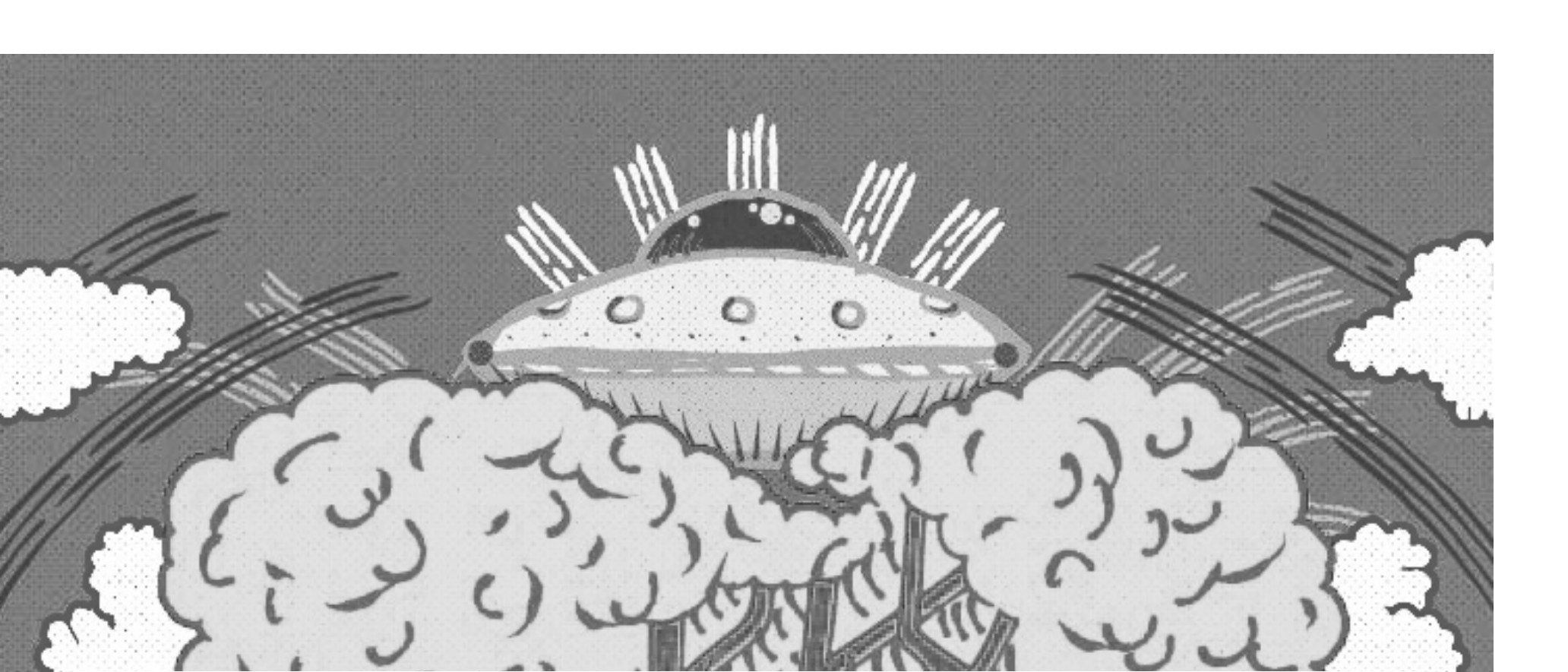




THE WORLD'S GREATEST CITY FOR THE ARTS AND OUTDOORS

Cultural inspectors Floomf and Schmorple come to Eugene

When Floomf and Schmorple descended upon Earth, it was for one specific reason: To investigate a claim made by the city of Eugene in the early aughts.

The two were inspectors for the highly regarded Associated Stars Systems for Cross-cultural Outerspace Propagation (ASSCOP) located in the Boopz Galaxy, and their satellite scanner had intercepted the message:

Eugene is *The World's Greatest City for the Arts and Outdoors*.

As civil servants, Floomf and Schmorple drew the line between mere puffery and valid bragging rights throughout the known universe. Their "WORLD'S GREATEST" file was bursting with "confirmed" and "denied" claims.

Floomf and Schmorple landed at City Hall. Bouncing out of their zipzip spacecraft, the inspectors peered upon an expanse of gravel, a sign interrupting their view: "Site of Future City Hall."

"Brilliant," Floomf said, shaking his purple head in disbelief. "Wasn't it the great Camus who said: 'We need the sweet pain of anticipation to tell us we are really alive'? Anticipation is better than realization. Best to let the citizens of Eugene let this play out in their imaginations indefinitely."

Schmorple blinked widely. "Future is always bright," he beeped and nodded.

Floomf took out a sheet of star stickers and placed a silver one neatly in a check box on his clipboard.

The inspectors bounced east, weaving through downtown. Floomf pointed out the uniquely Eugene architecture to Schmorple.

"A groundbreaking combination of concrete and stucco," Floomf said, pointing out the gray civic buildings, omnipresent parking structures and the monolithic cultural center. "They're like storm

clouds on the ground. See how they're all mossy, yellowed and stained? It takes decades to develop an earthy patina like that. Blipsters from Boopz would pay a fortune for that distressed vintage look."

Floomf scribbled excitedly on his clipboard: "Pacific Northwest Brutalism."

Schmorple squawked and burped, flapping his fingered tail at the low skyline.

"You're right, you're always right Schmorple," Floomf said. "A new school of design seems to have emerged as well — sparkling tin boxes, like Minimalist gerbil cages, but for humans! How divine."

Floomf put down two gold stars in a check box.

"Where to next?" Schmorple beeped.

"The Park Blocks," Floomf said. "According to city government, this is officially where the Arts and Outdoors become one. They called it the gem of the city."

Arriving at the northeast block, Floomf and Schmorple bumped into another sign — "Site of Future Farmers Market."

"Clever bastards!" Floomf howled in delight. "They've done it again."

While Floomf was adding another star to his sheet, Schmorple bounced to the Park Blocks' solitary bits of grass, two small green soul patches in a sea of concrete. He rolled around on his plumed belly in one patch, gurgling with delight.

"And look Schmorple! A parking lot!" Floomf said, grinning, his tubular ears swaying in the breeze. "Get it? The *Park Blocks* have *parking*."

Before Floomf could reach for another sticker, a goateed gentleman in khakis stepped up behind him and started murmuring "win-win, win-win."

"Pardon?" Floomf said.

"I'm a Very Official Officer from the city of Eugene," said the Khaki Man. "And we want it to go down on the record, intergalactically, that all Eugene scenarios are win-win, no matter who loses."

"Makes sense," Floomf said, nodding slowly.

"Just like our Win-Win City Square," said the Khaki Man, pointing southwest. "Take a look and surely you will mark it in your files as win-win."

Floomf and Schmorple wobbled like Jello-O in place.

"World's Greatest?" Schmorple beeped.

"Yes, that's right, very good," said the Khaki Man.

"So," said Floomf. "Could you also direct us to the river?"

"You can't get there from here," the Khaki Man cackled, turned and walked away.

The inspectors shrugged and bounced down to

Win-Win Square. They had read in their Eugene file that it was a civil place where literary greats were honored.

And so it was! There stood a life-size, flesh-colored plastic mold of Nicholas Sparks (author of *The Notebook*) getting a piggyback ride from Marcus Mariota, surrounded by poured concrete. Above the concrete sat a sparkling tin-box apartment — wrapped with a ticker that flashed "Win-Win-Win-Win-Win" and then "VACANCY."

"I love me some Sparks," Floomf said, peeling off three golden star stickers and triumphantly sticking them in another check box. "Did you know he's the first author to sell his e-books, and bring readers to tears, in every market of the universe?"

Schmorple beeped excitedly and pointed to a little golden plaque in the concrete. "Past Site of Kesey Square. 'Never Give an Inch,' — *Ken Kesey*." "Who's Ken—"

"Share the road dickheads!" a veiny little guy on a fixed gear snarled, hocking a loogie at Schmorple and Floomf as he biked past. Floomf and Schmorple blinked and wiped their faces, laughing.

"Classic artsy-outdoorsy type," Floomf said.

A woman in khakis hurried around the concrete slab "square."

"Excuse me," Floomf called out. "Where is art?"

"Art?! Well we used to have galleries, museums and such, but they shut down when they weren't deemed 'Win-Win,'" the Khaki woman said. "But there's a Former Artists and Gallery Owners support group that meets at the church every Tuesday if you're interested."

"Thanks," Schmorple beeped.

"So," said Floomf. "How do we get to the river?"

"No one knows," she said, suddenly eyeing them suspiciously. Floomf and Schmorple could hear her yell out "Get a job," while she rounded the corner.

Floomf and Schmorple wobbled some more.

After eight days of searching, dirtied, bruised and tired but hopeful, the inspectors tumbled onto the bank of the river. There a sign stood: "Future Site of Riverfront."

"Those Earthling wizards have outdone themselves!" Floomf said, tickled pink. "To the future!"

"Yes," Schmorple beeped. "Eugene will always have bright future."

With that, Floomf put away his stickers and took out a rubber stamp and slammed it down on the Eugene claim: CONFIRMED.

They bounced back to their zipzip spacecraft and blasted off, excited to share the news with ASSCOP. — *Schmangela Buttz*