



Level 4

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis Digs Up the Seashore

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Meet Miss Bandicota

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis was a little Indian mole rat who grew up in a maze of burrows with her mother, seven sisters and ten brothers. They were terrific pests, the nineteen of them, always out on a rampage.

One night she was out foraging as usual, when suddenly, she heard an angry human voice. Quick and nimble, she just managed to escape from the farmer's scary grasp.

As she was fleeing, she looked into the eyes of a mole rat stuck in a trap. Those were the saddest eyes she had ever seen.

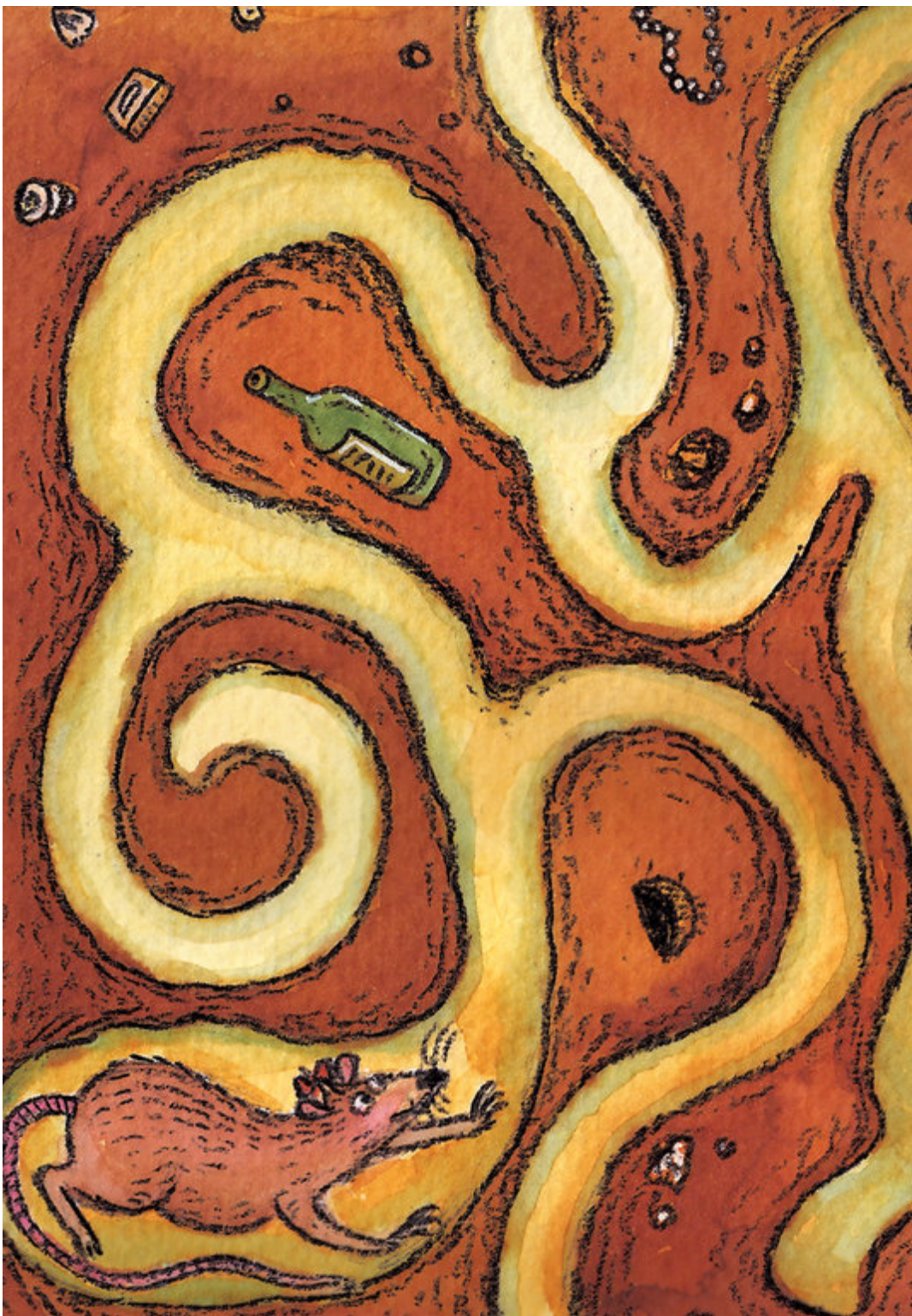




She was so terrified that she huddled in her mother's burrow all night, her eyes tight shut. In the early hours of twilight she announced to everybody's dismay that she would never attack a farm again.

All her brothers and sisters tried to change her mind, but she would not budge. She soon became bored and restless and realised that she couldn't sit in that same old burrow any longer.

She quietly packed her explorer's kit with her sunglasses, binoculars, magnifying glass and, of course, her favourite - a strip of sticker bandages.



Her mother was worried. "Whatever will you do? Whatever else can you do?"

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis smiled and said simply, "I can burrow."

So she burrowed and burrowed and burrowed and burrowed. But there was never a dull moment, for every burrow she dug went to some place new. And she would never need to attack a farm again.



On the Seashore

Somebody raised her tiny nose out of a hole in the sand. Who was that?

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis!

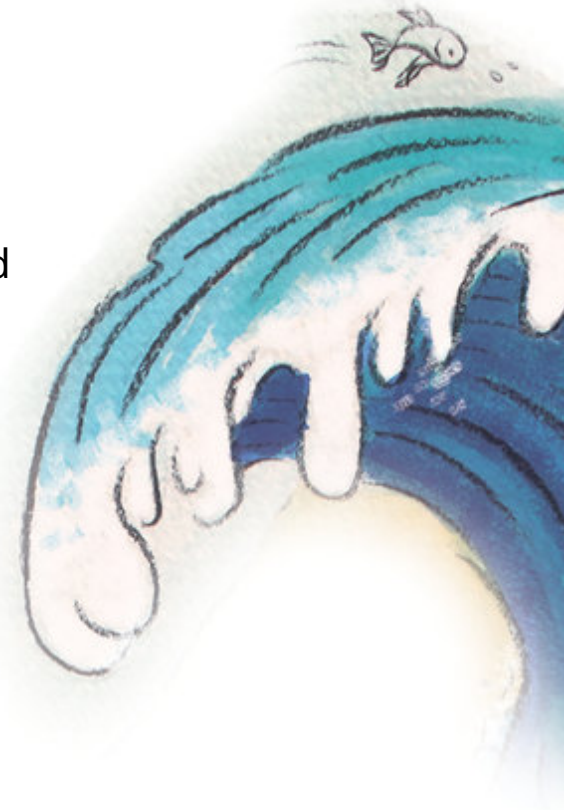
She had just emerged from a new burrow after a long night of digging through sand and clay.

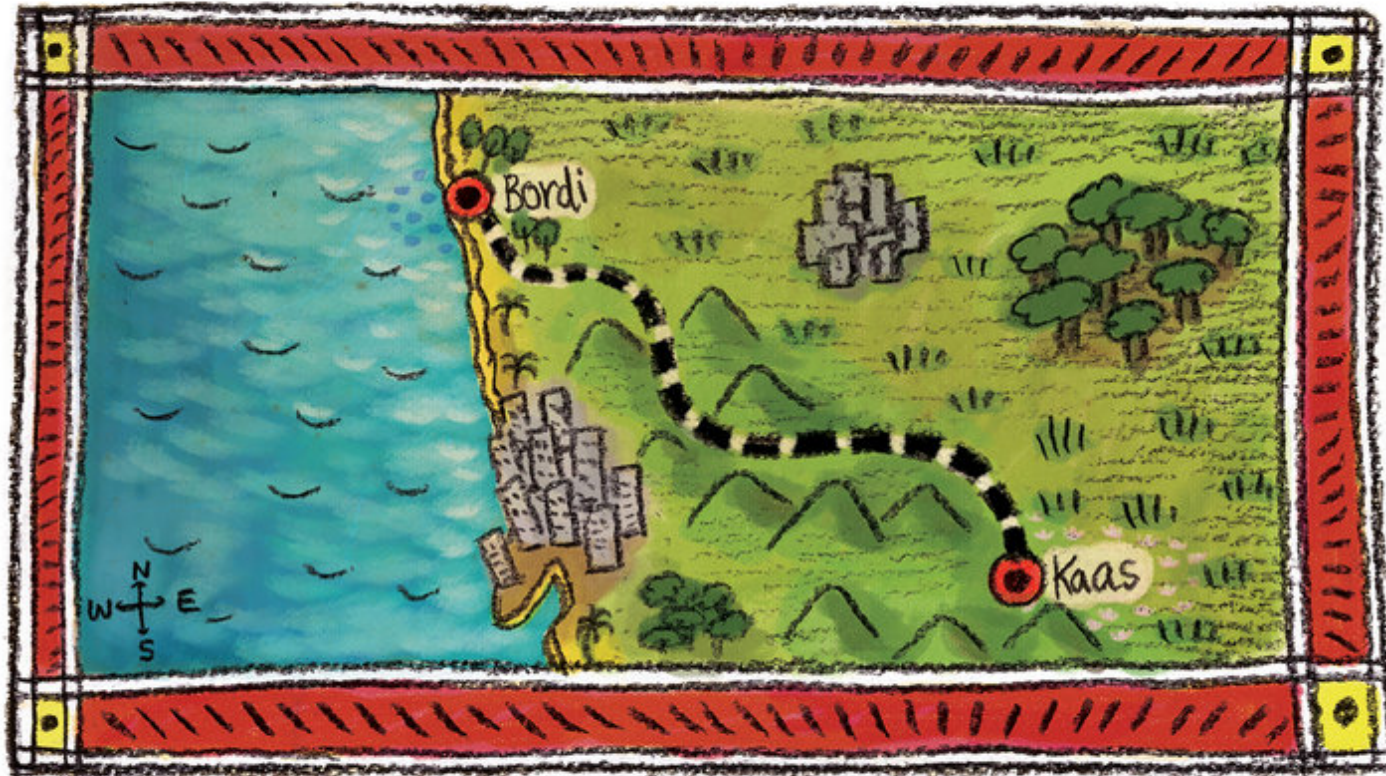
The sun was going to rise. Just as she was about to set her sunglasses on top of her nose, she caught a glimpse of the world above.

In a flash she was washed back into her burrow. As she struggled to find solid ground, she yelled frantically, "Help, help! The river has burst it's banks!"

"There's no need to panic. This is the Arabian Sea," said a calm and reassuring voice drifting nearby.

A baffled Miss Bandicota Bengalensis scrambled out on to the soggy sand. As she shook her dripping tail, she felt the soft, wet ground sinking slowly beneath her.





She was looking down at her toes uneasily, when she noticed something bright and blue floating between her feet!

"You've reached the beach of Bordi, seventeen kilometres of fabulous sticky sand!" it said.



In a fraction of a second, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis had grabbed the magnifying glass from her kit.

The very next moment, she was keenly examining the fascinating little creature, as it lingered on, quite unperturbed by this sudden intrusion.

It was a strange-looking animal; a round body, silvery grey in the middle, surrounded by a turquoise-coloured ring and numerous translucent tentacles branching out radially.

"Who are you?" asked Miss Bandicota Bengalensis inquisitively.

"You can call us Porpita. We are a colony of polyps," it said, swimming by lazily.

"I'm Miss Bandicota Bengalensis. Whatever is... er... are polyps?"

As you might already know, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis could never resist asking a question.

"Sort of like a family," it answered. "We live together and work in unison. Some of us breathe, eat; some of us taste or feel and some of us make little new polyps."



Miss Bandicota Bengalensis was most intrigued.

"That doesn't sound like my family at all. We all live in our own burrows, collect our own food and make our own baby mole rats."

"How quaint!" remarked Porpita, "It must be quite tiring to be a mole rat."

"Not at all, we... glug glug glug... glug... glug..."

Poor Miss Bandicota Bengalensis swallowed a mouthful of sea water as she was knocked over by a large wave.

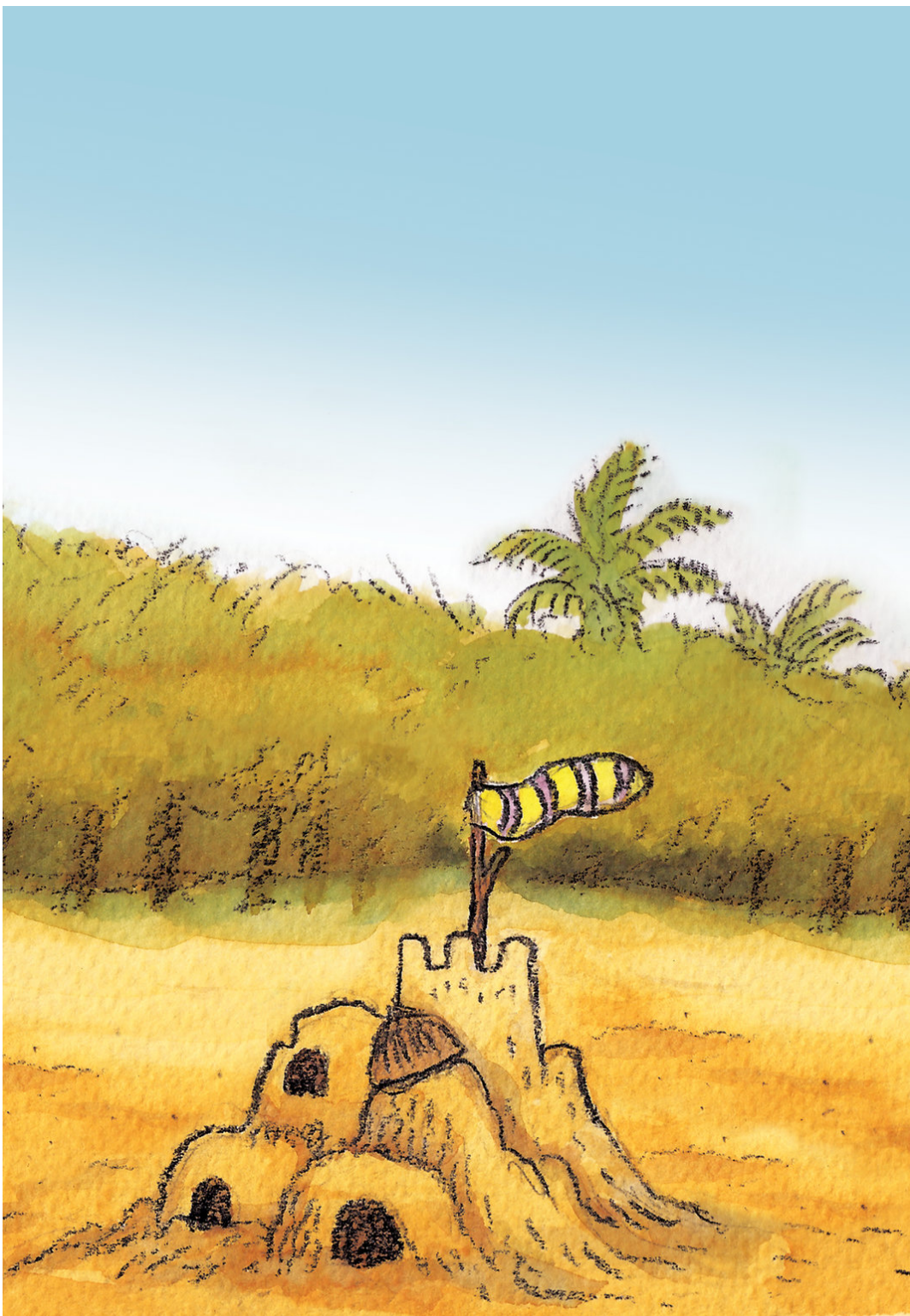
"Thoo... thoo... thoo," she spat out, wincing at the horrid taste of salt water. Almost immediately, she leapt towards the shore, dodging another quick wave.

As the waves subsided, she turned around to ask Porpita yet another question. And stopped in wonder.

Scores of sparkling polyps, just like Porpita, were gliding leisurely over the rolling waves. It was as if the night sky had gently dropped countless twinkling stars into a magical sea.

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis stood mesmerised by the polyps that dipped and rose gently with the waves of Bordi. She bid them a silent farewell as they faded into the tranquil waters.





"Deeper! Deeper!"

An eager voice shook Miss Bandicota Bengalensis out of her daydream.

Her drowsy eyes fell upon a couple of human kids digging the sands of Bordi with funny-looking tools.

From her last trip to Kaas Pathar, the plateau of flowers, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis had learned that not every human was a danger to mole rats. So she rushed in to play.

"Can I dig too?" she pleaded anxiously,
"I love to burrow!"

The kids shrieked and bolted, flinging their beach toys away. Miss Bengalis looked baffled. She had grown up running away from humans. This was the first time she had seen humans run away from mole rats!

"We're not all out to catch you, you know?" she hollered after them. But the kids had long disappeared.



Miss Bandicota Bengalensis looked at a bright green toy lying next to her feet.

She picked it up and made a futile attempt to dig with it.

'No wonder humans can't burrow!' she thought to herself. She dropped it and began to stroll down the lonely shore.



Further down the beach, she came upon a peculiar sight. Tiny balls of sand were scattered around in puzzling patterns. It was as if the seashore was dotted with constellations.

'The mystery of the curious sand balls!' thought Miss Bandicota Bengalensis. Her face lit up. Holding up her magnifying glass, she was lost in her investigation.

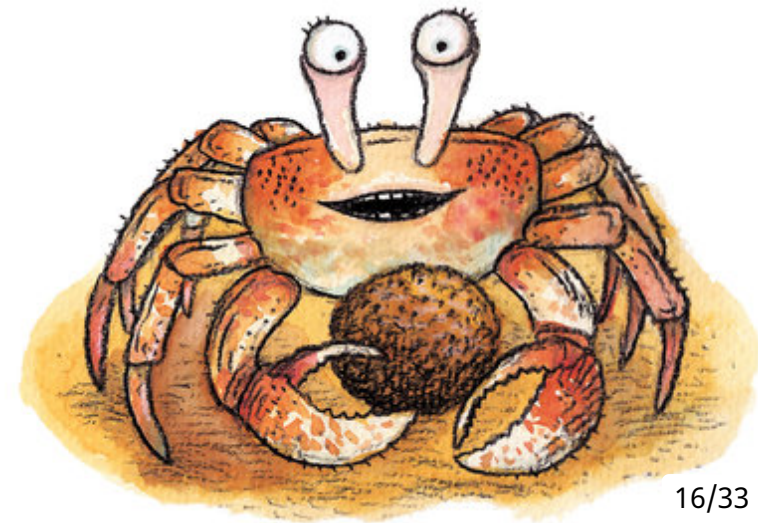


Suddenly, she felt a small pinch at the tip of her tail. Swinging around, she spotted a crab looking up at her.

"No need to be nasty! I was just looking," Miss Bandicota Bengalensis said reproachfully, tucking her tail between her legs.

"Sorry about that! I was just going about breakfast when your tail came in the way," said the crab apologetically.

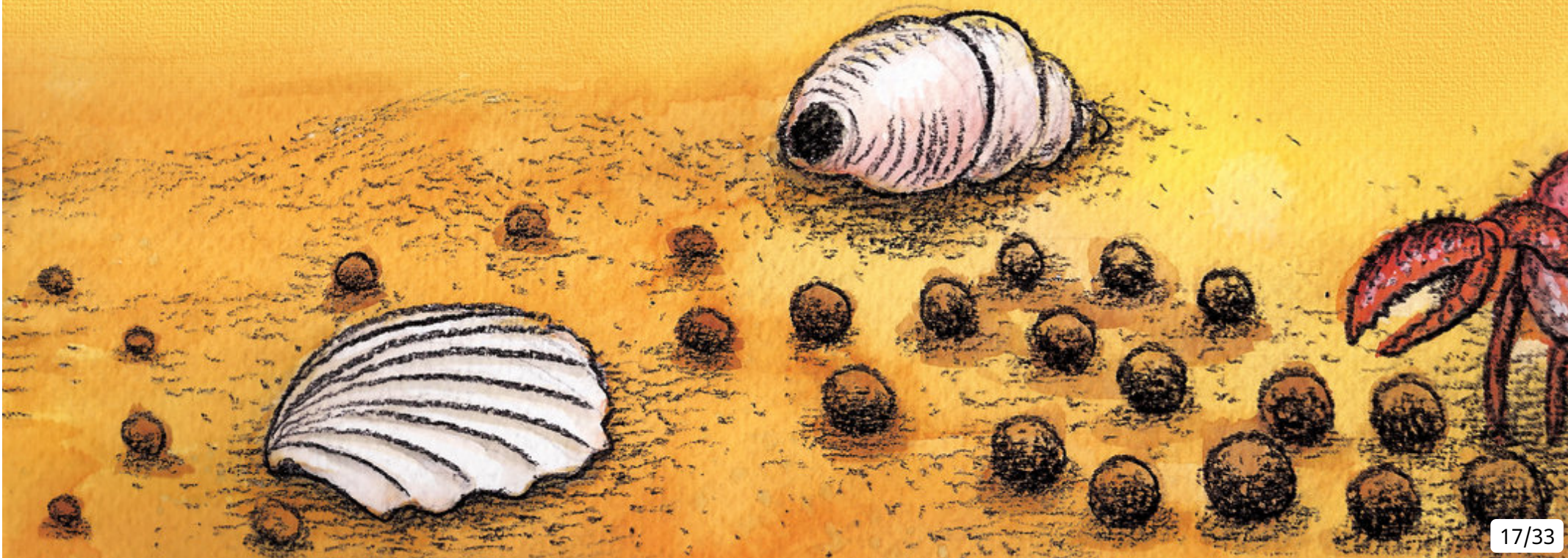
"Oh, never mind! Mole rats nibble all day too. I know what you mean," replied Miss Bandicota Bengalensis, for she happened to be a very forgiving mole rat.



"I'm Mrs. Scopimera," said the crab.

"I'm Miss Bandicota Bengalensis. Do you know where these tiny balls of sand came from?"

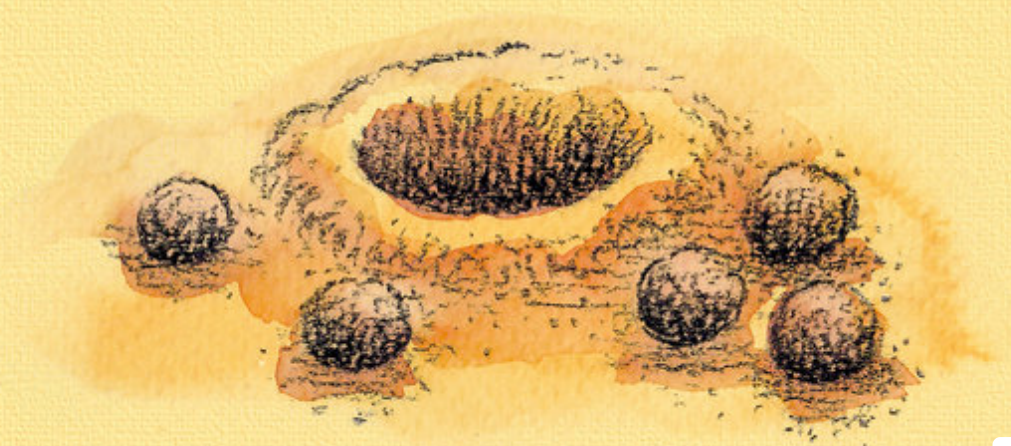
"Oh, those are just sand bubbles! We make sand balls like that when we suck our food in."



"And do you make them yourself or do you also have a family to help you, like Porpita?" asked Miss Bandicota Bengalensis.

"Oh! You mean the polyps? I've seen them stick together in rings, bobbing in the water all day. We sand bubblebers are nothing like them," she said proudly. "We wander the beach sands, sometimes in pairs, sometimes alone."

"We do have large families though," she continued. "My children must be down there, up to some mischief or the other. Would you like to play with them?" she said in a friendly voice.



A little Scopimera peeped out of a hole and called, "Come on, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis. We're building a maze! Will you help us with the burrows?"

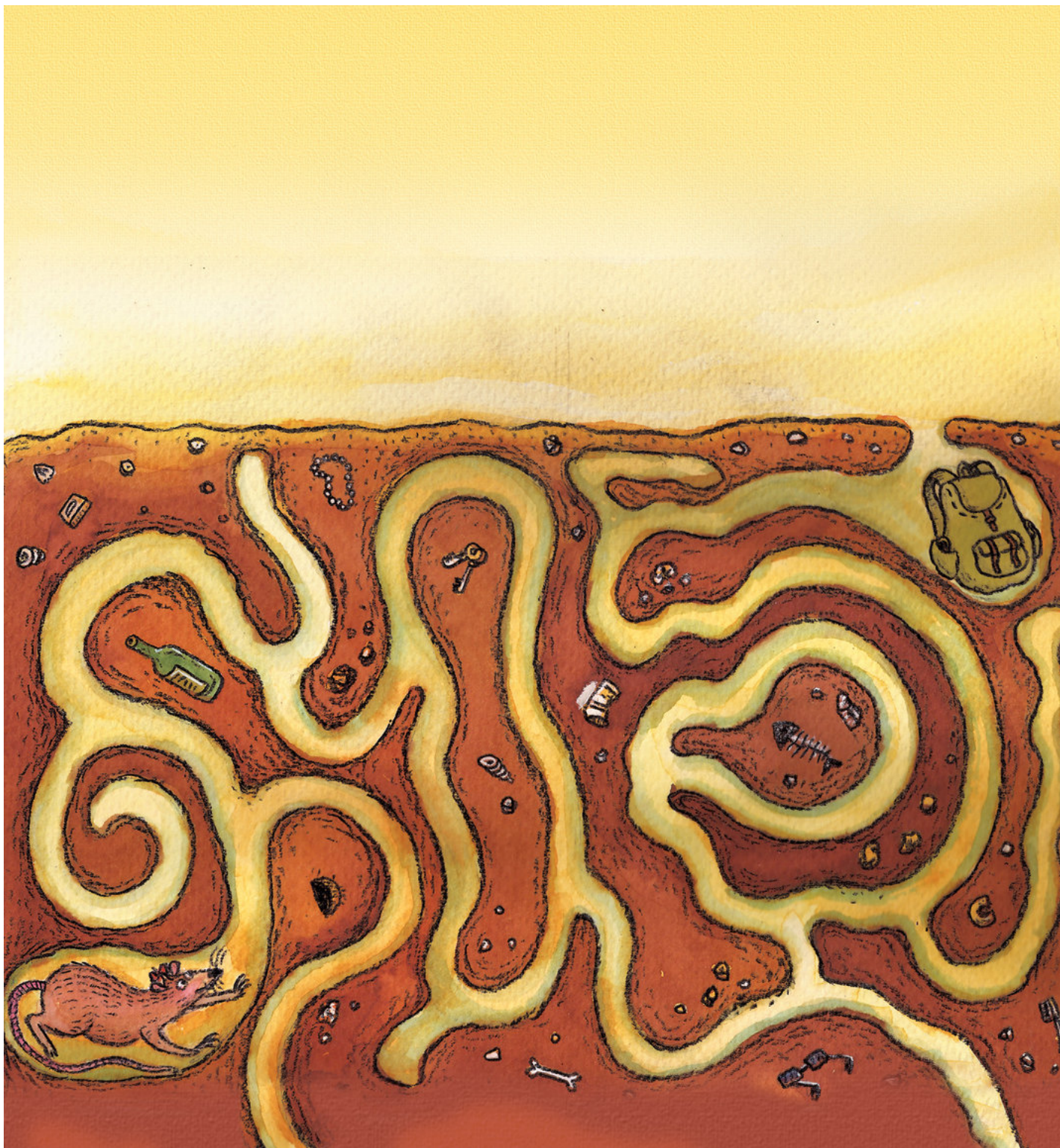
"Burrows? I love burrows!" Miss Bandicota Bengalensis sprang into the nearest hole, head first. Immediately, she was stuck!

She was upside down in the sticky sand, her head in a hole and her legs sticking out in the air. Not one to lose heart easily, she threw her kit into the hole and promptly started burrowing to make a tunnel.

The little sand bubbler crabs were thrilled. They had never seen anyone burrow so fast!

They all began digging industriously, some sideways, some backwards, some upside down and some all around. In no time the seashore of Bordi was dug up into a secret maze.

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis wanted to try out every new tunnel in it!

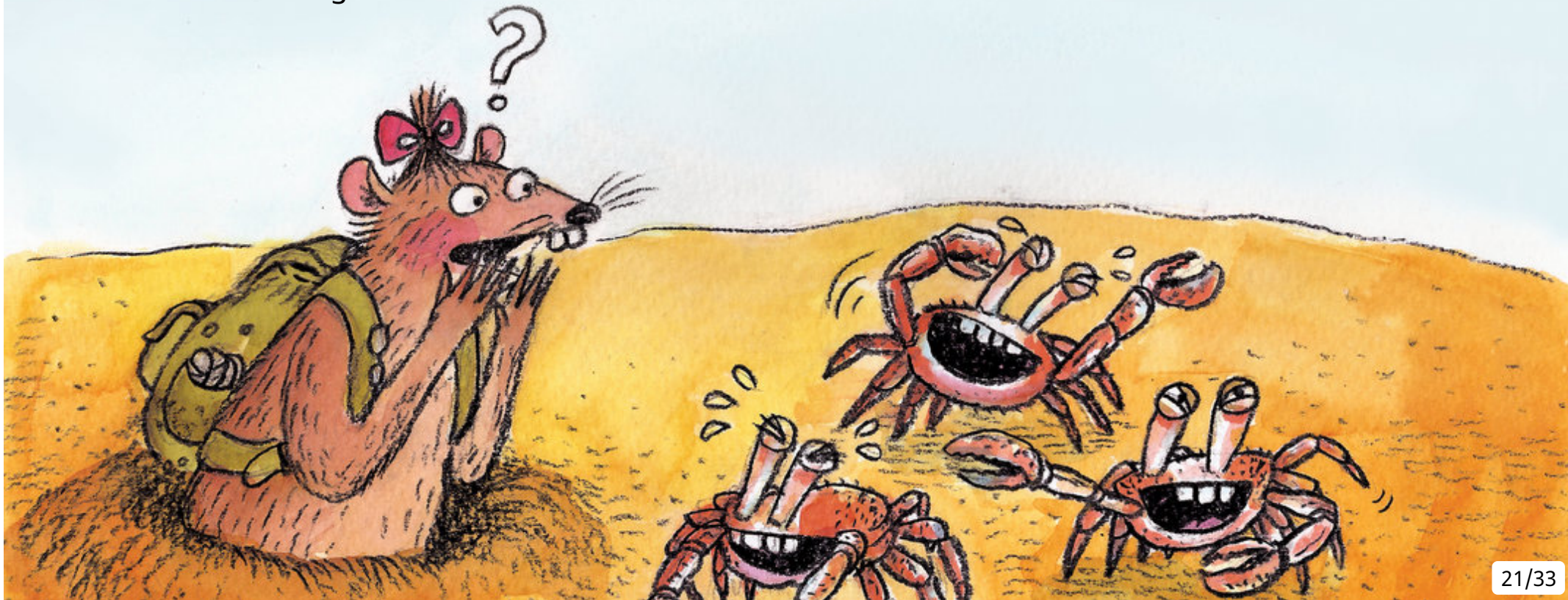


Can you help Miss Bandicota Bengalensis get back to her travel kit through the secret maze?

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis scurried excitedly through the underground maze at lightning speed. She finally reached her travel kit with shining eyes and a triumphant smile. She had never crossed so many new burrows in such little time!

As she climbed out of the hole, she gasped in horror, "The sea has vanished!" She scampered around in circles, only to turn back again and again, "Gone! Disappeared!"

As her eyes grew bigger and rounder in shock, more and more Scopimera kids clutched at their tummies and rolled in laughter. Poor Miss Bandicota Bengalensis!



"There! There! It's just low tide," said Mrs. Scopimera kindly, coming to her rescue.

"It's just low what?" asked a puzzled Miss Bandicota Bengalensis.

"Low tide. The sea water recedes during low tide and returns when the tide is high. Nothing to worry about, you know, it happens twice a day. That's when we sand bubblebers get to eat. We have to rush into our holes again when the waves return."

"But where does the sea go?"

"Just far, far behind. The water only seems to disappear over the flat and gentle Bardi sands. If you look hard enough, you will see a foamy white line. That's where the shore is now."

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis fished out her binoculars hastily. Sure enough, she could see the waves of the Arabian Sea in the distant horizon.

She heaved sigh of relief and collapsed on the sand. All that running around had made her very hungry and very thirsty.

So she she began yet another journey, this time in search of food and water.



Mrs. Scopimera accompanied her down the beach, up to the rows of casuarina trees. There, she wished Miss Bandicota Bengalensis luck and returned to her children.

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis trotted ahead, along the edge of the beach. Her legs began to hurt. The tip of her tail, where Mrs. Scopimera had pinched it, was smarting.





Always prepared,
Miss Bandicota Bengalensis
stuck her sticker bandage
around her tail.

The strong little mole rat
walked steadily on, even as
the rays of the sun beat
down upon her.

After what seemed like
a zillion steps, she reached
a sharp bend in the road.



As the coast turned inwards, to her joy, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis discovered a charming grove of chickoo trees. The branches, laden with soft brown fruit, swung low. The orchard grounds were strewn sweet ripe chickoos.

A farm pond lay nestled in the shadows of a hundred trees. Miss Bandicota Bengalensis first rushed to the edge of the pond and drank to her heart's content.

Now refreshed, she dashed around the trees, madly gathering a heap of chickoos. She made a heap any self-respecting mole rat would be proud of!





Pleased with the morning's work, Miss Bandicota Bengalensis leaned back to admire the most alluring pile of fruit she had ever seen.

Her greedy fingers couldn't wait to poke into the soft ripe skin. Her greedy toes couldn't wait to jump on the pile.

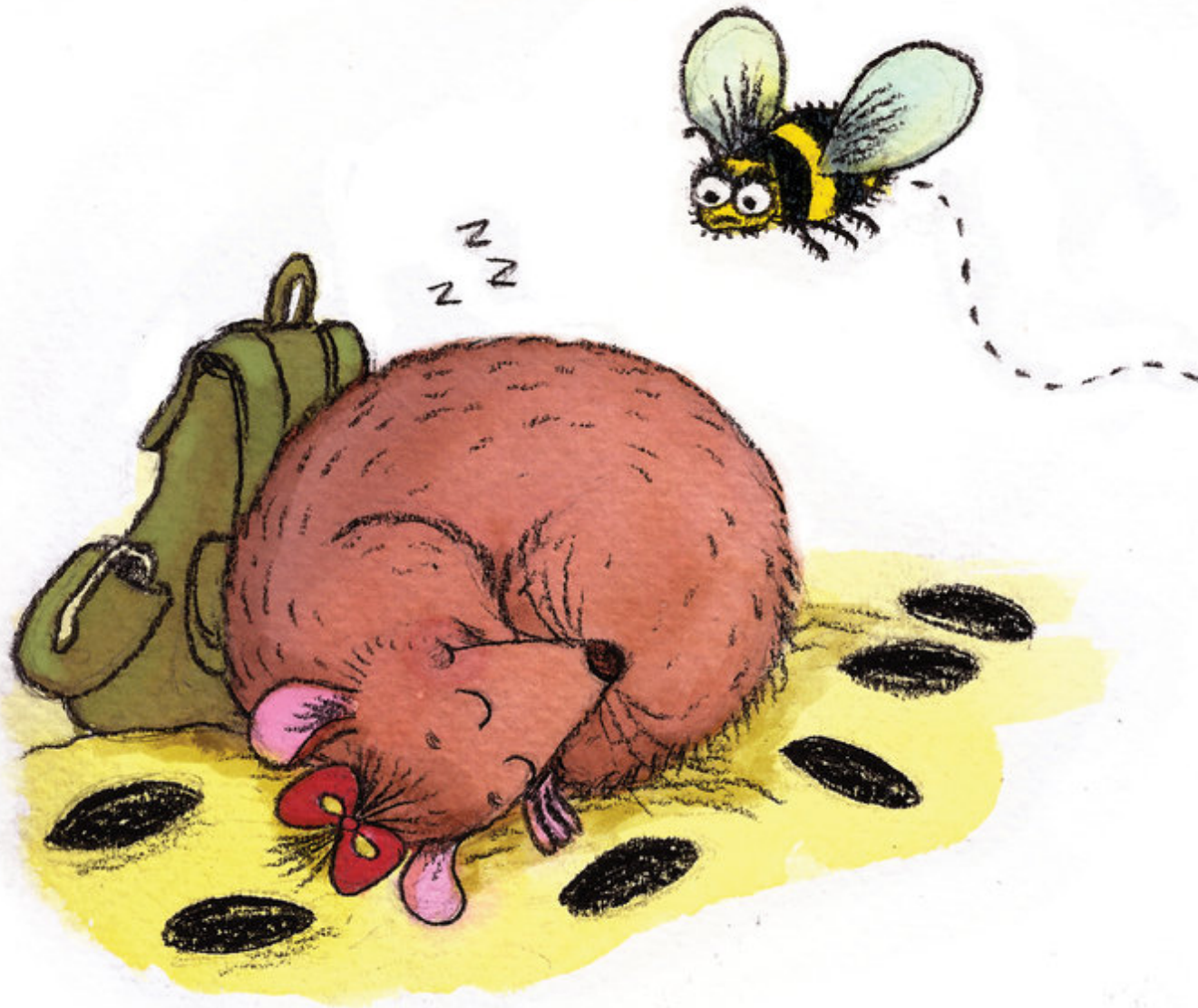
Nobody saw the very hungry mole rat pounce on the chickoos.

But before long...

A busy honey bee was foraging around in the afternoon, when she came upon an enormous pile of black and beady chickoo seeds. A happy mole rat lay curled in a hole beneath it.

"A good worker works all day and sleeps only at night," muttered the honey bee.

A very sleepy Miss Bandicota Bengalensis turned over and murmured, "Sleep at night? No, no, no, not at all. Tonight, I must dig a new burrow..."





Bandicota bengalensis, also known as the Indian mole rat, is a giant rat of South Asia. It is not related to the true bandicoot.

They can be up to 40 cm long, including the tail. They are seen as pests because they damage cereal crops and gardens.

They make pig-like grunts when attacking. The name 'bandicoot' is derived from the Telugu word pandikokku, which translates to 'pig-rat'.



Did you know that ***Porpita porpita*** is also called the 'blue button jellyfish'? But it is actually not a jellyfish at all!

As you now know, it is a colony of many tentacle-shaped animals.

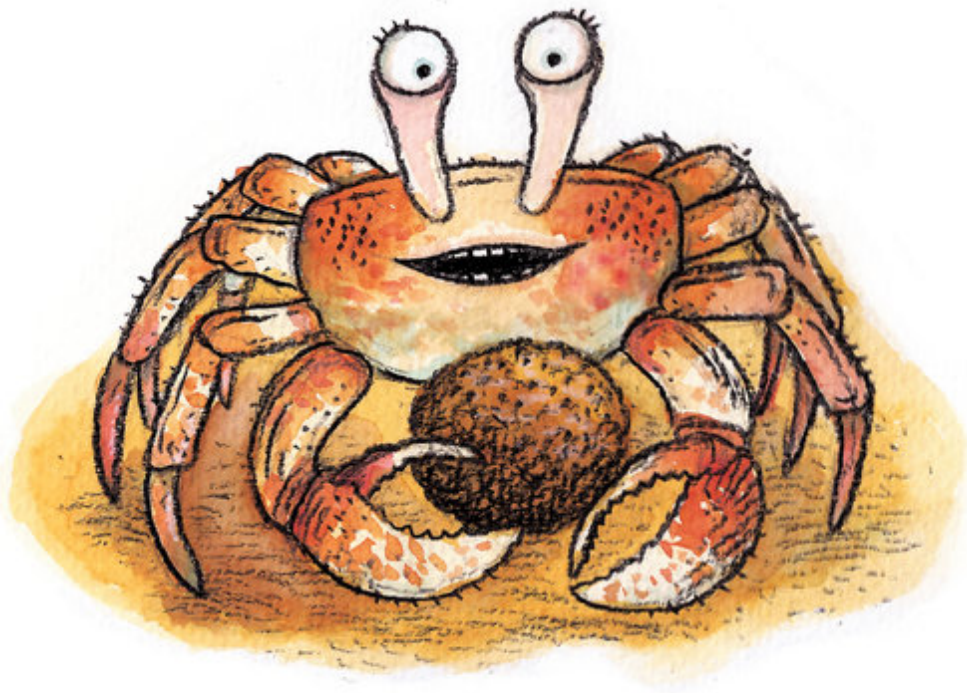
They all float together and eat through a single mouth in the centre of the button!



Can you believe that the **chickoo**
(scientific name: *Manilkara zapota*)
is not from India?

It came from faraway Central American
countries like Mexico.

The chickoo travelled across the oceans with
adventurers just like Miss Bandicota to reach the
shores of India, maybe about 200 years ago.



The **sand bubbler crab** does not have lungs. So how does it breathe? It has 'gas windows' on its legs, through which it takes in oxygen.

At high tide, the land crab depends on the air trapped in its burrows. At low tide, it emerges, to feed and make sand bubbles.

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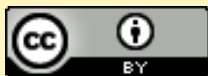
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Miss Bandicota Bengalensis Digs Up the Seashore

(English)

Miss Bandicota Bengalensis was not just any little Indian mole rat. She had magical eyes like no other mole rat and she wanted to see everything. Every night, she packed her explorer's kit: her sunglasses, binoculars, magnifying glass and of course, her favourite - a strip of sticker bandages. "An explorer is always prepared," she said. Every time she dug in a new direction and returned through a new burrow! This time our unlikely explorer has surfaced near the sea. Enjoy a walk along the beach with her as she befriends a host of strange creatures.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.



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