

CIBOLA

Connie Willis

Connie Willis lives in Greeley, Colorado, with her family. She first attracted attention as a writer in the late '70s with a number of outstanding stories for the now-defunct magazine *Galileo*, and went on to establish herself as one of the most popular and critically acclaimed writers of the 1980s. In 1982, she won two Nebula Awards, one for her superb novelette "Fire Watch," and one for her poignant short story "A Letter from the Clearys"; a few months later, "Fire Watch" went on to win her a Hugo Award as well. In 1989, her powerful novella "The Last of the Winnebagoes" won both the Nebula and the Hugo, and she won another Nebula last year for her novelette "At the Rialto." Her books include the novel *Water Witch*,

written in collaboration with Cynthia Felice, *Fire Watch*, a collection of her short fiction, and the outstanding *Lincoln's Dreams*, her first solo novel. Her most recent book is another novel in collaboration with Cynthia Felice, *Light Raid*. Upcoming is a major new solo novel, *Doomsday Book*. Her story "The Sidon in the Mirror" was in our First Annual Collection; her "Blued Moon" was in our Second Annual Collection; her "Chance" was in our Fourth Annual Collection; her "The Last of the Winnebagoes" was in our Sixth Annual Collection; and "At the Rialto" was in our Seventh Annual Collection.

Willis's is a unique and powerful voice, comfortable with either comedy or tragedy—here, in a story that tastes of both, she takes us to a remote and exotic corner of the world—modern-day Denver—for a tantalizing glimpse of an elusive and fascinating vision.

"Carla, you grew up in Denver," Jake said. "Here's an assignment that might interest you."

This is his standard opening line. It means he is about to dump another "local interest" piece on me.

"Come on, Jake," I said. "No more nutty Bronco fans who've

spray-painted their kids orange and blue, okay? Give me a real story. Please?”

“Bronco season’s over, and the NFL draft was last week,” he said. “This isn’t a local interest.”

“You’re right there,” I said. “These stories you keep giving me are of no interest, local or otherwise. I did the time machine piece for you. And the psychic dentist. Give me a break. Let me cover something that doesn’t involve nuttos.”

“It’s for the ‘Our Living Western Heritage’ series.” He handed me a slip of paper. “You can interview her this morning and then cover the skyscraper moratorium hearings this afternoon.”

This was plainly a bribe, since the hearings were front page stuff right now, and “historical interests” could be almost as bad as locals—senile old women in nursing homes rambling on about the good old days. But at least they didn’t crawl in their washing machines and tell you to push “rinse” so they could travel into the future. And they didn’t try to perform psychic oral surgery on you.

“All right,” I said, and took the slip of paper. “Rosa Turcorillo,” it read and gave an address out on Santa Fe. “What’s her phone number?”

“She doesn’t have a phone,” Jake said. “You’ll have to go out there.” He started across the city room to his office. “The hearings are at one o’clock.”

“What is she, one of Denver’s first Chicano settlers?” I called after him.

He waited till he was just outside his office to answer me. “She says she’s the great-granddaughter of Coronado,” he said, and beat a hasty retreat into his office. “She says she knows where the Seven Cities of Cibola are.”

I spent forty-five minutes researching Coronado and copying articles and then drove out to see his great-granddaughter. She lived out on south Santa Fe past Hampden, so I took I-25 and then was sorry. The morning rush hour was still crawling along at about ten miles an hour pumping carbon monoxide into the air. I read the whole article stopped behind a semi between Speer and Sixth Avenue.

Coronado trekked through the Southwest looking for the legendary Seven Cities of Gold in the 1540s, which poked a big hole in Rosa's story, since any great-granddaughter of his would have to be at least three hundred years old.

There wasn't any mystery about the Seven Cities of Cibola either. Coronado found them, near Gallup, New Mexico, and conquered them but they were nothing but mud-hut villages. Having been burned once, he promptly took off after another promise of gold in Quivira in Kansas someplace where there wasn't any gold either. He hadn't been in Colorado at all.

I pulled onto Santa Fe, cursing Jake for sending me on another wild-goose chase, and headed south. Denver is famous for traffic, air pollution, and neighborhoods that have seen better days. Santa Fe isn't one of those neighborhoods. It's been a decaying line of rusting railroad tracks, crummy bars, old motels, and waterbed stores for as long as I can remember, and I, as Jake continually reminds me, grew up in Denver.

Coronado's granddaughter lived clear south past Hampden, in a trailer park with a sign with "Olde West Motel" and a neon bison on it, and Rosa Turcorillo's old Airstream looked like it had been there since the days when the buffalo roamed. It was tiny, the kind of trailer I would call "Turcorillo's modest mobile home" in the article, no more than fifteen feet long and eight wide.

Rosa was nearly that wide herself. When she answered my knock, she barely fit in the door. She was wearing a voluminous turquoise housecoat, and had long black braids.

“What do you want?” she said, holding the metal door so she could slam it in case I was the police or a repo man.

“I’m Carla Johnson from the *Denver Record*,” I said. “I’d like to interview you about Coronado.” I fished in my bag for my press card. “We’re doing a series on ‘Our Living Western Heritage.’” I finally found the press card and handed it to her. “We’re interviewing people who are part of our past.”

She stared at the press card disinterestedly. This was not the way it was supposed to work. Nuttos usually drag you in the house and start babbling before you finish telling them who you are. She should already be halfway through her account of how she’d traced her ancestry to Coronado by means of the I Ching.

“I would have telephoned first, but you didn’t have a phone,” I said.

She handed the card to me and started to shut the door.

“If this isn’t a good time, I can come back,” I babbled. “And we don’t have to do the interview here if you’d rather not. We can go to the *Record* office or to a restaurant.”

She opened the door and flashed a smile that had half of Cibola’s missing gold in it. “I ain’t dressed,” she said. “It’ll take me a couple of minutes. Come on in.”

I climbed the metal steps and went inside. Rosa pointed at a flowered couch, told me to sit down and disappeared into the rear of the trailer.

I was glad I had suggested going out. The place was no messier than my desk, but it was only about six feet long and had the couch, a dinette set, and a recliner. There was no way it would hold me and Coronado’s granddaughter, too. The place may have had a surplus of furniture but it didn’t have any of the usual crazy stuff, no pyramids, no astrological charts, no crystals. A deck of cards was laid out like the tarot on the dinette table, but when I

leaned across to look at them, I saw it was a half-finished game of solitaire. I put the red eight on the black nine.

Rosa came out, wearing orange polyester pants and a yellow print blouse and carrying a large black leather purse. I stood up and started to say, "Where would you like to go? Is there someplace close?" but I only got it half out.

"The Eldorado Cafe," she said and started out the door, moving pretty fast for somebody three hundred years old and three hundred pounds.

"I don't know where the Eldorado Cafe is," I said, unlocking the car door for her. "You'll have to tell me where it is."

"Turn right," she said. "They have good cinnamon rolls."

I wondered if it was the offer of the food or just the chance to go someplace that had made her consent to the interview. Whichever, I might as well get it over with. "So Coronado was your great-grandfather?" I said.

She looked at me as if I were out of my mind. "No. Who told you that?"

Jake, I thought, who I plan to tear limb from limb when I get back to the *Record*. "You aren't Coronado's great-granddaughter?"

She folded her arms over her stomach. "I am the descendant of El Turco."

El Turco. It sounded like something out of *Zorro*. "So it's this El Turco who's your great-grandfather?"

"Great-*great*. El Turco was Pawnee. Coronado captured him at Cicuye and put a collar around his neck so he could not run away. Turn right."

We were already halfway through the intersection. I jerked the steering wheel to the right and nearly skidded into a pickup.

Rosa seemed unperturbed. "Coronado wanted El Turco to

guide him to Cibola,” she said.

I wanted to ask if he had, but I didn’t want to prevent Rosa from giving me directions. I drove slowly through the next intersection, alert to sudden instructions, but there weren’t any. I drove on down the block.

“And did El Turco guide Coronado to Cibola?”

“Sure. You should have turned left back there,” she said.

She apparently hadn’t inherited her great-great-grandfather’s scouting ability. I went around the block and turned left, and was overjoyed to see the Eldorado Cafe down the street. I pulled into the parking lot and we got out.

“They make their own cinnamon rolls,” she said, looking at me hopefully as we went in. “With frosting.”

We sat down in a booth. “Have anything you want,” I said. “This is on the *Record*.”

She ordered a cinnamon roll and a large Coke. I ordered coffee and began fishing in my bag for my tape recorder.

“You lived here in Denver a long time?” she asked.

“All my life. I grew up here.”

She smiled her gold-toothed smile at me. “You like Denver?”

“Sure,” I said. I found the pocket-sized recorder and laid it on the table. “Smog, oil refineries, traffic. What’s not to like?”

“I like it too,” she said.

The waitress set a cinnamon roll the size of Mile High Stadium in front of her and poured my coffee.

“You know what Coronado fed El Turco?” The waitress brought her large Coke. “Probably one tortilla a day. And he didn’t have no shoes. Coronado make him walk all that way to Colorado

and no shoes.”

I switched the tape recorder on. “You say Coronado came to Colorado,” I said, “but what I’ve read says he traveled through New Mexico and Oklahoma and up into Kansas, but not Colorado.”

“He was in Colorado.” She jabbed her finger into the table. “He was *here*.”

I wondered if she meant here in Colorado or here in the Eldorado Cafe.

“When was that? On his way to Quivira?”

“Quivira?” she said, looking blank. “I don’t know nothing about Quivira.”

“Quivira was a place where there was supposed to be gold,” I said. “He went there after he found the Seven Cities of Cibola.”

“He didn’t find them,” she said, chewing on a mouthful of cinnamon roll. “That’s why he killed El Turco.”

“Coronado killed El Turco?”

“Yeah. After he led him to Cibola.”

This was even worse than talking to the psychic dentist.

“Coronado said El Turco made the whole thing up,” Rosa said. “He said El Turco was going to lead Coronado into an ambush and kill him. He said the Seven Cities didn’t exist.”

“But they did?”

“Of course. El Turco led him to the place.”

“But I thought you said Coronado didn’t find them.”

“He didn’t.”

I was hopelessly confused by now. “Why not?”

“Because they weren’t there.”

I was going to run Jake through his paper shredder an inch at a time. I had wasted a whole morning on this and I was not even going to be able to get a story out of it.

“You mean they were some sort of mirage?” I asked.

Rosa considered this through several bites of cinnamon roll. “No. A mirage is something that isn’t there. These were there.”

“But invisible?”

“No.”

“Hidden.”

“No.”

“But Coronado couldn’t see them?”

She shook her head. With her forefinger, she picked up a few stray pieces of frosting left on her plate and stuck them in her mouth. “How could he when they weren’t there?”

The tape clicked off, and I didn’t even bother to turn it over. I looked at my watch. If I took her back now I could make it to the hearings early and maybe interview some of the developers. I picked up the check and went over to the cash register.

“Do you want to see them?”

“What do you mean? See the Seven Cities of Cibola?”

“Yeah. I’ll take you to them.”

“You mean go to New Mexico?”

“No. I told you, Coronado came to Colorado.”

“When?”

“When he was looking for the Seven Cities of Cibola.”

“No, I mean when can I see them? Right now?”

“No,” she said, with that, ‘how dumb can anyone be?’ look. She reached for a copy of the *Rocky Mountain News* that was lying on the counter and looked inside the back page. “Tomorrow morning. Six o’clock.”

One of my favorite things about Denver is that it’s spread all over the place and takes you forever to get anywhere. The mountains finally put a stop to things twenty miles to the west, but in all three other directions it can sprawl all the way to the state line and apparently is trying to. Being a reporter here isn’t so much a question of driving journalistic ambition as of driving, period.

The skyscraper moratorium hearings were out on Colorado Boulevard across from the Hotel Giorgio, one of the skyscrapers under discussion. It took me forty-five minutes to get there from the Olde West Trailer Park.

I was half an hour late, which meant the hearings had already gotten completely off the subject. “What about reflecting glass?” someone in the audience was saying. “I think it should be outlawed in skyscrapers. I was nearly blinded the other day on the way to work.”

“Yeah,” a middle-aged woman said. “If we’re going to have skyscrapers, they should look like skyscrapers.” She waved vaguely at the Hotel Giorgio, which looks like a giant black milk carton.

“And not like that United Bank building downtown!” someone else said. “It looks like a damned cash register!”

From there it was a short illogical jump to the impossibility of parking downtown, Denver’s becoming too decentralized, and whether the new airport should be built or not. By five-thirty they were back on reflecting glass.

“Why don’t they put glass you can see through in their skyscrapers?” an old man who looked a lot like the time machine

inventor said. "I'll tell you why not. Because those big business executives are doing things they should be ashamed of, and they don't want us to see them."

I left at seven and went back to the *Record* to try to piece my notes together into some kind of story. Jake was there.

"How'd your interview with Coronado's granddaughter go?" he asked.

"The Seven Cities of Cibola are here in Denver only Coronado couldn't see them because they're not there." I looked around. "Is there a copy of the *News* someplace?"

"*Here?* In the *Record* building!" he said, clutching his chest in mock horror. "That bad, huh? You're going to go work for the *News*?" But he fished a copy out of the mess on somebody's desk and handed it to me. I opened it to the back page.

There was no "Best Times for Viewing Lost Cities of Gold" column. There were pictures and dates of the phases of the moon, road conditions, and "What's in the Stars: by Stella." My horoscope of the day read: "Any assignment you accept today will turn out differently than you expect." The rest of the page was devoted to the weather, which was supposed to be sunny and warm tomorrow.

The facing page had the crossword puzzle, "Today in History," and squibs about Princess Di and a Bronco fan who'd planted his garden in the shape of a Bronco quarterback. I was surprised Jake hadn't assigned me that story.

I went down to Research and looked up El Turco. He was an Indian slave, probably Pawnee, who had scouted for Coronado, but that was his nickname, not his name. The Spanish had called him "The Turk" because of his peculiar hair. He had been captured at Cicuye, *after* Coronado's foray into Cibola, and had promised to

lead them to Quivira, tempting them with stories of golden streets and great stone palaces. When the stories didn't pan out, Coronado had had him executed. I could understand why.

Jake cornered me on my way home. "Look, don't quit," he said. "Tell you what, forget Coronado. There's a guy out in Lakewood who's planted his garden in the shape of John Elway's face. Daffodils for hair, blue hyacinths for eyes."

"Can't," I said, sidling past him. "I've got a date to see the Seven Cities of Gold."

Another delightful aspect of the Beautiful Mile-High City is that in the middle of April, after you've planted your favorite Bronco, you can get fifteen inches of snow. It had started getting cloudy by the time I left the paper, but fool that I was, I thought it was an afternoon thunderstorm. The *News's* forecast had, after all, been for warm and sunny. When I woke up at four-thirty there was a foot and half of snow on the ground and more tumbling down.

"Why are you going back if she's such a nut?" Jake had asked me when I told him I couldn't take the Elway garden. "You don't seriously think she's onto something, do you?" and I had had a hard time explaining to him why I was planning to get up at an ungodly hour and trek all the way out to Santa Fe again.

She was *not* El Turco's great-great-granddaughter. Two greats still left her at two hundred and fifty plus, and her history was as garbled as her math, but when I had gotten impatient she had said, "Do you want to see them?" and when I had asked her when, she had consulted the *News's* crossword puzzle and said, "Tomorrow morning."

I had gotten offers of proof before. The time machine inventor had proposed that I climb in his washing machine and be sent forward to "a glorious future, a time when everyone is rich," and the psychic dentist had offered to pull my wisdom teeth. But

there's always a catch to these offers.

"Your teeth will have been extracted in another plane of reality," the dentist had said. "X-rays taken in this plane will show them as still being there," and the time machine guy had checked his soak cycle and the stars at the last minute and decided there wouldn't be another temporal agitation until August of 2158.

Rosa hadn't put any restrictions at all on her offer. "You want to see them?" she said, and there was no mention of reality planes or stellar-laundry connections, no mention of any catch. Which doesn't mean there won't be one, I thought, getting out the mittens and scarf I had just put away for the season and going out to scrape the windshield off. When I got there she would no doubt say the snow made it impossible to see the Cities or I could only see them if I believed in UFO's. Or maybe she'd point off somewhere in the general direction of Denver's brown cloud and say, "What do you mean, you can't see them?"

I-25 was a mess, cars off the road everywhere and snow driving into my headlights so I could barely see. I got behind a snowplow and stayed there, and it was nearly six o'clock by the time I made it to the trailer. Rosa took a good five minutes to come to the door, and when she finally got there she wasn't dressed. She stared blearily at me, her hair out of its braids and hanging tangled around her face.

"Remember me? Carla Johnson? You promised to show me the Seven Cities?"

"Cities?" she said blankly.

"The Seven Cities of Cibola."

"Oh, yeah," she said, and motioned for me to come inside. "There aren't seven. El Turco was a dumb Pawnee. He don't know how to count."

"How many are there?" I asked, thinking, this is the catch.

There aren't seven and they aren't gold.

"Depends," she said. "More than seven. You still wanta go see them?"

"Yes."

She went into the bedroom and came out after a few minutes with her hair braided, the pants and blouse of the day before and an enormous red carcoat, and we took off toward Cibola. We went south again, past more waterbed stores and rusting railroad tracks, and out to Belleview.

It was beginning to get fairly light out, though it was impossible to tell if the sun was up or not. It was still snowing hard.

She had me turn onto Belleview, giving me at least ten yards' warning, and we headed east toward the Tech Center. Those people at the hearing who'd complained about Denver becoming too decentralized had a point. The Tech Center looked like another downtown as we headed toward it.

A multi-colored downtown, garish even through the veil of snow. The Metropoint building was pinkish-lavender, the one next to it was midnight blue, while the Hyatt Regency had gone in for turquoise and bronze, and there was an assortment of silver, sea-green, and taupe. There was an assortment of shapes, too: deranged trapezoids, overweight butterflies, giant beer cans. They were clearly moratorium material, each of them with its full complement of reflecting glass, and, presumably, executives with something to hide.

Rosa had me turn left onto Yosemite, and we headed north again. The snowplows hadn't made it out here yet, and it was heavy going. I leaned forward and peered through the windshield, and so did Rosa.

"Do you think we'll be able to see them?" I asked.

“Can’t tell yet,” she said. “Turn right.”

I turned into a snow-filled street. “I’ve been reading about your great-grandfather.”

“Great-*great*,” she said.

“He confessed he’d lied about the cities, that there really wasn’t any gold.”

She shrugged. “He was scared. He thought Coronado was going to kill him.”

“Coronado *did* kill him,” I said. “He said El Turco was leading his army into a trap.”

She shrugged again and wiped a space clear on the windshield to look through.

“If the Seven Cities existed, why didn’t El Turco take Coronado to them? It would have saved his life.”

“They weren’t there.” She leaned back.

“You mean they’re not there all the time?” I said.

“You know the Grand Canyon?” she asked. “My great-great-grandfather discovered the Grand Canyon. He told Coronado he seen it. Nobody saw the Grand Canyon again for three hundred years. Just because nobody seen it don’t mean it wasn’t there. You was supposed to turn right back there at the light.”

I could see why Coronado had strangled El Turco. If I hadn’t been afraid I’d get stuck in the snow, I’d have stopped and throttled her right then. I turned around, slipping and sliding, and went back to the light.

“Left at the next corner and go down the block a little ways,” she said, pointing. “Pull in there.”

“There” was the parking lot of a donut shop. It had a giant

neon donut in the middle of its steamed-up windows. I knew how Coronado felt when he rode into the huddle of mud huts that was supposed to have been the City of Gold.

“This is Cibola?” I said.

“No way,” she said, heaving herself out of the car. “They’re not there today.”

“You *said* they were always there,” I said.

“They are.” She shut the car door, dislodging a clump of snow. “Just not all the time. I think they’re in one of those time-things.”

“Time-things? You mean a time warp?” I asked, trying to remember what the washing-machine guy had called it. “A temporal agitation?”

“How would I know? I’m not a scientist. They have good donuts here. Cream-filled.”

The donuts were actually pretty good, and by the time we started home the snow had stopped and was already turning to slush, and I no longer wanted to strangle her on the spot. I figured in another hour the sun would be out, and John Elway’s hyacinth-blue eyes would be poking through again. By the time we turned onto Hampden, I felt calm enough to ask when she thought the Seven Cities might put in another appearance.

She had bought a *Rocky Mountain News* and a box of cream-filled donuts to take home. She opened the box and contemplated them. “More than seven,” she said. “You like to write?”

“What?” I said, wondering if Coronado had had this much trouble communicating with El Turco.

“That’s why you’re a reporter, because you like to write?”

“No,” I said. “The writing’s a real pain. When will this time-warp thing happen again?”

She bit into a donut. “That’s Cinderella City,” she said, gesturing to the mall on our right with it. “You ever been there?”

I nodded.

“I went there once. They got marble floors and this big fountain. They got lots of stores. You can buy just about anything you want there. Clothes, jewels, shoes.”

If she wanted to do a little shopping now that she’d had breakfast, she could forget it. And she could forget about changing the subject. “When can we go see the Seven Cities again? Tomorrow?”

She licked cream filling off her fingers and turned the *News* over. “Not tomorrow,” she said. “El Turco would have liked Cinderella City. He didn’t have no shoes. He had to walk all the way to Colorado in his bare feet. Even in the snow.”

I imagined my hands closing around her plump neck. “When are the Seven Cities going to be there again?” I demanded. “And don’t tell me they’re always there.”

She consulted the celebrity squibs. “Not tomorrow,” she said. “Day after tomorrow. Five o’clock. You must like people, then. That’s why you wanted to be a reporter? To meet all kinds of people?”

“No,” I said. “Believe it or not, I wanted to travel.”

She grinned her golden smile at me. “Like Coronado,” she said.

I spent the next two days interviewing developers, environmentalists, and council members, and pondering why Coronado had continued to follow El Turco, even after it was clear

he was a pathological liar.

I had stopped at the first 7-Eleven I could find after letting Rosa and her donuts off and bought a copy of the *News*. I read the entire back section, including the comics. For all I knew, she was using *Doonesbury* for an oracle. Or *Nancy*.

I read the obits and worked the crossword puzzle and then went over the back page again. There was nothing remotely time-warp-related. The moon was at first quarter. Sunset would occur at 7:51 P.M. Road conditions for the Eisenhower Tunnel were snow-packed and blowing. Chains required. My horoscope read, “Don’t get involved in wild goose chases. A good stay-at-home day.”

Rosa no more knew where the Seven Cities of Gold were than her great-great-grandfather. According to the stuff I read in between moratorium jaunts, he had changed his story every fifteen minutes or so, depending on what Coronado wanted to hear.

The other Indian scouts had warned Coronado, told him there was nothing to the north but buffalo and a few teepees, but Coronado had gone blindly on. “El Turco seems to have exerted a Pied-Piperlike power over Coronado,” one of the historians had written, “a power which none of Coronado’s officers could understand.”

“Are you still working on that crazy Coronado thing?” Jake asked me when I got back to the *Record*. “I thought you were covering the hearings.”

“I am,” I said, looking up the Grand Canyon. “They’ve been postponed because of the snow. I have an appointment with the United Coalition Against Uncontrolled Growth at eleven.”

“Good,” he said. “I don’t need the Coronado piece, after all. We’re running a series on ‘Denver Today’ instead.”

He went back upstairs. I found the Grand Canyon. It had

been discovered by Lopez de Cardenas, one of Coronado's men. El Turco hadn't been with him.

I drove out to Aurora in a blinding snowstorm to interview the United Coalition. They were united only in spirit, not in location. The president had his office in one of the Pavilion Towers off Havana, but the secretary who had all the graphs and spreadsheets, was out at Fiddler's Green. I spent the whole afternoon shuttling back and forth between them through the snow, and wondering what had ever possessed me to become a journalist. I'd wanted to travel. I had had the idea, gotten from TV that journalists got to go all over the world, writing about exotic and amazing places. Like the UNIPAC building and the Plaza Towers.

They were sort of amazing, if you like Modern Corporate. Brass and chrome and Persian carpets. Atriums and palm trees and fountains splashing in marble pools. I wondered what Rosa, who had been so impressed with Cinderella City, would have thought of some of these places. El Turco would certainly have been impressed. Of course, he would probably have been impressed by the donut shop, and would no doubt have convinced Coronado to drag his whole army there with tales of fabulous, cream-filled wealth.

I finished up the United Coalition and went back to the *Record* to call some developers and builders and get their side. It was still snowing, and there weren't any signs of snow removal, creative or otherwise, that I could see. I set up some appointments for the next day, and then went back down to Research.

El Turco hadn't been the only person to tell tales of the fabulous Seven Cities of Gold. A Spanish explorer, Cabeza de Vaca, had reported them first, and his black slave Estevanico claimed to have seen them, too. Friar Marcos had gone with Estevanico to find them, and, according to him, Estevanico had actually entered Cibola.

They had made up a signal. Estevanico was to send back a small cross if he found a little village, a big cross if he found a city. Estevanico was killed in a battle with Indians, and Friar Marcos fled back to Coronado, but he said he'd seen the Seven Cities in the distance, and he claimed that Estevanico had sent back "a cross the size of a man."

There were all kinds of other tales, too, that the Navajos had gold and silver mines, that Montezuma had moved his treasure north to keep it from the Spanish, that there was a golden city on a lake, with canoes whose oarlocks were solid gold. If El Turco had been lying, he wasn't the only one.

I spent the next day interviewing pro-uncontrolled growth types. They were united, too. "Denver has to retain its central identity," they all told me from what it was hard to believe was not a pre-written script. "It's becoming split into a half-dozen sub-cities, each with its own separate goals."

They were in less agreement as to where the problem lay. One of the builders who'd developed the Tech Center thought the Plaza Tower out at Fiddler's Green was an eyesore, Fiddler's Green complained about Aurora, Aurora thought there was too much building going on around Colorado Boulevard. They were all united on one thing, however: downtown was completely out of control.

I logged several thousand miles in the snow, which showed no signs of letting up, and went home to bed. I debated setting my alarm. Rosa didn't know where the Seven Cities of Gold were, the Living Western Heritage series had been canceled, and Coronado would have saved everybody a lot of trouble if he had listened to his generals.

But Estevanico had sent back a giant cross, and there was the "time-thing" thing. I had not done enough stories on psychic peridontia yet to start believing their nutto theories, but I had done enough to know what they were supposed to sound like. Rosa's was

all wrong.

“I don’t know what it’s called,” she’d said, which was far too vague. Nutto theories may not make any sense, but they’re all worked out, down to the last bit of pseudo-scientific jargon. The psychic dentist had told me all about transcendental maxillofacial extractile vibrations, and the time travel guy had showed me a hand-lettered chart showing how the partial load setting affected future events.

If Rosa’s Seven Cities were just one more nutto theory, she would have been talking about morphogenetic temporal dislocation and simultaneous reality modes. She would at least know what the “time-thing” was called.

I compromised by setting the alarm on “music” and went to bed.

I overslept. The station I’d set the alarm on wasn’t on the air at four-thirty in the morning. I raced into my clothes, dragged a brush through my hair, and took off. There was almost no traffic—who in their right mind is up at four-thirty?—and it had stopped snowing. By the time I pulled onto Santa Fe I was only running ten minutes late. Not that it mattered. She would probably take half an hour to drag herself to the door and tell me the Seven Cities of Cibola had canceled again.

I was wrong. She was standing outside waiting in her red carcoat and a pair of orange Bronco earmuffs. “You’re late,” she said, squeezing herself in beside me. “Got to go.”

“Where?”

She pointed. “Turn left.”

“Why don’t you just tell me where we’re going?” I said, “and that way I’ll have a little advance warning.”

“Turn right,” she said.

We turned onto Hampden and started up past Cinderella City. Hampden is never free of traffic, no matter what time of day it is. There were dozens of cars on the road. I got in the center lane, hoping she'd give me at least a few feet of warning for the next turn, but she leaned back and folded her arms across her massive bosom.

"You're sure the Seven Cities will appear this morning?" I asked.

She leaned forward and peered through the windshield at the slowly lightening sky, looking for who knows what. "Good chance. Can't tell for sure."

I felt like Coronado, dragged from pillar to post. Just a little farther, just a little farther. I wondered if this could be not only a scam but a set-up, if we would end up pulling up next to a black van in some dark parking lot, and I would find myself on the cover of the *Record* as a robbery victim or worse. She was certainly anxious enough. She kept holding up her arm so she could read her watch in the lights of the cars behind us. More likely, we were heading for some bakery that opened at the crack of dawn, and she wanted to be there when the fried cinnamon rolls came out of the oven.

"Turn right!" she said. "Can't you go no faster?"

I went faster. We were out in Cherry Creek now, and it was starting to get really light. The snowstorm was apparently over. The sky was turning a faint lavender-blue.

"Now right, up there," she said, and I saw where we were going. This road led past Cherry Creek High School and then up along the top of the dam. A nice isolated place for a robbery.

We went past the last houses and pulled out onto the dam road. Rosa turned in her seat to peer out my window and the back, obviously looking for something. There wasn't much to see. The water wasn't visible from this point, and she was looking the wrong

direction, out towards Denver. There were still a few lights, the early-bird traffic down on I-225 and the last few orangish street lights that hadn't gone off automatically. The snow had taken on the bluish-lavender color of the sky.

I stopped the car.

"What are you doing?" she demanded. "Go all the way up."

"I can't," I said, pointing ahead. "The road's closed."

She peered at the chain strung across the road as if she couldn't figure out what it was, and then opened the door and got out.

Now it was my turn to say, "What are you doing?"

"We gotta walk," she said. "We'll miss it otherwise."

"Miss what? Are you telling me there's going to be a time warp up there on top of the dam?"

She looked at me like I was crazy. "Time warp?" she said. Her grin glittered in my headlights. "No. Come on."

Even Coronado had finally said, "All right, enough," and ordered his men to strangle El Turco. But not until he'd been lured all the way up to Kansas. And, according to Rosa, Colorado. The Seven Cities of Cibola were *not* going to be up on top of Cherry Creek dam, no matter what Rosa said, and I wasn't even going to get a story out of this, but I switched off my lights and got out of the car and climbed over the chain.

It was almost fully light now, and the shadowy dimnesses below were sorting themselves out into decentralized Denver. The black *2001* towers off Havana were right below us, and past them the peculiar Mayan-pyramid shape of the National Farmer's Union. The Tech Center rose in a jumble off to the left, beer cans and trapezoids, and then there was a long curve of isolated buildings all the way to downtown, an island of skyscraping towers obviously in need of a moratorium.

“Come on,” Rosa said. She started walking faster, panting along the road ahead of me and looking anxiously toward the east, where at least a black van wasn’t parked. “Coronado shouldn’t have killed El Turco. It wasn’t his fault.”

“What wasn’t his fault?”

“It was one of those time-things, what did you call it?” she said, breathing hard.

“A temporal agitation?”

“Yeah, only he didn’t know it. He thought it was there all the time, and when he brought Coronado there it wasn’t there, and he didn’t know what had happened.”

She looked anxiously to the east again, where a band of clouds extending about an inch above the horizon was beginning to turn pinkish-gray, and broke into an ungainly run. I trotted after her, trying to remember the procedure for CPR.

She ran into the pullout at the top of the dam and stopped, panting hard. She put her hand up to her heaving chest and looked out across the snow at Denver.

“So you’re saying the cities existed in some other time? In the future?”

She glanced over her shoulder at the horizon. The sun was nearly up. The narrow cloud turned pale pink, and the snow on Mt. Evans went the kind of fuschia we use in the Sunday supplements. “And you think there’s going to be another time-warp this morning?” I said.

She gave me that “how can one person be so stupid” look. “Of course not,” she said, and the sun cleared the cloud. “There they are,” she said.

There they were. The reflecting glass in the curved towers of Fiddler’s Green caught first, and then the Tech Center and the Silverado Building on Colorado Boulevard, and the downtown

skyline burst into flames. They turned pink and then orange, the Hotel Giorgio and the Metropoint building and the Plaza Towers, blazing pinnacles and turrets and towers.

“You didn’t believe me, did you?” Rosa said.

“No,” I said, unwilling to take my eyes off of them. “I didn’t.”

There were more than seven. Far out to the west the Federal Center ignited, and off to the north the angled lines of grain elevators gleamed. Downtown blazed, blinding building moratorium advocates on their way to work. In between, the Career Development Institute and the United Bank Building and the Hyatt Regency burned gold, standing out from the snow like citadels, like cities. No wonder El Turco had dragged Coronado all the way to Colorado. Marble palaces and golden streets.

“I told you they were there all the time,” she said.

It was over in another minute, the fires going out one by one in the panes of reflecting glass, downtown first and then the Cigna building and Bellevue Place, fading to their everyday silver and onyx and emerald. The Pavilion Towers below us darkened and the last of the sodium street lights went out.

“There all the time,” Rosa said solemnly.

“Yeah,” I said. I would have to get Jake up here to see this. I’d have to buy a *News* on the way home and check on the time of sunrise for tomorrow. And the weather.

I turned around. The sun glittered off the water of the reservoir. There was an aluminum rowboat out in the middle of it. It had golden oarlocks.

Rosa had started back down the road to the car. I caught up with her. “I’ll buy you a pecan roll,” I said. “Do you know of any good places around here?”

She grinned. Her gold teeth gleamed in the last light of

Cibola. “The best,” she said.