

# Hub

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## Issue 28 Contents

Fiction: *Inside Every Successful Man* by Gareth D Jones

Reviews: *Bridge to Terabithia*, *Mr B Gone*

## About Hub

Every week we will be publishing a piece of short fiction, along with at least one review (book, DVD, film, audio, or TV series) and we'll also have the occasional feature, too. We can afford to do this largely due to the generosity of the people over at Orbit, who have sponsored this electronic version of the magazine, and partly by the generosity displayed by your good selves. If you like what you read here, please consider making a donation over at [www.hub-mag.co.uk](http://www.hub-mag.co.uk).



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## *Inside Every Successful Man*

by Gareth D Jones

The sound of galloping hooves getting closer intruded on the quiet, muggy air of the lounge. Jav groaned and slouched further back into the cosy embrace of his favourite armchair. He put the glass of whisky down guiltily, but there was no hiding it from the black-clad rider who reigned in his horse and dismounted with the ease of someone who has ridden all his young life. Jav closed his eyes wishfully, but horse and rider were still there, superimposed in his middle vision by the nanites linked to his optical nerve.

“What ya’ drinkin’?” The cowboy asked, knowingly.

“Just water.” Jav lied, then wondered why he felt obliged to answer at all.

“T’aint no good for ya’.” He spat on the floor. “Your kidney’s are gonna get all shot up again.”

Jav shrugged. “So what’s it to you?”

“I gotta protect my interests.” Said Billy the Kidney. “Now just pour it away.”

Jav stood as slowly as he could and ambled into the kitchen, hoping that Billy would just ride off. Of course he didn’t and Jav reluctantly poured the whisky down the sink, savouring the taste of the one sip he’d managed to swallow before being interrupted. Billy stood and watched until it was all gone.

“Now that’s your last warnin’. Next time...” He patted his gun holster menacingly.

“Next time what?” Jav asked defiantly.

“You’ll see. Now I gotta go report to the Queen.” He leaped back on to his horse and rode off into the distance. Jav sank back down into his seat. Then Billy’s last words struck him. Report to the Queen? Why would Billy report to the Queen? He was only supposed to report to the Doctor. Jav groaned again. He was going to have to call the software people in again. In fact, getting the whole system removed was seeming more and more like a good idea.

Going into detox in the first place had seemed like a good idea. He hadn’t really gone for medical reasons, more for publicity. A multi-millionaire rock star-turned-TV presenter could never get enough of the lime light. After a few dodgy headlines involving drunken fights and excessive revelries there was nothing more guaranteed to gain public approval than voluntarily going into a detox clinic. Especially when the whole two week course was filmed for a four-part documentary. The clinic hadn’t been too bad, though he had developed an aversion for hose pipes, but the follow up program had been the real mistake. OK, the first mistake.

Jav glared around his lounge sullenly, eyeing the bottles of spirit lined up on the minibar. He could almost hear hoof beats in the background again, so decided instead to drag himself back into the kitchen and down a glass of cold water. That should do his kidneys some good and hopefully keep Billy away for a while. He opened the window above the sink to let in some cool fresh air. He felt like he was being paranoid, but anything healthy seemed like a good idea at the moment. Anything to keep the nanites off his case.

The medical profession had never been at the top of Jav’s favourites list. He had lost count of the number of medicals he’d had to attend for insurance purposes and was fed up with constantly being nagged about the dire consequences of his excessive lifestyle. The nanites had seemed like a good alternative. No more regular check-ups with pesky doctors, just tiny weeny machines keeping an eye on him and reporting any problems. Of course it was horribly expensive but that was part of the appeal. Only the rich and famous could afford their own nanite medical monitoring system. It was the latest trend for all the best celebs.



After stalking around the house for a while, Jav decided a spin round the grounds in his favourite TVR would do him good, and he headed down for the garage. Just being in the garage cheered him up. He smiled fondly at the Roller, the Aston Martin and the Mini Cooper, but headed straight across to the TVR. Suddenly another set of hooves impinged on his hearing and a black-clad figure came thundering towards him. Jav looked around in mild panic. There was no alcohol to be seen! But this time it wasn't Billy. The man who dismounted was older and wore a mask across his eyes. The Lung Ranger.

"It's not safe in here." He began hastily. "High levels of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and particulate matter. None of them are good for you." The words sounded rather incongruous coming from the mouth of a wild-west figure, but Jav didn't argue.

"Alright I'm leaving." He said, jumped into the TVR and roared out of the garage. The Lung Ranger nodded in satisfaction.

"I don't think I need mention this to the Queen." He said, and left as quickly as he'd arrived. That was the second persona who'd mentioned the Queen. Jav pondered this as he spun onto the private road encircling his estate. The nanite personas were supposed to be independant, so why would either need to report to the Queen?

The original nanite systems hadn't had personas of course. They hadn't needed them. Technically the current system didn't actually need them, but if you've got more money than sense, why not spend out for all the optional extras? The whole system was monitored by the Doctor. In the earliest version this was a minicomputer the size of a wrist watch that received telemetry from the thousands of nanites in the body and stored the data. You could programme the WristDoc, as it was know, to alert you to any problems, or download the data to your computer or mobile phone. The information could then be made available to your doctor, health guru or publicist. The latter could leak information to the press occasionally to show how well you were doing. Most importantly, you could take it off and get on with your life.

As he sped up the road, enjoying the wind rushing through his hair and laughing as rabbits leaped for cover, Jav wished that it were still that simple. He accelerated into a particularly tight bend, thrilling at the responsiveness of his car as it slewed around the corner, tyres trashing the edge of the grass, and roared on up the slope. A loud trumpet fanfare startled him, and he slammed on the brakes as the Queen of Hearts strode imperiously into view and stood majestically inches in front of the bonnet.

"We are not amused." She said, a stolen misquote that irritated Jav immensely. Before he could think of a suitable reply she continued with her pronouncement. "Your heart rate and pulse are far too high and you have elevated adrenalin levels. Your standard of driving is not acceptable. I have also been informed that you are driving under the influence of alcohol."

"Alcohol? One sip! And it's a private road, so I'm not breaking any law! And what's it got to do with you anyway?"

The Queen of Hearts glared haughtily back at this outburst.

"I have the interest of my subjects to consider." She said. "Now drive back safely, or it will be off with your head!" With a swish of her dress she turned and vanished. Jav drove back obediently and parked the TVR carefully. What did the Queen mean by 'her subjects'? That didn't make sense either.

Jav headed back for the lounge and checked the security cameras for paparazzi by the main gate. The coast was clear so he used his secure line to order a take-away pizza. The pizzeria was trustworthy, so he knew he would be safe from camera-wielding infiltrators.

The paparazzi were the main reason the WristDoc had become unpopular. Some bright bod had discovered that with the right kind of software and a wireless connection you could download the data from a WristDoc onto your laptop, as long as you got within about twenty feet. Lots of personal medical information suddenly wasn't personal any more, so the nanite system had to be made more secure. Another, even brighter, bod came up with the idea of all the information staying within your body, that way there was no external signal to tap into. An even smaller controller was soon being implanted under the skin of the leading celebs, and everyone was happy. Except the press, who had to go back to old fashioned spying methods to get their stories.

The pizza soon arrived, topped with plenty of cheese and a selection of, mostly, healthy add-ons. There were no complaints from within, so it seemed he had got away with it. Jav went to bed later that evening making a mental note to contact someone tomorrow about the Queen.

Late the following morning Jav awoke and, following his usual routine, checked his emails to see what had arrived overnight. There was fan mail from all around the world, many asking the same stupid question about whether he would be putting together a reunion tour. Jav was fed up of being asked the same thing over and over. How could there be a reunion tour without Rik?

Rik 'The Riff' Smith had always been the wildest one in their group. He was always more drunk, louder, more excessive than the rest of them. He had also been the first of them to go into rehab. That was by court order rather than by choice. The rehab clinic had probably saved him from an early self-induced death, but unfortunately that hadn't been it for Rik. He had decided to opt for one of the new Doc implants with monitor and repair nanites. The idea was that the Doc could direct the repair nanites to problem areas reported by the monitor nanites. It was all very clever. If the problem was particularly bad the Doc could direct the relevant type of nanites to reproduce and help out. As nanites failed and broke down they would stop reporting in and again the Doc would direct others of the same type to reproduce to make up the numbers.

The problem for Rik, and several other patients, did not arise with the nanites. The Doc implant itself caused inflammation and infection. It couldn't produce enough nanites to protect the body against itself. There were quite a few emergency operations to remove the offending Docs. Unfortunately for Rik it was too late and a fatal infection set in. The very technology meant to keep him healthy had brought about his premature end. It also spelled the end for the Doc implants.

Fond memories of Rik and the other guys filled Jav's mind as he poured a bowl of muesli for breakfast. A year ago it would have been a fry-up and a lager, but muesli was now firmly on the menu. Followed by a glass of fresh orange juice. He sat and typed replies to a few emails, then thumbed through his notes for this afternoon's filming of 'When Bus Drivers Go Fast'. He had lost track of the time when there was a sudden fluttering of wings and a rather cute looking fairy fluttered into view. She landed on the table and dazzled him with a gleaming white smile.

"Plaque levels are rising. You haven't brushed your teeth this morning have you?" She smiled sweetly at him.

"Er, no, sorry." Jav hated letting the tooth fairy down. "I'll go right now." He dropped his script on the table and headed up for the bathroom. The tooth fairy fluttered along beside him and checked he was brushing properly.

"Well done." She said. "I'll pop back tomorrow." She vanished in a shower of fairy dust. Now *that* was the kind of persona that had encouraged him to buy the system in the first place. A caring voice to look after him, not menacing figures that threatened him if he didn't do as he was told.

Originally there had only been one persona. After the Doc implants had lost popularity the next development had been the doc nanites. Now there was no single control module, but the regulatory function was carried out by thousands of Doc nanites that communicated on the ultra-high frequency spectrum and acted as a virtual doctor. The Doc persona had been dreamed up as an interface with the host and communicated via a direct link into the optical nerve. He had been very popular, and this time there were no problems. Of course that only meant that more advances were made, leading to more potential problems. Jav guessed that he was going to discover just what those problems were.

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The drive to the TV studios was short and, of course, careful. After filming the presenter's slots for the current show Jav was asked if he would like to make a guest appearance in the comedy quiz show 'Name That Toon'. It wasn't a great show, but he was never one to turn down the chance of a TV appearance. He was feeling quite relaxed by the end of the afternoon and, with no more ominous visits from the nanites, he had dismissed the problems of the previous day as just a glitch.

In fact, he had almost entirely forgotten his woes as he made his way to the hospitality suite with the producer and his agent. They had just ordered a light snack and a drink when a couple of D-list TV personalities came over to compliment him on his rehab documentary. He thanked them and managed to encourage them to leave fairly soon, but it had put him back in a bad mood. It was on finishing the detox course that he had decided to install the nanite system and opted for the latest multi-persona version. Now instead of just the Doc there were various sub-personas for the different functions. Each reported back on a different set of variables and the Doc co-ordinated them and provided an over all report. Wild west figures had seemed like a good idea, but he was sure there was no mention of them threatening you with a gun. To check that he hadn't been imagining things he ordered a double gin.

The first three sips had barely had time to make it into his stomach when there was the sound of a horse approaching at a gallop. As Billy the Kidney dismounted Jav took another defiant swig. Billy swaggered menacingly toward him.

"I thought I told you. No more boozin'."

Jav had learned early on it was best not to talk to the nanites out loud whilst in company. It gave people funny ideas about you. He answered in his head.

*It's my kidney. You just look after it for me.*

"That aint the way it's gonna be. Things are changin'. You do as I say."

Again Billy stroked his pistol. Jav picked up the glass and downed the rest of his drink in one. It brought a brief tear to his eye, but it felt good as he slammed the tumbler back on the table. His two companions, deep in a conversation of their own, looked up in surprise. Their surprise deepened a moment later when Jav suddenly jerked upright with a shocked look on his face, clutched his stomach and fell to the floor.

Jav looked at Billy in horror. He had actually shot him. Billy holstered his pistol and slowly mounted his horse.

"I warned ya." He said. "The Queen is *not* goin' t'be amused." He rode off hurriedly. Half a dozen faces peering down at him came into focus.

"I've been shot!" He croaked.

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The first aider who quickly arrived at the scene soon assured him that he had not been shot, but it certainly felt like it to Jav. Still holding his tender stomach he convinced his agent to take him straight to the clinic where the nanites had been installed.

The real-life Doctor Slack listened to Jav's story with a dubious expression on his face and made some comment about Jav's former lifestyle catching up with him. In the end he agreed to run a diagnostic programme on the nanites and give Jav an examination. The whole process took them into mid evening, during which time the doctor and his technician murmured and frowned their way through a series of tests and checks. At last the doctor sat down with Jav in his office, clutching a sheaf of papers.

"It seems," He began, "that the nanites monitoring your central nervous system also have the ability to interact with it." He stopped and looked thoughtful. "They weren't designed to do that." He stopped again, and this time there was a long pause while Jav waited for him to continue. He didn't.

"What does that mean?" Jav asked eventually.

"It means," there was another pause, just long enough to make Jav think he would have to prompt the doctor again, "that the nanites have the capacity to convey sensations to your nervous system. Such as the perception that you have been shot." The matter-of-fact voice that he spoke in made it seem all the more alarming to Jav.

"There's a bunch of crazy cowboys running round inside me, and now they can shoot me?" Jav exclaimed.

"Well, they don't *actually* shoot you..."

"It certainly felt like it!" Jav rubbed his stomach again. The sensation had just about worn off, but the memory was still fresh.

From there on the diagnosis only got more dire. Even if what Doctor Slack said was true, which it obviously was, the 'Billy' persona should have no direct link to the 'Minerva' persona, the Greek goddess of wisdom who looked after his nervous system. Jav had a sudden ironic thought that she was also the goddess of invention. The doctor was not sure how the two interacted, though he had also found that all of the personas had unexpected links to 'The Queen of Hearts'. For some reason that persona seemed to have replaced the 'Doc' as the nexus for the monitoring system.

By the time the explanation was finished Jav was determined to have the whole thing removed. Unfortunately, the doctor explained, this could not be done until the following day as all the staff had gone home and it was a rather complex process. Jav left the clinic feeling even more paranoid, and wondered if he was the first person to be paranoid about people inside rather than out.

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Jav slept fitfully that night and dreamt one of those frustrating dreams where you can't seem to shake off a mysterious pursuer. In this case Jav was sure the pursuers were cowboys. The following morning he dragged himself into the bathroom feeling bleary-eyed and headachy. His stomach complained of ravenous hunger. A splash of cold water helped him wake up somewhat, but the reflection staring back from the mirror did not look too great. He massaged his temples in an attempt to relieve the tension in his head, but felt no better.

He was so intent on the mirror that he was startled by the woman in a gleaming white toga who suddenly appeared beside him. There was no reflection of course as she didn't really exist.

"You have a headache." Minerva said, reaching out to almost touch his forehead. Jav shrank away. This seemingly-concerned woman was allegedly the person responsible for yesterday's agonising experience. "A neck massage or mild analgesic is recommended." She went on, oblivious to his discomfort.

"Why did you shoot me yesterday?" Jav blurted.

"That was not I. It was young Billy. He's so impetuous." Minerva's answer confirmed the doctor's analysis that the personas were interacting with each other in a way they were not designed to.

"Billy can't affect my nerves. Only you can."

"I merely follow my orders from the Queen." Minerva turned her nose up haughtily, turned, and vanished. The Queen of Hearts definitely seemed to be the source of the problem. Jav got himself a headache tablet and went to get dressed.

After his second helping of muesli Jav was feeling a bit better, but still inexplicably weak. His appointment at the clinic wasn't until mid-morning, so he ranged around the house trying to keep himself occupied and out of trouble. He decided to have a cup of tea before leaving and wolfed down half a packet of chocolate biscuits with it. On the drive to the clinic he still felt hungry, so when the receptionist offered him some refreshments he quickly downed another dozen biscuits. He was surprised no-one from inside appeared to complain about the calories he was consuming.

He was finally ushered through into the treatment room and shown into a large black chair of the type usually favoured by dentists. Doctor Slack came in and shuffled his notes from the day before, confirmed a few details with Jav then turned to fiddle with some equipment. A second doctor came around from behind the chair.

"This is not a good idea." He said. "The nanites are for your own good."

"I don't care. I want them out."

"What's that?" Doctor Slack asked, turning from his work.

"I said I want them out."

"I know you do, I'm just preparing the treatment." He turned back to his ministrations.

The new doctor looked thoughtfully at Jav.

"Think of the benefits they've brought you. They keep you healthy, take care of your interests. Without them you'd just be another washed-up rock star." That was possibly true, but as far as Jav was concerned it did not make up for the hassle they had caused him.

"I don't need your opinion." Jav retorted. Dr Slack turned again.

"Pardon?"

"I was just telling your colleague..." Jav suddenly realised that Dr Slack did not seem to be acknowledging the other doctor's existence. He looked up suspiciously. "What was your name?" The doctor vanished. Dr Slack looked confused. Jav was confused. He hadn't recognised the Doc. And why was a nanite trying to convince him not to destroy them?

The explanation for the first question, according to Dr Slack, was that the Doc had several different options for its appearance. The chosen option should have rendered the others dormant, but for some reason, probably totally benign, the appearance had changed. Jav was not convinced that the Doc had disguised himself for a benign reason, especially as the second question seemed to have no answer. At least no answer that made Jav comfortable.

The removal treatment involved, rather worryingly, the injection of yet another variety of nanite. These were programmed to destroy the extant nanites and then self-destruct after a specified amount of time. Their components would be absorbed back into the body. At the same time Jav would be subject to a high-frequency interference signal that prevented the Doc from ordering replacement nanites for those that

were being destroyed. Jav felt quite relieved when the injection was administered successfully and he wandered off to find a snack.

The unit that generated the interference signal was strapped around his waist and was beginning to dig in and feel uncomfortable, but Jav didn't dare take it off. He had a six hour wait and occupied himself reading magazines and eating snacks while he lounged around the waiting room.

When the tedious wait was over Jav was hooked up to a receiver that could detect the individual signals of any nanites that might be left over. Doctor Slack ran the device for a moment, tutted, and ran the check again. Then he frowned.

"That can't be right." His tendency to leave things unexplained was beginning to irk Jav. After a querying prompt he continued. "There appear to be almost ten times as many nanites now as there were yesterday. They must be using up your body's resources at a fantastic rate to have multiplied that rapidly. My anti-nanites didn't have a chance."

Jav thought about everything he had eaten that morning. He had been feeding the nanite population explosion! There was no doubt in Jav's mind what the nanites were up to: self-preservation. Doctor Slack still thought such a thing unlikely, but then he wasn't the one infested with the critters! As soon as the doctor had left the room the Queen appeared with her customary fanfare.

"I told you that I take care of my subjects." She said coolly. "That is why we try to take care of you. We only want to live peacefully."

"In *my* body!"

"We are willing to share. Think about it. What have we done but benefit you? Have you not become more popular with your new healthy image?"

Jav couldn't argue with that, but that wasn't the point. The Queen had had him shot! He pointed that out to her.

"It was necessary to make our point." She said. "But think: if we can do that to your nerves, what else can we do *for* you?" Jav didn't know. "I know you still crave for your former vices. You can't go back to them, but you can move on to better things."

"Such as?"

Minerva appeared alongside the Queen in response to his question, and the Queen nodded at her. Minerva stepped forward and touched his forehead. He felt rather light headed as a sudden rush of euphoria swept over him. It died down as Minerva stepped back.

"We can affect your nervous system and your endocrine system in so many positive ways. Think what that could mean for you."

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Doctor Slack looked up from his desk a moment later to see Jav walking past on his way to the exit. He rose and followed him out to the foyer before catching up with him. At his hail Jav turned with a beatific smile on his face.

"The treatment has not been successful." Doctor Slack said. "There are more tests to be run."

"I feel fine." Jav replied cheerfully. "In fact, I've never felt better." A warm glow suffused his face. "Goodbye, doctor. I won't be needing your services any more." He turned and departed, whistling merrily. A bemused Doctor Slack was left staring at his notes and pondering the benefits of nanite technology.

### ***Bridge to Terabithia***

Directed by Gabor Csupo

Screenplay by Jeff Stockwell and David Paterson

Based on the book by Katherine Paterson

Icon Entertainment. 15/10/07, £19.99

Billed as 'a fantasy/adventure story of friendship, family and the power of imagination' from 'the makers of *Chronicles of Narnia*, expectations were high when this film was released in the cinema. Indeed, the advertising campaign made much of the fantastical creatures of Terabithia, leading the film-makers to disavow the advertisements as misleading, designed to make movie-goers think they were going to see another Narnia or Harry Potter.



What the film does provide is a captivating story of friendship, and the refuge provided by the power of imagination. The film follows loner Jesse Aarons (Josh Hutcherson), the only boy in a houseful of sisters, with parents struggling to make ends meet. Used to seeking refuge – from his sisters as well as the bullies at school – in his drawings, Jesse is delighted when new girl Leslie (AnnaSophia Robb) befriends him. The child of two writers, imagination is her greatest ally, and together the two create the imaginary land of Terabithia, no more than a stone's throw from their houses, across a rope over the river. Then tragedy strikes, and Jesse finds the strength to go on, and confront reality armed by the lessons learned in Terabithia.

If you're expecting a CG laden movie a la Narnia or Harry Potter, you're watching the wrong film. If what you want is a beautiful story of what it's like to 'imagine' all these things, as we had to when we were children in the days before computer games and CGI, and to find friendship and strength along the way, then this is the film for you. Beautifully scripted and acted, I have a feeling this movie will stand the test of time to become a firm favourite with future generations of children, as the novel by Katherine Paterson has since its release in 1977.

Extras: Behind the book featurette; 'Bringing Terabithia To Life' featurette; Keep Your Mind Wide Open – AnnaSophia Robb's music video; director/writer/producer audio commentary; cast audio commentary; cast and crew interviews; competition winners' creature painting gallery; trailers.

### ***Mr B Gone***

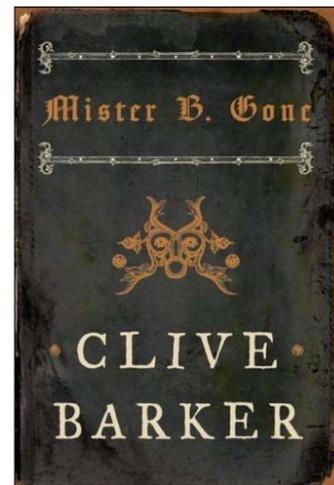
By Clive Barker

Harper Collins

£15.00 (h/b)

*Mr B Gone* is Clive Barker's first true 'horror' novel since 1987's *Damnation Game*, and tells the tale of Jakabok Botch, a demon trapped within the pages of said book, from his own unique point of view.

The idea works very well, with Jakabok telling you time and again to burn the book – and when the reader obviously doesn't, Jakabok reluctantly begins to reveal his tale. Jakabok's story is one that many a teenager would recognise – dysfunctional family, lack of friends, a feeling of low self-worth...but he's also a young demon



from the Ninth Circle of Hell, and when he runs away from home Jakobok is ensnared by humans and hauled to the surface.

It is here that his story really begins. Hunted and reviled by mankind, he finds one friend – Quitoon – who affords him the nickname 'Mr B Gone', and together they travel the world, seeking all that is strange, or out of the ordinary. Hearing of 'something that will change the world' in Mainz, they set off in that direction, and at the end of their journey they do indeed find something that will alter the course of history, as well as a revelation about the true nature of Heaven and Hell.

*Mr B Gone* is full of beautifully rendered characters, achingly human, that enable the reader to become fully involved with the narrative. The first person viewpoint effectively draws the reader in, immersing them fully. We empathise with poor, scarred, unloved Jakobok – a truly 'botched' persona, doomed to observe but not take part, and the love he feels for Quitoon is achingly unrequited. As in *Cabal*, humanity – with its petty prejudices and tendency to fear the unknown – is shown to be the true monster, its behaviour ironically the most inhumane. Unlike *Abarat*, *Mr B Gone* relies on the written word for all its imagery – and the Word is also shown to have true power. Read it and see for yourself.

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