

CHRYSALIS

Chapter 12 The trail



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This is an exciting development! The colony is calling me, lighting the beacon to bring long lost Anthony home!

Still, let's not get carried away. Remember what happened the last time you got carried away, Anthony? You still haven't returned to max HP!

After inspecting the source of the scent on the tunnel floor, I immediately move back to my comfortable stealth position on the ceiling and continue down the tunnel. I'll have to continue down this path until I can pick up the trail somewhere.

The tunnel itself is becoming more irregular in direction, zigging and zagging through the earth, even as it continues its downward slope.

As I move I'm beginning to feel vibrations in the air from down the tunnel. Something is definitely happening in front of me. I must proceed with all caution!

Thirty metres ahead the tunnel splits once again. I'm starting to feel that these tunnels and caves are going to be splitting into a very messy network of tunnels. This is going to be hard to keep track of.

[Tunnel sense has reached level 2]

This is what I'm counting on! According to its description this skill helps maintain a sense of direction whilst underground. I suspect because of this effect I've been able to know which way the tunnel is sloping or curving almost without having to think about it. I'll have to depend on this to help me navigate and remember which way is which.

Since I can't detect any pheromone trail from either tunnel and one seems no safer than the other, I decide place a mark in the ceiling right at the split which indicates which direction I have taken. If I create and maintain a simple set of symbols to mark the tunnels it will hopefully help my memory.

After scraping a simple arrow into the rock with my mandibles I move down the right hand path.

Ten minutes later I have returned to the juncture.

Well then! Not going down that way anytime soon! It hadn't taken long for me to discern something was wrong with that tunnel and without having to travel far I encountered an area wherein the tunnel widened slightly creating a sort of hollow that had been occupied for a group of wolf lizards. Five of them were lounging on the rocks, gnawing on bones of what appeared to be recently killed prey. I wasn't prepared to try and sneak past them so I turned my tail and returned.

What symbol should I use for instant death?

In the end I scratch a rough X for danger and a ~ shape next to my mark for the right tunnel to try and represent the wolf lizard tail before marking the left tunnel and moving into it.

Hopefully this path is a little more manageable!

After a few hundred meters the tunnel seems quite safe, almost pleasant, as tunnels go.

HOLD IT!

I freeze in the process of walking, one foreleg poised in the air to advance as I stare hard at the space in front of me.

Is this What I think it is?

Before me I can see, barely see, a thin, silvery line of delicate thread stretched taught across the tunnel.

Very gently I bring my leg back towards my body and place it down before taking a few steps back and examining what I see in front of me.

Without having +2 eyesight there is no way I would have been able to notice in time.

Reflecting the soft blue light of the rock walls there is a web of whisker thin strands stretched across the tunnel. I had been so close to walking headfirst into a welcome I would not have survived.

Monster spider! I shiver.

I can't help but feel indignant.

Stupid spiders! You think you're the king of the insect world? Huh!? You let your webs do all the hard work for you! Not an honest, straight forward worker like an ant. If I had two hundred of my kind here, boy you'd have to watch out!

After inspecting carefully I can't see any spider on this web, but that doesn't mean it isn't nearby.

I hesitate. I either have to move through this tunnel or back to the family of wolf lizards and try and sneak through. Since I don't like my odds of sneaking I may have to try and gather some information about this spider monster to make an informed decision on the best path forward.

After some consideration I move to the floor of the tunnel and gather up a few loose rocks. I practice using my mandibles to toss them a short distance, the hard impact sound of rock on rock echoes through the tunnel.

I get the hang of it pretty quickly and line up a few rocks close to the web. Swinging my head I lob a rock at the web. The stone impacts the strands, causing the entire web to shake but it doesn't stick and falls to the ground. Without waiting I throw a second one and then turn and scurry away to hide in the shadows to observe.

At first, nothing happens. The shaking of the web makes it much easier to see, a neat pattern covering the whole of the tunnels width. Eventually the motion stops but still, I wait.

Here it comes! I almost missed it at first since it was moving on the ceiling, the show off! One leg and then the next emerges from the shadows as the monster appears to inspect the prey that shook its web.

Ugh, this thing is hideous! Eight furry legs (clearly too many) support its fat bulbous body as it moves forward and begins to daintily touch and examine the web.

Now as I recall it, a spider is an arachnid, not an insect like me. I have three body segments (head, thorax and abdomen) and six legs whilst a spider has eight legs (yuck) and two body segments (head and abdomen).

This spider is not part of the mighty insect family, he's lower on the food chain! Looking closely, it appears to be roughly my size as well. It's possible this is not a high level monster.

The spider begins to move off the rock and onto the web itself, inspecting the strands more closely. An idea is beginning to form in my mind. Let's just wait a little for our many-legged friend to sit still for us...

The spider is moving slowly across the web, still trying to determine the cause of the disturbance, meanwhile I am carefully pointing my rear at the target, trying to accurately judge the distance.

Hold Hooooold..... Fire!

Pow!

I blast out a mighty shot of acid, trying to force the attack at my maximum range. Immediately after letting the acid fly, I begin to change locations and watch the target to see the effect of my artillery.

At this range the accuracy was a little lacking and rather than hitting the spider straight on the abdomen as I'd hoped, the acid sprays across the legs on the right side.

The spider reacts immediately, flailing around at incredible speed! Loathsome fangs are bared, dripping dark fluid as the beast turns this way and that, its many eyes glaring into the tunnel as it attempts to locate its antagonist.

This is something the spider clearly has over me. Even upgraded, my eyesight is probably no match for the natural eyes of a spider. Most spiders have up to

eight eyes! As solitary hunters they need excellent senses, much for the same reason I do!

The stealth skill is currently displaying its strength as my foe seems unable to identify my location. Perhaps I was able to catch it unawares, the creature's attention focused on the web rather than observing the tunnel.

I watch the movements of my target like a hawk. After scrambling for a while, the spider calms down and moves defensively to the side of the web, near the walls, watching the tunnel carefully. I can see its eyes gleaming slightly in the tunnel light. It clearly thinks it has hidden carefully.

Stupid spider! I've been watching you all along!

And now you are perfectly still!

Moving slowly, oh so slowly, I turn and prepare to fire a second shot.

Take into account the elevation and angle, no breeze to worry about, think of the arc.

Fire!

I turn just in time to see my acid shoot over the spiders head and spray onto its abdomen, sticking and clinging to the monsters hairy body. I can hear an audible hiss of pain from the spider as once again it thrashes and charges about behind its web, trying to find me.

But I am long gone! Once I confirm the hit I put the jets on and run the heck out of there!

Chase me if you want you dumb spider! If you're brave enough to leave your web that is!