

# The Batcave

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## **This game relies on video call technology and a specific feature within it:**

The Windows Desktop version of Zoom has a feature to turn around the camera view, i.e. you could appear hanging from the ceiling. It can be found (at the time of this writing) under Virtual Background which can be selected from the menu when using the dropdown arrow next to "Video". In the window for the Virtual Background, the preview screen has a button to turn the angle by 90 degree. Click it twice, and you appear upside down – like a bat hanging from the ceiling.

### Tips:

0) Do the technical check-up how turning upside-down works at the beginning of coming together. Don't sweat it if something doesn't work. Either find a way to work around difficulties or play another game if it feels too frustrating.

1) If you or some players can't turn their video around for some reason – don't worry: the game still works and you can just leave it to everybody's imagination hanging from the ceiling. Or – if it's just one player, the bat might have a reason to sit on the ground.

2) Having two screens is fantastic as you can both look at the Google Spreadsheet (make a copy here: <https://fckaf.de/tix>) with all character information and play the same time. Otherwise, make some written notes. It allows you to much easier to bring in what others might want to play towards.

3) If you want to go in full bat-mode: pick a blanket, a dark one if possible and wrap it around you, so it resembles your wings. Activate the Virtual Background with a picture of a nice cave. It's not necessary has the same picture.

## Summary

- Nr of players: 2-6, recommended 3-5; facilitator is playing as well
- Play time: 1.5 hours (fewer players means a slightly shorter game)
- Intensity: Low, light-hearted
- CW: misrepresentation of animals' behaviours, watching oneself and others upside-down on video

## What this game is about

In this game we play a family of bats looking for a new cave. We will move and make noises as if we were bats. We will be able to speak normally, though it is recommended to respond as much as possibly with bat-conform gestures and noises. To intensify the feel that we are bats, we turn our camera view upside down. That way we appear as if we are hanging from the ceiling.

## Optional: Learn a bit about bats

Before play, maybe you take a bit of time to get accommodated together what you know about bats. For example, read parts of the Wikipedia article together or use any other source to learn a bit about the creatures we want to incorporate together in this game. This game is not about a perfect representation. It is totally fine relying on our own beliefs, tropes and anthropocentric interpretations. In fact, bats don't speak English by the way. Maybe you have a bat expert at the table who is eager to share what they know about bats. You could also watch a bat video together before you start playing to get into the mood, for example:

- National Geographic: how a mother finds its baby: <https://youtu.be/eaLnK4jc1nA>
- Björk "Cover Me" music video filmed in a bat cave: <https://youtu.be/ZMcl6Prb3LI>

## What will happen

In the next 90 minutes, we play pretend to be a swarm of bats. We start with a warm-up exercise to get into right mood, leave our normal life behind and relax. We use what we did in the warm-up, to define a bit of bat language for our group - gestures which indicate a certain emotion within our swarm. That is followed by character creation where we develop a bit of personality for each of us to play with and create hooks to push our search for a better cave forward. Actual play is split into three phases. Phase 1 is about getting to know each other and specifically learn about our needs and passions. We will have 10 minutes for this and are fully in-character in that time. Phase 2 is our

search for a new cave. The bats fly out. We don't do this in-character but will instead search the web for a good new home for our swarm. This phase is only 5 minutes long. In Phase 3 we return to the cave to share what we found and try to agree on which home might fit best. This is again in-character and we will have 20 minutes.

### Tone discussion

This is the moment you should have a tone discussion as a group. The game can be played with a very different tone in mind. Think about where you as a group want to place this session in terms of:

- "Realism", from bats with golf course handicaps to bats eating only specific kinds of fruits
- Mood of the swarm, from extra hilarious without worries over very supportive to tense discussion about who will be left behind

### Structure of play

The Batcave	Time
Introduction & Safety plus tone discussion	15
Optional: Learn a bit about bats	5
Warm-up	5
Our language	5
Our characters	10
Break: Enter the Cave	4
ACTUAL PLAY TIME	
Phase 1: In the Batcave – <i>what the new home should be like</i>	10
Phase 2: Fly out into the world – <i>search a better home</i>	5
Phase 3: Return to the Batcave – <i>decide where to live</i>	20
Leave the Cave	1
Debrief	10
TOTAL	~80-90

Add 3 minutes per each player above 4 to Phase 1 and Phase 3.

### Warm-up

We practice being bats. Go full into bat-mood. Hanging from the ceiling, with your arms visibly on the video crossed, is the perfect starting position for your bat. But then figure out how the bat-self of you behaves. And very importantly, look around what others are doing: imitate them, learn from what they are doing. This is swarm behaviour: do what others are doing, chime in – it's very important for these social creatures. Imitate for a while and then converge to until everybody makes the same motion. Then somebody should naturally start something new and others follow them again. Do so, until you have about five different bat-signature-moves.

### Our language

We are now establishing signs from the warm-up exercise for which we will have fixed semantics. That means, that these signs, gestures etc. mean something we define now.

Three players can pick one of the habits learnt in the warm-up to mean one of the three concepts:

- **Understanding**, empathy, community
- **Disagreement**, annoyance, disgust
- **Excitement**, joy, fun

Practice them a bit. One of you will say the name of the concept and the others quickly do the sign.

### Our characters

All bats refer to each other with they/them pronouns. They have a clear distinction in their animalistic routines what male and female bats do but when they enter serious discussions, gender does not play a role and as it turns out their language hence hasn't developed gender specific distinctions in pronouns (this is our game, not science).

Now let's each of us take some time to come up with a character.

Maybe you have a real world or a fictive person in mind you want to play as a bat. Maybe you want to play yourself. Or you come up with something completely new. Each bat has a) a Name, b) a body feature, c) a special need, d) finds joy in..., e) is the Voice for... in the swarm.

### Name

Bat names only have one syllable, so you can scream them if necessary. The last syllable of your own name or your last name could perfectly work.

Example names (and make up your own)		
Gry	Zok	Que
Hen	Bri	Not
Sion	Tri	Fru
Prak	Lod	Lig
Rit	Kra	Xam
Lan	Gee	Tew

### Body feature

Life is tough for bats. Pick something you want to take care of while playing. This could be a corner stone of how you play your character or just a matter of fact – your choice.

Think about: how is this feature affecting you and your relationship to the swarm?

Body feature (or come up with your own)	
1	One-legged
2	Tooth missing
3	Vision impaired (good we have ultrasound!)
4	Part of fur missing
5	Parasites
6	Not properly healing wound

### Special need

Most bats have their own definition of when to feel comfortable in a cave. Pick something you want to look out for in the new cave to be found. This is relevant in play, especially in Phase 1. **The current cave is not fulfilling any of your needs (anymore).** Imagine to bring it up in discussions, explain what you want and demand being respected by others.

Think about: Why is that more important for you than for most others?

Special need (or come up with your own)	
1	Very dark corners
2	No humidity
3	No distracting noises
4	High ceilings
5	Small entrance
6	Same temperature all year long

### Joy

But from a young age on, bats develop a personal taste for how to find true pleasure while in a cave. This is relevant in play. Show others your excitement if one of the newly found places seems suitable for maximize your joy.

Think about: when, with whom and how did you develop this taste?

Finds joy in... (or come up with your own)	
1	Flying through narrow tunnels
2	Falling deep before returning flying
3	Crawling through unknown territory
4	Eating exotic things
5	Playing with water
6	Creating echo effects

### Voice

Most bats have a unique social role in the swarm. Or share that role more or less competitively. Use your Voice in play to push the conversation forward for more social dynamics.

Think about: how to use your voice for the benefit of the swarm to find a better cave for everyone?

Has the Voice as... (or come up with your own)	
1	The Elder
2	The Jester
3	The Protector
4	The Rebel
5	The Innocent
6	The Healer

## ACTUAL PLAY STRUCTURE

### Short Break: Enter the Cave

Before entering the cave, i.e. actual play time, take a small break. Turn your cameras and mics off, stretch your body, before releasing the inner bat. When you return on camera with mic on, you are in-character.

### In the Batcave

In the bat cave, take your time to get accommodated to being a bat. Continue to imitate what others do.

*Importantly, whenever somebody has a strong reaction, chime in.*

If one suddenly unfolds their wings, they all do. Start talking about what's on your bat's mind. React with your bat-language to what others are saying or doing. Sooner or later help to bring the conversation to one point:

*The bat cave is not a suitable place to live anymore. It's time to fly out into the world and look for a new home.*

Gather what everybody envisions for a new home. Remember, you are a bat, with a bat's mind and a bat's way to see (and hear) the world. When 10 minutes are over, the bats are getting nervous. And they all leave the cave in a whirlwind of bodies and screams at the moment one of them, shouts:

*It's time to get out.*

### Fly out into the world

Switch your cameras off. Your mics can stay on if you enjoy sending a scream or other noises to your fellow bats once in a while. You are now for exactly 5 minutes on the search for a suitable new cave. And as it happens, you are at your computer and can search the world with a few clicks. Go out there to find a good place. A structure, a building, whatever is good for you and your fellow bats. Ignore that there might be humans occupying a place. This is a bat's world.

### Return to the Batcave

Everybody returns by switching their camera on and getting into bat position, with their arms crossed. For the next 15 minutes, tell each other which place you have found. Why it would be the best to go to. Show what you like or dislike about what the others have found. Don't talk about the new cave you found too explicitly. Keep in mind that you are a bat and have a bat's view on the world.

Within these 15 minutes, you need to make a decision with consent. Towards the end of the time, you can ask where the bats stand (or hang): If all react with Understanding or better Excitement, this is a place you can go. How can you convince, what can you do to change those bats' minds who show Disagreement?

### The game is over: Leave the Cave

Finally, it's time to fly. The swarm will move together. Scream your way out of the old cave together.

### Debrief

The game is over. We are no bats anymore. Our video camera is set to standard orientation again. If you want to leave now that is fine. Thank you for playing. Those who stay for maximum 10 minutes longer, let's go around in a circle twice to talk about these three questions:

- What was the place you recommended?
- How was it to be a bat?
- Will your bat find happiness in their new home?