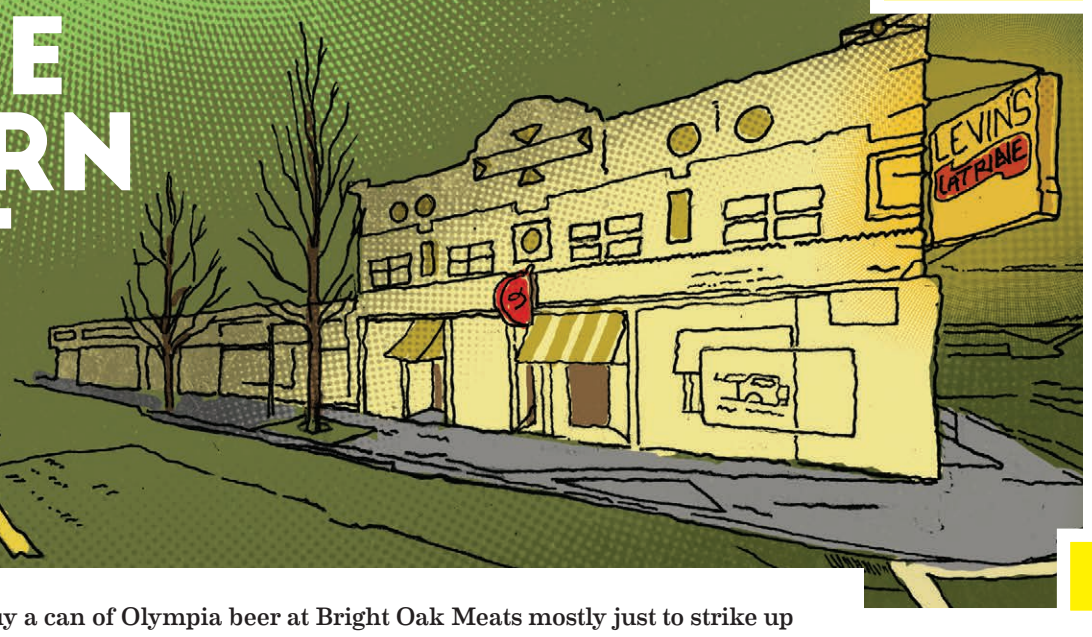
ALL QUIET ON THE EASTERN FRONT

Groping in the dark for Springfield's slowing pulse

By Ben Ricker



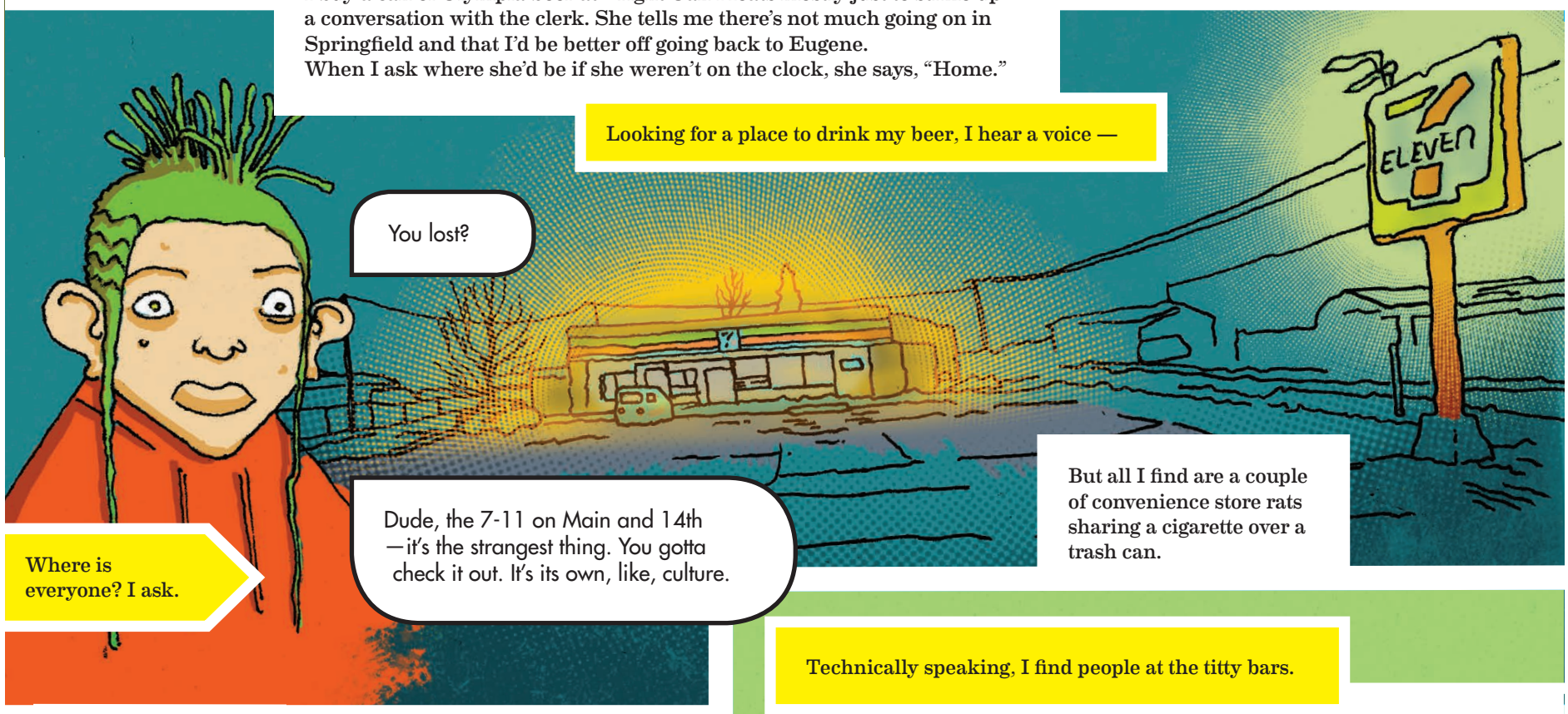
What's up with Springfield?

Rumor has it, Eugene's scrawny, hardscrabble counterpart is fast becoming a nightlife hotspot. But the streets are dark and empty on Saturday night. There's nobody around. I barge in on a "supper club" at Claim 52's The Abbey, where a small flock of clean-cut types gather around a table to sip craft-made half-beers. The folk duo onstage at the Growler Underground almost outnumbers its audience.

It's kinda depressing.

I buy a can of Olympia beer at Bright Oak Meats mostly just to strike up a conversation with the clerk. She tells me there's not much going on in Springfield and that I'd be better off going back to Eugene. When I ask where she'd be if she weren't on the clock, she says, "Home."

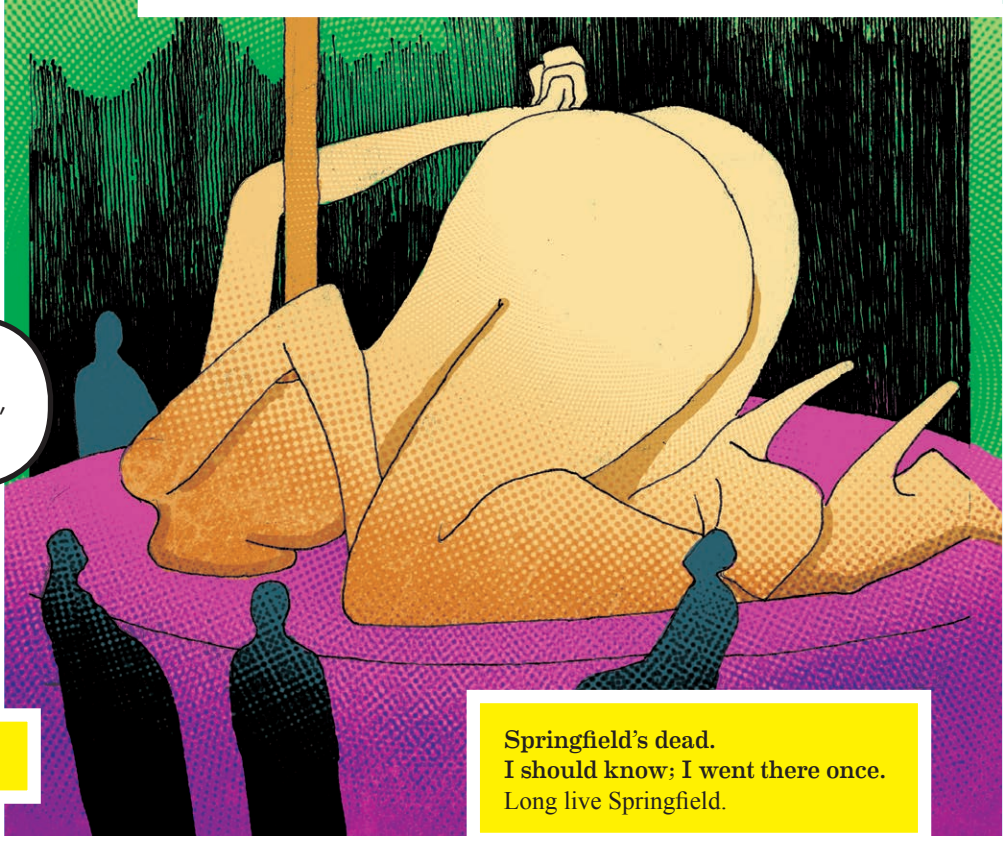
Looking for a place to drink my beer, I hear a voice —



But all I find are a couple of convenience store rats sharing a cigarette over a trash can.

Technically speaking, I find people at the titty bars.

Spyce Gentlemen's Club and the Brick House are packed. I'm left with the impression that the only souls enjoying themselves in Springfield are slouched around a pit, throwing cash at naked women who will climb right into your lap if it means another couple bucks.



Zigzagging aimlessly through town, I hear Steve Winwood's voice coming from a shitty boom box somewhere nearby. I follow it to the Willamalane Adult Activity Center, where I find a half-dozen homeless folks resting outside. After dark, the homeless don't necessarily want some weird geek drawing extra attention their way. But I begin to make friends after offering to share my Olympia.

They tell me everyone's at the strip clubs.

Springfield's dead.
I should know; I went there once.
Long live Springfield.