

CHRYSALIS

Chapter 14 The express lane



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[You have consumed a new source of Biomass: Puer Aranea, you are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Puer Aranea unlocked]

[You have gained one Biomass]

[Puer Aranea: Child Spider. A newly born spider monster, relies on its web to secure prey.]

I feel great shame.

Clearly the rage I directed at this spider, the contempt I felt for it growing fat on biomass behind its cozy web was very misplaced.

This is a level one baby spider monster. It's possible it never managed to consume any biomass at all.

How pitiful.

Your existence is so pitiful!

We won't talk about your end...

I'm sorry young spider!

After my first two blasts of acid the spider was already heavily wounded, without any way to recover the damage caused by my acid, its pitifully small health pool had shrunk to almost nothing.

When I entered the nest to continue the battle it was already on the edge of death, my last shot was enough to defeat it. Being only level one, I'm sure the experience I've gained isn't much, but by consuming it (the taste was as you could imagine), I have gained two more biomass.

Once again, eyes +3 is within my reach!

With my vision finally in a non-life threateningly sucky state I'll be able to concentrate on other aspects of my body.

Maybe then I'll be able to actually fight something.

Wishful thinking! I suck!

I have to find out how I can grow into at least an adult ant. Perhaps I need to achieve more levels? Before that can happen I need to locate a place I can hunt.

Having consumed the unfortunate arachnid I have at least secured a path forward, so I've little choice but to continue on my journey.

I use broken rocks and dust in order to break through the web on the other side of the nest and squeeze myself between the threads once more.

Enter stealth mode!

Scrabbling back to the ceiling I move cautiously down the tunnel once more.

It isn't long before I find something new.

A shaft plunging straight down into the dark.

Directly in the middle of the tunnel the floor drops away instantly and before me is a hole, four metres in diameter that I cannot see the bottom of, despite the winding light threads that twist through the rock walls.

How far down does this thing go?!

The tunnel I'm in keeps continuing forward so once again I am left with a choice.

If I assume that deeper means more dangerous then I should leave my exploration of this shaft for later. I still take time to sniff the edge of the hole carefully with my antennae, seeking any sign of the trail.

Nothing.

I'm a little disappointed but at the same time a little relieved. I'd rather not have to pursue the trail deeper into these tunnels if I could avoid it, but since going higher in the tunnels isn't safe either (due to the threat of painful death by human), going deeper may be the smarter option...

Gah! My head hurts!

I will have to explore all options in the end probably. No need to keep thinking about it. Onward!

Passing over the shaft opening I proceed further down the tunnel, warily scanning as I do so.

After twenty minutes I encounter another development.

It turns out my small tunnel connects to a much larger one, similar to the cavern I was in before. This large passage is at least thirty metres wide and twenty metres high. Sitting at the opening to my small tunnel I can already see other small tunnel openings breaking off from this main passage.

I know what this means...

More monsters!

I can already see a few prowling between rock formations and I can hear even more. I wonder if this passage links back to the first cavern I was in? Have I

just done a wide loop and reconnected to the very passage I was trying to get away from?

I have to be careful.

First things first, I retreat back into the smaller tunnel and start searching for a section of soft dirt I can use to dig. I have to move back about a hundred metres but I find a section of wall I can work with.

Next I begin to construct a nest once more, opening a hole in the tunnel wall and removing the chunks of dirt and rock to block off the tunnel. I just don't feel safe unless I can put even a very flimsy layer of protection around myself.

It takes a few hours but I excavate a cosy, dark nest and manage to block off the tunnel towards the new cavern, leaving my small opening on the ceiling to allow my passage.

Also:

[Digging has reached Level 4].

Even if it is a fairly useless skill, it feels good to grow and improve! When I think about it, I'm already a vastly improved little monster than I was when I started. My senses are sharper, my acid stronger and my skills have improved.

I'm still pathetically weak in combat, I know that, but still.

Let me be proud of myself.

Nest site secured. Time for a nap!

To explore new terrain and possibly hunt, I need to be sharp, so I decide to get some rest in first. I flop my hard carapace down, with my legs splayed out. I can't actually shut my eyes, since I have no eyelids. It's a little weird, to say the least. Since I raised insects in the past I know that ants don't actually sleep, but basically stay still and rest for a while. It's a state called torpor.

As I stay still and unmoving I gradually drift into a fuzzy state of half attention. All stimuli fades into a background noise and my mind slowly drifts away from my senses.

Getting some shut eye... Without actually shutting my eyes.

Sometime later I shake myself awake and pull my legs under me, ready to stand and venture forth.

My mind is refreshed! Peak performance has been reached, it's time to explore.

There are two things I'm concerned about right now. Firstly, I want to try and secure one more biomass so I can improve my eyesight once more. Once that has been achieved I won't try and amass four more points to achieve +4 but start to upgrade the rest of my body. With more powerful legs, carapace, mandibles and acid gland I'll feel a lot more comfortable exposing myself when hunting.

Secondly, I need to secure more XP. With more levels I may be able to increase my stats or progress into an adult ant which may increase my

chances of survival greatly. I also have a plan to try and secure more experience safely. Hopefully I'll be able to try it out in this cavern, as long as there is enough monsters, I think I will.

I emerge into the large tunnel and quickly take shelter amongst the rock formations on the ceiling. My stealth has long reached level three. Hopefully I can raise it further by shadowing some monsters in here.

Looking back and forth I can tell that to my left the cavern slopes gradually upwards as it curves into the distance. I can't help but worry that this tunnel is the path that extended from the cavern I was in before. Have I circled around just to put myself directly in front of the soldiers again?!

It seems as though this area of dungeon mostly consists of these larger 'main' tunnels with small ones branching and twisting off in all directions, creating spaces for smaller monsters to exist and group together.

So the large tunnels are the highways and the smaller ones are the backstreets?

Something like that.

Sweeping my antennae I move towards the downward sloping side.

[Tunnel Sense has reached Level 3]

Huh. So trying to decide direction and map the tunnels in my mind is levelling my tunnel sense? Feels a little weird to think the system is able to monitor my thoughts...

Well, skill levels is something that can only help for now!

Hopefully somewhere in this direction I'll be able to find what I'm looking for.

I've noticed two new types of monster in this area already. The first is like a large rat but with three tails, each one tipped with a spike of some sort. Absolutely don't want to mess with that guy. The second is a mollusc looking creature, its long slimy body coated with organic looking spines of bright colours, almost like coral growing directly from the creatures back. Something to consider about this thing is that it is at least twice my size and is clearly

capable of moving on the walls since I've seen two of them sliding up vertically already.

I hate slug like things! Yuk! They don't appear to be able to move very quickly but I would be shocked if these brightly coloured bros weren't poisonous in some way.

I'll avoid their trails as well, just in case.

Ah ha! I'm starting to hear the sweet sound I've been hoping for! Growls of beasts and the gnashing of claws are starting to happen further ahead! Onward, with the speed of Shadowfax!