

A BOOK THAT LIVES UP TO ITS TITLE

By Suzanna Hartzell-Baird

**LIMITED EDITION
SNEAK-PREVIEW**

WARNING - Important Safety Instructions

1. Read these instructions.
2. Keep these instructions.
3. Heed all warnings.
4. Follow all instructions.
5. Do not attempt to operate while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
6. Do not attempt to operate heavy machinery or a motor vehicle while utilizing this product until you are sure how this product will affect you.
7. Do not ingest. If accidental ingestion occurs, contact the poison control center immediately.
8. Do not use this product near water.
9. This product is highly flammable. Do not use this product near open flame.
10. Do not store near any heat sources, such as heat registers, stoves, radiators, or other apparatuses that produce heat.
11. Install in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Clean only with dry cloth.
12. Do not dry clean.
13. Protect this product from being walked-on or smashed.
14. Only use with attachments or accessories specified by the manufacturer.
15. Do not attempt to plug in.
16. This product is sealed for your protection. Do not use if the seal has been broken or tampered with.
17. Use only with bookcase, shelf, or table specified by the manufacturer or sold with the product. When a bookcase is used, use caution when moving the bookcase to avoid injury from tip-over.
18. Discontinue use of this product during lightning storms or power outages or when unused for long periods of time.
19. Refer all servicing to qualified service personnel. Servicing is required when the product does not operate normally, has been dropped, or has been damaged in any way, such as: cover or spine damage, soiled pages, objects have fallen onto the product, or the product has been exposed to rain, moisture, or spilled liquids.

20. Avoid eye contact.
21. Do not use while sleeping.
22. Some side effects are normal and should be expected, including neck or eyestrain. If you experience nausea, dizziness, or headache persisting for longer than five (5) days, contact your physician immediately.
23. Peanuts may have been processed in the same facility in which this product was manufactured.
24. Not intended for children under the age of six (6) years or for individuals who cannot read.

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THE BEGINNING

Some famous scientist from someplace living somewhere at some point in his life once said that matter could be neither created nor destroyed.

One might speculate that this principle would be problematic when humankind wanted to eliminate various substances. Collections of radioactive materials, diseased or mutation-contaminated cells from medical research, and the leftover circuitry of fusion powered computers threatened to hinder progress. With byproducts of this magnitude piling up, the international government was hesitant to grant the voluminous backlog of permit requests filed by entities seeking to utilize waste-producing manufacturing processes that their operations departments insisted were necessary to attain a competitive advantage and maximize profit potential.

Privately funded corporate scientists across the globe were indignant that the government would dare to impede the planet's intellectual and commercial expansion merely because, in the end, a few million tons of radioactive garbage would be produced.

After a lengthy debate littered with homage such as, "you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs," and, "what goes around comes around," TriUranium, Inc. publicized its intention to shut down its Earth division, costing hundreds of thousands of civilian jobs. Earth's government saw only one alternative—shipping the garbage into space.

Unsurprisingly, this, too, was met with objection.

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She stared at it. Fixedly. She was uninterested, yet unable to look away. The small, white spec of a space ship inched across the monitor. Actually, a more accurate description would be that the small, white spec of a space ship millimetered across the monitor, as it was moving very slowly.

Susinian pondered what her life would have been like if she had instead been a stowaway on the space ship, rather than just the person assigned to watch it on a monitor. If she'd been alive at the time the ship was launched and had known then what she knew now about how her life would turn out, she wondered whether she would have selected a life in a ship full of garbage over the humdrum existence she experienced here on Earth.

Due to principles of physics that may or may not have been postulated by Einstein, time slows down as an object approaches light speed. If an object—hypothetically a space ship, in the sense that the hypothetical is actually the object being referred to—is moving extremely quickly through space, the time a passenger on the ship would experience would seem like the average, run-of-the-mill, regular passage of time, whereas on Earth, whose inhabitants are not moving at light speed, significantly more time would have passed. For example—again in the sense that the example is actually what is occurring—traveling at 99.9999% of the speed of light, a person could travel across the galaxy easily within his or her lifetime. However, from the perception of people on Earth, 250,000 years would pass between the time of the launch and the time the craft left the galaxy.

This was the 250,000th year for the garbage ship. In a few more hours, the ship belonging to the International Space Program of Transportation (ISPOT) would exit the galaxy. Susinian, an ISPOT employee, was instructed to monitor the craft particularly carefully this evening to ensure that it followed the final segment of its anticipated path. After that, ISPOT's legal and

ethical obligation—in the sense that corporations have ethical obligations to avoid bad public relations—to monitor the ship would be fulfilled. If Susinian were aboard the ship, this would be the evening that she'd exit the galaxy and enter her destiny.

But she wasn't aboard the ship. Instead, she was on the 853rd floor of a crowded office building, slumped in her Wake-Me-Up chair, which periodically jiggled its user at various jolting speeds based on when it sensed a lack of attentive movement. After lunch in the mid-afternoon, it was enough to make some employees nauseous. The next chair update was expected to resolve this issue and would be addressed further at the upcoming ISPO safety meeting. In the meantime, Susinian was wearing her image stabilizing safety goggles to try to mitigate the effects.

While Susinian was earning her undergraduate degree in physics and aeronautical engineering, she fantasized about wearing a sleek rubberized lab tunic, discussing the modification of light waves with her colleagues, and averting catastrophic events by single-handedly altering the path of a 364 square foot comet hurtling towards Earth. Maybe they would even name the comet after her.

But there hadn't been any comets in her career. And it looked like there wouldn't be any. Ever. She probably should have given up her dreams of notoriety shortly after completing graduate school, when she accepted a government job with the title "Sanitation and Waste Removal Specialist." Not a lot of pizzazz in that job description.

Susinian nonetheless tried to convince herself that her work wasn't so bad. Lots of people would have considered themselves lucky to have such high paying employment that required little or no real responsibility or talent, and, today, her position even had ties to an event of historical significance. A vessel that was launched 250,000 years ago was finally making its way out of the galaxy. That type of thing didn't happen every day. In fact, it took 250,000 years, an almost incomprehensible amount of time. Surely, that meant that her work was meaningful. Or semi-meaningful.

But why, then, did it bother her that she had spent her entire adult life monitoring this flying trashcan?

Her piercing blue eyes continued to stare blearily at the computer monitor in front of her while the six radar devices to her left bleeped in the background, each at different intervals and at slightly different pitches so there was never an instant of silence, yet never a sound worth listening to.

* * * * *

00078.0890°N 03589000.675°W

It was dark, very dark. Like a starless night, like a night that had never seen any stars, or like a black hole. There was distinctly no light source where he was. He couldn't remember how he'd gotten here. He also couldn't remember ever being anywhere else. In fact, when he thought about it, he couldn't remember anything at all.

It was cold. It was as cold as it was dark. There was no heat here, just like there was no light. And he was moving.

* * * * *

Less than a mile away, nestled in the impressive shadow cast by the magnificent ISPO building, was the solid-brick one-story law office of Mamarack P. Duckfelder. Mamarack was a solo practitioner with an enviable book of business. She had represented clients ranging from the notorious retinal scan counterfeiter Rico Alphonse to the Mercy of Death Hospital and was currently working on a case for a gentleman who was the product of a cloned marriage.

Whereas she didn't ordinarily like family law, last year she'd been the recipient of the Family Law in a Nutshell Leadership Award. She immediately realized that her name must have been selected in error because she had never actually practiced any family law, but after spending countless unsuccessful hours trying to straighten out the situation, she decided to accept the award for family law services that she would render in the future and save the organization the inconvenience of having to reprint the programs for the award ceremony.

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00777.2207°N 08216000.900°W

He was still awake. And he still couldn't remember. But he presumed there had to have been a yesterday. And yesterday he must have been someplace else. He must have come from someplace. He must be going someplace. And he was going there quickly. He must be at someplace. There must be some purpose to this trip. He must have a purpose on this vessel, whatever it was. Whoever he was.

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Mamarack adjusted her chair to the optimum height for typing proficiently on her handheld computer. She thoughtfully began drafting a letter to her client's parents.

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Collins:

It has recently come to my client's attention that the circumstances surrounding his birth were of dubious origin. As you know, my client was shocked and appalled to learn that not one but both of his parents were the byproducts of artificial human replication. As a result of this traumatic information, my client has experienced substantial emotional distress and suffering. Accordingly, my client seeks restitution damages of at least \$589,749,930,294.94 and the contact information of the original cellular donors so that he can form a relationship with the true providers of his genetic material, rather than their imposter cloned versions. Please provide your response within seven (7) business days.

Sincerely,
Mamarack P. Duckfelder, Esq.

Mamarack admired her work on screen. Another finely crafted letter. Her client ought to be quite satisfied with that one. Her clients were always satisfied.