable back then as transportation than as a food source. As to rabbits, let’s just say that I think they’re adorable. I don’t like it when you kill them. Go on. What’s your next question?”

“Okay. Why Christianity?”

"I gave you Christianity because you needed an update. I gave the early Jews the Ten Commandments and a few helpful hints about what to eat. But I didn’t give them the Torah. They wrote that themselves. It happens to be a great piece of fiction -- a real page turner. But I wasn’t the author. And as the other Hebrew laws became more complex and restrictive over the years you stopped paying attention to the only things that really matter, so I dropped in at Bethlehem and found a cute kid to give you some relief. Needless to say, you managed to screw that up too as time went by. I assume that you’ve read and absorbed the Bible, which you people also wrote entirely on your own, by the way. It has so many contradictions in it that I’m amazed anyone reads it anymore. The Gospel of John disagrees with the other three Gospels on the activities of Jesus and all four Gospels contradict each other on the details of his last moments and resurrection. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke contradict even each other on the genealogy of Jesus’ father. It’s a mess. The notion that I resurrected Jesus is particularly silly. I gave him my advice, which he was happy to pass on to others, but when he died that was that."

“So there was no resurrection. I assume reincarnation is another myth?”

“Yes, Absidy. When it’s over it’s over. Ashes to ashes and all that. But don’t tell Shirley Maclaine. She has a thing with reincarnation and it would kill her if she knew the truth.”

“Cute. What about heaven and hell? Do they exist?”

“No, Absidy, but you might want to keep that to yourself for now. You aren’t quite ready for that.”

“So if there is no heaven or hell I gather that neither is there a Devil?”

God shook her head. "Nope. No Lucifer, no Satan, no Devil. At least none that I know of. Humans have spawned some pretty nasty characters over the years but they were independent contractors."

“What about Angels?”

“The L.A. Angels? Of course. They’re my favorite baseball team.” God paused, as if waiting for Absidy or Ella to laugh at the lame joke. “Sorry kid, but there are no Angels. At least not in the sense that you mean it.”

“Right. And after Christianity you gave us Mohammed and Islam,” Absidy replied.

Ella chimed in. “Islam is some gift, Al. It’s the most sexist and repressive religion on Earth. You can’t be a Muslim unless you revere the Qur’an, and the Qur’an, taken literally, includes passages that encourage violence against non-believers. What were you thinking?”

“Be careful Ella,” said Alfie, “I’m not through using your body just yet.”

Absidy found this amusing. He was now engaged in a discussion with God while he or she was in co-possession of Ella, and God was rapidly discovering that Ella had a few ideas of her own to add to the conversation.

"Absidy, you and Ella need to put this all in historic perspective. I gave you what I believed was necessary at each time in your history, but whenever I give you kids a few pointers you manage to fuck it up one way or the other. You become so obsessed with your religions that you replace compassion and reason with interpretive rules that I never intended you to have. The Qur’an contains some lovely verses, but yes, Islam is repressive and sexist, as Ella puts it. And like the Bible, it speaks of a life after death, which there isn’t -- again in the sense that you mean it. I realize that I’m digressing here, but think of death as a biologic state. Even I have difficulty describing it in terms that you would understand. Your consciousness is a kind of energy. The laws of conservation dictate that the total quantity of matter and energy in this universe remain constant. Therefore, your consciousness “remains” after your bodies die, but not in the human sense. If it helps, what was your consciousness when you were alive is out there with me, albeit in another form,“ said God, pointing up at the sky. ”You are all part of me."

“Fine,” said Ella. But what about all those verses in the Qur’an about Jihad, and Martyrdom? And all that business about seventy two virgins waiting in paradise for the fighters and the martyrs?"

“There you go again,” said Alfie. “Like I was saying, I gave you Islam through Mohammed, but I didn’t write the whole Qur’an, Ella. It was you kids who threw that stuff, as you call it, in there along with the better verses in the Qur’an. You did that with the verses about women too. There were your doing, not mine. The Muslims are motivated to terrorism because the Qur’an tells them that fighting non-believers is a duty of every Muslim. It tells them that if they die fighting they can go to heaven -- which you now know doesn’t exist -- where the virgins will be waiting to service their needs. It sounds pretty dumb, doesn’t it? But you guys wrote all that, not me.”

“Okay, what about Scientology?” asked Absidy. “Does it qualify as a religion?”

“Yikes!” exclaimed the Lord, “Don’t even go there. What a bunch of fruitcakes! And as far as I can tell it’s also a major ripoff. The only people who manage to attain a so-called higher state are either celebrities or they have so much money that they can afford it.”

“So I gather that you don’t care what religions we choose to observe?” said Ella.

“Listen carefully. I couldn’t care less what formal religions you observe,” said the Lord, "or for that matter, whether you observe any at all. What matters to me is how you live your lives, not if

or how you worship me. If you want to observe Judaism, go to a synagogue. If you want to be a Catholic or a Protestant, go to a church. If Islam is your thing then pray to me five times each day. It's all the same to me, Ella. Human beings seem to thrive on having cultural and religious traditions that you can identify with. It's like sports teams. You like to have a side that you can root for. But you get carried away and it becomes destructive. Don't take ANY of the interpretive rules and passages so seriously. See them for what they are -- your own opinions and interpretations written by your ancestors that do nothing but interpret the opinions of their ancestors. None of it is required reading in my school, dude, and none of it should be taken literally. You all need to stop bickering about who is right and who is wrong. Your religions are nothing but cultural traditions. That's my command. Live your lives with fairness, integrity and respect for the truth. It won't extend your individual existences, but it's how you should live. You should also stop overpopulating the Earth. There are already too many of you. You kids are on the brink of disaster as it is. And if you don't kick the fossil fuel habit you'll soon find that you're cooking the planet. Interstellar travel isn't happening, guys. This is the only home that mankind will ever have. No worm holes, no warp drives, nada. Sorry, but it is what it is."

"Okay, but I have one more question: Why?"

"Why what?

"Why are we here? What is the purpose of life?"

"I really hate that question, Absidy. I don't know so many of you keep asking it. It's pointless."

"Why is it pointless? Shouldn't we know the purpose of existence?"

"No. Because life is just the inevitable consequence of chemistry, of the stuff that comprises this universe, and since the universe itself has no purpose unless it's some part of a cosmic computer simulation, then neither does life. So there. Are you happy now? That's my final answer." With those words ringing in Absidy's mortal ears, God left Ella's body.

"Wow!" she exclaimed. "That was a really interesting experience! No offense, Absidy, but it was even better than sex. And I'm really hungry. What have you got in the fridge?"

From *Seven Till Dawn* sends Absidy and some decidedly unusual friends on a take-no-prisoners romp across three continents. It is NOT recommended for young readers. The print (softcover) and Kindle editions are now available at Amazon.com.. The ipad version is on sale at the itunes store, and in nook, and other ebook formats at Barnes&Noble and elsewhere, (Please send me a note if you can't find it online.)

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