

Ghosted in the Fourth Dimension

I entered the fourth dimension on my twelfth birthday. A solid month of begging and whining had successfully pressured my mother into buying a 4D-brand headset for my present. It was big and clunky; a visor that strapped to your head, much like a welding helmet.

Angela and Louise were at my house after school every day, taking turns, and wearing out their welcome with my mom. 4D wasn't that popular at first, but we were the class nerds, and jumped all over anything techie.

"Time's up, Ange, hand it over." Louise hovered dangerously close to Angela's wildly swinging arms.

"Just two minutes, Weezy. Give me two minutes and you can have an extra two."

I looked up from my phone. "Then that goes for me, also. What are you doing, Ange?"

"Playing VR handball, but it's pretty bad, kind of like pong. I'm almost done."

"Tara! Your friends are going to have to go home soon!" my mom called from the kitchen.

The 4D world back then was laggy and lacked detail. What little content it had was pixelated and stuck out like special effects from a bad '80s movie, but the basics were there and they were way better than their competition. It was augmented reality, or AR, and virtual reality, VR. The AR used location technologies to plant digital objects in the real world that you could only see through the visor. A digital Ferrari might be parked in your driveway, or a giraffe might be nibbling at your apple tree, but let's be real, I saw more floating car insurance ads than wildlife.

Multi-directional treadmills allowed you to walk in the digital realm of the VR world.

Advanced haptic suits simulated touch through vibration or by applying force. Over time, cameras and laser sensors were installed in public areas to digitize the real world so people could interact with it remotely, from home. Their projected images strolled through the streets and offices in lieu of their flesh.

4D quickly became the most successful tech company and they poured everything they earned back into their creation. The imagery became indistinguishable from the real world. It rocked. The headsets were replaced by light-weight glasses, followed by

Comment [1]: I enjoyed reading this. You do a good job of describing what everyday life with AR and VR might look like, and how these change over time from an optional technology, to a ubiquitous one.

Many of your sentences, especially in the beginning, contain the word "was." This makes them sound more passive. It's a style choice, but removing some of them could give this more punch.

Finally, you cover a lot in two pages. We're introduced to the narrator character, Angela/Ange, Louise/Weezy, Mom, and 4D in the first few hundred words. You give us a micro scene, and then begin describing technological and social change.

It may be more impactful to anchor this in a single scene taking place in "real time" and then have the character think back to past events of how the world got this way.

Comment [2]: I know some people would want this, but isn't being lazier the point with a lot of virtual reality? So now having to walk on a treadmill kind of defeats the purpose. Perhaps mention that those treadmills soon became dusty as people switched to "autowalk" easy mode.

contact lenses. Eventually many people had permanent optical and cochlear implants, but I stuck with the removable lenses and earbuds.

4D pried their way into society and did their best to lock the door so no one could get out. Their social media platform dominated before long, mostly among younger people, followed by older generations. Settings could be adjusted to show a live stream of messages, likes and dislikes all within your vision. It wasn't really my thing, but a bunch of my friends were addicts.

The retail world embraced augmented reality. A fast-food restaurant's menus and interior/exterior décor could be digitized and updated at costs that 4D ensured were too low to pass on. No maintenance, no installation, fewer employees. Of course, they maintained their physical décor and signage for a while, but it was drab and out of date. Grocery stores, big box retailers, and convenience stores all got on board. Customers needed 4D to experience it, so subscriptions soared.

This period was a bit painful. I remember standing in line behind an older guy, who had no 4D access, asking the girl at the till to read off the prices on the menu board that he couldn't see and describe what the burger special looked like.

The virtual reality options cemented their grip on society. Suddenly, experiences that were unavailable or too expensive for the average person were within reach. The average schmo could watch the world heavy-weight championship bout from ringside virtual seats, live. I watched live concerts from the front row. I saw the president take the oath of office from ten feet away. I went to the [Super-Bowl](#), the [World Series](#), the NBA championship final. I watched from a point of view, hovering in mid-air, above the ball. There were unlimited premium seats to sell in the virtual world. No nosebleeds. I couldn't get enough VR and VA because like I said, nerd. It was the bots that unsettled me, but those would come later.