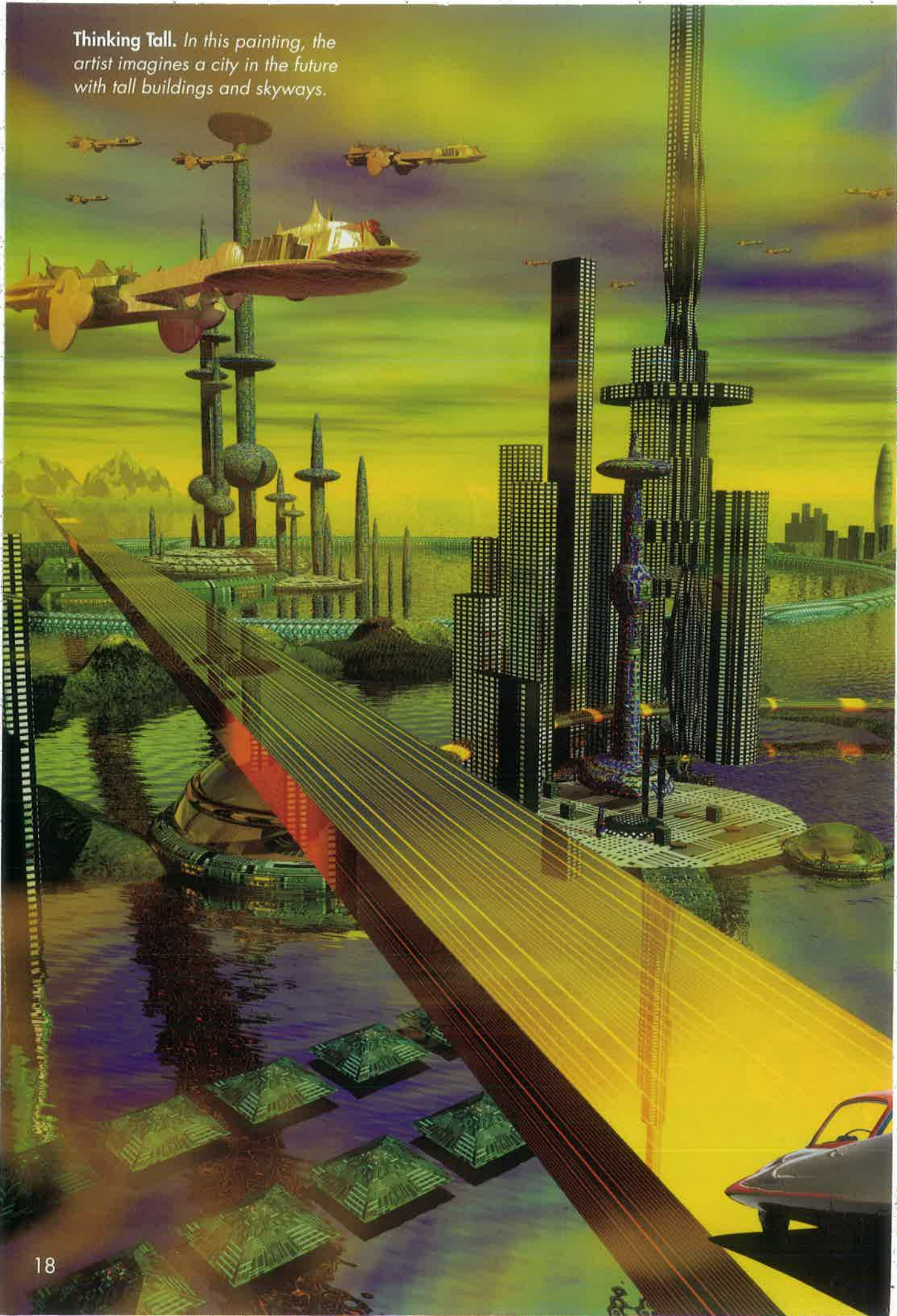


Thinking Tall. In this painting, the artist imagines a city in the future with tall buildings and skyways.





Reading Strategy: As you read this story, use all your senses. Imagine what life would be like if all the predictions about the future came true.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Does your family have a robot that cooks and cleans? Does your mom fly to work with a jetpack on her back? Just 50 years ago, that's how some people imagined life in 2009. After all, anything is possible in the future.

BY TERRI L. JONES





Zooming Into the Future.
A car designer thought trains of the future might look like this.

GYRONAUT BY ALEX S. TREMBLES, COURTESY OF STEE TREMBLES AND SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

What will the future bring? People just can't stop asking that question. Some bold thinkers try answering it, too. To imagine life in the future, you have to know what might be possible. You also need a lot of imagination.

Science fiction is one way to predict the future. It's a kind of writing that blends real science with fantasy. Over the years, science fiction writers, artists, and engineers have had many ideas about what life would be like in 2009. Does your everyday life look anything like what they imagined?

Home, Sweet Robot

In the 1950s, Ray Bradbury wrote a book called *The Martian Chronicles*. It describes a house that talks. From inside the walls, a voice tells people when to get out of bed. It also tells them whose birthday it is and how to dress.

In Bradbury's house of the future, there is a **robot** for every chore. One robot cooks while other robots set the table and wash the dishes. Tiny mice-like robots scurry around vacuuming the floor.

Some of Bradbury's **predictions** came true. Today, robots are on the job in many places. They vacuum floors. They cook meals. They even build cars and explore outer space.

Bradbury wasn't the only one to imagine a house of the future. In the 1950s, Disneyland created a theme park called Tomorrowland. A "smart" house practically ran itself. Today, many homes have automatic controls for air temperature and sound systems. You may have a microwave that cooks meals in just minutes.



© TOPIC PHOTO AGENCY/AGE FOTOSTOCK

Cities in Space

Some predictions that were made in the 1950s were out of this world. Writers, scientists, and artists imagined whole cities in space. Some thought that by the early 1990s, Earthlings would live on the moon. Can you imagine sitting under a glass dome, watching Earth rise and set?

How would people grow fruits and vegetables in space? Simple. They'd use **hydroponics**, which was a well-known way to grow plants without soil. How would they heat their buildings? Energy from the sun would supply all their power.

These ideas weren't so crazy. Today, many homes on Earth use solar power. Some experimental cars and planes even run on sun power. Astronauts live for months on the International Space Station. Still, do you know anyone who lives on another planet? Probably not. Some people dream about living on Mars. However, the space city of people's imagination is still many years away.

Present + Possible = Future

The dreamers of the 1950s also had ideas about how people might communicate. One idea turned up in the "Dick Tracy" comic strip. Tracy was a tough, smart detective. He had a special way of staying in touch with people.

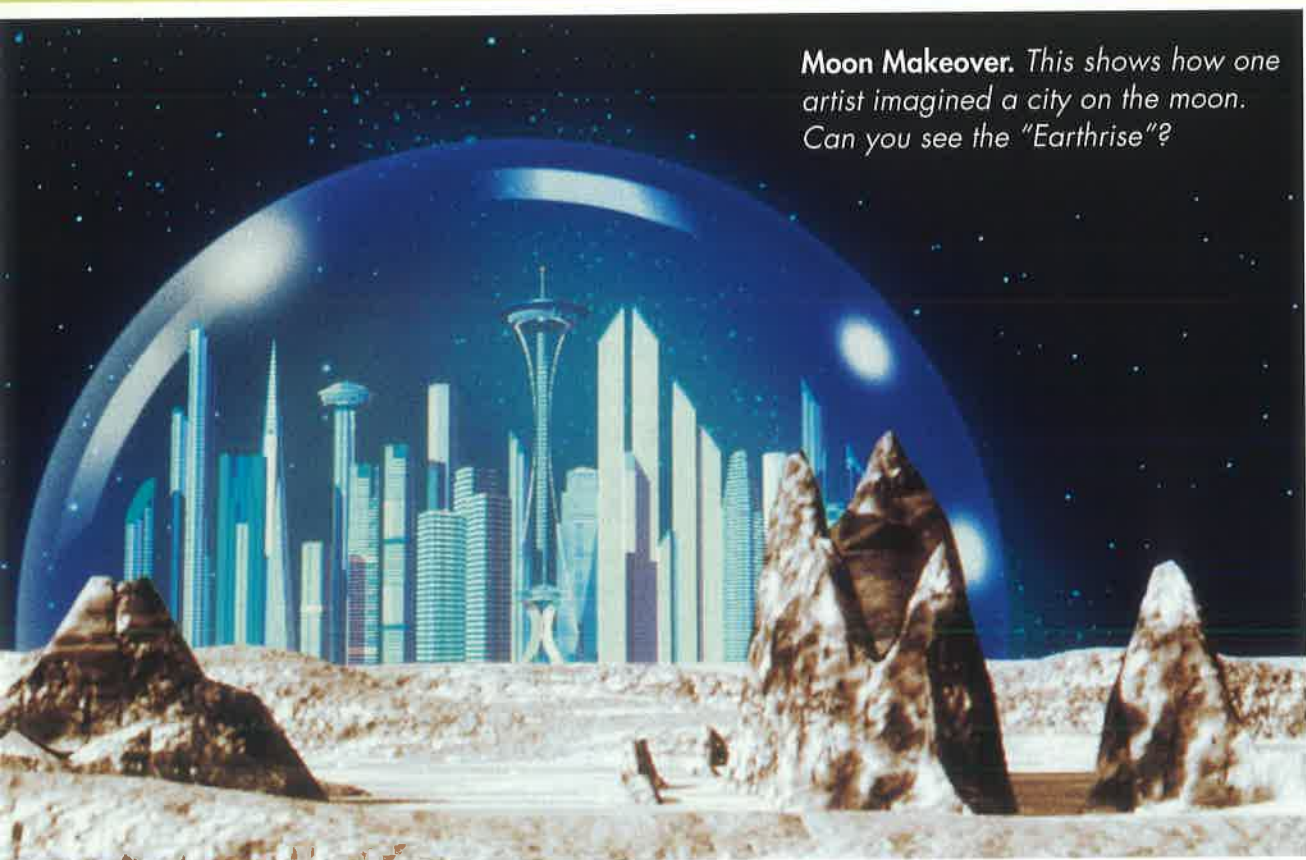
On his wrist, Tracy wore an amazing watch. It had a telephone that he could use anywhere. Even better, it had a two-way television. This meant he could see people while he was talking to them.

The two parts of Tracy's watch—telephone and television—both existed in the 1950s. Yet it took an artist to put them together in a new way.

Slowly, real life caught up with the comics. Today, people have cell phones. Some are even videophones. People also use webcams to see each other while they "talk" over the Internet. As "Dick Tracy" predicted, pieces of what was the present came together later in the future.



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Moon Makeover. *This shows how one artist imagined a city on the moon. Can you see the "Earthrise"?*



Rev It Up. People once thought that jetpacks would soon catch on for everyday travel.

Up, Up, But Not Away

Some people don't stop at imagining the future. They start building it. That happened when people wanted better ways to get around. They made models of machines that would change the world. Or so they thought.

Take the jetpack. It's a backpack that carries a small rocket engine. You put it on, rev it up, and soar. No need to ask for a ride to school or wait for the bus. Real life turned out to be more complicated. Doesn't it always?

For starters, jetpacks couldn't carry much fuel. So the average trip was maybe half a minute. You can't get very far in that time.

Then there were problems with safety. Jetpack fuel can be dangerous stuff. It heats up to about 700° Celsius (1300° Fahrenheit). The roaring engine can also damage your hearing.

Of course, there are some incredible problem solvers in this world. Someday, a clever inventor may come up with a jetpack that truly takes off. It may be a while, though. So you better hold on to your bus pass.

Getting From Here to There

Another invention that flew was the Aerocar. It was a flying car with folding wings. A silly idea, right? But wait! An Aerocar was built in 1949. In fact, six of them were built over the next ten years. They really worked! Still, the idea never caught on. Maybe Aerocars were too hard to land in the driveway.

How about getting rid of cars altogether? In one science fiction story, people jumped onto moving belts to get around. In the 1950s, that may have sounded crazy. But today, you can see "people movers" in airports, escalators in stores, and even moving sidewalks.

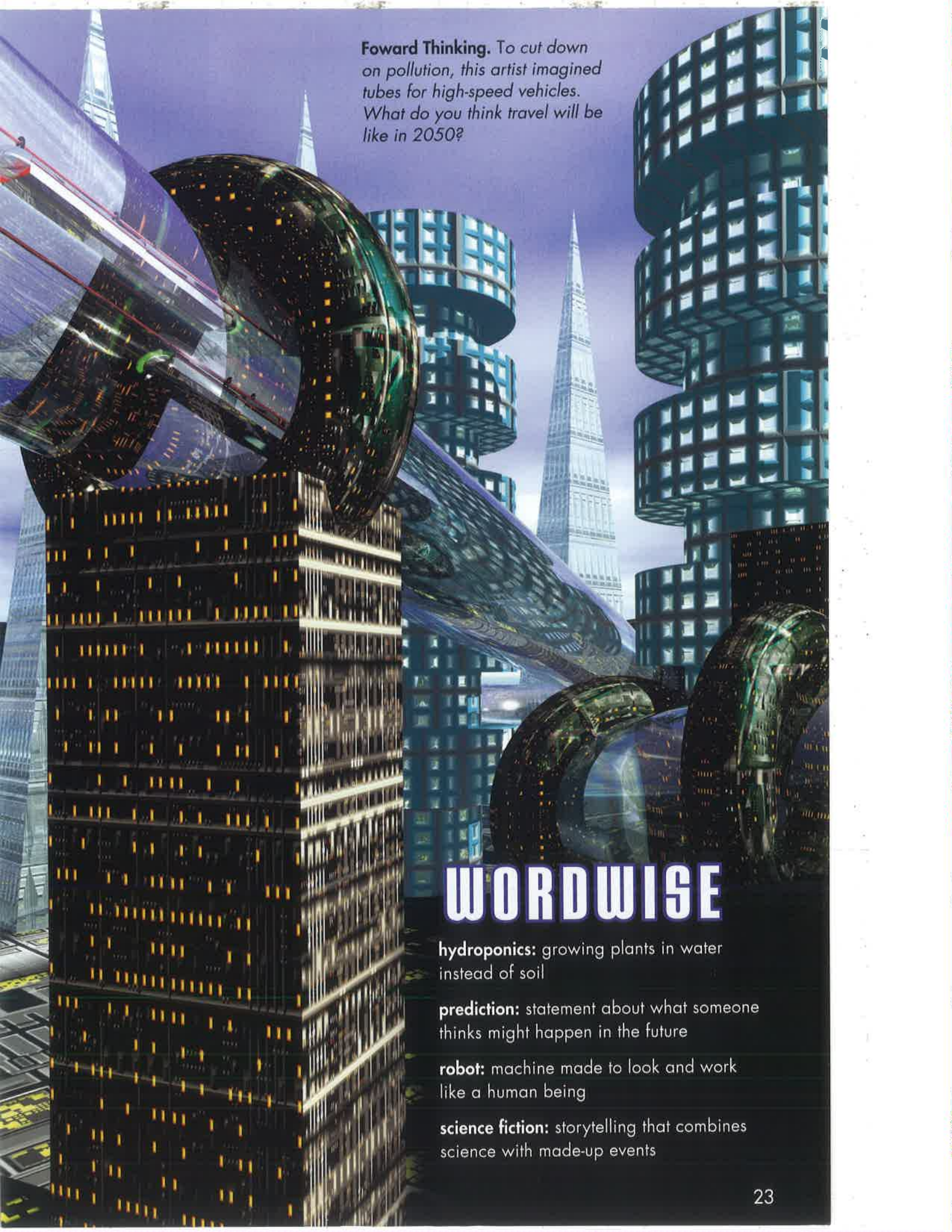
What people really wanted was a smart car. In the 1950s, car companies tried to make cars that drove themselves. No one sat behind the wheel. Instead, someone just pushed a few buttons. The car drove itself. So the whole family could sit in the back seat and play games. Is such a car possible? You can buy a simpler version today. But it will be a while before a totally automated car hits the streets.

Fast Forward

It's hard to think of a world without computers. In 1950, only a few computers existed. They were very large—the size of a room. Few people imagined that computers would become as widespread as they are today. Hey, you can't always get it right!

Then scientists invented the integrated circuit. That's a computer chip. The chips made computers smaller and more popular. Of course, there are now millions of computers in the world.

Okay, the future of the fifties has arrived. Think about *your* future and start dreaming. Will you get to work with a jetpack? Will you download digital books straight into your brain? Invisibility suits and underwater cities are just two things that may be possible. What else? Think big. Think fantastic! The future is yours to invent.



Forward Thinking. To cut down on pollution, this artist imagined tubes for high-speed vehicles. What do you think travel will be like in 2050?

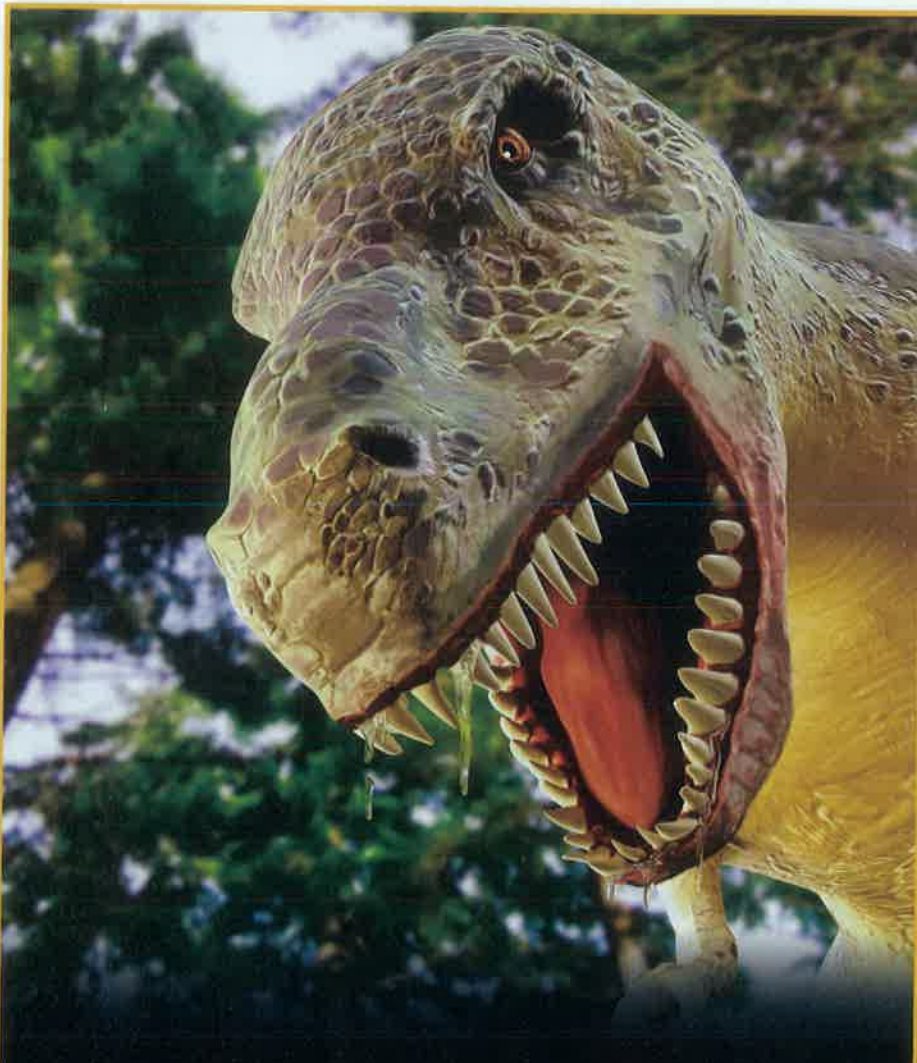
WORDWISE

hydroponics: growing plants in water instead of soil

prediction: statement about what someone thinks might happen in the future

robot: machine made to look and work like a human being

science fiction: storytelling that combines science with made-up events



Coming in May

Dinosaurs in Motion: Find out how scientists work with moviemakers to bring dinosaurs to life.

Pedal Power: A billion people ride bikes. Race into the history of this popular way to get around.

A Glimpse of Gorillas: Get a close-up look at a family of lowland gorillas.

Return to the Moon: Forty years ago, people walked on the moon. Now, NASA has big plans for going back there.

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Cover: A white-spotted *Agrias* butterfly sits on a leaf in Brazil.

(Photo: © Luiz Claudio Morigo/Nature Picture Library)

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