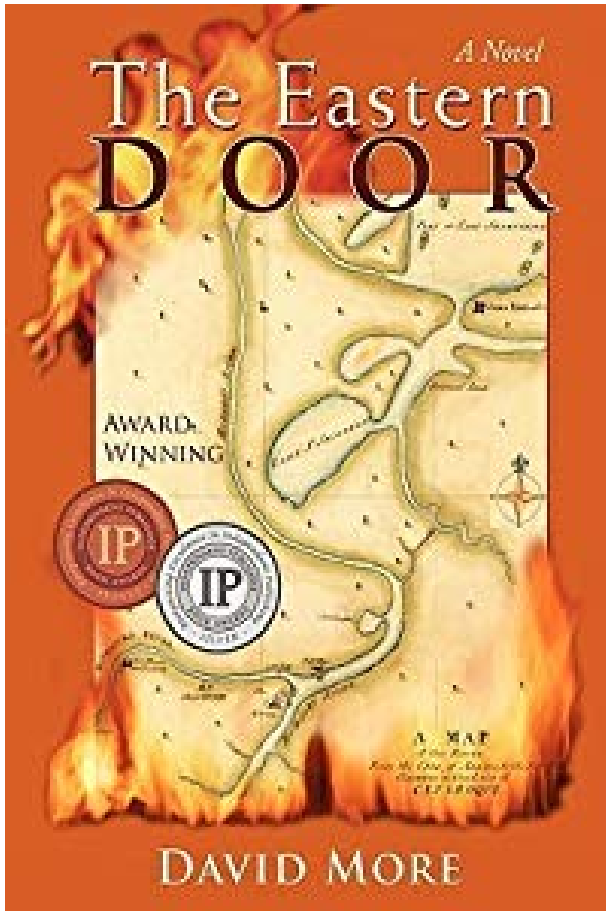


The Eastern Door



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The French officer leading the band of ten was alert. He heard the thump of the hatchet stroke, which freed the tree overhead, and he motioned the party to stop, but it was a mistake. Two of his men were unable to dodge the deadfall and its thick, brittle branches speared them as the trunk smashed them to the ground. Nearly simultaneously, six musket shots exploded. The officer had turned away in sudden alarm, just as Billy pulled the trigger. The usual fraction of a second delay, between the flash in the pan and the ignition of the main charge in the barrel, seemed to take an hour. Billy, his heart now pounding in earnest, dropped the musket and picked up his hatchet, his hand suddenly sweat-slicked." You missed, you fool, and now you'll have to make the best of this.

"He stood and charged blindly through the smoke, teeth bared in fear and rage. But he had not missed. He nearly tripped over his victim. The three-quarter inch lead ball had smashed into the left side of the Frenchman's chest and he lay dying on the track, wide-eyed. He gulped blood quietly for a few seconds and then was gone, staring at the sky.