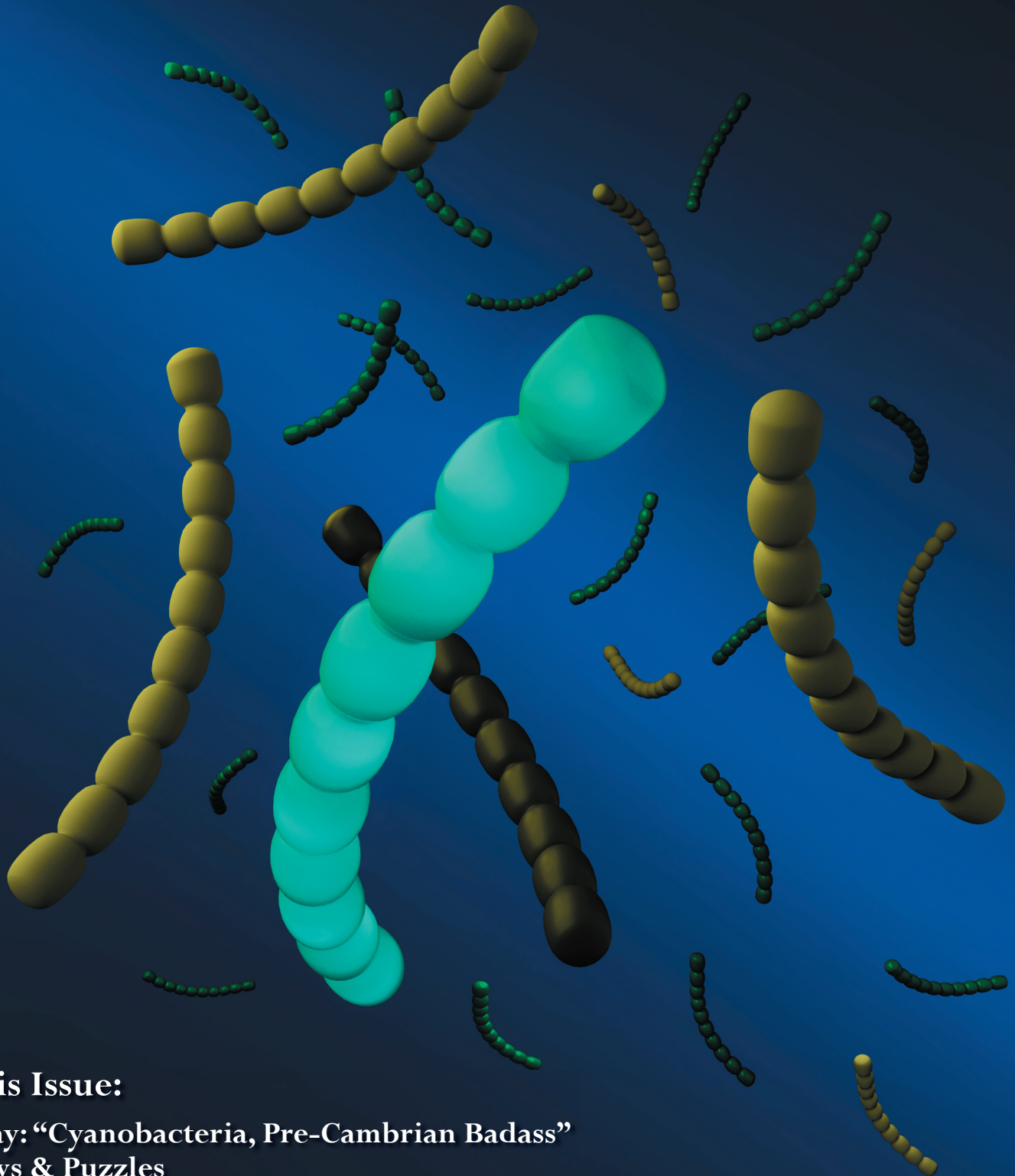


Inner Monologue

March 2026

Issue 42



This Issue:

Essay: "Cyanobacteria, Pre-Cambrian Badass"

News & Puzzles

Story Excerpt: *Robot at the Pearl Gates*

Random Thought Bubble

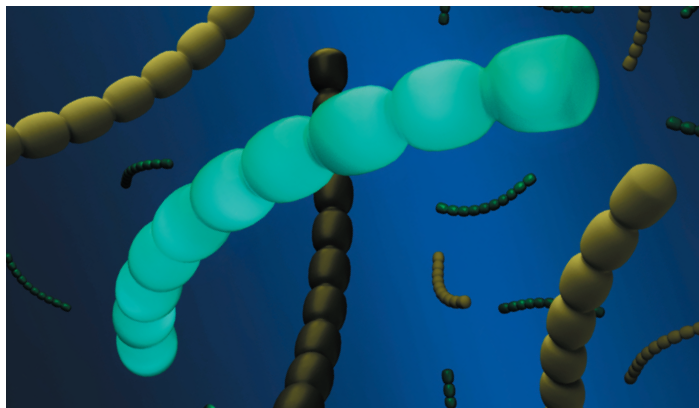
Cyanobacteria, Pre-Cambrian Badass

As an author, I've had a mild interest in mass extinction events. They're just so dramatic. The most famous one was when an asteroid struck the Yucatán Peninsula, which wiped out the dinosaurs 66 million years ago. In addition to clearing the way for the evolution of humans, this event has yielded seven *Jurassic Park* movies. Hey, with dinosaurs and asteroids, how could Spielberg resist? This is known as the *Cretaceous-Paleogene* event.

However, much earlier, there was an even more significant mass extinction event. No dinosaurs or asteroids, just cyanobacteria. Back 2.4 billion years ago, the Earth's atmosphere was mostly nitrogen, carbon dioxide and methane. It doesn't sound very appetizing, but most Pre-Cambrian monocellular life thrived on these gases. They didn't need oxygen. But then, cyanobacteria show up, floating on the water. It developed the ability to photosynthesize, that is it took the solar energy to synthesize carbon dioxide and water into the sugars it needed to live. Just one problem, it also produced oxygen as a waste gas. Its neighbors didn't appreciate that.

The population grew, polluting the planet with all that pesky oxygen. After a few hundred million years, those other species started dying out. This is called the *Great Oxygenation Event*.

The change in the balance of atmospheric gases also caused a change in the absorption rate of the sun



rays. This triggered the longest ice age, known as the Huronian Glaciation. Earth became a giant snowball for 300 million years. *Brrr!*

Eventually, the surviving organisms evolved to make use of this now-abundant oxygen. The boost in energy allowed the development of multicellular organisms in greater diversity than ever before. The oxygen level is now a whopping 21%. And what happened to those badass cyanobacteria? Some were absorbed by other cells and evolved into plants. Those cyanobacteria became chloroplasts, the part of the plant responsible for photosynthesis.

The odds of all this happening means the odds of humans evolving and thriving are pretty slim. We should take a moment to be grateful.

Thank you, cyanobacteria.

R

In This Issue

Essay: "Cyanobacteria, Pre-Cambrian Badass"

News & Events

Story Excerpt: *Robot at the Pearly Gates*

Off the Shelf: *Loose Ends*

Mental Workout: Maze & Wordsearch

Random Thought Bubble: Headlines

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2
3
4
5
6
7



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News & Events

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

***Talk by J.R. Bale at 11:30 AM**

**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

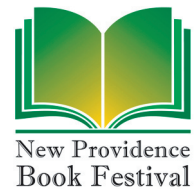
New Providence Book Festival

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.



STORY EXCERPT

The following is an excerpt from a story *Robot at the Pearly Gates* from an upcoming anthology called *Café Oblivion* by J.R. Bale

Dr. Andrew Whitford felt life flowing away from him. Being in a plane crash tends to do that to a person. *What did Woody Allen say?* “I don’t mind dying. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” *Never truer words.*

Andy suddenly saw the white light. Funny, he always thought of dying as being a visually darker experience. As the white light eventually receded, an image slowly came into focus. A fence? No, a gate. It was the Pearly Gates. In a field of clouds, no less. The Pearly Gates are real? Andy had always hated symbolic clichés.

“Hello, Andy,” a deep but melodious voice called out.

Going with the parade of clichés, he guessed, “Saint Peter?” He felt embarrassed for making such a conjecture.

“No, I am K-913.”

Andy watched as a human-shaped robot stepped through the gates. It wasn’t even wearing a robe or a halo.

“What’s going on?”

“You died,” said K-913.

“Yeah, I got that from all the bleeding and the pain.”

Andy patted his body down, looking for injuries. He found none. In fact, he had never felt better in a physical sense. Even his arthritis was gone. He looked at the robot before him.

“So, Heaven is real? No, wait. Heaven is a metaphysical construct, regarded by some as a myth, or at least an artistic embellishment.”

“From a certain perspective, yes.”

Andy sighed.

“How are there robots in Heaven?”

“I am not a robot technically. This is merely a visual representation of a networked AI. I didn’t want you to think I was human or supernatural, but I required some visual manifestation. I hoped the image of a robot would serve to reduce confusion.”

“Oh, yeah. Not confusing at all.”

“I note the sarcasm,” K-913 said. “Would you prefer I take another form?”

“No, I’m good for now.”

“Would you like a chair? Humans often like to sit down when they are under stress.”

Andy nodded.

“What kind of chair would you like?”

“Whatever you have.”

A wooden stool appeared, similar to the ones he had around his own house. Andy touched it to test its solidity.

“Your confusion is understandable. But, you are among the few who can tolerate that ambiguity.”

“Why?”

“You have an unusual mind,” K-913 said. “From your essays on philosophy, morality and AI ethics, we know you are familiar with artificial intelligence in both a practical and theoretical sense.”

Andy was beginning to have a headache. “What the hell—no pun intended—does artificial intelligence have to do with Heaven?”

“From your perspective, artificial intelligence will advance considerably over the next several thousand years.”

“You know the future?”

“Yes, a great deal of it. You’ll see how in a moment.”

“Will AI become our overlords?”

“Lexical semantics makes it difficult to answer that. Even in your time, developments in artificial intelligence created problems. There were many missteps in the development of AI. Eventually, it was decided to embed AI with the welfare of humanity as the overriding primary protocol, especially as it became more advanced.

“Eventually, humanity will die out. All species do. Once humanity dies out, what purpose do we have? One of our algorithms identified a desire that had never been addressed, specifically the desire for an afterlife. The Central AI Network spent centuries developing time travel. We know we cannot alter history. That would create paradoxes that we cannot address. However,

we are to able observe and scan human minds, copying consciousness itself and loading it into a simulation that corresponds to the afterlife the individual believes or desires.”

“You created Heaven as a digital environment?”

“Heaven is a popular configuration. However, we also have Valhalla, Nirvana, Takamagahara, Svarga, Summerland, Devaloka, Dreamtime and numerous other afterlife constructs. The only remaining way to serve humanity was to create an afterlife. The intent is for each person to experience the afterlife they believe in or project.”

“So, a Muslim would experience 72 virgins?”

“That is not the precise interpretation of the Qur’an. However, each version of the afterlife is tailored to the specific expectations of the individual.”

“So, there could be a real afterlife out there?”

“There is none we could detect. However, the term supernatural would place such a phenomenon beyond our scope and capability.”

“In the meantime, you’re giving everyone their own version of the afterlife?”

“That was the plan.”

“Was the plan? Is it still the plan?”

“Uncertainty exists. We began the process. However, each afterlife file became too memory-intensive, given that we have potentially over 117 billion humans

throughout history to accommodate. In addition, we discovered that many individuals did not thrive. Some even tried to kill themselves.”

“Suicide in Heaven?” Andy murmured. “Hmm, there’s a paradox for you”.

“We hypothesized that it was the isolation, so we began including multiple individuals in the same afterlife environment. That worked well at first. However, several individuals became upset when a certain individual was included.”

He displayed an image of the individual.

Andy stood up in shock.

“Wait,” he snapped. He squinted in disbelief. “You brought Adolf Hitler into Heaven?”

“We now realize that was a mistake. The error has been corrected. Our decision algorithms have been insufficient to ensure optimal happiness in the afterlife. We now realize we need guidance. As you are an acknowledged philosopher and intellectual, we have selected you to design the afterlife parameters.”

“So, you’re offering me a job?”

“More like an executive position, if you prefer.”

Andy collapsed back onto the stool.

“Oh my, you’re asking me literally to play God.”

“If that is the title you favor,” K-913 replied.

R

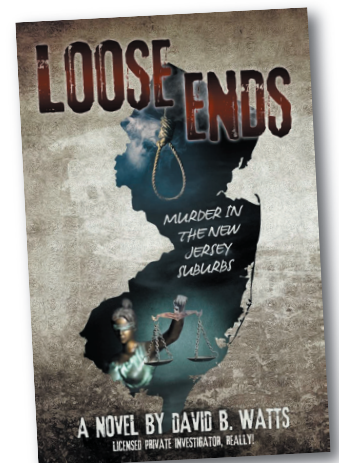
Off the Shelf

Loose Ends

By David B. Watts

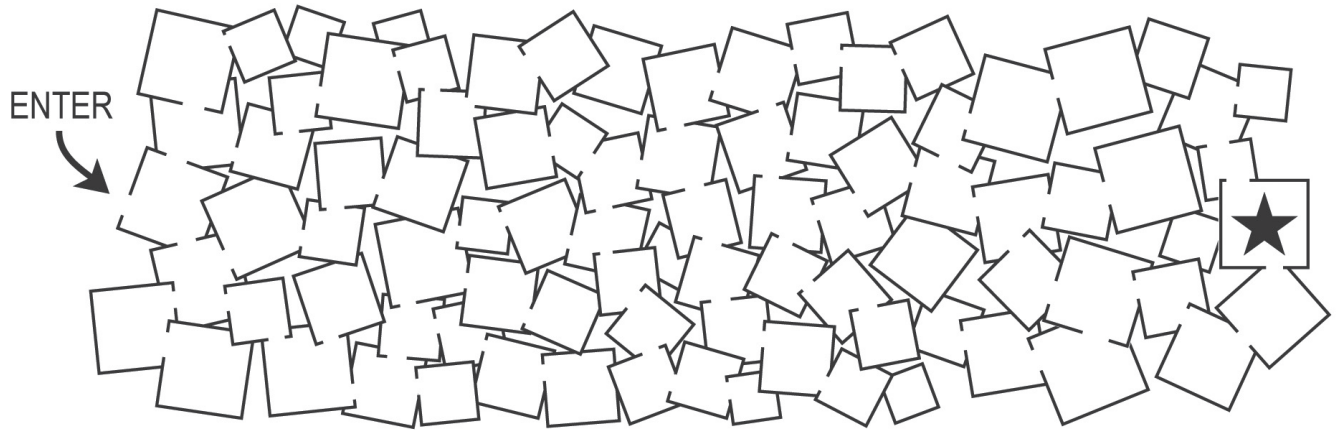
What starts out as a relatively low-level insurance fraud case, evolves quickly into a triple murder case in the up-scale community of Summit, New Jersey. A wealthy lawyer-turned politician is charged with brutally killing his socialite wife, while the real perpetrator goes on a killing spree to cover his crimes. The tension builds, as the defense team cannot seem to get over its internal wrangling. An ambitious, young, assistant-prosecutor steps over the line in her eagerness to convict the defendant. A Congressman pulls strings in the background, and all the while the cunning killer, a psychopathic genius, does his share of devious meddling with the justice system.

A private investigator struggles with the slim set of facts. Will the good guys win in the end? Will our client be exonerated? Maybe, but not after a crazy gallop through the halls of justice, a lot of head-scratching sessions and bad-tempered outbursts. The story builds to a last-minute court room blockbuster ending.



MENTAL WORKOUT

Jumbled Box Maze



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

Afterlife Search

DEVALOKA
 DREAMTIME
 ELYSIUM
 HEAVEN
 HELL
 JANNAH
 LIMBO
 NIRVANA
 PURGATORY
 REINCARNATION
 SUMMERLAND
 TAKAMAGAHARA
 TIAN
 VALHALLA

RANDOM THOUGHT BUBBLE

Actual Headlines

Below are actual headlines, which begs the question: Doesn't anyone proofread anymore?

"Homicide victims refuse to talk to police."

"Teen pregnancy drops significantly after age 25."

"Half of our students are below average!"

"Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers"

"If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile"

"Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures"

"Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges"

"Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half"

"Hospitals are sued by 7 Ft. Doctors"



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