

A brand-new decade

Written By BRIAN LOCKHART

Yes, it's a brand-new year.

I guess all those 1950s late night science fiction movies and the Twilight Zone TV show got it all wrong because I don't have a jet pack in my garage.

There are also no glass-domed cities, flying cars, laser beam guns, or robot butlers.

The moon hasn't been colonized, and no one has had to launch themselves into deep space like the Space Family Robinson in 1997, to find a new planet to inhabit because the Earth is over populated.

The concept of going to Mars and setting up shop is not feasible, even if Space X has made plans to go there ? it's not a realistic project.

In fact, the entire space program has kind of stalled. Instead of zooming off to other planets, astronauts are only going as far as the International Space Station, and even that is becoming a questionable expense.

This was all, of course, science fiction ? the key word being fiction.

To gain a real perspective on the future I researched a paper published in 1950, by the leading scientists of the day who made their predictions for the year 2000 ? some 50 years ahead of their time.

Some of their scientific predictions were wildly inaccurate while others came much closer to the mark.

For some reason, they concluded a Third World War would have already happened and a World Federation of some sort would be created. Not sure why everyone has been predicting a third global war for decades, but it hasn't happened yet, and won't likely happen any time soon.

The scientists were sure there would be an artificial planet built to orbit the earth that would shine as bright as the moon and act as a radar and transmitting beacon. They were sort of right on that one given satellites, but they aren't quite the size of the moon.

As for travel they predicted you could move around the entire planet in a day. We're close to that: you can get from here to Australia in about 24 hours.

They also figured the cruising speed for commercial airliners would be over 1000 mph. Nope, not even close to that.

It was thought that atomic power to replace coal and lack of water powered resources should be ?getting under way.? Well, they predicted atomic power, however the first reactors were created only four years after their prediction. Not sure how they didn't see that coming sooner.

There are several predictions regarding health care, although most of them haven't been achieved yet, like a cure for the common cold. However, they did predict that polio would be eliminated before 2000.

In 1950, television was still a new medium. The scientists predicted TV would become 3 dimensional with the characters appearing in your living room complete with the smells that come with a scene. We're not quite there yet.

They also predicted that radio broadcasting will be totally eliminated because no one would ?tune into a program that cannot be seen.? I guess they didn't figure in the fact that keeping your eyes on the road while driving was important, although they did think flying cars would be common place.

One thing they did envision was today's smart-phone or iPhone.

?The telephone will be transformed from wire to radio and will be equipped with the visuality of television. Every pedestrian will have his own walking telephone.?

It is interesting to note that two of the most powerful tools ever developed were not predicted at all, at least not in any research I can find.

Digital technology never seemed to be on the radar ? at least not in the sense we use it today.

And there were no early references to a future kind of internet as we know it, other than a couple of very vague references to possible use of computers. No one ever seemed to think of a global information system connected to every home.

In fact, the common thinking at the time was that as computers became more powerful they would also become larger. See Professor Frink, on the Simpsons.

The above predictions were made for the year 2000, which at the time was considered far into the future and a benchmark year because it marked the turn of the century. And here we are 21 years past that benchmark year.

We haven't quite made it to the world of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey, but you never know what still may come over the next few years.

I still have a space reserved in the garage for my new jet pack when they finally are on sale for consumer use.