

Markus Grolik

## Inspector Salamander – Crime Scene: Scrap Yard

128 pages  
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With b/w illustrations by the author  
Age 7 and up

### Central Command: Scrap Yard

Inspector Salamander, specialist in difficult to hopeless cases, is working hard in his office inside one of the broken washing machines at the scrap yard, when the famous opera singer Luigi Crötelli shows up at his door. He's been searching for his nephew Antonio in the frog pond at the scrap yard. But there's no trace of Antonio, nor of the pond and its inhabitants. A hopeless case? Not for Inspector Salamander! Together with his assistant Spider-Manni and his special foldable kickboard, he sets out to investigate, and soon discovers the scrap yard has a whole host of suspicious inhabitants.

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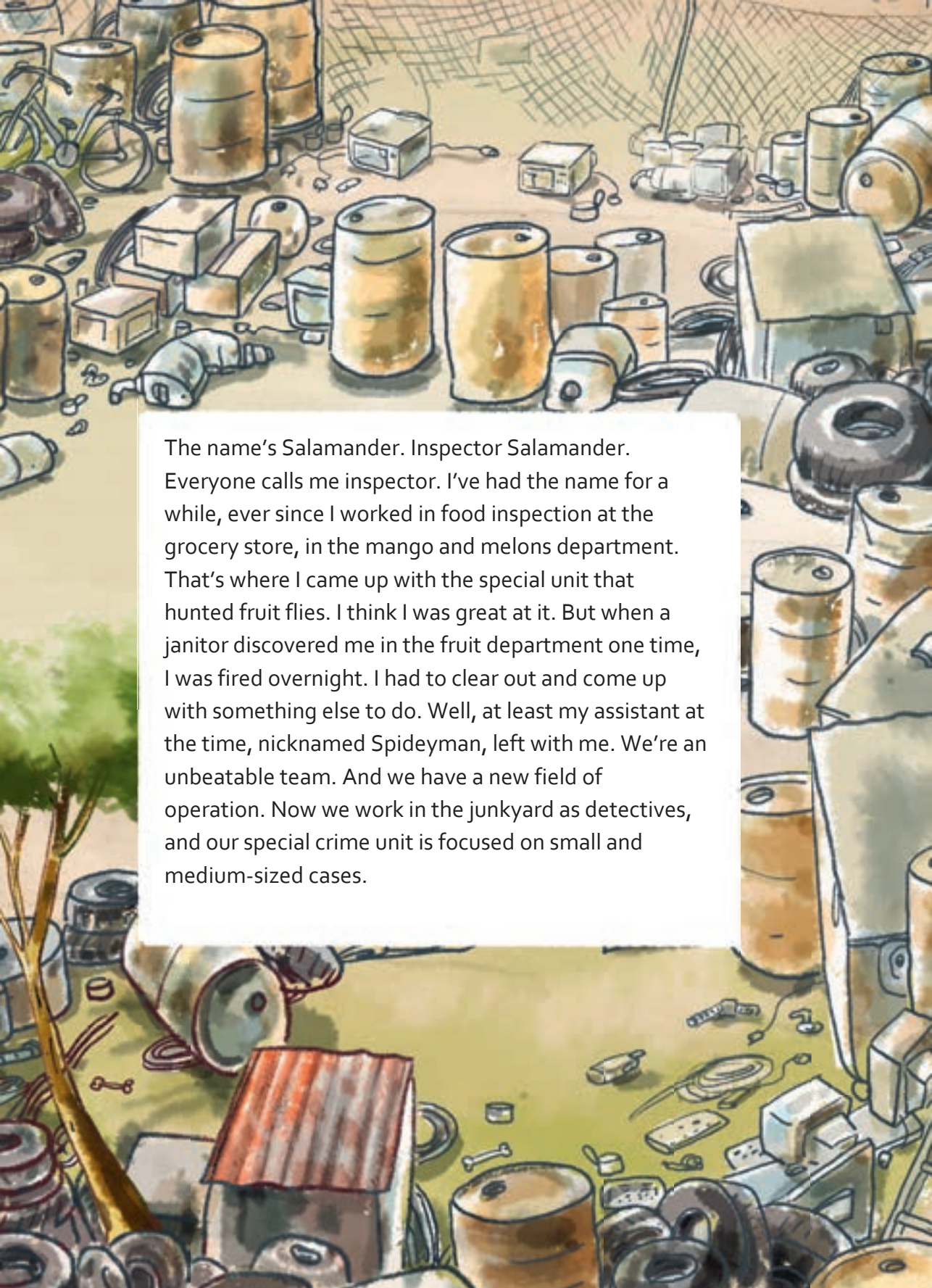
**Markus Grolik**, born in 1965, was trained as a fashion designer and worked as a film poster painter before he studied art at a Munich university. Since then, he has illustrated quite a number of children's books and even written a few of them. Besides that, he draws very successful cartoons for agencies, newspapers, and publishers. During his free time, he and his two children continue their search for dragons and unicorns.





*It's your turn,  
Salamander!*





The name's Salamander. Inspector Salamander. Everyone calls me inspector. I've had the name for a while, ever since I worked in food inspection at the grocery store, in the mango and melons department. That's where I came up with the special unit that hunted fruit flies. I think I was great at it. But when a janitor discovered me in the fruit department one time, I was fired overnight. I had to clear out and come up with something else to do. Well, at least my assistant at the time, nicknamed Spideyman, left with me. We're an unbeatable team. And we have a new field of operation. Now we work in the junkyard as detectives, and our special crime unit is focused on small and medium-sized cases.



We set up our office in a broken washing machine. The rusty drum inside has the perfect amount of space for two savvy professionals like Spideyman and me. We have a sign hanging over the door that reads: »Open around the clock. You've come to the right place! Salamander and Co. – experts at solving crimes fast. Whether it's an invasion of pesky silverfish or kidnapped fruit, we've got you covered.« And in smaller print underneath: »Even bloody murders don't phase us – but they cost extra.«

To make sure we stay on top of our game in the fight against organized crime, Spideyman and I regularly play Memory. I win most of the time. And that's what we were doing when a stranger showed up one day.











*Hello.*

*Is this the  
right place?*

The first things I noticed were the smoking jacket and the melodious voice.

»Are you Inspector Salamander, the expert at solving crimes fast?«

»That's me. Everything from silverfish invasions to fruit kidnappings.«

The stranger looked relieved. He introduced himself as Luigi Crötelli. His name sounded sophisticated, but his smoking jacket was too tight.

Luigi Crötelli was a world-famous opera singer. A toad tenor who performed in Milan and Verona. Frogs and amphibians the world over fell at his feet. A few days ago Crötelli received a letter from his nephew Antonio, who lived with his small family on a tiny pond in the junkyard.





*Dear Uncle Luigi,  
Could you come visit as soon as possible and  
helpf us out with a frog concert? We're  
eager to see you. We need your help.  
Best wishes, your nephew Antonio*

*P.S. I've include our address and a  
map so you can find our exact  
location.*



Crötelli wondered about the urgency expressed in the letter, but he was looking forward to seeing his nephew again. He immediately sent Antonio tickets for a charity concert. Then he packed his bags and set off. But when he arrived at the junkyard yesterday, he was confronted with a huge problem.

Luigi Crötelli's voice trembled. He struggled for words. The pond had disappeared. It had completely dried up. There was nothing left, not even a single drop of water. And what was even worse was that there was no sign of Antonio and his family. They were all gone, as if the ground had swallowed them up. It was a disturbing story.

*Very  
strange!*

*That sounds  
like a difficult  
case to me.*





A cartoon illustration of a green toad-like character, Inspector Salamander, standing in a sewer. He is wearing a green suit with a striped vest and a bow tie. He has a worried expression and is holding a small white card with a spider on it. A speech bubble above him contains text. In the background, there are large, curved sewer pipes. To the right, there is a small wooden table. In the foreground, there are some cardboard boxes, one of which has a spider on it, and some papers.

*Inspector Salamander, you must find my nephew and his family.*

»Only you can track down my nephew and his family.« Crötelli sounded desperate.

»This could get tricky«, Spideyman whispered to me. »Let's keep playing.« I scratched my chin.

»Please take the case«, begged the toad.

»Okay. Twenty dried fruit flies a day plus expenses«, I said.

»Sure, that's fine«, Crötelli said, sighing with relief.



I stuffed Spideyman and my foldable kickboard in the pockets of my trench coat. We got into Crötelli's limousine, and his chauffeur sped over to the spot where the pond had been. I got out. It was hard to believe that there had been any water here, let alone a pond big enough for frogs.

»Salamander, report to me as soon as you get a lead«, Crötelli said.

He handed me his business card, and then the limo sped away.



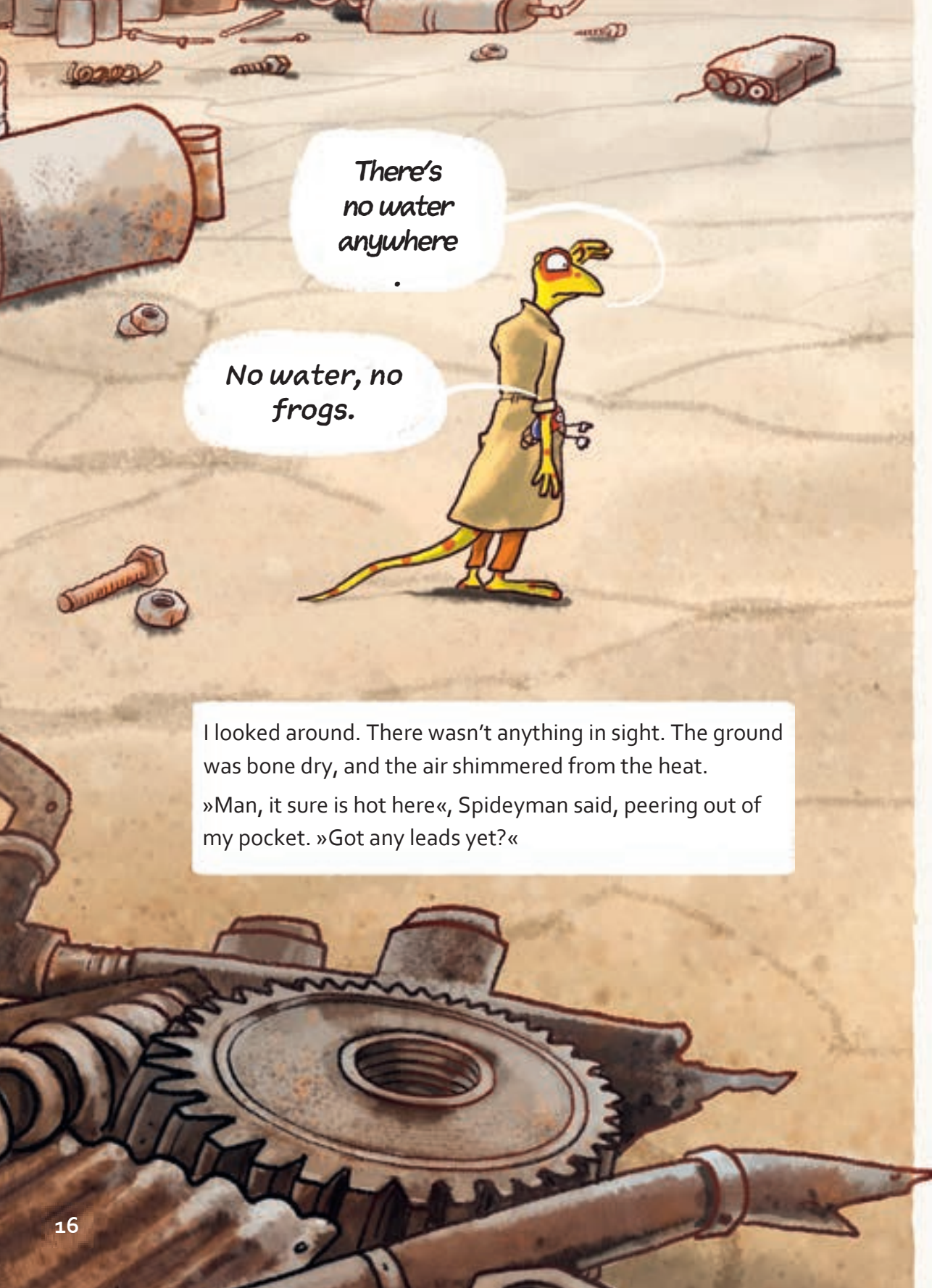
WROMMMM

Step on  
the gas!

I think it's best to  
bring you to the  
pond right away.

You'll find me at  
the Ritz. Good  
luck, Salamander!





There's  
no water  
anywhere  
.

No water, no  
frogs.

I looked around. There wasn't anything in sight. The ground was bone dry, and the air shimmered from the heat.

»Man, it sure is hot here«, Spideyman said, peering out of my pocket. »Got any leads yet?«



»Nooo«, I breathed, squinting.  
»There was no sign of life anywhere. Not a hint of a breeze or any shade. Nothing.  
Suddenly something moved.



*Nothing's  
happening  
here!*

*Wait, I  
think I see  
something.*



*Hey you,  
over there!*

*Hey, stop!  
Wait a  
minute!*

*Hello!*


*What? Oh  
no!*

I focused on a spot in front of me. I recognized the outline of an ant. It was a red fire ant. He seemed to be pushing some kind of shopping basket in front of him. Maybe he was our first witness. I immediately took off running towards the ant, waving my arms wildly. The ant briefly lifted its fiery red head and then dashed off. I examined the shopping basket. It was a funny object. It was made out of one half of a walnut shell and had a wire handle. This was highly suspicious! And the ant was incredibly fast.

*Faster!*

*Don't run out  
of steam now!*





After him!  
What are you  
waiting for?

What  
is this?

I'm outta here!

Of course I ran after him at full speed. He sprinted toward an old cardboard box. It was a box intended for tropical fruit inscribed with the name Tropicana. The ant yanked open a door and disappeared inside. I gasped for breath. Spideyman sighed. »He got away.«

Phew, I  
did it!



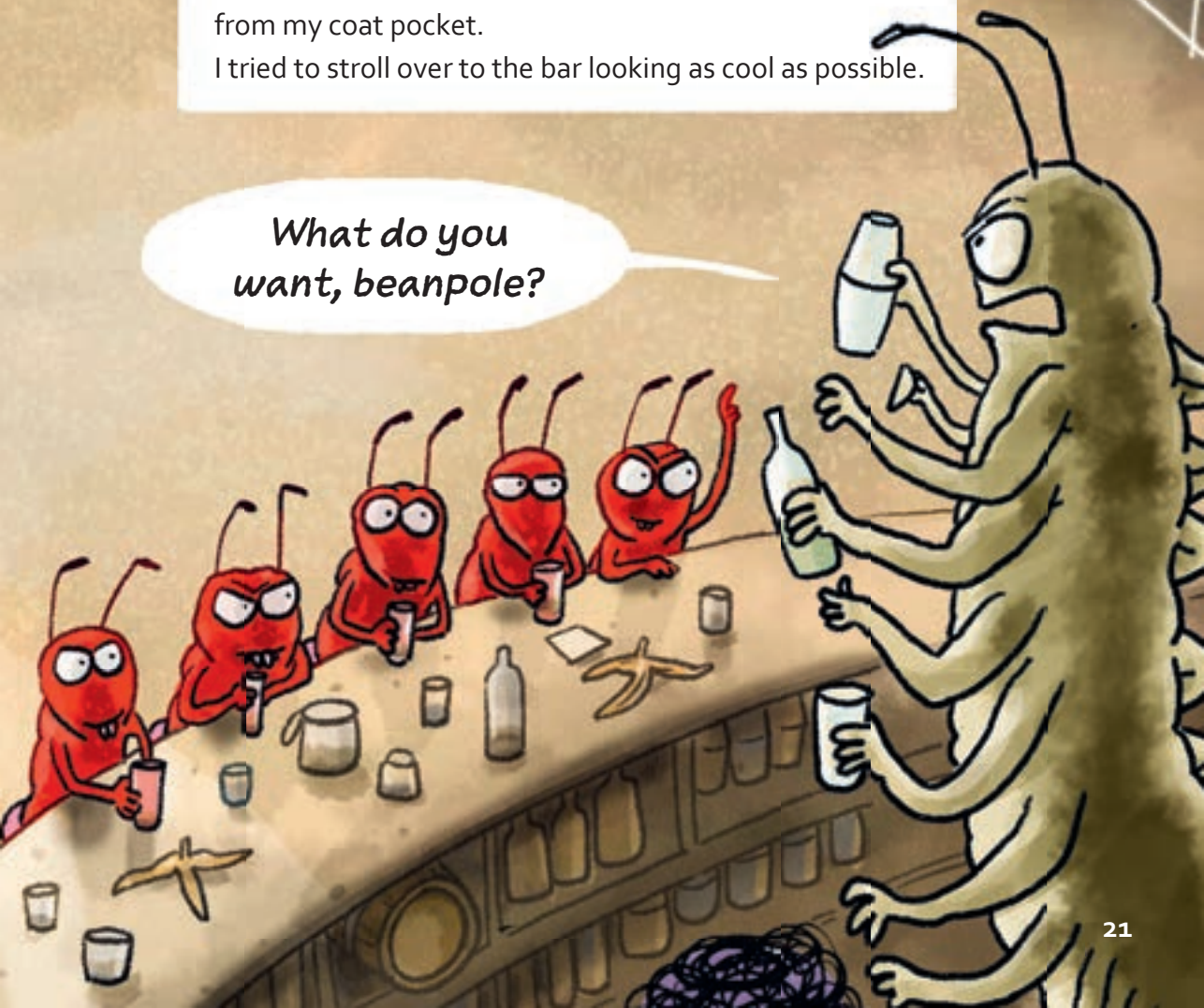
I heard music and voices as I opened the door to the Tropicana. All eyes turned on me. The conversations stopped. Only the jukebox kept on playing the cockroach's song. A picture of a half-naked tarantula on a plush sofa hung on the wall. Ants were sitting at all the tables. They were all just as red as the one I had chased outside. I let my eyes wander. Which one was the ant who had just run away from me?



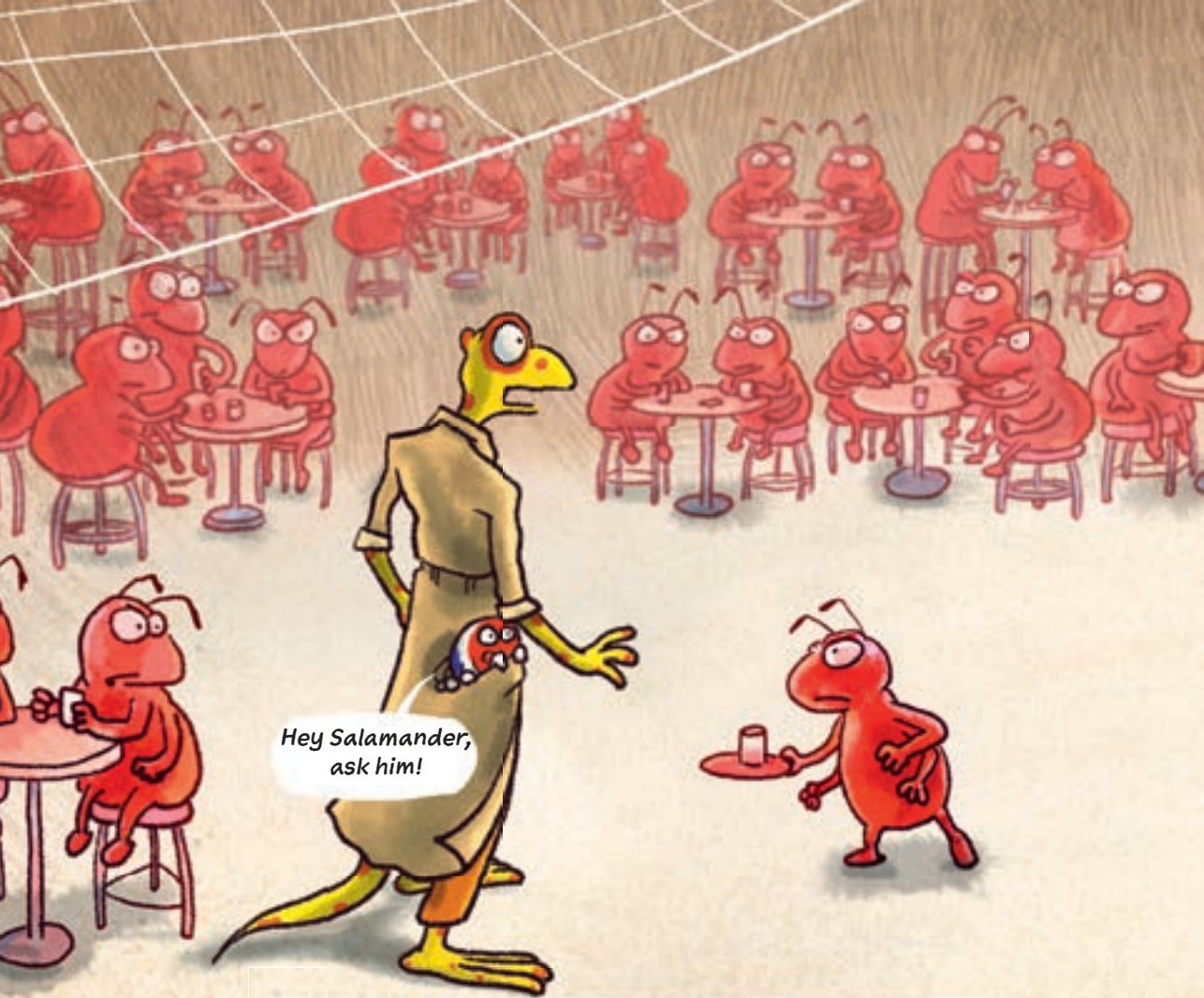




»Ask the centipede over at the bar«, Spideyman hissed from my coat pocket.  
I tried to stroll over to the bar looking as cool as possible.







Hey Salamander,  
ask him!

»I just want to ask a few questions«, I said.  
»Inspector Salamander, special crime unit for small and medium-sized cases.«  
»What kind of questions?«  
»About the pond.«  
»What pond?«  
»The frog pond?«  
»There is no frog pond here.«  
»And the frogs?«  
»There aren't any frogs here! Or do you see any?« A huge spider popped up behind the centipede. There was no doubt about it: it was the spider in the picture.







We don't like nosy  
amphibians around here!

Get out!





»I got it. I'm already on my way out«, I shouted as I waved my hands. That was my trick to get out my special foldable kickboard and open it up in a snap. Before the spider and the centipede could jump over the counter, I was already hightailing it towards the exit. The ants intending to block my path sprang to the side. I crashed against the door at full force, and it sprang open with a terrible screech.

