



HUNGRY BATS AND BUGGY NIGHTS

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In the Carlsbad Caverns there are lots of deep, dark places. One of these places is a great, arched room - the Bat Cave - and here Braz the Bat awakes from a long day of sleeping.

***Grumble, Grumble.* Braz's empty stomach spoke loudly, and he knew it was time to wake up. The rest of the colony was hungry too, and they whizzed and buzzed around him. Braz stretches his wings and prepares to fly.**



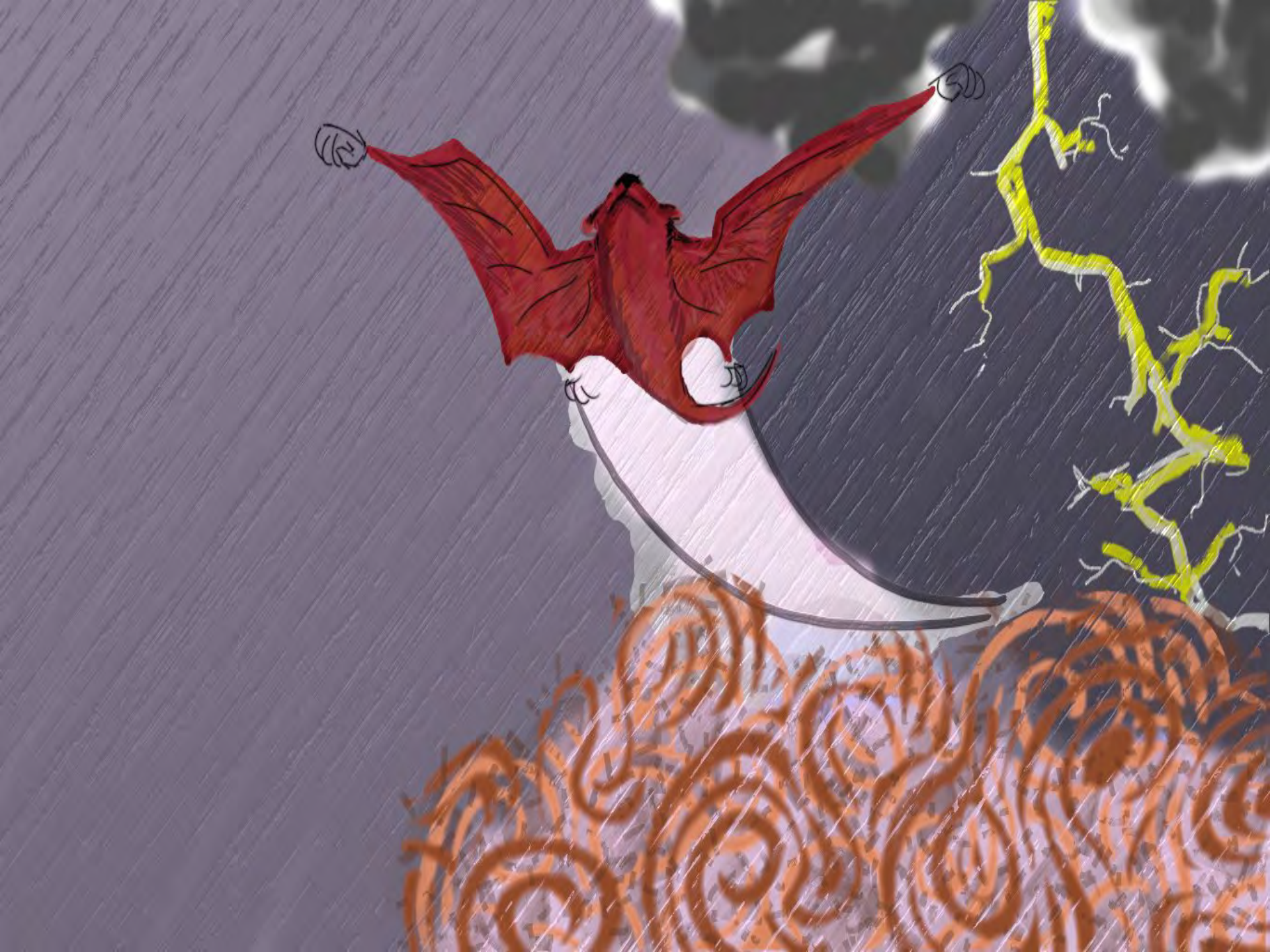
Braz joins a brigade of bats as they charge through the tunnel towards the cavern exit. They dart through hanging stalactites and towering stalagmites, eager for dinner and yearning for the bug-rich desert air.



But as Braz soars out of the cavern exit, he is met by flashes of light and the roar of thunder. Fat drops of rainwater pummel his wings, over and over again - it feels like they are weighed down with rocks!

The struggling bats waver in the air and lightning continues to crack the sky - the monstrous storm threatens to throw them into the sharp plants below.

Braz and the bats know they must turn around. They drop back into the Carlsbad Caverns, where the air is still and the storm cannot get them.



Grumble, Grumble.

The next night, Braz and the bats awake much earlier. Their stomachs are still empty, and the grumbling shakes them awake. They had now gone *two whole days* without a meal!

Once again, the bats race toward the cavern exit, dodging the many sharp hanging obstacles along the way.

As they approach the outside world, Braz is relieved to see the stars beyond - the angry clouds had passed, and tonight the desert sky would be clear for flight.



Though Braz would soon find that the path ahead was not completely clear:

As Braz flies through the mouth of the cave, a wide mouth wielding venomous fangs lunges at him - *a snake!*

The snake was quick, but Braz - an agile bat - even quicker. Braz flew to safety above the snake, and saw that it was hanging over the cave's edge, waiting patiently for bats to pass nearby.



“You tried to snatch me from the air, that’s not fair!” cried Braz.

“Oh, but you see, you’re not the only one that’s hungry,” replied the snake.

Braz’s mouth watered for bugs, just as the snakes did for bats. “I suppose you’re right,” said Braz. “But I’ll be sure to avoid you each night ahead.”

“You can try,” snickered the snake. “But will your friends be so lucky?”



Braz leaves the snake and joins a group of emerging bats. They begin to climb high into the night sky. From up here, they can see the wide desert world.

Soon enough, they spot a curious moving cloud below them - *a giant colony of moths!* The bats buzz with excitement - there is nothing they like more than a rich, heavy meal of moths.



Like missiles, Braz and the bats shoot through the sky to meet the moths, who are flying towards an expansive field - of corn! The first moths begin to land on the corn stalks. Then, Braz watches the moths do the most curious thing - *they begin to lay eggs in the corn!* Braz realizes that when eggs hatch, the hungry larvae inside will begin eating the corn.



But here come the bats, catching up with rest of the moth cloud! Although it is night, Braz is able to sense the exact movements of the moths, so much so, he is able to swoop down and snatch them from the air!

The other bats come down from the sky and do the same, using their sharp teeth to grab big, juicy bugs, swallow them, and then dive down for more!

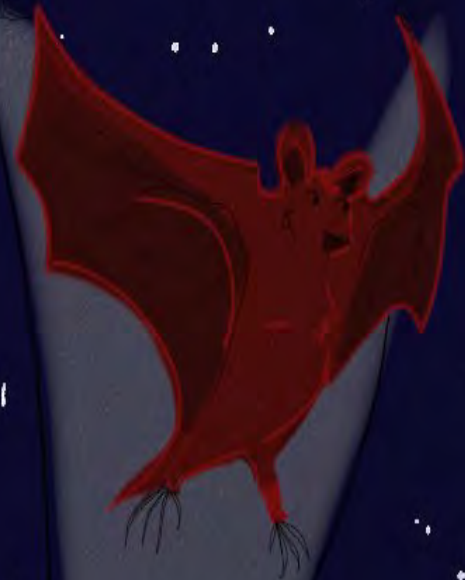


**A farmer stands on the edge of the cornfield,
admiring the bats as they slash through the air,
gobble bugs, and save his crops from the moth eggs.
The farmer smiles and whispers into the night,
“Thank you for coming, bats.”**



By this time, Braz had eaten half his weight in bugs! His belly bulged, and knew he should not eat any more - he still had to fly back home, to the Caverns. But even though his stomach was full of moths, Braz could pump his wings quickly, and he soared through the night sky.

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**His flying, though, was interrupted when he spotted a bat in a strange place for a bat - the ground.
*Something must be wrong, thought Braz.***

Braz flew closer and thought that the bat must be very ill. Its face and shoulders were covered in a white fuzz, and its wings had torn through, so it could no longer fly .

“What’s wrong? Are you okay!?” shouted Braz.



“Keep away, keep away, I’m awfully sick!” warns the bat.

“With what?” asks Braz. “It looks like you have much more than a cold.”

“It covers our noses, faces, shoulders, and wings with white stuff - white-nose syndrome, we call it. I can’t sleep anymore, and my wings won’t stop it itching!”

Braz flew closer. “How can I help?”

“Just don’t get any closer. The best thing you can do is *stay away*, and to make sure you don’t spread it to your own bat colony.”



“See,” the sick bat said, “look at my friends.”

Beyond the bat, at the base of an Ocotillo cactus, lay more bats, all with white faces and shoulders. Braz thought they must have been very tired - they barely moved, even though the desert air was thick with dinner.

“I hope that anyone who comes into my cave makes sure they aren’t carrying this awful bat disease,” thought Braz.



Crack! Rumble! Boom!
Braz spies another storm approaching.

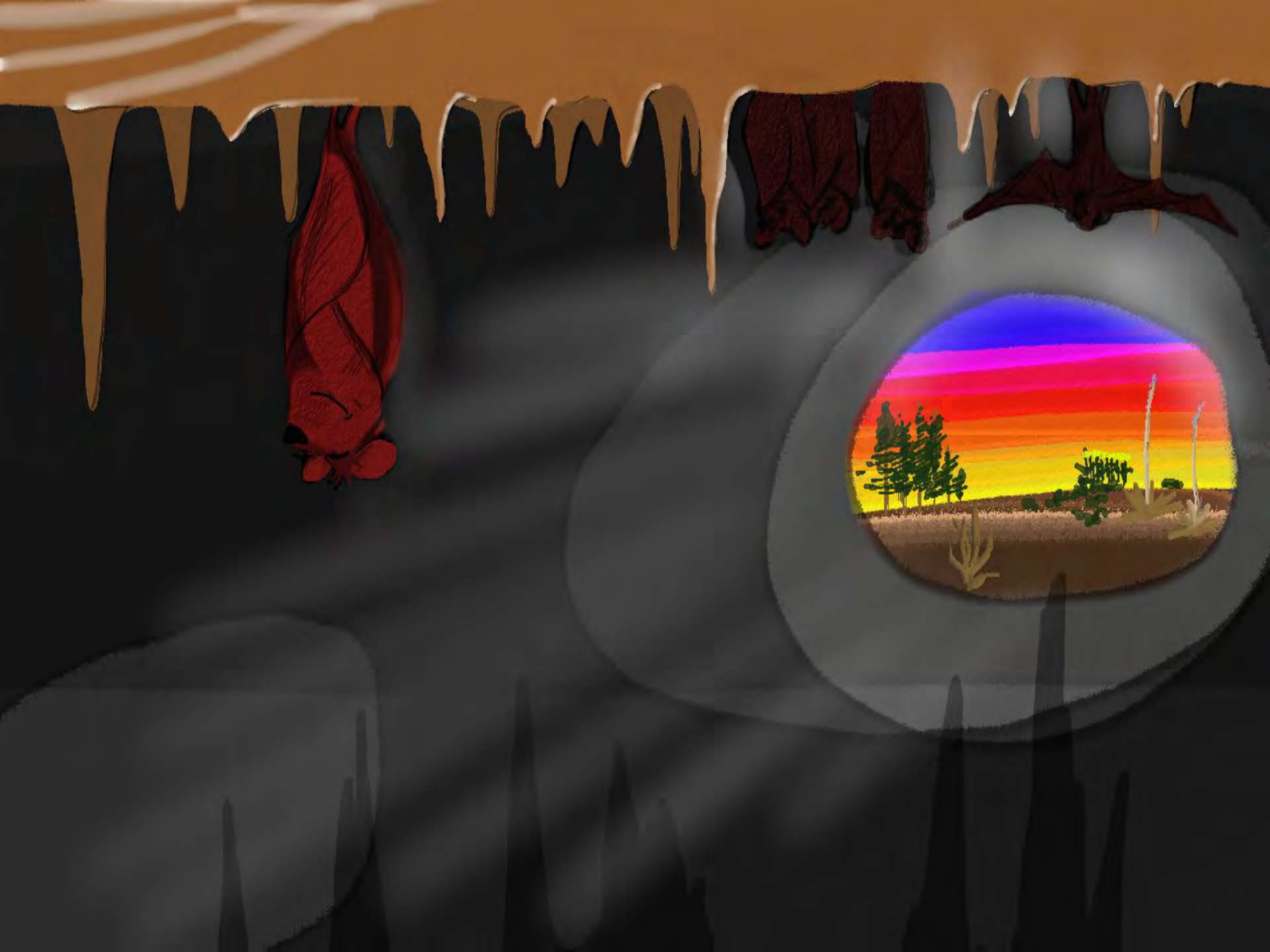
He feels the wind push at his wings, and he knows he must fly quickly back to the Caverns. He felt pity for his bat friend, but soon water would pour from the sky and Braz would be trapped between roaring thunder and the cold desert floor.



Like all bats, Braz was a fast flier and he outran the raging storm behind him.

The sun began to rise now, hinting that it was time for Braz to go to bed. He swooped into the great mouth of the Caverns and flew to the dark world of the Bat Cave.

He took his place amongst his bat friends, hanging upside down, still with a belly full of bugs, safe again inside the protected Caverns.





THE END