

Mark Edmondson

THE CREEK WAY



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ILLUSTRATED BY KRIS LILLYMAN



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About the Author

Mark's passion for technology began at an early age when he developed a database solution to help his father and neighbors manage complex livestock administration. This early exposure to tech problem-solving shaped his future career in professional services.

Mark worked in a small local accounting firm before joining Big 4 firm PwC. He went on to lead global innovation projects that transformed the audit process for thousands of PwC professionals worldwide.

In 2016, Mark founded Inflo with a mission to make audit more attractive. Inflo provides accounting firms with cutting-edge audit technology and guidance from experts. Inflo helps forward-thinking accounting firms improve their client services and the working lives of their teams.

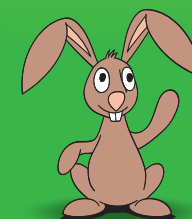
Mark also helps accounting leaders to navigate technology and change management through The Audit Opinion. This monthly newsletter offers practical insights from the best minds in the accounting profession. You can sign up for free using the QR code below.

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Thanks to my daughter Lucy, for the idea to use animals
for this story. To Alice, for all her incredible ideas. And
to Terri, for being by my side for it all...

Nestled between rolling hills and sparkling streams there was a town unlike any other. Silver Pines had always been a special place.



For generations, it had been known as a magical destination where dreams came to life. As the years passed, Silver Pines grew into a bustling hub of entertainment and adventure.

Families traveled from far and wide to experience the many attractions.

The theme park, Phoenix Edge, boasted the fastest rollercoasters. They made you feel like you could touch the clouds.



At the aquarium, Roll-with-the-Tide, visitors marveled at the most exotic fish from the depths of the ocean.

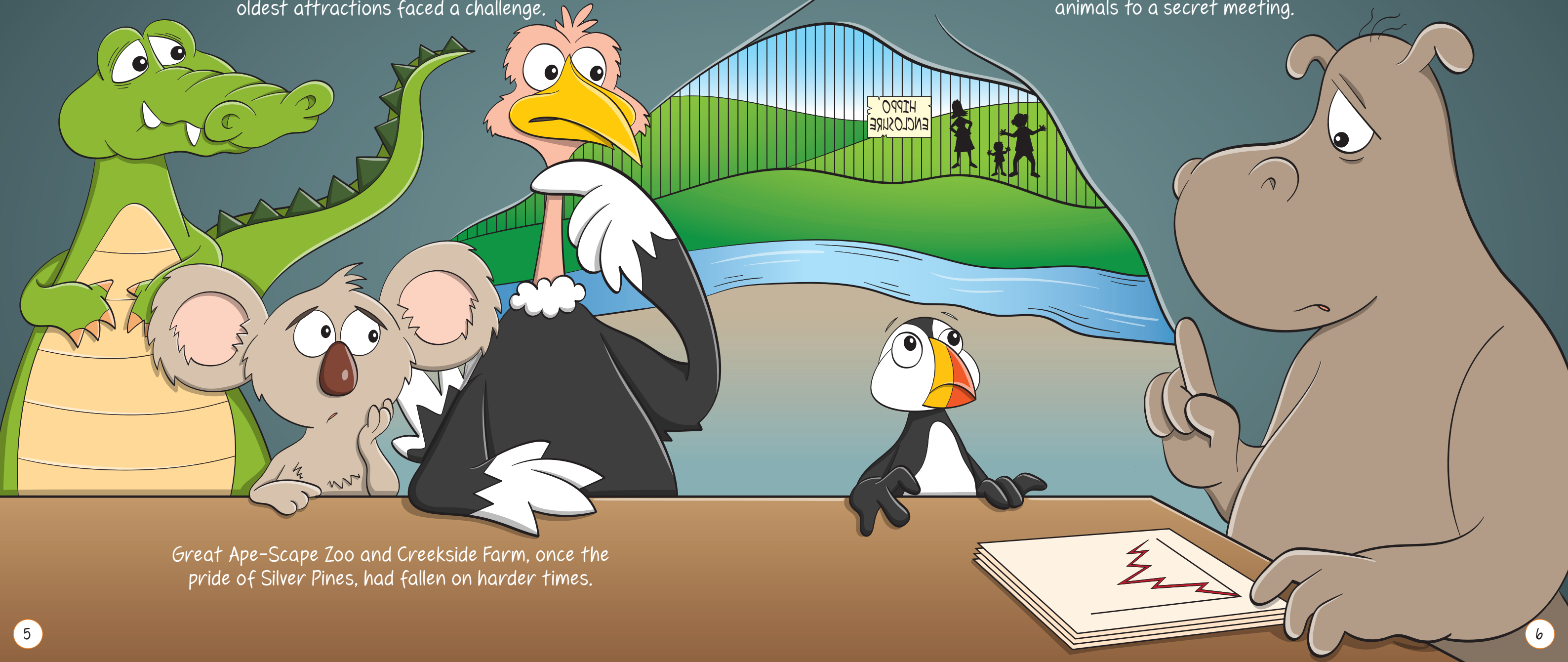


The arcade, Jump N Joysticks, dazzled gamers with its incredible prizes and cutting-edge technology.

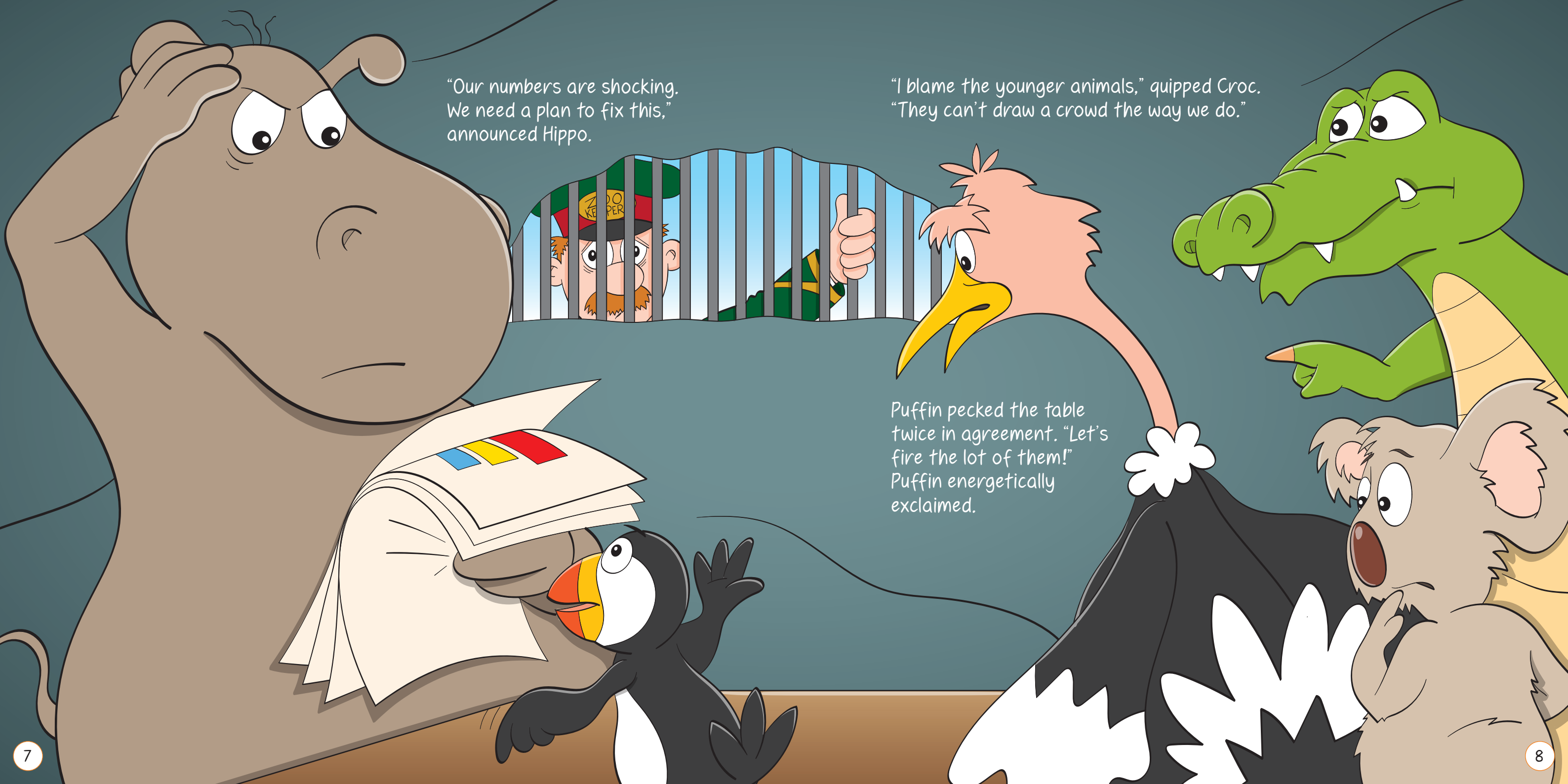


Silver Pines had something for everyone, the perfect blend of thrills and wonder. But amid all the excitement and laughter, two of the town's oldest attractions faced a challenge.

The Zoo had seen a steady fall in visitors. Hippo, Chair of the Zoo Board, had summoned the senior animals to a secret meeting.



Great Ape-Scape Zoo and Creekside Farm, once the pride of Silver Pines, had fallen on harder times.

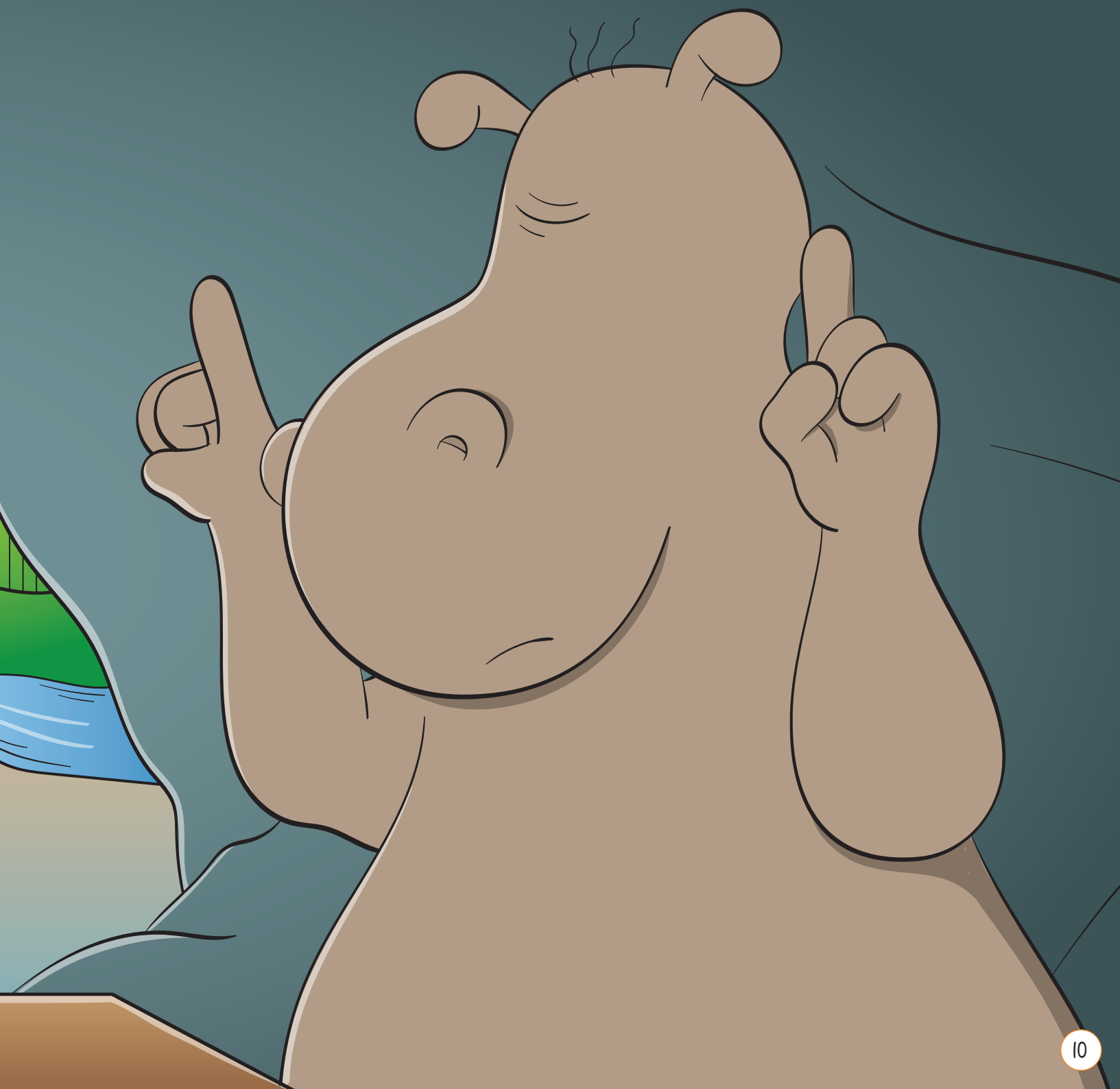
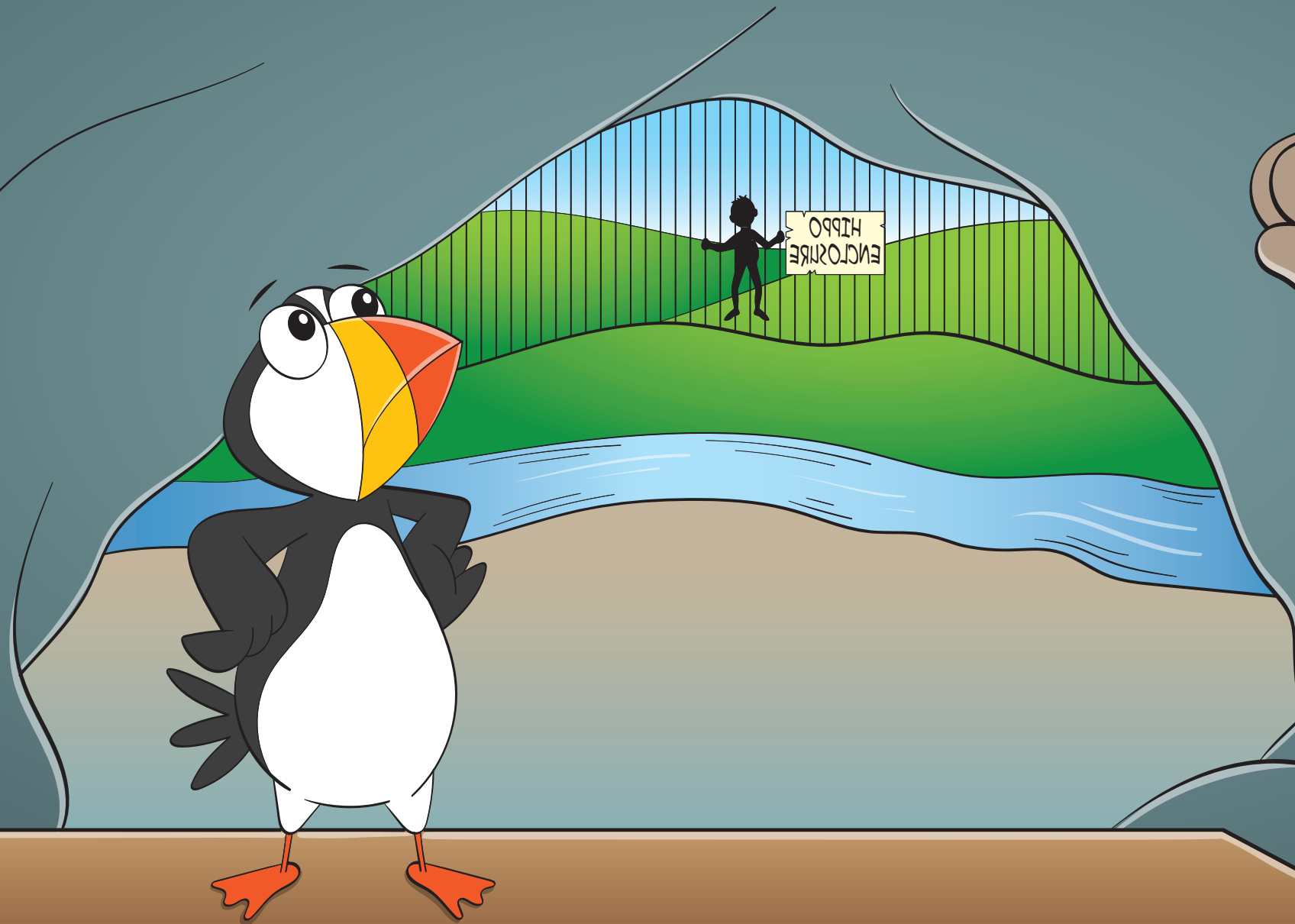


"Our numbers are shocking. We need a plan to fix this," announced Hippo.

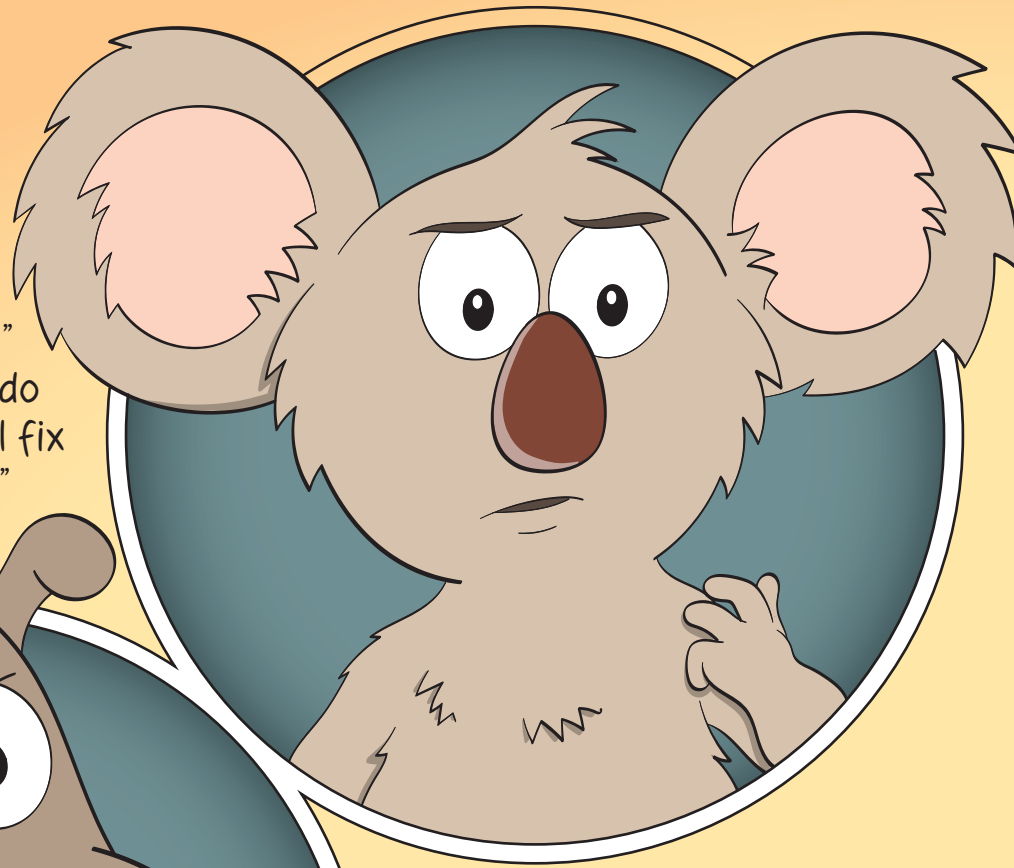
"I blame the younger animals," quipped Croc. "They can't draw a crowd the way we do."

Puffin pecked the table twice in agreement. "Let's fire the lot of them!" Puffin energetically exclaimed.

“Sadly, we can’t do that, Puffin,” sighed Hippo. “What we need is a rebrand and an attention-grabbing relaunch. A new name. A new logo. We should redefine what it means to be a Zoo!” Hippo said, closing his eyes as he finished dramatically.

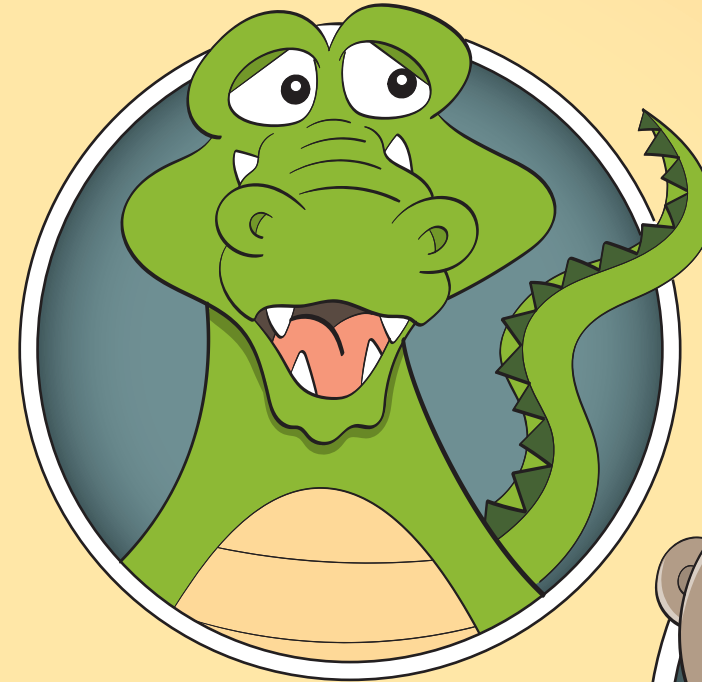


"That sounds costly," grumbled Koala. "How do you know a rebrand will fix all of our problems?"

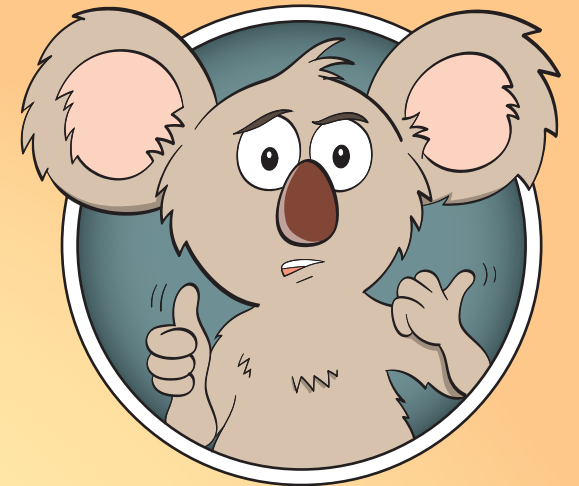


"I'm disappointed you would question my experience," rebuffed Hippo bluntly. "I know this is what we need. I have been in this business longer than all of you."

"We should go back to our old branding - we still have the signs in the shed. The bowling alley, Only 10-Pin, has an old fashioned brand and they are doing OK." muttered Koala.



"We did this at my previous Zoo," replied Hippo. "Let's lock it in right now that precisely six months from today we will host an incredible party to celebrate our newfound success."



"How long will a full rebrand take, Hippo?" asked Croc, ignoring Koala's rambling.



The animals then put this to a vote, with everyone approving the motion. Although there were some sheepish looks towards Hippo as they voted.

Puffin looked pleased with this newly given power. "I will set some high expectations with who I appoint!" Puffin replied.

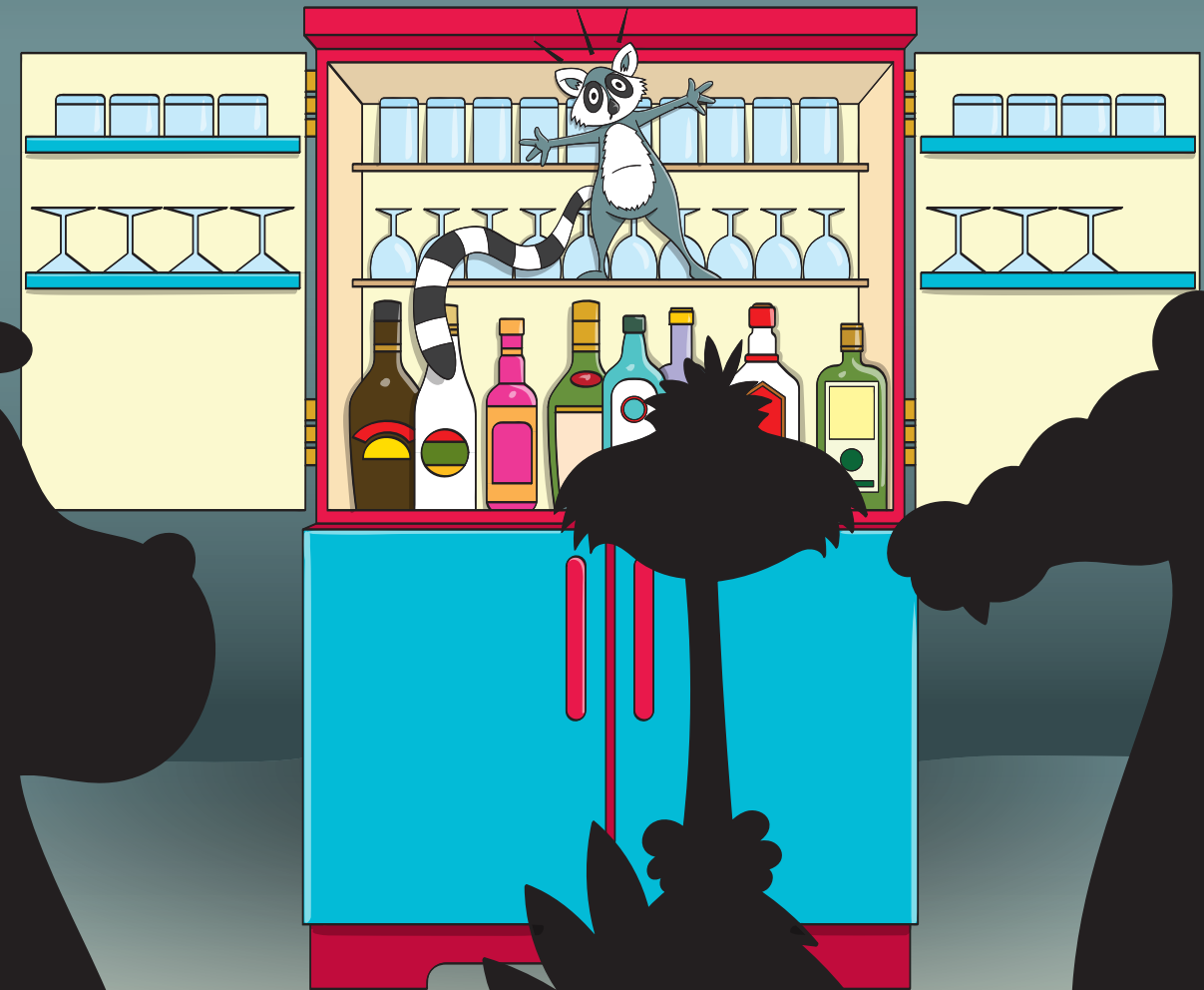
"Puffin, can you form a committee to lead this project? But make sure they bring all decisions to our monthly Board meeting," said Hippo.



"In the meantime though, we need to improve our profits immediately," chimed in Ostrich. "I recommend we cut back on cleaning costs as an easy win."



The group all nodded in agreement. Then they opened the cupboard for the usual after meeting drinks.




Meanwhile, down at Creekside farm, all of the farm animals had gathered in the barn.

"I invited you all here today because our numbers are continuing to decline," said Alpaca.

"How do our numbers compare to others?" asked Rooster.

"The data doesn't look good," responded Dog. "Our ticket sales are down 13% year-on-year. All of the other attractions in Silver Pines are up by at least 10%, except for the Zoo, and farms across the country are up 7% on average."



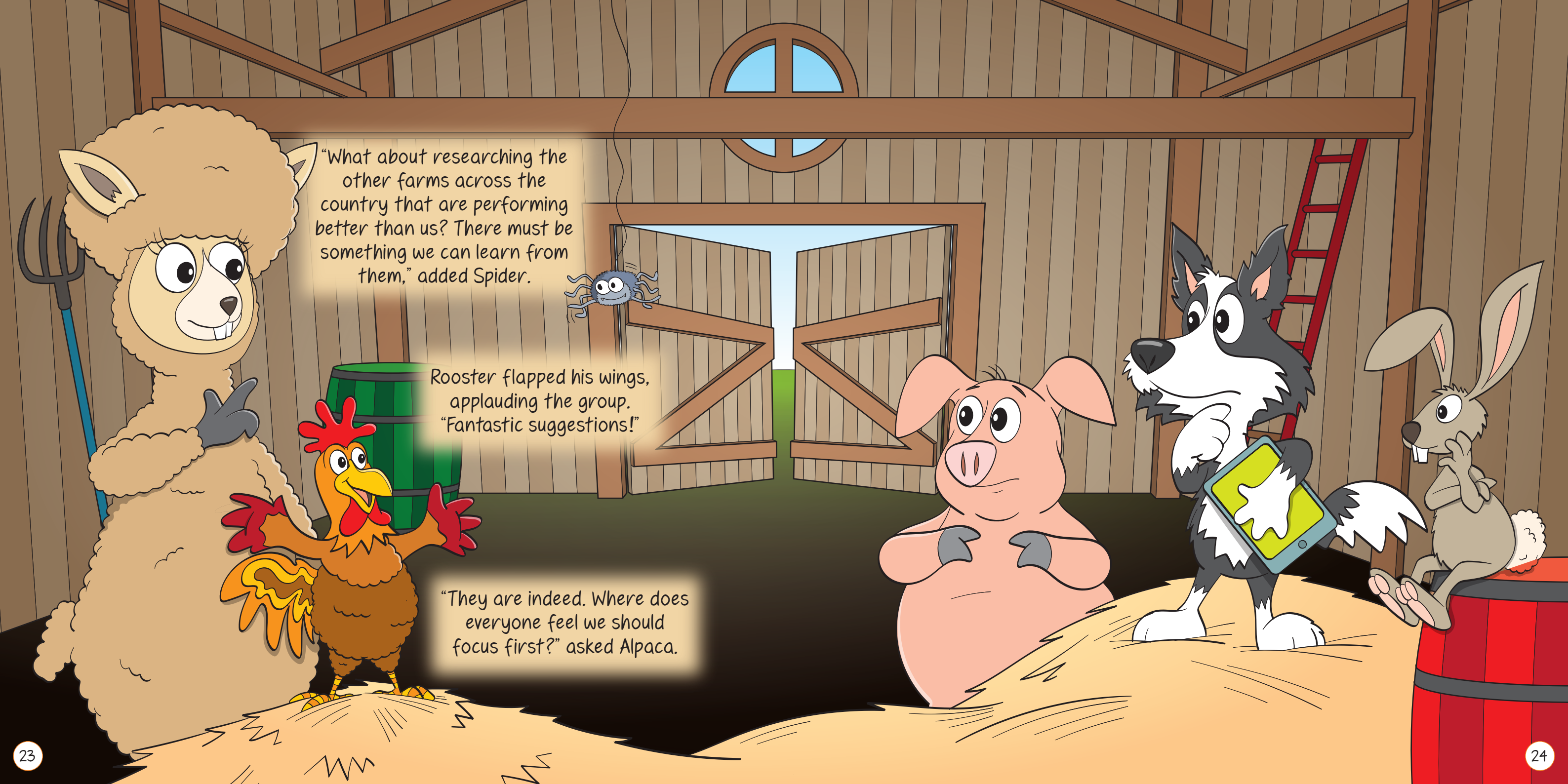
"Right," said Rooster. "But we are doing a lot of good things! Does anyone know what we could be doing better?"

The group was quiet.
"OK. Then the issue we must address is that our performance is not as good as others. We don't know why. So rather than discussing theories, let's think of solutions that will help us learn more," said Alpaca.



"I think we should do some research first," said Pig. "Let's speak with customers coming to Creekside and ask what they like most and how we can improve."

"I think we should speak with customers at the theme park," said Rabbit. "That is the most popular attraction in Silver Pines and I think the views of people who aren't our customers are more important, as we need new visitors."



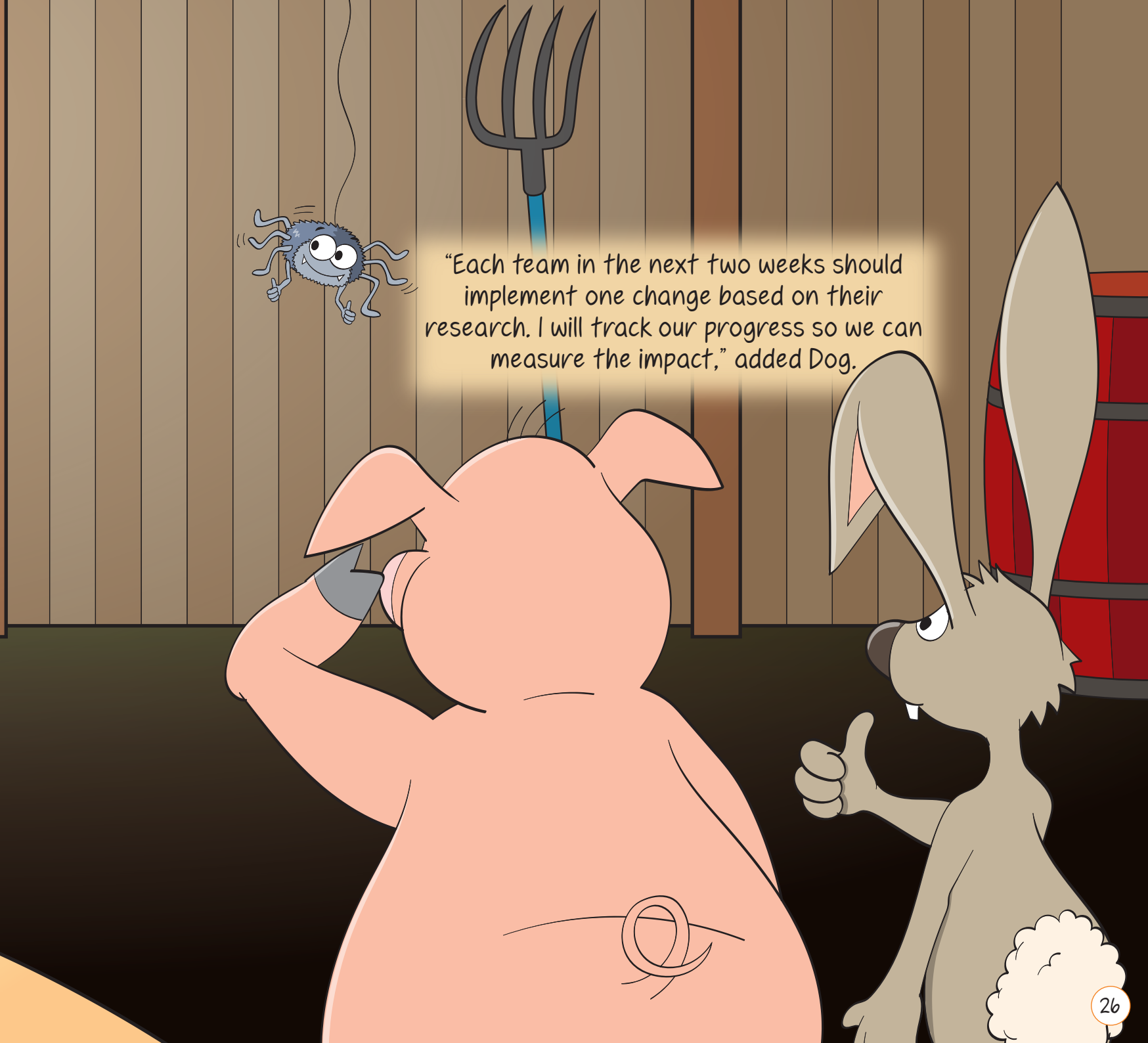
"What about researching the other farms across the country that are performing better than us? There must be something we can learn from them," added Spider.

Rooster flapped his wings, applauding the group. "Fantastic suggestions!"

"They are indeed. Where does everyone feel we should focus first?" asked Alpaca.



"I think I have a way we can do all these ideas," responded Rooster. "Pig, form a team to research our customers. Rabbit, your team go and speak with people at the theme park. Spider, your team go and research the other farm attractions."



"Each team in the next two weeks should implement one change based on their research. I will track our progress so we can measure the impact," added Dog.

Alpaca then emphasized that Pig, Rabbit, and Spider had the power to make the decisions needed to implement the changes at the farm.
“If you need anything, I am here to help. We have money to invest. I would suggest making small investments and see what you learn. This is going to be fantastic!” exclaimed Rooster.

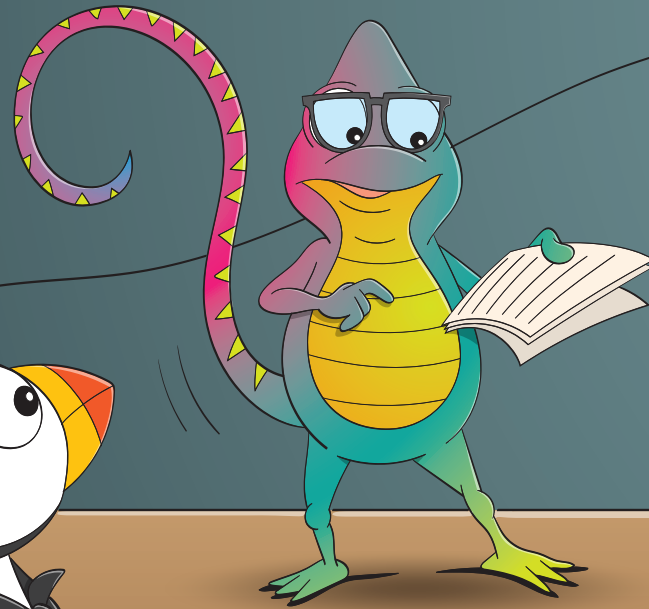


And with that, the farm animals left the barn bouncing with enthusiasm!



Two months later, Chameleon – the relaunch project leader hired by Puffin – was presenting an update to the Zoo Board.

“The project team have been meeting regularly over the last two months,” outlined Chameleon. “We have agreed on a charter, assigned sponsoring animals, and implemented progress reporting for the project.”



“But after much debate,” Chameleon continued. “The project team feels a full relaunch could alienate our established, loyal customers. We would therefore like to propose to the Board a more conservative approach.”



"What are you proposing then?" challenged Hippo, leaning forward as if close to stomping on Chameleon.

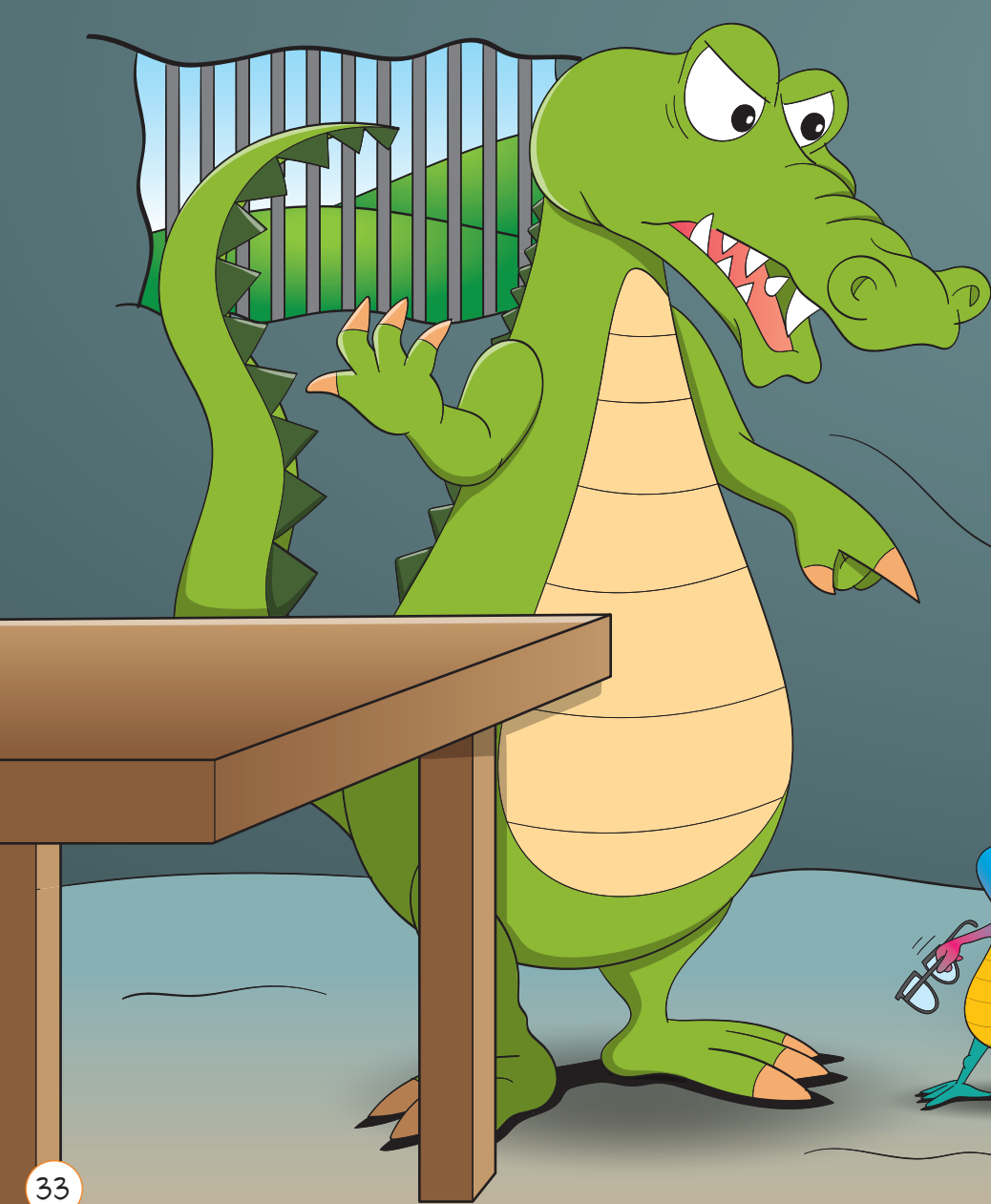
"The project team believes a repaint would be more appropriate than a rebrand," stated Chameleon, seemingly unaware that Hippo was inching nearer.



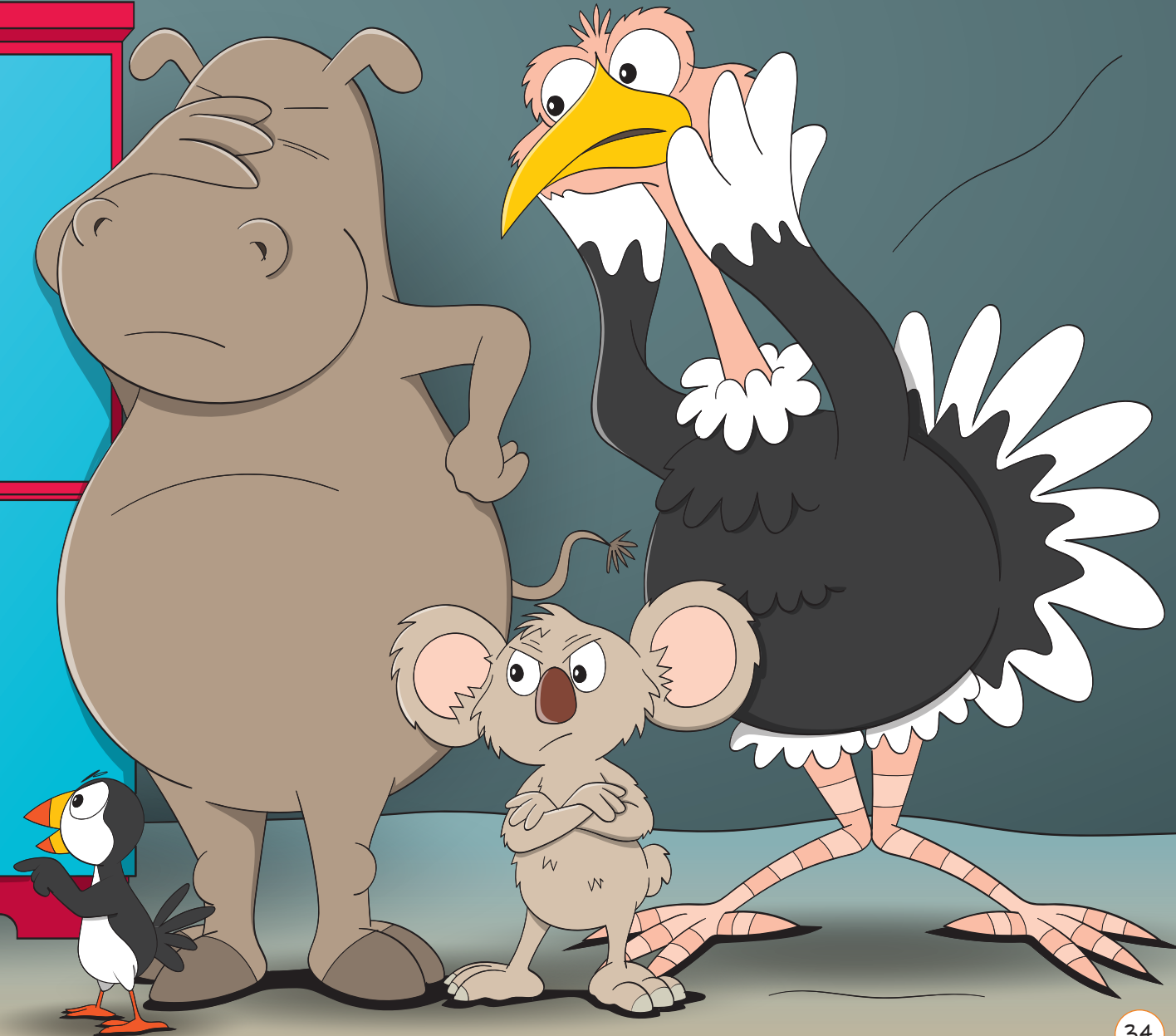
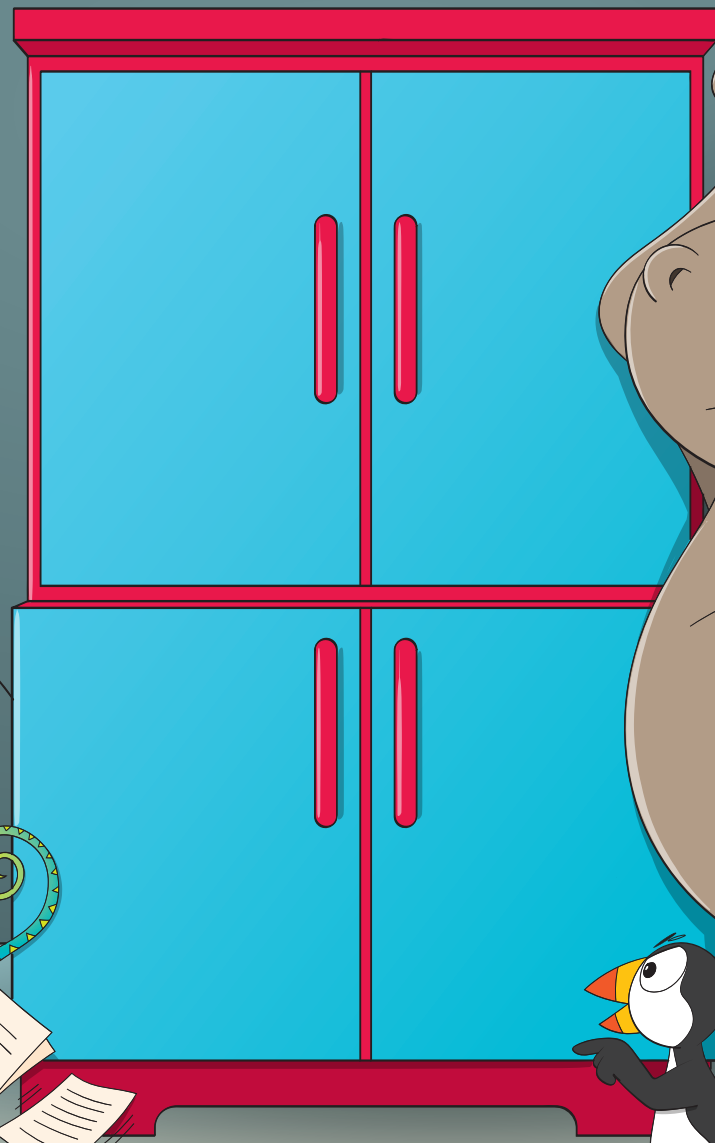
"You are proposing we simply change the color of the paintwork in the Zoo?" questioned Puffin.
"Nothing that controversial!" responded Chameleon naively. "The project team is recommending we repaint the Zoo in the same sunshine yellow color we use currently. It will give the Zoo a completely new lease of life while not disrupting the status quo."



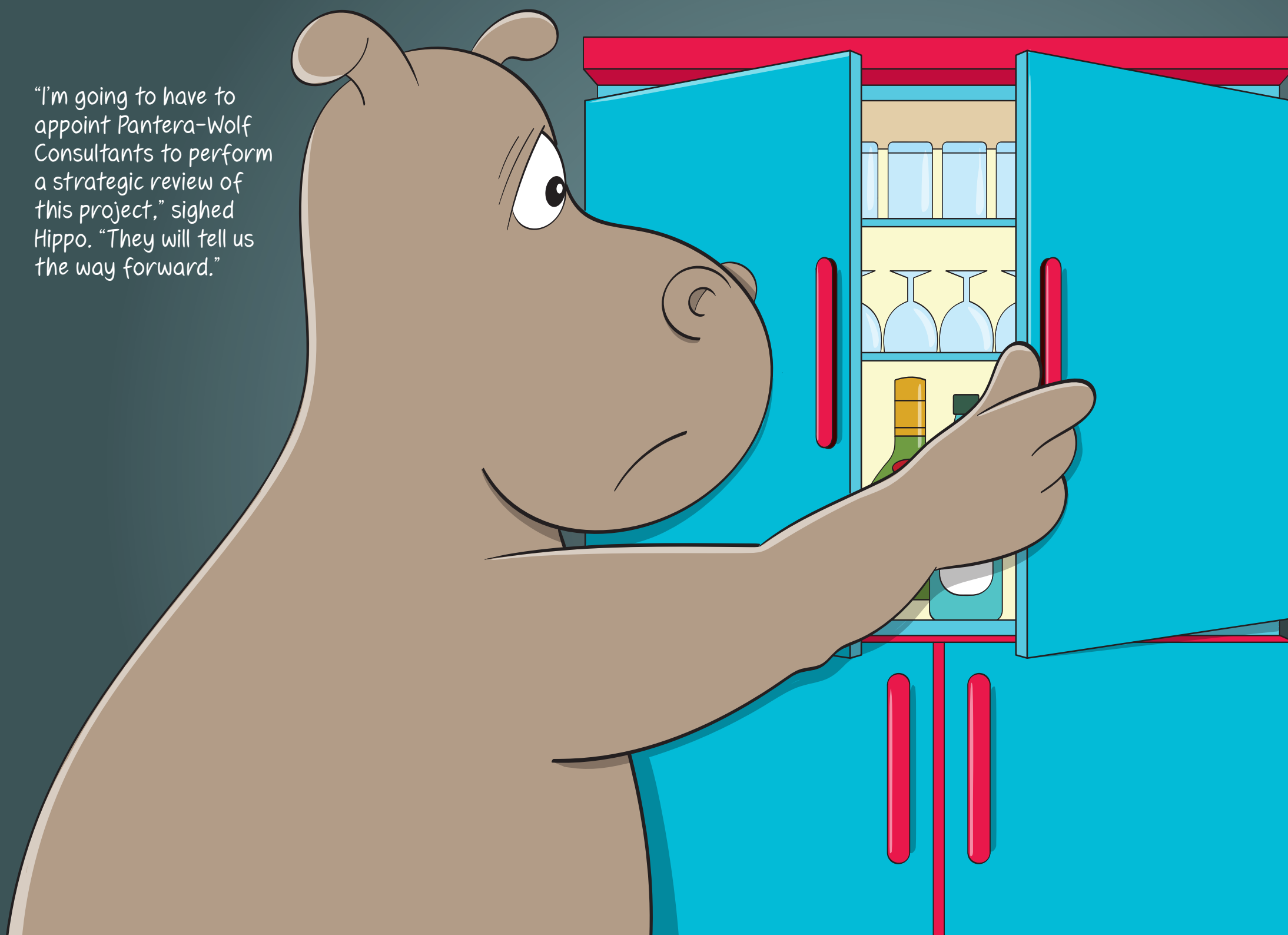
"I think you should turn sunshine yellow so I can't see you," quipped Croc. "Did you hit every branch when you fell out of the stupid tree?"



"This is completely unacceptable!" cut in Puffin. "I should never have hired you to lead this project. You're fired!"



"I'm going to have to appoint Pantera-Wolf Consultants to perform a strategic review of this project," sighed Hippo. "They will tell us the way forward."



"What about going back to the old brand?" asked Koala, as Hippo opened the drinks cupboard. "I found the old signs in the shed. They are still in good condition and that would save us a fortune."

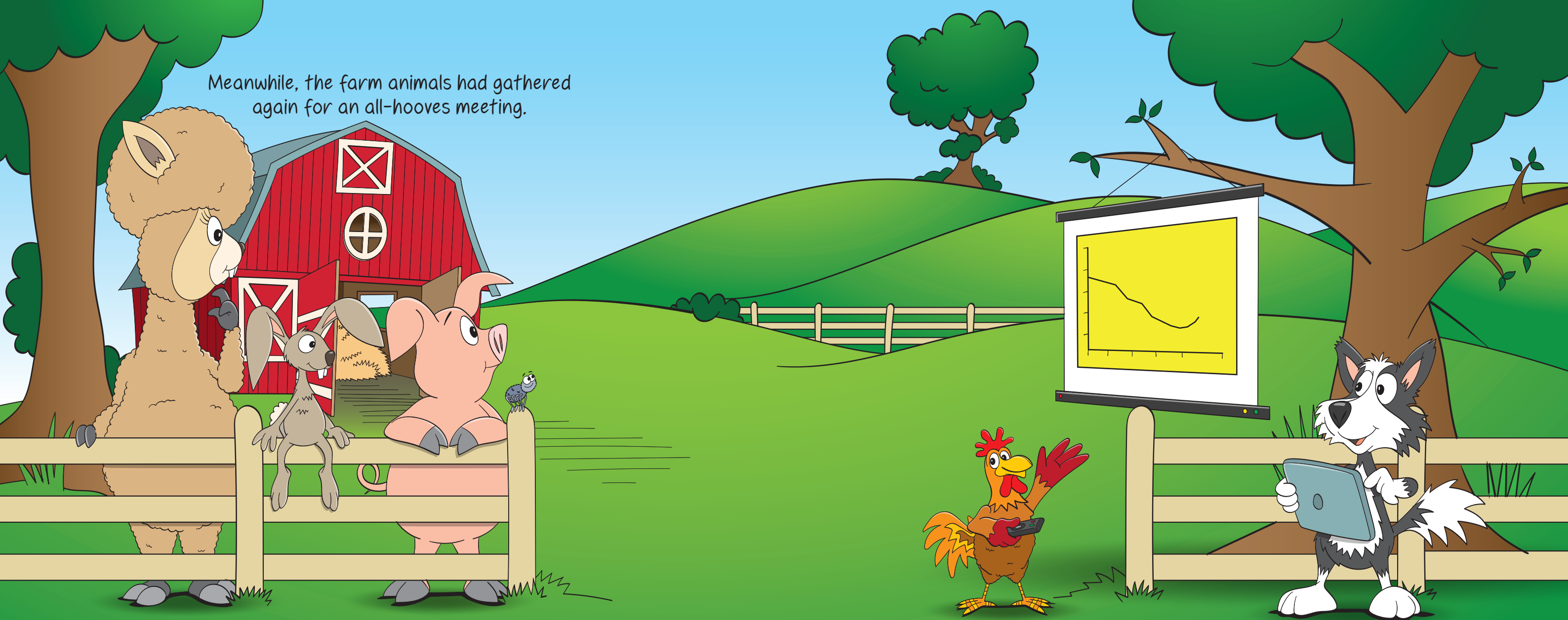


"On that topic," interjected Ostrich, before Koala could get into full swing with another nostalgic tale of the Zoo long ago. "We need to save more money based on the latest numbers. Individual areas for all of the junior animals are just unnecessary. I'm going to implement a cage-sharing approach."

"Do it," snapped Croc. "So long as we're not sharing, who cares!" To a chorus of laughter, the Zoo animals all drank to celebrate another productive Board meeting.



Meanwhile, the farm animals had gathered again for an all-hooves meeting.



“To help inform our thinking, Rooster supported me investing in new technology which gives us better data on our visitors and where they are spending their money,” opened Dog.

Sharing his screen, Dog showed how overall weekly visitor numbers were now trending upwards.

Alpaca invited each of the team leaders to provide an update on their work to date.

Rabbit bounced to the front first.

"At the theme park, we found parents were enjoying the rides with their kids. They told us Creekside had nothing fun for adults," shared Rabbit.

"So, we opened two licensed bars - one selling beer and the other cider. Beer was the most popular based on the drinks sales and the feedback we collected."

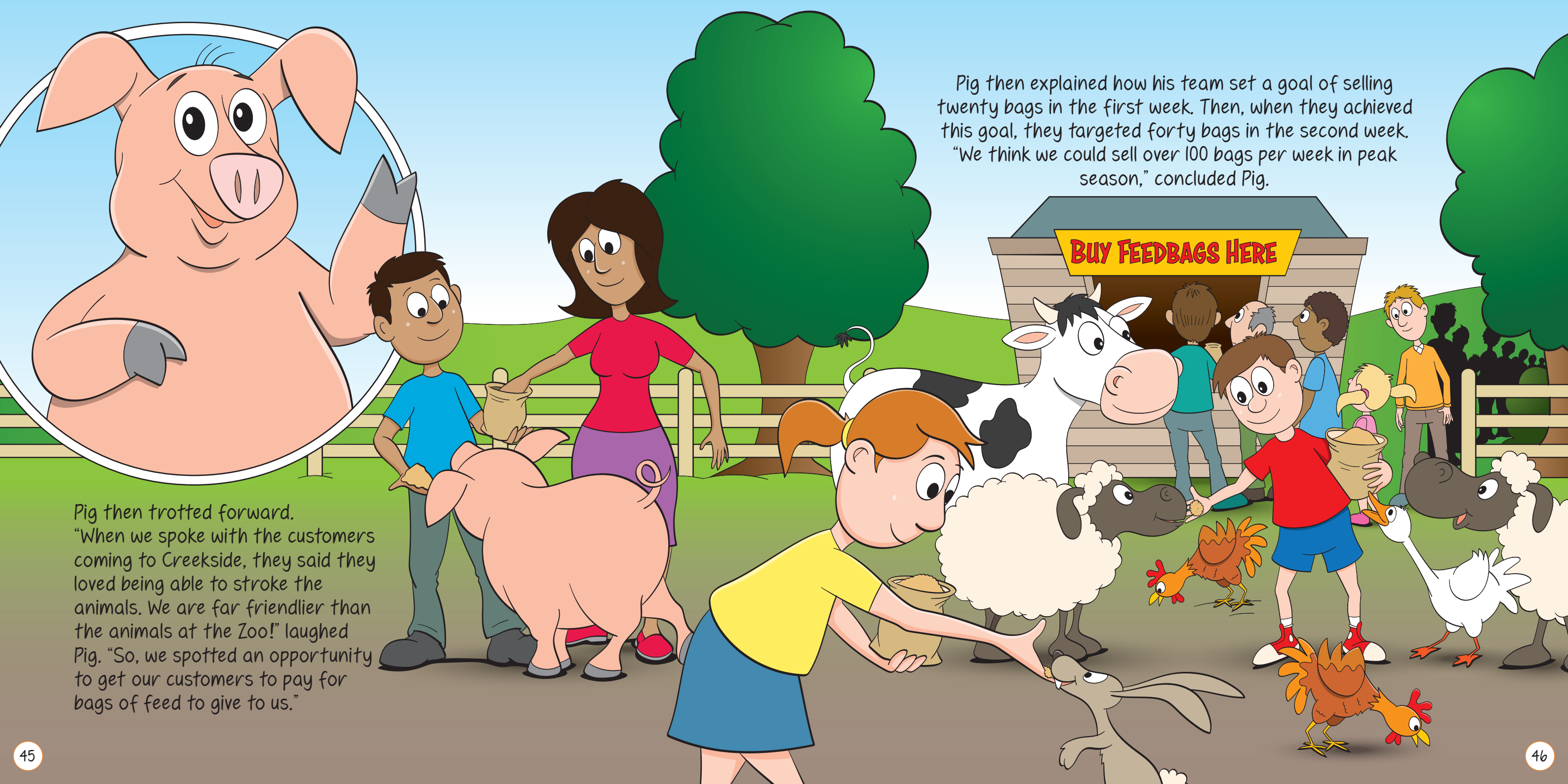
But, we observed that only one parent could drink because the other needed to drive to get to the farm."

Rabbit explained how his team had added both a shuttle bus service and a tractor ride between Creekside and the town so both parents could enjoy the farm drinks.

"Fantastic work team!" celebrated Rooster. "The animal names for the beers were a great touch! I love a Young Spotted Hen. I feel you could do more with that idea."

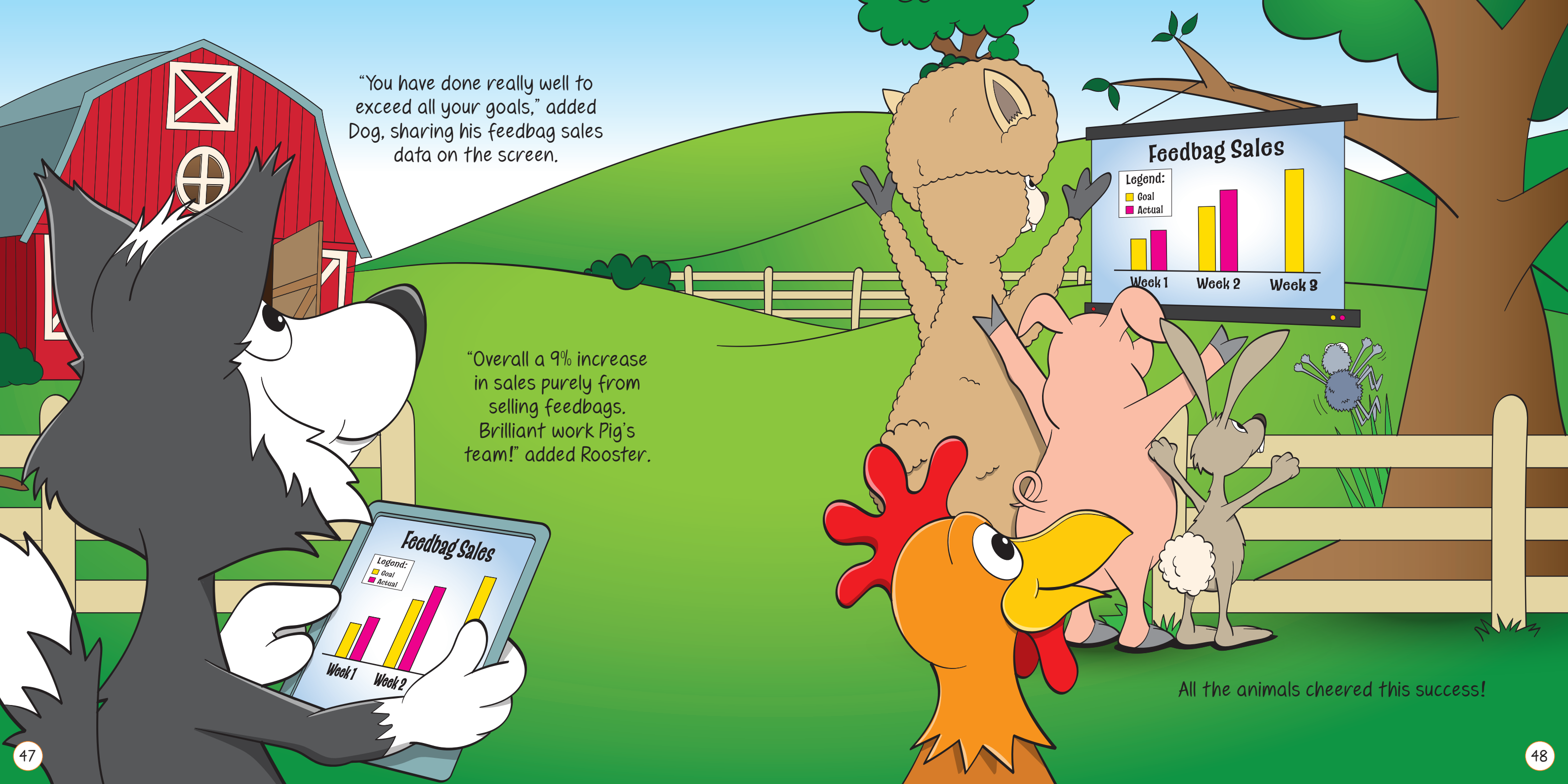
All the animals cheered!

"Our drinks sales are up 243% as a result of your changes," added Dog.



Pig then trotted forward. "When we spoke with the customers coming to Creekside, they said they loved being able to stroke the animals. We are far friendlier than the animals at the Zoo!" laughed Pig. "So, we spotted an opportunity to get our customers to pay for bags of feed to give to us."

Pig then explained how his team set a goal of selling twenty bags in the first week. Then, when they achieved this goal, they targeted forty bags in the second week. "We think we could sell over 100 bags per week in peak season," concluded Pig.



“You have done really well to exceed all your goals,” added Dog, sharing his feedbag sales data on the screen.

“Overall a 9% increase in sales purely from selling feedbags. Brilliant work Pig’s team!” added Rooster.

Feedbag Sales

Legend:
■ Goal
■ Actual

Week 1 Week 2 Week 3

Feedbag Sales

Legend:
■ Goal
■ Actual

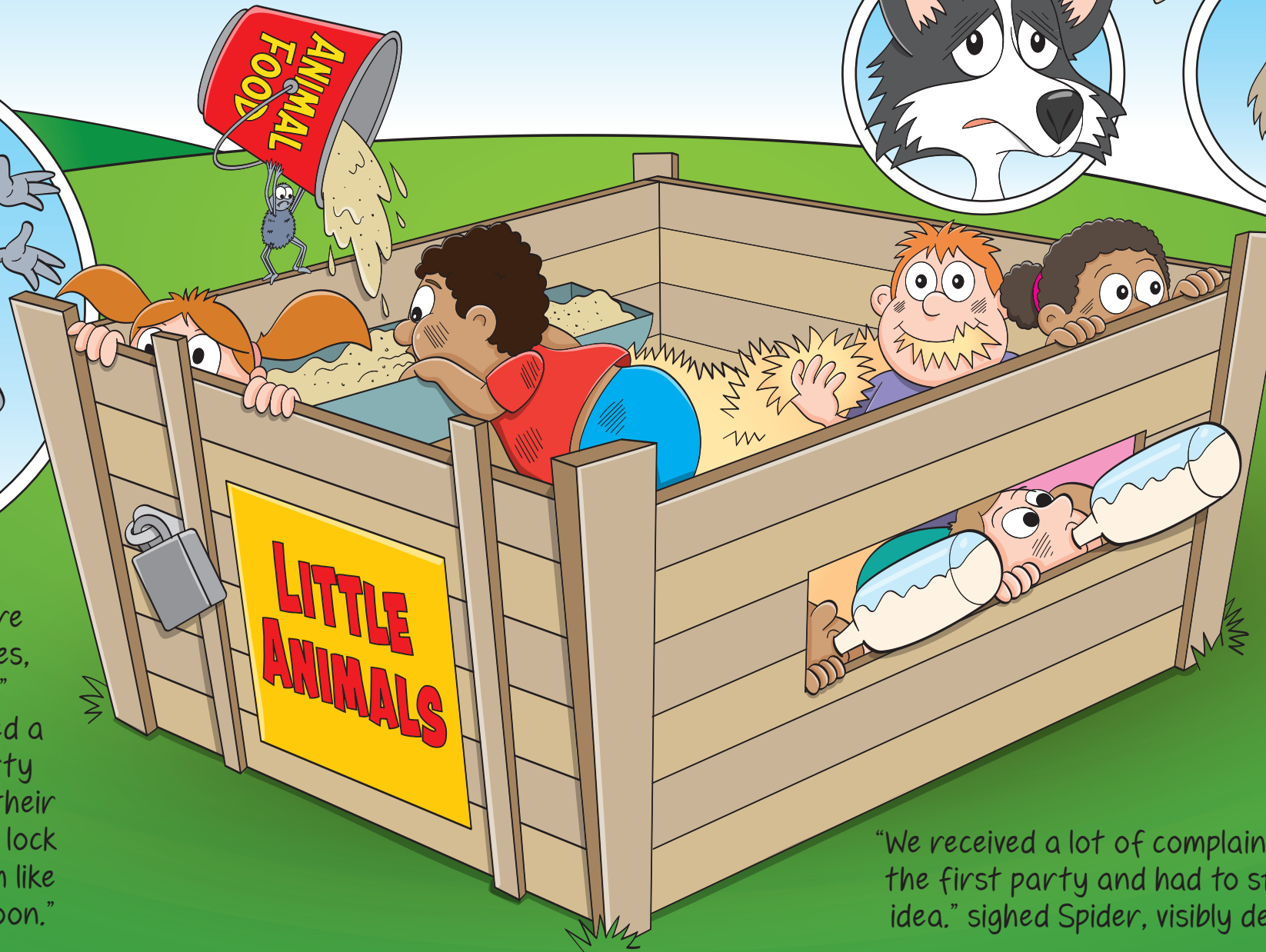
Week 1 Week 2

All the animals cheered this success!

It was then Spider's turn to update the group.



"We found other farms were hosting kids birthday parties, which we have never done," explained Spider. "We launched a 'Little Animals' birthday party package. Parents could leave their children with us and we would lock them in a pen and treat them like farm animals for the afternoon."



A few animals cringed as Spider shared this idea.

"We received a lot of complaints after the first party and had to stop this idea," sighed Spider, visibly deflated.

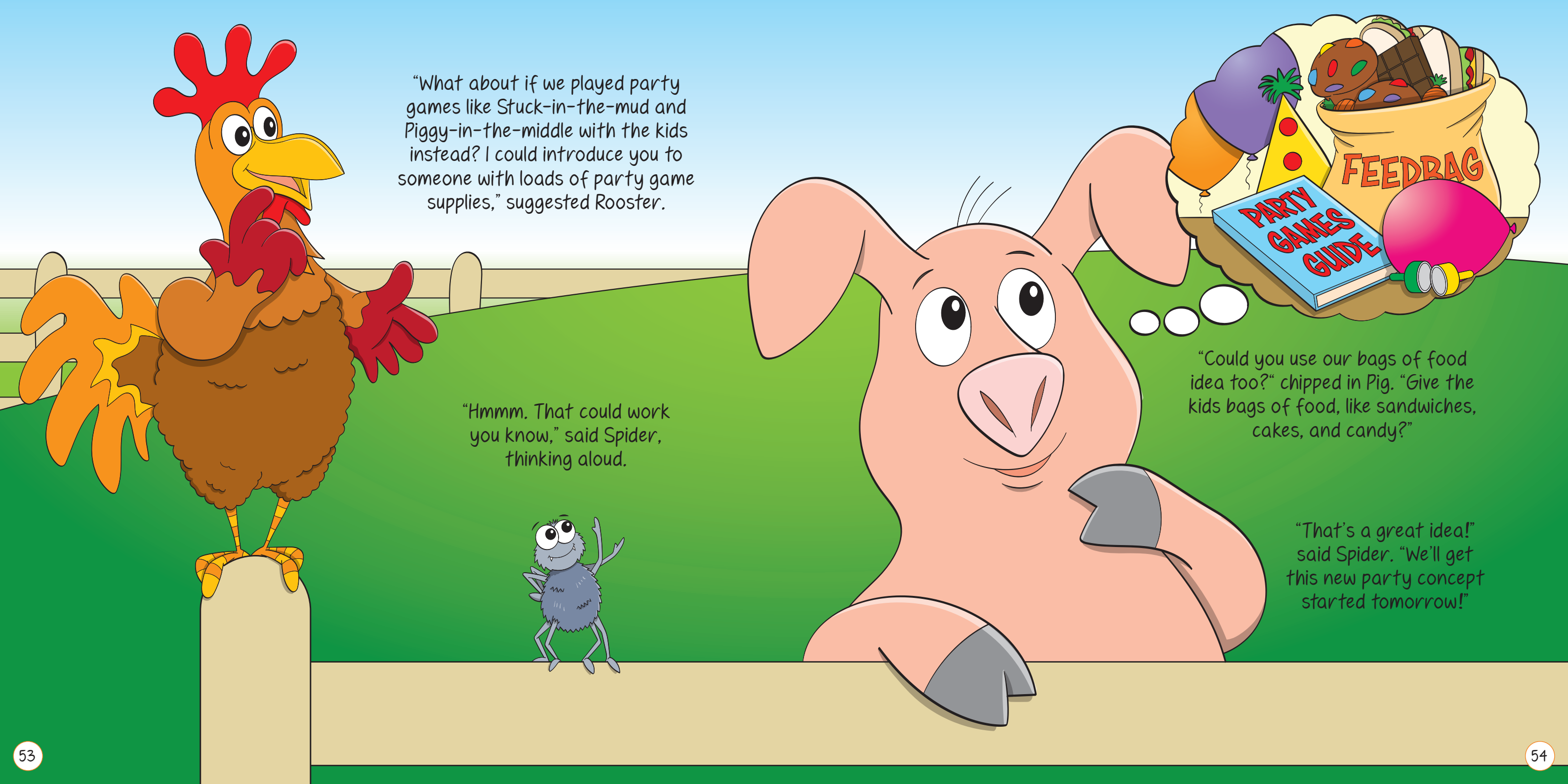


"That's unfortunate," consoled Alpaca. "What did you learn from this?"

"Despite parents moaning their kids behaved like animals and threatening to lock them up, this was just a figure of speech. Parents do still want to celebrate birthdays at the farm though," shared spider.



Dog shared on the screen monthly complaint levels. It was clear to everyone that Spider's "Little Animals" parties had set a new record. But not a good one.



“What about if we played party games like Stuck-in-the-mud and Piggy-in-the-middle with the kids instead? I could introduce you to someone with loads of party game supplies,” suggested Rooster.

“Hmmm. That could work you know,” said Spider, thinking aloud.

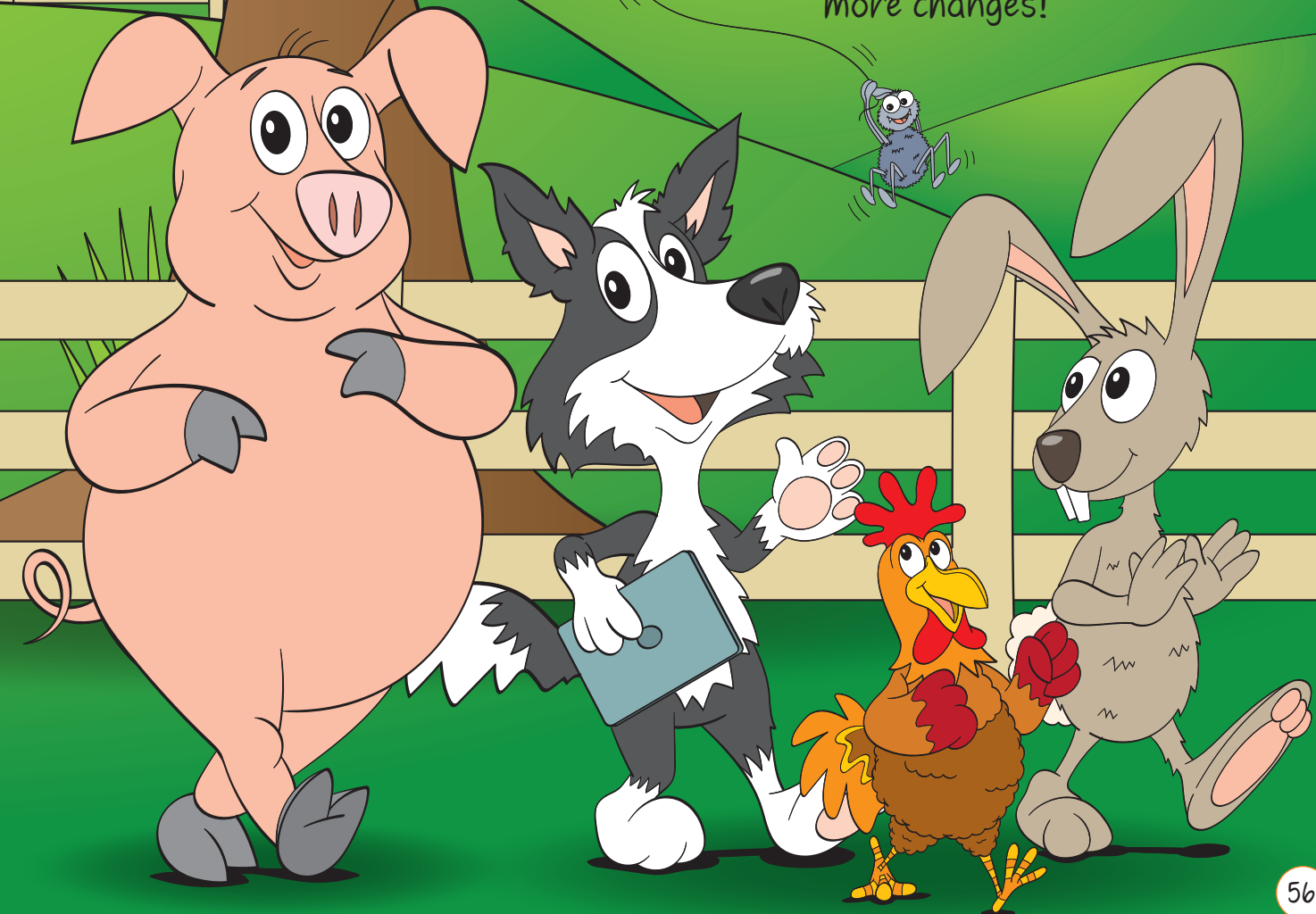
“Could you use our bags of food idea too?” chipped in Pig. “Give the kids bags of food, like sandwiches, cakes, and candy?”

“That’s a great idea!” said Spider. “We’ll get this new party concept started tomorrow!”

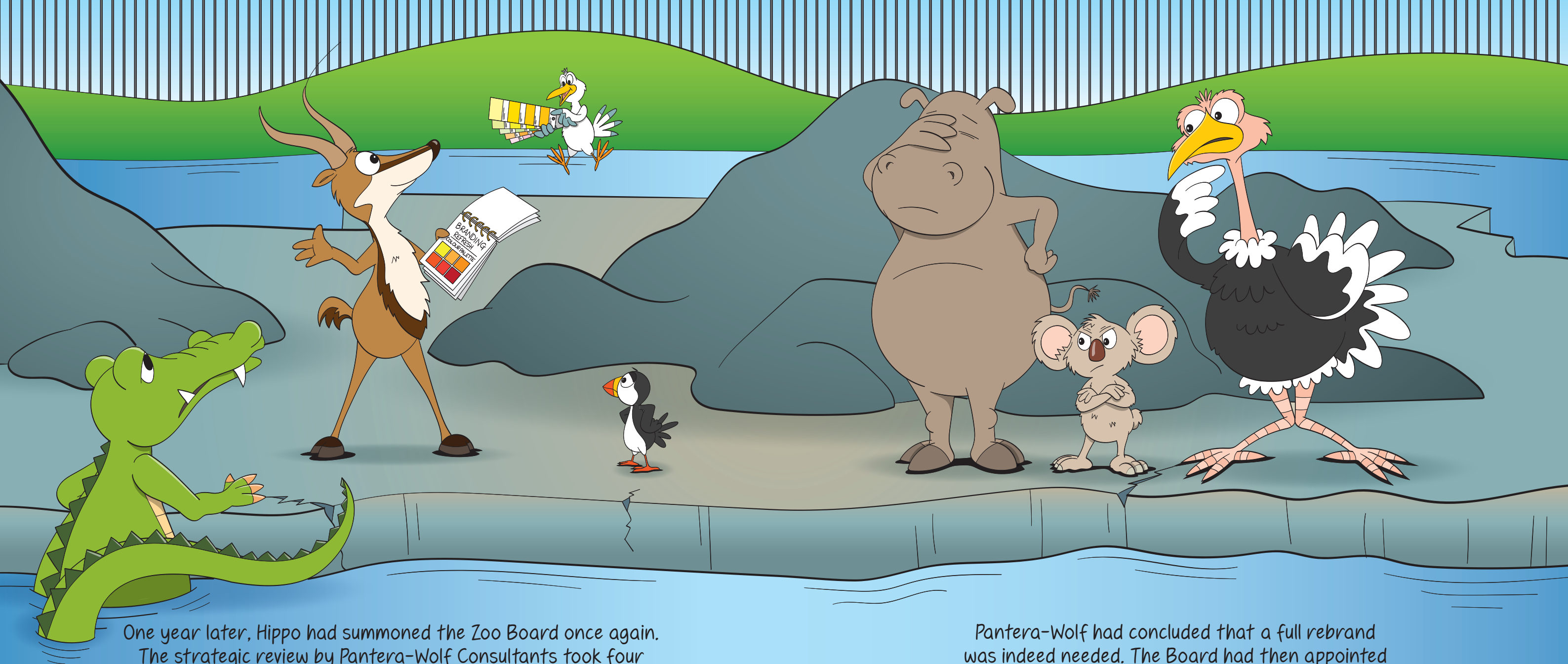


Alpaca congratulated all the animals on the work they had done. "This is a great start! I want everyone to go for their ideas - be bold, take risks!"

This is
The Creek Way!



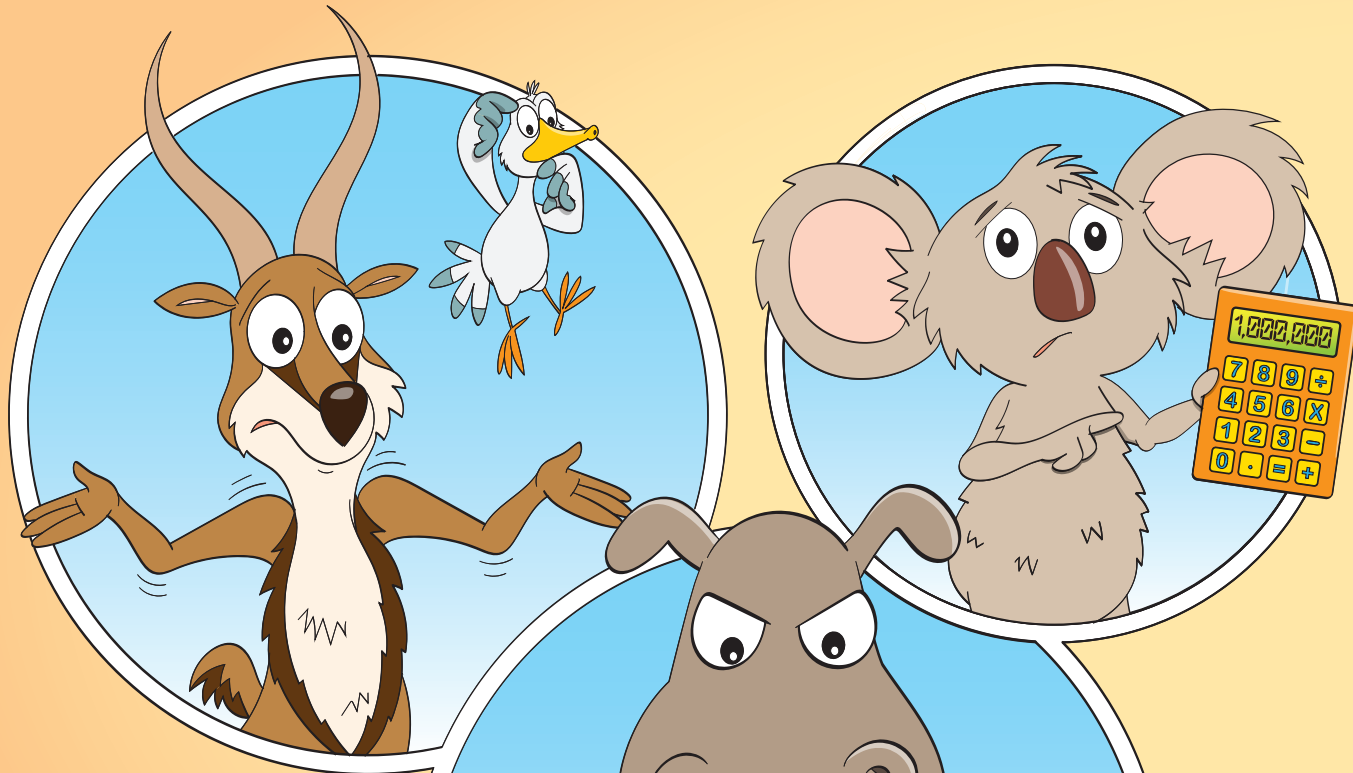
The animals left the meeting buzzing from their achievements and looking forward to making more changes!



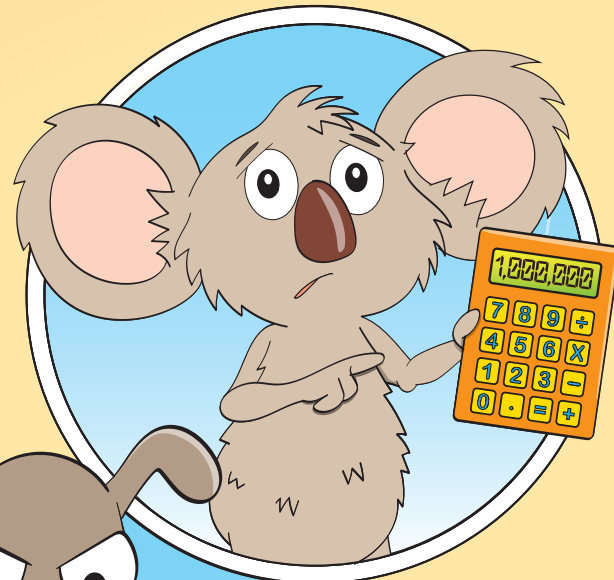
One year later, Hippo had summoned the Zoo Board once again. The strategic review by Pantera-Wolf Consultants took four months to complete and was based on extensive interviews with members of the Zoo Board.

Pantera-Wolf had concluded that a full rebrand was indeed needed. The Board had then appointed Seagull+Gazelle, a sister company of Pantera-Wolf, to perform the rebrand.

It was unclear when the rebrand would be complete. But it was significantly delayed and running way over budget.



Ticket sales were at an all-time low.



The smell was putting off visitors, and the cage-sharing measures had not been wise.



The Tigers had eaten the Buffalo, and the Rhinos had squashed the Warthogs.





The Zoo's losses were getting bigger and bigger and there was no money left. Silver Pines Bank was threatening to appoint Pantera-Wolf to manage the Zoo's bankruptcy proceedings.

The Zoo Board was meeting today. Breaking with tradition, this meeting started with drinks. They had to decide: how could the Zoo be rescued?

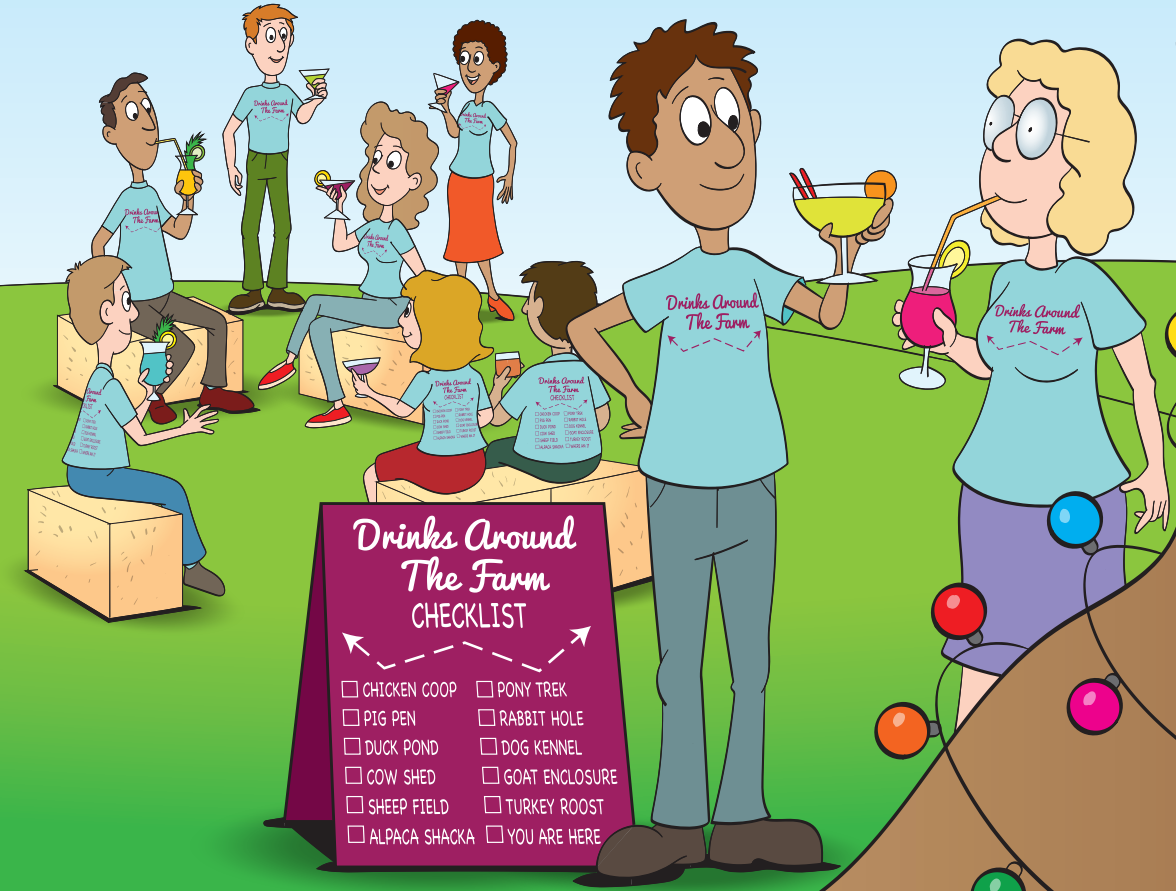
Down at Creekside, things were going from strength to strength. There were many new Creekside experiences. The animals had all embraced a culture of agility and continual improvement. Rabbit's team had expanded from selling beers to launching a cocktail menu in a phenomenal new "Drinks around the Farm" experience.



- Cocktail Menu**
- Ponycolada
 - Strawberry Duckerie
 - Muddy Mary
 - Moscow Mule
 - Barn Star Martini
 - Duck's Fizz
 - Cosmopossum

Drinks Around The Farm Cocktail Barn

Guests could enjoy cocktails including Duck's Fizz, Muddy Mary, and Cosmo-possum. Rabbit's team continually experimented by running different ideas at the same time and measuring what worked best.

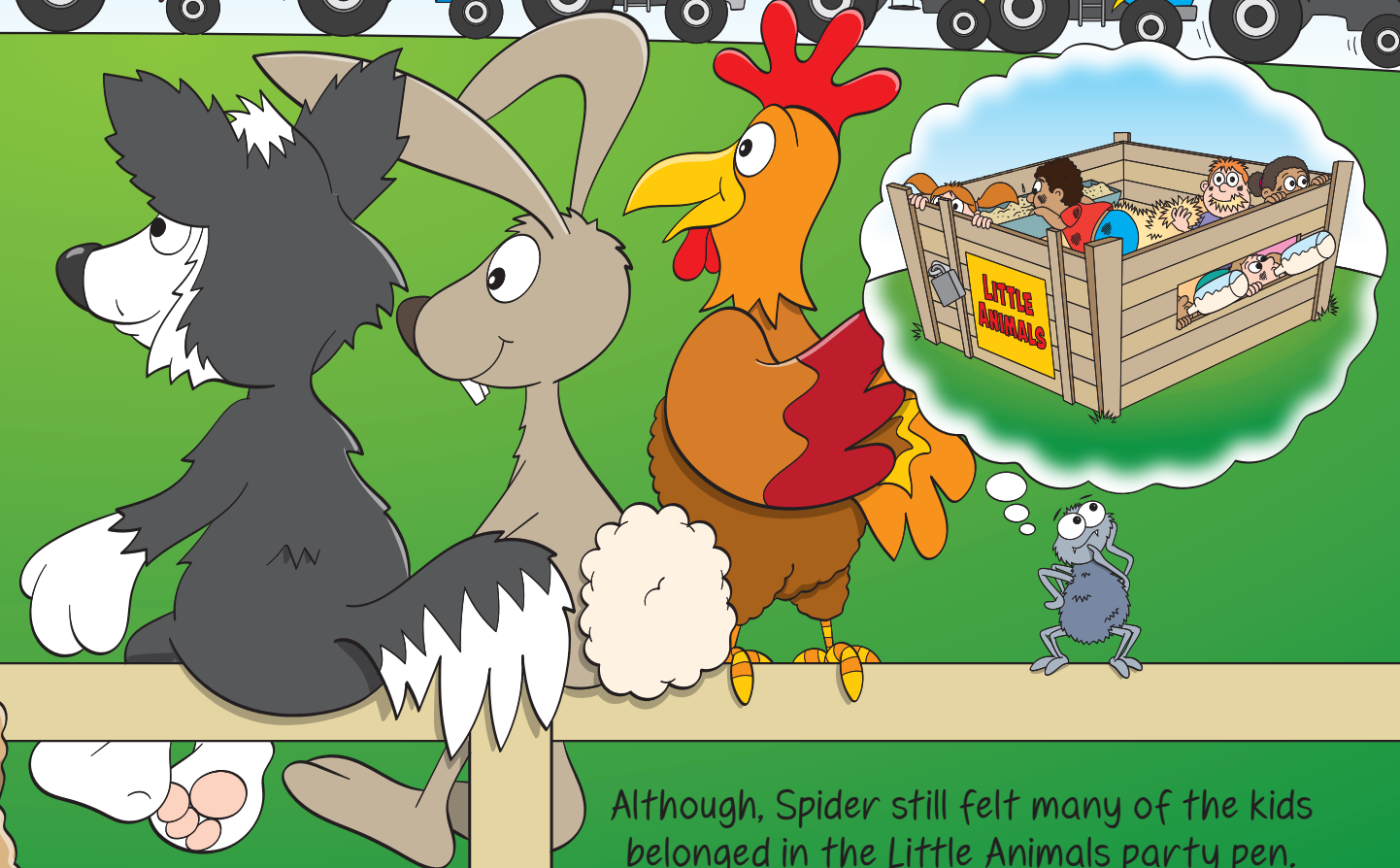
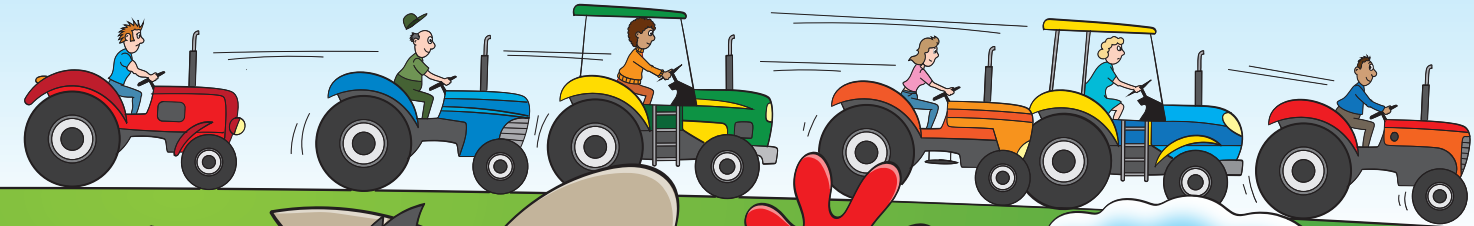
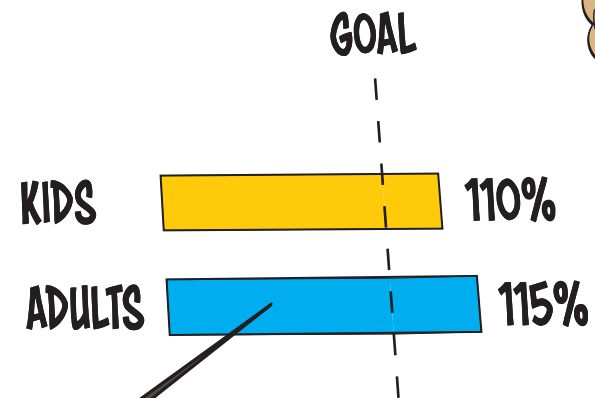


- Drinks Around The Farm
CHECKLIST**
- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> CHICKEN COOP | <input type="checkbox"/> PONY TREK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PIG PEN | <input type="checkbox"/> RABBIT HOLE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DUCK POND | <input type="checkbox"/> DOG KENNEL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COW SHED | <input type="checkbox"/> GOAT ENCLOSURE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHEEP FIELD | <input type="checkbox"/> TURKEY ROOST |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ALPACA SHACKA | <input type="checkbox"/> YOU ARE HERE |

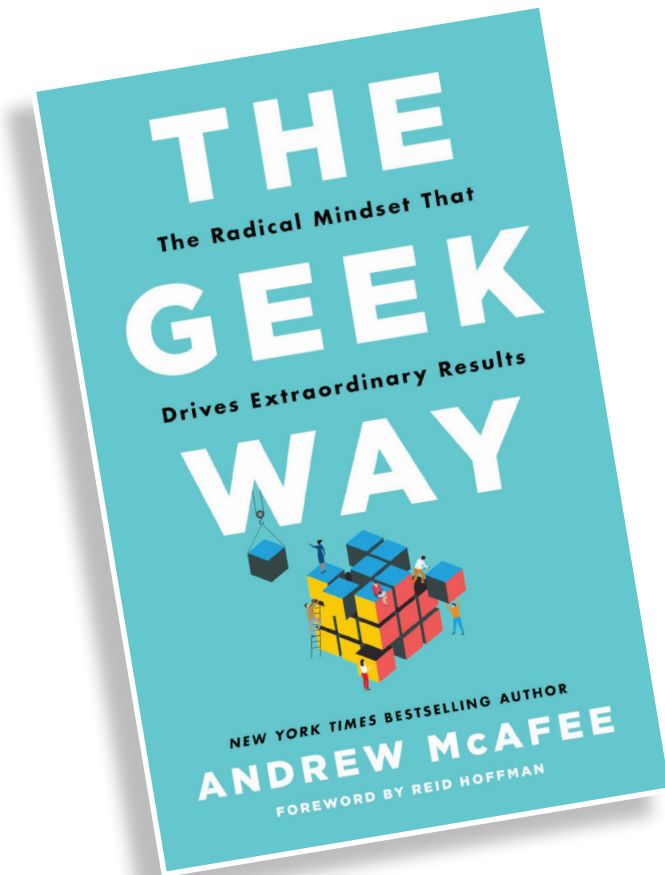
Pig's team now offered guests grooming, petting, and other experiences with the farm animals. These had become a big hit with kids and adults alike! For each new idea Pig's team set clear objectives so they could measure their success.

And Spider's kids' parties now had families traveling from all over. From Swimming with the Fishes to the Tractor Racing Derby, there was something for everyone! Spider's team were always making minor changes, quickly applying their learning from both successes and failures.

PETTING TARGET



Although, Spider still felt many of the kids belonged in the Little Animals party pen.



The Geek Way, by Andrew McAfee had a huge influence on this story. It has heavily impacted my leadership and the broader Info business. It is a must read for any current or aspiring business leader!

Also Available by Mark Edmondson

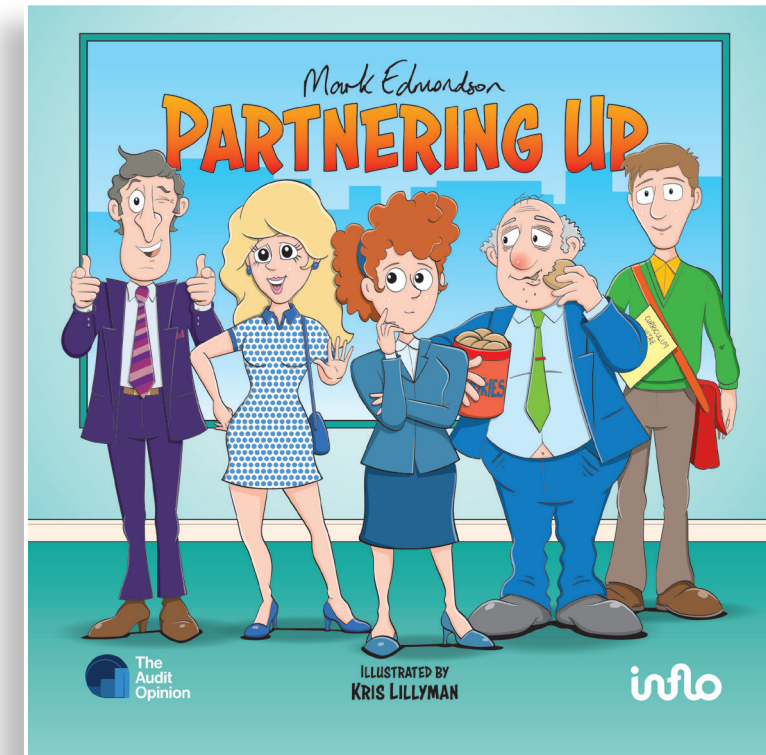
A Better Axe



Jack's business is falling behind as technology advances. With a demotivated team and outdated practices, can he adapt before it's too late?

A Better Axe is a powerful fable about embracing change, making smarter technology decisions, and leading a team through digital transformation.

Partnering Up



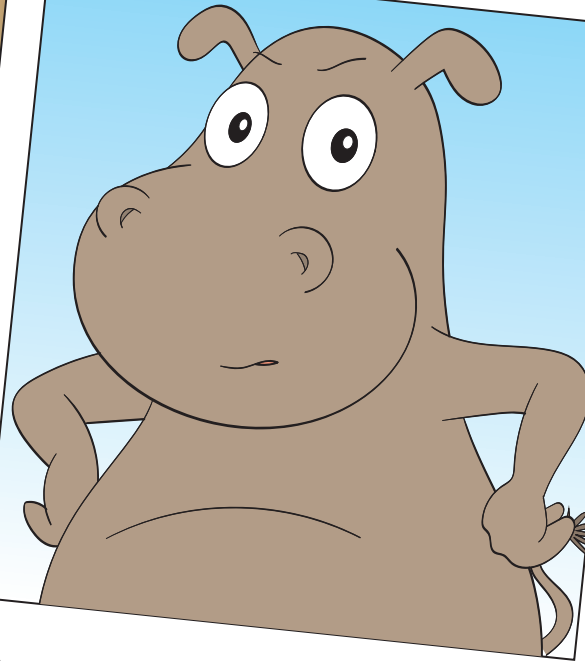
Jane's business is booming – but so are her challenges. She needs the right partner to help scale her success.

Partnering Up offers valuable insights on choosing strategic partners, evaluating technology providers, and making smarter long-term innovation decisions.

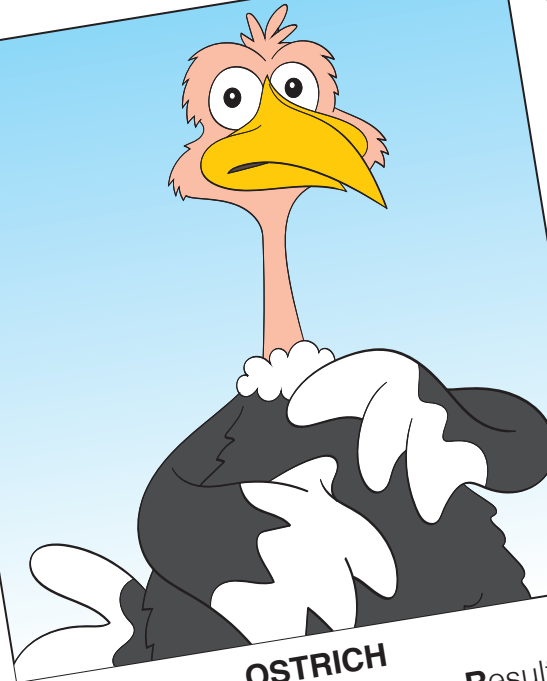
Meet The Zoo Animals



CROC
CRitical **O**f Colleagues



HIPPO
Highest **P**aid **P**erson's **O**pinion



OSTRICH
Obsessing over **S**hort **T**erm **R**esults,
Ignoring **C**ustomer **H**appiness



KOALA
Keeps **O**n **A**dvocating
Legacy **A**pproaches



PUFFIN
PUnishes **F**ailure **F**orcefully
but **I**Neffectively

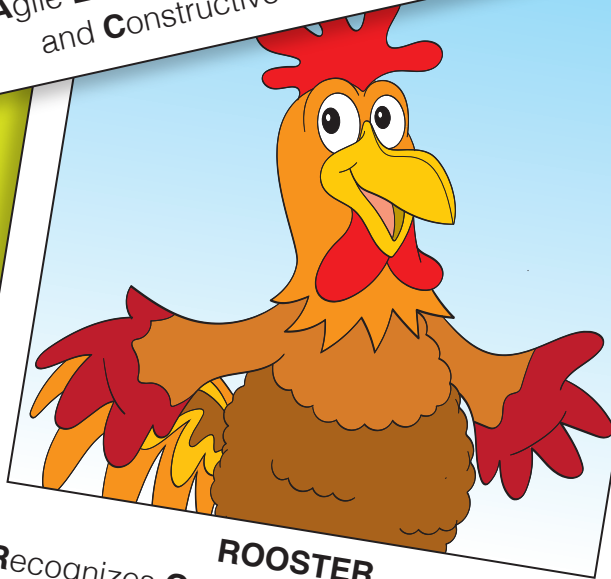
Meet The Farm Animals



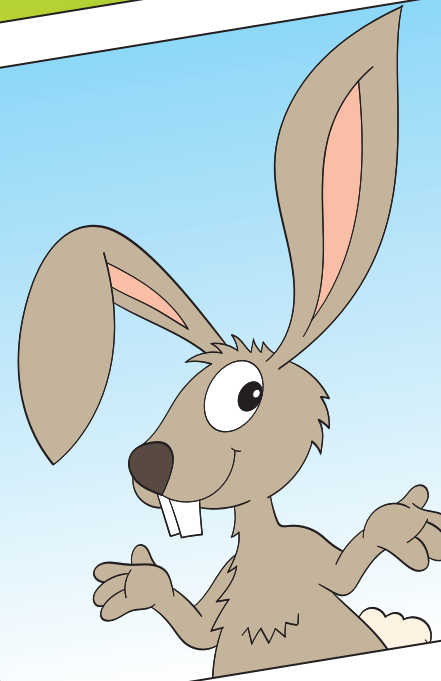
DOG
Data Over Gut



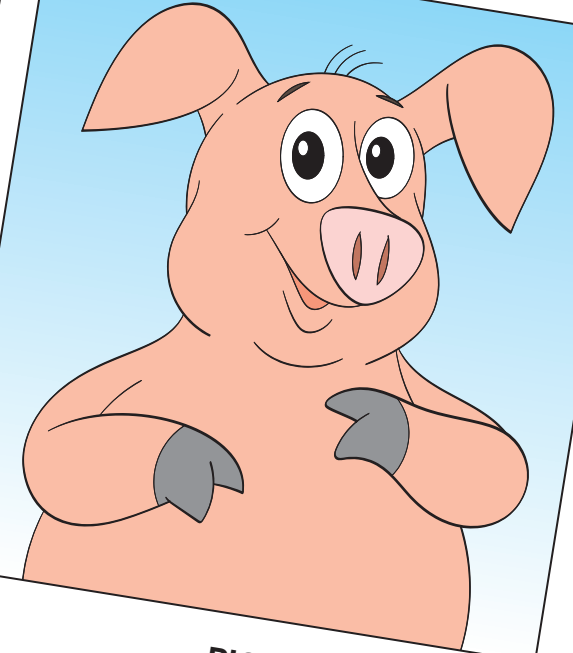
ALPACA
Agile Leader Promoting **A**utonomy
and **C**onstructive **A**rguments



ROOSTER
Recognizes **O**penly and **O**ften, **S**upporting
with **T**ips, **E**xperience and **R**esources



RABBIT
Running **A B** Information Tests



PIG
Promotes **I**terative **G**oals



SPIDER
Speedily Iterating to **D**Eploy **R**efinements

Silver Pines is the destination of choice for a family vacation. But two of the longest standing attractions have fallen on harder times. The animals at Great Ape-Scape Zoo and Creekside Farm must innovate for the visitors to return.

The Creek Way explores how traditional innovation techniques are being challenged by modern methodologies. And how teams can achieve more by embracing iterative development and team autonomy.

As the Zoo animals take a top-down waterfall approach, the farm animals adopt an agile collaborative effort. But how will the teams fare trying to turn around their fortunes?

This book shows you how to:

- Break down large projects into smaller tasks
- Make more scientific, data-driven decisions
- Empower ownership and accountability across teams
- Learn from failures and successes

Witness how to create a culture of innovation, empower teams, and create an impactful business - The Creek Way!

