

Lost in Reality

James D. Lane

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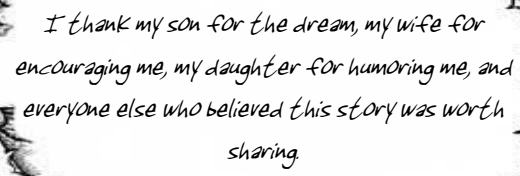
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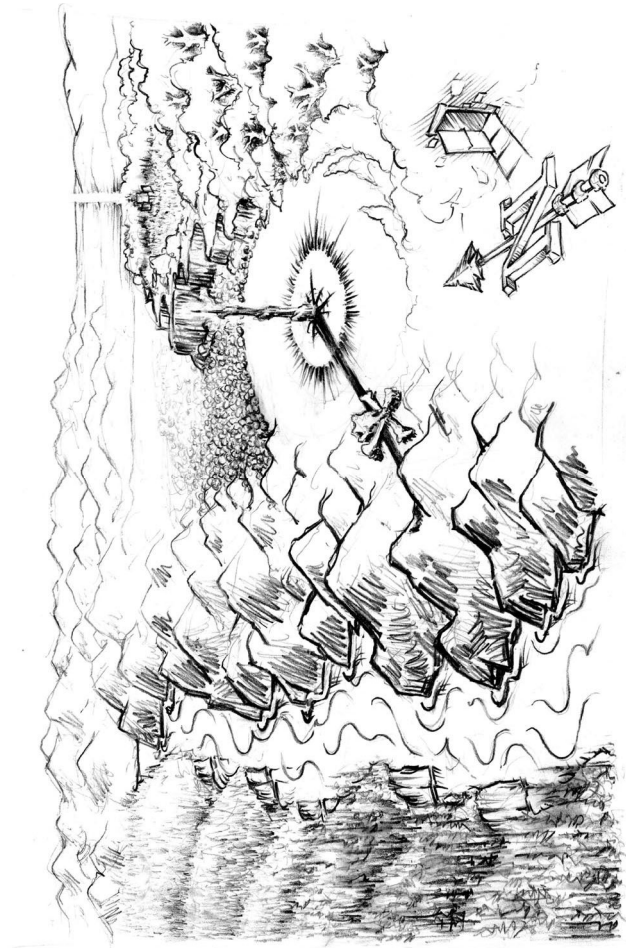
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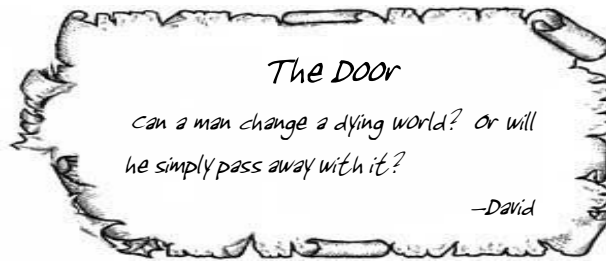
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*I thank my son for the dream, my wife for
encouraging me, my daughter for humoring me, and
everyone else who believed this story was worth
sharing*





Sitting on the thick green grass enjoying the warm summer sun, David could hear his children, Brittany and Jarod, laughing and chatting with the neighbor kids. Nearby, the fire department was testing equipment in the school parking lot. Watching them, David recalled his days as a volunteer firefighter, which had ended seven years ago when his daughter was born. He missed those days but enjoyed the time that he now spent with his children all the more.

David wandered over to the fire engine and started talking with Jim and Tom. They had been talking for a while when David realized that he could no longer see or hear his children and went to look for them. When he finally spotted them, they ran away from him as if they were playing hide-and-seek.

“Okay,” David called out. “Ready or not, here I come.”

As he rounded the corner of the building, he saw a man he didn’t recognize was waving to Brittany and Jarod.

“Tom! Could you come help me?” David called out.

Electronic billboards alerting citizens to child abductions had finally reached his small town. Starting to panic, he ran to Brittany, who giggled and squealed when

he caught her. Jarod and the man were nowhere to be seen.

Hearing a voice calling his name, he turned around. His friends, Jim and Tom had caught up with him.

“What’s wrong?” Jim asked.

“I think Jarod is being kidnapped! Watch Brittany for me!”

Ignoring Brittany’s tearful pleas, he ran after Jarod. As he rounded a corner, he saw the man shove Jarod through what appeared to be some sort of utility entrance to the boiler room. David reached the door, but the handle was seized solid. His blood hot and his heart racing, he rushed after the man and grabbed him, twisting his right arm behind him and grabbing him around the neck.

“Open that door and give me my son back or I’ll kill you!”

“It’s not that easy!” gasped the man.

David tightened his grip around the man’s neck. “It has to be that easy because my son went through that door only seconds ago! Let me in or I’ll tear the door off its hinges! My friends have an axe in their fire truck.”

“You don’t want to do that!” the man cautioned, still struggling to speak. “If you do, you’ll only enter the school building.”

“That’s exactly what I intend to do. What kind of sick game are you playing?”

David’s friends came rushing around the corner and stopped short as if uncertain whom to help.

Knowing that the man couldn’t get past his friends, David released him.

The man whirled around to face David. “My daughter is in there, too! I was in there for a while looking for her, but I couldn’t find her. When you go

through that door, you're not entering the school building. You're entering a confusing, deceiving other dimension. I had lost all hope in finding my daughter until I realized that I could send someone else in my place. The only way I could convince you to go was if your child was lost in there, too."

Tears welled up in the man's eyes, and David's heart twisted. He wanted to pummel this man for what he had done to Jarod, but he felt real compassion for the man's daughter lost in a foreign world without her father.

"How do I get in?" David asked.

"Not so fast!"

"Time is wasting! I want my son back!"

"You have to promise to bring my daughter back, or I won't tell you how to get in."

"You're going with me! I'm not doing this alone!"

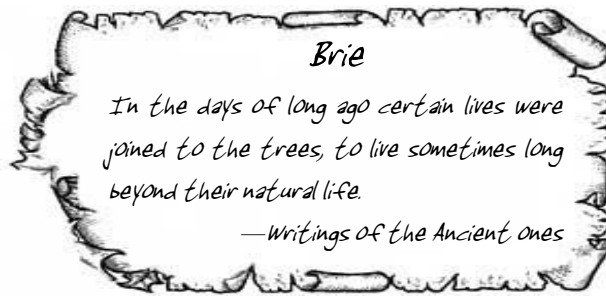
"You have to do it alone! I've already tried this with another man, and when we stepped through that door, we were combined into one being, transformed into something else completely. It's amazing that we even got back out. Our minds couldn't communicate because our thoughts were intermixing to create meaningless confusion. We couldn't even make our shared body walk because of our bewilderment. We started to walk forward, or so we thought, but we tripped ourselves and fell backwards right out of this doorway. That happened a week ago. I've been pondering what to do ever since. This morning, when I saw your son run around the corner, it hit me immediately. I could hear you calling to him, and I had to act fast."

"Watch Brittany for me while I figure out what's going on here," he said to his friends then turned back to

the man. “Okay, I’m asking you again. How do I get through that door?”

The man leaned forward and whispered in David’s ear, “*Hürde Inntreadh.*”

It sounded like nonsense, but David walked over to the door, whispered the phrase as clearly as he could, and grabbed the handle. The door opened.



Despite the man's story, David had expected to find himself inside the boiler room. Instead, he was in a dark, strange place—not so much dark as dim, but it *felt* dark. The voices of his friends were strangely distant and muffled, but he could make out parts of what they were saying. They had seen enough to know that he had entered some place other than the school building. David jumped as the door swung shut behind him with a heavy clunk.

"I'm here, Dad," said Jarod's voice. "I'm tired, and I wanna go home."

Instinctively, David reached down for his son's hand, only to grasp empty air. Yet his heart leaped with joy. Jarod had to be close by.

"Where are you, Jarod? I can't see you."

"I can't see you either, Dad, but I could hear you calling my name."

That's strange, David thought. I haven't spoken a word since I entered this place. I was only thinking, 'Jarod where are you?'

"I'm here, Dad. You don't have to keep asking me where I am."