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DUNGEON DRESSING: STAIRS



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DUNGEON DRESSING: STAIRS

*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 stairs in your dungeon. Designed to be used both during preparation or actual play, *Dungeon Dressing: Stairs* is an invaluable addition to any GM's armoury!*

CREDITS

Design: Creighton Broadhurst

Development: Creighton Broadhurst

Art: Rick Hershey, William McAusland and Matt Morrow. Some artwork copyright William McAusland, used with permission. Publisher's Choice Quality Stock Art © Rick Hershey/Fat Goblin Games

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STAIRS

Stairs come in many shapes and sizes, including steep, gradual, precipitous and spiral. Stairs in dungeons don't even have to be made of stone—some can be of wood, bone or other magical or fantastical substances.

Staircases are important parts of most dungeons, enabling easy passage between the various levels of the place. In occupied dungeons, they are often one of the areas which sees the most traffic as the place's denizens emerge to fight, hunt and trade. They are therefore perfect places for you to place hints, clues and other interesting features to highlight what lurks in the connected dungeon levels.

As areas of particularly heavy traffic, staircases are an excellent place for random encounters. However, take care to design the dungeon's staircases to enable interesting tactical movement.

MAJOR STAIR FEATURES

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

In many dungeons, stairs simply link two levels, but there is nothing to stop you designing a staircase linking several dungeon levels. The characteristics and features of such stairways can change between the connected levels; remember to add several different dressings and features to such a stair.

| D% | MAJOR FEATURE |
|-------|---|
| 01-02 | The staircase has a low roof—characters over 5 ft. tall must duck or bash their head on the ceiling. |
| 03-04 | The stairway has a high ceiling. |
| 05-06 | One wall has empty torch sconces set along its length. Several of the sconces are bent as if hit with considerable force; two are missing. |
| 07-08 | Small niches in both walls once held candles. The niches are now empty but for dust and small puddles of hardened wax. |
| 09-10 | A small niche pierces the ceiling. The niche is the remains of a long-since tripped trap that once contained several vials of oil. The step below the niche depresses slightly when stood on ¹ . |
| 11-12 | The stair's risers are of radically different heights ² . |
| 13-14 | The stair's risers are particularly high ² . |
| 15-16 | The stair's rises are particularly low ² , meaning there are many more individual steps than normal. |
| 17-18 | An iron handrail is set into the stair's left-hand wall. |
| 19-20 | The staircase has an iron handrail set into the right-hand wall. |
| 21-22 | The staircase has a half-landing halfway down. |
| 23-24 | The staircase has several half-landings spaced equally along its length. |

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| 25-26 | A small wall niche provides space for a guard to lurk. A stone seat is carved into one of its walls. |
| 27-28 | Elaborate scrollwork decorates each step. |
| 29-30 | The carved mark of the master mason responsible for building the stairs decorates every third step ¹ . |
| 31-32 | Carvings of ferocious, mythical beasts decorate the stair's ceiling. |
| 33-34 | A prayer for the dead is carved into one wall. |
| 35-36 | At one point, the ceiling drops by several feet; tall characters must duck to traverse safely. |
| 37-38 | The staircase intersects a small, dry natural cavern. The cavern intersects the stair's ceiling. |
| 39-40 | An iron banister runs down the middle of the stairs. |
| 41-42 | The remains of an iron banister runs down the middle of the stairs. Occasional corroded posts still stand upright and small holes in the floor show where others once stood. |
| 43-44 | Praise to the dungeon's owner decorates the walls. |
| 45-46 | The stairway passes through a small chamber. |
| 47-48 | Iron lamps hang from the ceiling on slender chains. |
| 49-50 | Rusted chains hang from the ceiling. |
| 51-52 | A secret compartment ¹ pierces the riser at the top and bottom of the staircase. The niches are empty. |
| 53-54 | The staircase has a secret compartment ¹ cut into a riser at its midpoint. The niche contains a mouldering parchment praising the dungeon's original architect. |
| 55-56 | The staircase is poorly made; several of the stairs shift alarmingly underfoot. |
| 57-58 | Several tiny ventilation shafts pierce the ceiling. |
| 59-60 | Sounds echo alarmingly on the staircase ³ . |
| 61-62 | A carving of a gigantic mouth covers the wall at the head of the staircase. |
| 63-64 | The staircase widens as it descends. |
| 65-66 | The staircase narrows as it descends. |
| 67-68 | Minerals in the walls glimmer, if exposed to light. |
| 69-70 | The ceiling is vaulted. |
| 71-72 | The stairs are poorly made. |
| 73-74 | The stairs split at one point passing either side of a chunk of hard stone before rejoining further on. |
| 75-76 | Small niches pierce the stair's walls. Once used for holding trophies, they now stand empty. |
| 77-78 | Each stair is engraved with a different letter ¹ . When put together the letters spell out a message from the dungeon's designer. |
| 79-80 | The stairs descend directly over a natural cave. A Large creature (or a particularly heavy Medium creature) causes a portion of the stairs to collapse into the cavern below ⁴ . |

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| 81-82 | The stair's ceiling is studded with many irregular holes and small outcrops of hanging rock. Lights in the stairway cast areas of deep shadow onto the steps. |
| 83-84 | A bas relief cut into the walls depicts a legendary figure or deity standing in a heroic pose. |
| 85-86 | A long, rambling carving on one wall depicts a legendary event. The carving is a work of art and incredibly detailed. |
| 87-88 | The stairs have a narrow drainage channel cut into one wall. It is filled with sludge. |
| 89-90 | Every second stair is of a darker stone, creating a striped pattern. While not valuable, considerable effort went into bringing the stone here—for what reason remains unclear. |
| 91-92 | The stairs are of a dark stone (see 89-90 for details). |
| 93-94 | Crude wind chimes hang from the ceiling. Characters over 5 ft. tall strike the chimes, unless they take care ⁵ , which creates a hard, metallic jangling sound. |
| 95-96 | A secret compartment in one stair contains a lever ¹ . Pulling the lever drops a hidden portcullis ¹ at the top or bottom of the stairs. |
| 97-98 | The stairway is unadorned but for tool marks on the walls and ceiling. |
| 99-100 | The stairs are trapped. Refer to Stair Tricks & Traps to determine what wards the stairs. |

1. Successful find secret door roll locates.
2. Reduce the character's speed by 10 ft.
3. Reduce the character's chance to move silently by 5%.
4. Falling characters suffer 2d6 falling damage and land prone.
5. Rolling equal or less than the character's Dexterity score on 3d6 succeeds succeeds.

CONSTRUCTED STAIRS

Many dungeon stairs are constructed—built by the dungeon's architects to facilitate movement between levels. Constructed stairs can be gradual, steep or precipitous and can include landings and other features.

- **Difficult Terrain:** It costs two squares of movement to enter a square containing stairs. Thus, characters cannot run or charge on stairs.
- **Higher Ground:** Characters fighting on stairs gain a +1 bonus to melee attacks made against opponents below them.

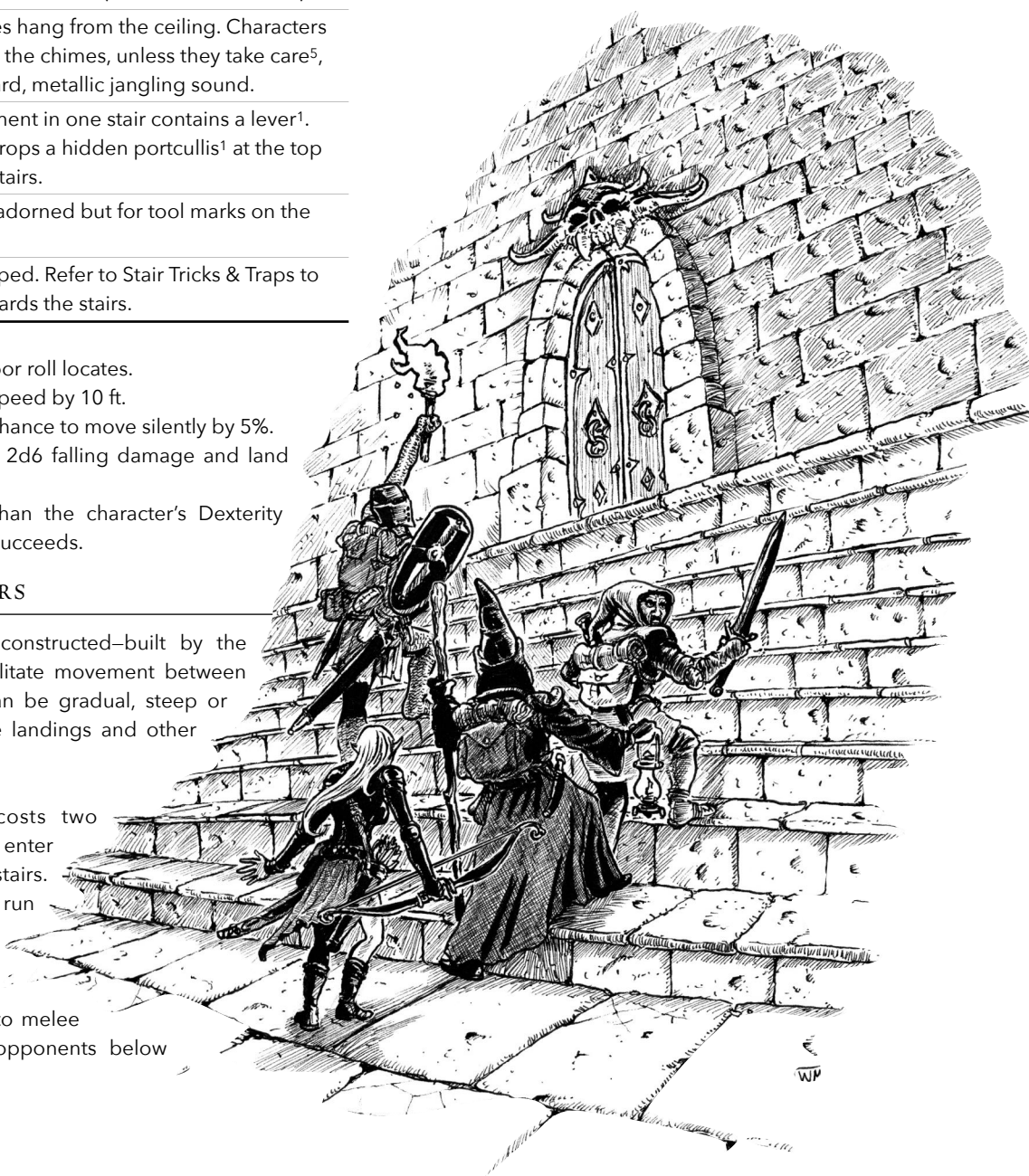
SPIRAL STAIRCASE

Designed as defensive features, spiral staircases provide cover to defenders against attacks originating either from above or below them (but not both).

- **Right Spiral:** A staircase spiralling to the right provides 50% cover (+4 to AC) from attacks originating below.
- **Left Spiral:** A staircase spiralling to the left provides 50% cover (+4 to AC) from attacks originating above.

NATURAL STAIRS

Natural staircases are just that—the result of natural processes and are not crafted by intelligent creatures. They are rare in dungeons, but relatively common in natural caverns. Natural stairs can be gradual, steep or precipitous, but are rarely spiral in nature.



MINOR STAIR FEATURES & DRESSING

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

| D% | MINOR FEATURE OR DRESSING |
|----|--|
| 01 | The staircase smells musty. |
| 02 | A faint breeze blows up or down the stairs. |
| 03 | A strong wind blows up or down the stairs. The wind has a 50% chance of extinguishing unprotected light sources. |
| 04 | The middle portion of each step is noticeably worn, as if countless feet have used the stairs. |
| 05 | Water drips onto several stairs creating a slippery section ¹ . |
| 06 | Phosphorescent lichen grows on the walls, providing illumination as a candle. |
| 07 | Dust covers the steps; footprints can easily ² be made out (perhaps providing clues to what lurks below). |
| 08 | A smear of charcoal shows where a previous explorer extinguished a torch. |
| 09 | A torn and slashed belt pouch lies on the stair. It is old, mouldering and empty. |
| 10 | Faint splatters of old, dried blood decorate the stairs. |
| 11 | A smear of chalk indicates where a message has been rubbed out. |
| 12 | A broken spear shaft (lacking its tip) lies on the stairs. |
| 13 | A previous explorer has scratched into the ceiling the message, "Beware the Corridor of Columns." |
| 14 | An old spray of arterial blood "decorates" part of one wall and the ceiling. Given the size of the stain something probably died here. |
| 15 | One of the stairs is badly chipped as if something had repeatedly struck it with a heavy object. |
| 16 | A torch sconce juts from the wall, at a drunken angle. |
| 17 | Part of the stairs is scorched and bits of stone are melted, as if subjected to intense heat. |
| 18 | Light rubble from the ceiling or walls covers some of the stairs. |
| 19 | Heavy rubble from the ceiling or walls covers some of the stairs. |
| 20 | Great cracks pierce the walls and ceiling. |
| 21 | Cobwebs cover the ceiling; many small insects are caught within. |
| 22 | Brownish-green mould grows along one wall. |
| 23 | Phosphorescent fungus grows in clumps on the stairs, giving off sickly yellow light equal to a torch. |
| 24 | The partial skeleton of a humanoid lies amid its moulding equipment. The unfortunate is missing its head and left arm. |

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| 25 | A torn and empty backpack has been upended over a torch sconce. |
| 26 | Obscene graffiti daubs one wall. The graffiti shows humanoids of an appropriate type for the dungeon killing and mutilating their racial enemies (or humans if the race has no traditional foes). |
| 27 | A puddle of water covers one badly set step. |
| 28 | A small pile of dry excrement sits atop one step. |
| 29 | A mottled black and red mushroom almost 2 ft. tall grows on a step. |
| 30 | Several steps are badly cracked, and hide an improvised secret cavity ³ . The niche could be empty or hold some hastily hidden minor treasure. |
| 31 | A rock fall partially blocks the stairs. Someone has cleared part of the debris and it is possible to squeeze passed the fallen stones. |
| 32 | Small niches cut into the walls to hold trophies now display decomposing severed heads collected by the most powerful monster or group dwelling below. |
| 33 | A bloody handprint mars one wall. |
| 34 | The constant sound of dripping water echoes through the stairway. |
| 35 | A broken chair lies at a crazy angle across several stairs; it is missing three legs. |
| 36 | Moss-like fungus grows on several steps. |
| 37 | Tiny (harmless) insects the stairs; they lair deep in several cracks cutting across several steps. |
| 38 | A thin cloud of purple smoke—similar to that given off by a torch—hugs the ceiling. |
| 39 | A sudden strong gust of wind fills the staircase. The wind has a 50% chance of extinguishing unprotected light sources. |
| 40 | Small bits of stone fall from the ceiling, as the characters traverse the stairs. |
| 41 | A piece of blooded rag lies on the floor. |
| 42 | The stairs are dusty; the tracks of those living nearby are faintly visible ³ . |
| 43 | The sudden bang of a far-off door slamming fills the stairway with sudden sound. |
| 44 | Water oozes from cracks in one stair. |
| 45 | The rotting body of a rat lies on a step; its back is clearly broken. |
| 46 | "Kerav came this way" is etched into the ceiling. |
| 47 | One of the steps is crumbling away. A character standing on the step may fall ⁴ . |
| 48 | A bent dagger lies precariously balanced on the edge of a step. |
| 49 | Shards of a broken silver mirror lie scattered about. The remains are worth 12 sp. |
| 50 | A wet blood trail leads down the centre of the steps ⁵ . |
| 51 | As #50, but the blood is dried. |

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| 52 | Bats roost on the ceiling. Bright lights or loud noise startle them. The flock's flight up the stairs has a 75% of extinguishing any unprotected flames. |
| 53 | Beautiful frescos once decorated the ceiling; they have suffered extensive water damage. |
| 54 | Spider webs cover the ceiling; many harmless tiny spiders lair within. |
| 55 | Slender stalactites hang from the ceiling. |
| 56 | Grey sludge—a mixture of water and dust—covers the stairs. |
| 57 | Flaking, dry grey sludge—a mixture of water and dust—covers portions of the stairs. |
| 58 | Muddy footprints—ascending and descending the stairs—are clearly visible. |
| 59 | Rubbish and trash cover a few stairs. |
| 60 | The remains of a small campfire on a particularly wide step are clearly visible. |
| 61 | A humanoid's jawbone rests in a torch sconce. |
| 62 | Water oozes out of the wall before sluggishly flowing down the stairs ¹ . |
| 63 | Signs of old flooding—stains on the walls and so on—mar the walls and stairs. |
| 64 | "Forgive me" is faintly carved into one wall. Smears of dried blood cover the carving. |
| 65 | A sack holding crumbs of food lies on the stairs. |
| 66 | The faint smell of decay fills the staircase. |
| 67 | A single mushroom grows on a step. It is almost 1 ft. tall and completely white in colour. |
| 68 | Animal droppings cover some of the stairs ⁶ . |
| 69 | The faint smell of smoke lingers in the air. |
| 70 | The shards of a broken glass vial lie on one stair. |
| 71 | A small collapse has partially blocked a short section of stair. The area counts as difficult terrain. |
| 72 | The decomposing, headless corpse of a goblin or other humanoid appropriate to the dungeon lies on the stairs. |
| 73 | Stubs of candles stand against the wall on every third stair. |
| 74 | The ceiling sags in places ⁷ . |
| 75 | A section of the wall or ceiling shows signs of water damage and subsequent repair. |
| 76 | The steps are worn and uneven. The stairs count as difficult terrain. |
| 77 | Slightly damp moss grows against the walls of this staircase; the middle of the staircase is clear of moss. |
| 78 | Cracked and broken tiles cover each step. |
| 79 | A single stone has fallen from one wall and cracked the step beneath. |
| 80 | A small, precariously balanced pyramid of flat, white stones stands on one step. |

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| 81 | The stairway smells of urine. |
| 82 | The stairs are in pristine condition. |
| 83 | The dusty steps show signs of being hurriedly swept. |
| 84 | Cobwebs cover the ceiling. Several dead insects rest within, but no spiders are immediately visible. |
| 85 | Orange slime covers the ceiling; it occasionally drips onto the stairs. |
| 86 | A slime-covered platinum piece lies against one wall ³ . |
| 87 | A few pieces of dried wood—perhaps dropped fire wood—lie along the stairway's length. |
| 88 | A pentagram decorates the ceiling. |
| 89 | An iron spike is hammered into a wall; a short piece of frayed hemp rope hangs from the spike. |
| 90 | A rusting, dented gauntlet lies on one step; its twin rests several steps away. |
| 91 | A field of mushrooms grows over a long length of stairway; water drips down from above. Some mushrooms are crushed and broken. |
| 92 | "Beware the Lurker" (in Common) is smeared in dried blood on one step. |
| 93 | Deliberately misleading graffiti is daubed on the walls. |
| 94 | A crude representation of a lidless eye or other arcane symbol decorates one wall. |
| 95 | The splintered shaft of a spear lies across several stairs; its splintered end has been gnawed by something. |
| 96 | A crude symbol of an inverted pyramid surmounted by three lidless eyes decorates one step ³ . |
| 97 | A crude symbol of a sundered crown dripping blood decorates one step ³ . |
| 98 | Obvious drag marks—created by something large like a heavy chest—mar the steps. |
| 99 | Roll twice on this table, ignoring results of 99 - 100. |
| 100 | Roll thrice on this table, ignoring results of 99 - 100. |

1. Reduce the character's speed by 10 ft.
2. Successful find secret door roll, with twice the normal chance of success, locates.
3. Successful find secret door roll locates.
4. The character must roll equal or less than their Dexterity score on 3d6 or fall 1d2x5 ft. down the stairs and land prone. A character falling 10 ft. suffers 1d3 damage.
5. A ranger, or other skilled tracker, examining the marks can reveal the dragged creature was man-sized and due to the amount of blood on the stairs is almost certainly dead.
6. A ranger or druid can determine they are probably rat droppings.
7. A dwarf or gnome can reveal it to be safe.

STAIR TRICKS & TRAPS

Stairs 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 protect stairs.

SLIDING STAIRS

This classic trap is designed to get intruders to the bottom of the stairs as quickly as possible (where no doubt something nasty like a pit trap, pool of acid or other hazard awaits them). Alternatively, this trap can be used to dump the intruders into a much deeper dungeon level than they wished to explore. This last version of the trap works particularly well if it does not reset for several hours or days; this forces the trapped adventurers to seek another way out.

Activation: A character activates the trap, when they step on a pressure plate halfway down the stairs. The trap resets 10 minutes after it is activated.

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 failing this check by 20% or more accidentally activates the trap. A character making a successful find secret doors roll finds a small switch at the top and bottom of the stairs that controls the trap. Destroying the pressure plate defeats the trap.

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

As you put your weight onto a step, there is an audible click.

- **Flat Stairs (Round 1):** The stairs flatten forming a chute down which any character on them slides. Roll initiative for the characters and track their progress down the stairs in the order they act (as this might be important depending on what lurks at the bottom). A character sliding down the chute can arrest its progress by rolling equal or less than their Dexterity score on 4d6.
- **Sliding (Subsequent Rounds):** A sliding character travels 30 ft. downwards on their turn unless they roll equal or less than their Dexterity score on 4d6 to arrest their progress. A



character failing this check by 3 or less slows their speed by 10 ft. for the round and only has to roll 3d6 on their next turn to stop their descent.

- **Prone (Exiting the Stairs):** When a character reaches the bottom of the stairs they land prone.

Sharp Stairs Variant: Some versions of this trap force the intruders to slide over specially sharpened stairs. Such unfortunates suffer deep lacerations as a result. Characters sliding down a sharpened stair suffer 1d6 damage per 20 ft. travelled.

Long Fall Variant: Some versions of this trap end in a long drop into a deep dungeon level, pit or other isolated place. Characters reaching the bottom of the stairs can roll equal or less than their Dexterity score on 4d6 to grab the lip of the stairs as they fall. Characters falling from the stair suffer 1d6 damage per 10 ft. fallen and land prone.

Water Fall Variant: Treat this variant as the Long Fall Variant except the characters plunge into a deep body of water after exiting the stairway. Characters falling into water take no damage for the first 20 ft. fallen and 1d6 for each 10 ft. fallen thereafter. Some Water Fall variants have ferocious, carnivorous monsters dwelling in the water, adding to the hapless intruders' problems.

COLLAPSING STAIRS

These stairs, whether by accident or design, collapse as the characters traverse their length. If these stairs are deliberately trapped to collapse they have the bypass method listed below. If their collapse is accidental, they have no bypass method.

Activation: A character activates the trap, when they step on a pressure plate halfway down the stairs. This trap does not 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 failing this check by 20% or more activates the trap. A character making a successful find secret doors roll finds a small switch at the top and bottom of the stairs that controls the trap (if the stairs have been deliberately trapped). Destroying the stairs defeats the trap.

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

As you put your weight onto a step, it falls away beneath you.

- **Collapsing Stairs (Round 1):** When the stairs collapse, characters traversing them tumble 50 ft. into a pit below (suffering 5d6 falling damage) and land prone. If a character rolls equal or less than their Dexterity score on 4d6 they negate the fall by grabbing a wall or leaping to a stable fragment of the stairs.
- **Trapped (Subsequent Rounds):** Characters are trapped in the pit until they climb out or are rescued.

Falling Masonry Variant: As above, but characters falling into the pit are also struck by pieces of falling masonry and other debris. The falling debris (THAC0 17) inflicts 4d6 damage.

ILLUSIONARY BOULDER

A twist on a classic trap, this lurking danger utilises illusion magic to force intruders to rapidly descend the stairs. This trap is particularly effective, if paired with another trap further down the stairs or in the area beyond as those fleeing the falling boulder won't have time to search for additional dangers.

Alternatively, guardians in the area at the bottom of the stairs are automatically alerted to the presence of intruders by the crash of the boulder falling and the probable subsequent sounds of frantically fleeing intruders.

Activation: A character activates the trap, when they get halfway down the stairs. The trap resets after one hour.

Find the Trap: A character using *detect magic* (or similar spell) finds the trap by detecting the illusion aura of the *programmed illusion* spell on the ceiling.

Defeating the Trap: A character casting *dispel magic* can attempt to dispel the trap as if the trap's creator was an 12th-level illusionist. A character making a find secret doors roll finds a small arcane sigil at the top and bottom of the stairs; touching the sigil controls the trap. Destroying both sigils defeats the trap.

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

With a crash, a huge boulder falls from the ceiling behind you and begins to slowly roll down the stairs.

- **Falling Boulder:** The *programmed illusion* acts as a *spectral force* spell to create the illusion of a boulder falling from a hidden trapdoor in the ceiling. The spell includes visual and auditory components but cannot cause actual damage. Any character struck by the boulder can make a saving throw against spells to realise it is an illusion. Characters failing their save fall prone and believe they suffer 6d6 damage. (This damage is illusory and disappears once the illusion ends).
- **Rolling, Rolling (Round 1):** Roll initiative. The boulder rolls 10 ft. down the stairs.
- **Faster, Faster (Subsequent Rounds):** The boulder speeds up, rolling 20 ft. down the stairs until it reaches the bottom of the stairs.
- **Effect (End; Round 11):** The boulder (and all illusory damage it caused) disappears.

Note: This trap works best on a long and/or precipitous stair as the extra movement cost forces the characters to make difficult decisions; do they move carefully and avoid the chance of falling, move quickly away and risk tumbling down the stairs or expend magical resources to escape the danger? Alternatively, the trap could force exploring adventurers into another trap. For example, a pit trap could lurk further down the stairs or the Illusory Boulder trap could be linked to a section of Collapsing Stairs—characters fleeing the falling boulder are unlikely to be able to stop, search for and disarm the second trap.



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