

Inner Monologue

June 2026

Issue 44

Oh, now he
wants my help?



This Issue:

Essay: "Chess, More than a Game"

News & Puzzles

Short Story: *Death & Marriage, Not in That Order*

Random Thought Bubble: *Secret Lives of Chess Pieces*

Chess, More than a Game

Chess is one of the most popular games in the world. Even if you aren't an avid player, you know of it and its stature. My own father taught me the game while I was a child. Through chess, he taught me strategic thinking, persistence and patience, not that I excel in any of those areas. But I am grateful for that father-son time. Chess is one of the few games that actually increases attention span, rather than shortening it. Yes, I'm looking at you, video game world.

I believe chess is healthier for a growing mind than any electronic game. Chess was invented in 7th century India. It spread to Persia, then the Arab world, and finally to Europe. The modern rules of chess emerged in Europe at the end of the 15th century, becoming standardized and gaining universal acceptance by the end of the 19th century.

When the scientists at IBM worked on developing preliminary artificial intelligence, they chose chess as a framework for developing and testing machine learning and problem-solving. In 1997, IBM's Deep Blue became the first computer to win a match against a reigning World Champion, Garry Kasparov. Deep Blue's victory is considered a milestone in



the history of artificial intelligence.

It is easy to see how some people can become obsessed with the game, across the world, playing in parks with fresh air and fresh challengers. For those who are interested, July 20th is International Chess Day, in case you want to check.

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Essay: "Chess, More than a Game"

News & Events

Short Story: *Death & Marriage, Not in That Order*

Off the Shelf: *Make It True*

Mental Workout: Maze & Wordsearch

Random Thought Bubble: *Secret Lives of Chess Pieces*

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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.

June 5, 2026

Friday
6 pm - 9 pm

Toms River Book Show

Toms River Artist Community Gallery
40 Main Street (Route 9)
Toms River, NJ 08753



June 6, 2026

Saturday
11 am - 4 pm

Passaic County Book Festival

Weasel Brook Park
745 Park Drive
Clifton, NJ



September 12, 2026

Saturday
9 am - 5 pm

Authors Alley at Belvidere Victorian Day

Garret Wall Park
Belvidere, NJ

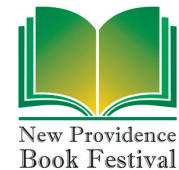


September 26, 2026

Saturday
10 am - 4 pm

New Providence Book Festival

1350 Springfield Avenue
Grounds of the Salt Box Museum
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 short story entitled
Death & Marriage, Not in That Order by J.R. Bale

Weddings are a family obligation. Sometimes they're happy, other times, tedious. My wife Jenna's cousin's daughter, from his first marriage, Ashley, whom I might have met when she was a girl, but don't remember, was getting married. I really wish they'd include a genealogy chart with the invitations. Being married into any family requires attendance at such affairs, which I do cheerfully.

Ashley and Doug's wedding and reception were going to be at the same location, an upscale wedding mill, not far from Princeton. That was a relief. I hate the awkward interlude while the bridal party is being photographed. It's good to have a bar nearby.

The wedding was at five, the reception at six. We would also be responsible for transporting my mother-in-law, Cora. I've always liked Cora. She always had a great sense of humor. I suspect her sense of humor was a bit naughtier when younger. These days, her jokes or quips went up to the line, but never crossed it.

We picked Cora up at 3:30. She was always ready to go. No waiting required. These days, Cora moved a little slower and was less steady on her feet. So, if she had an appointment, she just readied herself earlier.

"Frank, you're always on time," she said as she saw me.

"And you're always ready to go," I said. I have to admit I could never make the usual mother-in-law jokes. Cora always treated me with respect. And she had certainly earned mine over the years.

As we drove down the highway, it was slow going, slower than usual, even for that time of day. And then I saw why. There had been an accident, a bad one. I had seen plenty of accidents over the years, but something about this one caught my eye.

A woman dressed in a bright red business suit was lying across the dashboard of one of the vehicles. A

police officer was standing nearby, but looking away. There was nothing he could do for the deceased. I was trying to imagine the physical dynamics that would have resulted in her being thrown onto the dashboard in such a tidy way.

Jenna and Cora were talking family gossip. I resisted the impulse to point out the body to them. There was no point in upsetting them. I was grateful as the cars sped up as they passed the accident site.

While driving, I had wondered about that poor woman's life. Where was she going? A meeting? A family gathering? To pick up her children?

After another 35 minutes, we arrived at the Grand Palace. I'm not a fan of valet parking. Maybe I have trust issues. But the valets were sharply dressed and unusually polite. And they didn't dawdle or create that awkward moment to indicate they were expecting a tip. I usually only tip when the car is returned to me in good condition.

I helped Cora up the steps. We were directed to the Franklin Room, which tonight would serve as a chapel. Jenna darted in and out of the rows of chairs, saying hello to distant cousins and elderly aunts and uncles. My wife relished being a social butterfly. I sat with Cora, as various distant relations stopped by to compliment her on how good she looked, especially given her age, which was a state secret.

At the front of the room stood a gangly, red-haired, young man. He was the right age to be the groom, but something made me not so sure. No best man was standing with him. Then I suspected he might be there to officiate. However, I knew my wife's family had a Catholic priest in the extended family. I had seen him at a previous family wedding. To explain how he was

related, I would have to consult the family tree that wasn't included in the invitation. I think his name was Father Rory something-Irish. But there was no sighting of any priest.

The gangly kid put a microphone to his mouth.

"Hey, everyone!" he said with a big grin. "Today, we come together to help Ashley and Doug do this whole marriage thing. And I can't think of a more beautiful couple. Can you feel the love in the room? Let's get this thing started."

"Whatever happened to 'dearly beloved?'" one woman behind us whispered. "Honestly!"

Suddenly, two tuxedoed men sauntered—almost dancing—up the aisle. The groom and best man had arrived. Apparently, the skinny red-haired kid was indeed to be the officiant. He looked barely old enough to shave. I mentally named him "Reverend Gangly-Ginger." I guess anyone can be an Internet-ordained minister for twenty dollars these days.

Music started playing. It wasn't *Here Comes the Bride*, as one would have expected. I couldn't place the song, but it was pleasant and upbeat. Then Ashley appeared from behind a green velvet curtain. She looked gorgeous, as young brides do. Her thick blonde hair pulled back in a hairstyle that suggested an earlier, more traditional era. She walked up the aisle a little faster than I would have expected. Was it because her eagerness? Or the tempo of the music? When she arrived at the front, she and Doug kissed.

"They're not supposed to kiss until the end," I heard one woman across the aisle say with a definite tone of disapproval.

Ashley and Doug turned and faced each other.

"Welcome, everyone," the kid said. "My name is Ezra." (Now, he was Reverend Ezra Gangly-Ginger.) "I was Ashley and Doug's resident advisor at college. And have I got some stories to tell!" Everyone laughed. "But I'll hold off, because we come here to celebrate Ashley and Doug's love and commitment to one another. As is traditional, they have some readings chosen by the happy couple."

Ashley proceeded to read from *Winnie the Pooh*. Apparently, it was her favorite story as a child. Then, Doug read from something called *Doctor Who*, whatever that was. I could see some of the older attendees scrunching up their faces at such unconventional readings. That made me smile.

Then Reverend Ezra Gangly-Ginger performed a simple but elegant set of "I Dos."

To which Ashley said, "As Yoda once said, do or do not. There is no try. I do."

"I do too." Doug responded.

"I do three," Ezra blurted out.

Some of the younger attendees laughed. A number of blue-haired ladies across the aisle rolled their eyes so fast, I could almost hear them snap.

"Go forth in all your beliefs," Reverend Ezra said,

(Continued on Page 6)

Off the Shelf

Nagler's Secret

By Michael Stephen Daigle

In 1994, Ironton, N.J., Detective Frank Nagler should be flying high. As a rookie cop the year before he solved the city's worst-ever crime spree: Serial killer Charlie Adams had killed nine women until Nagler stopped him. Nagler was a hero. People stopped him on the street to thank him. But beneath the façade of joy, Nagler carried a secret that surfaces during a police raid on a house known for drugs and child sex. A terrible case. A terrible case that lingered. In 2020, reporter Jimmy Dawson looked at his notes from that case and asked why it hadn't been solved. Or had it?

Learn more at www.MichaelStephenDaigle.com.



“and prove that I am not mistaken in mine. I present to you all, Ashley and Doug, our happy married couple.”

Everyone applauded. As the couple walked back down the aisle, I wondered whether Ezra’s ordination allowed him to do other things. Could he have stopped by the roadside and administered last rites to the woman in the red suit? What made me think of her again? The life cut short, I suppose. For some reason, I assigned her a name, too. Nothing funny, just Alice. Poor Alice. I was sad for her family. Then I wondered, Did she have children? Was there a future wedding she would miss?

We found a table, holding an extra two seats for Jenna’s brother Kyle and his wife Portia. Kyle was a car enthusiast, so it figures he’d marry a woman named Porsche/Portia. If he hadn’t found Porsche, I’m sure he would have found a girl named Bentley or Masserati. Finally, they showed up.

“Sorry, we’re late,” Kyle said. “There was a horrible accident on the highway. A really mangled Toyota Sienna.”

Figures he would notice the car, not the people. But to be fair, the bodies might have been cleared away by the time Kyle and Porsche passed the accident.

Kyle was more interested in feeding his face than looking after his mother. Once again that duty fell to

me. When we got to the hors d’oeuvres room, we discovered it was actually a great hall, extending through several arches. I was sure the far end of the hall was in another zip code. In the first section there were choices of seafood: shrimp, scallops, raw oysters, fried calamari and lobster claws. The next section had a variety of cheeses and fruit. After that were the Italian selections: mini-pizzas and a pasta bar. Next, as we got closer to the Delaware River, dim sum and sushi presented themselves.

This had to cost a fortune. When my daughter marries, would I be expected to foot the bill for something equally lavish? If this was the new standard, maybe I should instill the romantic idea of elopement in my daughter. Dana was only nine years old, but it’s never too early to begin indoctrination.

A tall, distinguished man who looked like he might be the maître’d at an exclusive French restaurant circulated through the crowd. He was inviting all the guest to move into the Oak Room for dinner. It was hard to believe that there was an actual dinner after this gargantuan feast.

I walked into the bar for a brief refuge from the loud music. I sat down where I could view the festivities without my eardrums being buffeted by the musical assault. I ordered a beer.”

“That’ll be twelve dollars,” the bartender said.

Twelve dollars for a beer? I suppose I couldn’t complain, given I had already consumed all that food for free. I gave her \$15, but I nursed the beer for quite a while.

I looked out into the main room. It was interesting to watch. The women were most interesting. The younger ones, still in their teens, wore dresses that made them look much older. Likewise with the make-up. At the other end of the spectrum, certain older women were wearing outfits definitely designed for younger ladies. A particularly heavy woman, who I was sure was a cousin of Jenna’s, was squeezed into a strapless number. I was wondering when that stuffed sausage would burst. I’m not the kind of man who body shames, but one really should respect the laws of physics.

Some of the men were also unusual. A couple men were wearing plaid sports jackets from a distant decade. No ties. The elegance of the venue made the contrast quite striking.

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Then I saw him, the missing family priest. He made a beeline for me. I don't know why.

"You're Jenna's husband, aren't you?"

I could see him trying to remember my name, a valiant effort considering I don't think he ever knew it."

"Frank," I said.

"Of course, that's it. Rory O'Malley."

"I remember you. Where does the church have you stationed these days, Father?"

"Oh, here and there."

I was surprised at his vagueness.

Eventually he added, "I'm between parishes at the moment, but I do weekend duty at St. Aloysius."

A couple passed and waved to Father Rory.

"That's George and Diana Nash. Oh, they're the most wonderful people. They have me over for dinner all the time."

"Nice," I said.

"So, what are you up to these days?" Rory asked.

"Same as always."

"Forgive an old priest's memories. I don't recall."

"I'm an engineer."

Another couple waved as they passed.

"Oh, that's Ted and Angela Kowalski," he said. "Oh, they're a fantastic couple. They have me over for dinner all the time."

"So, how did you like the ceremony?" I asked.

"I'm afraid I missed it."

"I'm surprised they didn't ask you."

"They... sort of did. They wanted me to co-officiate with some kid who is a minister of the Church of the Vacuous Internet, or something like that. It's a solemn occassion. It should be treated as such. I decided it was

best to avoid that sort of silliness. Oh, don't get me wrong; I wish the young couple the best. But you may have noticed they're not very traditional."

"I did."

Father Rory pointed out more couples who had him "over for dinner all the time." I suspected he was trying to wrangle an invitation. I didn't think Jenna would appreciate my taking the bait. After a few minutes, I excused myself.

The main course was amazing: filet mignon and lobster. This was followed by a ridiculous choice of desserts, plus the official wedding cake. My daughter Dana was definitely eloping.

Mercifully, it was eventually time to go. We thanked the parents of the bride and wished the couple the very best. While waiting for the valet to bring my car, Jenna's two great aunts, Myrtle and Chloe, walked up.

"Don't you think that was an appalling wedding?" Myrtle asked. "Those young people just aren't serious. How will their marriage last? I mean, honestly."

"What do you think, Frank?" Chloe asked.

Usually, I'm smart enough to avoid getting in the middle of these things. But the champagne may have loosened my tongue. I also thought of Alice.

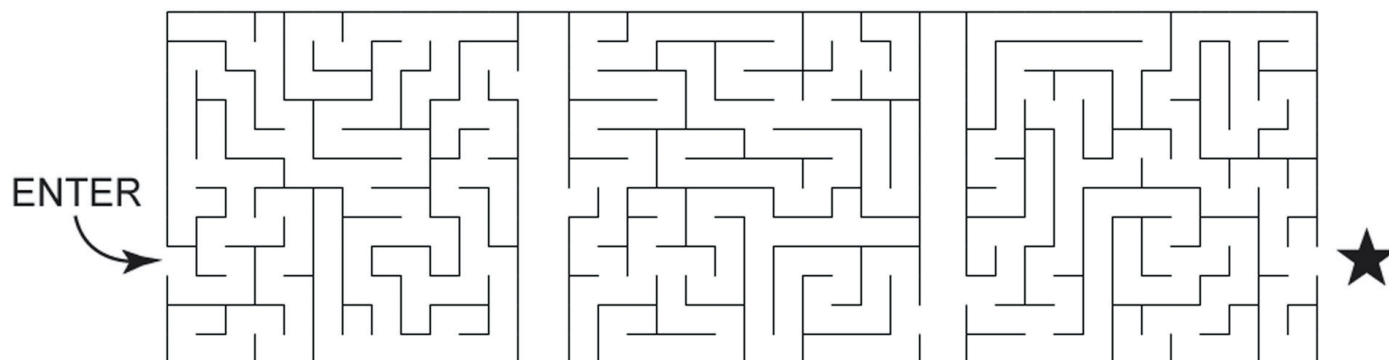
"I think life is short," I said. "I think those two young people may very well be serious. Or not. But one thing they are not is solemn. Life is too short to be solemn."

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MENTAL WORKOUT

Squares Maze



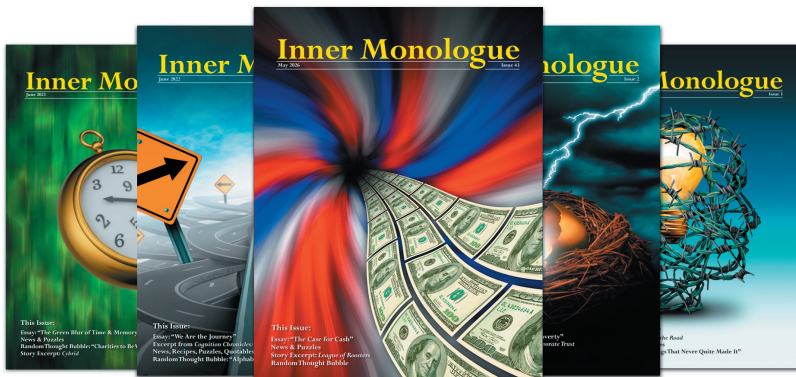
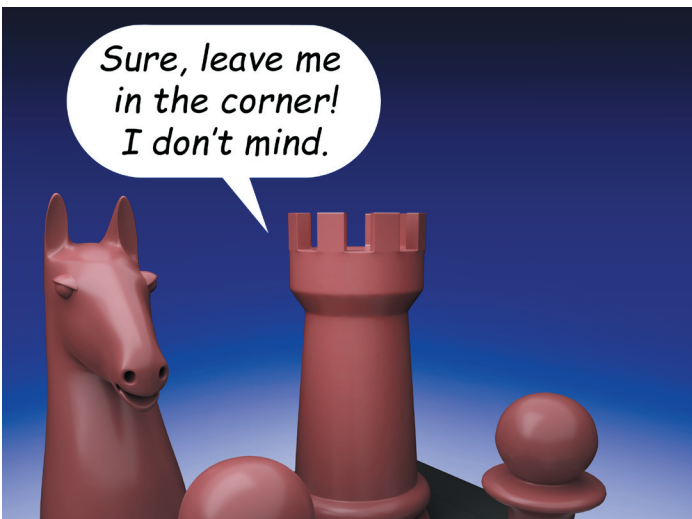
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Chess Wordsearch

BISHOP
 BOARD
 CASTLING
 CHECKMATE
 CHESS
 KING
 KNIGHT
 PATIENCE
 PAWN
 PROMOTION
 QUEEN
 ROOK
 SACRIFICE
 STALEMATE
 STRATEGY

RANDOM THOUGHT BUBBLE

Secret Lives of Chess Pieces



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Thanks and be well.

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