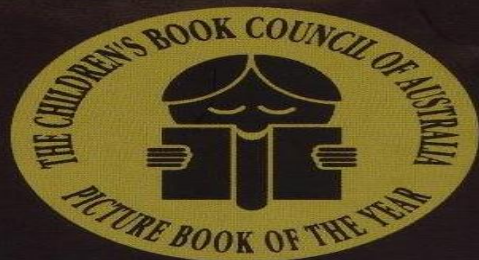


GARY CREW



STEVEN WOOLMAN

THE WATER TOWER



Nobody in Preston could remember when the watertower was built, or who had built it, but there it stood on Shooters Hill — its iron legs rusted, its egg-shaped tank warped and leaking — casting a long, dark shadow across the valley, across Preston itself.

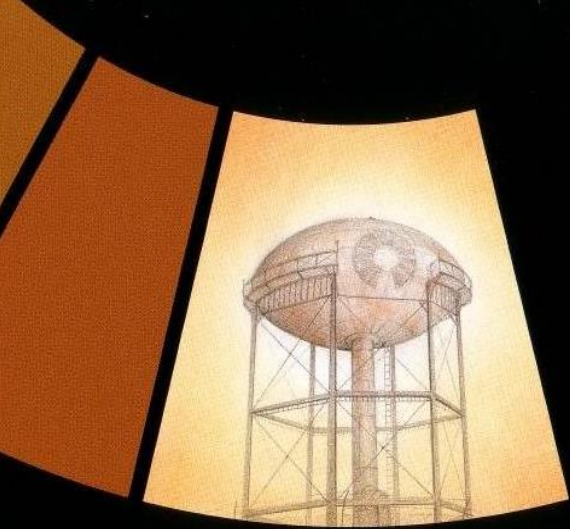




One summer afternoon, Spike Trotter met Bubba D'Angelo by the service station and together they went up to the tower for a swim.

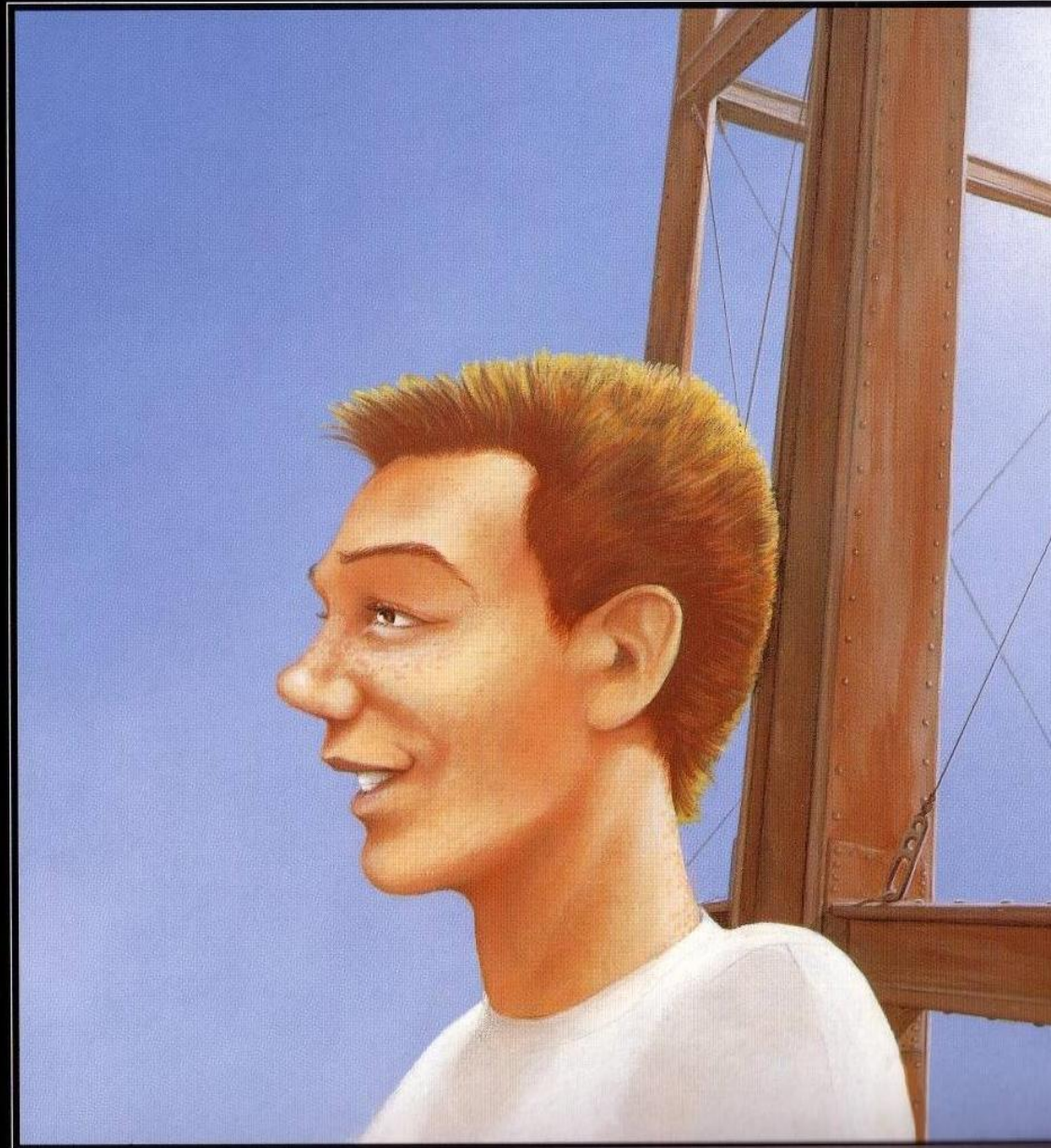
Spike led the way, as usual.
“My mother says it’s dangerous up there,” he said, “but it’s worth it, hey?”

Bubba puffed on behind. His mother couldn’t have cared less where he went.



At the summit, Spike stopped to look down on the sweltering town. “Suckers,” he grinned, and headed for the tower.

Last summer, a security fence had kept trespassers out, but now the metal posts were twisted and flattened and barbed wire lay coiled on the ground.

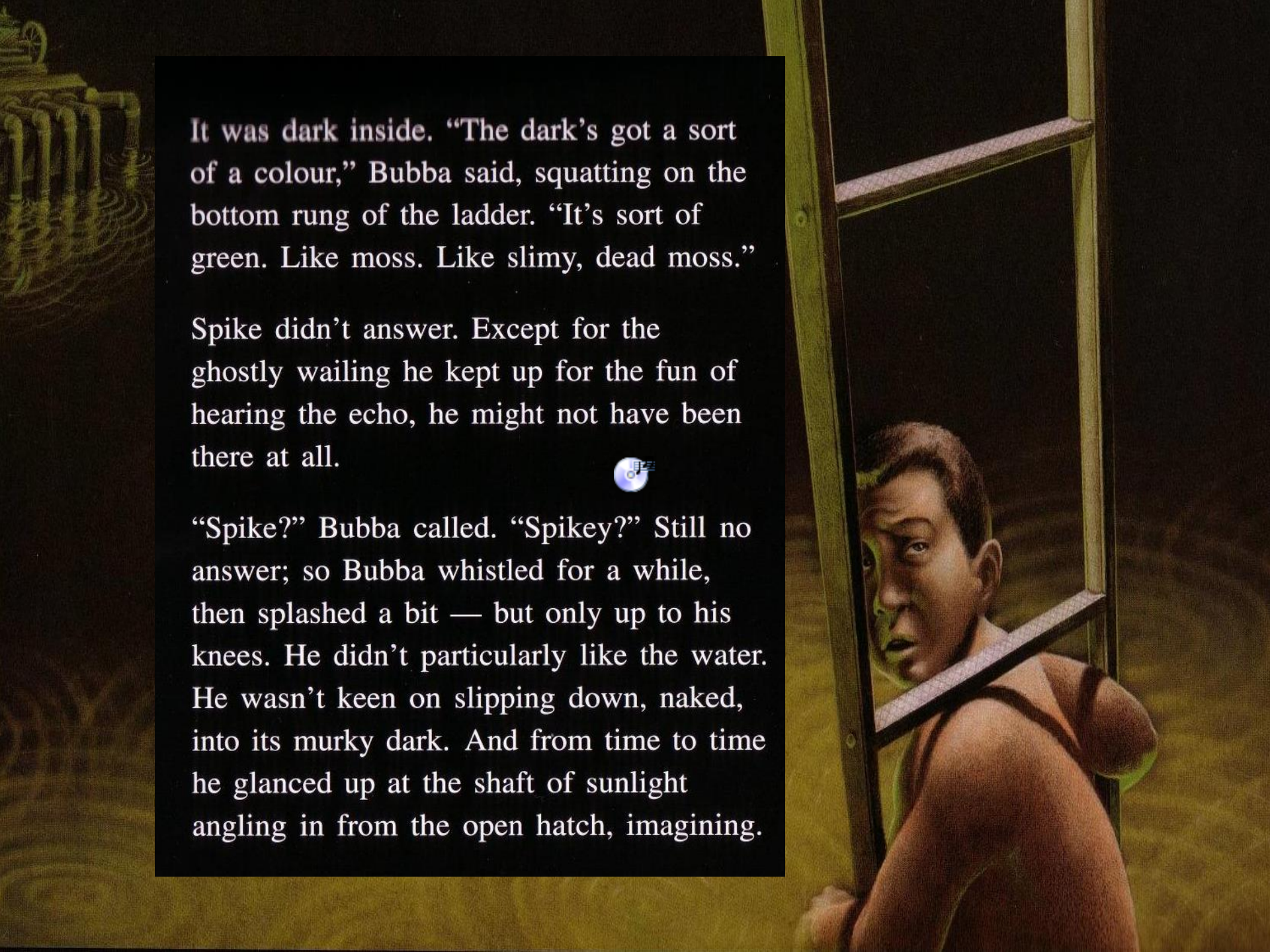




“You reckon vandals done that?” Bubba asked, recovering his breath.

But Spike was already on the top. “Hurry up,” he yelled, throwing open the access hatch. “It’s scorching up here.”

He pulled his shirt over his head, dropped his shorts and clambered down into the tank.

The background of the page is a dark, atmospheric illustration. On the right, a man with dark skin and short hair is climbing a wooden ladder. He is looking back over his shoulder with a concerned expression. The ladder is made of light-colored wood and is set against a dark, textured background that resembles a ship's hull or a large industrial structure. In the upper left corner, there are several vertical pipes or tubes, some of which have small wheels or caps at the top. The overall lighting is dim, with a greenish-yellow hue, suggesting a dark, enclosed space.

It was dark inside. “The dark’s got a sort of a colour,” Bubba said, squatting on the bottom rung of the ladder. “It’s sort of green. Like moss. Like slimy, dead moss.”

Spike didn’t answer. Except for the ghostly wailing he kept up for the fun of hearing the echo, he might not have been there at all.



“Spike?” Bubba called. “Spikey?” Still no answer; so Bubba whistled for a while, then splashed a bit — but only up to his knees. He didn’t particularly like the water. He wasn’t keen on slipping down, naked, into its murky dark. And from time to time he glanced up at the shaft of sunlight angling in from the open hatch, imagining.