

= Skinner 's Room =

Skinner 's Room is a short story by William Gibson originally composed for Visionary San Francisco , a 1990 museum exhibition exploring the future of San Francisco . It features the first appearance in Gibson 's fiction of " the Bridge " , which Gibson revisited as the setting of his acclaimed Bridge trilogy of novels . In the story , the Bridge is overrun by squatters , among them Skinner , who occupies a shack atop a bridgetower . An altered version of the story was published in Omni magazine and subsequently anthologized . " Skinner 's Room " was nominated for the 1992 Locus Award for Best Short Story .

= = Synopsis = =

The story takes place in a near @-@ future where the United States is in decline , having been negatively affected by some event referred to as the " devaluations . " It is set in a decaying San Francisco in which the San Francisco ? Oakland Bay Bridge is closed and taken over by the homeless . The wealthy denizens of the city have retreated to gated @-@ access enclaves . The room mentioned in the title is a shack built on top one of the bridge 's towers . Skinner has lived on the bridge , and in his room , for a long time , and is accompanied by a girl with an interest in the history of the bridge town and who arrived only three months before .

The story reveals that , long ago , the Bridge had been closed to vehicle traffic ( for three years ) and that the pressure to find somewhere to live had forced homeless people to seize the bridge and set up a squatters ' town there . The community that arose was vibrant and was watched by the world 's media . The town grew in a piecemeal fashion , built from salvaged parts as well as from material apparently donated by more wealthy nations . At the end of the story Skinner has a dream in which he remembers being at the front of the crowd who seized the bridge ( Skinner is the first onto the bridge ) and scaled the towers .

= = Publication history = =

" Skinner 's Room " was commissioned by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art for its exhibition " Visionary San Francisco " , shown from June 14 to August 26 , 1990 . Gibson 's story inspired a contribution to the exhibition by architects Ming Fung and Craig Hodgetts . Ming and Hodgetts designed the urban environment which would have catalysed the transformation of the Bridge . They envisioned a San Francisco in which the rich live in high @-@ tech , self @-@ sufficient , self @-@ contained towers , above the decrepit city and its crumbling bridge , isolated from the amorphous city . The crate @-@ packaged installation , which was surrounded by scrap metal , computer chips , and pages from manga comic strips , featured a model of the towers , along with Gibson on a monitor discussing the future and reading from " Skinner 's Room " .

A slightly different version of the short story was featured in the November 1991 issue of Omni . The OMNI version concerns an unnamed girl and an old man named Skinner who live in the one @-@ room shack built on top of the first cable tower of the Bridge . This version was collected in Gardner Dozois ' 1992 anthology The Year 's Best Science Fiction : Ninth Annual Collection , and in Larry McCaffery 's After Yesterday 's Crash ( 1995 ) .

= = Significance = =

" Skinner 's Room " is the first appearance of the Bridge in Gibson 's fiction . In the acknowledgments at the end of his 1994 novel Virtual Light , Gibson writes that the short story later developed into the novel ; the character of Skinner is one of the main characters in Virtual Light and the setting and characters of " Skinner 's Room " are revisited in the sequels to the novel , Idoru and All Tomorrow 's Parties ( collectively known as the Bridge trilogy ) .

The New York Times hailed the " Visionary San Francisco " exhibition as " one of the most ambitious , and admirable , efforts to address the realm of architecture and cities that any museum

in the country has mounted in the last decade " . Despite organiser Paulo Polledri 's claim that the collaboration was an " appeal to civic responsibility by showing the effects of its absence " , The New York Times judged Ming and Hodgetts 's reaction to " Skinner 's Room " a " powerful , but sad and not a little cynical , work " . After its 1991 republication in OMNI , " Skinner 's Room " was nominated for the Locus Award for Best Short Story in 1992 .