

Inner Monologue

November 2025

Issue 39



This Issue:

Essay: "Where Were the Y2K Deniers?"

News & Puzzles

Book Excerpt: *Frozen Blueberries*

Random Thought Bubble

Where Were the Y2K Deniers?

For those who were not around in the 1990s, “Y2K” was the name of a potential issue where computers across the globe would malfunction simultaneously. Many older computer systems used a two-digit format to represent the year (e.g., “99” for 1999), and some feared that these systems would misinterpret “00” as 1900, causing errors and potentially widespread system failures.

As the world was beginning to depend on computers increasingly, people took the issue seriously and prepared to mitigate the threat. So finally, when January 1st, 2000 arrived, there were only minor glitches. It was a crisis successfully avoided.

I was working in the corporate world at the time. At the company meeting in early January 2000, our CEO dismissed the Y2K issue, saying, “Well, that was a lot of nothing.”

I was shocked by his dismissal of the problem. I wanted to yell, “It was nothing because we prepared!” But honestly, that would have been career-limiting.

While some people were not particularly concerned, I don’t recall any outright Y2K deniers. Why is that?

When I first considered this, I was sitting in a field at an outdoor book event in sweltering heat. We’d had several days in the 90s and 100s. Yet, there are many who deny climate change despite the evidence and the increasing perspiration.



Each year is hotter than the one before. Photographs show ice caps shrinking. Evidence is abundant. Yet there are many screaming their denial, even constructing conspiracy theories.

Today, many people think “research” is hopping on the Internet to see what other people think. That is not scientific research; it is just opinion polling.

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News & Events

Within the next few months we anticipate the publication of *Road Signs, A Short Story Anthology*. I contributed two stories, *U-turn* and *Route 380*, along with 15 stories from other authors.

Below are the book events I've committed to so far. Each in-person event includes a range of talented authors.

March 14, 2026
10 am - 4 pm

Books in Bloom
30 Calais Road
Randolph, NJ 07869

**Books
in Bloom**

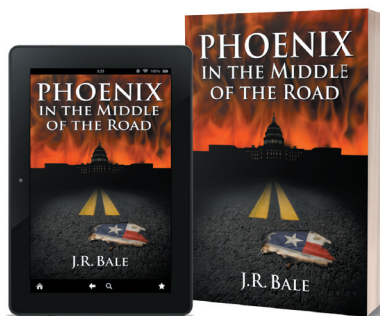
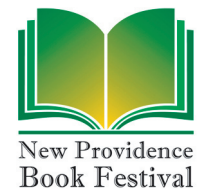
May 2-3, 2026
Noon - 4 pm

Days of Wine Romance & More
Brook Hollow Winery
594 Route 94
Columbia, New Jersey 07832
www adayofwineromanceandmore.com

*A Day of Wine, Romance,
AND MORE!*

September 19, 2026
9 am - 3 pm

New Providence Book Festival
Grounds of the Salt Box Museum
1350 Springfield Avenue
New Providence, NJ 07974
www.NewProvidenceBookFestival.com



About J.R. Bale

J.R. Bale has always tried to explore the themes in his stories from an unusual perspective, whether it was politics in *Phoenix in the Middle of the Road* or consciousness in *Cognition Chronicles: The Redstone Legacy*, and *Cognition Chronicles: Destiny's Orphans*.

In his pursuit of diverse perspectives, he has traveled to over a dozen countries across four continents. He even applied to NASA's space program. When not writing books, he is a marketing consultant and college professor. You can learn more about J.R. at www.JRBale.com.



BOOK EXCERPT

The following is an excerpt from a story *Frozen Blueberries* from an upcoming anthology called *Café Oblivion* by J.R. Bale

Jordana Evers reduced her sled's speed as she approached Beta Town. Beta Town was one of three settlements that surrounded the outer navigational beacons for the Kōri spaceport.

Kōri was an icy planet which had little native life beyond some barely edible plants and few harmless microbes, both remnants from millennia ago when the planet was warmer. Not a great choice for a human colony, but for nearly fourteen years, it served as Jordana's refuge. In its current state, Kōri was only of value because it was roughly the mid-point on the trade route between Earth and the much more hospitable Colony Three, more of a layover for maintenance than a real destination.

Jordana cut her sled's power completely, coasting to a stop at the edge of the Beta Town marketplace. As she climbed out of her sled, she could see clouds of warm breath punctuating the cold outdoor bazaar. The clouds expelled from people's nostrils reminded her of dragons. Of course, few would remember what a dragon was, if they ever knew. That was an old Earth myth.

"Jordana Evers, you're a sight for frosty eyes," called out Mira, one of the local peddlers. Jordana didn't socialize much in the settlement, but Mira and her niece were an exception. Ten years earlier, the beacon was refurbished and was now fully automated, but the town remained. All that remained were refugees, fugitives and any others who couldn't afford to get off this dirty snowball in space. Kindness in this coarse and frigid world was rare. Mira, pushed up her sun goggles and walked over to give her a hug.

"How long has it been?"

"Suppose over a month," Jordana said.

"Closer to two, I think. Well, come warm yourself."

The heater in Jordana's sled wasn't working properly, so she appreciated the warmth emanating from Mira's

street stove at her food stand.

"So," Mira asked, "what delicacies did you bring for me this time?"

"Some potatoes, gorra beans, but mostly blueberries."

"Ah, your blueberries, my favorite." Mira grinned. "How you grow them out on that forsaken ice plateau, I can't imagine. You know last week, one man bought up my entire stock of blueberries."

"The entire stock?" Jordana frowned.

"Well to be fair, there wasn't much left at that point. Four and half cans, I think."

"He wasn't from around these parts I take it."

"You're right. No Beta-towner could afford all your delicious berries. And he dressed better than the usual tech that comes out to check on the beacon. Anyways, this Galt fellow—that was his name I think—he said he wanted to meet you. Said he might want to start a proper blueberry farm and would love to work with you."

"What was he doing out here, so far from the space port if he wasn't a tech?"

"Couldn't say. However, we do get the occasional adventuring tourist."

"Well, I have no interest in that sort of farming. If you see him, tell this Galt fellow you heard I died on the ice."

"Glad to hear it," Mira chuckled as she unloaded another case. "I don't mean the dying part. But an industrial farm on Kōri might put my little stand out of business."

"It's getting late," Jordana said, looking out at the cold sun dropping over the horizon. "Is your store room available tonight?"

"Yes, but I have a warm bed you might prefer."

"And put Kensie out of her room? No, the store room is just fine. I've got my sleeping bag."

"Well, at least take some dinner with us. Last night,

I made a pot of mushroom and potato stew, perfect for warming the bones.”

Jordana smiled. “Of course. But first, I have to pick up some supplies at Clender’s before he closes. I need to head out first thing in the morning. See you in an hour?”

“Gives me enough time to bake some bread.”

Jordana drove her sled to behind the supply store. She adjusted her solar panels on the roof to collect the last photons of the dying light. Walking in the back way, she found the owner, an older man stocking some shelves.

“Hey Clender, how are you?”

“Cold.” That described Clender both physically and emotionally. He wasn’t friendly, but he was honest and dependable. “Whatdaya need?”

Strictly business. Same old Clender.

“Fifty re-sealable food cans, an I-3 thermal blanket, two boxes of protein concentrates and a new H34 heater for my sled.”

“Haven’t been able to get heaters for a couple months. I got six on backorder.”

“Oh well.”

“Want some therm-cubes?”

“Maybe a couple.”

“Only a couple?” Clender grunted. “You must really like the cold,”

“It keeps me alive,” she said. “By the way, did you ever get in the new rock cutter I ordered?”

“Yeah, I’ve been holding it for almost a month. Wasn’t sure I’d see you again,” Clender grumbled. “I was gettin’ ready to send it back.”

He pulled out the cutter and handed it to her. She then paid her bill. Clender helped Jordana load the supplies into her sled. As they were finished, Mira’s niece came running up to her.

“Kensie, what are you doing here?”

“Aunt Mira asked me to bring you this note,” Kensie said.

Given that Jordana was about to return to Mira’s place, this felt ominous. She opened the note:

*A man was here looking for you.
Although he tried to cover it up, he had a
bounty hunter’s mark on his arm. Be careful.*

Mira

Bounty hunters? It had been a long time since she

dealt with any of them. She had kept a low profile, rarely visiting the town, limiting her contacts to Mira, Clender and very few others. She never went to the saloon or socialized anywhere. Then, she remembered Mira mentioning Galt, the man who was interested in blueberries. A coincidence?

“Kensie, did anyone follow you here?”

“I don’t think so. Aunt Mira told me to cut through the lodge.”

She swung Kensie around, seeming to look at her, but she was really looking over the girl’s shoulder. Jordana saw what she suspected. A man was warming his hands at the neighboring store’s street stove. In the twilight, she couldn’t make out many details beyond the fact that he was wearing a big, bulky coat. Kōri residents knew to wear clothing in layers. This was an off-world bounty hunter.

“Okay, Kensie. Thank you. Now, head back the same way you came.” She knew the bounty hunter would have no interest in the girl, now that he had found Jordana. As Kensie trudged home, she walked back into Clender’s, looking at the supplies available.

“Clender,” she called out, “I’ll also take two lengths of this aluminum truss.”

Clender gave her an odd look and a shrug. She tossed him the credit chits. Jordana knew the hunter would be waiting just outside the door. She threw the first truss almost all the way to the sled. As the bounty hunter looked out, she swiftly slammed the second one into the side of his head. He let out a grunt as he toppled over. She looked down at his unconscious body and checked his forearm and found a triangular cross-hair tattoo, the mark of the Bounty Hunters Guild. Suddenly, a cord passed down through her vision and around her neck. She grabbed the cord with one hand and turned her head so it wouldn’t break her trachea.

“Wasn’t supposed to hurt or kill ya,” the hunter growled, “but you just took out my partner.”

Jordana pulled her knife out and stabbed her attacker in the thigh. Then moved the knife to her throat to cut the cord. She spun around.

“You’re Galt?”

The bounty hunter didn’t answer, but pulled a much larger knife from under his tunic. He advanced on her with a wobbly gait, slashing back and forth, clearly

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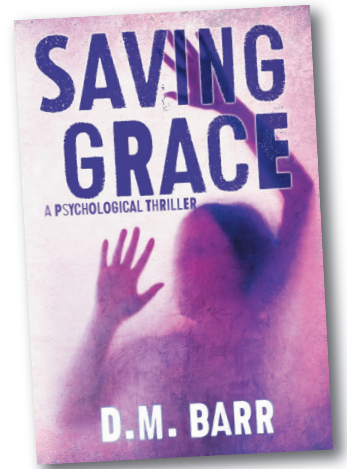
Off the Shelf

Saving Grace

By D.M. Barr

Grace Pierrepont Rendell has been treated for paranoia since childhood. When she secretly quits her meds, she begins to suspect that once her father passes, her husband will murder her for her inheritance. Realizing that no one will believe the ravings of a supposed psychotic, she devises a way to save herself—she will write herself out of danger, authoring a novel with the heroine in exactly the same circumstances, subtly exposing her husband’s scheme to the world. She hires acclaimed author Lynn Andrews to help edit her literary insurance policy, but when Lynn is murdered, Grace is discovered standing over the bloody remains. The clock is ticking: can she write and publish her manuscript before she is strapped into a straitjacket, accused of homicide, or lowered six feet under?

Learn more at www.dmbarr.com.



(Continued from Page 2)

Y2K was abstract. No one knew all the ramifications if the issue was left unaddressed. In the 1990s and 2000s, the Internet was in its early days. Although we had the “Information Super Highway,” there was no social media yet. The maelstrom of disinformation had yet to begin.

With the rise of “alternate facts,” vaccine denial, evolution denial and even round-Earth denial are on the rise. While we all love a good story, has narrative really become more important than truth?

R

(Continued from Page 5)

enraged by the pain in his thigh. Jordana dodged repeatedly, but eventually his blade caught her in her forearm.

Suddenly, there was a loud thud. The hunter fell to the ground and lie motionless. Clender was standing over him with a large wooden club.

“They don’t allow guns on the transport ships,” he growled, “but an antique baseball bat—”

“Thanks,” Jordana said. “I owe you.”

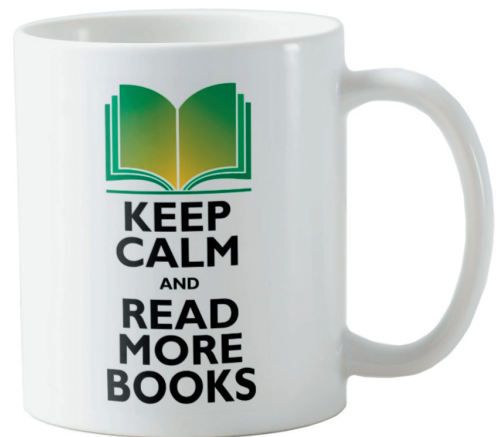
“Customer service,” Clender mumbled. “Plus, bounty hunters are bad for business. Better head back to Mira’s. I’ll clean up this mess.”

R

Swag Box

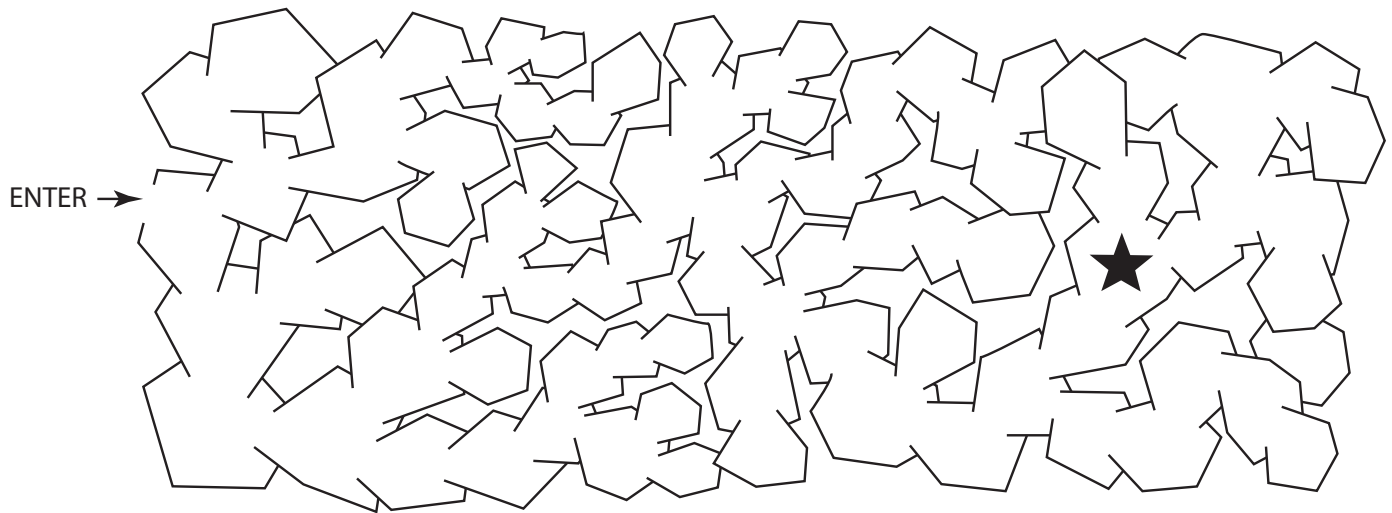
What’s your favorite beverage while reading a book? Coffee? Tea? Cocoa? Either way, make a pro-book statement while reading.

This literate mug is available on Zazzle at <https://bit.ly/Zazzle-KeepCalmMug>.



MENTAL WORKOUT

Irregular Polygon Maze



C T Y P Z Y T Z T V D N P X O
I O Z A U R B G D Z O H R F S
J F N J W Z Z R T I J A O M T
R D I N Q M O G T F M R C K B
M M C W E W T A M N Y D E L U
H U A Z S C C W I C R D S R R
T Z S S P I T N F P O R S B A
I J A O L O T I R J M I O Z L
R P R P B E T O O A E V R N X
O B P K R Z G P P N M E M Q R
G A J N W R D R A O B Y E K S
L L E E A R O G E L K L J T Z
A T C M I P R I N T E R Q U P
S F L G E R A W T F O S I D F
W H V L F L K C O M P U T E R

Computer Search

ALGORITHM
APPLICATION
COMPUTER
CONNECTION
HARD DRIVE
INTERNET
KEYBOARD
LAPTOP
MEMORY
PASSWORD
PRINTER
PROCESSOR
PROGRAM
SOFTWARE
WIFI

RANDOM THOUGHT BUBBLE

Q&A Humor to Groan By

Q: Why did the author write in an elevator?

A: He wanted the story to work on many levels.

Q: What do you call the ending of a mystery story in a book?

A: A novel solution.

Q: What did the alien say to the garden?

A: Take me to your weeder.

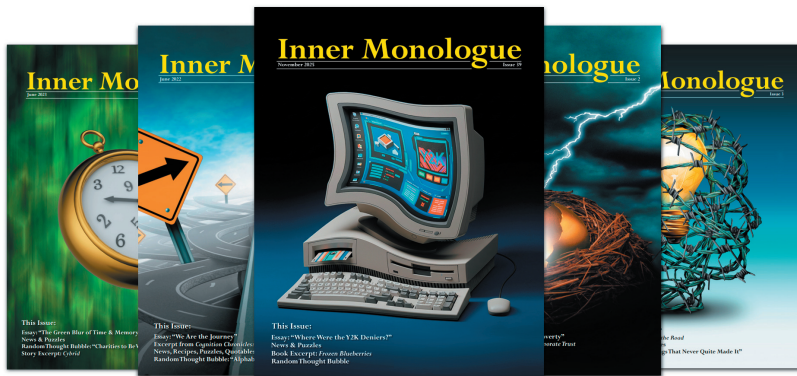
Q: What do you call the lighting on Noah's Ark?

A: Flood lights.

Q: How many novelists does it take to screw in a lightbulb?

A: Only one, but they have to give it an unexpected twist at the end.

Groan at your own descretion.



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Your contact information will never be sold. I would also enjoy any feedback. Tell me what you like and don't like so much.

Thanks and be well.

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