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Carl Abbott

Rocky Mountain Refuge: Constructing “Colorado” in Science Fiction

On the publicity circuit for his apocalypse-vampire-quest novel *The Passage* (2010), Justin Cronin made a telling point to a *Denver Post* interviewer: “When you’re in Colorado you feel sheltered and hidden away. The mountains of Colorado are very good for that. It seemed like the perfect place for a top-secret installation” (Vidimos). Cronin is not a Coloradoan. Nevertheless, he had preexisting ideas about the state that he drew on for *The Passage*—ideas that he then made concrete by repeated visits to absorb the details of topography and light. More recently he elaborated that he “wanted someplace in the middle of the country, remote and mountainous, off any major highways.... Telluride worked for me because of its particular ruggedness, the placement of the river, the architecture of its canyons.”¹

For Cronin as for many Americans, Colorado carries implied and widely shared meanings: it seems an apt and appropriate setting for some things but not for others. The place is distant from coastal population centers. It has high, steep mountains. It is good for hiding away, whether for hippie dropouts, secret scientists, or refugees from continental disaster. In the discussion that follows, I probe such meanings of place by examining how a diverse group of American sf writers has employed, reinforced, or altered readers’ common associations about Colorado. Beginning by discussing the character and image of Colorado in the popular imagination, I then discuss several ways in which science fiction utilizes place as a substrate for narrative.

My examples span several periods in the development of speculative fiction, from the *Astounding* era to recent bestsellers. Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) is a monument of science fiction that has received extensive critical analysis; Walter M. Miller, Jr.’s *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman* (1997) is a posthumously published sequel to *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959). Several texts are less frequently read works by important sf writers: Robert A. Heinlein’s *Sixth Column* (1949) and *The Door into Summer* (1956), Ursula K. Le Guin’s *City of Illusions* (1967), and Leigh Brackett’s *The Long Tomorrow* (1955). Three are mainstream bestsellers: Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), Stephen King’s *The Stand* (1978), and Cronin’s *The Passage*. This eclectic selection shows how thoroughly a distinct and consistent conceptualization of a particular place can run through works that greatly differ otherwise.

Regional identities emerge from the interaction of imaginative representations and social and economic conditions; every fiction writer who chooses a particular setting enters into a distinct stream of imagery and description, simultaneously drawing on popular understanding and helping to reconfirm or reshape that understanding.² The more fully developed the popular

regional identity, of course, the harder it may be to redirect or reimagine: Boston comes with more baggage than Boise. This challenge and opportunity is particularly interesting for sf writers. They have, in the abstract, wide freedom to take regional settings in new directions. At the same time, if their narratives take place on Earth, they are constrained by their own internalization of regional or national identities and by readers' expectations.³

For a century and a half, Colorado has stood for the larger mountain West in popular culture. It has been the US's most accessible western adventure land, a place that invites self-discovery—yet the state is often imagined at the same time as the nation's refuge from threats of the future. Sf writers have drawn on its constructed identities (both as blank slate and as fortress) to imagine Colorado, and the central Rocky Mountain region more generally, as a place of isolation. Like Cronin, earlier sf writers found in Colorado a good place for characters to hide, take refuge, or simply survive—but also to find or invent new selves.

Heart of the West. Apart from California, which has been a world of its own, Colorado from the time of the Pike's Peak gold rush of 1858-59 has been the most extensively publicized of the western territories and states. For writers from elsewhere, the state has been an easy stand-in for the vast mountainous interior of North America. Western railroads and eastern writers made Colorado a prominent tourist destination as early as the 1870s, when the blood was scarcely dry from the wars that drove the Cheyenne and Arapahos from the plains. Front and center was the instant city of Colorado Springs, conceived and created from the ground up by the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad and its founder, William Jackson Palmer (Brosnan 91-117; Abbott, Leonard, and Noel 220-39). First laid out in 1871, the city was entertaining 25,000 visitors a year before the decade was over. Colorado Springs was the Saratoga of the West, called "Little London" because of its appeal to English visitors—a place splendidly separated from its region's Spanish and Indian histories.

Building on the success of Colorado Springs, tourism spread through the Colorado mountains encouraged by some of the West's most extensive travel-promotion literature. Coastal people might know specific sites in Wyoming (Old Faithful) or Montana (Glacier National Park) or New Mexico (Santa Fe), but they were not likely to have strong conceptions of "Wyoming" or "New Mexico" as larger regions and communities. They did, however, have an image of Colorado built from travel books, promotional brochures, and the actual experience of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad's "Around the Circle Tour," which put a four-day, 1000-mile loop through Rocky Mountain scenery within reach of middle-class families (Wrobel 21-23, Abbott, Leonard, and Noel 227-28).

Colorado was a *tabula rasa* in these tourism depictions, as historian Thomas Andrews compellingly argues. The tourist landscape ignored the state's vast industrial apparatus of mines, company towns, smelters, and slag heaps. The bloody and troubled history of labor-management violence at Leadville and Cripple Creek and Ludlow disappeared, as did its communities of Greek,

Italian, and Slavic mine and factory workers. The travel industry erased the industrial landscape to replace it with an imagery of unspoiled wilderness. As if they did not represent lives of toil, mining ghost towns became part of the “natural” picturesque landscape, literally returning to the land as their buildings decayed.

Colorado was also a health resort. The air, said both physicians and land developers, was pure, exhilarating, and stimulating—perfect for people with tuberculosis. The altitude itself was said to quicken the life processes. “Lungers” came to Colorado by the tens of thousands in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, seeking it out as a “great and beneficial sanatorium” where one’s body could be renewed. Governor Fred Pitkin’s claim in the 1880s that “we can almost bring a dead man back to life” (qtd. in McGiffert 23) was a little strong; but his contemporary, Dr. Samuel Fisk, agreed that “there is a wealth of life stored up in the dry, sunny climate of this state” (313).

The reimagining of Colorado continued after World War II. The story of Aspen is well known: it was transformed from a dying mining town into a cultural center and ski town and then into one of the most fashionable locations in the country. Squeezed by the rising prices of “Aspenization,” ski-bums repeated the process at Crested Butte, Telluride, and other recreated communities (Richie).⁴ John Denver captured Colorado’s connection to personal reinvention in the first line of his song “Rocky Mountain High” (1973): “He was born in the summer of his 27th year.”

Paradoxically, Colorado was very much isolated from the more powerful flows of east-west commerce until 1979, when the Interstate Highway builders shoved I-70 through the Eisenhower Tunnel. It was easy to get *to*, not so easy to get *through*. The first transcontinental railroad detoured north of the Colorado mountains. The Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads detoured south, as did Route 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles. This isolation interacted in the early years of the Cold War with a strong national interest in dispersing people and industry outside crowded city centers and off the coasts to minimize vulnerability to aerial bombardment (O’Mara, Dudley). Denver was already promoting itself as the “The Second Capital of the United States” because of the many federal branch-offices that had opened during the New Deal and World War II; the city even put in a pitch in 1945 for the headquarters of the new United Nations, losing out to New York.⁵ Fully uprooting the federal government never got far, but Colorado did get its special Cold War fortress in the form of the blast-hardened operations center for the North American Aerospace Defense Command, completed in 1966 beneath Cheyenne Mountain near Colorado Springs.

Remnant and Refuge, Redemption and Reconstruction. Few of the authors with whom I am dealing had a close association with Colorado or deep experience of the central Rocky Mountain region. Heinlein lived in Colorado from 1949 to 1965, but for years before had used the state in his early fiction. Le Guin’s mother grew up in Telluride, Colorado; King spent one year in Boulder in the early 1970s; and others have traveled or vacationed there. Yet in

their use of Colorado these writers drew less on direct experience than on a shared popular sense of the area's physical isolation and social newness, constructing fictions that have reiterated and reinforced that very sense of isolation.

Sf novelists imagine Colorado in four overlapping, sometimes intersecting ways: as a *remnant* society or site, as an isolated *refuge* or hiding place, as a place of *redemption*, and as a place to *reconstruct* a better social system. As a *remnant* location, Colorado is a site where elements of an earlier America persist or survive under varying degrees of threat from foreign invaders or social dissolution. Colorado as a *refuge* can be the hiding place for secret laboratories or a site where survivors of disaster gather for the protection that isolation can provide. Remnant and refuge are relatively passive functions, but Colorado also operates as backdrop or occasion for rediscovery or *redemption* at the individual level. The state has also been imagined as a base from which society can be actively *rebuilt* rather than simply maintained.

The discussion that follows groups its authors in pairs around particularly prominent themes, not so much to suggest influence as to emphasize parallels in the use of Colorado settings. Their common use or understanding of Colorado does not embrace the classic American frontier as theorized and described by Frederick Jackson Turner. The Turnerian frontier is a process rather than a place, a zone of sequential transformation by explorers, traders, farmers, miners, boosters, engineers, railroad builders, and many others. Turner's successive frontiers all eventually become incorporated into a modern urban-industrial nation. Such a process is central to the actual history of Colorado—how else get a metropolitan Denver of three million?—but not to the science-fictional Colorado, which is often pictured in terms of static isolation.⁶

After Conquest: Remnant America. Heinlein, pioneer of so many sf ideas, provides an entry point into Colorado as both refuge and remnant. *Sixth Column*, written in 1941 for *Astounding Science Fiction*, published in book form in 1949, and republished as *The Day After Tomorrow* in 1951, is a late example of the Yellow Peril fiction that flourished in the early twentieth century (Davis 275-355). So-called PanAsian imperialists have conquered the US using superior weapons and are cowing the American people into submission. Heinlein identifies the victors as a blended people from several East Asian nations, but their practice of ritual suicide pinpoints the Japanese as a dominant element, especially since Japan in 1941 was absorbing much of China into a Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Somewhere beneath the Colorado Rockies, however, is the Citadel, secret hideaway of ultramodern laboratories whose existence is unsuspected by the enemy. The half-dozen mismatched survivors in this underground research facility quickly harness previously unknown sources of energy to fight the PanAsians and hatch a false religion, behind whose facade they assemble a resistance movement. They utilize super-engineering, erecting an instant temple on top of the Citadel and a church in Denver, spreading the word across the country in a matter of months, and bamboozling the PanAsians into surrender by humiliating their governors and military-officer class. This is

an early version of Heinlein's later plots emphasizing the achievement of large ends through manipulation of public opinion.

Heinlein drew the outline for *Sixth Column* from "All," an unpublished story by John W. Campbell, Jr. that the editor had passed along. The skeleton of the plot is the same—Asian conquest, development of superweapons by a few American scientists deep in the mountains, and promulgation of a new religion as a mask for a resistance movement. Campbell's "Temple of All" is located in the "Province of Colorado" in a "lone, lost canyon" (73) that carves a "great gash in the hide of the earth" (77). Campbell did not otherwise develop or use the setting, however, either for local color or as a plot element, leaving Heinlein all the room he might want for his own version.⁷

Colorado is not essential to the plot—the first organized church of the God Mota could have been located in many cities other than Denver—but the Rocky Mountains are necessary for the Citadel's adequate concealment as a base of operations. Heinlein would soon visit Denver for the 1941 Worldcon, where he was Guest of Honor at a meeting with ninety attendees; but his direct knowledge of the state was limited when he was writing *Sixth Column* for *Astounding*, and his Rocky Mountain setting is vaguely sketched. Little is said about how the entrance to the Citadel is concealed or what its physical surroundings look like. Nor is it precisely located, although it has to be somewhere in the Front Range. There are towns nearby and a medium-sized city within a three-day walk (presumably Pueblo or Colorado Springs). It is close enough to Denver that people can easily go back and forth when they are spreading their fake religion. Denver itself is vague, a stage-set city with generic elements such as a police station and warehouse district; specific streets and neighborhoods are not named.

Heinlein followed Campbell's outline but *Sixth Column* also drew on the prominence of Colorado in the twentieth-century American imagination. Where would you hide a research facility? Among and underneath big mountains. Which big mountains? The Rockies are the easiest to name. Where in the Rockies? Colorado is the best known of the Rocky Mountain states, the easiest for Campbell and Heinlein to write about and for readers to picture.

Fifteen years later, Heinlein revisited Colorado in his time-travel novel *The Door into Summer* (1956). This time the state is a remnant more than a refuge. Heinlein was by that time a local, having moved in 1949 to Colorado Springs, a city he described as "remote" in 1952 (*Grumbles* 139). When *The Door into Summer* begins, the Six Weeks War has left the US victorious over Russia at the cost of a devastated eastern seaboard: the federal government and capital have relocated to Denver.⁸ The novel begins and ends in southern California, but protagonist Daniel Boone Davis makes two visits to Denver, one in 1970 and another in 2001. Both descriptions are more grounded than in *Sixth Column*, each referring to Colfax Avenue, the main east-west street that carried travelers on US Route 40 through the heart of the city before the era of Interstate Highways. In 1970, soon after the war, Denver is thriving:

still getting used to being the national seat of government and ... not quite happy in the role, like a boy in his first formal evening clothes.... The city was being jerry-built in all directions to house the bureaucrats and lobbyists and contact men and clerk-typists and flunkies; buildings were being thrown up so fast that with each one there was hazard of enclosing a cow inside the walls. (134)

After time travel to the year 2001, however, Davis can no longer find Colfax Avenue and the city seems more crowded than Greater Los Angeles. Combined with the thriving metropolis is a version of refuge, for “everything essential to the government was buried back under the Rockies” (116).⁹ As in *Sixth Column*, Heinlein’s plot does not depend on Colorado or Denver specifics, but the setting fits easily into the story because the state can so easily represent the much larger mid-continent/mountain region.

Unlike Heinlein, with his fifteen-year sojourn in Colorado, Philip K. Dick spent his whole life in California. His only apparent connection to Colorado was to pass through the state as a babe in arms during a parental road trip in 1929 (Rickman 367). Nevertheless, Colorado serves as a contrast to California in a novel that revisits some of Heinlein’s subject matter with a vastly different sensibility. In *The Man in the High Castle*, the Axis powers have won World War II. The Nazis occupy the eastern half of the former United States, while Japan controls California, Oregon, Washington, and Nevada through the puppet Pacific States of America. In between are the Rocky Mountain States, nominally independent but “loosely banded to the PSA” (14). The “Colorado” action moves along the Front Range from the small town of Canon City to Denver to Cheyenne, Wyoming (fewer than ten miles north of the state line and essentially part of the Front Range metropolitan region).

In Dick’s telling, the rump nation of the Rocky Mountain States serves as a buffer and backwater that includes Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, the eastern part of Nevada, the “open empty desert states,” and the “pasture states” of the Great Plains (34). Nonetheless, the Colorado Front Range cities are the political and economic center. With the US defeated rather than victorious in global war, Canon City and Denver have none of the vitality attributed to Denver in *The Door into Summer*. There is nothing in Colorado for the young and ambitious, in contrast to the eastern states said to be prospering under the Nazis. Juliana Frink, stuck in Canon City following a move from San Francisco after her divorce, comments to a visitor that “This is just the sticks to you, the Rockies. Nothing has happened here since before the war. Retired old people, farmers, the stupid, slow, poor ... and all the smart boys have flocked east to New York, crossed the border legally or illegally” (36).

Colorado was for Dick a convenient representative of remnant America because the state can be viewed as generically western and historically unencumbered. It lacks the social complications that would have ensued had Dick picked Utah, with its Mormon heritage, or New Mexico, with its Hispanic population. Few Americans in the 1950s remembered the Colorado Indian wars and the Sand Creek Massacre (the state’s past had no Indians as famous as Sitting Bull, Cochise, or Chief Joseph). The state’s mining history, with its

complex ethnic labor force, was easy to forget. This ordinariness of Colorado is a point that Dick makes with intended irony when the reclusive author Hawthorne Abendsen turns out to live not in the rumored fortress of a High Castle—"guns all over the place ...[,] charged barbed wire around the place, and it's set in the mountains" (85)—but on the outskirts of Cheyenne in "a single-story stucco house with many shrubs and a good deal of garden made up mostly of climbing roses" (231). Cheyenne and other places to which Juliana travels are characterized by the sort of suburbia that was springing up across the entire continent in the world in which the Allies won and Dick wrote. In the context of the novel, by extension, the remnant enclave along the Front Range of the Rockies is a refuge for everyday American life, though under pressure from occupying powers both to the east and to the west.

Dick's remnant America is very different from Heinlein's. Whereas Heinlein's Colorado retains the supposed American values of go-getting enterprise and adventure, Dick's anticipates the quotidian America of subdivisions and truck stops, a society with more limitations than possibilities. Juliana Frink is a judo instructor at Ray's Gym in Canon City, scraping by and living in a small apartment. She eats at Tasty Charley's Broiled Hamburgers, where the jukebox plays hillbilly songs and she saves a passing trucker from a bed at the Honey Bee Motel when she picks him up for a one-night stand. The trucker turns out to be a Nazi agent assigned to assassinate Abendsen. He can afford a snazzy Denver hotel, but after Juliana kills him she is immediately back in the working-class world of waitresses and fry cooks and workers who drift from job to job. Like the US that Dick would have known during and after World War II, Colorado in *High Castle* is still getting over the effects of a war that has disrupted families, short-circuited careers, and turned people like Juliana into loners: she is quite at home grabbing a chicken-salad sandwich and a Coke for dinner at an all-night drugstore.

High Mountain Refuge. Ayn Rand was a radical free-market utopian with no sympathy for any of Dick's marginal characters. Her drugs of choice were nicotine and alcohol. With utmost self-confidence, she promoted a philosophy that she called Objectivism, mixing Adam Smith with Social Darwinism to argue for the untrammelled development of individual abilities with the fewest possible social strictures and legal limitations. In effect, she gave uncompromising expression to the sort of libertarian ideas that Heinlein ascribed to some of his characters but accepted personally only in part. At the same time, she elevated the trope of the hidden laboratory that Heinlein used in *Sixth Column* and made it pivotal in a massive fictional manifesto. In *Atlas Shrugged*, Colorado plays multiple roles. It is the last remnant of a dying capitalist economy and then a refuge from which society can be rebuilt in isolation around social ideals that have been systematically destroyed outside.

In the early sections of this sprawling novel, the American economy is imploding under the pressure of labor unions, socialism, and bureaucratic parasitism. The collapsing US refers back to Rand's own experience of Russia in the early 1920s under the stress of the transition to communism. In her

imagined America, incompetent worker-committees and inept government officials try to supplant the captains of industry (Burns 135, Heller 193-94). Colorado is the potential saving remnant, the last place where vigorous capitalism survives, perhaps because of its distance from coastal corruption. Rand sees Colorado not as the everyday America of *High Castle* but as a vestige of a heroic, entrepreneurial US. Her heroine, Dagny Taggart, strives to keep alive her family's vast transcontinental railroad empire by building a new spur line into Colorado, even as industry collapses in other parts of the nation. The line is a success but the national government passes a draconian version of antitrust legislation that crushes the railroad. Even the Colorado economy begins to wither—what Rand in her notes for the novel and in the book itself called “the destruction of Colorado” (Harriman 704).

Seven hundred pages in, Colorado shifts from remnant to refuge: Taggart stumbles onto—or rather drops into—the secret retreat of great men who have been abandoning the nation. She finds the refuge by accident when her small plane crashes through thick clouds into a Colorado mountain valley protected by “refractor rays” (704) that project a concealing mirage. “Galt's Gulch,” a spectacularly scenic basin deep in the Colorado Rockies, takes its nickname from the heroic genius-inventor John Galt, who has gathered together the nation's most brilliant inventors, scientists, artists, and entrepreneurs as an idyllic, market-based “community” isolated from the larger society that hobbled and disrespected them. Under the refractor screen, amidst towering cliffs, crashing waterfalls, and soaring trees, titans of mind and mammon live in comfort as self-satisfied refugees who have gone on strike from the ignorance, greed, and stupidity of those they call the “looters,” the ordinary people (such as Juliana Frink) whom they, and Rand, despise.

The valley itself has undergone a quick transformation from playground to fortress. Banker Midas Mulligan had originally acquired it as a private retreat, buying piecemeal from ranchers and thereby erasing a resource-production landscape in favor of a leisure landscape in a way that matches the analysis of Colorado's history by Thomas Andrews. This valley, Mulligan says, “is not listed on any map” (747), an improbability that would seem laughable to actual Coloradans aware of how many fur-trappers, miners, geologists, sheep-herders, and tourists have combed the state; yet Mulligan's assertion highlights Colorado's aura of isolation as seen from Los Angeles or New York. Mulligan has

cut off all possible avenues of approach, except one road—and it's camouflaged beyond anyone's power to discover.... I could live here for the rest of my life and never have to see the face of a looter. (747)

Rand modeled Galt's Gulch on Ouray, Colorado, an old mining town at the head of the Uncompahgre River. She picked it from a map (as she did many of her settings for the novel) but visited in 1949. She raved that she had fallen in love with Colorado as “the most beautiful part of the country” and told a correspondent that she could not wait “to tell you about the valley we discovered”; a decade later she called Ouray “the most beautifully dramatic spot

in the whole state, and it's surrounded by a ring of mountains (though Galt's Valley would be somewhat larger)" (Berliner 456, 509). There is no evidence that Rand ever did a systematic comparison with other claimants to Colorado's scenic crown, but Ouray was indeed spectacular and extremely isolated in 1951.

The hidden valley is a familiar trope. Everyone in the 1940s knew about Shangri-la through James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* (1933) and the movie version with Ronald Colman and Jane Wyatt (1937)—especially those such as Rand who had connections with the film industry. One of her favorite books as a child had been Maurice Champagne's *The Mysterious Valley* (1915), a French-language adventure-fantasy for children set deep in the Himalayas that is reminiscent of the imperial fantasies of H. Rider Haggard and many others (see Rieder, Fraser, and Claeson). Rand's childhood favorite populated the hidden valley with manly, thinking heroes such as the rational capitalists of *Atlas Shrugged* (Heller 12-14).

Rand also imagined a special sort of hidden valley—an American West sort of place. As Jennifer Burns notes (169-70), the powerful individuals who gather there practice western informality and represent the producer ideology against that of the corrupt eastern establishment. In this way they reflect a long line of western protests against the parasitism of eastern corporations, although Rand presumably abhorred the cooperative or collectivist forms that such protest had historically taken in the Granger movement, Populism, and radical labor organizing through the Western Federation of Miners and the Industrial Workers of the World. It is the West of mythical individualism rather than the frontier of worker organization that makes Rand's Colorado the suitable place for tycoons to take refuge and plot the retaking of America. Indeed, at the novel's end, their sanctuary has become a base from which to build society anew according to Galtian principles. As the lights go off in New York, Dagny Taggart recognizes the futility of trying to salvage the family railroad corporation and throws in with the elite. The hidden Colorado valley will be the nucleus from which a new, more vigorous United States can be reborn. The nation will not be so much restored as reinvented as a super-capitalist utopia, although its tycoons will change not a whit.

Leigh Brackett, like Rand a novelist and Hollywood screenwriter, anticipated Galt's Gulch by two years in *The Long Tomorrow* (1955). Her post-apocalypse novel similarly sends its protagonist to discover a hidden Colorado valley full of scientific experts; it ends with the promise of social reconstruction. Brackett's story takes place eighty years after "the War." The US has adopted a new constitutional amendment: "No city, no town, no community of more than one thousand people or two hundred buildings to the square mile shall be built or permitted to exist anywhere in the United States of America" (14). With results that mirror the ultimate decline of Rand's imagined collectivized America, technology has reverted to the level of the early 1800s. The surviving nation is a set of small farming settlements and trading towns linked by annual trading fairs and steamboats.

The action revolves around young Len Colter, whose name echoes early explorer and mountain man John Colter (circa 1774-circa 1812). Len flees the

enforced limits of his formally conservative society. In an homage to Mark Twain, Brackett depicts his journey by steam-powered barge down the Ohio River and then up the wide Missouri. At the mouth of the Platte, the group switches to mule-drawn wagons for a trek southwestward across the “large and lonely prairie” (139). At a rendezvous along the South Platte (where small fur-trading posts could have been found in the 1830s and 1840s), they meet other wagons that have come up the Arkansas Valley or eastward over South Pass, other historic trading routes. Finally their route penetrates through red-rock canyons deep into the heart of the Colorado Rockies.

Behind the wall of the Front Range is a forward-looking community built on the past. The ordinary silver-mining town of Fall Creek is cover for Bartorstown, a refuge where science is kept alive, concealed from nomads and farmers by indirection rather than gizmo technology such as Rand’s refractor screens. Occasional visitors see only an ordinary mountain settlement. As one of the residents comments, “main thing is to look like everybody else, and then they don’t notice you” (152). If indirection fails, the town and facility are guarded by the equivalent of closed-circuit television and hemmed in by the mountains:

The cliffs were too steep to climb, the narrow gorge of the stream bed was too broken and treacherous with falls and rockslides the site had been carefully picked, and it had not changed in a century. The eyes of Bartorstown watched, the ears listened, and the hidden death was always ready in the winding lower pass. (196)

Outsiders do not know that behind a steel blast-door in the old mine shafts, the pre-Destruction government once built a secret research facility whose original staff of 40 has swelled into the hundreds with post-collapse refugees, a somewhat more realistic idea than Heinlein’s “secret six” who mastermind a revolution in *Sixth Column*. For the past decades, technicians and scientists have been tending a 1950s-style supercomputer and trying to find ways to reintroduce advanced technology without also reintroducing war. In the 2030s, Len Colter finds a self-conscious refuge for scientists and engineers of the sort Rand admired, although the community’s goal is not ego-stoking entrepreneurship but the technical and social control of new technology.¹⁰

Whereas Rand’s philosophy demands disjuncture and reinvention, Brackett emphasizes continuity and restoration. Galt’s Gulchers are secessionists, but Bartorstown was originally a government project. Its scientists are survivors and conservators of past knowledge; here, the purpose of a Colorado refuge is to provide time to figure out how to do it better next time, a point the author makes clear in a sequence between Colter and the Bartorstowners:

“Someday atomic power will come back no matter what anybody does to stop it.”

“A thing once known always comes back.”

“And the cities will come back too.”

“In time, inevitably.”

“And it will happen all over again, the cities and the bomb, unless you find a way to stop it.”

“Unless men have changed a lot by tomorrow, yes.”

“Then,” said Len, still frowning, still somber, “then I guess you’re trying to do what ought to be done.” (177)

Journeys to Self-Discovery and Redemption. Mysterious mountain hideaways are fun for authors to imagine, and so are transcontinental treks. The former make for great set-piece descriptions, while the latter can nearly write themselves with blizzards, sandstorms, equipment failures, or attacks by nomads always available to keep things moving. Brackett enjoyed writing Len Colter’s journey, and Ursula Le Guin took equal or greater satisfaction in taking her protagonist cross-country in her early novel *City of Illusions*. She commented in her introduction to a reissue of 1978 that one of the pleasures of writing was

the chance to imagine my country, America, without cities, almost without towns, as sparsely populated by our species as it was five hundred years ago.... The sense of time, but more than that the sense of space, extent, the wideness of the continent. The wideness. The wilderness. (147)

Her novel’s evocative power emerges from the contrast between that empty land and the fantastic alien city perched on the very top of Colorado.

Far into the future, North America has been nearly abandoned by humans and there remain only scattered, quiet settlements and ruins of older times. The hero, Falk, who suffers from loss of memory, awakens in the eastern forest and heads westward in search of the great city of the Shing, the people who have made themselves the masters and tyrants of Earth. His journey retraces the route of nineteenth-century pioneers—and of Len Colter—across great rivers and vast prairies. He finally reaches the alien city of Es Toch, which soars into the sky on both sides of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River, a location only forty miles by Shing aircar from Rand’s Ouray. Es Toch is isolated in both site and function. To reach it on foot is

to clamber over the roof-tree of a continent. Range after range of mountains rose; day after day the two crept upward into the world of the heights, and still their goal lay farther up and farther on.... the air grew thin and icy, the sky dark blue, and the sun of April shone dazzling on the fleecy backs of clouds that grazed the meadows far beneath their way. (108-110)

Falk finally surmounts the last mountain bulwark to glimpse the spectacular city:

The City of the Lords of Earth was built on the two rims of a canyon, a tremendous cleft through the mountains, narrow, fantastic, its black walls striped with green plunging terrifically down half a mile to the silver tinsel strip of a river in the shadowy depths. On the very edges of the facing cliffs the towers of the city jutted up, hardly based on earth at all, linked across the chasm by delicate bridge-spans. Towers, roadways and bridges ceased and the wall closed the city off again just before a vertiginous bend of the canyon. (113).

Es Toch is one of a kind, a center of high culture and technology in a continent that the Shing deliberately keep primitive. There are no other cities in North America, only roaming tribes and rudimentary settlements to the east and open,

unpeopled territory westward to the Pacific. The city is simultaneously a command post, a mountain-moated fortress, and a place of safety for the Shing.

Es Toch gave no sense of history, of reaching back in time and out in space, though it had ruled the world for a millennium.... Es Toch was self-contained, self-nourished, rootless.... Yet it was wonderful, like a carved jewel fallen in the vast wilderness of the Earth: wonderful, timeless, alien. (159)

Why the Black Canyon? Le Guin stopped there in the 1950s on a vacation trip and had a fright when her two very young children disappeared over the edge of the lookout (they had jumped down safely to a second ledge). As she has told me, the incident inscribed the canyon in her memory: "It gave me, you could say, an uneasy feeling about the canyon. But it was beautiful and strange, and I began imagining what if you built a city in it."¹¹ For Le Guin and her character Falk, this canyon in the heart of the Colorado mountains was fascinating and awe-inspiring; for Le Guin's Shing, it is a place with few past occupants where a city can be imagined and built. For them, Colorado is the empty place where they "were still alien ... after twelve hundred years" (195). Yet although a blank slate for the Shing, it is a site of self-discovery for Falk. He discovers that he is "actually" Ramarren, one of the survivors of an interstellar expedition from the planet Werel that the Shing intercepted and destroyed, and that his present identity is only six years old. He agrees to the revival of his earlier identity, a process that is supposed to erase "Falk." Through power of will, however, he preserves the more recent personality while regaining his older self. Dagny learns new things about the world in Galt's Gulch; Falk learns new things about himself in Es Toch.¹²

Treks toward self-discovery and transformation are also central to Cronin's *The Passage*—along with a secret Defense Department laboratory described as a guarded and isolated compound high on a ridge or plateau in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado. Cronin depicts the compound in more careful and realistic detail than either Heinlein or Brackett provides for their fortresses of science; but Colorado is for him likewise a place for individual transformation. Both Cronin and Le Guin set up plot conflict by having external forces transform individuals to evil ends and then allow key characters to restore or at least in part redeem themselves by personal volition. In a complex echo of Denver's lyrics about rebirth, the isolated mountain location is a place of new beginnings at the most basic level of individual personalities.

Central to the journeys that structure Cronin's action is Amy Bellefonte, a girl who twice journeys to the Colorado installation. In the first instance, federal agents kidnap and spirit her to the laboratory, where she is to be the final test recipient of a slowly perfected virus that has turned its twelve previous recipients, all inmates taken from death row, into telepathic vampires. For Amy the virus brings near immortality but not the ravaging hunger of the twelve. At the end of the first section of the novel, the vampires break loose to spread the virus to the entire continent. Amy escapes, to reappear ninety-two years later at First Colony, a fortified community of survivor-descendants located in the San Jacinto Mountains of southern California. Her profoundly disturbing presence

catalyzes a small group of the Colony's younger generation to flee its impending collapse and return with her to the laboratory that turned her into a near-immortal.

Whereas Le Guin began to write with the destination for Falk's trek in mind, Cronin began with the starting point of an expedition, choosing California as the setting for the colony of survivors but extrapolating to Colorado as the end-point for a journey that would involve changes of topography and weather (*Vidimos*). The route from California to Colorado passes the city of Las Vegas—a site of evil in this novel—on its way to the defunct laboratory. Like Le Guin, Cronin enjoyed the chance to contribute to the tradition of epic storytelling around the classic American theme of “the individual's confrontation with the vast open spaces of the continent” (Cronin “Justin”). He chose Colorado because of its distance and isolation, and also as the geographic pivot for his balanced plot; it is roughly equidistant from Memphis, the start of the first journey, and Riverside County, California, the start of the second.

Within Colorado, he picked the old mining and modern resort town of Telluride, only ten miles on a map from Rand's Ouray/Galt's Gulch (although fifty miles by passable highways):

Telluride worked for me because of its particular ruggedness, the placement of the river, the architecture of its canyons. I had not been there before but had several friends with houses there, and canvassed them a bit for information.¹³

Cronin heightens the sense of isolation by only hinting at the location of the Compound in the first section; its exact location is not identified until the second trek is underway. We first see the site through the eyes of FBI agent Brad Wolgast, who knows only that it is six hours west of Denver. Then we see it through the eyes of Grey, one of the support staff who is hired in Dallas, flown to Cheyenne, and driven in a blacked-out van with occasional views outside that indicate they are going to Colorado. This is indirection, since Cheyenne to Telluride is the long way to get there. Is it to keep the reader guessing? Is it to indicate how careful the managers of the project are? We next see the site through the eyes of Carter, last of the death row subjects, who is flown from Houston to “someplace cold” (105) and again past small towns with McDonalds franchises into the mountains. Descriptions of the Compound as an island floating in the clouds (119) from which the view is “empty pine forest” (173) emphasize its isolation.

Ninety-two years later, as the double refugees take a carefully plotted route across Nevada and Central Utah, the location is slowly identified as Telluride. Cronin twice drove the route to get accurate details and did much the same in Telluride itself: “Once I made this choice, I visited Telluride several times, once in the early winter (I actually got snowed in during the first major snowfall of the season), when my characters make their ascent.”¹⁴ For Amy's return, he describes the approaches in detail, both in terms of details that a group on foot would notice (how to cross rivers, where the climbs are, where to find shelter) and in terms of the beauty of the scenery and the effects of shifting sunlight in narrow mountain valleys.

Yet the return to Colorado provides catharsis without final resolution. Amy regains her ability to speak during the journey and begins to come to terms with her memories: "She often spoke like this, in vague riddles. Yet something felt different this time. It was as if the past were rising up before her eyes, stepping into view like a deer from the brush" (627). Some circles are closed and others left open. She reunites briefly with a supportive figure from her traumatic childhood. The most feral and fearsome of the twelve master-vampires perishes along with the remnants of the laboratory. But Alicia, the fiercest warrior among the Californians, is transformed by a version of the virus into a sort of superwoman with implications unknown. From this place of multiple rebirths, where the human psyche can be perverted or redeemed, the Californians separate and continue their journey to still uncertain futures.

Reconstructing Civil Society. For the people of *The Passage*, the Rocky Mountains are not a refuge but a place of self-discovery and change. In contrast, Walter M. Miller, Jr., located multiple remnants and refuges on the Colorado Piedmont, within the valleys of the Rockies, and in the inter-mountain desert on the western slope. The abbey in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) is located west of the mountain rampart formed by the Sangre de Cristo range, north of Santa Fe. Perhaps the most precise location is found in that novel's sequel, *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman* (1997). The map that posthumous collaborator Terry Bisson took great pains to develop places the abbey in Abiquiu, New Mexico, where there is indeed a present-day Benedictine monastery.¹⁵ Although the monastery is the primary remnant and refuge for Miller, Colorado settings also play a prominent role in *Wild Horse Woman*. The Papacy, expelled from New Rome (at the site of the earlier city of St. Louis), has relocated to Valana, part of the Denver Free State. This is a new city located, according to Bisson, on the site of Colorado Springs.

Valana had grown up rapidly around an ancient hilltop fortress which had in earlier centuries been a bastion of defense by the mountain people against the more savage Nomads of an earlier age.... Before the exiled papacy had moved here, the city had become a sort of middle kingdom among the contiguous communities of the populated region, where merchants traded with miners for silver and pelts, with Nomads for hides and meat, and with farmers for meat and corn. (83-84)

The advantage here is the isolation of distance, putting the reviving religious center far away from the continued savagery of the Mississippi Valley and the growing Texark Empire.

Another locale in *Saint Leibowitz* is New Jerusalem, a haven for genetically handicapped refugees from Texark tyranny:

[The] isolation of New Jerusalem ... its resources and natural defenses, made it the largest congregation of genetically dubious persons outside the Valley [of the Misborn, in the Watchit-Ol'zarkia region] and most appealing as a sanctuary for permanent fugitives. (169)

To reach New Jerusalem from Valana requires winding across the first ranges of the Rockies to the western side, placing the site somewhere around the margins of Colorado's San Luis or South Park valleys.

In the second book, Miller was thus building a more complex region than in *Canticle*. The sequel's southern Rocky Mountains (of Colorado and New Mexico) host a more elaborate social ecology of multiple communities that interact through trade, politics, and religious hierarchy; the area is struggling to build, in effect, an independent state protected by physical separation from other emerging centers of power. In Miller's chronology, *Wild Horse Woman* is roughly contemporaneous with "Fiat Lux," the second of *Canticle*'s three free-standing sections. That section centers on the initiation of a new scientific revolution, a new Renaissance in which both the abbey's monks and its carefully preserved archives play an important role in restarting technoscientific culture and society. This is the aim of the residents of Brackett's Bartorstown as well, but Miller focuses pessimistically on the temptations of power, the subordination of science to power-politics, and the cyclical nature of history. Given that the central issue of *Wild Horse Woman* is the challenge of reviving political structures in ways that are not inherently flawed, Miller's two books in effect examine two complementary facets of social reconstruction that might be possible in an isolated Rocky Mountain region.

In King's *The Stand* (1978), Colorado is likewise a refuge whose promise is not simple survival but rather active social reinvention where refugees try to reassemble only the best elements of the vanished world.¹⁶ Accidental release of mutating influenza from a biological warfare laboratory kills the vast majority of Americans. A handful of survivors come together from scattered points in the South and Northeast US, responding to visions and dreams that call them to the middle landscape of Boulder, Colorado. Hundred-year-old Abigail Freemantle, who figures as a sage and prophet, sees herself going west:

at first with just a few people, then a few more, then a few more. West, always going west, until I could see the Rocky Mountains.... and there would be signs ... no, not signs from God but regular road signs, and every one of them saying things like BOULDER, COLORADO, 609 MILES or THIS WAY TO BOULDER. (513)

In Boulder the refugees rebuild a Free Zone and a semblance of normal life. There are a few dozen inhabitants at first, a few hundred when their first Colorado winter closes in, and some 11,000 by the following April. Boulder, it turns out, is a relatively easy place to start anew because most of its former residents seem to have tidied up and left town before the plague hit; the corpses are few, the houses are habitable, and the electricity is easy to restore. In the process of restoring physical systems, the new settlers also buckle down to reconstituting civil society. The residents come together at the Chautauqua Auditorium—a real place located where the town gives way to mountain parks and one that harkens back to earlier American traditions of community. They restore symbols of community by reaffirming the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. They create a steering committee and hold town meetings. Their fundamental dilemma resembles that of the survivors in Cronin's *The*

Passage, but their goal is societal rather than individual—social restoration rather than personal reinvention.

Why Boulder? Think Celestial Seasonings tea, a brand founded in Boulder in 1969. Think hippie environmentalists and the city's pioneering efforts to preserve its character by establishing a greenbelt of open space (Scott 251-80). King lived in this self-satisfied, self-consciously progressive community in 1974-75, at the height of its hipness and attractiveness. That was just a few years before Boulder would seem a suitable setting for Robin Williams to play an ET on *Mork and Mindy* (1978-82)—a show that used college-town jokes but would not have worked if set in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. As Connie Willis puts it in her social satire *Bellwether* (1996), "Boulder's almost terminally hip. The rest of the state calls it the People's Republic of Boulder, and it's got every possible kind of New Ager" (54).

King's novel sets Boulder in contrast to Las Vegas. Other survivors, attracted by evil rather than good, pass directly through Colorado on their way to Vegas, that seemingly most artificial of cities.¹⁷ In *The Passage*, Las Vegas is an outpost of evil that attracts the questers by its conspicuousness. In *The Stand*, it is the center for an alternative empire in the far western states (there is a shadow of Tolkien's Mordor in the geography, with Las Vegas situated within the rings of mountain ranges that create the Great Basin of Nevada and adjacent states). In juxtaposing the two places, King directly inverts the values of Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. The villains, led by the fantastically powered Randall Flagg, make Las Vegas a center of rigorously enforced rules and order guided by objective thought. Flagg is, the Boulderites realize, "the last magician of rational thought, gathering the tools of technology" (919). Residents of the Free Zone, in contrast, practice deliberative democracy rather than untrammelled individualism, are open to the tides of emotion and spiritual leanings, and even value the Randian *bêtes noires* of self-sacrifice and altruism. They triumph after the strongest of the Free Zone settlers travel to Las Vegas to confront physical evil with spiritual strength—although evil eventually devours itself when the most crazed of Flagg's followers appears with a live atomic bomb that Flagg accidentally detonates.

The Zones, as mentioned, try to create a non-Randian society of cooperation and community, but they share with Bartorstowners and Galt's Gulchers the imperative of starting from scratch after disaster. King hints at the possibility of social reinvention, while Brackett offers concerned scientists as the solution to controlling the genie that cannot be rebottled. Yet King also echoes Miller's pessimism: some of the Boulderites at the end of the story have begun to worry about new hierarchies of authority and power, perhaps essential for a growing community but still a disturbing anticipation of the repeating cycle of knowledge, hubris, and disaster depicted in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

The Power of Place. This discussion of Colorado as refuge (and in other roles) in sf stories of near and far futures is a reminder of the importance to the genre's imaginative process not only of politics and culture but of place. Sf writers work within a continuum of place-freedom. The further their setting is

from now and here, the fewer constraints it offers: Trantor, Coruscant, Athshe, and Pandora can be anything their creators wish, with whatever degree of internal world-building consistency is deemed important. Stories set on Mars or Ganymede should adhere to known planetology, but an author retains wide leeway in constructing a sense of place (Crossley). In contrast, when the setting is Earth itself, landscapes and cities come with established identities that assist in the construction of the plot by fixing readers' expectations and bringing popular place-conceptions into play.

I have considered "Colorado" settings in sf as both background and plot element. The powerful and persistent Colorado imaginary comes in two complementary versions. As a place of isolation and safety, it is an appropriate location for remnant societies and for refuge following disaster. As an isolated place of sparse settlement and thin (or even erased) history, it is likewise suitable for varieties of rebirth, social and individual. Many of these stories could have been set somewhere else in the Rockies, but it is telling that they are not. The popular image of Colorado, its accessibility as a tourist destination, and its function as shorthand for "mountain West" has made it the sf setting of choice given certain scenarios.

At the same time, that shared understanding makes the setting a direct influence on the action, shaping the responses of the human characters in ways that readers might expect. In *The Stand*, the refugees like Boulder. Some were predisposed in its favor before they arrived, and most are motivated to defend their fragile community in part because it is such a nice, John Denver-like place in which to reconstruct civil society. Juliana Frink and Hawthorne Abendsen in *The Man in the High Castle* can take risks because Colorado's isolated location protects them from the daily influence of Japanese and German authority. The industrialists in Rand's Galt's Gulch and the technocrats in Brackett's Bartorstown have chosen to hide in the Colorado mountains because they represent isolation, even though there are parts of the American West that were and are, in fact, more remote and unreachable. The bureaucrats who have sited Heinlein's Citadel and Cronin's US Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases before the stories begin "know" that the Colorado Rockies mean isolation.¹⁸

The two roles of refuge and rebuilding operate together in all the novels surveyed in this essay. In Heinlein, Brackett, Rand, and King they appear in an imagined historical sequence whereby a remnant of refugees shelter in Colorado and then, in the last chapter, begin to rebuild something of the society they have lost—although each anticipated future is different. In Dick's more pessimistic view, the remnant Rocky Mountain States have at least marginal freedom for social reconstruction but no apparent interest in taking the opportunity. Even less optimistic is Miller's depiction of characters who hope desperately to reinvent society but find their hopes frustrated. Le Guin's Shing have used their isolation not for social liberation but to construct and maintain tyranny, although individual self-discovery and renewal remain possible in spite of their efforts. Cronin puts individual reinvention and tyranny directly in conflict. In *The Passage*, human beings are created anew in Colorado but to bad consequences;

any semblance of safety is elsewhere. His characters are a long moral stretch from the successful scam artists of *Sixth Column*, but they inhabit what is recognizably the same Rocky Mountain region.

Las Vegas offers an obvious contrast to these visions of Colorado. It is a city with a bad reputation, a place of crime and/or excess, a model and exemplar of evil in *The Stand* and a breeder of bad things in *The Passage*. When his Colorado-bound expedition reaches Las Vegas, Cronin employs the classic trope of the deserted city. As in countless sf tales, his small band explores abandoned buildings in the hope of finding treasures such as fuel and supplies but instead encounters traps and terror. For King, Boulder's empty buildings are neutral containers that can be readapted by refugees, while the toppling towers of Las Vegas are nests of danger and disaster.

Another natural juxtaposition is the static conceptualization of Colorado against a more complexly imagined California. California is a land of aspiration, technology, and extra-continental connections—a place that we imagine will cast off both past and present in search of its future (see Katerberg). In that state's northern reaches, Lauren Olamina in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1994) can find the room to invent a new religion and society. The same jumbled valleys hide a post-hippie culture in Thomas Pynchon's semi-science-fictional *Vineland* (1990). In more populated parts of the state, future San Francisco and future Los Angeles take on active identities that draw on popular images of the two places. San Francisco is a city of creativity in the fiction of Pat Murphy and William Gibson and a city with a soul—quite literally in Fritz Leiber's *Our Lady of Darkness* (1977). In works too numerous to catalog, Los Angeles is the city of the next thing. Whatever is coming, it is coming first to Southern California—social breakdown or technological transformation, besieged neighborhoods or arcologies, Asian invasion or android infiltration, bladerunners or terminators, or even the utopian possibilities of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Pacific Edge* (1990).

Heinlein's Citadel and Temple of All, Brackett's Bartorstown, Rand's Galt's Gulch, Cronin's Compound, and King's Boulder all appear ready-made in Colorado: someone has previously done the strenuous engineering and earth-moving to create these refuges. Brackett's fictional Bartorstown and Cronin's Telluride are former mining towns that have become facades for scientific research. Rand's Galt's Gulch is the epitome of Thomas Andrews's tourist landscape, its mining and ranching economy eradicated for the convenience of billionaires. There is real work to be done in King's Boulder, but it is the work of putting a system back in working order rather than constructing it.

Because work *is* change and always has been in the history of the American West, its limited dramatization in these stories leads to a second conclusion: that science-fictional Colorado is a static place—or more precisely a static idea *about* place, a less rich setting than California or Mars. As Robert Crossley has recently shown, Mars is a particularly dynamic imaginary whose depiction has evolved in response to changes in terrestrial politics as well as expanding knowledge. In contrast, the Colorado imaginary has changed little through the decades, even though the state itself has grown from about one million when

Campbell and Heinlein wrote “All” and *Sixth Column* to five million today, with concomitant changes in economic and social patterns. Sf writers mainly have offered variations on old themes rather than imagining Colorado as it is now, although more recent writers such as King, Bishop, and Cronin provide more detailed settings that begin to introduce possibilities of change.

NOTES

1. Justin Cronin, “Why Telluride?” Message to the author. 28 February 2011.
2. For standard analyses of American regions, see Zelinsky, Gastil, Garreau, and Ayers et al, and Meinig’s magisterial four-volume historical geography.
3. A story set in Cincinnati or St. Louis has carte blanche with most readers, but not so for San Francisco or Tokyo. The more often disaster novels and movies represent national or global devastation with images of New York in ruins (Page, Yablon) or Los Angeles laid low (Davis), the more these cities seem the proper embodiments of catastrophe.
4. In one more erasure of the state’s multiethnic past, as Coleman has explored, Alpine skiing was brought to the US by German, Austrian, and Swiss instructors.
5. During the 1950s, President Dwight Eisenhower’s choice of Colorado for summer vacations added to its glamour and popularity and recapitulated the efforts of a local promoter in 1911 to build a Summer White House in the foothills west of Denver.
6. The characterization of Colorado as a place of isolation and refuge distinguishes my discussion from sf critique that emphasizes the plot tropes in sf that survive from the Western, as in the television series “Firefly” (2002), or develops analogies to resource and settlement frontiers (Abbott *Frontiers*). It is consistent, however, with criticism that emphasizes the scenario of the lone individual in the wilderness as central both in western fiction (Tompkins, Comer) and in “frontier” sf (Mogen; Mogen, Sanders, and Karpinski; Wolfe).
7. Campbell’s “All” was finally published in 1976, along with two other previously unpublished stories: see Campbell.
8. John Barnes’s recent *Directive 51* (2010) and *Daybreak Zero* (2011) relocate a governmental agency in Pueblo, Colorado. After a series of nano-plagues have destroyed most rubber, plastic, and electrical conductors and pushed industrial and communication technologies back a century, rival remnant regimes claiming Constitutional legitimacy arise in Athens, Georgia, and Olympia, Washington. In between is the Reconstruction Research Center in Pueblo, which coordinates efforts to understand the rapidly changing new world and serves as a third power center and neutral broker.
9. Heinlein’s “All You Zombies—” (1959) places some scenes in a “Sub Rockies base” and a “Sub Rockies Annex—HQ Temporal DOL,” but these are locations for which the special characteristics of Colorado are not important.
10. For additional interpretations of *The Long Tomorrow*, see Parkin-Speer and DeBlasio.
11. Le Guin, “Query.” Message to the author. 18 April 2010.
12. Suzanne Collins’s wildly popular young-adult novel *The Hunger Games* (2008) is set in a post-environmental-disaster America ruled from Panem, a shining city “built in a place once called the Rockies” (41). It is a Shing-like place that is isolated from the thirteen surrounding, politically subordinate provinces. “The mountains form a natural barrier between the Capitol and the eastern districts. It is almost impossible to enter from the east except through the tunnels. This geographical advantage was a major factor in the districts losing the war Since they had to scale the mountains, they were easy targets for the Capitol’s air force” (59). Like Es Toch, the city impresses by “the

magnificence of the glistening buildings in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air” (59). Once the protagonists have arrived in Panem, however, its location ceases to play any role in their survival and self-discovery.

13. Cronin, “Why Telluride?” Message to the author. 28 February 2011

14. Cronin, “Why Telluride?” Message to the author. 28 February 2011.

15. Terry Bisson, “Wild Horse Woman Question.” Message to the author. 23 April 2010; see also “A Canticle for Miller.”

16. *The Stand* draws on King’s short story “Night Surf” (1969), which also describes the survivors of a catastrophic virus. Set in New Hampshire, the story covers only one day. Its teenage protagonists share more with the children in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) than with the more complexly realized and hopeful characters of *The Stand*.

17. Some of the Las Vegas-bound travelers find the Eisenhower Tunnel under Loveland Pass blocked by an eight-mile traffic jam of crashed and crushed vehicles and reference the John Denver song, which was ubiquitous in the years when King was writing *The Stand*: “Colorado Rocky Mountain high, Trashcan Man thought, I’ve seen it raining Chevies in the sky” (607).

18. Michael Bishop’s fantasy novel *Unicorn Mountain* (1988) also uses Colorado’s isolation not just as a setting for personal redemption, but as a driving force in the process. Bishop’s fantasy involves unicorns passing back and forth from the high Colorado mountains to a parallel universe. The story’s focus, however, is the process of self-discovery by a young man who comes from Atlanta to a southern Colorado ranch to die of AIDS. He finds a tentative sort of spiritual rest—a process facilitated by the relative isolation of the Colorado high country. A secondary plot involves a father and daughter from the Ute tribe of western Colorado who also find varieties of personal redemption and rebirth. The setting is presented with realistic detail, with the town of “Huerfano” standing in for Walsenberg and “Remuda County” for Huerfano County. The ranch where Bo Gavin visits backs up into the mountains off the real Colorado state route 69. Bishop lived in Colorado Springs from 1968 to 1972, when popular culture was discovering, rediscovering, and reinventing Colorado. My thanks to Terry Bisson for reminding me about Bishop’s book.

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ABSTRACT

Colorado has long functioned in American culture as the epitome of the American West, identified both as a safe refuge and as a place for starting over. This essay examines the ways in which writers of speculative fiction have drawn on Colorado's historically constructed identity as the setting for stories of refuge and retreat. The discussion examines parallels in the use of the Colorado setting by sf writers Robert A. Heinlein, Philip K. Dick, Walter M. Miller, Jr., Leigh Brackett, and Ursula K. LeGuin, by political novelist Ayn Rand, and by mainstream thriller writers Stephen King and Justin Cronin. The analysis suggests that popular ideas about regional characteristics can play important roles in framing the science-fiction imagination.