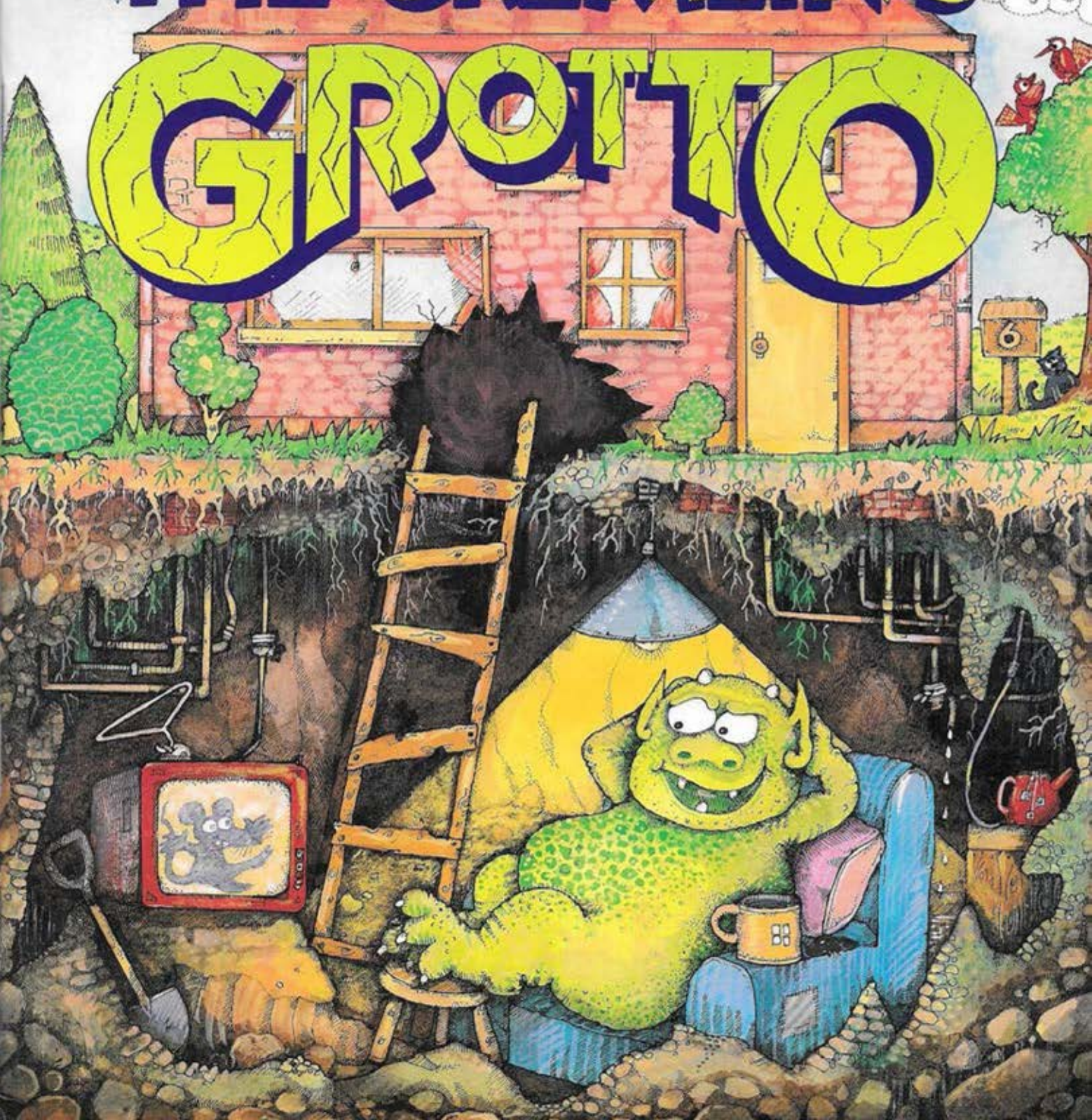


MICHAEL SALMON



THE GREMLIN'S GROTTO



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WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY

Michael Salmon

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The Da Vinci family was a typical modern family. Mr Da Vinci worked in a music store in the city and Mrs Da Vinci worked in the local library. They lived happily in a nice house surrounded by lawn and trees.

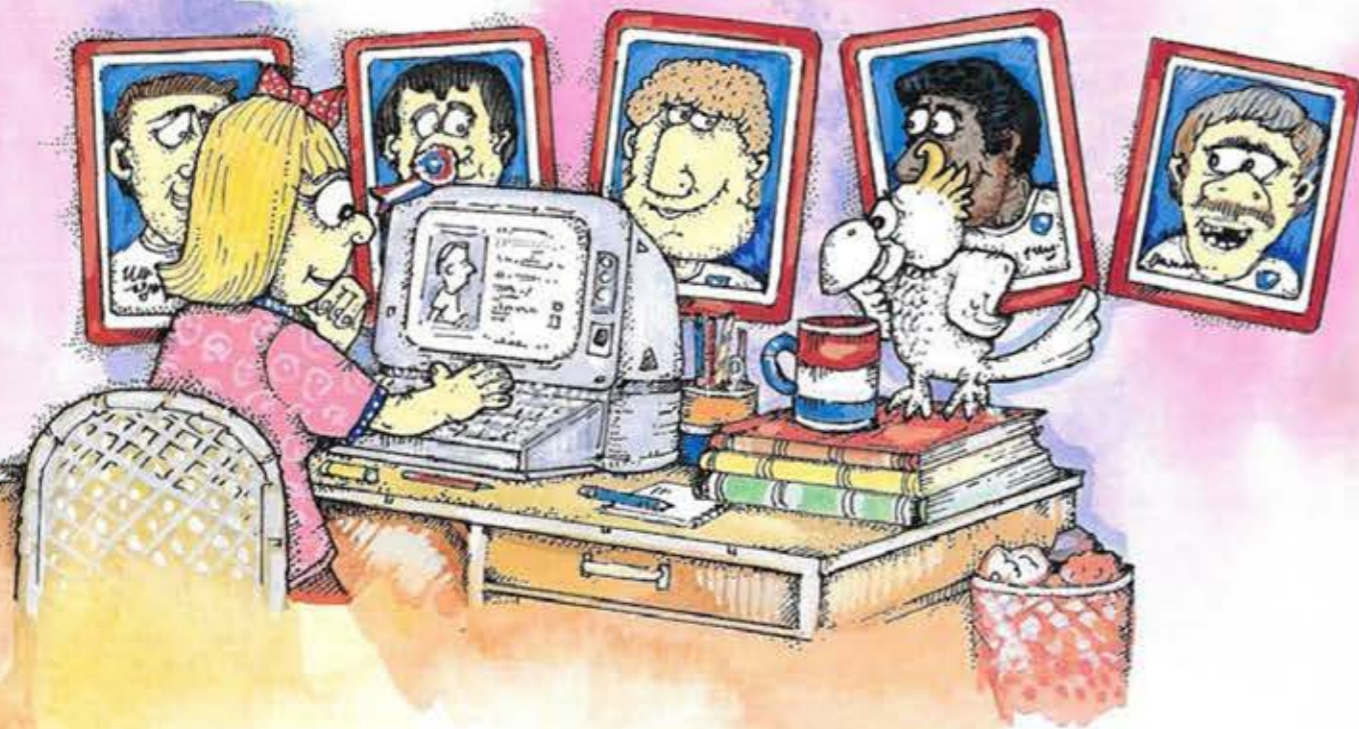
Mr and Mrs Da Vinci were very proud of their children, Lucy and Leonardo. And Lucy and Leonardo loved their pets, Diego the dog, Bobby the cat and Pelé the parrot.



The Da Vinci family was a typical modern family, *except* for winter weekends . . .

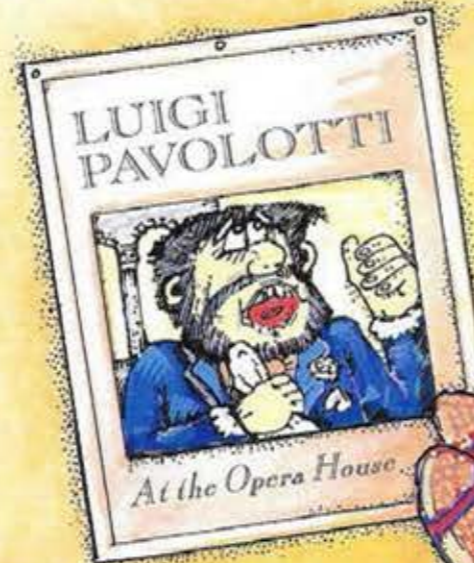
Every Saturday afternoon they dressed up in brightly coloured hats and scarves, wore rosettes and carried rattles, then shouted and screamed for two hours.

Yes, the Da Vincis were soccer fans. They followed their local team, the Mighty Saints, and hadn't missed a match in five years!



Lucy had all the player profiles on her computer and pictures of her favourite team members pinned on the wall. She knew exactly what each one ate for breakfast, what he did in his spare time and which pop group he liked most.

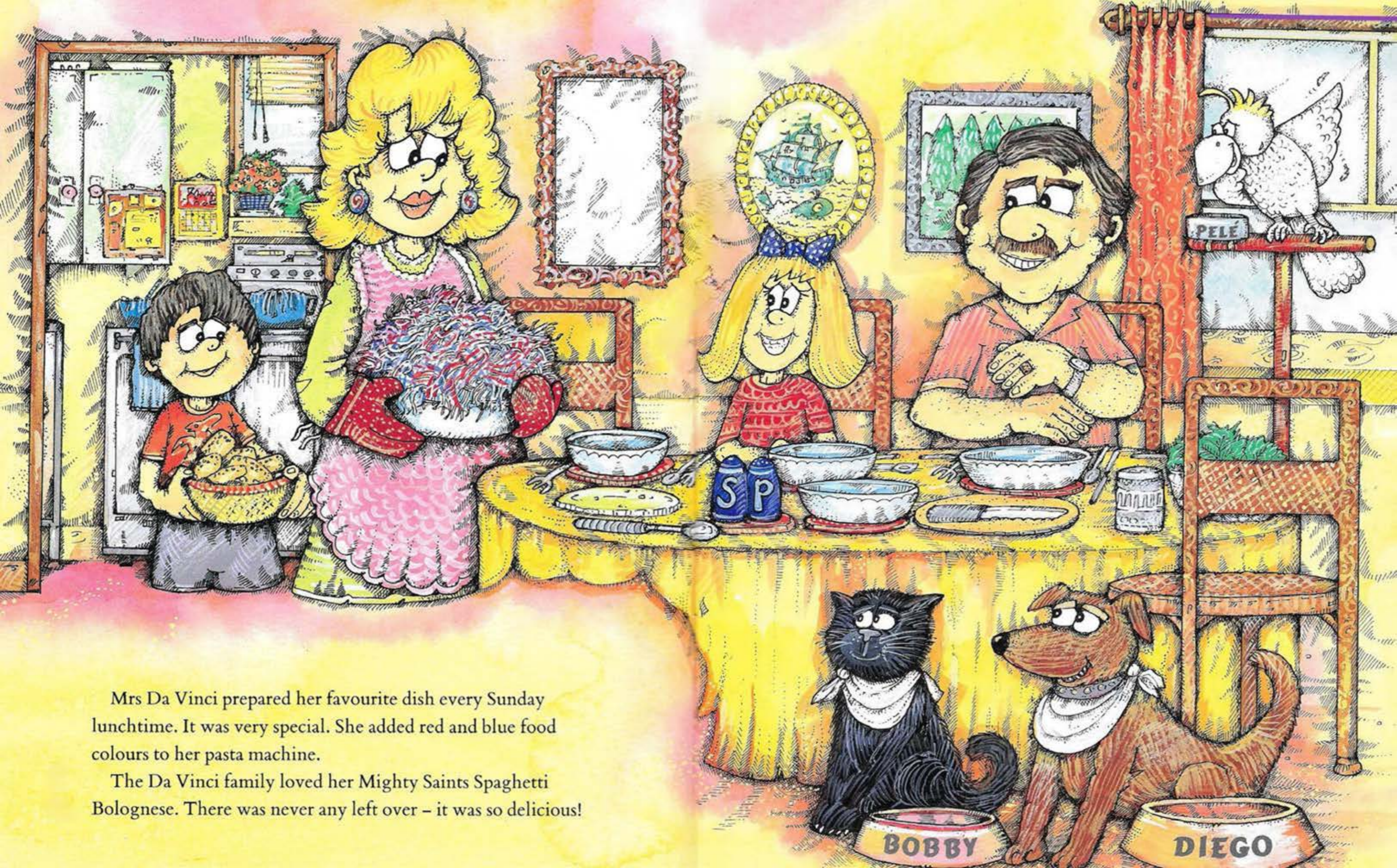
Leonardo had painted his model dinosaur collection in the club colours: red, white and blue. Apart from soccer, his dinosaurs were the most important things in his life.



When Mr Da Vinci wasn't with his family or watching the soccer, there was nothing he liked doing more than sitting in his comfy chair in the study, listening to his favourite records and tapes, especially to the famous opera singer, Luigi Pavolotti.

Sometimes, while he was in the shower, Mr Da Vinci pretended he too was a great tenor singing the soccer club song.





Mrs Da Vinci prepared her favourite dish every Sunday lunchtime. It was very special. She added red and blue food colours to her pasta machine.

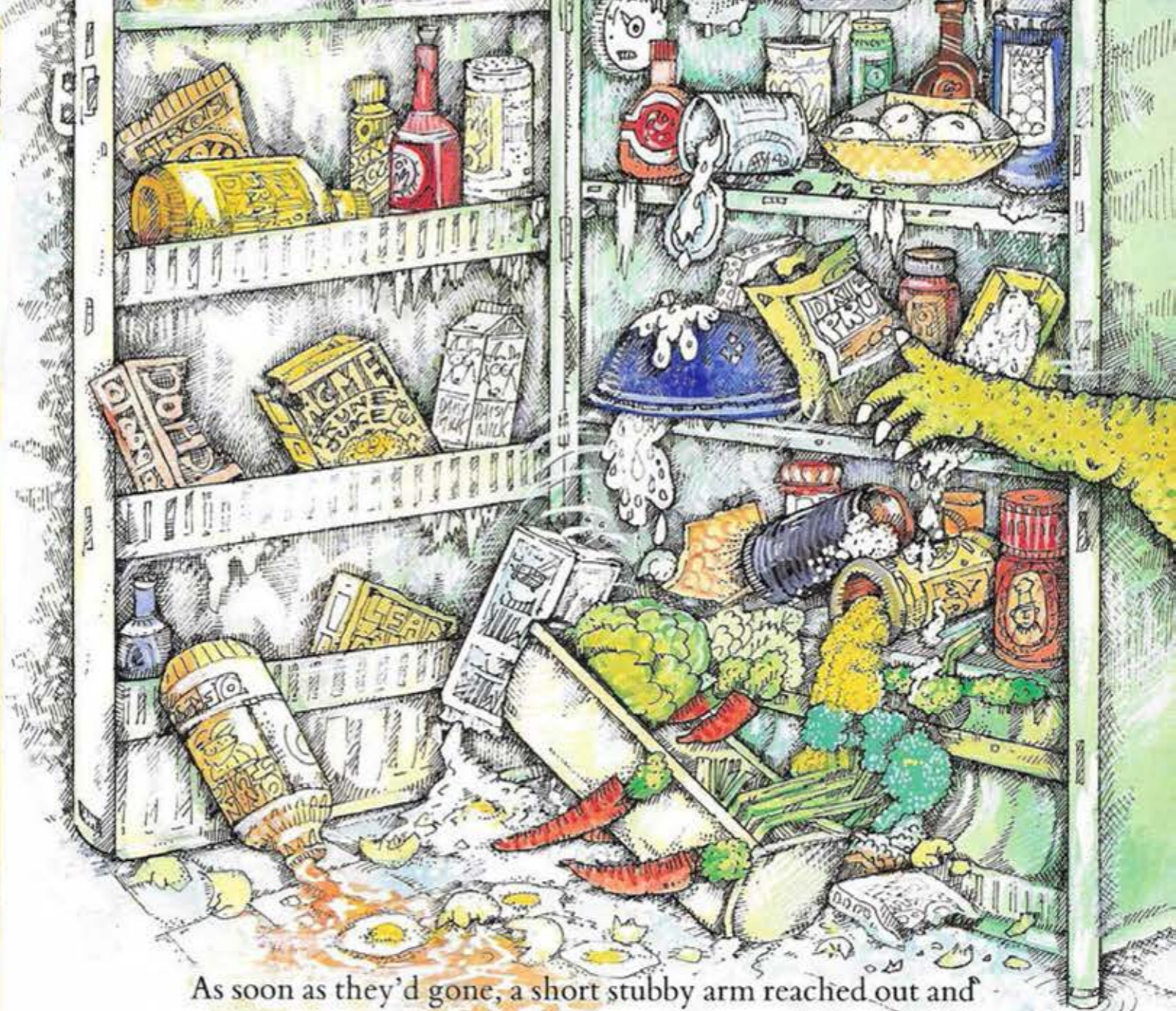
The Da Vinci family loved her Mighty Saints Spaghetti Bolognese. There was never any left over – it was so delicious!



It was halfway through the soccer season and the Mighty Saints hadn't lost a game.

As usual, the Da Vincis put on their raincoats and boots and headed off towards the station. It was a miserable day. Pelé, Diego and Bobby watched as the family bravely forged ahead through the gusty wind and pouring rain.

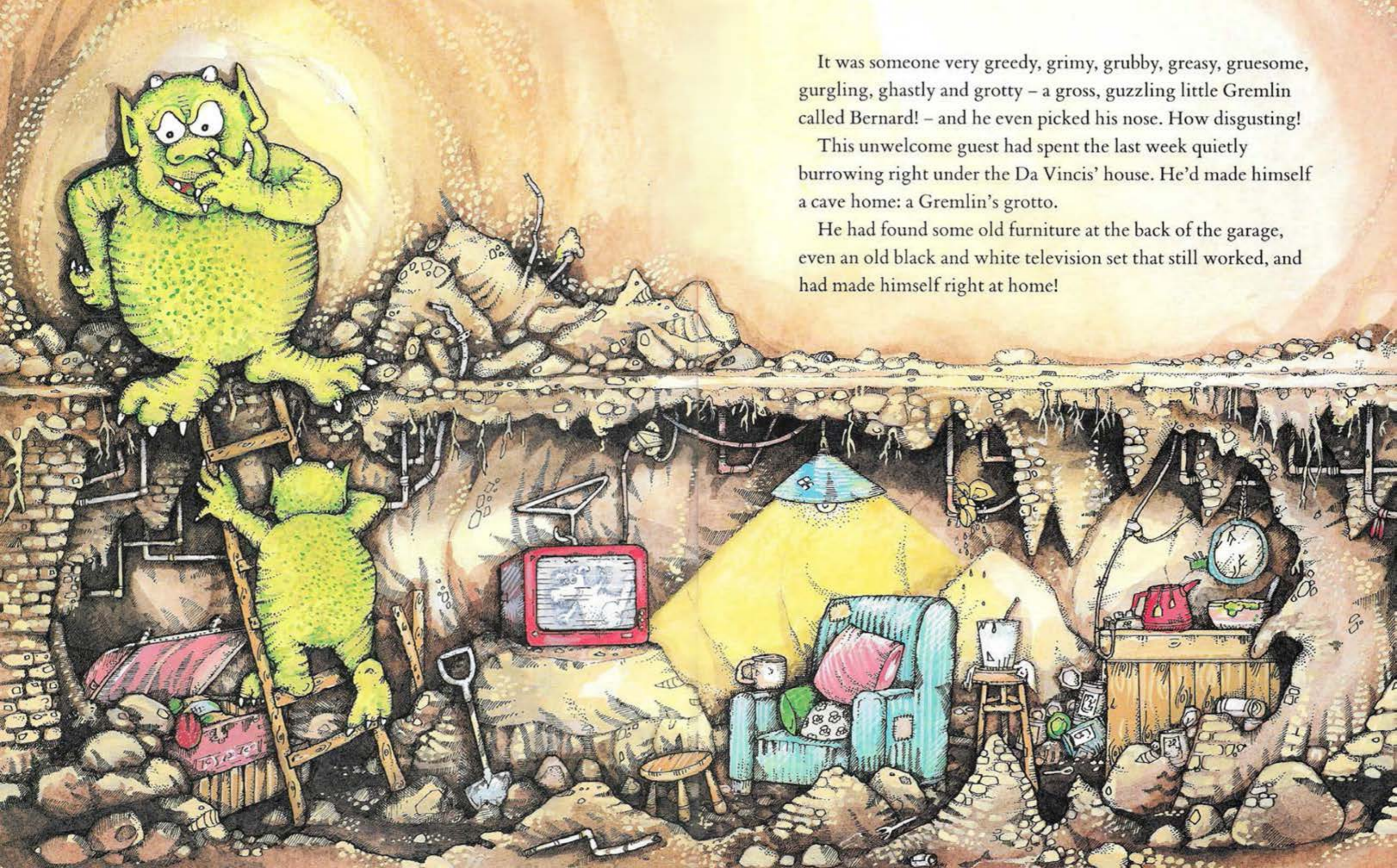
The family didn't know it yet, but it was going to be a *bad* day for the Da Vincis.



As soon as they'd gone, a short stubby arm reached out and closed the lounge-room door, shutting the pets in the front of the house.

In the kitchen, the refrigerator was flung open and the short chunky arm hauled out the contents. Milk splashed on the floor, eggs broke on the tiles, food slopped everywhere. There was a slurping, gurgling, guzzling noise. Whoever, or *whatever* it was, must have been very hungry.

The kitchen was a mess. Who would do such a thing?



It was someone very greedy, grimy, grubby, greasy, gruesome, gurgling, ghastly and grotty – a gross, guzzling little Gremlin called Bernard! – and he even picked his nose. How disgusting!

This unwelcome guest had spent the last week quietly burrowing right under the Da Vincis' house. He'd made himself a cave home: a Gremlin's grotto.

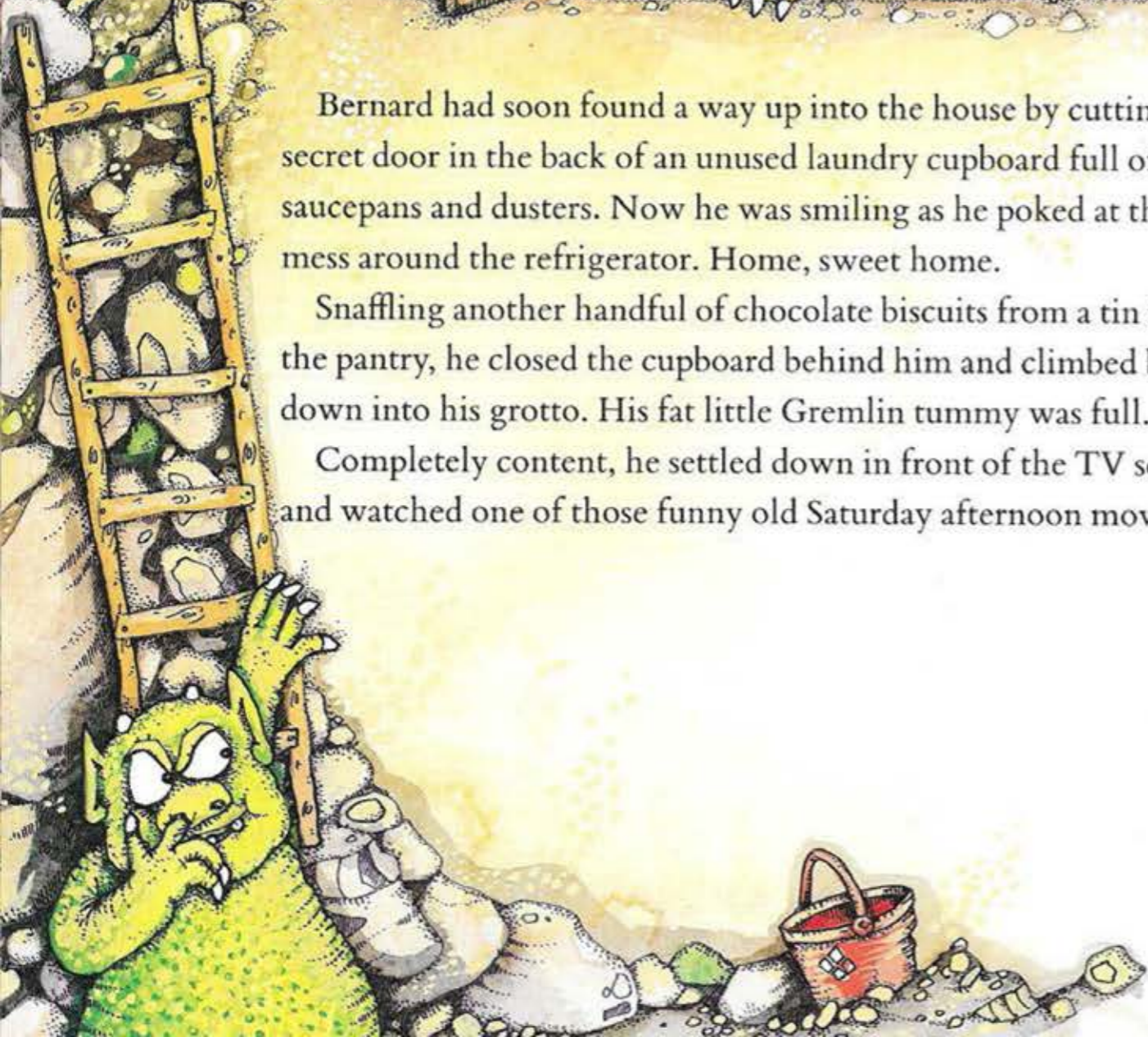
He had found some old furniture at the back of the garage, even an old black and white television set that still worked, and had made himself right at home!



Bernard had soon found a way up into the house by cutting a secret door in the back of an unused laundry cupboard full of old saucepans and dusters. Now he was smiling as he poked at the mess around the refrigerator. Home, sweet home.

Snaffling another handful of chocolate biscuits from a tin in the pantry, he closed the cupboard behind him and climbed back down into his grotto. His fat little Gremlin tummy was full.

Completely content, he settled down in front of the TV set and watched one of those funny old Saturday afternoon movies.



The Da Vincis were upset. Their Mighty Saints had lost the match, five goals to nil, and one of the goal scorers had been clearly offside. Or so Mr Da Vinci grumbled as he opened the front door.

Mrs Da Vinci went into the kitchen to make everyone a cup of tea. She screamed when she saw the mess.

'How could you!' she sobbed, as Diego, Bobby and Pelé looked on, very puzzled. 'There will be no dinner tonight for you, you naughty pets! That will teach you to make a mess in *my* kitchen.'





Over the next few weeks there were more strange happenings . . .

There were muddy paw-prints all over the bath towels and bath mat.

Someone had left the tap dripping in the basin with the plug in, flooding the bathroom.



Leonardo's best dinosaur model, the Tyrannosaurus Rex, mysteriously disappeared from the top of the bookcase.

Someone pulled the plug on Lucy's computer and wiped her latest program all about the soccer players' favourite ice-cream flavours. It had taken her months to collect all *that* information. Worst of all, some of her treasured computer disks were also missing.

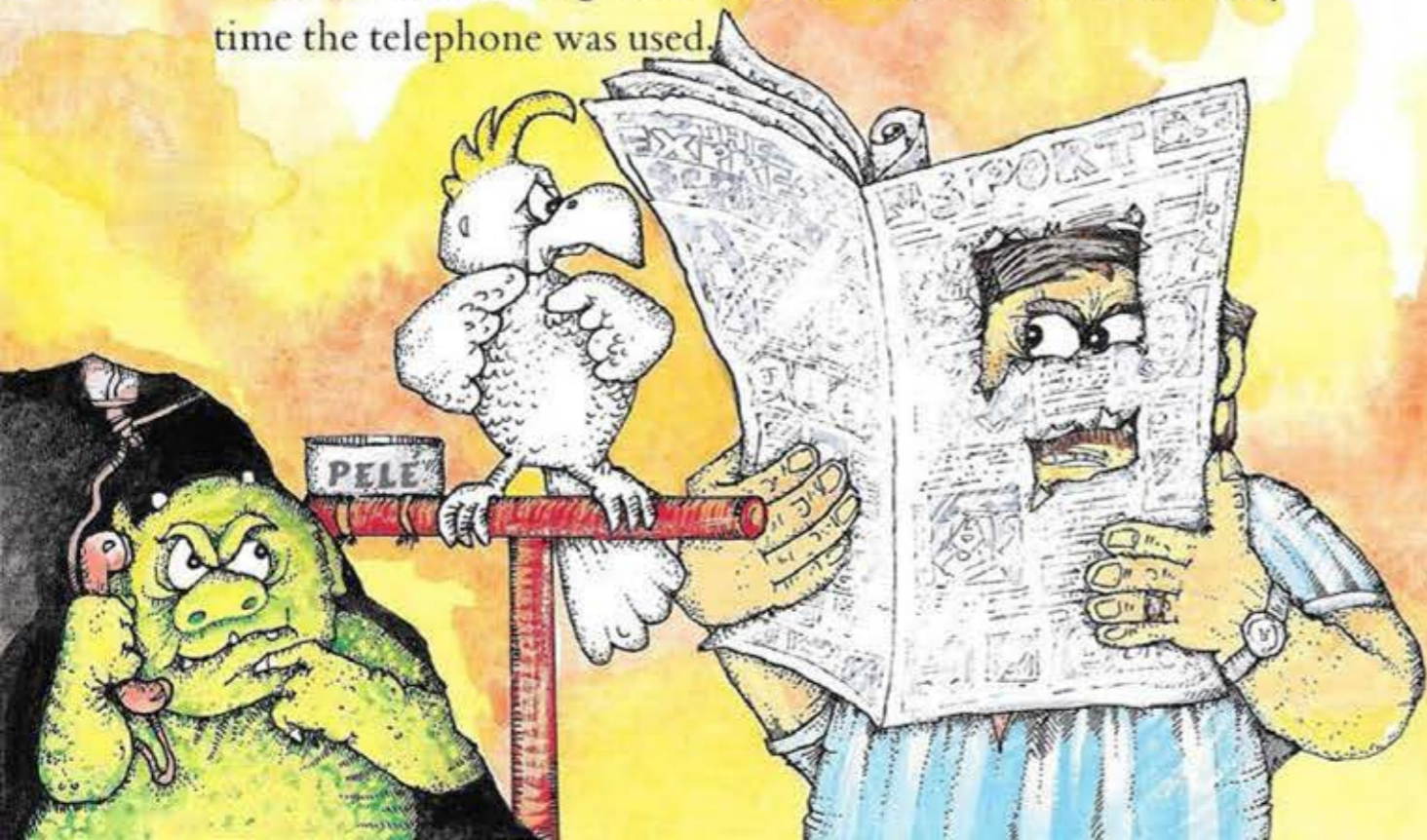




Someone had unwound all Mr Da Vinci's cassette tapes and the great Luigi Pavolotti was in ribbons all over the floor.

There were big holes in the sports pages of the morning newspaper.

Someone was making rude noises on the end of the line every time the telephone was used.



The garbage bin was emptied all over the backyard. And then, one Friday night, there was a knock on the front door. Someone had telephoned for hamburgers, French fries, pizzas and Chinese food . . . with extra fried rice!





Late that night, Mr and Mrs Da Vinci were still awake, and worried. Hardly anyone in the family was talking to anybody else. Something had to be done quickly – but what?

Meanwhile, down below in his grotto, the Gremlin was starting to feel hungry again, hungry for more chocolate biscuits.



Mr Da Vinci got up. He was sure he could hear noises downstairs – in fact he'd been hearing lots of noises recently. They all seemed to be coming up from the floorboards. It was all quite mysterious.

He crept downstairs clutching a shoe and a torch, and entered the kitchen.



Gremlins see very well in the dark and Bernard had seen the torchlight long before Mr Da Vinci reached the bottom of the stairs. The sneaky Gremlin shrank back behind the bench. He didn't see Diego who was also investigating the sounds.

'GRROWW-WOOFF!' barked Diego.

'YEE-OWW!' screeched the startled Gremlin as he jumped up in the air.



'OWWCHH!' yelled Mr Da Vinci as he tripped over Leonardo's football and banged his head on the cupboard.

The Gremlin shot past him. Mr Da Vinci felt very groggy and Diego's licks weren't helping.

'That was the *biggest* rat I've ever seen,' he gasped. 'This is serious!'





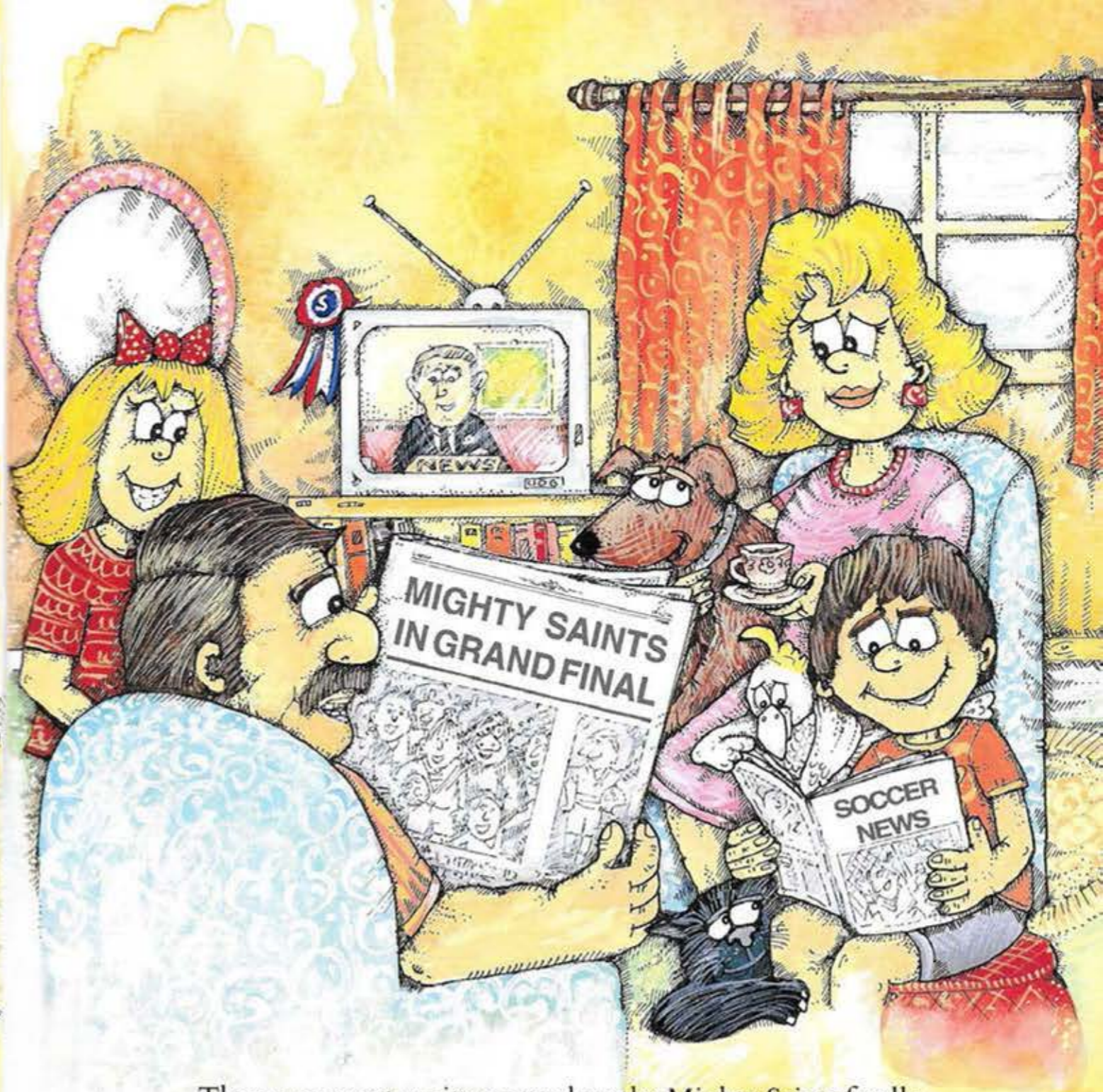
The Pest Exterminators were called in to get rid of the big rat. They wheeled in strange-looking machines with nozzles that squirted dark smelly smoke in, around and behind everything.

Bernard coughed as the swirling black fog poured through the air vents and through any cracks in the floor. He tried holding a fish bowl over his head but it was no use. Finally he lay down low on the floor where the smoke wasn't as thick.

‘That should fix any rats in this house,’ agreed the Pest Exterminators as they turned their machines off.

Life in the Da Vincis' house returned almost to normal after the Pest Exterminators' visit. Very few cupboard doors were left open and hardly any household items went missing or were broken.

The Gremlin dug away at the roof of his grotto. He had to move closer to the humans above, to hear what they were saying and doing. He wasn't going to get caught again.



There was great excitement when the Mighty Saints finally reached the Grand Final, the first time in eighteen years. The Da Vincis listened to the television news and read the newspapers. Leonardo and Lucy eagerly counted off the days to the big day.

Grand Final day finally arrived. Leonardo had stayed up late watching old replays from previous years on the television. He couldn't sleep.

Everyone was dressed in red, white and blue. Lucy wore her lucky charm bracelet.

'I'll just get the tickets,' said Mr Da Vinci as he looked in the drawer. 'I put them in here last we-e-e-k...' Mr Da Vinci froze. The drawer was empty!

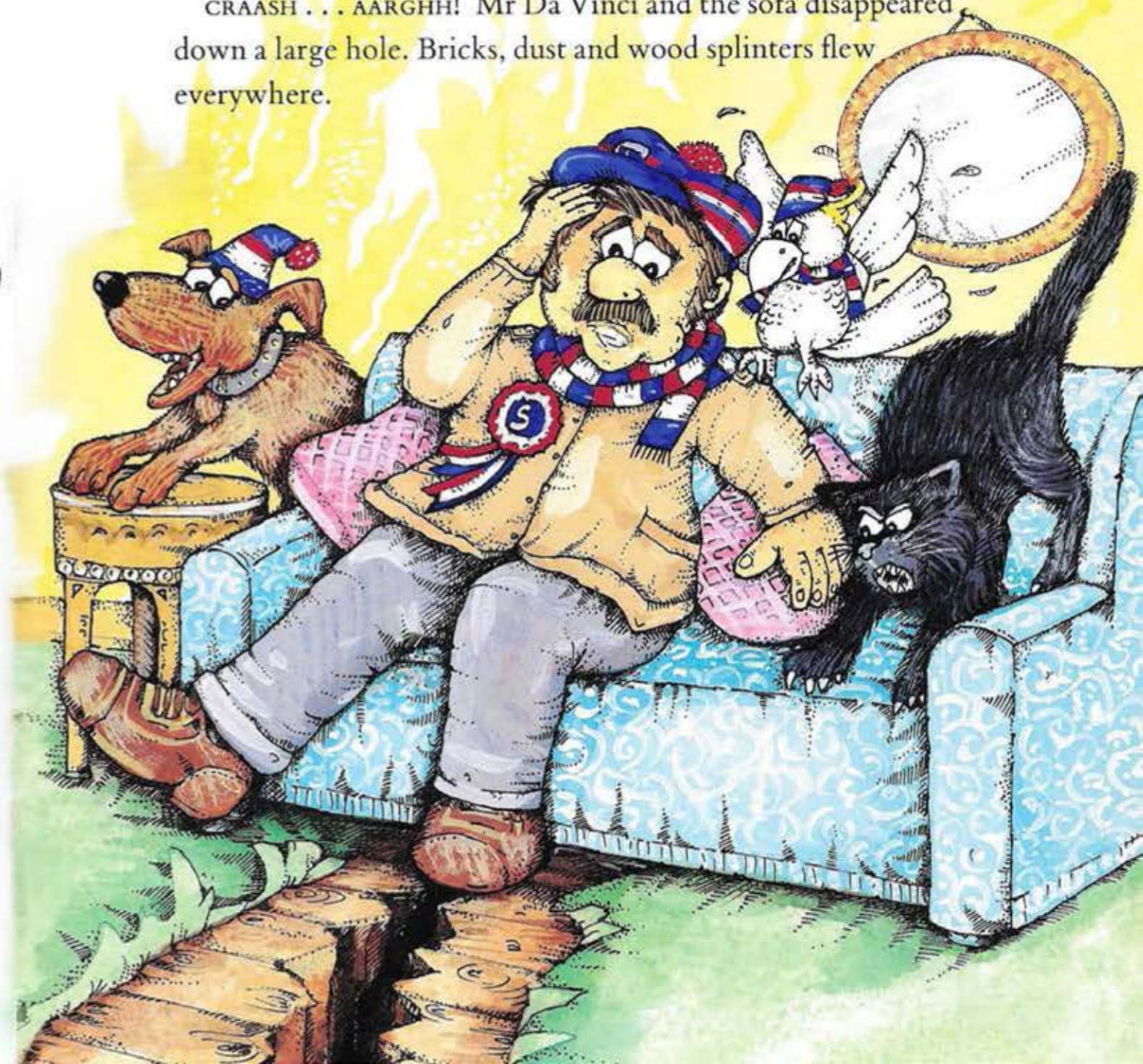
Everyone had a look. The tickets were definitely *not* there.



'I just knew something like this would happen,' groaned Mr Da Vinci as he slumped on the sofa. 'It was all too good to be true.'

RIPPP... TEARRR... Suddenly the carpet between his feet parted and a large crack appeared in the floorboards beneath him.

CRAASH... AARGHH! Mr Da Vinci and the sofa disappeared down a large hole. Bricks, dust and wood splinters flew everywhere.



Mr Da Vinci gasped as he wiped the dust from his eyes. The sofa had cushioned his fall through the floor. He could see all the old furniture he'd thought was in the back of the garage.

'There's my dinosaur!' exclaimed Leonardo as he peered down into the gloom.

'And my soccer magazines!' cried Mrs Da Vinci. 'And my pasta machine!'

'And there are my missing computer disks!' squeaked Lucy, pointing down excitedly.

Mr Da Vinci had seen something much more important. There in the settling dust, on a nearby rock, were the four Grand Final tickets.

'Those rats must have been pretty tricky,' he thought to himself, as Leonardo lowered the step ladder.





The Da Vincis locked the front door quickly. They'd sort out all the mess later.

They arrived at the stadium just in time to see their team run on the field. All their troubles were forgotten as they clapped, yelled, booed and shouted at the tops of their voices.

Finally, the referee blew his whistle. The Saints had won in a nail-biting finish. The players hugged each other, the supporters hugged each other. It was all very exciting and very exhausting.



Meanwhile, Bernard climbed out of the rubble that had once been his grotto. He pulled his suitcase out of the dirt and started to pack. He'd had enough. How much can a Gremlin take? He'd been barked at, smoked out, then flattened by a falling sofa. He was going to dig a new grotto . . . *somewhere else.*

Has your toothpaste tube been squeezed in the middle recently? And its top left off? Or your refrigerator door been left open all night?

If so, the Gremlin may just have found his new home . . .

under your house!

**THE
END**

