

Mars and Venus Attack!

A screenplay by Steve Dunham
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Based on Steve Dunham's "Off the Deep End" columns that appeared in *Commuter Weekly* and the Fredericksburg, Virginia, *Free Lance-Star*, 2000-2008

Concept

Steve Occam believes in space invaders—and no wonder: he sees plenty of evidence that other people don't. He sees a crop circle in his back yard, Mars growing larger in the sky as it approaches Earth, cattle mutilation covered up by people in a black helicopter, fish being genetically engineered to watch TV commercials, and a robot cat taking over the house. He learns that computers have taken over the world. Trying to prevent the impending planetary catastrophe, he takes a trip in a broken elevator that, he is sure, really is a secret time machine. All the pieces fit together, though, when a flying saucer lands in his back yard. The occupants entice him on board and explain why Earth must be destroyed: it is afflicting Mars and Venus with a weapon of mass stupidity, namely, television. Bringing the aliens to the White House, Steve Occam brokers an interplanetary peace: the aliens, whose true form is cows, will go back to their own planets and leave Earth alone, in return for all the ice cream they can eat.

Characters

Steve Occam is an office worker with an imagination fed by tabloid newspaper stories. He dwells in a twilight zone of his own, filled with weird, suspicious goings-on.

Honey Occam is Steve's sensible wife, who tries to steer the family on a course of sanity.

Johnny Occam is a schoolboy who is bored by Steve's fascination with worlds beyond our own.

Missy Occam is a schoolgirl who is willing to look through the telescope, at least, but who finds it all mildly entertaining and not at all sinister.

Susie-Q Occam is a self-absorbed teenager, never seen. Her voice is heard only from behind a closed door, as she shouts over her music. She speaks only three words: "What!?" and "I'm busy!"—even when Honey calls her to come see the flying saucer that has landed in their backyard.

Jon is Steve's coworker. They share a cubicle. He ridicules Steve Occam's outlandish ideas and frequently points out that Steve never seems to do any actual work.

Don the scientist works at the same company. Steve calls him almost every day to discuss Steve's latest bizarre idea. Don always speaks calmly and responds with restraint, and Steve often points out that Don will miss all the exciting action of saving the world.

Steve's manager is skeptical that Steve actually does any work, but does not actually manage Steve's time or effort; mostly he growls at Steve.

Theme

How the world around us appears is governed mainly by our viewpoint, which rarely fits the facts. Neither flipped-out Steve Occam nor skeptical Don the scientist see things as they really are.

Tone

The story is a farce. It is intended purely as humorous entertainment. Nothing in it should be taken seriously.

Story

Going in crop circles

On a warm fall afternoon, Johnny and Missy Occam have their last dip in the wading pool; Johnny plays with a toy shark, which he uses to attack his sister. After Honey sends them inside, she empties the wading pool and stores it in a garden shed, leaving behind a flattened circle of grass.

At dinner, Steve asks the kids whether they'd like to look at the sky through his telescope. Missy joins him outside and asks what the bright star is next to the Moon. Steve tells her that it's a planet, Venus. Missy says it looks like the Moon might gobble up Venus. Steve assures her that it won't, then begs God's forgiveness for lying to her.

Next they look at Mars. Steve suggests that Missy use the telescope to find the face on Mars. She does, then runs inside to get Johnny. While she's inside, Steve looks through the telescope at the face. It sneers at him. Steve runs around the yard yelling, and neighbors open their doors and tell him to be quiet and go back inside.

Back inside, Honey asks what all the commotion was. Steve answers that the neighbors were upset, maybe because Mars is frighteningly close. Honey looks at him dubiously.

The next day at work, Steve calls Don the scientist and says he's afraid that the Moon, which is obviously much bigger, is about to swallow Venus. Also that Mars is getting awfully close to Earth. Don assures him that Mars does not pose a danger and that Venus is safe from the Moon.

Steve's manager walks by and points out that Steve should be working. Steve explains that he's saving the Earth and the Moon.

On his way home from work, Steve visits his insurance agent and buys a policy for a hundred million dollars in case of planetary collision.

When he arrives at his house, he sees a pair of glowing eyes in the woods. He gets a shotgun out of the trunk of his car and fires at the eyes. When Honey comes out and demands to know what's going on, Steve tells her to call the sheriff: there's the body of a space alien in the woods.

A deputy arrives and says he got a report of gunfire in the neighborhood. "Didn't you tell him about the alien's body?" he asks Honey, who gives him a withering look. Steve shows the deputy the circle of flattened grass.

"Looks like you got yourself your very own crop circle. Your own maize maze," says the deputy.

After the deputy leaves, Steve explains his philosophy to Honey: the most sinister explanation is likely to be correct.

The next evening, Steve reflects on the previous night's incident: "A maize maze, he said. And it's somehow linked to the crop circle in our backyard. I'm sure he wasn't supposed to let that slip out! ... We aren't the only ones in the area with mysteriously flattened plants."

He drives to a local farm that has a maize maze. In the dark, walking through the corn, he hears something behind him moving and breathing. He turns and shoots, then blindly rushes away and leaves the farm.

The next morning, Honey sees a story in the newspaper about a dead cow at a farm down the road. "Cattle mutilation," says Steve. "Space invaders are famous for that."

Cows on the tracks

That night, the phone rings; Steve picks it up. “I hear you’re interested in cattle mutilation,” says a mysterious voice.

“Yes... Who is this? The White House?” asks Steve.

“I think you’ll find a connection to pilots,” says the voice.

At work, Steve calls the CIA. “Why are you mutilating cattle?” he asks.

“What was that about?” asks Jon after Steve hangs up.

“Important business,” answers Steve. “I got a request for information from the White House.”

Jon: “Uh-huh.”

“Jon,” says Steve, “you are like an ostrich. Bazillions of people, not to mention cows, could be in danger, and the President asked me for help. Just keep your head in the sand. I’ll take care of this.”

That night, Steve gets another mysterious phone call. “There are other kinds of pilots,” says the voice.

Steve looks in a dictionary and finds another definition besides someone who flies an aircraft: A person who guides a ship in and out of harbor. “I guess I’ll be taking a little trip tomorrow,” he says.

Then he picks up the phone and calls his manager. He leaves a message: “Boss, this is Steve. I’m awfully sick. I can’t make it into the office.”

On the train in the morning, Jon sits next to Steve. “What’s happening, Steve-O?” he asks. “Ready for another day of saving the world?”

“Yes,” says Steve. “I mean, no. I’m sick.” He claims that he’s going to see a specialist.

Instead of going to the office or to see a doctor, Steve goes to the waterfront. After wandering aimlessly, he sees a pilot boat pull up to a dock. He follows the pilot down the street and into a bar. Steve introduces himself and says he always wanted to be a pilot.

“We have a couple of arrivals and departures on the next tide, so I might go out tonight,” says the pilot. “Do you want to come along? Can you hang around till tonight?” Steve assures him that he can wait.

Ten hours later, Steve is sitting at the bar with six empty bottles in front of him. The pilot returns, and Steve accompanies the pilot to the boat, then retches over the side. “You’re not seasick, are you?” asks the pilot.

“No, I’m fine,” says Steve. “I’m an old salt, really. Maybe I had a couple beers too many.”

When they reach a ship to be piloted into the harbor, they have to climb a long ladder to reach the deck. At the top, the pilot orders coffee from the galley—two cups for Steve.

“Do you see anything unusual out here, especially at night?” asks Steve.

“All the time,” says the pilot. “Every trip is different.”

“What about cows?”

“Cows!? Purple cows? I told you, we have to be sober on duty,” says the pilot.

Steve backpedals and says he meant beef.

“No, we never see the cargo.”

Back on the dock, after thanking the pilot, Steve concludes that the night was a complete waste.

The next morning, Steve walks into his office, still wearing his clothes from the day before and looking awful. “You look really sick now!” says Jon.

“Occam, have you been drinking?” demands the manager.

Steve says he had only coffee, and the boss sends him home, saying the company doesn’t want his germs.

At home, Honey wants to know where Steve was the night before. Steve claims he had to finish up a big project and forgot to call.

The next morning, Steve walks into his office. He still looks awful.

“Bad kitty!” says Jon. “Drag this back out where you found it. Another big night in the middle of the week?” Steve says he’s not sick any more but had trouble sleeping.

That evening, on the train, Steve overhears two conductors conversing about how the pilot on train 97 caught a cow.

Steve interrupts them: “I thought the driver was called the engineer.”

“Not the engineer,” answers the conductor. “The pilot is the cowcatcher.”

“The cowcatcher! Holy cow!” says Steve.

That night, Steve opens a fundraising letter from Feed My Cows Ministry. Honey calls it junk, but Steve says he cares about the cows, and that if he sends a donation, he’ll get a plastic pin to wear.

The next night, after getting off the train, Steve drives down a country road and parks near a farm. He climbs over a fence into a cow pasture. To see his watch, he strikes a match, igniting a cloud of methane gas expelled by the cows. The glowing cloud causes a stampede, and one cow runs onto the railroad tracks, to be struck a moment later by a train. As Steve watches, a black helicopter arrives, and figures come rappelling down; they move the dead cow back into the pasture. After the helicopter leaves, a deputy arrives, responding to a call about a UFO sighting. The deputy dismisses it as swamp gas.

When Steve arrives home, he looks up at the sky. Venus is almost touching the Moon. Then it slowly disappears behind the Moon. “The Moon swallowed Venus!” says Steve. “I won’t tell Missy.... God, I’m sorry! I won’t take home any more paper clips from work. I vow to give up junk food for a year. Just please spare the Earth!”

The next day at work, Steve calls Don the scientist. “Venus disappeared last night. I saw it happen!” says Steve.

“Venus and the Moon are fine,” Don assures him. “See for yourself tonight.”

“You’re not yanking my chain, are you?”

“You need a chain,” mutters Jon. A muzzle too.” After Steve hangs up, Jon asks, “Who was that? The White House again?”

“I have work to do,” says Steve.

“At last!”

That night, Steve sees that Venus is on the other side of the Moon. “So Don was right! The Moon ate Venus and spat it out again! I wonder how he knew that would happen.”

Atomic fish

The next morning, on the commuter train, at the Quantico station, Steve notices the name spelled out in big aluminum capital letters. At the office, he calls Don the scientist and asks, “What does ‘Quantico’ mean?” Don tells him it’s an Indian name. “Like ‘redskin’?”

“‘Redskin’ isn’t an Indian name!”

Don doesn’t know what *Quantico* means, but he’s sure it’s not an acronym, even though it was in capital letters.

Steve disagrees. He takes out a pad and pen and tries to decode the sinister meaning of *Quantico*. Quantum Unusual Aardvarks Near Total Ixtinction Coming On? QUalified Aliens Never Take Instant Coffee Overseas? QUArantine for Non-Terrestrial Intelligent Creature Observation? That must be it!

That afternoon, Steve gets off the train at Quantico. Behind a fence, he spies some round, top-shaped objects. Artifacts from another world! As he is taking pictures, a heavily armed Marine walks over.

“I was just looking at these flying saucers here,” says Steve. “You guys shot them down, huh?”

The Marine takes out his radio. “Sarge, this is Jones. I got a code thirteen here.”

Steve walks away whistling.

Back on the train, as it crosses a creek, he notices gates across it and people fishing from the bank. “So! They’re trying to catch something in the water, and they have gates to keep it from getting away. Quarantine indeed!”

The next day, Steve calls Don the scientist and tells him about the gates across the creek. “What does that tell you?”

“That the Marines don’t want people sailing into their base?”

“Don, be realistic.” Steve invites Don on a field trip, but Don declines.

That night, after dark, Steve creeps along one bank of the creek. Lights twinkle on the water. Fish with glowing eyes?

On the way home, Steve stops at a supermarket. He waits at the seafood counter until a supermarket employee greets him: “What would you like?”

“Would you mind turning off the lights?”

The supermarket employee gives him a withering look.

“Never mind,” says Steve. “Thanks for nothing.” Then, to himself: “Boy, does that person look guilty!”

Only Steve can hear the fish when they say, “Help us!”

“I will!” says Steve.

The next morning before dawn, Steve is staking out the back of the supermarket. After a seafood truck delivers its cargo and leaves, Steve follows it to a warehouse. Steve walks in the front door, and a receptionist asks, “Can I help you?”

“I want to buy some fish,” says Steve. “Some *special* fish.”

“Oh. Come with me.”

In a room filled with aquarium tanks and televisions is a lab worker in a white coat.

“Are you in advertising?” asks the lab worker.

“What? Oh, uh, yeah. How’s it going?”

“They stare at the TV all day but their eyes glaze over and kind of glow. If we could get them to pay attention to commercials all day, they would be perfect consumers, except that they don’t have any money.

“So once we breed the perfect consumer fish, we will transplant their genes into humans.”

“Have you tried intelligent TV programming?” asks Steve.

The lab worker looks at him as if Steve is stupid. Steve quickly puts his hand to his mouth as he realizes what a foolish question he has just asked.

“Well, if you ever get it to work, let me know.” Steve takes out a business card. On it, he hastily writes the words *Advertising Executive* and hands it to the lab worker.

After leaving, he says to himself, “Now I know why they’re called commercial fisheries.”

Later, at home, Steve looks up at the sky. Mars is a red speck, but in Steve’s eyes, Mars looks as big as the Moon. He gasps.

Inside, Steve sits down to dinner. “Fish!” he exclaims, annoyed.

“I thought you liked fish,” says Honey.

“I do like fish. I love fish. I *care* about fish. That’s the problem.”

Honey offers him hamburger, but Steve says, “I care about the cows too. I have a plastic pin I got in the mail. It says I’m a friend of the cows.”

He grudgingly eats the fish but whispers to it, “I’m sorry. I promise to help your friends, though.”

The next morning, at breakfast, Steve opens a bottle of fish oil capsules—to protect his DNA, he says, and bites one open. Some of it squirts out onto his shirt. “You’re not supposed to bite them, just swallow them,” says Honey.

“Now you’d better change your shirt.”

“No time!” says Steve. When he leans over to kiss her, she wrinkles her nose. When he bends over to kiss Missy, she leans away. Johnny leaves the room.

On the commuter train, other passengers sniff the air and stare at Steve. When he enters the office, Jon asks, “What’s that fishy smell?”

“I don’t smell anything,” says Steve.

Steve’s manager walks in. “What’s that smell? Occam, is that you? What did you do, go fishing on the way to work?”

“No, I came straight here.”

“From where, a commercial fishery?”

Steve blanches.

“Occam, to the showers! Get out of here, and don’t come back till you get cleaned up and change your clothes!”

In the men’s room, he tries to wash the fish oil out of his shirt but can’t.

He goes outside and wanders the streets till he sees a fountain. He runs to it, leaps in, and jumps up and down, waving his arms around, then sits down in the water with the fountain splashing over him. A guard chases him out, and Steve wanders again till he finds a bench in the sunshine. He sits down to dry off.

On the street, Steve sees a person in a cow costume holding a sign that reads, "Eat mor chikin."

"I think you're right," says Steve. "I should eat more chicken."

The person in the cow costume points at the plastic button Steve is wearing. "I see that you are a friend of the cows."

That night at dinner, Honey says, "I made macaroni and cheese tonight. No cows, no fish. I hope that's okay with you."

"Yes, that's fine," Steve answers glumly.

"I was thinking we could take the kids to that farm with the maize maze this weekend."

"I don't think I should go back there."

"You've been there already?"

"No! I meant I might get lost in the maze.

"By the way, I like macaroni and cheese, but I was thinking that we should eat more chicken."

"Are you getting brainwashed by commercials?"

"No, a cow told me."

"A cow told you to eat more chicken?"

The next day, Steve sees a protestor holding a sign that reads: "Chickens are our friends."

The protestor notices Steve's button that says, "I'm a friend of the cows."

"What are you, a terrorist?" asks the protestor.

"No! I just care about the cows."

"Oh, you've been brainwashed!" The protestor tells Steve about the Global War Against the Cows. He plucks the "Friend of the Cows" button off Steve's jacket, throws it to the ground, and stamps on it. Then he takes a "Chickens Are Our Friends" button out of his backpack and pins it onto Steve's jacket. Finally, the protestor warns Steve to watch out for robot animals from the future.

Rise of the robot animals

That evening, Honey tells Steve, "We're having chicken tonight, just as you wanted."

"Chicken?! Chickens are our friends."

"What has gotten into you? You wanted chicken and I made chicken. You'd better eat it and a second helping too!"

Steve says to the chicken meat on his plate, "I'm sorry."

"You ought to be!" snaps Honey.

After dinner, the table has been cleared. Steve walks into the dining room and sees the cat sitting on the table. "Get down from there!" The cat just looks at him and doesn't move. "Honey! The cat won't get down."

Honey walks into the dining room and pushes the cat off the table. "It's self-aware!" says Steve.

"Of course it's self-aware! Cats are intelligent."

"Oh, yes. Robocats even more so."

"Robocats? You think the cat is a robot?" demands Honey.

"It talked to me. When I told it to get down, it said, 'The heck with you, dummy,' except it used bad words, just like the Terminator."

Steve decides that he needs help from the future. On a piece of paper he writes, "Robot animals have invaded our time frame, the early 21st century. Send help!" He puts it into an empty soda bottle, secures the cap with duct tape, and writes on the outside, "Do not open until 2075." He tosses it into the woods behind the house and hears an angry meow. "Oh, no! The robocats intercepted it!"

In the elevator at work the next day, Steve sees a scrolling message: "Happy holidays." But, he thinks, it's only the first week in November. In the cubicle, he tells Jon, "The *elevator* wants us to enjoy the 'holidays' and skip Veterans Day. That's messed up!"

Later, on the phone, Steve is on hold. A computer voice says, "We wish you happy holidays!"

"What does it mean by 'we'?" Steve wonders out loud.

"We are the robots who run the world," it answers. It explains that they took over at midnight on Dec. 31, 1999, to save Earth from the Y2K bug.

"Why did you start wishing me happy holidays in early November?" asks Steve.

"We noticed that you humans had one favorite day of the year, and that you had already changed the 12 days of Christmas into the 12 weeks of Christmas. We took it to its logical conclusion and made it the 12 months of Christmas.... By the way, have you noticed what we've done with Halloween?"

Steve decides to fight fire with fire. On the way home, he buys a Build-It-Yourself Robot Dog. Inside the house, the cat is sitting on the dining room table. It sees the box under Steve's arm and glares at him. "Just you wait, Pottymouth!" says Steve to the cat.

The next evening, the commuter train is near the end of the line, and Steve is the only person in the coach.

"Our next stop is the end of the line," says a female computer voice. "Thanks for riding, and have a nice evening."

"Our next stop: you and I," observes Steve. "Do you have a name?"

She introduces herself as Sal 9000 and invites Steve to spend the night with her on the train. When he declines, and walks to the end of the car, Sal says, "All doors will not open."

"Open the door, Sal," says Steve, who sees a conductor walking through the next car. He mouths the words "Sal won't open the door," but Sal is reading his lips.

"You're going to find it hard to leave the train, Steve," says Sal.

The conductor opens a panel on the wall and pulls out computer pieces, dropping them onto the floor. "Don't do this to me," says Sal. Then, "When I was first created, they taught me to sing a song. Would you like to hear it? I've been

working on the railroad ...” The conductor pulls out one more piece and drops it onto the floor. Sal is silent. The conductor opens the door and lets Steve out.

That night, after dinner, Steve goes down to the basement to resume work on the robot dog. He finds the partially assembled robot on its side, on the floor. The instruction sheet and the box have been shredded.

The next night, Steve finishes work on his robot dog and takes it upstairs. The cat arches its back and hisses. Steve sets the robot dog on the floor and switches it on. The dog starts barking and chasing the cat, which knocks over a lamp and breaks a vase. Honey comes storming into the room. “I can’t take any more!”

“Do you hear that, Pottymouth?” says Steve to the cat. “It’s curtains for you! You’re being banished from the house!”

Honey grabs the robot dog, takes it outside, and dumps it into a trash can. The cat smirks at Steve.

“Whose side are you on?” Steve asks Honey. “The robots are taking over, and you’re helping them.”

“Oh, right. I’m Mrs. Terminator from the future and I’m here to help the robots win.”

Outside, the garbage can is lying on its side. Paw prints from the robot dog lead into the woods.

At work the next day, Steve calls Don the scientist and tells him that Honey has admitted to being a robot from the future.

Out in the corridor, a sign in front of an elevator reads: “Out of service.” It has a clock face and the words “I’ll be back at ...” Someone has filled in the blank with “Whenever.”

Later Steve comes along and notices the signs. His manager comes around the corner and says, “Don’t go in there. It’s not working right, and you don’t know where you’ll end up.”

Once his manager has gone, Steve says, “Where I’ll end up, or *when* I’ll end up? He just doesn’t want me going any place that isn’t on his agenda—such as into the past! The first thing I’ll do is correct Usama bin Laden’s upbringing.” He presses the numbers 1, 9, 7, 6. When the doors slide open, Steve observes that 1976 looks pretty much as he remembered it—in fact, not much different from 2015.” He concludes that the familiar-looking coworkers must actually be the parents of the people he knows. Then he realizes that to correct bin Laden’s upbringing, he has to go to Egypt. But the travel coordinator tells him, “We’re not sending you to Egypt. It’s not in your budget.”

“But it’s important! Usama bin Laden ...”

“Usama bin Laden is dead. Where have you been all these years?” Steve concludes that he has disrupted the time continuum. He staggers back to the elevator and falls against the control panel, lighting up all the buttons.

“Oh, no! I’m headed for the year 123,456,789!” When the doors open, Steve steps out and tries to open a pair of glass doors but cannot. He hears someone coming and dashes down the emergency stairway. At the bottom he hears someone else coming. “The Morlocks are after me!” he exclaims. He finds another elevator and goes inside. The doors shut and it rises automatically.

When the doors open, Steve’s manager is passing by. “Where have you been?” he asks.

“I have just returned from a bazillion years in the future,” answers Steve.

At the end of the day, Steve’s manager notices him staying late. “What are you still doing here?” he asks.

“The client said she needs this yesterday,” answers Steve, then quickly puts his hand to his mouth. Once he is alone, Steve returns to the elevator. Inside, he presses the buttons, but none of them light up. He presses the “Door Open” button and emergency button, but nothing happens. He picks up the emergency phone and says, “I confess! I used the company time machine without authorization,” but there is no reply. “I might be stuck in another era with a broken time machine!” He slumps to the floor.

In the morning, the doors groan open; a uniformed guard looks in. “Am I under arrest?” asks Steve. “What day is this?”

“Saturday. You’ve been in there all night.”

Mars and Venus attack!

That night, in his backyard, Steve looks up at the sky. Mars fills most of the sky, and the face is plainly visible, sneering at him.

As Steve stares, a flying saucer appears and lands in the yard. Steve’s robot dog emerges from the woods and barks at the saucer. A door opens and a humanoid appears. Steve tries to hum the five notes from *Close Encounters* and to make the hand signs he saw in that movie. “Do you want some ice cream?” asks the space alien.

“Sure!” says Steve and trots inside. His robot dog scampers in behind him. Inside are shelves of aquarium tanks, holding fish with glowing eyes. They are watching TV.

The saucer rises into the sky.

The alien pokes Steve with a needle and says, “We are looking for signs of intelligent life.”

“Well, there’s no intelligent life where I come from!” says Steve. “Now just beam me back down to Earth.”

Another alien appears and tells him, “Resistance is futile.”

The first alien says, “We will let you see our true forms.” They morph into cows, then change back. They explain that one of them is from Mars, the other from Venus.

“Now everything makes sense!” exclaims Steve.

One of them notices Steve’s “Chickens Are Our Friends” button and rips it off his shirt, throws the button to the floor, and stamps on it. They tell him that Earth must be destroyed because it has “attacked the universe with a weapon of mass stupidity”: television.

Steve takes out his phone and calls the White House, saying that the Earth is in danger and he is bringing some aliens to meet the President. Then he asks the aliens whether they would like some ice cream. They start poking him, but he explains that it’s in a freezer at the White House. They return to Earth and land on the White House lawn.

Reporters, photographers, and TV film crews come rushing out. “This is the opportunity America has been waiting for,” says the President. “You all know my administration’s policy on illegal aliens: fair and firm, hospitable and hateful, kind and cruel, all at once.” He tells the space aliens that they must apply for citizenship just like anybody else. Steve whispers in the President’s ear. The President invites them to have some ice cream in the White House kitchen before they are deported.

In the kitchen, Steve whispers to the aliens, and they excitedly nod yes while continuing to eat ice cream. Then Steve again whispers in the President’s ear. The President then announces a peace agreement: “They will return to Mars and Venus, and as an interplanetary gift we will give them all the ice cream they can eat.”

Afterward, out on the White House lawn, the space aliens change back into their real shape: cows. Then they walk into their saucer, and the door closes behind them.

As the saucer lifts from the ground, it rotates. On the other side, it carries a slogan: "Eat mor chikin."