

Chrysalis 19

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Chapter 19: The Harves

This is clearly one ticked off slug. I really wish I had considered what I would do if the monster turned out to be an acid spitting nightmare of death.

Too late to weep ant tears, since ants can't cry anyway. Only thing to do is finish off this slug. The problem is that I have a limited supply of acid within me, usually only three or four shots worth at a time. I haven't managed to time exactly how long it takes to regenerate each blast yet so after firing one more round I won't know how long it will take until another becomes available.

Since I can't really attack the slug with my mandibles, the acid is my only option. Somehow I have to land a decisive blow with my final acid attack.

I can think of one strategy but I really don't want to have to take such a risk!

Why have you forced me into this situation Gandalf!? If I wasn't in such a hurry I'd never even consider this!

Gritting my mandibles I begin to move towards the slug, trying to keep my profile low by moving between uneven folds in the rock wall.

[Grip has reached level 4]

Finally! How long do I have to scramble about on walls and ceilings before this skill will level up?! Perhaps I it only really considers time I spend fighting whilst on walls?

No time to worry about it now, battle is at hand!

The slug is moving through its own acid now, sliding over the adhesive muck without taking any damage, probably protected by its slime barrier. I think the monster usually hunts by immobilizing and burning its foe with this stuff before closing in for the feast.

Here goes nothing.

I've managed to close to within ten metres of the slug. I'm sure its seen me moving closer but probably hasn't been able to pinpoint me. Seemingly unfazed the slug continues to advance towards my location.

I take a deep breath and then attempt my strategy. Leaping to a standing position, I proudly present my backside to the slug, wagging it about in front of the creatures disbelieving eye stalks.

Get an eyeful slug! Like what you see?

Apparently even a monstrous slug creature over two metres long is unsure how to react to an ant wiggling its bum at it. The creature pauses in shock before rearing back with its toothy mouth wide open.

Now! Fire!

[Acid Shot has reached Level 4]

A shot so perfect even Gandalf approves!

The sizzling liquid erupts out of my gaster at tremendous speed, arcing through the air in a solid jet of death. The slug has compressed its body, preparing to lunge forward and fire another blast when my own acid splashes directly into its face and crucially, straight down the monsters gullet.

The reaction is immediate. The slug contorts itself in response, falling off the wall and slapping wetly against the floor where it continues to writhe as the acid burns away inside it. The rocky protrusions along its back scrape and scratch against the stone with loud rasping noises. Hopefully nothing is drawn to investigate...

A flawless plan!

I'd hope by baiting the monster I'd be able to fire a critical shot inside its mouth, which I'd figured would be the only way I could deal fatal damage with one shot of acid, since the rest of the creature is still protected by its slime barrier.

I continue to observe my victim as it suffers under the effects of my attack.

I mean, I hope I dealt fatal damage....

[You have defeated Level 4 Alcyoneum Slug]

[You have gained XP]

Triumph! The slug has finally ceased its writhing and gone limp, a two meter long sludgy picture of disgusting mollusc.

Now for the task of consuming my prey..

I mean, now that I think about it... Do I really have to ... eat ... that?

If an ant could vomit I'd be on the verge of it now....

Don't be stupid Anthony, people on Earth ate molluscs like snails all the time! You can't afford to turn up your nose at any source of Biomass so stop whining and dig into that slug!

Ugh.

Approaching the slug I take note of its slime layer. The creature isn't producing slime anymore but most parts of it are still coated in the stuff, I'll have to remove it before I can eat the whole thing.

Using more dirt to soak away the slime I clean off one half before I start to eat it. I only manage to get halfway through before I become full ... this is one big slug.

[You have consumed a new source of biomass: Alcyoneum Slug. You are awarded one Biomass]

[Basic profile of the Alcyoneum Slug unlocked]

[Alcyoneum Slug: Coral Slug, This creature uses powerful acid to attack its foes, beware of the poisonous spines on its back]

[You have gained one Biomass]

Even more disgusting than I'd thought, I mean, the texture alone...

I'm not able to consume the rest of the slug immediately so I quickly dig a hole in the wall and bury it before returning to my nest. I can't rest on my laurels now even if I did just have survive a nasty fight. Time is limited and my pace has to be high. Risks can't be avoided right now.

I use my new Biomass to upgrade my acid, my primary weapon, to +2 and after enduring the mutation I return to the cavern to scout for more prey. I can vaguely feel the acid inside my acid gland building up again slowly, I think at the moment I only have one shot, not enough to take on a creature so I'll have to continue scouting for now.

The improvement to my Grip skill is scarcely noticeable, I can tell that its slightly easier to carry my weight as I crawl about on the ceiling, but that seems to be it. Any advantage at all is well worth it I suppose. I wonder what Grip will advance into once it reaches level 5? You won't cop out and just call it advanced grip will you Gandalf?

Once more moving quietly I begin to scout up and down the tunnel, searching for opportunities. I can see monsters moving in small groups here and there, a pair of lizard hounds are sniffing about and a group of claw centipedes similarly snooping, sliding around rocks and up onto the walls, looking for an opportunity.

Out of the corner of my eye I happen to see a flicker of movement and I turn just in time to see a familiar shape ducking in between two stone outcroppings on the wall.

If it isn't my old friend the Thorn Lizard! I'm almost feeling nostalgic for the very first hunt. I haven't seen another one of these creatures since the first one at the water pool.

Well then, the next prey is decided!

I can reuse some elements of my first plan for this attack. I'll use the wall terrain and my acid to battle the creature. I won't try and prepare a trap again, I'll battle it head on with acid and mandibles to see how I last.

Approaching cautiously I try to position myself above where I last saw the lizard and try to track it down. Using my improved antennae and eyesight I'm eventually able to spot it tucked up against the rock, resting. My Biomass investments are continuing to pay off!

Having located the creature I slowly scabble about, looking for footholds as I position myself for the shot I want to take. I only have enough 'juice' in the tank for one shot, possibly two. If I want to succeed in this hunt then I need to make it count.

I shift across the roof to the other side of the lizard, opening up the angles to its face. Next I painstakingly creep, one leg at a time, forward to try and get as close as I can. With only one shot, it needs to count.

Since the Lizard is resting I'm able to sneak within five meters of the target, moving with such incredible patience it takes me almost fifteen minutes to close this distance.

It takes a lot of concentration to focus on being still for this much time! I'm exhausted by the time I get into position. My last fight was too risky, this time I want to improve my odds as much as possible.

After slowly turning and present the blast zone towards my target I tilt my head and take careful aim.

Boom!

Bullseye!

At such short range against a non-moving target I'm able to land my acid directly onto the face of the Thorn Lizard. The creature snarls and growls before shutting its eyes and trying to use its claws to swipe the stinging acid off its face.

Taking advantage of the distracted target I close in quickly from above. The creature's long spines swing wildly through the air as it sweeps its pained head through the air trying to dislodge the acid. I approach with caution, trying to avoid getting stabbed and poisoned before I lunge forward with a vicious bite.

My mandibles aren't a fantastic weapon at all, as a worker ant they are intended for digging, shifting dirt and holding onto stuff, not piercing or cutting. For that reason the 'teeth' on the inside of each jaw are very flat, not able to rip or tear into creatures.

Some ants, like bull ants, have nasty looking mandibles, long and sharp whilst others, like the trap jaw ant, have strong locking muscles that can coil like a spring before slamming the jaws shut with tremendous force.

Without any such potential, my bites are more like squeezing the poor creature repeatedly. I'm sure it's annoying but each bite isn't doing a whole lot for me. In which case I will make up for any deficiency with quantity!

Take that! And that!

Darting forward over and over again I crush the blinded creature's head within my mandibles over and over again.

[Bite has reached level 4]

Another level four skill! Excellent!

The Thorn Lizard tries to blindly stab forward in response to my aggression, trying to catch me with its nasty spines, but the creature is too slow and its moves too telegraphed. Without a solid idea of my position it's forced into large movements that are too easy to see coming.

Eventually the Lizard is defeated.

[You have defeated Level 3 Thorn Lizard]

[You have gained XP]