

Isaac Asimov's predictions of the world in 2014

Predictions made by the writer 50 years ago are all over the Internet. But Asimov wasn't right about everything.

Isaac Asimov was one of the greatest science fiction authors of the last century. In 1964, he wrote an article for the New York Times imagining the world 50 years in the future – in 2014.

Some of his ideas are accurate (for example, he predicts Skype and video-calls). But reading the article reminds you that future technology will always be difficult to predict accurately.

People will continue to live further away from nature. They will create an environment that will suit them better.

Asimov was talking about a world in which it is normal for humans to live underground, with large electronic screens and ceilings.

Modern society, however, still thinks that the natural world is important. For many people, our technology world has made outdoor activities even more valuable.

However, if you think about smartphones, tablets and laptops – which always show us news from our friends, information and entertainment – then you can say that Asimov was right.

Robots will neither be common nor very good in 2014, but they will exist.

Asimov is right, and he even predicts that we will see a large, slow-moving robot cleaner

that is able to pick things up, clean and manipulate different machines.

Specialised robots that work in industry are normal in the modern world.

Vehicles will not be driven by people.

Although these are not common, driverless cars developed by Google are certainly coming in the future. The dull but necessary work of testing their safety and discussing the laws are some of the problems that are currently slowing the cars' progress.

Population pressure will force people to live in desert and polar areas.

His estimate of the world population in 2014 was close (he guessed 6.5 billion and the real number is closer to 7.1bn), but Asimov was wrong about the deserts and polar regions.

In the future, people won't work.

Asimov believed that in 2014, people will not need to work. Instead, machines will do all the work and we will suffer from "the disease of boredom."

In reality, machines are certainly taking human jobs, but there are still a lot of jobs.

Adapted from The Independent, Friday, 03 January 2014, by James Vincent