

# Green Skies

A man is picking grapes. One bunch of the luscious purple fruit at a time, his basket grows heavier. He looks down. His feet are strapped to a gradually rising hoverboard. Thousands of yards below him, a green carpet stretches out, interspersed with tiny houses and tiny gray roads. Miniature cars crawl like ants. The grapevine plummets down, down, down, until it can no longer be seen.

He looks up. A massive, oblong platform hangs suspended in the air above his head, the underside thick with verdure. The grapevine soars above his head and disappears into the floating object.

The year is 2028.

Welcome to the future.

Juan Rodriguez owns Cloud Farm, a vast hoverboard - 1,000 by 800 feet - that soars a mile above the forests of Minnesota. "One of our biggest crops is grapes," says Rodriguez as he gazes over a sea of gently waving corn stalks. "We suspend trellises from the hoverboard that stretch almost to the ground. Of course, we can't get a single vine to grow a mile high. To get over that problem, we place small platforms every ten feet on the trellis. Each platform contains a new grapevine. We have over a hundred of these lattices hanging from the farm. I sometimes pick

grapes myself. It's unbelievably surreal to be standing on a hoverboard, hanging onto the trellis with one hand and picking grapes with the other, and knowing that I'm working at a job a whole mile higher than it was performed just ten years ago."

"As for the bottom of the farm," says Rodriguez with a laugh, "Now that's where it gets interesting. Our shade-loving plants - lettuce and carrots - we transplant upside-down on the underside of the farm after sprouting them on the top. We have a metal mesh stretched over the soil, preventing it from falling out. Watering the plants can get pretty interesting. I sometimes go help the men. We have spigots with hoses attached hanging from the bottom of the farm. Picture men standing on little hoverboards, 5,000 feet above Earth, spraying water above their heads with hoses and trying desperately not to flip their hoverboard over. Of course, such things do sometimes happen. In that case, dozens of other guys drop whatever they're doing, rush over to where he is - dangling upside-down from his hoverboard, its engines pumping hard in reverse and blasting air in his face - and flip him right-side up again. Everyone laughs, except the guy who got flipped. He generally quits his job right then.

"Then we grow crops on the top of Cloud Farm, of course," says Rodriguez. "Corn, as you can see. The process is about the same as on the ground, only the machines we use here are smaller. Our seeds, water, machinery, pretty much everything is delivered by helicopter. I have my own personal chopper. That's necessary for the owner of an aerial farm. In fact, all my hands have to know how to fly a helicopter.

“Then there are the storms. A mighty black anvil piles up in the sky, enveloping the farm. Lightning splits the sky; thunder crashes. It’s a good thing we have a lightning rod, because the farm is struck multiple times every thunderstorm. We need to wear heavy-duty earplugs because of the thunder. The wind howls over the thrashing corn. Trellises are often carried away. Rain pours in torrents. After a few hours, nature has expended its fury and we remove our earplugs and continue our work like nothing happened - unless we need to do repair work. Once, one of the giant rotors gave out and the farm began dangerously tilting. We had to rush into an emergency operation and ended up cutting the power supply to another motor so that the farm came back into balance. But it was still sinking - very slowly, but still sinking. It took us seven hours to get the rotor fixed. By then, we were less than a thousand feet from the ground and most of our trellises were destroyed. That year was disastrous financially, but the farm normally runs a good profit.”

The year is 2028.

This is farming.

Welcome to the future.