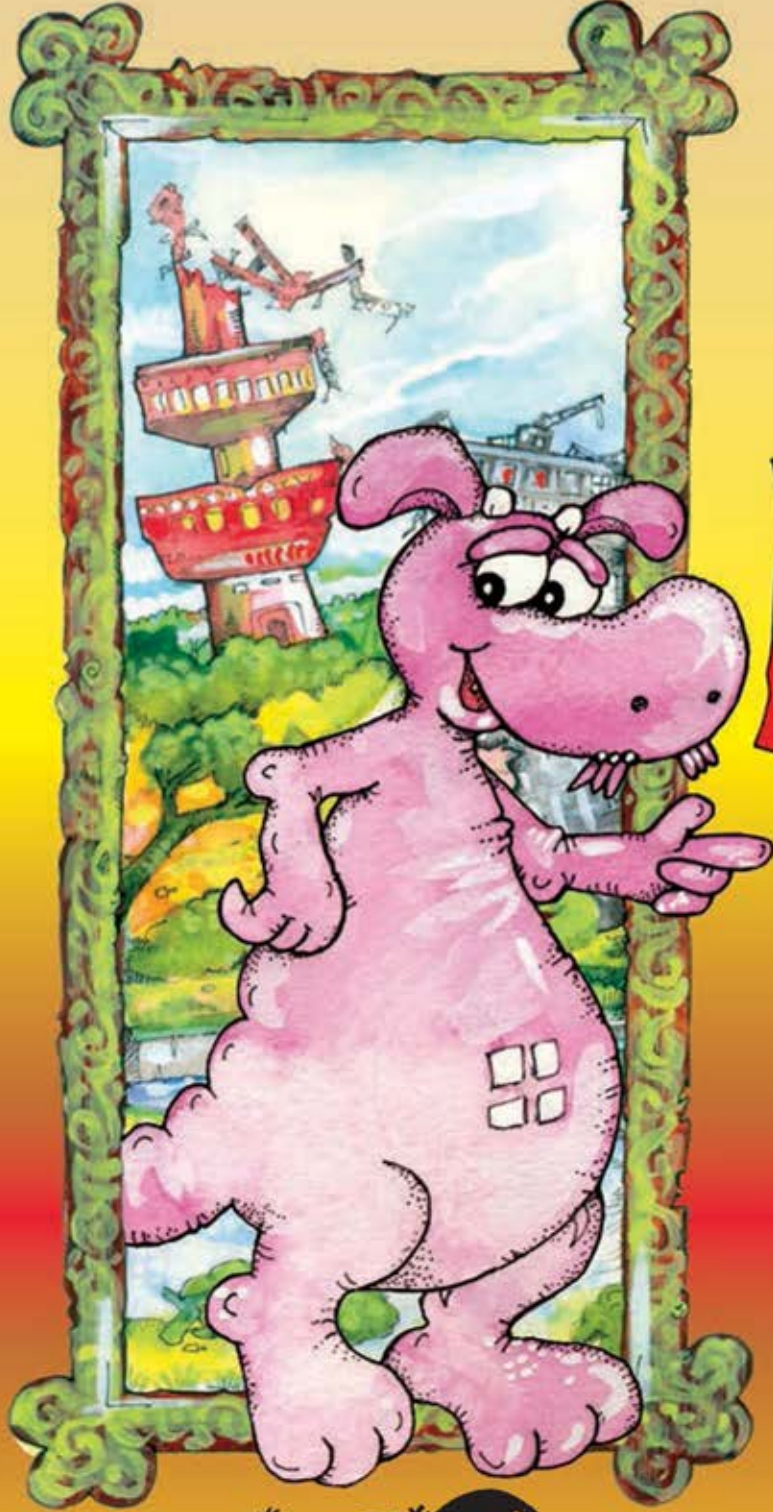


Michael Salmon

# THE MONSTER that ATE CANBERRA



**THE BUNYIP  
IS BACK!**



Australian Government  
National Capital Authority

**BASED ON THE  
ORIGINAL ALEXANDER  
BUNYIP BOOK**  
first published in 1972



# THE ALEXANDER BUNYIP STORY

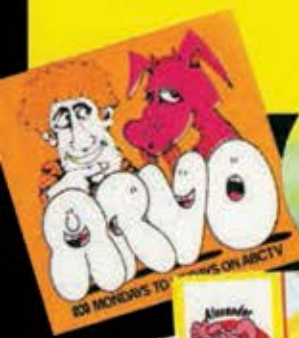
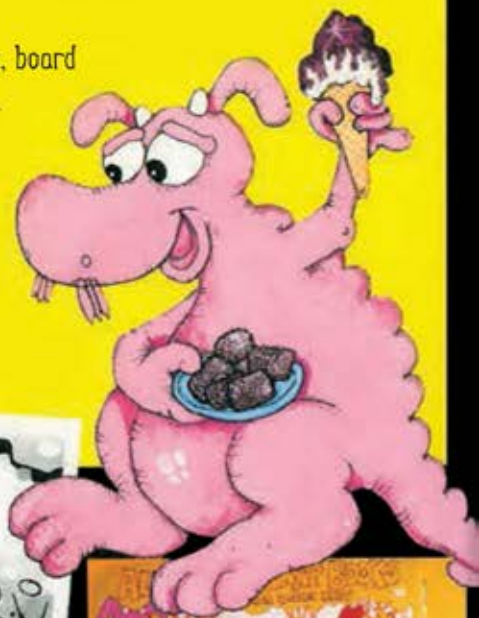
In 1972 Michael Salmon wrote and illustrated his first children's book *The Monster That Ate Canberra*. Both adults and young people were entertained by the antics of the book's main character, a large, pink, greedy Bunyip called ALEXANDER as he feasted on famous buildings around Lake Burley Griffin.

Alexander's appetite increased as ABC radio serialised his book: further sequels were written and The Canberra Children's Theatre presented two Bunyip pantomimes (1973 & 1975). Alexander was introduced to children around Australia on ABC TV in his first show *Arvo* (1978). Together with his co-host Ron Blanchard, the Bunyip made guest appearances in many city and country areas filming their daily episodes. Over the years Alexander starred in other shows on afternoon television including *Alexander's Afternoon*, *The Alexander Bunyip Show* (Silly Season Cinema) and finally *Alexander Bunyip's Billabong*.

Alexander had his own half-page in the *Women's Weekly* magazine for two years and many toys, board games, puzzles and general merchandise were created around the Bunyip and his puppet friends.

Alexander is delighted to make a reappearance in this new edition of his book. He hopes that the Canberra mums and dads of today, who were kids back in 1972, will enjoy this book just as much as they did back then. Perhaps they might even consider reading it to their own children.

Unfortunately Alexander is still as greedy as ever, especially if there are any lamingtons about, and his manners have not improved with age!



Alexander, puppet friends, puppeteers & Bunyip inventor  
ABC TV, 1982



Making Alexander Bunyip's Billabong — ABC TV Studios,  
Gore Hill, Sydney 1982



**Australian Government**  
**National Capital Authority**

Building the National Capital in the Hearts of all Australians  
GPO Box 373, Canberra ACT 2601  
[www.nationalcapital.gov.au](http://www.nationalcapital.gov.au)

ISBN 0-9579550-4-9



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# THE MONSTER THAT ATE CANBERRA

written & illustrated by

**MICHAEL  
SALMON**

a book for the younger generations of Canberra...  
and our visitors

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ISBN 0 9579550 4 9



# CANBERRA

is the Capital City of

# AUSTRALIA

## BUNYIP

A supposedly mythological Australian monster inhabiting the billabongs and watercourses of the country. Reported sightings are rare and have never been substantiated.

# ALEXANDER

Didn't really want to go to Canberra, but this is how it happened...

Alexander was a bunyip.

In fact, he was one of only three buniyps left in Australia.

Very few people have ever seen a bunyip, as they are very shy creatures, always hiding in the bush.

Many years ago in Tasmania, Alexander's great Uncle Hugo was once spotted asleep, snoring loudly in an orchard, by a group of angry apple growers.

(A great disgrace to that southern branch of the family!)

Buniyps are dreadfully shortsighted. They can see things close up, but when they look at things far away, they're very blurry.

Buniyps try to be neat and tidy and Alexander was no exception.

Alexander had a problem – a big problem.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, large yellow trucks from the city would dump loads of rubbish into his billabong.

He tried his best to clean it up into tidy piles.

But it was no use, the trucks kept coming.

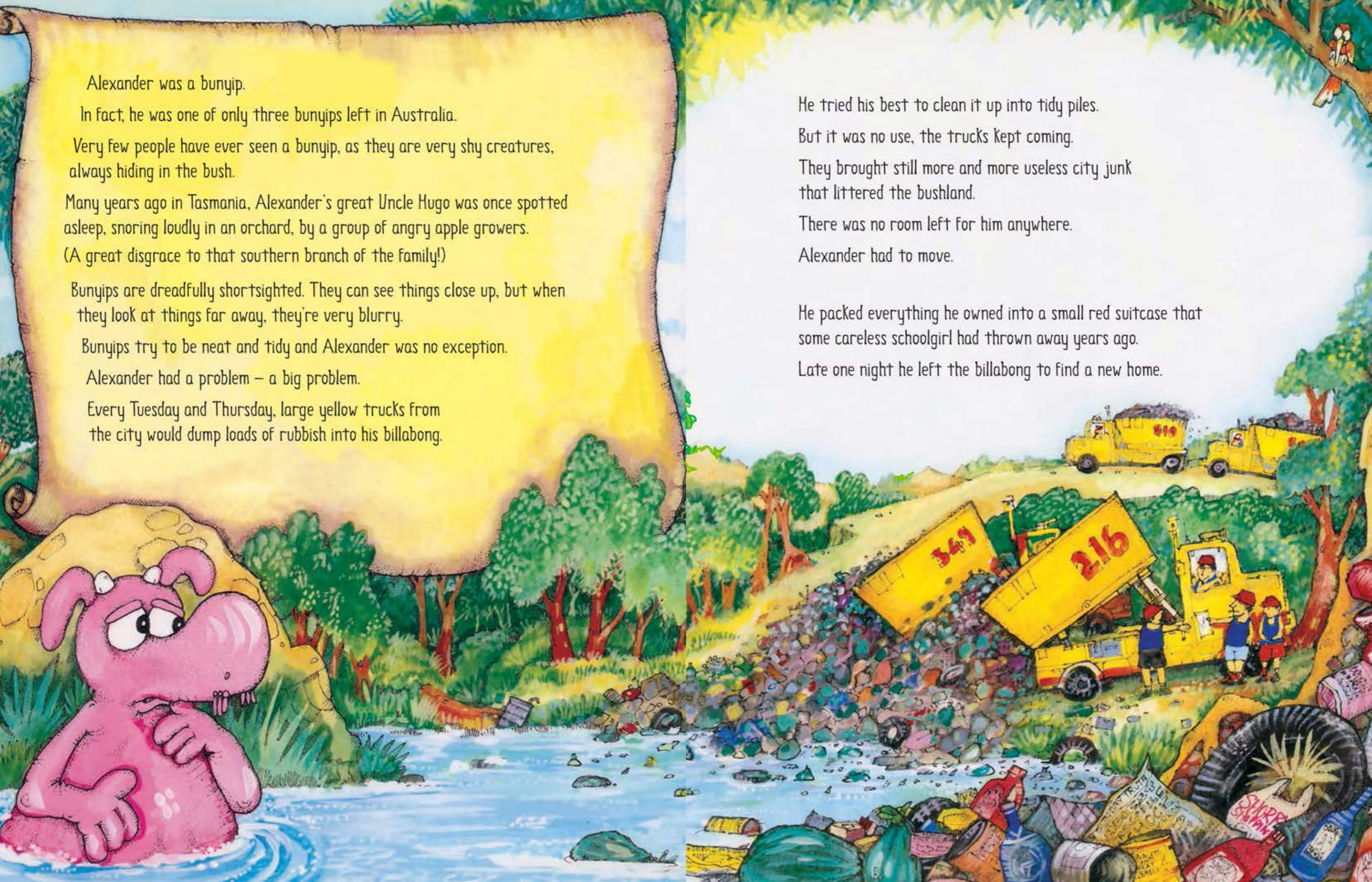
They brought still more and more useless city junk that littered the bushland.

There was no room left for him anywhere.

Alexander had to move.

He packed everything he owned into a small red suitcase that some careless schoolgirl had thrown away years ago.

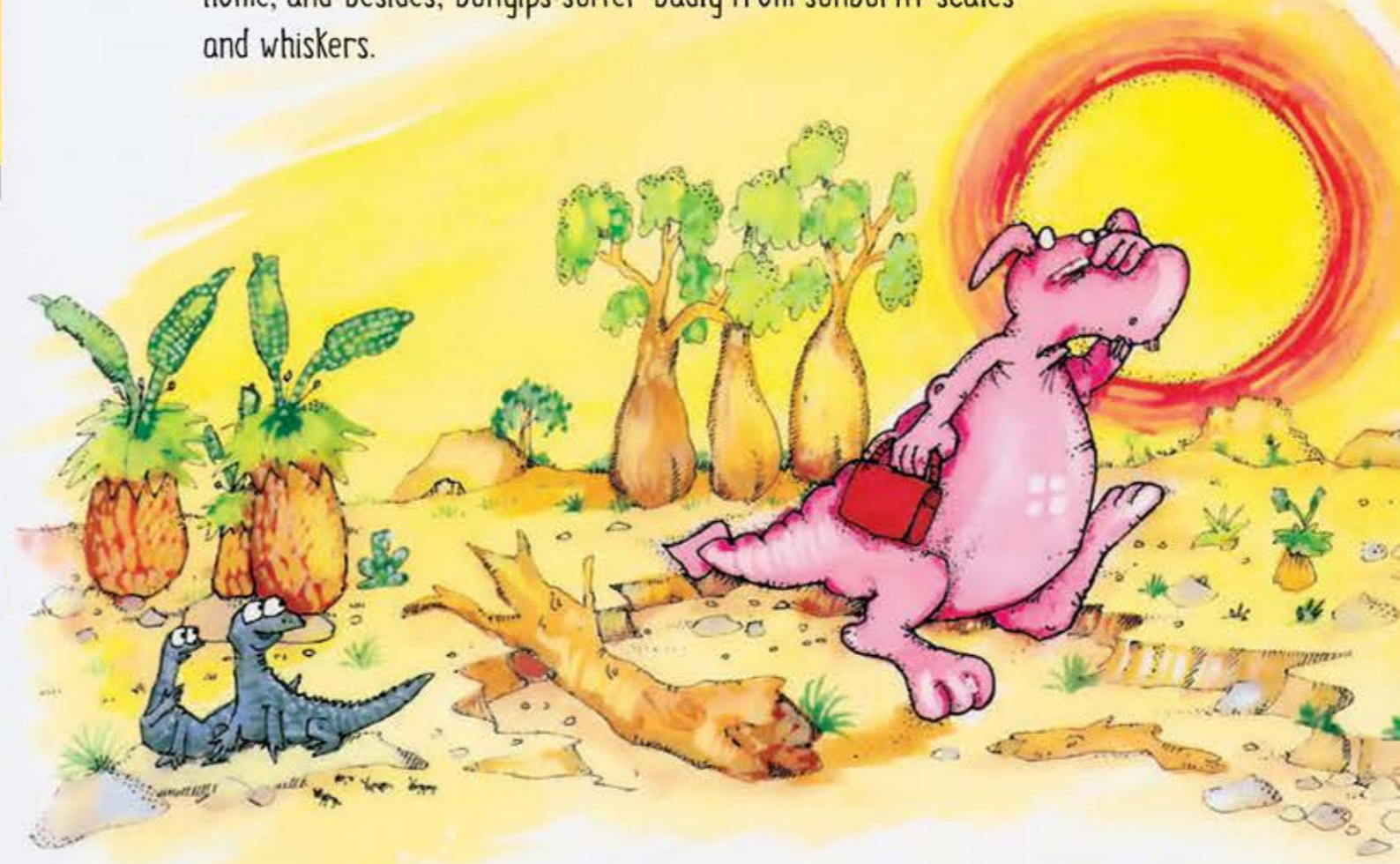
Late one night he left the billabong to find a new home.





He wandered up north where the sugar cane and palm trees grow... but it was much too hot and steamy for Alexander to live there, and besides, bunyips suffer terribly from mosquito bites.

Alexander travelled way out west to the desert where the bottle and grass trees grow ... but it was much too hot and dry for him to make a home, and besides, bunyips suffer badly from sunburnt scales and whiskers.



He travelled far to the south where the mountain ranges were covered with snow and ice ... but it was much too cold for Alexander, and besides, bunyips suffer badly from frozen tails and frostbitten toes.





Alexander had almost given up hope of ever finding a new home.

He felt so tired and weary and his eyes kept playing tricks on him.

All his toes had bunyip blisters from bumping and stumbling over the rough ground.

He had been following a small stream that disappeared into the nearby hills.

The sun was going down and it was becoming quite dark. Another hour, and it would be his bedtime.

He peered over the top of the first hill and couldn't believe what he saw... there, nestling between the mountains in the distance was the biggest billabong that he had ever seen.

Alexander rubbed his eyes and looked again, it must be a dream.

It wasn't until he tasted the muddy water that he realised it was all fair dinkum.

At last he had found the perfect home... Lake Burley Griffin!

He settled down under a gum tree and went peacefully to sleep for the first time in many nights.

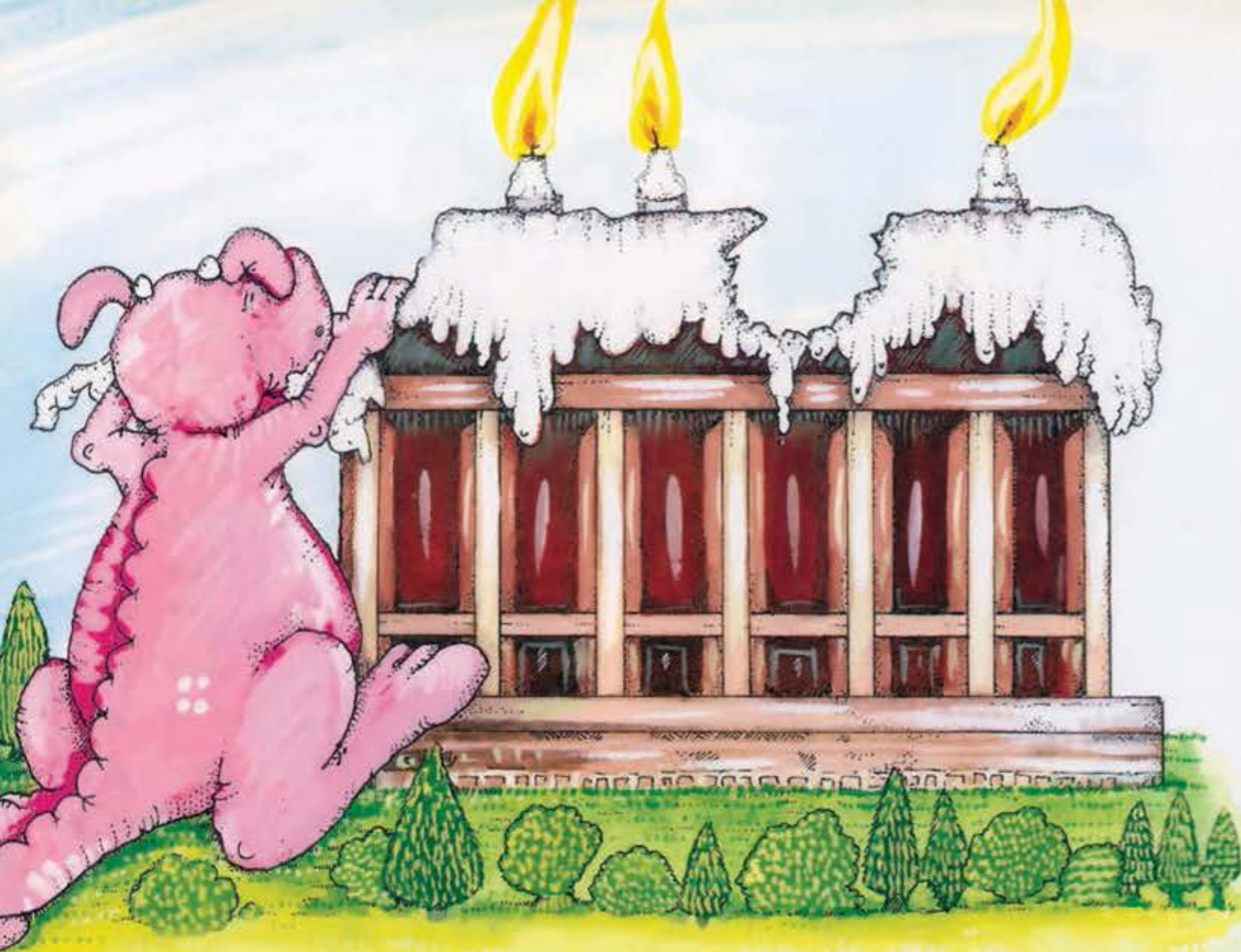




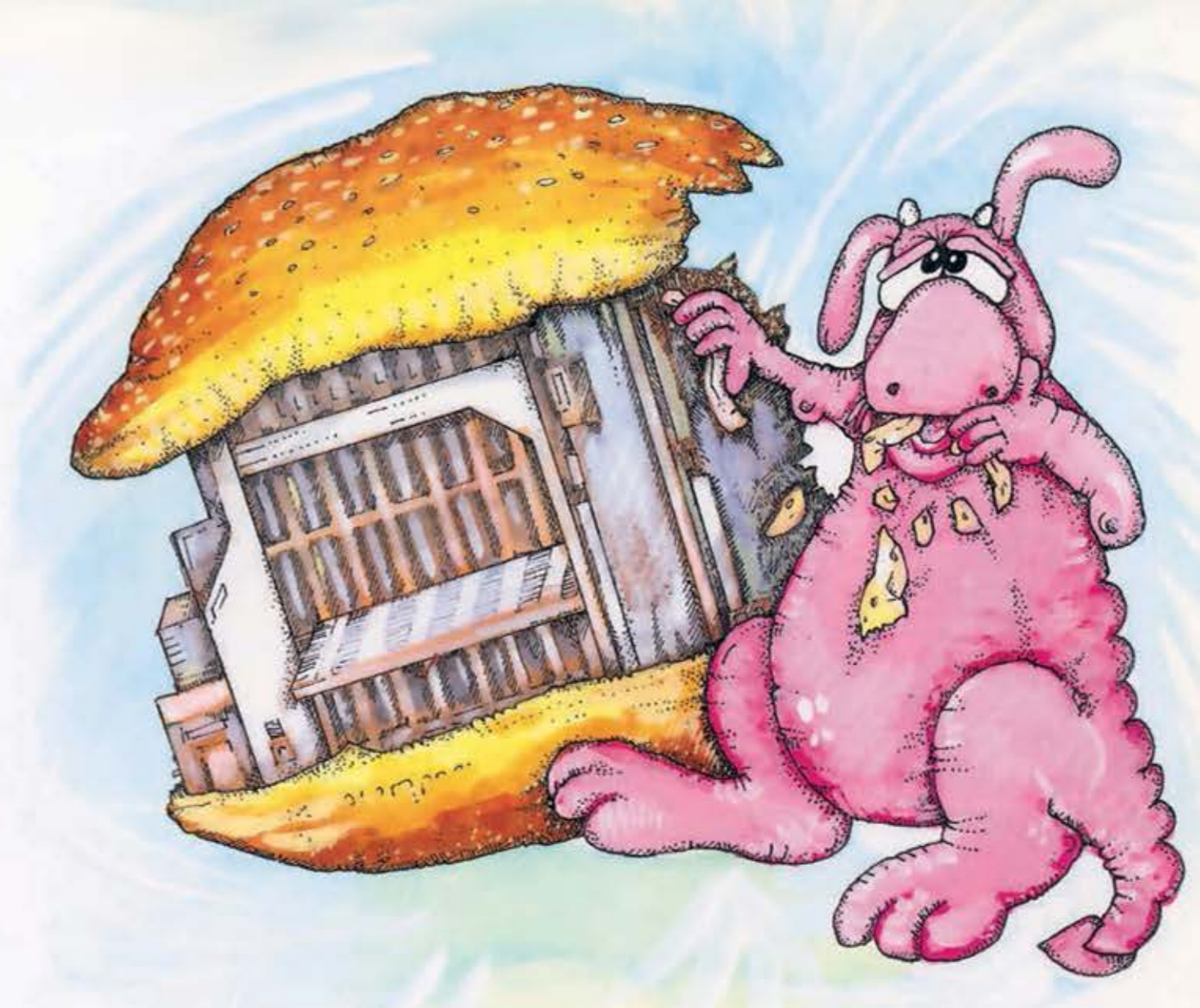
The next morning bright and early, Alexander hurried back down to his new billabong to wash off the dirt and dust from his travels. He waded through the warm, brown water and sat under a nearby fountain ... The Captain Cook waterspout! He soon scrubbed all his shiny scales clean with his favourite red plastic back scrubber.



As he dried himself he looked around the shores of the lake. It was far greener than most other billabongs. The trees and flowers were growing in neat, straight rows in the gardens and parks. 'What clever plants they must be.' Alexander said to himself.



Alexander couldn't see the buildings properly in the glare of the morning sun. In fact, The National Library looked to him very much like a giant, iced birthday cake. Which reminded him, he was very hungry. Bunyips will eat simply anything that looks tasty and the Library seemed a perfect start to a bunyip's breakfast. He swam across the lake and broke a chunk of icing off the top and tasted it. 'Real beaut!' He took a big munch, then another... then another. The columns around the side were a bit sugary and sweet, but he was starving!



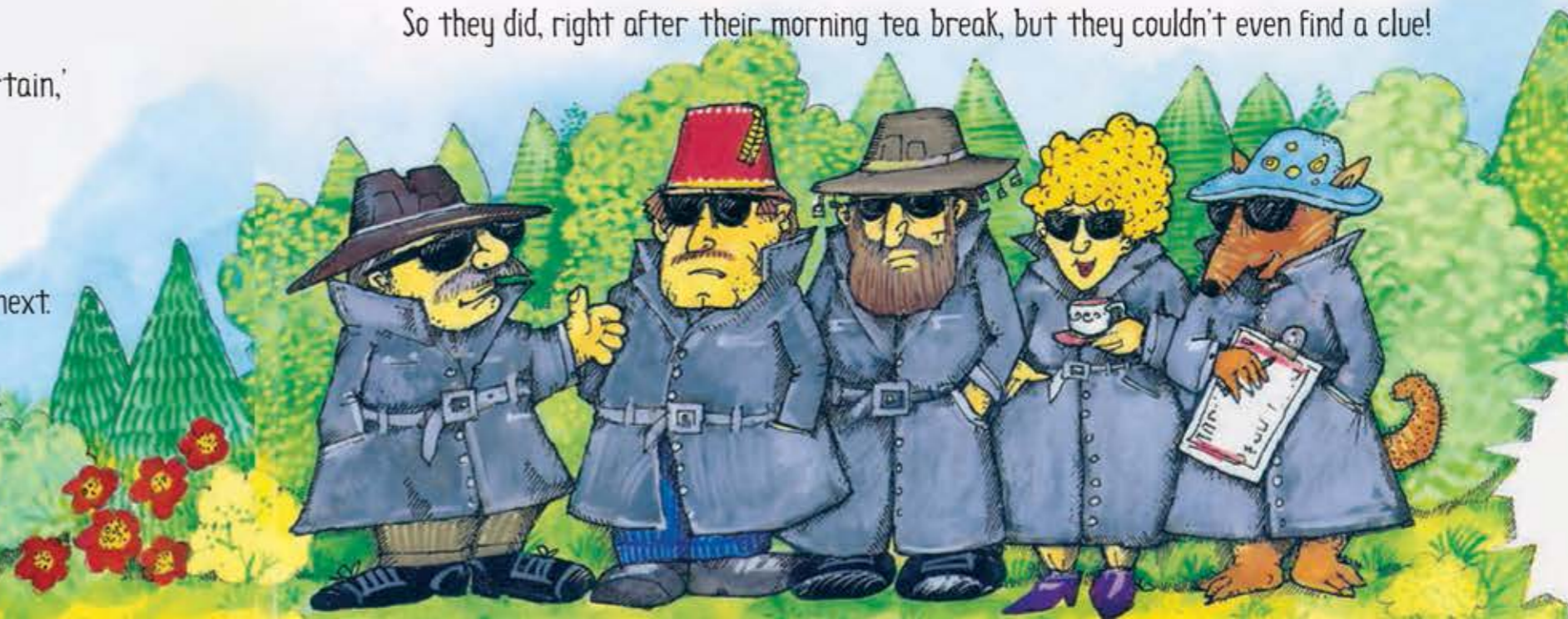
Alexander wanted more to eat... a second course. The National Art Gallery shimmered in the sun like a big, fat, juicy hamburger. He bit into the burger... 'Yuck!, Ugh!, Urk!' It tasted revolting, like lots of different flavours all mixed together. The bunyip spat it out and quickly drank some billabong water to get the nasty taste out of his mouth. He swam to the other end of the lake and snoozed off amongst the reeds and bulrushes with his tummy almost full.





You can imagine what was happening as Canberra people went to work ... there was panic in the city. Something or someone had eaten most of their fine Library and had chewed one end off the Art Gallery... you could see the teeth marks. What would people say, especially the tourists? The Police Chief rang the Minister for Kulture (and Footy). After all – books, paintings and kicking goals were his business. It was far too early in the day for him to think clearly so The Police Chief rang his mate, The Minister for Certain things. That Minister wasn't very helpful either. 'This sounds definitely most uncertain,' said The Police Chief. 'I'll ring the Minister for Uncertain things...'. But that Minister was having trouble remembering what day it was. He picked up both phones, he couldn't remember which one was working... So, The Police Chief looked at the Minister's manual to see what he should do next. "In an emergency, ring The Department of Meat Pies and Tomato Sauce".

'Mate, it can't be anything Aussie that did that,' said the Meat Pie Minister. 'It'll be something foreign for sure, I'll ring the Minister for Foreign Affairs... no worries.' Unfortunately that Minister was away on holiday in Fiji, so the Number 2 man answered, 'She'll be right cobber. We'll have our team of agents there in no time.' The Special Squad was right on the job. 'This is an emergency,' said their Commander. 'Our City has to look neat and tidy for all the tourists to take their photos, we can't have this happening, search everywhere.' So they did, right after their morning tea break, but they couldn't even find a clue!





Alexander slept for hours; he had no idea of the trouble that he had caused.

He woke up, his tummy rumbled deep down... he was hungry again.

Between the trees further up his billabong, he could just see what looked like a large pizza, sitting on top of a hill.

He waddled up to see more, it smelt good.

He lifted up a big slice and began to munch ... 'Yum!'

Soon, Australia's pride and joy, Parliament House, had disappeared, devoured by a greedy bunyip.



Alexander burped and looked around. 'Some dessert would be nice.'

On top of the tallest mountain he could see what looked like a gigantic ice cream sundae with nuts on top.

He climbed up Black Mountain towards... The Telstra Tower. As soon as he caught his breath, he gave it a lick, then a nibble... 'Mmm, it's double yum.'

'HEY YOU! You can't do that!' shouted angry human voices behind him,

'That's our tower.'

The frightened bunyip rolled down the mountainside, splashed into the lake and swam away quickly, leaving three astonished Telstra workers staring in disbelief.

'Where had that absolutely huge Monster come from?'

In half an hour, right after they'd had their afternoon tea, the Special Squad arrived with their special equipment.

They inspected the damage and studied Alexander's paw prints.

The Squad started to argue amongst themselves...

'Perhaps it was a huge, mutant rabbit that's escaped from the mad Scientists at that testing laboratory nearby?'

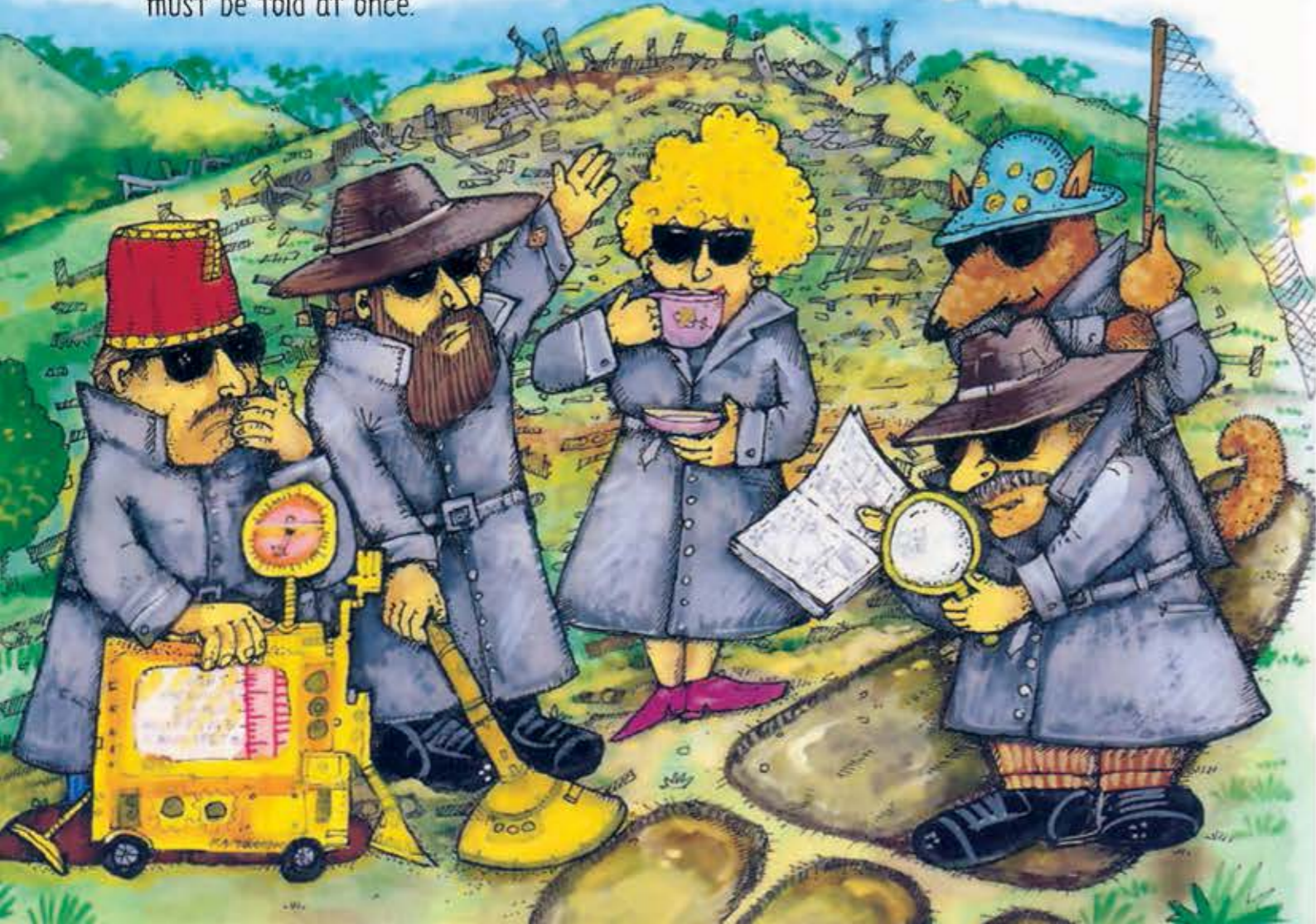
'Nonsense, it's probably a dinosaur or a long lost relative of the Loch Ness Monster.'

'No way, I think it was a giant crocodile from Queanbeyan, over the border.'

Their Commander had been studying the prints then looking in his special manual.

'You're all wrong. It's a very rare and dangerous Aussie creature, a Bunyip Australis, last seen in Tasmania in 1949.'

'Horrors, this is really serious', gasped all the Squad together. 'The Prime Minister must be told at once.'



'Canberra is becoming a national disgrace,' shouted the Prime Minister as he saw the newspaper headlines.

'This creature has been loose for two days and must be caught before he does any more damage to our beautiful Capital City.'

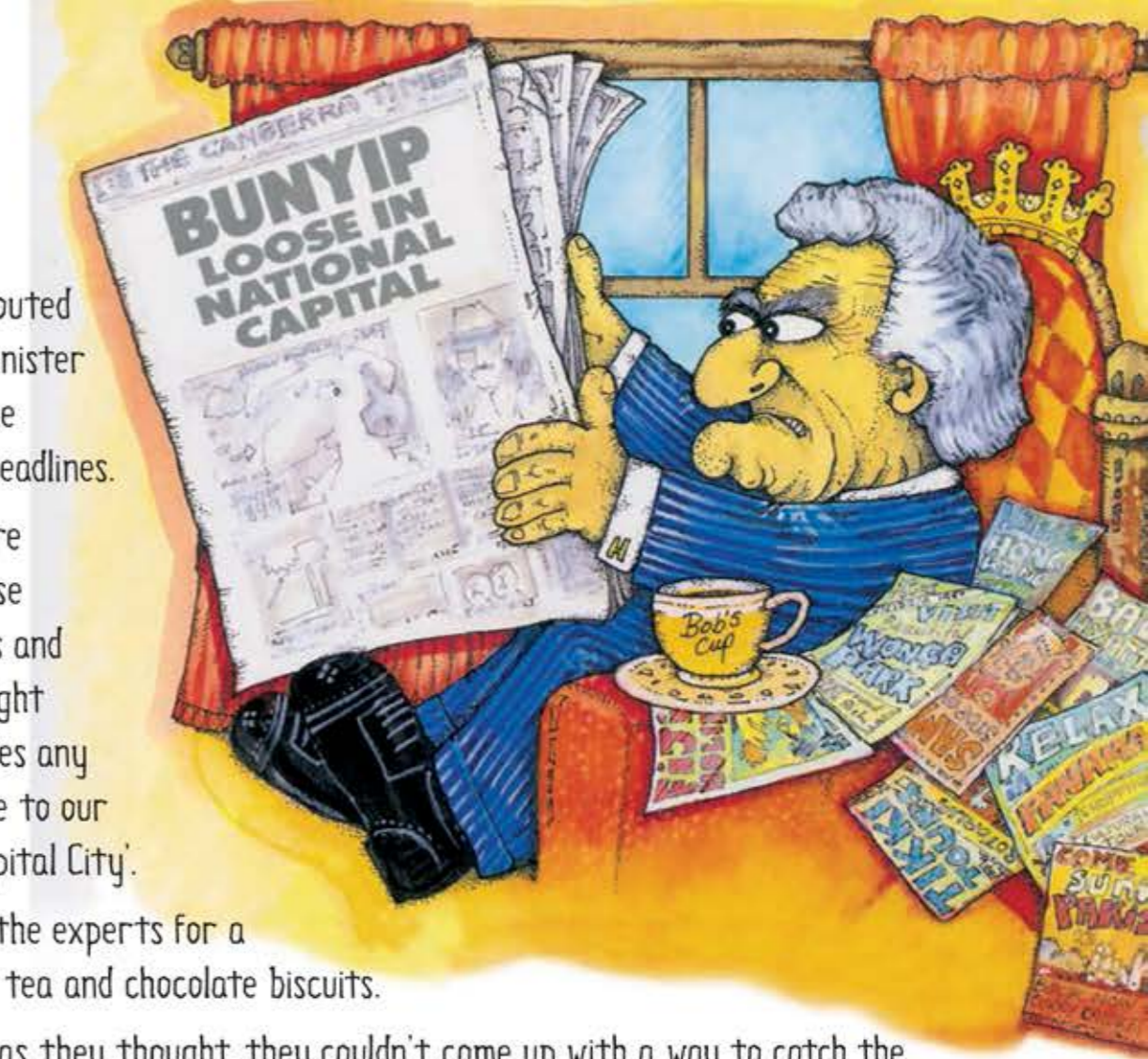
He called in the experts for a meeting and tea and chocolate biscuits.

But as hard as they thought, they couldn't come up with a way to catch the bunyip until a wise Professor from the University spoke up.

'Why don't we just let the water out of the lake, so it won't be able to swim away this time, and we can catch it.'

The Prime Minister agreed immediately (he couldn't think of a better idea), and ordered the plug to be pulled out of The Scrivener Dam.

He'd soon fix that pesky bunyip!





Alexander was  
very worried.

Three angry humans shouting at him yesterday and now even more in a boat were searching his billabong.

He hid down deep in the rushes but now the lake water was slowly disappearing.

By nightfall there was nothing but large puddles of oozing, sticky mud...

he couldn't move, he was stuck fast.

The bunyip sat, shivering in the cold night air, he could see flashing lights in the distance.

The lights were getting closer, and there were whirring noises up in the sky.

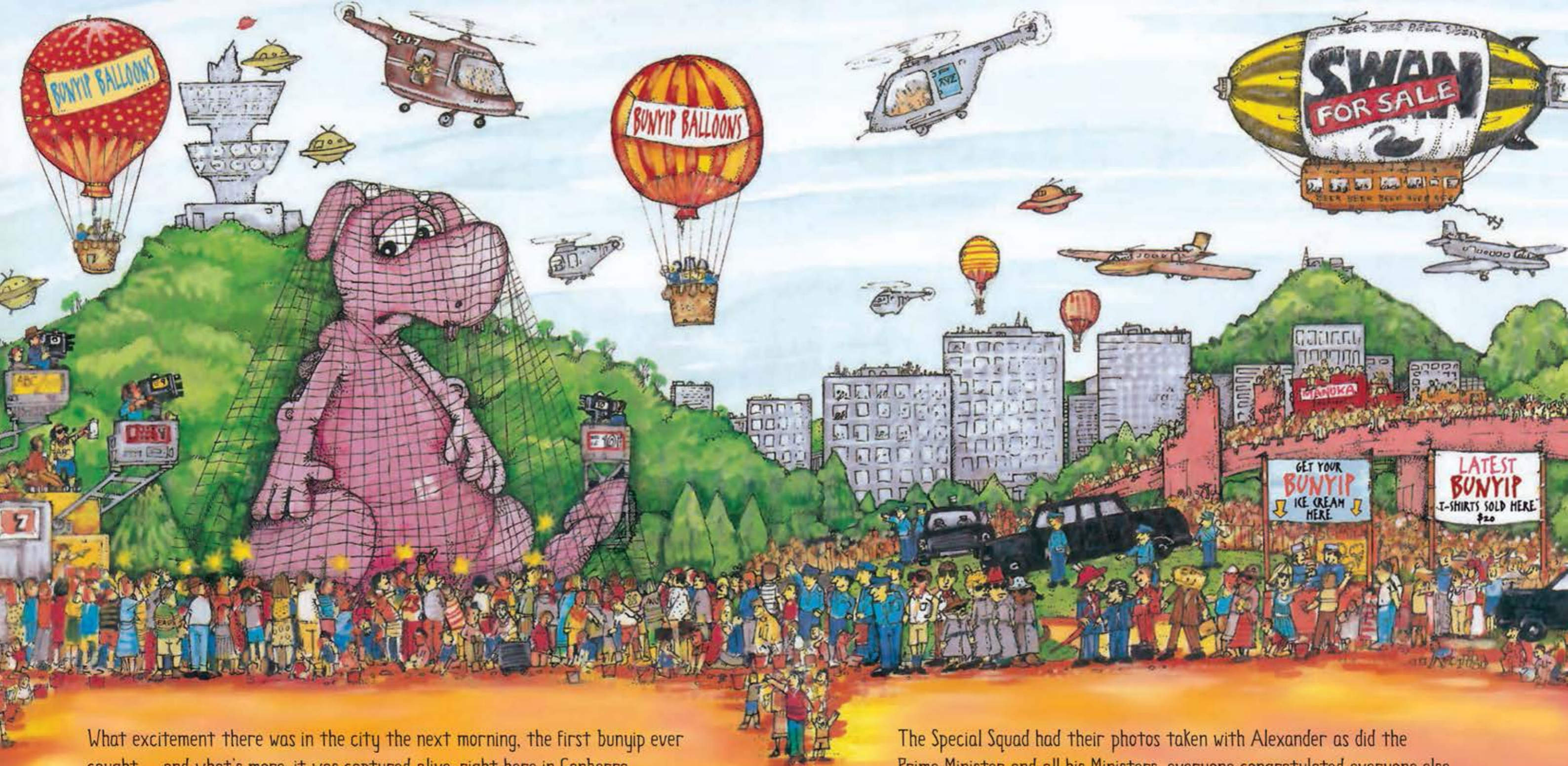
A beam of light flashed straight into his eyes and Alexander couldn't see anything.

'There he is! That's the bunyip. We've got him at last' yelled the Commander of the Special Squad as he sat in one of the helicopters that hovered above Alexander.

'Drop the net!'

Before the bunyip knew what was what, a large net was dropped over him, pinning his arms to his sides.

Alexander was well and truly caught...

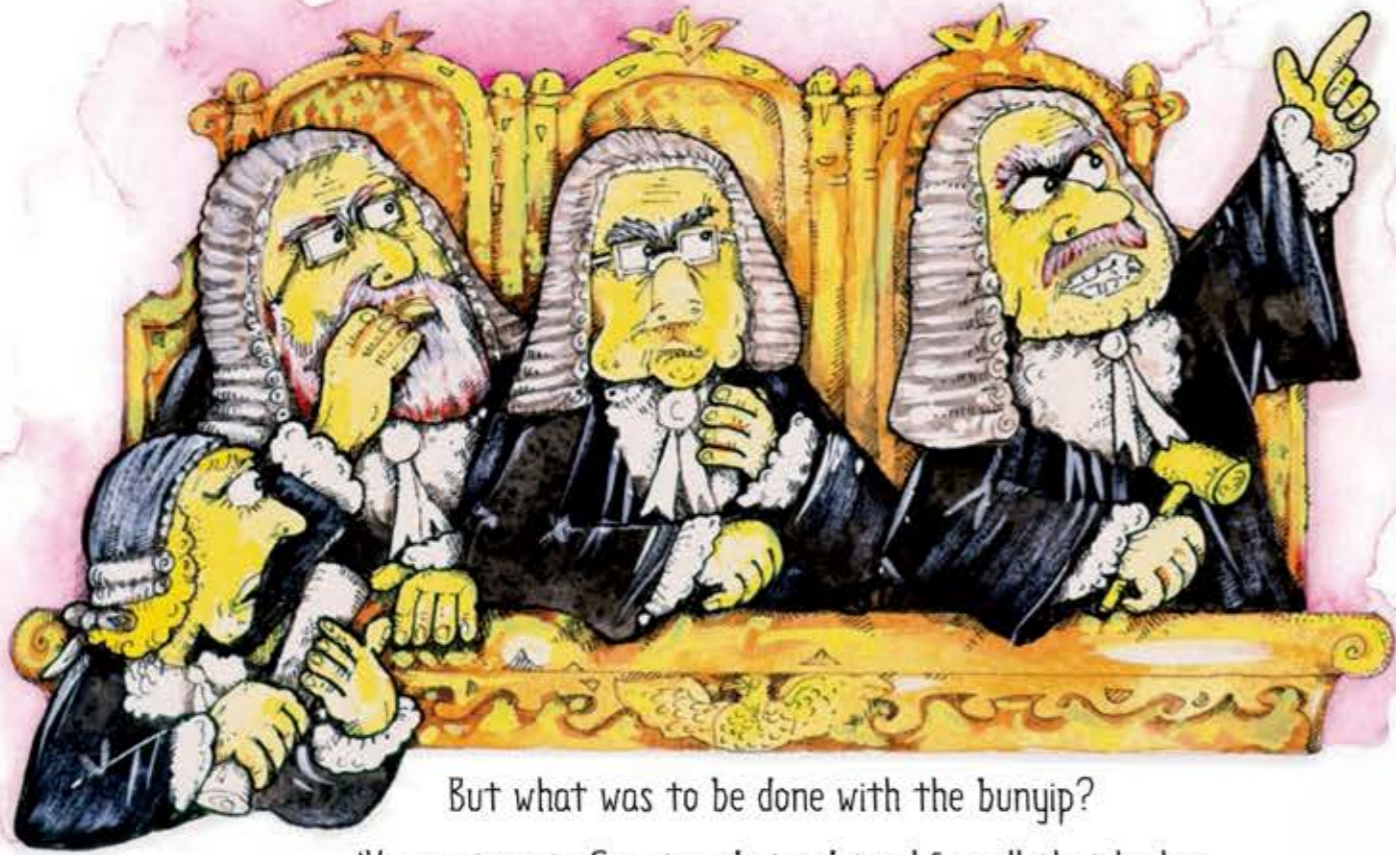


What excitement there was in the city the next morning, the first bunyip ever caught ... and what's more, it was captured alive, right here in Canberra.

Television crews, radio interviewers and newspaper reporters were all there, asking questions, taking photos and filming the miserable bunyip.

The Special Squad had their photos taken with Alexander as did the Prime Minister and all his Ministers, everyone congratulated everyone else.

Even the Governor General turned up and congratulated everyone once again, after all, that was his job.



But what was to be done with the bunyip?

'He must go to Court and stand trial for all that he has done wrong,' said the Prime Minister.

The Judges looked very grave and stern sitting up on their bench...

'BUNYIP, YOU ARE CHARGED WITH EATING THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, CHEWING THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY, DEVOURING OUR PARLIAMENT HOUSE AND SCARING EVERYBODY UP IN THE TELSTRA TOWER.

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY FOR YOURSELF?'

Unfortunately Alexander had no idea what the Judges were saying as bunyips don't speak English!

He was frightened of humans; after all, it was because of the rubbish that they had dumped into his old billabong, that he was here in the first place.

Now why were these humans so upset?

He hadn't done anything wrong, he'd just found a new home.

The Judges had a problem: this bunyip refused to talk and was obviously guilty.

But what were they to do with him?

There was not a prison cell big enough to hold him and to build a special one would cost too much money.

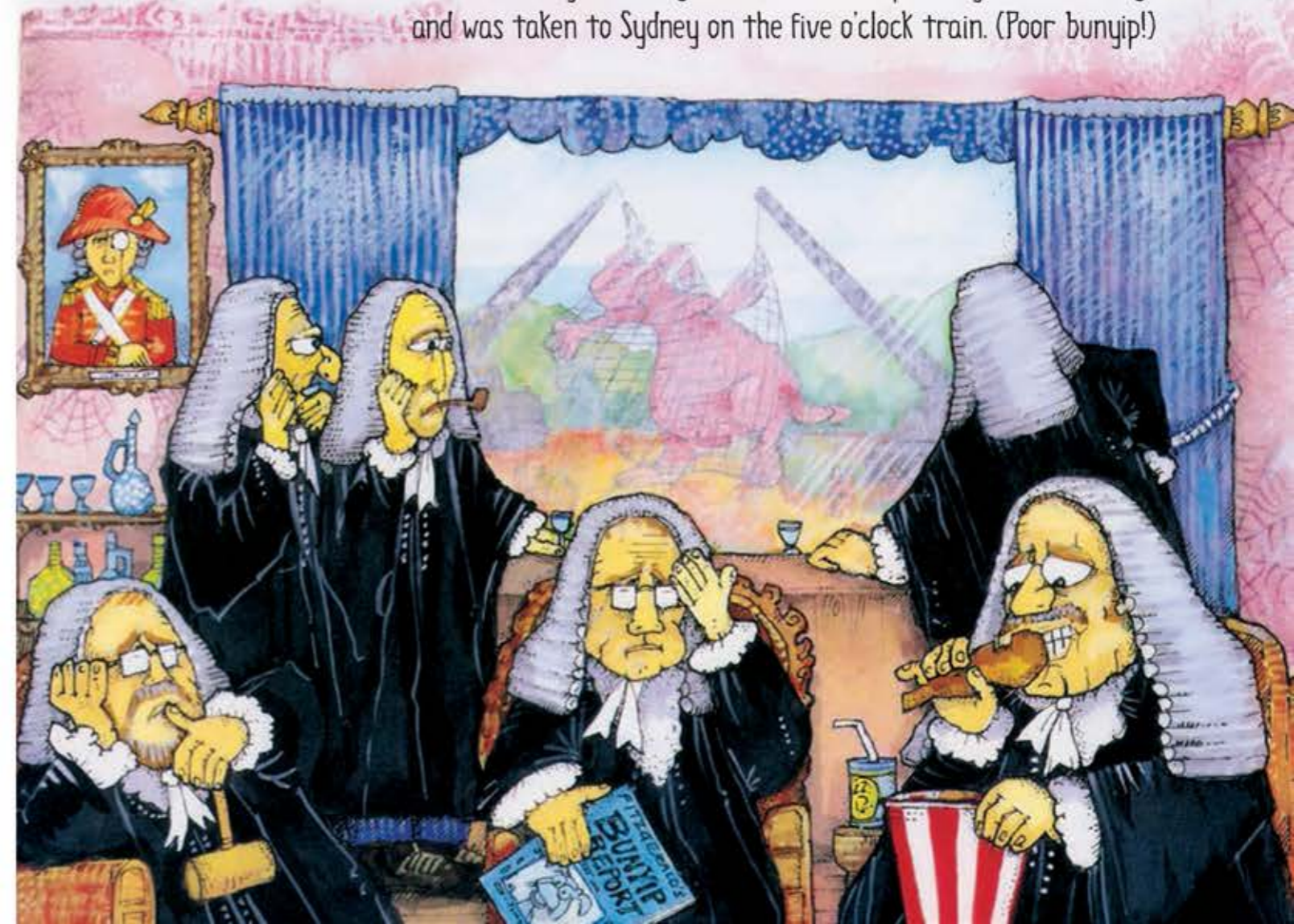
Just then, there was a knock on the courtroom door and an official looking gentleman entered carrying a briefcase and lots of extra papers.

'Your Worships, I'm from the Sydney Zoo.

We've built a large house for pink elephants, but we can't find any. It would, however, be a perfect cage for a bunyip.'

A good solution to the problem, everyone agreed.

Alexander was lifted by two large cranes into a specially built carriage and was taken to Sydney on the five o'clock train. (Poor bunyip!)





Alexander was very unhappy in the zoo.

When the zoo opened each morning, he would hide in the back of his cage and hope that he couldn't be seen.

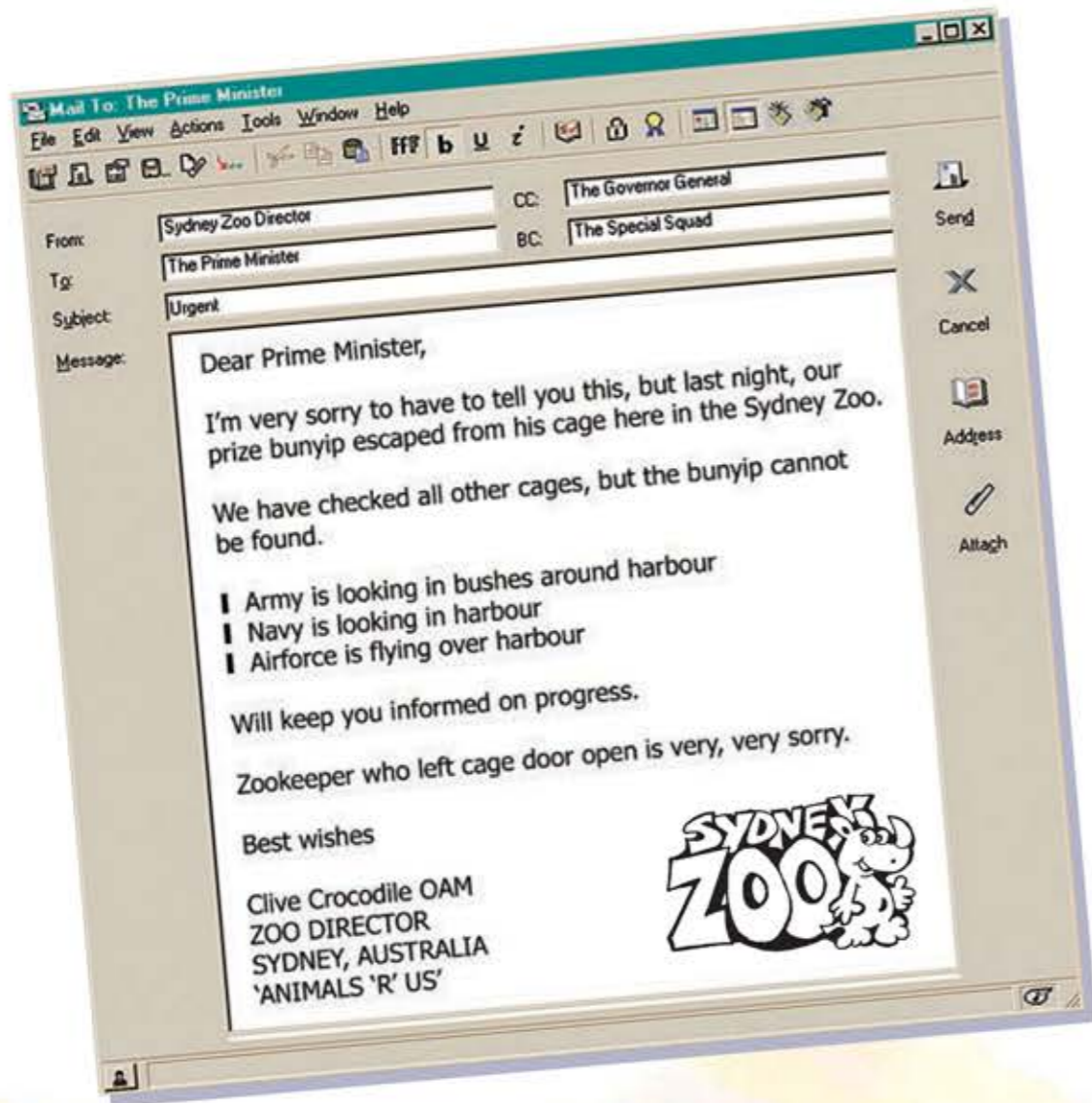
But it was no use, crowds of visitors lined up to see the famous bunyip.

They laughed and pointed at him and sometimes the children threw scrunched up chocolate bar wrappers through the bars at him.

Alexander hated the food that the zookeeper fed him each day, bundles of spinach, hay and grass... Yuck! It wasn't nearly as good as that food back in Canberra.

**HE  
HAD  
TO  
DO  
SOMETHING...**

He noticed that sometimes his absentminded zookeeper didn't lock the cage door properly after feeding time.



Yesterday, I received a photograph from Sydney, sent by my granddaughter Dominique.

It looks as though Alexander decided to have a meal before he left town!  
They still haven't found him...





So if you live in Canberra, and you hear a noise outside while you are snugly tucked up in bed one night – don't worry.  
It may just be a certain bunyip passing by on his way back to that billabong.  
It may even be Alexander, looking for more yummy food!

THE  
END



# PLACES TO VISIT

## KIDS IN CANBERRA CHECKLIST

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL CAPITAL EXHIBITION  | <input type="checkbox"/> OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BLUNDELLS' COTTAGE           | <input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL      | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMONWEALTH PLACE             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ANZAC PARADE                 | <input type="checkbox"/> RECONCILIATION PLACE           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> QUESTACON                    | <input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL CARILLON              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PARLIAMENT HOUSE             | <input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA | <input type="checkbox"/> NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA  |

For more information contact the  
National Capital Exhibition on (02) 6257 1068

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