

The Introduction to

**CROSS**  
**TRAFFIC** **TIME**

by

**Lawrence Watt-Evans**

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ISBN 0-9671783-6-3

Cover art by Kiri Evans

FoxAcre Press  
401 Ethan Allen Avenue  
Takoma Park, Maryland 20912  
[www.foxacre.com](http://www.foxacre.com)

## Introduction

Welcome to my book!

Maybe you're here because you've enjoyed my novels, or because you've seen some of these stories in magazines or anthologies and liked them. Or maybe the title piqued your interest, or the cover caught your eye. Whatever the reason, I hope you'll be pleased by the stories; I think there are some good ones.

I always wanted to see my name on a collection of short stories; I've always wanted to be a writer, always loved short stories. My novels have been appearing for over a decade, and much of the thrill has worn off, but short stories are still special for me, and a single-author collection like this—well, it's been something I've wanted for as long as I can remember, and I've finally made it.

It's taken a long time for it to happen, and I want to use this introduction to tell you how it came about. Let me start off with an explanation of how I wound up as a writer of fantasy and science fiction. After that I'll explain where the stories in this collection came from. It's going to be largely a shameless display of egotism, so nobody will be offended if you get bored and skip ahead to the stories.

Here's the beginning: I started reading science fiction when I was five. Honest. And I decided to write it when I was seven.

Both my parents read science fiction, you see. That meant my three older siblings read it, as well. I don't remember ever not knowing what science fiction was; the concept had percolated into my consciousness by the time I was four, definitely.

It was about that age that I noticed my sibs reading comic books, and I saw the nifty pictures of dinosaurs and spaceships and stuff and *I* wanted to read comic books, too.

And when I was five, I learned the letters of the alphabet in kindergarten, and the sounds each one made. I still remember the flash of insight when the teacher wrote a song called "K-K-Katy" on the blackboard and taught us to sing it, and the connection between those three Ks and the sound at the beginning of the song clicked into place

somewhere in my head, and I began sounding out words.

I didn't know I was actually reading; I assumed that there was some trick to it I hadn't learned yet, but what I was doing seemed to work, so I tried it out.

I tried it not on Dr. Seuss or any of the kid stuff I was supposed to read, but on a coverless comic book, identified twenty years later as *ADVENTURES INTO THE UNKNOWN* #105, that my sister Marian had picked up somewhere and left lying around the house. The lead story, "Last of the Tree People," involved a botanist who goes to the Moon and finds intelligent trees and carnivorous dinosaurs. Another story was called "The Martian Mirage," and had this nifty domed city that appeared and disappeared. A third was "Born to Be A Grocer," about these weird disembodied intelligences that live among us—and who are about to take over the world.

I was hooked.

Not on science fiction, per se—on comic books.

Tarzan, Turok, Superboy, all of those. It was 1959. I'd missed the Golden Age of Comics; the gruesome horror and crime of the early 1950s had been stamped out; the great superhero revival hadn't really started yet. All the same, there were plenty of exciting comic books out there to read, and I loved them all. I had no money, but I had two older sisters who bought them, and that was just as good.

I had an older brother, too, but I don't remember him ever having any money or buying any comic books. Fortunately, Marian and Jody weren't the stereotypical 1950s sissy-type girls—they didn't bring home romance comics, they brought home westerns and science fiction and superhero stuff. Also Little Lulu and Donald Duck, but those were great, too.

And there was a whole big box that had accumulated before I'd learned to read.

So I went on to first grade and discovered that I was reading the right way after all, and then I went on to second grade, where several very important events in my life happened.

First, I ran out of comic books. I'd worked my way through the box, and I was reading them faster than my sisters bought them, and my weekly allowance was only a dime, and even at the used book store in those pre-inflation days that only bought two second-hand comics—or four, if I got coverless ones.

I could go through four in an afternoon; what about the other six days each week?

My parents had been complaining all along that I should read something better than comic books, so, in desperation, I took them up on it. I'd had my fill of Dick and Jane and their kin in school—books, I am convinced, that were designed to teach kids that reading is excruciatingly dull. I wanted something *good*.

Well, my parents read books for fun, so I swiped two of those, and snuck 'em up to my room, and even into school. The idea of reading an entire grown-up novel was too daunting to contemplate, so I picked two that were collections of short stories.

The first one was *The Green Hills of Earth*, by Robert A. Heinlein. The second one was *The October Country*, by Ray Bradbury.

*That* got me hooked on science fiction. And fantasy. And horror. I was thoroughly caught, even though I couldn't follow a lot of what the heck was going on in those stories—when I was seven, most of “Delilah and the Space Rigger” or “The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse” went right over my head.

The next important event was my first in-class writing assignment. The teacher, Miss Conroy, gave us a title, and told us to write something to go with it—a story, an essay, anything. The title was “Little Bird.”

Most of the kids did stuff like, “See the bird. It is a little bird. See the bird fly away. Fly, bird, fly.” Dick and Jane strike again. Bleah.

A few got some rudimentary plot in there; I remember there were about three that I thought were okay.

Mine was a love story about two chickadees—it just about covered both sides of the sheet of paper we were given. When the teacher read it it sounded pretty dumb—but not as bad as the other kids, and Miss Conroy praised it and said something about maybe someday I'd be a writer.

I liked that idea. Writing it had been fun. Not much of what I did in school was fun, at that point. So I went home and showed my paper with the gold star on it to my mother and said, “I want to be a writer when I grow up.”

Seven is an age when the subject of what you'll be when you grow up is a popular one. I'd previously talked about being in real estate (“a house seller”) or urban planning (“a city builder”) or the

sciences (“an atom bomb builder”), and my parents had always encouraged me.

But when I said I wanted to be a writer, my mother said, “Are you sure? That’s a very hard way to make a living; you might not be able to do it.”

I was astonished and baffled. I could be a rocket scientist, or a nuclear physicist, but not a writer?

So I tried it out on my father, and got about the same reaction.

I’m still not quite sure why, even after thirty years. It wasn’t just a bad day, or anything; from then on, right up until I sold my first novel, my parents encouraged me to write, if I wanted to, but as a *hobby*—making a career of it they seemed to consider impractical or downright impossible.

I took it as a challenge, though.

I read my third grown-up book not long after that—an anthology called *Fifty Short Science Fiction Tales*, edited by Isaac Asimov and Groff Conklin. The stories in there were a lot of fun, but not so spectacularly well-written as Heinlein and Bradbury, and they were short, too. I could imagine writing as long and as well as some of these other guys—I *did* imagine writing as long and as well as some of these other guys.

So when I was eight I wrote my first science fiction story, and hid it from my parents. I still have it. It’s terrible, of course, but not bad for a third grader. It’s in first person, told by a mutant lab mouse—I stole the idea of a super-intelligent rodent from “Barney,” by Will Stanton, but making him the narrator was original with me.

From then on, I wrote stories off and on, and unless they were for school assignments, I never showed them to anybody. They weren’t all science fiction, by any means; for one thing, in high school I discovered the distinction between science fiction and fantasy, and encountered the fantasy subgenre known as sword-and-sorcery, which I fell in love with for a time.

In 1972 I burned most of those old stories. Also in 1972 I first submitted one, to THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION.

It got rejected, of course. But it was a form rejection—there wasn’t any letter telling me that if I ever again polluted their slushpile they’d track me down and smash my typewriter.

I found this moderately encouraging.

Also in 1972 I sold a few feature articles to a local weekly paper—a very bad local weekly, but they paid me actual money. This was encouraging, too. And I published a sort of satirical underground newspaper called ENTROPY, using borrowed equipment, and sold it in my high school for a dime a copy and actually turned a profit. I wrote about half of each issue myself, including parodies of Conan the Barbarian and the like.

And it was *fun*. I'd never enjoyed making money before, when I'd shoveled snow or sold greeting cards or bagged groceries at the local supermarket, but I was getting paid for writing, which was what I did for fun anyway!

And people liked it!

I came to the conclusion that writing for money had to be about the best racket there ever was, and I was determined to get into it, sooner or later, somehow. My parents notwithstanding, I was convinced I could do it.

Not convinced enough to start immediately, though. Instead I went off to college on schedule, majoring in architecture.

I had a good time in college. Too good a time. Early in 1974 I got kicked out (“asked to withdraw”) for what I think was officially termed “flagrant neglect of studies.” Which means I was partying instead of going to class for much of my final semester.

Now, having been kicked out, I was faced with the problem of what to do next.

One thing I did *not* want to do was go home and face my parents—especially my father, who had graduated *summa cum laude* from the same university that I'd just flunked out of, and had been the class salutatorian, as well. *His* father had taken his degree there *cum laude*. That was a lot of family history I preferred to avoid.

So I went to Pittsburgh and rented a furnished room, using borrowed money. (Why Pittsburgh? Because my girlfriend was there—the one I'm married to now.)

Another thing I did not want to do was to get a real job. I've always hated the very concept of holding down a real job, and I haven't been impressed with the reality, either, on those occasions when I've tried it. And I rather resented having been kicked out. It was my own damn fault, but I still didn't like it. I wanted back in.

Fortunately, the university had (and has, I believe) a fairly generous readmission policy. The theory seems to be that if you got in the first place you can do the work; if you got kicked out, the problem was motivation, not ability, and that's something that can easily change. So you can be re-admitted up to three times.

You have to apply for it, though, and prove you've been doing something with yourself other than sitting in a basement somewhere listening to Led Zeppelin over headphones for sixteen hours a day. And you are supposedly required to be gone for more than a year, though I knew people who had managed to get around that part.

That meant that I could apply for readmission in the spring of 1975, and theoretically, if I impressed the relevant bureaucrats, I could return to campus in September of '75 to take another shot at the semester I'd blown off.

I wanted something I could put in my readmission application that would make it look like I was doing something interesting with myself, something conducive to personal growth and self-discovery and all that sort of thing. I also wanted something to do with my time that I could use as an excuse for not going full-time flipping burgers somewhere. I had a year and a few months.

And I'd recently heard a story—I still don't know if it's true—about Larry Niven that I took as an inspiration.

According to the story, when Niven decided to be a writer he gave himself a year. He holed up somewhere and wrote, and did nothing much *except* write, for a year. He collected lots of rejection slips, and then, toward the end of the year, started selling short stories.

Sounded good to me. If I wrote for a year, I would collect lots of rejection slips that I could then enclose with my application for readmission. That should look sufficiently interesting to the people considering my case. It would be an excuse not to get a real job. And what the heck, the stuff might start selling.

So I started writing.

I didn't *just* write, in the event; I did a stint as a cook at Arby's, among other things. Mostly, though, I pounded away at the typewriter. I turned out reams of stuff, including fragments that are still in my "to be finished someday" pile; I actually finished about two dozen short stories and a couple of novelets, and submitted them to every market I could think of. Most of them were fantasy, some were

science fiction, a few were mysteries, humor, or unclassifiable.

And in the spring of 1975, just a few days apart, two important pieces of mail arrived.

I'd been readmitted.

And I'd sold my first story.

The sale was for all of ten dollars, to a market I'd found in *Writer's Market* and submitted to almost as a joke; I went back to college.

That first story, though, has been reprinted a couple of times, earning several times the original ten bucks, and I rather like it. For historical reasons, I chose it to start off the present collection, so there it is: "Paranoid Fantasy #1."

(It was originally entitled, "Paranoid Fantasy #1, or, A Day in Whose Life?", but that was mercifully shortened the first time it was reprinted. The full-length version of the title hasn't been used since its original appearance in August, 1975.)

(And yes, there were other "paranoid fantasies"; I got up to #4, at least. The others never sold, and deservedly so.)

It's worth noting that there is a standard piece of advice to beginning writers, one that I hand out myself, that says you should never start off a story with, "The alarm clock rang..." It's a boring opening, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred it's the wrong place to begin the story.

I got away with it, though.

So I went back to college, and having actually sold a story, even so trivial a one as that, I was thought of as a Writer, by my classmates and myself. I'd learned a lot from all those rejections—about seventy of them, mostly form letters, but some more personal and detailed—and from reading *Writer's Market*, and from other books and magazines, and simply from the practice of writing that much.

One thing I'd learned—I'm not sure just where—was what the supposed odds were of selling a story through the slushpile. SF magazines, at that point, reportedly bought about one story out of every four hundred unsolicited submissions.

SF book publishers reportedly bought about one novel out of every forty unsolicited submissions.

One in forty is lousy odds, but it's a lot better than one in four hundred.

I therefore decided that my basic mistake had been writing short



stories, instead of a novel. When the summer of 1976 rolled around, and I was faced with the prospect of getting a summer job, I came up with a dodge—I'd write a novel, instead.

I did, too. I made the mistake of finishing it in a mere ten weeks, though, so that I wound up with a job cleaning laboratory glassware for the last few weeks of summer.

The novel was called *Slant*, and it was terrible. It didn't sell.

In May of 1977 I gave up on college, dropped out, and moved to Kentucky, where my fiancée (we were married three months later, and we're still married) had just gotten a good steady job. I continued to try to write, rather than getting a real job—it was a habit by this time. I took one of those unsold novelets, one that had gotten favorable comments from an editor (though it had still been rejected), and expanded it, rewrote it into a novel. This time I took fourteen months.

And this time, after a delay so long I'd given up and started looking for another line of work, it sold.

So I was a real writer, finally.

From then on, selling novels wasn't much of a problem. I wrote three sequels to that first one, rewrote *Slant* into the drastically-improved *The Cyborg and the Sorcerers*, and forged steadily onward, with book after book.

Short stuff, though—I still didn't have the hang of that. I tried a few more stories, got a few more rejections.

A magazine called THE SPACE GAMER contacted me early in 1980—the editor had read *The Lure of the Basilisk* and wanted to do an article on using overmen, creatures I'd described in the book, in role-playing games. I agreed, and asked if they might be interested in buying fiction.

They were. I sold them two stories, an old one from my files, and a new one that had come to me in a dream.

Honest. It did. I woke up one morning and there it was in my head. There's one description in it that I wrote only because it was important in the dream, and I still haven't figured out *why* it was important. THE SPACE GAMER published it under the unintelligible-to-non-gamers title "Minus Two Reaction"; I've included it here under its correct title, "One Night At A Local Bar."

Since the story came from a dream, I can't tell you much about it beyond the simple fact of its existence. It does have a point, but a

good many readers seem to miss it.

I've spared you the other story that ran in *THE SPACE GAMER*—the older one.

After those two *THE SPACE GAMER* seems to have become disenchanted with me; they rejected a couple of stories, and I quit submitting to them. I was doing well enough with novels that I didn't care all that much.

Short fiction still happened occasionally, though—something would demand to be written, and I would write it, and it would go out gathering rejections. And every so often one would sell.

For example: I was living in Lexington, Kentucky. There was a shop in town called *The Rusty Scabbard* that sold games and gaming supplies, and some friends of mine were regular patrons there.

One day my wife said something about the place, and got the name wrong—she couldn't remember the real name, so she made one up that sounded right, and called it *The Rune and the Dragon*.

I liked that. It was obviously the title of a story. What's more, it was obviously the title of a story I had to write. And it should be done in a high-fantasy style.

I made a couple of false starts, but then the whole thing fell together, and I wrote "*The Rune and the Dragon*," and it got rejected a couple of places, both of which said, "This is a fine story, but we're not doing this sort of straight fantasy adventure right now." The first one suggested sending it to the second one; the second one suggested sending it to *DRAGON Magazine*. *DRAGON* bought it, and published it in their November, 1984 issue.

And that was the last place it appeared until now. Here it is again.

Now, for the next part of this account, we need some background.

In March 1982, Ace Books re-issued Spider Robinson's short story collection, *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*, and I saw it displayed in the bookstores. I didn't read it, didn't even open it, just saw it. I liked the title. I'd always been fond of parallel world stories, never thought they'd really been done right, and I assumed from the title that the book was about parallel worlds. I also like barroom tales, and the combination sounded like a good idea. That title stuck with me, somewhere in the back of my head.

In 1983, my wife and I drove from Kentucky to Washington, D.C. and to Baltimore for the World Science Fiction Convention. We

stopped for lunch in a place called Sutton, West Virginia, and ate at a diner there that we liked—it's hard to say just why; there was just something about the atmosphere that appealed to us.

These two items percolated in my subconscious, tangled themselves up with parallel world theory and certain attitudes, and came out as a story called "Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers."

It sold the first place I sent it, which was ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE (henceforth ASIMOV'S, for short). It was my first sale to a real science fiction magazine. It was the first time a short story of mine had sold on the first try.

It went on to be the first story of mine to win a Hugo, and the first to be nominated for a Nebula, and the first to win the ASIMOV'S Readers' Poll Award. It's been anthologized, translated into Japanese and Polish, and adapted to radio.

After all that, I decided I'd finally gotten the hang of writing short stories.

And since then, while I still get rejections, I've been able to sell most of my short fiction.

Naturally, when one has a hit, one tries to follow it up, and the concept of "Harry's" obviously still had plenty of potential. Several other related stories have been planned; so far, I've only finished one. It's called "A Flying Saucer with Minnesota Plates," and it's here, right after the original story. It isn't exactly a sequel; it's just another story about the same place. It, too, appeared in ASIMOV'S originally.

I'd had another idea about parallel worlds that was intended to be a whole series of short stories—the basic concept was that some sort of accident has created a permanent, stable opening connecting an effectively-infinite number of alternate Earths. The series title was to be "The Hole Above the Parking Lot."

So far, though, I've only written one of the stories. My title for it was "Eurydice," and anyone who has a classical background will recognize the name and understand where the story came from. My agent protested, probably accurately, that 90% of the readers *wouldn't* have the necessary background, so it was retitled "An Infinity of Karen." It was first published in AMAZING in 1988; this is only its second appearance in English.

Another variant on the parallel world theme occurred to me about

ten years ago while I was walking to the supermarket one afternoon, thinking about vectors. No, I don't generally think about things like vectors when I'm out strolling; I have no idea why I did that day, I just did, and when I got home I wrote a story called "The Drifter"—but it's not the one that's included here. It was only about half as long, and although it had the same central concept I'd approached it entirely differently, and it was a pretty lousy story. I sent it out several places, and eventually it wound up in my agent's files, gathering dust.

Then, just recently, he cleaned out his files. He sent me a whole package of old stories he had no particular use for.

Most of them I didn't have any use for, either, but when I re-read "The Drifter" I said to myself, "I can fix this!" With the additional experience I'd acquired in the intervening years I could see immediately what I'd done wrong.

I didn't just fix it, though, I just about wrote an entire new story with the same title and premise, and I did it more or less in a single sitting. I don't think there's a single line from the original in the re-written version, but it all poured right onto the page, as if it had been working itself out in the back of my head all that time.

And yet another angle on the parallel-world idea—I've come up with dozens, many still unused—was the possibility that experimenting with travel between different realities would have unforeseen side-effects, effects that might be felt in worlds other than where the actual experimentation was being done. These might be very serious. Frederik Pohl came up with the same idea independently and used it as a sub-plot in *The Coming of the Quantum Cats*, under the name "ballistic recoil." I thought that he threw away some excellent story possibilities there—what if some of the affected parties had no idea what was causing it? Reality might seem to be coming apart, they would have no idea why, and they would have to just learn to live with it.

The result, so far, is the story "Storm Trooper," contained herein.

Related to the whole field of parallel worlds is the idea of alternate histories—what if some event had happened differently? How would the world be changed?

I'm not really all that fond of the subgenre, because there are just too many variables involved and there's a tendency for the stories to

degenerate into fictional history lectures, but I've tried it a couple of times. One of them was a very short consideration of one of the classic time-traveler-changes-history scenarios, written at the suggestion of Laurence M. Janifer; it's called "One-Shot," and it's included here.

And then there was Mike Resnick's invitation to do a story for his *Alternate Presidents* anthology—the premise was to write alternate-history stories based on presidential elections turning out differently.

I picked 1932, studied up on it, and discovered that Al Smith came very, very close to declaring himself a third-party candidate, which might have split the Democratic Party and gotten Hoover re-elected in a squeaker—Herbert Hoover, "the most hated man in America," with a second term, a heavily Democratic Congress, failing health, and the interventionist Henry Stimson as his Secretary of State and effective second in command.

What would have happened with Henry Stimson running U.S. foreign policy in the 1930s, rather than Franklin Roosevelt?

My guess is called "Truth, Justice, and the American Way."

And while we're changing history, the idea of time police who prevent people from changing history isn't a new one at all; probably Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" stories are the best-known examples. It's a fascinating idea. It's also sort of creepy—how mutable is the past? Fritz Leiber's "Change War" stories, about the Snakes and the Spiders, consider that. And one day, I sat down and wrote a little story about just how would a time patrolman know what's real and what isn't?

At least, I think that's what it's about. It's called "Real Time." It's about my favorite of all my short stories.

And one more final twist on the parallel world theme—why do science fiction stories seem to focus on crosstime travel, or on space travel, but never on *both*? After all, if there are an infinite number of parallel Earths, then there must be just as many Marses and Alphas Centauri. I had that question kicking around my head for years, and then one day I came up with the clever idea of writing a story live on-line on the GENIE computer network, as a publicity stunt—rather like Harlan Ellison's stunt of writing a story while sitting in a bookstore window. The idea I chose was the question of why either/or, and not both, and the result was "New Worlds."

I like stunts. I like doing things that aren't supposed to work, like the first line of "Paranoid Fantasy

1," and some other things in this collection that I don't want to give away here. I like challenges, if they're the right sort.

I was in a discussion of all those old juveniles from the '40s and '50s—that's what they were called then, anyway, now we'd say "young adult novels"—where two kids build a spaceship in their back yard. It's an idea that even made it into the movies, in "Explorers."

It was the consensus of the discussion, though, that SF readers are all too sophisticated for that sort of thing nowadays—you couldn't make it work. "Explorers" wasn't exactly a hit, so maybe it's not just readers, either.

It seemed to me there should be some way to *make* it work, to make people believe two kids could built a spaceship in their back yard.

So I did. I even sold it to ANALOG, that bastion of hard-core technological fiction—my very first sale there. And I had the audacity to call it simply, "Science Fiction."

I know exactly where that story came from. Others just happen, for no reason that I know of. One that just happened was "Watching New York Melt," which was written with my wife's help—she suggested the characters' luncheon preferences and added a few other details. I think I'd been thinking about conceptual art—always a dangerous thing to do.

In much the same way that "Science Fiction" was a result of one of the ancient clichés of the SF field, another one brought forth "Monster Kidnaps Girl At Mad Scientist's Command!" The title alone should make it plain that I wanted to write a story that would actually *belong* behind one of those old pulp covers that depicted a tentacular monster carrying off a busty young woman. I also wanted to explain why a monster would *want* a woman.

I tried to put a new twist on the whole thing, of course.

This story was turned down for being too sexy, too long, too strange, and for various other reasons that struck me as silly, before finally selling to PULPHOUSE WEEKLY. It's one of my own favorites, it's been a hit at public readings, and I really don't understand why it took so long to sell.

One way to come up with a new twist is to put together two things

that haven't gone together before. When LOCUS reviewed *On Stranger Tides*, by Tim Powers, the reviewer remarked on how Powers had done something that should have been obvious, by putting together two things the Caribbean is famous for—pirates and voodoo—that hadn't been put together before.

That got me thinking.

Mostly, it got me thinking, "Damn, why didn't *I* think of that?"

But then it got me thinking about what I could put together that obviously *went* together, but hadn't been done before.

I didn't come up with anything obvious, like pirates and voodoo, but I did eventually come up with an American folk tale—one that happens to be based on an actual historical incident; Thomas "Windwagon" Smith was real—and some elements of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* that looked like a nice fit.

Bradbury and American legends seemed like a pretty good match, and I'd always wanted to write a real old-fashioned tall tale; I did a little research, sent the rough draft to Mr. Bradbury to make sure he didn't object to my story, and the result was "Windwagon Smith and the Martians," which won me my second ASIMOV'S award and went on to various reprintings and adaptations.

Let me emphasize that I know what I derived from *The Martian Chronicles*; it was quite deliberate, and I would never have allowed the story to be published if Mr. Bradbury had not given his permission.

Thomas Smith, of course, is available for any author who cares to use him, like any other public figure of his day.

There is, by the way, a third source—it really only provided a passing reference. I'll leave it as a puzzle for the knowledgeable reader to identify what other (public domain) story I drew on.

So far, except for the first, these stories have been mostly science fiction, or at least borderline. After "Windwagon Smith and the Martians," though, we get into pure fantasy. Fantasy is the field I've been most successful in; I'm not quite sure why. I like it fine, you understand, but I like science fiction just as much.

Ah, well, no accounting for the vagaries of fate.

I have already, however, accounted for the origin of "The Rune and the Dragon." Let me now explain "The Palace of al-Tir al-Abtan."

Remember those two dozen stories I wrote in 1974 and 1975 that



didn't sell?

Well, one of them was called "The Palace of Llarimuir," and from the minute I started writing it, it felt special, better than anything else I'd done up to that point. I was very, very pleased with it; I had a feeling that here, at last, was the story that was going to break me into print. I mailed it off to an editor who shall remain nameless.

And he lost it.

I got a letter from the slush reader who had read it and passed it on to the editor with a strong recommendation; he really liked it. After that, nothing.

Eventually, I inquired, and was told that they had no such story, the editor didn't remember any such story, and did the slush reader really say that, because they didn't believe me.

I still have the reader's letter. He said that.

The story was gone—and I didn't have a carbon. I'd run out of carbon paper just before writing it, and didn't want to take time to get more, not while the writing was going so well. I figured it wouldn't hurt, just *one story* with no carbon.

I mean, of *course* that was the one they lost. (Of mine; I've heard from other writers that that editor lost a *lot* of manuscripts over the years.)

Life is much easier in these days of cheap photocopies and writing on computers, where I can just plug in a disk and print a new copy as needed. Back then, though, it was typewriter and carbon paper. All I had left was the rough drafts—and they were rough, all right. The story had gone through several false starts and variations before reaching its final form. And by the time I was convinced the story was lost, I was on my way back to college.

So I put it aside and tried to forget about it, with the intention of someday digging it out and reconstructing it.

And for once, someday actually came.

Susan Schwartz was editing the second *Arabesques* anthology, and invited me to submit a story. I didn't have any stories around that were appropriate, and a novel was nearing deadline, so I didn't have time to come up with an entirely new one. In a sudden inspiration, I pulled out the rough draft of "The Palace of Llarimuir," which was rather Oriental in setting and feel, and rewrote it into "The Palace of al-Tir al-Abtan." The only change necessary to make it an "Arabian



Nights” sort of story was to change the names from vaguely Celtic coinages to genuine Arabic.

In fact, the Arabic names fit the whole thing better than the originals.

It didn’t really fit the anthology that well, though, and Susan didn’t take it. MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY’S FANTASY MAGAZINE did.

“The Final Folly of Captain Dancy” happened after watching the adventure movie, “Nate and Hayes.” Throughout that, it seemed as if the heroes were making up elaborate schemes, risking their lives carrying them out, and not telling anybody what their plans were.

What would have happened, I wondered, if one of them had gotten killed? How could the rest of Bully Hayes’ crew carried on? All these complicated plots that depended on other people carrying out their parts in time...

The idea stewed for awhile, then gradually started growing. I had no idea how long the story was going to be—for awhile I thought it might be a novel, but it wrapped itself up neatly as a novella, the only one I’ve ever written. I like it.

And while I was always a few steps ahead of the characters, no, I did *not* know, while I was writing it, how it was all going to come out.

And finally, as a coda to these fantasy adventures, we have “After the Dragon Is Dead,” which is a consideration of just what does happen after the final fade-out.

So that’s the lot. These are not all my short fiction, by any means—I’ve left out most of my work in horror, series fantasy, and hard SF. And of course, I’m still writing more. All those will have to wait for some future volume or volumes. This time around I’ve focused on alternate realities and personal favorites.

I hope you’ll enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed writing them.

**About the Author**

Lawrence Watt-Evans is the author of more than thirty novels and more than a hundred short stories in the fields of fantasy, science fiction, and horror. He lives in Maryland with his wife, two children, the obligatory writer's cat, and his son's pet corn snake. Visit his website at <http://www.watt-evans.com/>

# CROSS TRAFFIC

TIME

by

**Lawrence Watt-Evans**

**272 pages \$18.00**

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ISBN 0-9671783-6-3

Cover art by Kiri Evans

Available now at [www.foxacre.com](http://www.foxacre.com) and  
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Available January 2001 from Ingram, Amazon.Com,  
BarnesandNoble.com, Borders.com, other online booksellers, and  
many fine science fiction bookstores

FoxAcre Press  
401 Ethan Allen Avenue  
Takoma Park, Maryland 20912  
[www.foxacre.com](http://www.foxacre.com)