

A DAY IN THE YEAR 2060

THE HUMAN HEART STILL YEARNS

The future has become the subject of highly specialized study in universities and private industry around the world. The following imaginary account about life in Vancouver in 2060 is based on interviews with several experts, including Frank Ogden, 69, of Vancouver, co-founder of the Canadian chapter of the Bethesda, Md.-based World Future Society, which provides services for professional forecasters and planners, and Christian de Laet, a 62-year-old Belgian-born consultant at Montreal's Gamma Institute, which carries out future-oriented studies for government and industry. In the 21st century, the futurists expect technology to develop even more rapidly than it has during the past 100 years.

Linda Harrison had been wrestling with the problem for a week. Now, as she placed raw vegetables on a plate, she found herself more and more attracted to the idea of applying to the North Vancouver Genesis Centre for permission to have a third child. She put the plate under the 12-inch-diameter sonic dome and brushed the sensor with her hand, activating the low-pitched melodious tone that would heat her lunch. Harrison left the kitchen and stood in the transparent ceramic sphere of her living room, absently watching the rain and the swirling mists that obscured the upper flanks of Grouse Mountain. As the sky darkened, detectors automatically turned up the light levels in the apartment. Perhaps, Harrison reflected, the federal law empowering the provinces to limit the size of families was justified. After all, the North American economy was only now beginning to revive following its total collapse in 2047. There had been no economic safeguards that could have protected the West against Japan's overnight withdrawal of almost \$995 billion in foreign investment. But then, no one could have foreseen recorded history's worst earthquake, which killed more than 13 million Japanese and left Tokyo to repatriate its assets to a shattered nation. Still, Harrison felt that it would be unfair if

the centre ruled that Rolfe, 9, and Peter, 4, were enough children—especially for a woman only 46 and still in her prime with a life expectancy of at least 125 years—45 years longer than the Canadian female average in 1990. Perhaps, Harrison thought, she could argue that she wanted a daughter to give the family better balance.

Harrison realized that, for some time now, the tone from the sonic dome had been telling her that her vegetables were ready. While she ate and watched the rain, her preoccupation with having a daughter led her to think of her own childhood in the second decade of the 21st century when she could vaguely remember her mother actually boiling water to cook vegetables. She guessed that genetic engineering—which had led to the development of new strains of green beans and mushrooms and dozens of other things that heated themselves in response to sound—was truly one of the marvels of the mid-21st century.

Rarity: But her children were marvels on a far more impressive scale. Rolfe had been conceived in the old-fashioned natural way in 2051—during a relationship now long gone in a society where marriage was a rarity—but Peter had been nurtured in an artificial womb at the Genesis Centre, which had fertilized her egg with an anonymous donor's sperm cell that had been genetically altered to correct minor abnormalities. So having a daughter would be a simple process—if her application were approved. An obstacle might be her capacity to support a larger family. Still, while her \$250,000-a-year salary was modest enough, it provided a good life in the five-room apartment in the seven-storey apartment cluster in the Upper Lonsdale district. Which was just as well: she would never be able to afford the \$7 million for an average three-bedroom house in neighboring West Vancouver.

Her reverie was interrupted by the musical murmuring of the phone. She put her plate aside and pressed the receive button on the console beside her chair, hoping it was Kurt calling from the lunar engineering laboratory.



FERNANDEZ/IMAGE BANK



An artist's rendition of a future city: a long, controlled life

But the holographic projector in a panel above her head flashed a full-size three-dimensional image of Nancy Wong into the middle of the living room. Her boss smiled tentatively; people always did while waiting for someone to answer. Harrison pressed a second button, and the transmitter across the room glowed pale amber.

Video: Wong told Harrison that three senior officials of the firm they worked for had just flown in from Hong Kong, Frankfurt and Singapore. Now, Wong wanted Harrison to bring her team to company headquarters for a conference on developments in consumer robotics. They disconnected. Harrison called the three members of her group, shut down the video communications system in the room that had



er robots-in-sports scandal: this time, the New York Yankees had been fined \$30 million for using a disguised Generation VII robot at third base. They would not have been caught if the robot had not malfunctioned in his second at-bat and driven a ball through the centre-field scoreboard. She flicked the screen off and played her usual game of trying to guess which of the six acrylic tunnels under Burrard Inlet between North Vancouver and the city TrafCon would slot her into. She whooshed out of the tunnel and spiralled up the ramp to the fourth level of the parking terminal at Howe and West Georgia. The nine kilometres had taken nearly eight minutes. No wonder the metropolitan region's eight million residents were up in arms over traffic delays. She could not imagine what it must have been like decades ago when people had to leave their homes every day and travel long distances just to work.

Fad: On West Georgia, in the shadow of the four-block-square indoor ski centre, she was surprised to discover that the Eyes Right chain had opened yet another outlet. With Asians making up 70 per cent of the people who lived in Greater Vancouver, the latest fashion fad among Caucasian women was to have their eyes surgically altered to give them an Eastern cast. She wondered how so many people could afford the procedure: only about 40 per cent of the adult population had the skills needed to qualify for a job at a time when total human knowledge was doubling every nine months.

The meeting at FuturEngineering lasted about 90 minutes. Most of it revolved around the success of the Singapore team in extracting a crude but unmistakable emotional response from an FE3000-series domestic robot. The experiment had involved programming the FE3000's artificial intelligence with an index of activities, which had been rated on a scale from

"most desirable" to "least desirable." When the robot had been promised and then denied the opportunity to engage in the "most desirable," it had knocked the team leader unconscious. That was interpreted as disappointment. Harrison was asked to explore the market for emotionally reactive robots.

To Harrison, the project made no sense. She headed for her car, remarking to a friend, "Science spends more than 70 years developing artificially intelligent robots that unquestioningly perform tasks ranging from guarding prisons to housework, and now we want to make them disagreeable." She recalled the Pleistocene-age mastodon she and the children had seen bellowing in its enclosure at the Los Angeles Super Zoo. The huge creature had been cloned from a single cell in 30,000-year-old tissue unearthed from the frozen Siberian

wasteland. If the world wanted a new class of serfs, why not clone them from the centuries-old remains of people who actually had been serfs? She concluded that she was likely just jealous of the billionaires whose lives beneath the vast climate-controlling ceramic dome covering West Vancouver were made immeasurably easier by household robots.

After work, when TrafCon brought Harrison's car out of the parking garage, she discovered that the rain had given way to a blizzard. The temperature had dropped sharply. Such drastic weather changes were becoming increasingly common and unpredictable. Year by year, the tree line across the North American continent was receding and cold polar air was pushing farther and farther south. That cold air eventually encountered warm air generated by the global greenhouse effect, and the result was constant atmospheric turmoil, especially over the northern British Columbia desert. Tomorrow, Harrison mused as the little car sped into the Burrard tunnel leading to North Vancouver, it would probably be hot and sunny.

TrafCon shunted her off onto a northbound Lonsdale exit ramp, and she looked up from her car's InfoScreen in time to see the apartment clusters—perched on carbon and concrete stems and resembling gigantic bunches of grapes—come into view. The snow had eased off, but accelerating 30-mile-an-hour winds were driving what remained of it.

Harrison's body heat failed to open the apartment entranceway; perhaps the infrared detector was acting up again. Last week, the delicate mechanism had malfunctioned and the panel had opened every time the neighbor's dog walked by. She pressed her palm against the autolock and the panel opened, closing silently behind her. Harrison checked the message centre in the communications room: Rolfe and Peter were spending the night with a friend under the dome in West Vancouver.

Shuttle: Feeling lonely suddenly, Harrison wandered aimlessly around the apartment, missing Kurt and wondering whether she should try to get on a moon shuttle the next day and pay him an unexpected visit. But Harrison decided that was not a good plan; Kurt hated surprises. She toyed with the notion of exploring the 500 worldwide channels of holographic television where the night before she had been both fascinated and appalled by a historical documentary from Madrid describing a bloody 20th-century ritual called bullfighting. She turned away and decided instead on an early night. She heated and ate two of the large mushrooms that tasted like hamburger and climbed into bed. The snow had turned to rain that coursed down the outer translucent shell of her bedroom sphere, forming patterns on the interior wall opposite the bed. She dimmed the lights, turned on the old-fashioned two-dimensional monitor and called up the classic novel that Nancy Wong had recommended. It was entitled *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and had been written by somebody called Orwell. Harrison thought the plot was pretty farfetched.

been her office for three years and rode the building's centre-core elevator on a cushion of compressed air to the basement garage. She punched the head-office co-ordinates into the control panel of her electric car and pressed the activator. The two-inch screen began flashing STANDBY, and for nearly a minute the car did not move. Then the display changed to ACTIVATING, the garage door slid noiselessly sideways, and the little car—its occupant sitting with her hands folded—sped to the nearby Lonsdale Avenue intersection where it paused briefly until the Greater Vancouver segment of TrafCon, the nationwide traffic-control computer, located an opening and fed it into the traffic.

Speeding down Lonsdale 15 cm behind the car ahead, Harrison skimmed the news in *The Electronic Sun* on the car's InfoScreen. Another

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DIRECTIONS: Read the article, "A Day in the Year 2060" and answer the following questions thoroughly.

1. List **10** of the technologies and changes of the future described in the article.

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|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

2. List **3** of the technologies or changes described in the article which you view as MOST DESIRABLE for the future? Explain why these would be desirable.

1.
Why Desirable?

2.
Why Desirable?

3.
Why Desirable?

3. List **3** of the technologies or changes which you view as MOST UNDESIRABLE for the future. Explain why these would be undesirable.

1.
Why Undesirable?

2.
Why Undesirable?

3.
Why Undesirable?

4. List 3 of the technologies or changes which you view as MOST LIKELY to occur by 2060. Explain why.

1.

Why Likely?

2.

Why Likely?

3.

Why Likely?

5. List 3 of the technologies or changes which you view as MOST UNLIKELY to occur by 2060. Explain why.

1.

Why Unlikely?

2.

Why Unlikely?

3.

Why Unlikely?

6. Evaluate this article in terms of what you learned from it. What ideas about the future did you gain from reading the article.