It's well known that the 90's and early 00's saw a continuous, prolonged chain of breakthroughs in technology. Similarly to the 50's and 60's "Space Age" concept, this period was so saturated with optimism for the future, but unlike that time, the 90's and 00's saw the average person interacting with technology far more directly than ever before. You didn't *have* to go to a specialised university, and be in peak health, to interface with machines that would change the future forever, and, needless to say, that was very exciting for people. The colloquially named "Y2K era" was most likely the time when people were getting the most creative and ambitious with computing; video games and other software were becoming more advanced, graphically and mechanically, and people were able to customise their PCs with things like novelty computer mouses and screensavers, forming a demographic that doesn't really exist nowadays.

The future was looking bright, and with such advances in technology, society's collective dream of driving a flying car sounded possible all of a sudden.

Enter Anthony Wilson's *How The Future Began: Communications*, a book published in 1999, which is full of all sorts of predictions people had for the future of technology. This book is *bafflingly* inaccurate, but that's exactly why I chose to pick it up in the first place; it's very fun for me to examine this sort of thing. That being said, I refuse to cover everything brought up in this book because there is just *too much*.

So, the book sells itself on essentially being a "sneak peek for what's to come", providing a good bit of information on how on Earth we ended up with things like, say, televisions or radios, but focusing mainly on sharing the technological predictions of a lot of so-called "experts" and how scientists and inventors would improve these things in the following decades. It even goes as far to suggest estimated dates for most things that it brings up, which is where things get weird.

One shining example of this is on page 30, where Anthony Wilson boldly claims,
"Less an information superhighway than a bad case of gridlock has been many people's experience of the Internet during the 1990's. But by 2010, the early years of the Internet will be long forgotten. Broadband optical connection will bring a new high-speed Internet directly into homes and offices, with access so rapid that tasks like downloading an entire movie will take only a second or two."

This section details the structure most paragraphs in this book use. In the first sentence, it presents the idea that plenty of people during the time knew that the internet was sluggish, and the second sentence, and start of the third, make a convincing claim, that the speed at which people connect with the internet was and is getting faster, but the second half of the third is far more outlandish. While I'm sure that having a very good internet connection and downloading a movie in quite low quality in 2010 *would* take a very short time, I would expect it to take quite a few minutes at least, much less "only a second or two".

Page 37 details how, by 2010, downloading music from the internet would have been far more popular than purchasing CDs, and this music would be transferred to miniature memory cards that would play on playback systems no bigger than credit cards.

If you swap a few variables around, and perhaps change it to a later date, then sure, this would be an acceptable claim. Although, the paragraph this is in ends with,
"Today's personal stereos, CD- and DVD-players will be seen only in museums, alongside old-fashioned gramophones."

And I don't know about you, but in the year 2023, I *still* use a CD player *and* a DVD player fairly regularly, and I know that plenty of people online still use things like record players. Even compared to a lot of the other claims made in this book, this one stands out for perpetuating the idea that our society--then *and* now--discards of our items *far* too quickly once they are viewed as "outdated", and that the last remaining items will be seen as "relics of the past".

This idea of technology being disposable is brought up briefly on page 17, too, where it says that by 2050, home computers may be as thin and flexible as pieces of paper, coming in widely-available tear-off pads, and would be all linked to the internet using radio waves. Not even touching on how absurd this idea would be and all of the problems with it, I think that it suggests once again that the human race, within a few decades of this book being published, would care even less about their personal items.

That made me feel sort of sad, because it's known that internet users of the 90's, especially young ones, made plenty of great memories on the family computer, whether it was playing edutainment games featuring their favourite cartoon characters, or looking at Geocities fan sites for beloved video games or shows. It deliberately counteracts the attitude that many had towards computers, suggesting that they act as mechanical slaves instead of friendly robotic buddies.

Among all of the things brought up in this book that seem like great additions to Sci-Fi movies, there are a surprising amount of things that it gets *right*, more or less.

For one, it talks a lot about how things like communication would improve, with mobile phones becoming more compact and powerful, and things like video-calling being invented, both of which are true. It brings up school and work becoming more remote through the use of the internet, and both being improved through computer programs and websites, also true. Page 41 hints at some sort of proto-live-streaming situation called "webcasting", and page 44 talks about being able to pick and choose what type of news you would hear, perhaps a prelude to things like social media sites. And while doors nowadays cannot recognise our DNA makeup to determine whether we can go through, things like keycards are widely used in places like motels.

One of the best things about this book, to me at least, is the abundance of gorgeous 90's CG renders. The flat colours and rudimentary shapes that make up the models shown in this book are so appealing to me, especially coupled with their uncanny lighting. The "Therapy Bed" shown on page 13 is a personal favourite, with the flat image of a random person shown above on a screen, and a small robot carrying some very polygonal wine glasses standing nearby. This book's entire visual style is just so awesome, too. There's a lot of edge-blurring and image-layering, (I was very excited when I noticed that an image collage shown on page 32 includes both a Tamagotchi *and* a PlayStation controller) and the classical paintings, depictions of dinosaurs and random binary code shown on any given page really give off the idea that computers are an invaluable (and very cool) gateway to all sorts of interesting information that's out there in cyberspace.

For a book made up of excitedly-whispered what-ifs, I found that Anthony Wilson's *How The Future Began: Communications* did actually fill in a few gaps in my knowledge about the history of computing, and really made me think about how much our attitude towards the future, as well as our usage of computers, has changed in the nearly 25 years since this

book was published. We're more or less trying to live in the moment nowadays, as our future looks more bleak by every passing day, but it really was a refreshing venture looking through this book, like peeking into a time when society was looking forward to whatever awaited them in a few decades instead.

Hey, *I'm* excited for intelligent computers using "neural net technology" to become widely available by the year 2060.