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2081: Looking 100 Years Into Future

WE HAVE barely recovered from the avalanche of predictions that culminated with the Bicentennial, and now we are faced with a new and probably longer series looking toward the 21st century.

Considering changes which have occurred since the Bicentennial, many of which might be classified as progress, we will be asked to believe some wild speculation from here on.

Few of us will be around to check up on predictions made in a new book titled "2081" by Girard K. O'Neill, but it is possible we might see some of his predictions realized before then.

For example, he notes that in 1781 the worldwide standard of passenger travel was the stagecoach, averaging six miles per hour. By 1881 the steam-powered train had stepped this up to 60 mph.

Now in 1981 as many as 20 million people travel routinely at 600 mph and others travel twice that fast. Pointing to speeds used to reach the moon and return, O'Neill predicts that by 2081 humans may be zipping

around at 6,000 mph. Will the 55 mph speed limit go?

In a pronouncement that "Star Wars Weapons May Come True," U.S. News & World Report visualizes outer space becoming a spectacular battleground with space ships orbiting 1,000 miles above Earth.

"The Pentagon is transforming Jules Verne's most exotic vision into new superweapons — magnetic guns that can shoot through virtually anything," the article reports.

"It's sad that space may become just another arena for human conflict," a Defense Department spokesman is quoted, "but we really have no choice but to experiment and get ready."

So there goes the long-heard prediction of humans dwelling in space colonies enjoying the wealth of fabulous resources. The idea is less attractive with deadly laser beams crisscrossing the heavens.

That leaves little choice except to make more room on earth for more people. United Nations experts predict that by the 21st century world population will still be increasing,

but not so fast. When we hit a peak of some 10 billion people on this old planet, most of them still will be living in less developed lands.

Nobody has predicted that people will stop wanting to eat, nor that a substantial proportion of them will stop expecting others to grow their food and deliver it to them.

This brings the U.S. Department of Agriculture into 21st century predictions. USDA says almost one of every three farms will be gone by then, with virtually all food going into commercial marketing channels coming from farms with annual sales above \$100,000 each.

USDA adds that new farmers will need about \$2 million in assets to get started on a farm big enough to generate that kind of production. New farmers mostly will be those who inherit partnerships or shares in highly specialized family farm corporations.

These forecasts are merely samples from current predictions. We dare to predict that many more imaginations will be at work soon trying to outguess the future. If they do, that'll be something!