

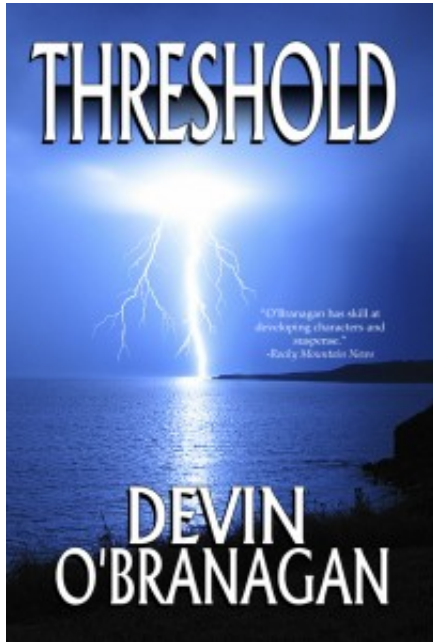
## Threshold

When I was young, I had a near-death experience. In many ways, it was a classic NDE. In others, it was nothing like what I would have expected. It changed my life—literally and figuratively—and forever altered the path I walked. I should have died. I didn't. I emerged from the event healed from a horrible illness. The light wasn't white, but intensely golden. There was a tunnel-like experience, except the tunnel moved into me instead of the other way around. And the "being of light" who manifested was totally unexpected. There are spiritual teachers of several faiths with whom I feel a connection, but the being who appeared to me wasn't among them. I had heard of the man, of course, but I followed a completely different spiritual path from his. Then, ten years after my NDE, I learned that on the very day of my threshold experience, the Swami who guided me had died. Was the grace that occurred to me a parting gift from a great soul? I now believe it was. One thing I am certain of is that what happened was indeed an experience of pure grace. I am also convinced it wasn't a play of imagination because, if it had been, everything would have unfolded differently.

Afterward, I did what most novelists do—I mined personal experience for my art. My novel, *Threshold*, was the result. I spent twenty years working on it and then stuck the manuscript under my bed. I'm not sure why I resisted letting it be published. It isn't autobiographical in the slightest. What happens to the young male protagonist is completely different from my own adventure, yet the novel remains intensely personal to me. A colleague asked to read it, said it was the best thing I had ever written, and I relented. I'm now glad I did because, of all my books, it is the one which seems to have had the most profound effect on readers. One reviewer suggested it was "divinely-inspired." I would say that's an accurate observation.

I began creative writing at age five. My first novel was published when I was a young woman and I've had a long and exciting career. Although I write in a number of different genres, the common thread—from my first story at five until my latest effort—is that of uncommon heroism. That's a term I use to describe ordinary people called to accomplish heroic quests.

In my novel, *Threshold*, Cole Dillon drowns in Deer Lake shortly before his thirteenth birthday. Elijah Thunderbird, a Native American shaman, travels between the worlds to bring Cole back from death. Unfortunately, Cole isn't supposed to survive, and with the natural order disrupted, dark spirits follow them home. During Cole's near-death experience, he is assigned an important mission that involves saving the lives of many other children. When he is revived, he can't remember the details and undertakes a challenging quest of discovery. Meanwhile, the dark spirits begin to manifest in the lives of the local town residents, bringing hatred and death. When shamanic visions reveal that many young lives are indeed in imminent danger, Elijah has to help Cole find the courage to do what is required of him before it is too late. As Elijah tries to help Cole, he struggles with his own personal demons, and both men—one young, one old—must decide how much they are willing to sacrifice in order to save others. It is a moving paranormal thriller about courage, faith, and the transformative power of love.



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**Here is an excerpt. Young Cole and his horse Shiloh are on their ranch in Montana:**

Cole pulled Shiloh up short while he tried to get a fix on his location. They were on the shore of Deer Lake, the lake's frozen surface looming gray before him in the early morning light. His grandparents lived in Johnstown, which was across the lake and beyond by ten miles. He remembered their house from family gatherings prior to his mother's disappearance and was sure he could find it again because Johnstown was a small town. He decided that braving the bitter weather was a small price to pay if the journey finally closed the case.

Cole and Shiloh were near the river that fed the lake, and he could see the bridge which crossed it. As he urged Shiloh to turn in that direction, the sharp sound of splitting ice ripped the air. Horrified, Cole realized that he had misjudged the lake's shoreline—the recent snowfall and wind-driven drifts had completely changed the landscape. Shiloh reared up in fear and caught Cole off guard. The horse bucked, Cole flew off, and he hit the split ice with such force that he crashed straight through to the freezing water below. Before he had time to react, a fierce undertow from the river captured and swept him away from the hole, deeper into the lake. Through the transparent sheet of ice that imprisoned him he could see where his sunglasses had landed, and beyond them he saw Shiloh trotting off in the direction from which they had come.

The freezing water caused little electric shocks to shoot through his eyes, but he found he couldn't close them. His lungs screamed for air and he clawed uselessly at the thick ice in an effort to return to the hole. Finally, his movement was halted when his pant leg snagged on something rising up from the lake bed. He yanked hard, but couldn't free himself. With a startled gasp, his lungs inhaled the frigid water which he now knew would be his grave.

I'm going to die, he thought with more amazement than fear.

He wondered what came next.

His discomfort passed, and the ringing in his ears stopped. He felt detached and distant to himself, then casually floated away from his body, up toward the sky. While he rose, he thought about his life. It hadn't been too bad, all things considered, but he suddenly wished he had been nicer to Dawn Bearpaw and not ridiculed her for her handicap.

The light from the sun grew brighter, and it felt warm and comforting. He looked up into it and was surprised to see a vaguely familiar figure floating toward him. When they drew closer to each other Cole felt the power this being commanded, and a sense of awe filled him. For some reason, he remembered a character from Star Trek.

"Are you Q?" Cole asked.

The entity smiled and extended a welcoming hand. "Let's fly together through the wormhole," its mind said to Cole's.

"Cool," Cole responded.

"There's a mission I want you to do that may save the lives of many other children, but it's your choice. There is always the issue of free will to consider."

That was right before the sky split in half, and they were catapulted into the starry abyss beyond.

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**Here is a second excerpt; this one is from the perspective of Native American shaman, Elijah:**

The morning was bright when Elijah neared the Dillon ranch and Cole's horse crossed the road in front of him. He was certain it was Shiloh by her unique cat-like stride. She didn't seem in a hurry, but the fact she was bridled and dragging reins did not bode well. Elijah didn't want to spook her, so he noted the direction she was traveling, drove up the road ahead of her, and parked the truck. He rummaged about in the glove box and found several unopened packets of sugar from his last trip to the Dairy Queen in Lewistown. He emptied them into his hand and set off on foot to intercept her.

As Shiloh approached, Elijah spoke to her familiarly. She stopped to look at him, her nose twitching at the sweet scent in the air, and he casually walked up to her with palm extended. When she took the bait, he grasped her reins, brought her face close to his, and smelled her anxiety. He mounted her quickly and urged her back in the direction from which she came. She balked, but he talked to her in hushed tones, in the language of the spirits, and she obeyed his request.

Shiloh was tense beneath him, her black tail flailing in an effort to slap away the dark hand that Elijah also felt. There was a hand that reached between the worlds to claim bodies, and there was a greedier one which grasped for souls. A chill, greater than that caused by mere cold, entered Elijah as he saw the nature of the rapacious fingers that clutched at them. A terrible sense of urgency overtook them both and the horse quickened to a full gallop without Elijah's request. They retraced Shiloh's fresh tracks to the lake. On its slick surface, twenty feet from the shore, Elijah noticed the sun glinting off what appeared to be a pair of sunglasses. For a moment his mind clouded and he almost rode out onto the lake, but above him the screech of a hawk—his guardian spirit—assaulted his senses, quickened his blood, and yanked him back to himself. He whoaed the horse, dismounted, then tied her reins to the trunk of a nearby pine tree. Gingerly, he stepped out onto the ice.

With a dreadful certainty, Elijah sensed that Cole was in the lake. Slowly, he advanced until he saw the lake's greedy mouth, eager to consume another live offering. He stopped, closed his eyes, and retreated to the center of the universe. He visualized the dark hand that hovered and saw the grasp had not yet completely enveloped its prey. His mind looked around for a sign of the boy, but saw nothing, so he opened his eyes and performed the same futile search. He untied his red and white neckerchief and attached it to a pen fished from his pocket. With careful aim, he tossed his marker into the black water and noticed the direction in which the current sucked it. Ignoring the crackling and popping beneath his feet, Elijah circled around the hole and tracked the marker until—through the ice ahead—he noticed a glowing light. Sinking to his knees, he cautiously crawled toward the apparition until he saw Cole staring up at him with empty eyes. His open mouth cried out soundlessly, and the water's dance caused his fingers to claw at the clear lid of his coffin. However, there was a subtle radiance surrounding Cole that gave Elijah hope.

Elijah removed a knife from the sheath on his belt and cautiously chipped at the ice around one of Cole's hands—he couldn't see what had snagged him in this spot and didn't want to dislodge him. However, the lake's frozen surface started to surrender loudly and with a spider's web of cracks that spread quickly. Throwing away caution, Elijah reached through the small hole into the frigid water and grasped Cole's hand. When he was sure of his grip, he used his spurs and the heel of his boot to enlarge the opening. An earsplitting shriek greeted his efforts, reverberating in his ears so intensely that he felt an irrational urge to release the boy and throw his hands to his head to keep the sound out. While he wondered about this, he felt movement from Cole, a tugging so fierce and unexpected that Elijah momentarily lost hold of him. Reacting swiftly, despite the clumsiness of his own numb fingers, he managed to clasp onto a lifeless wrist. Then something stronger than the undertow tried to yank Cole away, and Elijah struggled to hold on. Unable to feel what his own hand was doing, he visualized his grip as firm and sure, trusting that it would be so. With a final, decisive thrust of his heel he widened the hole and reached for Cole's free arm. As he fished for his struggling catch, he noticed that the undertow was sucking at Cole like a whirlpool. Looking down into the water, Elijah saw that the eddy was swirling backwards, contrary to the laws of nature. He stared at it in fascination until it hypnotized him with its peculiarity. He lost himself until Shiloh's loud snort captured his attention and his eyes managed to escape the vortex. Glancing at the horse who was bucking and thrashing to break free of her restraints, he came to his senses and hoisted Cole up through and onto the ice like a cold, dead fish. His movement offended the frozen sheet beneath them,

and it instantly rebelled by buckling. Elijah tossed Cole over his shoulder and managed to outrun the rift in the world that raced to claim them both.

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*Threshold* is available around the world via Amazon.

Bestselling author Devin O'Branagan writes paranormal thrillers, young adult urban fantasy, and paranormal romance. Her books have been published by Simon & Schuster's Pocket Books, German publisher Heyne Verlag, Turkish publisher Dogan Egmont, and indie publisher Cornucopia Creations. She writes a humor column for *TAILS Magazine*, is a member of the Dog Writers Association of America, the Cat Writers' Association, and many of her writing projects support animal rescue. Her website is [www.DevinWrites.com](http://www.DevinWrites.com)

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