



## International Snowmobile Safety Week (Jan 18th - Jan 25th, 2025)

Riding on a snowmobile is an invigorating sporting experience that allows people to enjoy and appreciate the great outdoors! International Snowmobile Safety Week draws attention to the fact that having the most amount of fun on snowmobile trails is only possible if everyone is able to stay safe. Even avid snowmobilers sometimes need to refresh their memories about the different sets of safety rules, regulations and guidelines.



# From Chai Under Neem Trees To A Carnival...

There were no sprawling crowds, no jostling for space. You could sip your *chai* while Vikram Seth casually read a poem under a *neem* tree, the rustling leaves forming an impromptu percussion section. It was a festival that felt like a well-kept secret. One attendee vividly remembers how the session with Ruskin Bond turned into an impromptu storytelling session for children, when the author spotted a group of young readers seated cross-legged on the floor.



Shailaza Singh  
Published Author,  
Poet and a Visitor

The Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF), often dubbed as the 'greatest literary show on Earth', has journeyed through a tapestry of transformations, since its modest inception in 2006. From the intimate courtyard of Diggi Palace to the expansive lawns of Hotel Clarks Amer, the festival's evolution mirrors the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity.

### The Humble Beginnings at Diggi Palace

In 2006, the inaugural JLF was a quaint affair, nestled within the historic Diggi Palace, a 19th-century *haveli* that exuded old-world charm. The palace's intricate architecture and verdant gardens provided a cozy backdrop for literary aficionados to engage in heartfelt discussions. Only a handful of people attended, barely 100 on the first day, but those who were present, bore witness to an intimate cultural experiment that seemed both fragile and magical.

"I remember how Salman Rushdie's name came up in whispered conversations back then," recalls an attendee from the early years. "We were just thrilled to have William Dalrymple and

Namita Gokhale host something so audacious in India." There were no sprawling crowds, no jostling for space. You could sip your *chai* while Vikram Seth casually read a poem under a *neem* tree, the rustling leaves forming an impromptu percussion section. It was a festival that felt like a well-kept secret. One attendee vividly remembers how the session with Ruskin Bond turned into an impromptu storytelling session for children, when the author spotted a group of young readers seated cross-legged on the floor. Another early gem of an anecdote came from a session in 2007, when a then relatively unknown author gave an impassioned reading from their debut novel. Years later, that author, now a celebrated literary figure, would fondly recall the intimate gathering at Diggi, saying, "It was the kind of setting where you could see every face in the audience, and every smile or frown, as they reacted to your words."

### The Crescendo of Popularity

As the years rolled on, the festival's allure grew exponentially. By 2015, JLF had expanded beyond the confines of Diggi Palace, hosting over 300 events across ten venues, including the Music Stage at Clarks Amer and special sessions at Amer Fort and Hawa Mahal. This expansion was a testament to the festival's burgeoning reputation, attracting literary stalwarts like V.S. Naipaul and Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who drew thousands of eager listeners. One of the most unforgettable moments came in 2012, when Oprah Winfrey

graced the stage. Her electrifying presence turned the festival grounds into a carnival. Crowds spilled over into the streets, vendors hawked *chai* and *samosas* with renewed gusto, and an impromptu book-signing session nearly turned into a stampede.

Another iconic moment was in 2018, when Margaret Atwood held court, discussing dystopias and feminism with an audience hanging on her every word. "The Handmaid's Tale is no longer just a warning, it's a mirror," she remarked, leaving the crowd in stunned silence. In 2016, a hilarious incident unfolded, when a stray cow wandered onto the festival grounds mid-session. As security scrambled to guide it away, the speaker, an acclaimed humourist, quipped, "Well, at least someone's here to chew the cud of our conversation!" The audience erupted in laughter, and the incident became one of the most talked-about moments that year.

In 2019, during a panel featuring Neil Gaiman, a blackout occurred just as he began to recount a spooky story. With the audience plunged into darkness, Gaiman's voice, rich and sonorous, continued to weave the tale. "It's almost as if the ghosts are listening too," he quipped, earning a round of applause once the lights returned.

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## #JLF2025



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unexpected turn. A playful debate between two authors about whether *Ravana* was misunderstood turned into an impromptu dramatic recitation of a scene from the *Ramayana*. "Only at JLF can you go from literary analysis to theatre in a heartbeat," one attendee quipped.

### A New Chapter at Hotel Clarks Amer

Fast forward to 2025, and the 18th edition of JLF is set to unfold from January 30 to February 3 at Hotel Clarks Amer. This venue shift signifies more than just a change in location, it reflects the festival's adaptive spirit and its commitment to inclusivity. With over 600 speakers, including Nobel laureates and Booker Prize winners, the festival promises a rich tapestry of dialogues spanning literature, politics, science, and the arts.

For the old guard, Diggi Palace's intimate nooks and crannies were the breeding grounds for serendipitous encounters and spontaneous debates. There was a time when a sudden downpour led to an impromptu poetry reading under a makeshift canopy, with the audience huddled together, hanging on to every word. Such moments, though less frequent now, have become the stuff of JLF legend.

Hotel Clarks Amer, however, offers its own unique charm. The sprawling lawns and modern amenities ensure that more people can partake in the festival without the claustrophobia that often marred the Diggi experience in its later years. Additionally, the hotel's layout allows for larger crowds while maintaining the fes-

tival's essence of intellectual intimacy. In 2021, during a discussion on storytelling, a famous actor-turned-author accidentally spilled their coffee on the mic. "Well, I've certainly spilled more tea in my book," they quipped, much to the audience's amusement. And who can forget the 2020 session when a first-time novelist, overwhelmed by the crowd, began to cry during their reading? The audience responded with a standing ovation, turning what could have been an awkward moment into a deeply moving one.

### Anecdotes from the Aisles

There's no shortage of stories from the festival's rich history. In 2010, Gulzar and Javed Akhtar shared the stage for a session on Urdu poetry that had the audience erupting in spontaneous applause. "It was less a session and more a masterclass," recalls a listener. "At one point, they started reciting verses to each other, and the synergy was magical."

### Nostalgia vs. Necessity

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### A Festival of Literature

The Jaipur Literature Festival's story is one of constant evolution, where every new chapter brings its own set of characters, challenges, and celebrations. While some lament the loss of Diggi's intimate charm, others embrace Clarks Amer as a symbol of growth and accessibility. The festival's essence, however, remains steadfast, a celebration of words, ideas, and human connection.

In a recent press conference, Sanjoy Roy the Managing Director of Teamwork Arts, addressed rumours about the festival's future. "Teamwork Arts will always manage JLF and isn't going anywhere, regardless of what the rumours may be," he assured. For those who have walked its pathways, whether under the neem trees or across the manicured lawns, JLF is more than a festival, it's a feeling, a story they'll carry And for those who are yet to experience it, the stage is set, the *chai* is brewing, and the stories are waiting ready to be lived, shared, and remembered.

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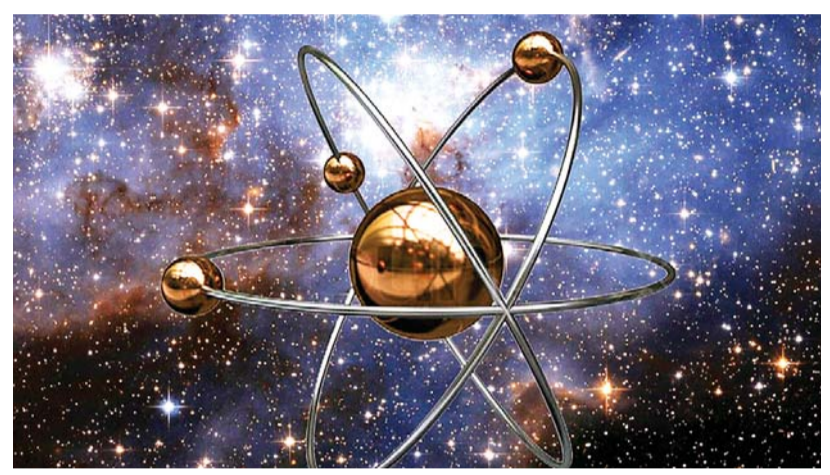
## #SPACE

# The Remarkable Emptiness of Existence

The space between the planets had to be filled with nothing, otherwise, friction would slow the planets down.

In 1654, a German scientist and politician named Otto von Guericke was supposed to be busy being the mayor of Magdeburg. But instead, he was putting on a demonstration for lords of the Holy Roman Empire. With his new-fangled invention, a vacuum pump, he sucked the air out of a copper sphere constructed of two hemispheres. He then had two teams of horses, 15 in each, who attempted to pull the hemispheres apart. To the astonishment of the royal onlookers, the horses couldn't separate the hemispheres because of the overwhelming pressure of the atmosphere around them.

Von Guericke became obsessed by the idea of a vacuum after learning about the recent and radical idea of a heliocentric universe, a



cosmos with the sun at the centre and the planets whipping around it. But for this idea to work, the space

between the planets had to be filled with nothing. Otherwise, friction would slow the planets down.

### Existence of the Vacuum

Scientists, philosophers, and theologians across the globe had debated the existence of the vacuum for millennia, and here was von Guericke and a bunch of horses showing that it was real. But the idea of the vacuum remained uncomfortable, and only begrudgingly acknowledged. We might be able to artificially create a vacuum with enough cleverness here on Earth, but nature abhorred the idea. Scientists produced a compromise, the space of space was filled with a fifth element, an aether, a substance that did not have much in the way of manifest properties, but it most definitely wasn't nothing. But as the quantum and cosmological revolutions of the 20th century arrived, scientists never found this aether

### Empty Places

At subatomic scales, scientists were also discovering atoms to be surprisingly empty places. If you were to rescale a hydrogen atom so that its nucleus was the size of a basketball, the nearest electron would sit around two miles away. With not so much as a lonely subatomic tumbleweed in between. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Continued experiments and observations only served to confirm that at scales, both large and small, we appeared to live in an empty world. And then that nothingness cracked open. Within the emptiness that dominates the volume of an atom and the volume of the universe, physicists found

### Quantum Universe

and continued to turn up empty-handed. The more they looked, through increasingly powerful telescopes and microscopes, the more they discovered nothing. In the 1920s, astronomer Edwin Hubble discovered that the Andromeda nebula was actually the Andromeda galaxy, an island home of billions of stars, sitting a staggering 2.5 million light-years away. As far as we could tell, all those lonely light-years were filled with not much at all, just the occasional lost hydrogen atom or wandering photon. Compared to the relatively small size of galaxies themselves (our own Milky Way stretches across for a mere 100,000 light-years), the universe seemed dominated by absence.

### Empty Places

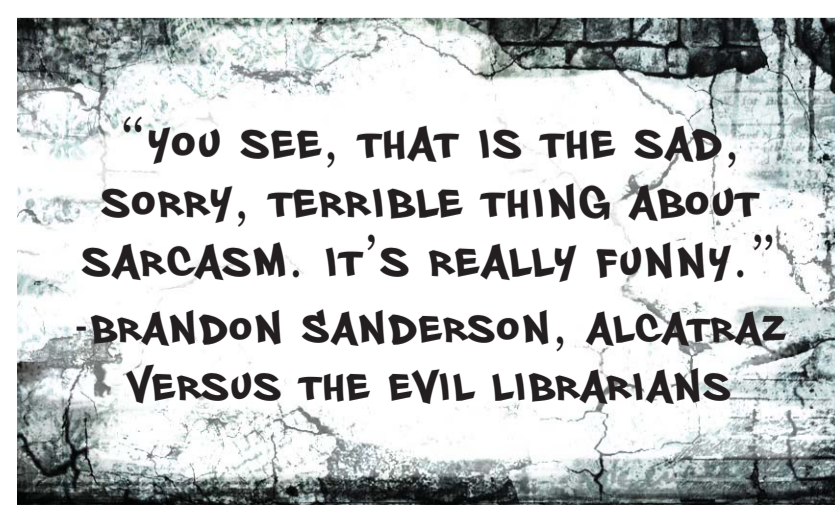
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something. Far from the sedate aether of yore, this 'something' is strong enough to be tearing our universe apart. The void, it turns out, is alive. In December 2022, an international team of astronomers released the results of their latest survey of galaxies, and their work has confirmed that the vacuum of space-time is wreaking havoc across the cosmos. They found that matter makes up only a minority contribution to the energy budget of the universe. Instead, most of the energy within the cosmos is contained in the vacuum, and that energy is dominating the future evolution of the universe.

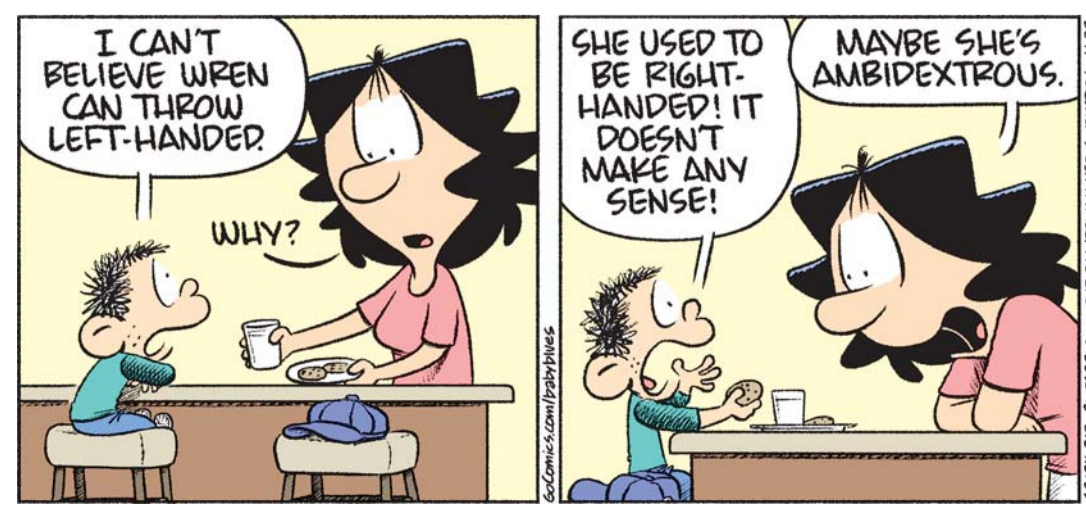
The trick here is that the vacuum, first demonstrated by von Guericke all those centuries ago, is not as empty as it seems. If you were to take a box (or, following von Guericke's example, two hemispheres), and remove everything from it, including all the particles, all the light, all the everything, you would not be left with, strictly speaking, nothing. What you'd be left with is the vacuum of space-time itself, which we've learned, is an entity in its own right.

We live in a quantum universe, a universe where you can never be quite sure about anything. At the tiniest of scales, subatomic particles fizz and pop into existence, briefly experiencing the world of living before returning back from where they came, disappearing from reality before they have a chance to meaningfully interact with anything else. All this would be mathematically annoying, but otherwise unremarkable.

## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman