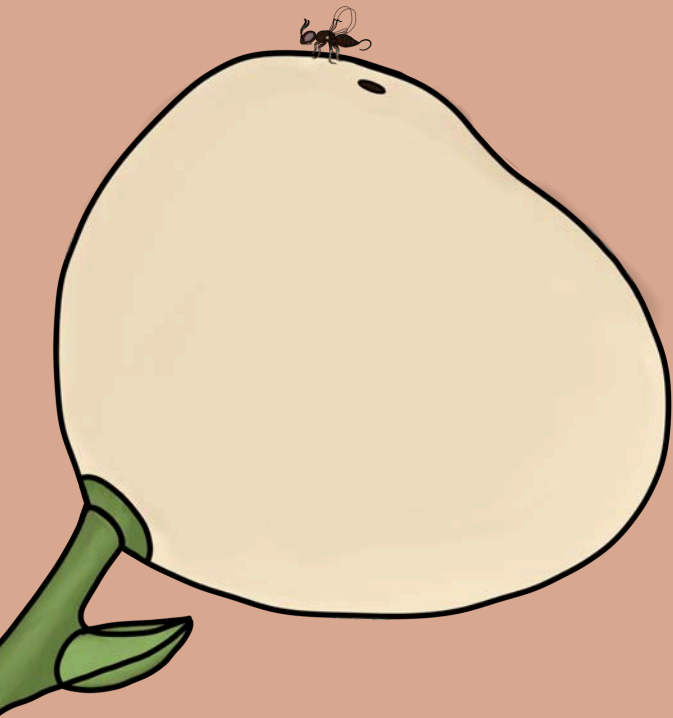


The Search for Splendid

It was another warm day, and the sun beamed down on an Afrotropical woodland where it met, amongst many other organisms, a small Red-Leaved Fig tree.

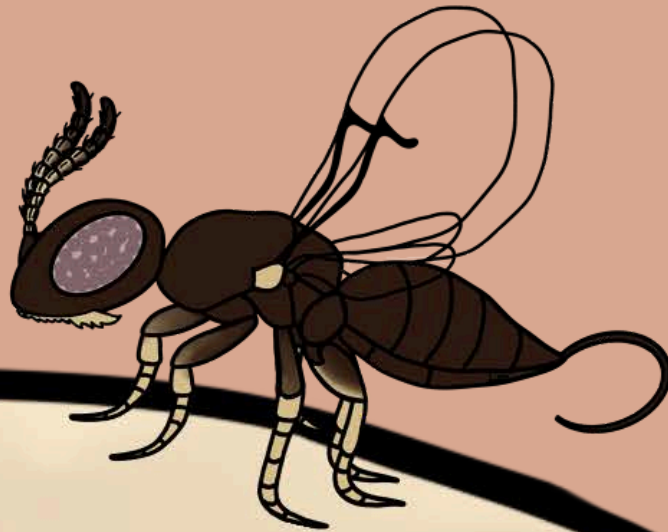
You'd be forgiven for not immediately recognising it as a fig tree as it was smaller and shrubbier than its better-known relatives, especially since it was growing out from between the many rocks on the ridge where it lived¹



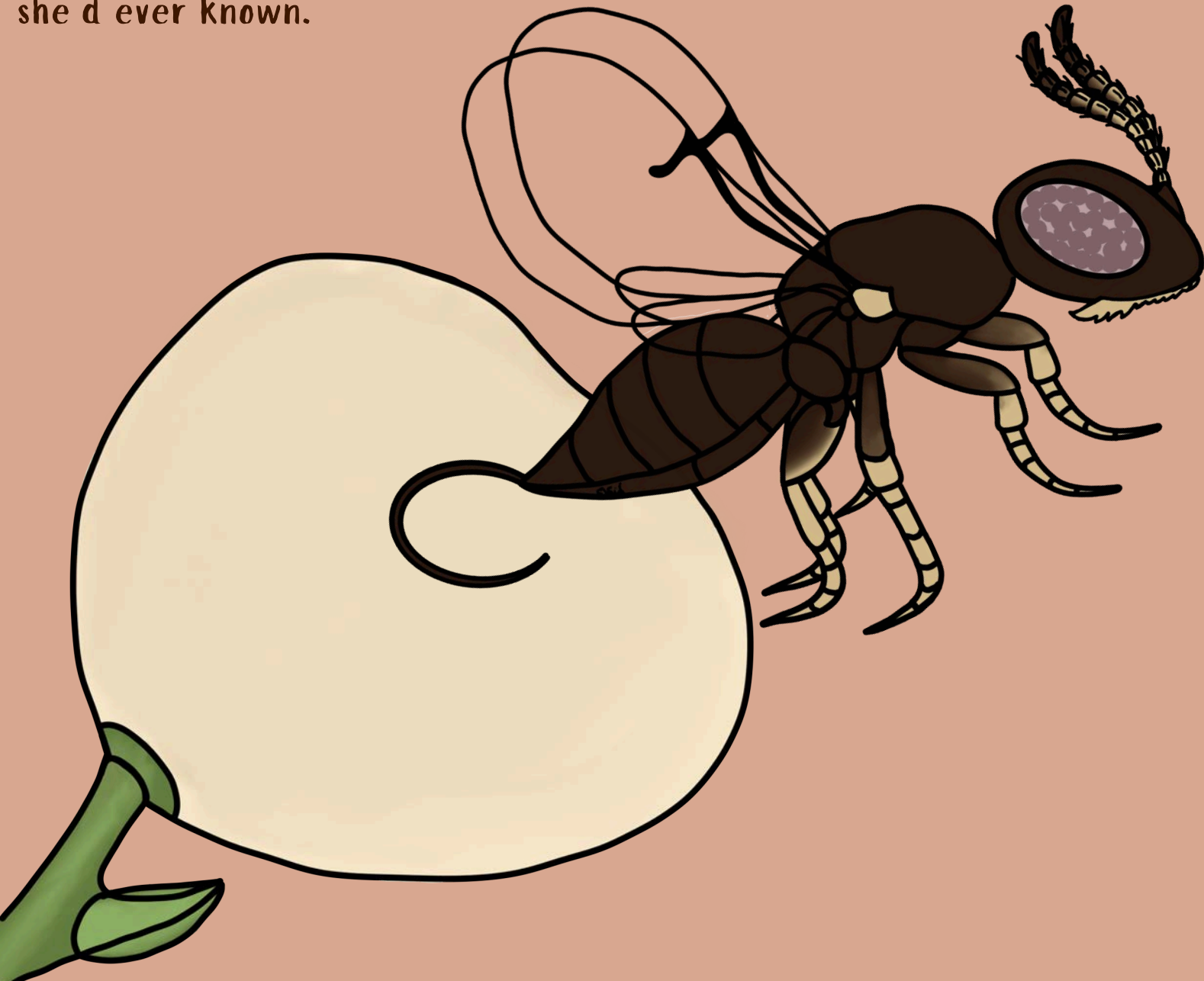


From one of its small yellowy figs, a tiny dark wasp with pockets full of pollen emerged through one of the doors her older brothers had carefully made¹⁻³.

“Remember to trust your instincts, Aria - it may take a while, but when you find the perfect new home, you’ll know” called her brother from within.

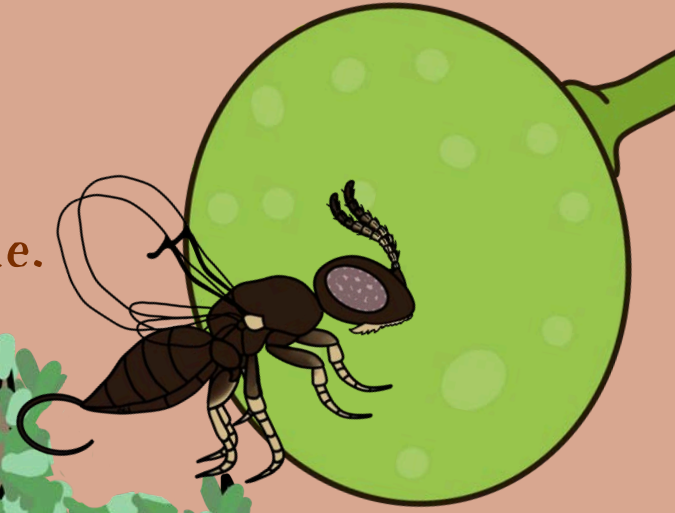
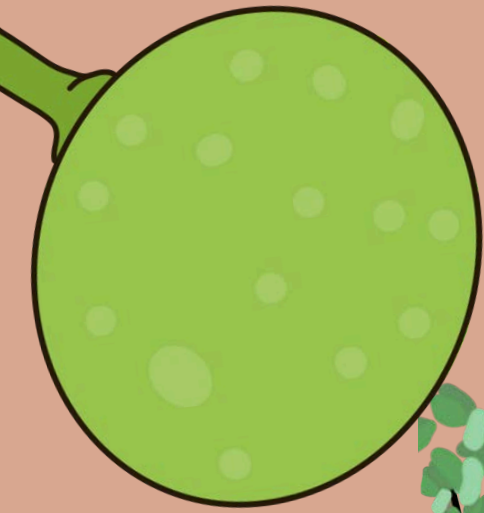


“Yes, yes, alright! I’m leaving now!” and with that, Aria, like her many sisters before her, opened her membranous wings and took off, leaving the only home she’d ever known.

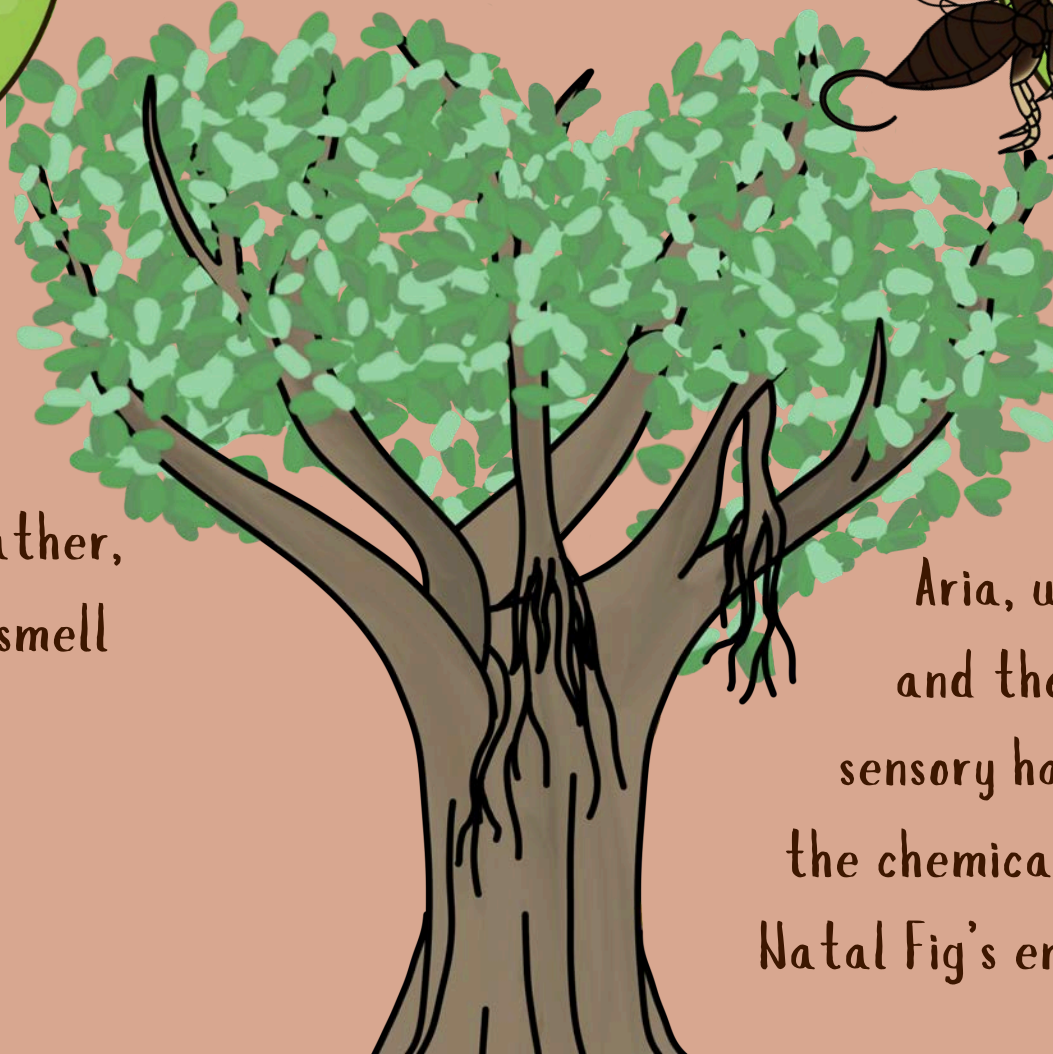


It wasn't long before she came across another fig tree.

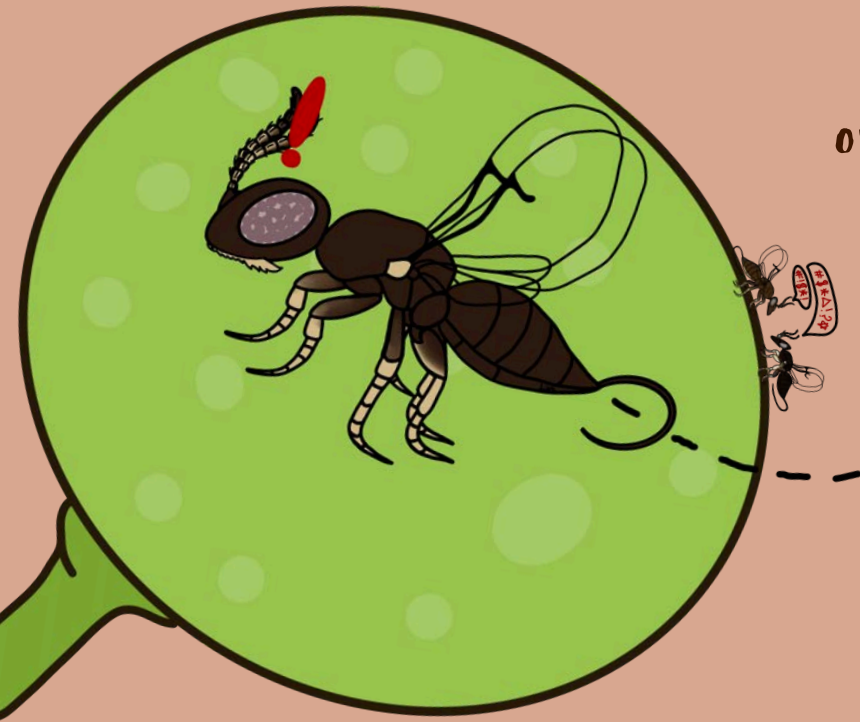
Well, that was easy,
she thought to herself,
so much for it taking a while.



However, as she
got closer,
something didn't
feel right - or rather,
something didn't smell
right.



Aria, using her antennae
and their three rows of
sensory hairs, had picked up
the chemicals released by the
Natal Fig's enclosed flowers³⁻⁵.

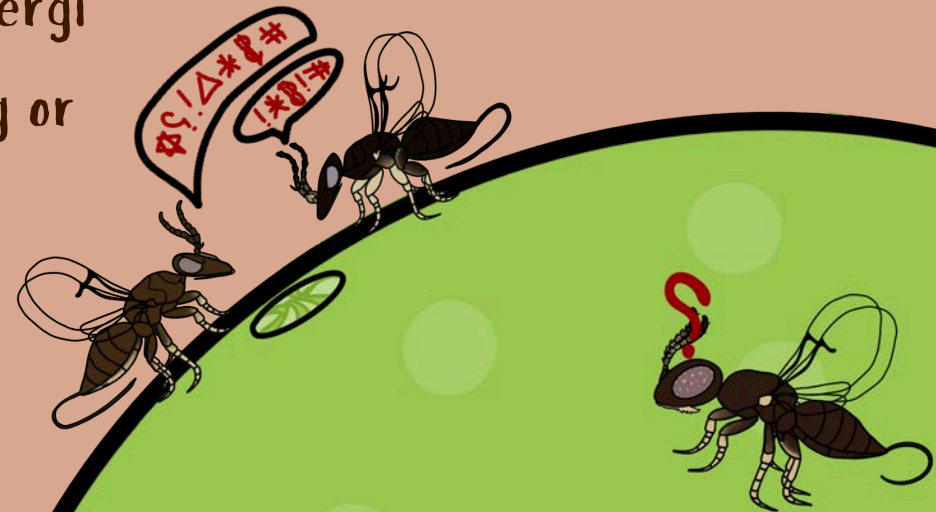


She was debating what to do when she overheard two voices coming from one of the tree's smooth, green figs¹.

As she approached, she found two wasps arguing by the door^{2,6}.

"I don't care if you found it first, Bergi - this fig is MINE! Go find a Coral Fig or any of those others you like!"

yelled one of the two wedge-faced wasps with long ovipositors^{1,2}.



“Don’t be ridiculous, Elisa - look how well my head fits!

Why don’t you go find a Burke’s Fig?”

retorted the other with a slightly shorter head^{1,2,7}.

“My head -”

began Elisa before

Aria decided she’d

had enough^{1,2}.



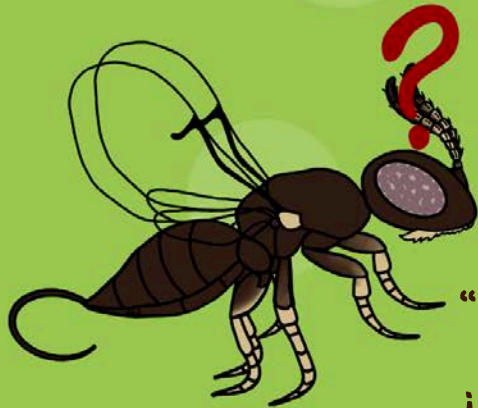
“Excuse me? Why are you both fighting?” she asked as she landed on the strange fig and approached the even stranger wasps.

“NOT YOU AS WELL”

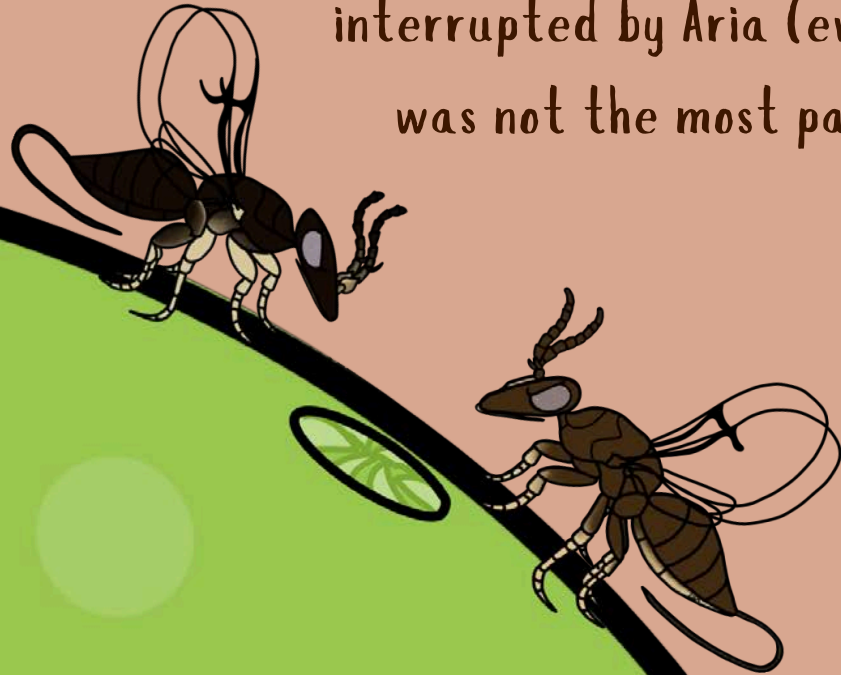
complained Elisa.

“Yes, look we know it smells splendid but -”

Bergi began, before she too was interrupted by Aria (evidently, she was not the most patient of fig wasps)^{2,4,6}.



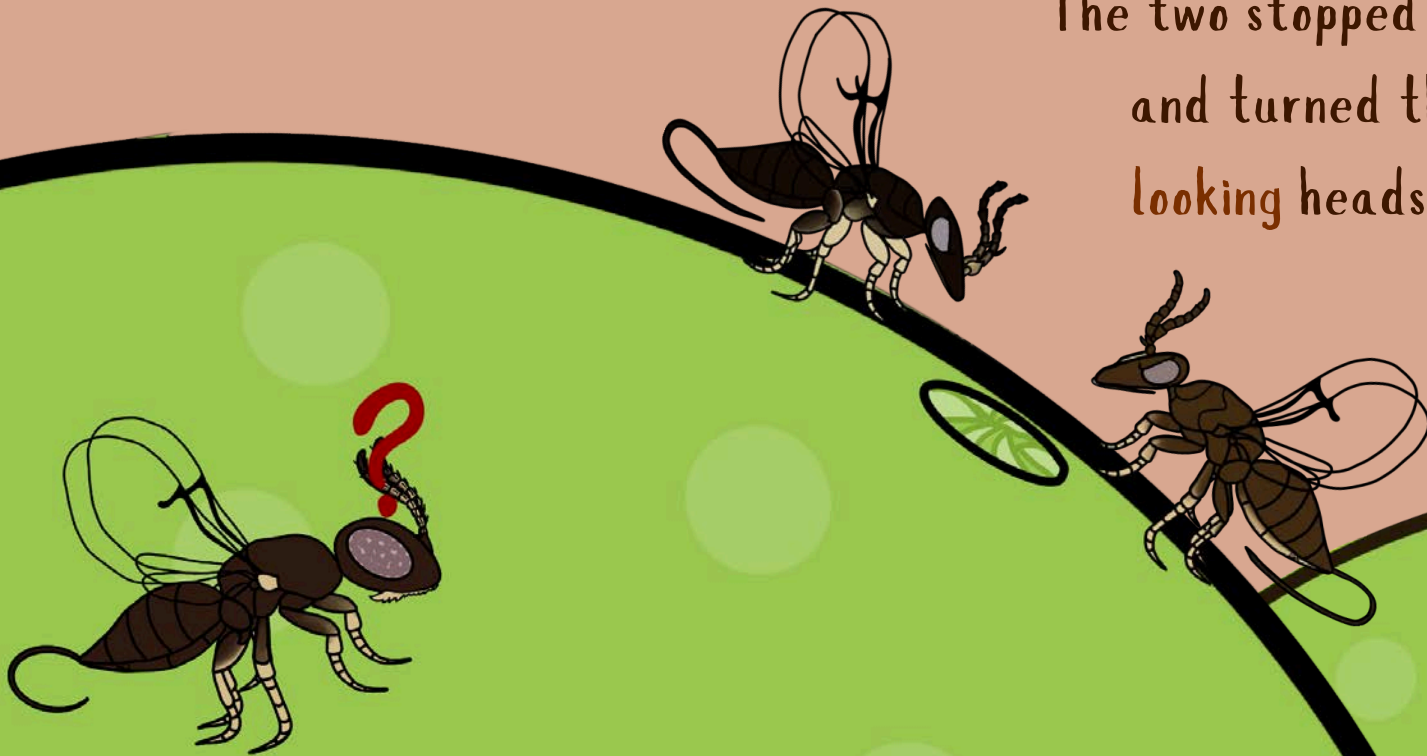
“Splendid? There’s nothing notable about it!” she exclaimed, antennae twitching^{4,6}.



The other two looked at her bewildered but clearly relieved to not have more competition. They attempted to resume their argument, but Aria continued:

“Plus, why can’t you just share? Look, there’s another fig right there”

The two stopped in their tracks and turned their quite odd-looking heads slowly back to face Aria.



“Share?”

they both said looking to each other.

“Well, I guess I don’t really want to
look any further -”

started Elisa,



“- and so many of the other trees are
already fully occupied”

finished Bergi².

With this, they both shot Aria a
sheepish look before squeezing
through the doors of the
adjacent figs^{2,6}.

I could have never gotten through that
weirdly shaped door,

thought Aria as she walked past one,

thankfully, they had those
bizarre faces^{1,7}.



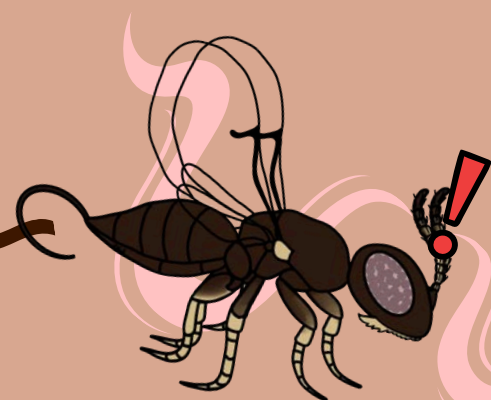
She contemplated this as she absentmindedly continued her search. She flew past several species of fig, none of which smelled 'splendid', including a Peter's Fig and Lowveld Fig at which she swore she saw the same wasp^{1,2}.

Everyone seems to have all these options, and I can't even find a single fig that feels right, she thought dejectedly, maybe I never will².

She was suddenly overwhelmed with a powerful feeling.

Her antennae twitched.

Something smelled splendid⁴.




She followed the scent to a nearby tree
she hadn't noticed¹.

It was quite large with a spreading
canopy of red-tinted
leaves¹.

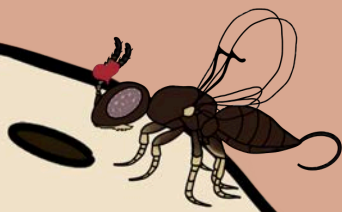


It didn't really look familiar,
but it smelled like

home

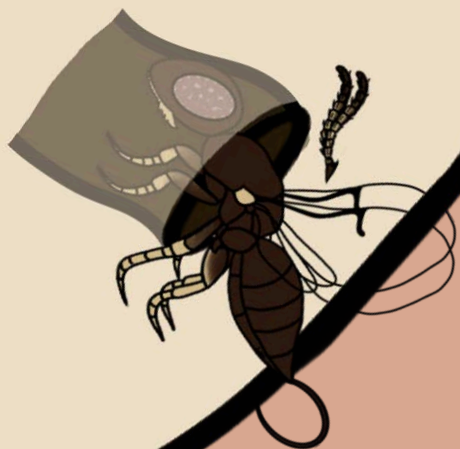


As she landed on one of its more familiar fruits her tiny brain hummed.



Approaching the door, she found it a different shape to the ones she'd seen earlier, and as she went to enter, her head fit in it like a key in a lock^{4,7}.

It was still enough of a squeeze that she had to leave her wings and antennae behind, but she didn't mind¹.



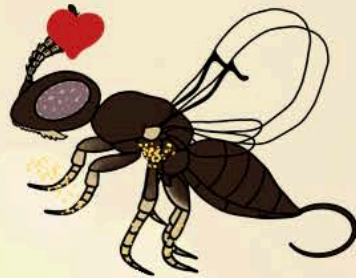
When she reached the room inside, she found what looked like dozens of small flowers¹.

Perfect.



And it was here that she lived out the rest
of her life, depositing pollen and her own
diminutive eggs into the flowers.

She hoped each of them would find their
own homes one day.



credits

Platyscapa soraria

Aria

Elisabethiella stuckenbergi

Bergi

Elisabethiella socotrensis

Elisa

Alfonsiella binghami

Wasp on Peter's & Lowveld Fig

Ficus ingens

Red-Leaved Fig

Ficus natalensis natalensis

Natal Fig

Ficus lingua

Coral Fig

Ficus burkei

Burke's Fig

Ficus petersii

Peter's Fig

Ficus stuhlmannii

Lowveld Fig

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