

# space evaders

As a new decade dawns, Sally Feldman is still waiting for that brave new world of self-laundering clothes, warp-speed package holidays and a robot named Hal

**H**ow did it come to this? It's 2010, and we're still wearing clothes we have to use buttons, zips or – for those of us who insist on partaking in extreme adventure travel or living in the American mid-west – Velcro to keep on. What happened to the utopian dream of spray-on, self-cleaning body suits? (The current trend for jumpsuits with nappy-droop doesn't count, no matter how high your heels, diverting your costume jewellery or snake-like your hips.) What of jet-propelled ankle boots and glass-domed cars flying soundlessly between buildings?

What's happened to a future of perfectly formed humans in non-carcinogenic eco-domes being witty and creating cyber-haiku and kinetic art installations, while robots mix cocktails and de-scale the bathroom tiles? Is the peak of human endeavour to be measured by the number of trainers slung over electricity cables?

## Surely warp speed and beaming up aren't difficult to achieve in a century that brought us cheek implants

The only physical evolution we seem to have made can be witnessed in the pages of the weeklies, where the female form is transforming into something uncannily like those creatures that walked down the ramp in *Close Encounters*, give or take the Jimmy Choos.

Most of us managed to get through 1984 without mishap – well, maybe not the Thompson Twins – and to party like it was 1999 without wiping our hard drives, so why has our vision of a more streamlined 21st century come to a grinding halt? Why do buses still come in groups of four? Why hasn't a bicycle yet been designed with a comfortable seat? Why do Australian TV ads still feature shouting people?

As the last plumes of multicoloured smoke faded from yet another fireworks display over: a) the Harbour Bridge; b) Eiffel Tower; c) Times Square, I'm pretty sure 2010 didn't see any of us heading to a bar where staff with eyes on stalks and green skin checked in our thermal-jet blazers (unless we were at the Hard Rock Café, or any other venue that has 'rock' or 'hard' in its signage).

The new decade will still have us eating food – stuff that has to be grown, cooked, fuffed about by 20 pairs of hands in a restaurant kitchen and wielded by wait staff in clothes that look better on them than they'll ever look on us because we eat

too much. And – the final indignity – we'll still have to chew it (unless we've already started our annual liver-cleansing diet).

At home, we'll still be cooking with the aid of such crude implements as food processors and knives – barely a brontosaurus bone away from chips of flint, for heaven's sake. What we *won't* be doing, alas, is blinking into a retina-recognition module to unlock a gleaming cabinet of multi-coloured pills and capsules that simulate sublime renderings of boeuf bourguignon, tarte Tatin or tofu burger (and leave us expertly nourished for our ideal BMI). And while screwcap closures are now ubiquitous, no one, according to my extensive research, has come up with a self-pouring bottle, a hangover that makes you feel better than you did when you went to bed, or a morning-after pill that expunges forever the memory of that rather more earth-bound close encounter.

In 2010, we're still piling into large metal tubes to be flung across the planet in extreme discomfort (fully flat beds notwithstanding), ingratiating ourselves with sullen customs officials and trying in vain to communicate with people whose language we're too lazy to learn, all in the name of broadening our horizons. Surely by now we should be floating blissfully in space to the strains of Strauss, being chucked tenderly under the chin by a super-robot called Hal in a room that looks like it's been decorated by Marie Antoinette's hairdresser. Wasn't the future of travel supposed to entail plugging into a convenient socket and experiencing the world's sensory treasures without leaving the sofa? Surely warp speed and beaming up aren't so difficult to achieve in a century that brought us cheek implants. If the best we can come up with is 3D movies, then we should hang our heads in shame before evolution, in the form of lollipop heads on shrinking bodies, does it for us. **VE+T**



ILLUSTRATION KAT MACLEOD