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DUNGEON DRESSING:
PORTCULLISES



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DUNGEON DRESSING: PORTCULLISES

Tired of your dungeons lacking in verisimilitude? Want to add cool little features of interest to your creations but don't have the time to come up with non-essential details? Want to make your dungeons feel more realistic? Then Dungeon Dressing is for you! Each instalment focuses on a common dungeon fixture such as stairs, pillars or pools and gives the harried GM the tools to bring such features to life with interesting and cool noteworthy features.

This instalment of Dungeon Dressing presents loads of great features and details to add to the portcullises in your dungeon. Designed to be used both during preparation or actual play, Dungeon Dressing: Portcullises is an invaluable addition to any GM's armoury!

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PORTCULLISES

Portcullises are imposing obstacles for adventurers. Their grid-like construction offers a glimpse of what lies beyond while providing defenders a powerful position from which to strike at interlopers.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Portcullises are designed to stop or, at the very least, slow down attackers so dungeon denizens can prepare a defence.

Cover: A portcullis provides 25% cover (+2 AC).

Line of Sight: A portcullis does not block line of sight.

"Detect" Spells: Most "detect" spells pass through a portcullis, unless otherwise noted.

Climbing: Portcullises are easy (+20% chance) to scale.

Operation: Most portcullises are operated using one of these three methods:

- **Rope or Chain Pulley:** This method of operating a portcullis is the most labour intensive. As many individuals as can reach the rope or chain can assist in operating the portcullis.
- **Manual Winch:** Reliant on physical labour a winch makes operating a portcullis substantially easier. Normally, up to six individuals can operate a winch.
- **Weighted Mechanism:** By using a counterweight this mechanism raises the portcullis with little effort from the operator (who does not need to make a Strength check to operate the portcullis).

CONSTRUCTION

Most portcullises are built from wood, metal or a combination of the two. More exotic portcullises made from stone, crystal or even magical energy can also be encountered in fantastical or wondrous dungeons.

Adamantine: Exceedingly rare, adamantine portcullises are used to awe visitors and protect items of surpassing importance.

Bone: A feature of necromancer's lairs and ancient tombs, bone portcullises are macabre features often crafted from the remains of those interred in the dungeon.

Cold Iron: Cold iron portcullises often feature in subterranean strongholds and are used to keep demons and fey creatures at bay.

Iron Bound Wooden: Iron bindings strengthen this wooden portcullis. Bound solely by iron rivets and nails, this is a sturdy piece of dungeon hardware.

Iron: Imposing and unyielding an iron portcullis is able to resist great punishment.

Mithral: These light, silvery portcullises are more easily worked than adamantine portcullises and are often works of art. They are often used to keep lycanthropes or devils out of an area.

Stone: Impressive portcullises crafted from great pieces of stone are resilient and able to endure great damage.

Wood: Constructed from toughen wood, these portcullises are secured with large iron nails and leather thongs. They are a formidable barrier.

PORTCULLIS CONDITION

Not all portcullises are in perfect condition. Some may have been damaged by previous explorers while others are as good as new. Use this table to determine the portcullis' general condition:

CONDITION	HEAR NOISE		
	ROLL	HP	CHANCE TO LIFT ¹
Dilapidated ²	+20%	-50%	+10
Poor ²	+10%	-25%	+5
Average	+0%	-	+0
Good	-10%	+25%	-5
Excellent	-20%	+50%	-10

- 1: Apply this modifier to the chance a character has to lift a portcullis. For example, a character with Strength 13 normally has a 2 in 6 chance of opening a door. Such a character could have a 3 in 6 chance of opening an average door.
- 2: These portcullises often do not fit their frame well. At the GM's discretion, a character may be able to squeeze under or around such a barrier.

MAJOR PORTCULLIS FEATURES

Use this table, to generate interesting characteristics for your portcullises. Some features may be inappropriate based on your dungeon's setup—ignore or modify such entries as appropriate.

D%	MAJOR FEATURE
01-05	The portcullis is linked to a twin further along the passageway. When one opens, the other shuts.
06-10	Intricate filigree panels depicting fauna and flora fill the portcullis's apertures. They pictures may provide clues as to what creatures and monsters lurk beyond.
11-12	Glittering crystals are embedded in the portcullis. The crystals function like a <i>hypnotic pattern</i> when exposed to light.
13-14	Many worn copper coins are welded to the portcullis.
15-16	The iron portcullis is made from magnetised ore ¹ .
17-18	Semi-precious stones are mounted into the heads of the nails and rivets that bind the portcullis. (The stones are worth a total of 300 gp).
19-20	The bars of the portcullis are made from the links of thick ship's chains.
21-22	The portcullis's mechanism is in reverse; when opened it sinks into the floor.
23-24	Constructed from a strange wood the portcullis oozes sap which is poisonous to touch ² .
25-26	The portcullis's horizontal bars make a concentric square which meets in the centre.

27-28	A large brass bull's head motif decorates the portcullis.
29-30	The portcullis' mechanism has failed while it is in the down position; it cannot be raised (except through brute strength).
31-32	The portcullis's lever mechanism is oversized and requires a special key to operate.
33-34	Each second vertical bar is shorter and topped with an eagle-shaped finial.
35-36	Vicious spikes protrude from the front of the portcullis.
37-38	The portcullis has an array of solid wooden shutters, which can be opened independently of one another.
39-40	Delicate slivers of multi-coloured glass forming a beautiful mosaic of a prince riding a griffon fills this portcullis's grid.
41-42	The portcullis has a large aperture set in its centre through which a ballista can be fired. A loaded ballista stands beyond ready to fire. Five more bolts lie on the floor near the ballista.
43-44	This portcullis's apertures are circular.
45-46	The portcullis is crafted from cold iron and decorated with flame-like engravings.
47-48	The portcullis's mechanism does not make a sound when the barrier is raised or dropped.
49-50	The portcullis is constructed from living wood and the flowers of a yellow musk creeper grow upon it.
51-52	The bottom of the portcullis ends in a single scythe-like blade, instead of spikes.
53-54	Decorated with finely carved lidless eyes, this bone portcullis allows its owner to view the area as if using a <i>crystal ball</i> .
55-56	The portcullis is painted with deep, lurid red paint. In places, the colour is flaking off.
57-58	The portcullis is an intricate weave of metal strands crafted to resemble a spider's web.
59-60	Incorporated into the portcullis's ironwork, an eye wrought of brass leers out at interlopers. Three silver tears fall from the eye.
61-62	The portcullis's spikes are hewn from large uncut shards of blood-red quartz.
63-64	Thick veins of emerald-hued stone run through the stone portcullis and emit a faint green glow.
65-66	The heraldic design of an embossed shield crossed with two warhammers decorates the portcullis.
67-68	Iron wrought ivy wraps itself around the portcullis and acts as barbed wire (and inflicts 1d4 slashing damage on those climbing the portcullis).
69-70	The portcullis is chased in silver. The decoration is worth 200 gp, but takes four hours to scrape off.
71-72	The portcullis opens from left to right, instead of moving up and down.
73-74	The portcullis's bars are elaborately inlaid with various soft and hard woods, to create a chequerboard effect.

75-76	The surrounding stonework resembles the large maw of a demonic creature and the portcullis is its teeth. Everburning magical flames in the demon's eye sockets cast flickering, lurid light over the surrounds.
77-78	The portcullis's bars are set diagonal making its apertures diamond-shaped.
79-80	The portcullis's mechanism is crafted from ornately engraved dragon bone.
81-82	Fashioned from volcanic glass the portcullis is immune to fire but is vulnerable to cold damage.
83-84	Graven images of skulls and skeletons decorate the portcullis's bars.
85-86	Holy psalms cover the portcullis's bars. They act as a <i>protection from good 10 ft. radius</i> spell.
87-88	Phosphorescent fungus grows over the portcullis, illuminating the surrounding area as a <i>light</i> spell.
89-90	The portcullis has deadbolts which secure it in place ³ .
91-92	The portcullis's lever is detachable and takes the form of an ornate masterwork longsword.
93-94	The portcullis has a small, locked access gate set within it for quick ingress and egress.
95-99	The portcullis' mechanism chimes like a child's lullaby when it is raised.
100	The portcullis is trapped. Refer to "Portcullis Tricks & Traps".

- The portcullis is magnetic and exerts an attraction on any metal objects within 30 ft. The magnetism pulls a character wearing or carrying one or more metal items toward the portcullis. If a character carries or wears items in more than one category, use the hardest category to determine how difficult it is to resist the pull. Every round, on their initiative, a character must roll against their Strength score using the relevant number of dice to resist the portcullis's pull. Success indicates the character can move 5 ft. away or stay in the same square. A character who fails is pulled 5 ft. closer to the portcullis.
 - Miscellaneous Metal Equipment and Small Weapons:** The character must roll under their Strength score on 2d6, to resist the doors' magnetism.
 - Metal Weapons:** The character must roll under their Strength score on 3d6, to resist the doors' magnetism.
 - Metal Armour:** The character must roll under their Strength score on 4d6, to resist the doors' magnetism.
- Save against poison or suffer a horrible allergic reaction that results in frenzied scratching of a virulent rash. Characters suffer from the rash for a full day and take a -2 penalty to hit rolls during that time. *Neutralise poison* removes the rash, and ends the itching.
- Decrease the character's chance to lift the portcullis by 10%.

MINOR PORTCULLIS FEATURES & DRESSING

Use this table, to generate interesting features for your portcullises. Some features may be inappropriate based on your dungeon's setup—ignore or modify such entries as appropriate.

D%	MINOR FEATURE OR DRESSING
01	Thick, virulent ivy covers the portcullis.
02	This partly lowered bone portcullis hangs about 1 ft. off the ground.
03	Two sets of manacles and chains are attached to the portcullis. Dried blood mars the manacles.
04	A knight in crumpled armour and dented helmet has his head stuck between the portcullis' bars.
05	This partially raised portcullis is wedged open by the body of someone who tried to crawl underneath it.
06	A pair of spiked gauntlets grasps the bars of the portcullis; bony hands yet remain within.
07	Lying sundered and smashed, the portcullis has been torn from its housing and left crumpled in front of where it once stood.
08	A hole has been burrowed through the wall to the side of the portcullis.
09	This portcullis's lifting mechanism has been sabotaged and no longer functions ¹ . It can only be lifted through brute strength.
10	The portcullis is half lowered.
11	Several severely maimed, and comprehensively looted, corpses lie crushed beneath the portcullis.
12	A porcelain and glass wind chime hangs from the portcullis.
13	The acrid odour of troll stench billows through the portcullis's bars.
14	A dead ogre lies in front of the portcullis; numerous arrows pierce her body.
15	The portcullis is dripping with a pale yellow, odourless ooze-like substance.
16	Parts of the portcullis are encrusted with mineral salts and calcium deposits.
17	The portcullis is breached in the centre; halfling and smaller creatures may squeeze through the gap.
18	The portcullis radiates evocation magic.
19	The portcullis is partially raised and is propped open by two large (but sadly empty) metal-bound chests.
20	A set of tiny bloody footprints and the drag marks of a large object lead up to the portcullis.
21	A makeshift ram lies before this rent portcullis.
22	The portcullis appears eroded as if subjected to strong acid. (Reduce the portcullis's hit points by one-third.)
23	The shredded clothes of a human-sized creature lie discarded in front of the portcullis.

24	A wreath of red flowers and green foliage hangs from the portcullis.
25	A dismembered arm is impaled under the portcullis.
26	Numerous protective sigils drawn in chalk decorate the ground beneath the portcullis.
27	Metal buckled and wood burnt, this portcullis has been subject to intense heat (and has lost half its hit points) as obvious scorch marks attest.
28	A paint pot and brush lie next to this freshly painted red-hued portcullis.
29	A half-empty barrel of dwarven spirits stands in front of the portcullis.
30	A flag bearing a gold lion rampant on a red field hangs limply from the portcullis.
31	A warrior is impaled on spikes protruding horizontally from the thick portcullis.
32	Thick mould grows over the portcullis.
33	Burning oil still smoulders on the portcullis, giving off thick black smoke. The smoke reduces normal vision to 10 ft. within 50 ft. of the portcullis.
34	A small anvil and metalworking tools lie scattered across the floor, before the portcullis.
35	A stained blanket hangs from the portcullis.
36	A shallow hole cuts into the floor under the portcullis. Small creatures can squeeze through the hole.
37	This wooden portcullis has stood so long it has taken root into the ground.
38	A section of the portcullis bares deep gnaw marks, as if it has been chewed by a large creature.
39	Muddy canine paw prints walk up to the closed portcullis; on the other side, muddy humanoid footprints lead away.
40	A large, dried bloodstain—directly under the portcullis—mars the floor.
41	Several large spider webs span the portcullis.
42	A black, bloodstained robe hangs from the portcullis.
43	This metal portcullis is now nothing more than a smouldering heap of metal slag.
44	A section of this metal portcullis is broken into thousands of icy shards; thick frost covers the rest. (The portcullis only has half the normal hit points.)
45	A small bag holding 5 gp hangs from the portcullis.
46	This metal portcullis is buckled and still crackling from a large electrical discharge. The area smells strongly of burnt ozone.
47	The portcullis shows signs of water damage, as if it has been submerged for a long time.
48	Two of the portcullis's bars are bent to allow a Small humanoid to pass through.
49	The smell of sulphur and brimstone wafts through the portcullis, from the area beyond.

50	A large open scroll written in blood hangs on the portcullis. The scroll reads, "Only death awaits you, turn back lest it finds you."
51	The end of a lasso is on one side of the lowered portcullis while the other end is looped over the lever on the portcullis's far side.
52	A rotting humanoid corpse is stuck to the portcullis by a sticky alchemical adhesive.
53	A carved raven statuette is perched on the portcullis.
54	The face of the portcullis is covered in abstract graffiti depicting the stars and the moon.
55	Something has attempted to dig beneath the portcullis and has left large scratches in the floor.
56	The portcullis hasn't been moved for a very long time and is thick with dust.
57	Shields of different sizes, types and heraldry hang from the portcullis.
58	The portcullis is poorly maintained and hangs loose. It rattles from a stiff breeze which passes along the corridor. This rattle is audible in the surrounding areas.
59	This magically shrunk portcullis has been removed from its setting and rested against a nearby wall.
60	A rough wooden plaque which reads, "No Entry" hangs from the portcullis.
61	The portcullis's spikes are embedded in the ground, making it harder to raise ¹ .
62	The portcullis is partially raised; humans and the like must duck to pass underneath.
63	A crumpled note lies by the portcullis. It reads, "Push the lever, don't pull it."
64	The decomposing remains of a naked human man are crucified on the portcullis.
65	The smell of excrement is thick in the air and clumps of organic matter cling to the portcullis.
66	The centre of the portcullis has been disintegrated; human-sized and smaller creatures can easily pass through. Grey dust coats the floor.
67	A lit, but guttering, torch lies close to the portcullis.
68	Severed heads tied to the portcullis serve as grisly trophies and warnings.
69	Bloodied handprints cover the portcullis and the nearby walls.
70	A section of the portcullis has been cut out and is leaning against a nearby wall.
71	The coiled body of a constrictor snake is wrapped through the portcullis's bars.
72	Arrows and javelins are embedded in the portcullis's bars. Several other missiles lie on the ground.
73	Two broken makeshift battering rams lie in front of the unbroken, but dented, portcullis.
74	Several empty potion vials lie near the portcullis.

75	A large stone ball is embedded in the portcullis leaving it bowed and cracked.
76	Coins of various denominations create a trail which passes through the portcullis.
77	The once extensively embellished and decorated portcullis is now bare of its semi-precious stones and precious furnishings.
78	Thick moss and lichen grow upon the portcullis.
79	The desiccated remains of a dire bat are cocooned in the gigantic spider webs covering the portcullis.
80	A vivid blue luminescence emanates from fungus growing over the portcullis.
81	Some of the portcullis's bars are bent together; wind whistles through them as it blows down the corridor.
82	The portcullis's lower part has been bent back upon itself. Explorers can crawl underneath.
83	A backpack, open book and waterskin lie on the other side of the portcullis.
84	A slain dwarf made his last stand by the portcullis. Numerous enemies lie dead at his feet.
85	The portcullis has a large dent in its bars.
86	This iron portcullis is rusty and flakes of eroded metal litter the floor.
87	Animal skull are wedged between the portcullis's bars.
88	This portcullis has been barricaded with bits of furniture making it hard to see what lies beyond.
89	A lifelike stone statue of a human stands motionless as he seems to look through the portcullis's bars.
90	One end of a thick length of rope is tied to the portcullis while the other lies coiled in a heap.
91	Blood and gore stain the front of the portcullis.
92	Two humanoids joined by a chain lay prone, one either side of the portcullis.
93	The portcullis is haunted by a spectre which manifests when the portal opens.
94	A strip of red silk is caught on one of the bars.
95	Flowers, silk handkerchiefs and other small mementos are tied to the portcullis.
96	Red, blue and white bunting hang from the portcullis.
97	The portcullis has been lifted from its housing and lies on the ground. A muscular human man—crushed into little more than pulp and gore lies beneath.
98	A large white sheet with a red cross daubed upon it hangs on the portcullis.
99	This portcullis is down; a broken crowbar lies on the floor nearby
100	The portcullis falls (or is raised) as the party's approach.

1: Decrease the character's chance to lift the portcullis by 5%.

PORTCULLIS TRICKS & TRAPS

Of course, portcullises are not always safe. Occasionally, the dungeon's designer hides clever traps and tricks in key locations throughout the complex. The traps and tricks here are examples of such features that can be used to protect portcullises.

A GM should also note the sound of a falling portcullis could potentially alert nearby dungeon denizens to the presence of intruders. A character making a hear noise (with a +50% chance of success) hears the portcullis slamming to the ground. Characters trapped below or on the wrong side of the portcullis when the dungeon denizens arrive could be in for a very hard time.

BASIC FALLING PORTCULLIS

Used to both defend areas and seriously injure or kill intruders, these traps are often used in pairs to split up groups of intruders.

Activation: The portcullis falls on the first person activating the pressure pad directly below it. The portcullis trap must be manually reset.

Find the Trap: A character making a successful find/remove traps roll finds the trap.

Defeating the Trap: A character making a successful find/remove traps roll disables the trap. A character making a successful find secret doors roll locates a nearby hidden switch which controls the trap. Once the trap has activated, a character can lift the portcullis with their normal chance of success. Destroying the portcullis's lever renders the portcullis inoperable.

Effect: When triggered, the trap has the following effects:

Suddenly a portcullis falls from the ceiling!

- **Falling Portcullis:** The portcullis falls on the first character passing beneath it (THAC0 15; 6d6 piercing damage) and pins them in place.

Variant: The portcullis does not fall immediately; instead it falls on the third person to pass beneath.

Variant: The portcullis is poisoned; characters struck by the portcullis must save against poison or be paralysed for one hour.



Variant: The portcullis is poisoned; characters struck by the portcullis must save against poison or die.

TOPPLING PORTCULLIS

Toppling portcullises can be the result of deliberate design, poor engineering, accidental damage or battle damage. Once sprung, the portcullis acts initially as a normal falling portcullis, but subsequently topples to the ground, possibly crushing more intruders. This kind of trap is rarely (deliberately) used to protect areas of great importance.

Activation: The portcullis falls on the first person activating the pressure pad directly below it. The portcullis trap must be manually reset.

Find the Trap: A character making a successful find/remove traps roll finds the trap.

Defeating the Trap: A character making a successful find/remove traps roll disables the trap. A character making a successful find secret doors roll locates a nearby hidden switch which controls the trap. Once the trap has activated, a character can lift the portcullis with their normal chance of success. Destroying the portcullis's lever renders the portcullis inoperable.

Effect: When triggered, the trap has the following effects:

Suddenly a portcullis falls from the ceiling!

- **Falling Portcullis (Round 1):** The portcullis falls on the first character passing beneath it (THAC0 15; 6d6 piercing damage) and pins them in place.
- **Toppling Portcullis (Round 3):** The portcullis topples over possibly crushing those engaged in lifting the portcullis to free a trapped companion. Characters closer than the height of the portcullis must make successful saving throw against breath weapon or suffer 5d6 damage and be trapped under the fallen portcullis. A successful lift gates roll enables a character trapped under the portcullis to crawl 5 ft. A character making their saving throw escapes the area before the portcullis topples to the ground.

Variant: The portcullis falls on the third person to pass beneath. Additionally, the portcullis has an equal to chance to fall into or away from the area it is protecting.

Variant: The round after it falls, the toppling portcullis is affected by a *heat metal* spell.

SPECTRAL PORTCULLIS

This portcullis of magically enchanted bone is perfectly suited to a powerful necromancer's lair or as a defence for a crypt or an undead spellcaster's inner sanctum. Through terrible and dangerous binding magic a necromancer has bound a spectre to this portcullis. The resultant trap has two distinct phases. First the characters must deal with the spectral portcullis. If they destroy that, they release the bound spectre!

Activation: The portcullis falls on the first person activating the pressure pad directly below it. The portcullis trap must be manually reset.

Find the Trap: A character using *detect magic* (or similar spell) finds the trap by detecting a necromantic aura on the portcullis. A character casting *detect evil* detects evil lurking in the portcullis. Characters within 10 ft. of the portcullis senses coldness flowing through—or perhaps from—the bone barrier.

Defeating the Trap: A character casting *dispel magic* can attempt to dispel the trap as if the trap's creator was an 15th-level wizard. A character making a successful find secret doors roll locates a nearby hidden switch which raises and lowers the portcullis. When the portcullis is raised, it does not attack those passing beneath it. Destroying the portcullis's lever renders the portcullis inoperable. Destroying the portcullis (AC 3, hit points 60) destroys the trap but releases the trapped banshee.

- **Damaging The Portcullis:** When a character damages the portcullis with a melee weapon shorter than six-foot long the skulls infused into the portcullis make a single attack (THAC0 13, 1d8 cold damage). The skulls can make five such attacks a round. The portcullis is immune to cold and it is damaged as a normal physical object (albeit a tough one).
- **Freed Spectre:** If the characters destroy the portcullis, the bindings ensnaring the spectre are destroyed and it escapes in the next round. Maddened, it attacks until slain.

Effect: When triggered, the trap has the following effects:

Suddenly, the eye sockets of the skulls fused into the bone portcullis start to glow red and black.

- **Falling Portcullis:** The portcullis falls on the first character passing beneath it (THAC0 15; 6d6 piercing damage and the character is impaled by the portcullis).
- **Terror Strikes (Round 2):** A character impaled by the trap has two life energy levels drained in the same manner as a spectre's touch.
- **Wail (Round 3, 13, 23 etc.):** Every ten rounds, the portcullis lets out a grief-laden wail. The wail lasts until the beginning of the next round. All creatures within 40 feet of the portcullis when it begins to wail, as well as all creatures ending their turn within that radius, must make a saving throw against spells. (This save is only required once per wail.) Creatures failing their saving throw flee the area for 7 rounds as if affected by a *fear* spell cast by a 7th-level spellcaster. *Silence* negates this wail.



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