

Inner Monologue

January 2026

Issue 40

This Issue:

Essay: "Universal Weirdness"

News & Puzzles

Book Excerpt: *Quads: The Last Iceberg*

Random Thought Bubble

Universal Weirdness

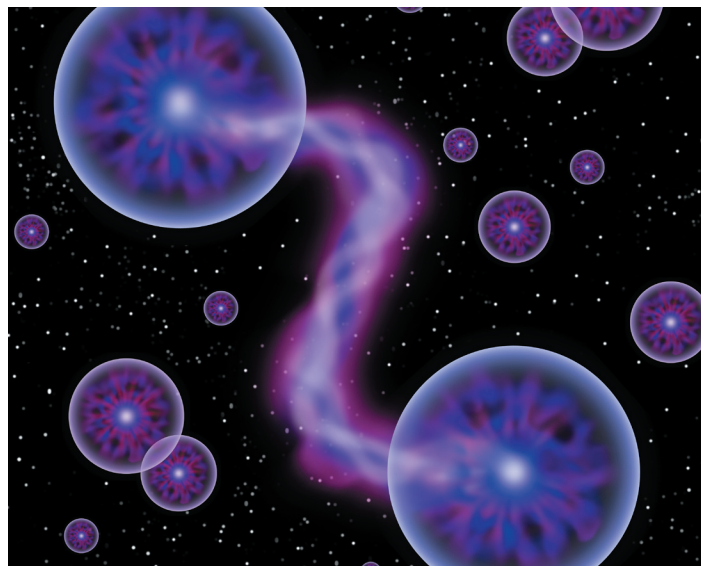
I used to think the universe was fairly straightforward. Gravity made things fall, usually at inconvenient times, but I blamed Newton for that. The sun shone. I later learned that it took eight minutes for light to reach the Earth from the Sun. Despite being impatient, I could tolerate that. Then Einstein explained that lightspeed was the speed limit.

Okay, Einstein's whole time-dilation thing for those approaching the speed of light seemed a bit weird. But honestly, when was I going to travel near the speed of light?

However, in recent years, I've been learning even weirder things about our universe. The universe is over 13 billion years old. Sounds fair. In an expanding universe, that seems like plenty of time for us to be clear of the Big Bang. However, now astronomers are claiming the farthest observable stars are over 28 billion light-years away. Okay, if the farthest stars are that far away and the universe is only 13 billion years old and nothing can travel faster than light, how can stars exist that far away?

To explain this, physicists assert that the fabric of the universe is also expanding. That means the universe is even stretchier than spandex. Weird!

The universe gets even weirder. There is something called the double-slit experiment in which the behavior of particles changes only based on whether they are being observed or not. Are these particles shy? Or just showing off?



Not weird enough? Try quantum entanglement. If two particles are quantumly entangled, whatever happens to one, happens to the other instantaneously, regardless on the distance between them. This principle holds great promise in the field of communications. This way, we can transmit our weirdness to even greater distances instantaneously.

The more we learn, the weirder the universe gets. Are human beings really up to this?

R

In This Issue

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Cover image by J.R. Bale, representing quantum entanglement



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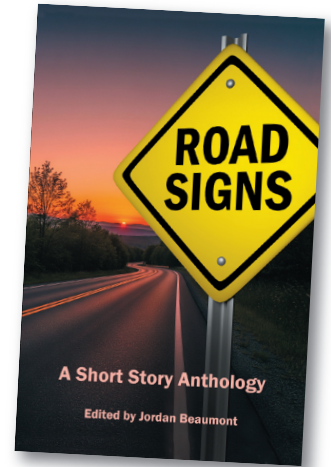
[@jrbale1](https://x.com/jrbale1)

News & Events

***Road Signs* Launches!**

Road Signs is a short story anthology being published by the Network of Writers & Artists (NOWA) Two of my short stories, ***U-Turn*** and ***Route 380*** are included. I also designed the cover. Other writers include Geneva Broussard, Michael Stephen Daigle, Melanie Davis, Susen Edwards, Lynn Eisenhower, Laurel English, Vivian Fransen, Pamela Hegarty, Eric Kemelis, Tom Kranz, Nev March, Elissa Matthews, Graham Matthews, M. C. Olmsted, Michael Penncavage and Kathleen Schumar.

Road Signs is available at www.amazon.com/dp/B0G5PVQHGX.



Upcoming Events

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**

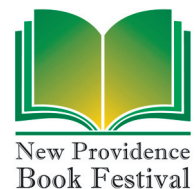
May 2-3, 2026
Noon - 4 pm

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 26, 2026
9 am - 3 pm

New Providence Book Festival
Grounds of the Salt ox 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 an upcoming novel *Quads: The Last Iceberg* by J.R. Bale

"Where is the captain?" demanded Branch Blackwood. "Shouldn't he be at the Captain's Table or something like that? Isn't that why it's called the Captain's Table?"

"Yes, sir," the attendant said in a conciliatory tone. "Captain Lucas is attending to navigational matters. The ice flows can be treacherous at this latitude."

"Navigational matters?" Blackwood spat. "Doesn't he have a bloody navigator? For the prices we're paying, he should have a whole fleet of navigators. Tell Captain Lucas we expect him to be present."

While all the guests were quadrillionaires, along with their family and staff, none were richer than Branch Blackwood. To upset Blackwood in any way might risk ruin. He wasn't simply a second-generation quadrillionaire; he was the richest, owning seven percent of the world's assets, not to mention the largest share of all human-indenture contracts.

"I understand we'll arrive at the last iceberg tomorrow," said Cannon, another guest, trying to distract Blackwood. "That will be a rare sight. They call it Omega. It's supposed to be quite grand, even though it's only half its original size."

Blackwood glared at the attendant, ignoring Cannon.

"Are you still here? Summon the Captain."

* * *

Captain Jake Lucas was overseeing the course corrections. The warming currents in the Arctic had become more treacherous in recent years. Then, the intercom beeped. Lucas picked it up and listened carefully.

"Very good," he said. "I'll be down shortly."

"Let me guess," Kate Grainer, his first officer, said, "Blackwood's being a spoiled jerk."

"Aren't all quads?" he asked.

"True, but he seems to be a darker shade of vile."

"And apparently, the booze hasn't mellowed him out." Lucas pulled on his formal dinner jacket roughly. Kate walked over to him and straightened his bow tie.

"Just remember, Captain," Kate said. "He's a quad. We need his money. So, be charming."



A few minutes later, Lucas entered the dining room.

"Ah, here's our captain," Blackwood said, "at last."

"Good evening, Mr. Blackwood. I hope everything is to your liking."

Lucas and his crew catered to their trillionaire clients. The finest wine collection, a highly trained chef, well-versed in multiple cuisines. Lucas and his crew sold luxury tours of the last of the icebergs.

"We had to course correct for an ice flow. If I hadn't, we would have had a rather unpleasant evening."

"Safety first," Cannon blurted out.

"I suppose so," Blackwood admitted, turning back to Captain Lucas. "Who owns your contract?"

"I say old chap," Cannon said, "that's a bit rude." Cannon was one of the few who could get away with saying such a thing to Blackwood. Blackwood ignored him.

"I have no contract," Lucas said. "I am a ship captain and an entrepreneur."

"Sounds dangerously like a pirate," Cannon joked.

"An entrepreneur? No contract?"

"It's entrepreneurs such as Captain Lucas," Cannon said, "that provide us such lovely and creative distractions."

Let's be honest, our corporate lackeys would never be this creative. They'd never take the risk."

"Maybe Mr. Cannon, you need a higher quality lackey," Blackwood said. "What corporation do you say you own?"

"I didn't. I enjoy Obsidian status."

"Really?"

"It has its advantages. Power without fame means greater flexibility."

"I distrust people who don't gloat."

"I gloat about my status. I presume I paid the same as you for this diversion. Mystery is my drug of choice. All guaranteed by the Corporate Congress."

"Be careful of your addiction," Blackwood said. "It only offers limited protection."

* * *

At about midnight, Lucas returned to the bridge.

"All the quads snug in their beds?" Lucas asked.

"There's one still in the library," Kate reported.

"The library?"

She nodded.

As he entered the library, Lucas discovered Mr. Cannon perusing the shelves of books. Cannon turned as Lucas entered.

"You have an impressive collection," Cannon said. "Many of these have been banned on the mainlands."

"Such bans don't apply on the seas," Lucas explained. "Maritime law. Maritime exemptions."

"True."

"You don't disapprove?"

Cannon shook his head. "But I wouldn't show these to Blackwood. He's a very ill-tempered animal. Very destructive."

"I've met several aggressively ambitious quad, I mean quadrillionaires."

"Quads. You can say it. I'm not offended. But Blackwood is much more than that. He's an unhinged psychopath."

"Isn't he one of your own?"

"He's a quad, but I'm nothing like him. He believes the rules don't apply to him. I want to warn you about something: Blackwood wants to climb Omega."

"That's not possible. The icebergs are too unstable."

"So is Blackwood."

"Regardless, it's too dangerous."

"He lives in a world where no one says no to him. I overheard him saying something to his bodyguard about borrowing one of your launches."

"I see. Thank you for the warning, Mr. Cannon."

Lucas stopped by the bridge before retiring.

"Kate, have someone lock up the launches."

"What if we have an emergency?"

"Keep a key ready. I heard one of our passengers has a mind to borrow one. It's just a precaution."

* * *

The next morning, Omega was on the horizon. By midday, they had reached it. The crew set up a luxurious buffet lunch. Lucas noticed Blackwood seemed calmer today.

"I've seen people walk on top of icebergs in videos," Blackwood said. "I think we do that."

"To be honest," Lucas said, the icebergs in the old documentaries were very stable, from a time before global warming. They were usually very flat or had usually run a ground. Omega is floating, irregularly shaped and melting, which means it's structurally unsound."

"Looks sturdy to me."

"Looks can be deceiving."

"Perhaps so," Blackwood said. "Well, I think we should honor the last iceberg with a champagne toast." Lucas felt relieved that Blackwood saw sense.

Full glasses of champagne were distributed.

"Perhaps a toast from our captain?"

"Here's to the frozen Earth. Millions of years ago, the entire planet was frozen, like a giant snowball in space. Someday, it will be again. It should humble us. We are passing through history. And we are privileged to witness it. To the human privilege."

Lucas raised his glass. All responded similarly. Various guests milled around and grazed at the luxurious buffet.

Suddenly, Lucas heard a sound only he and the crew recognized. Lucas ran to the window. A launch was in the ocean, headed toward Omega.

"I guess Blackwood is going to climb Omega after all," one of the guests said.

Lucas ran to the bridge.

"Get the launch on the radio!" Lucas grabbed the microphone. "Bring that boat back to the ship. You are in grave danger."

"What danger?" the voice responded.

"Who is this?"

"I'm Garvey, Mr. Blackwood's bodyguard."

"You need to return to the ship. Let me speak to Blackwood."

There was a pause. He turned toward Kate. "How did he access the launch?"

"I'll find out."

"And get the other launch ready with a crew."

(Continued on Page 6)

Off the Shelf

Golden Fire

By Pamela Hegarty

Goldenfire is the power within the Ark of the Covenant. Can it be found? Historian Christa Devlin and FBI Special Agent Braydon Fox race into the past to find the answers. They chase the history of the Ark across the world. They delve deeper into danger on a trail twisting and turning with enigmatic symbols, legends of the Knights Templar, and a centuries-old map. A vengeful mastermind is determined to find the Goldenfire first and unleash it as a weapon, deploying its lethal ancient power with his high-tech drones. The stakes are high. For Christa, this quest is personal. Her mother vanished, presumed killed, searching for the Goldenfire. Could she still be alive, healed by the power of the Goldenfire but trapped in a mountainous wilderness? Will Christa's actions save her mother, or put her in deadly peril?

Learn more at www.pamelahegarty.com.



(Continued from Page 5)

"Blackwood. Blackwood," Lucas yelled into the radio to no response. "You need to get away from the iceberg! It's too unstable."

Kate returned.

"They found a bolt cutter and the cut chains on the deck."

"Dammit."

"The other launch is ready," Kate

"The first launch is at Omega," called out one of the crew.

Lucas pulled out his binoculars.

"That idiot is trying to climb the side of the iceberg. He doesn't even have the right equipment." He turned to Kate. "Send out the other launch to bring those idiots back."

"Holy crap," the crewman called out. "The side of the iceberg where Blackwood was collapsed."

Tons of ice dropped on top of him and the launch. Lucas could hear the cry of the other passengers coming from the observation deck.

Cannon came running up onto the bridge.

"Everyone saw?"

Cannon nodded.

"The wealthiest man in the world just died, killed by his own stupidity. But the quads will blame you."

R

Swag Box

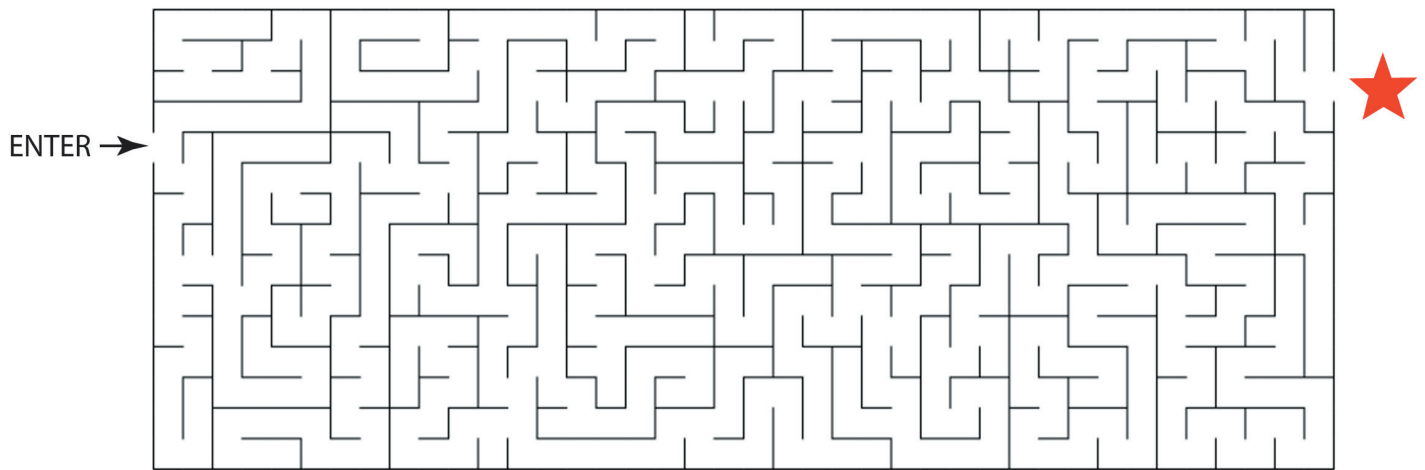
What's your favorite beverage while reading a book? Coffee? Tea? Cocoa? Either way, make a pro-book statement while reading.

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



MENTAL WORKOUT

Square Maze



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

Physics Search

ASTRONOMY
BIG BANG
DIMENSIONS
ENTANGLEMENT
EXPANSION
GRAVITY
LIGHTSPEED
MATTER
QUANTUM
QUARK
RELATIVITY
STRING THEORY
TIME
UNIVERSE
WORMHOLE

RANDOM THOUGHT BUBBLE

Unconventional New Year's Resolutions for 2026:

- I will avoid exercise to maintain the protective layer of fat around my heart.
- I will stop eating deep-fried Legos.
- I will begin every conversation with a warning that I forgot to take my meds today.
- I will start every email or text with "Greetings, Human" and see what happens.
- I will give a polite golf clap when the microwave hits zero.
- I will limit rhetorical questions to the bathroom or the elevator.
- I will stop opening the fridge to see if new food has magically appeared.
- I will stay out of the kitchen. (Apparently, I burned both the sushi and the salad.)
- I will avoid eye contact with my houseplants.
- I will respond to every person who annoys me with an interpretive dance.



Thank you for reading this issue. If you'd like to receive future issues, please go to www.jrbale.com/newsletter to sign up for more. You may unsubscribe at any time.

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.

R