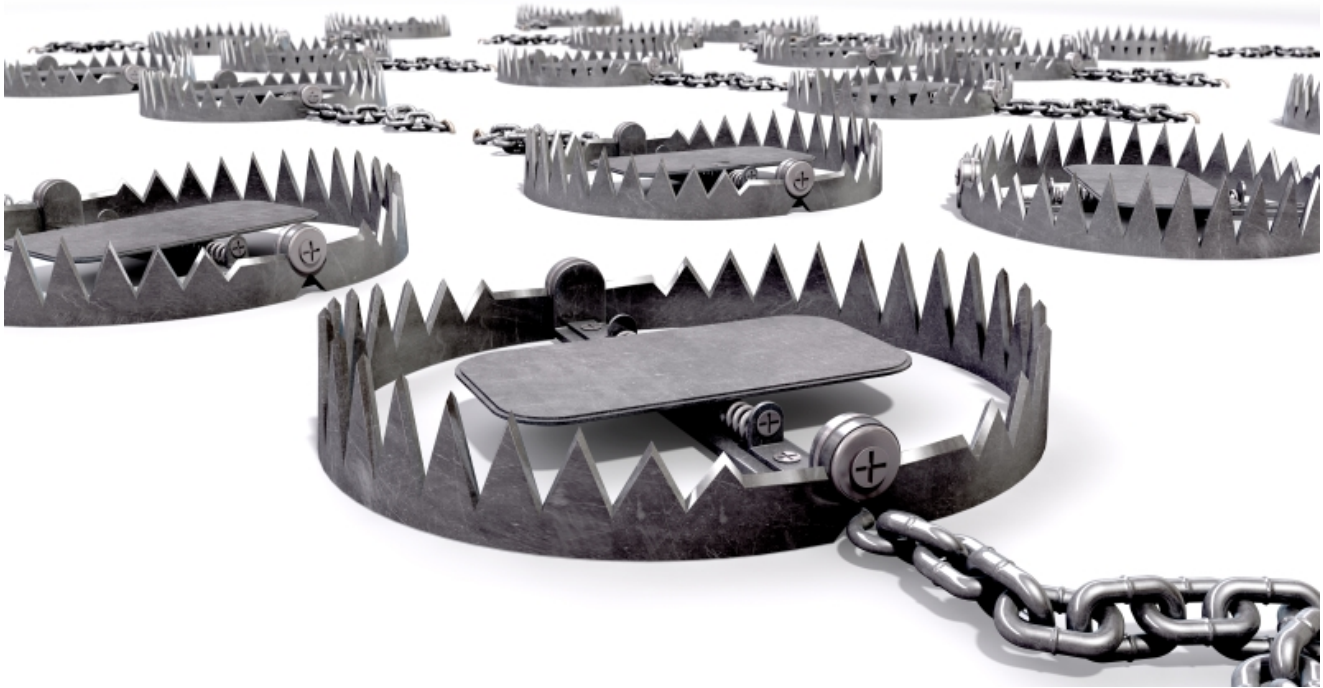# Traps, Triggers, and Puzzles 1

nerdolopedia.com/articles/2016/11/14/traps-triggers-and-puzzles-1

November 14, 2016

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Dungeons should be filled with danger and contains the remnants of those who built it. Dungeons are built for many different reasons: to house ancient treasures, imprison powerful creatures, hide secrets, etc. In order to protect these treasures and creatures the builders create traps and puzzles to keep out unwanted visitors.

Not only do traps provide narrative, but they provide depth and danger to your dungeons. You can flavor traps using various kinds of triggers. It is suggested to vary the traps, triggers, and puzzles as to provide suspense, narrative, and prevents boredom.

One of the struggles I had was finding various ideas for different kinds of puzzles and traps. For this article I will be covering a subset of various traps, triggers, and puzzles you can use and giving different perspectives on already well known traps.

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Trap: Darts

Darts are one of the iconic traps. These can be really good at surprising the players. What is great about darts is that they can be laced with poison to scale with the characters. As characters pass over a space or activate a trigger, these darts fly out of the wall to hit them.

While this is incredibly simple it can be used in interesting ways depending on placement of the trap. For instance while travel along a narrow passageway or narrow walkway having the darts fire at the characters along the length of the passageway or walkway.

Trap: Footsteps of the Pharaoh

While watching a show about a children's card game I was inspired by this unique trap. While walking into a room the characters find a massive humanoid statue standing with one foot in front of the other. When in the area of this statue's influence if the character has the opposite foot forward than the statue, the statue fires a burst of intense light coming from the statue's eyes targeting the character.

The way I made this trap not obvious was by asking the player what their character's dominant hand is. This is a pretty good indication of what foot they step forward. If using a grid every five feet the character has to avoid this beam of light. Either players will just rush and try to avoid all of the beams or they will take the slow calculated approach to it.

Trigger: Pressure Plates

The trigger that nearly everyone who has ever seen an Indiana Jones movie will know is the pressure plate. In simplest terms a pressure plate is a triggered platform that activates based on change in pressure.

This change in pressure can be interpreted several different ways. In the stereotypical fashion this is when a weight is applied to the platform, like an adventurer walking down the hall. It can also be the removal of weight, like a statue being moved off of the plate.

You can use a combination of these to also create a trigger, such as it activating once an applied weight has been moved off of it or returning a weight to the pressure plate.

Trigger: Tripwire

A thin wire or string is stretched across a walkway creates a tripwire. In the real world this was used in booby traps that would set off explosives. The idea is that the individual activating the trigger would release the tension held by the tripwire by tripping over it.

Traditionally this is designed to be tripped by your legs, but with modern technology we have created electronic tripwires which can be triggered by anything passing over it. Put trip wires in holes that players reach their arms into. Magic can be used in place of technology for wireless tripwires.

Puzzle: Keys and Scales

The players behold a large stone sarcophagus that has been locked and sealed. Surrounding it are two large stone statues of dragons. Immediately in front of each statue is a stone table with a strange scale sits on each. The scale has a pin each.

On top of the sarcophagus are nine keys. On the wall it states: Eight of the keys are false and one is real. The false keys weigh more than the real key. Picking the wrong key will leave you breathless.

When the players place keys on the scales they remove the pin and it will reveal which side is heavier. Once it has determined which is heavier it locks into place making it unuseable. This means the players get two chances to weigh the keys.

When an incorrect key is used on the sarcophagus the dragon statues begin releasing a poisonous gas into the room. You can tailor this poison gas to your party.

Solution: Separate the keys into three equal groups. On the first scale weigh two of the groups. One of two outcomes will occur. The first is that one group is lighter than the other. The lighter group has the true key. The second is if they are even, in which case the third unmeasured group.

For the group you have determined has the real key you take to the second scale. Very similar to the first weighing you leave one key off the scale and compare the other two. At this point it becomes obvious which key is the real one based on this result.

Variant: You can increase the number of coins to twelve but it requires you to add another scale to make it feasible.

Puzzle: Pieces of a Statue

At the entrance to the dungeon you find a large stone Maul. Further in the players walk into a room with a large sealed door on the opposite side. In the center is a pair of stone feet with small pegs sticking out of them. There are six other doors not counting the large sealed door and the door you entered in.

In each of the further rooms the players will find stone versions of limbs. These will be guarded with a variety of traps and puzzles. The stone limbs are the following: Head, Left Leg, Right Leg, Torso, Left Arm, Right Arm. They fit together to create a large stone statue.

It appears to be able to hold a weapon in its hands. When the stone maul found at the beginning of the dungeon is placed in the statue's hands it comes to life and attacks the player. When defeated the large sealed doors open.

I hope these puzzles, traps, and triggers gave you some inspiration. I plan on covering more puzzles, traps, and triggers in the future to cover more of these. With every trap and trigger in future you can use them in parallel with any other trigger to increase complexity (i.e. two pressure plates in order to open a door, pull two levers at the same time). It is best to try and match these to the narrative of the dungeon you are designing or reskinning them to work.
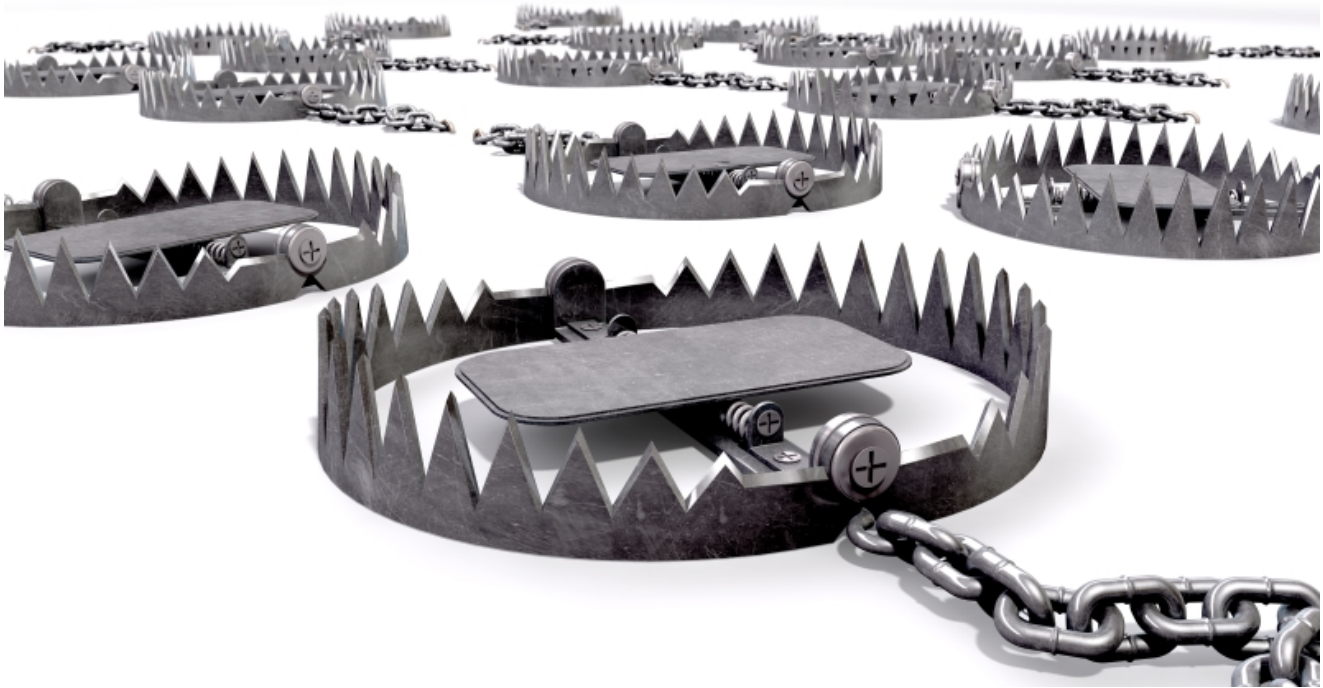
Jacob Waterman

Traps, Triggers, and Puzzles 2

March 9, 2017

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Trap: Gravity Shift

One of the more fun ways to mess with players is to shift their perspective of gravity. This can lead someone into another trap such as lava that is on the ceiling or into another shift in gravity. A gravity shift could also change direction or turn off entirely. This kind of trap may

be unexpected except to perceptive individuals as a shift in gravity may not be entirely noticeable. This kind of trap requires a level of three-dimensional thinking that some players may not be entirely good at, so take this into consideration before putting this in your dungeon.

Trap: Pit

One of the classic traps in tabletop games, a pit is a hole in which an individual falls into. This can be filled with any number of things or nothing at all. Spikes is a common hazard to be filled at the bottom of a pit, this is generally considered a dead fall. Each of the hazards placed at the bottom is a way to make the danger of the pit better. These hazards can also give narrative to the creators or past of the dungeon. A tiger in a pit would give the notion of regular maintained or common intruders, because the tiger needs to be fed.

The depth of a pit is variable. From the classic module "The Tomb of Horrors" there are several pits that are 100 feet deep. For most systems falling damage increases as the distance does so the depth of a pit increases its danger. Not only does falling make it more dangerous, but that also means climbing out can be a bigger danger.

Trigger: Lever

One of the simple machines, this is a wonderful trigger. Simply put, a lever is a rigid bar that is set on a pivot point. Most common in games they have two positions and only move along one axis. One of the more common levers that we experience nearly everyday is the shifter in your car. Depending on your car this lever can move along two axis and have several different positions.

Regardless of the number of positions a lever has the position of the lever determines what activates. A simple example is a pulled lever that opens a door. Not only does the position determine events but you can also consider the previous positions in the lever. For example lets assume a lever has five positions. A possible solution to opening a door would be to move the letter from the initial position (position 1) to position 4, then to position 2, and then back to the initial position. This could be considered like a combination lock. Getting a position incorrect could also trigger a trap.

Trigger: Button

Now, if you are reading this, you have used a button of some kind. Buttons are incredibly similar to pressure plates. One could say they are identical to pressure plates just a smaller version. One of the mechanics I forgot to mention in my previous article with pressure plates was the mechanics to reset the pressure plate back to its original position.

Puzzle: Ring of Fire

This room has one exit and one entrance. On the floor are magical runes in a circle. A character who has arcane knowledge and inspects the circle will find that they are protection runes. To run this puzzle you will need to have all the players roll initiative, because after 18 seconds the room will fill with fire. The only safe space is inside of the magical circle. Once the fire dies down the exit unlocks. To increase the challenge of this puzzle you can have fire elementals come from the flames after they erupt.

Most players are hesitant to step into magical circles so likely they will be consumed by flames. Because of the backwards nature of this puzzle players from here will have a difficult time believing what is the correct approach to magical circles. Always keep them guessing.

Puzzle: Fill the Bowl

A classic puzzle that I have seen in a few locations. Another room with a locked exit all that sits in the room is a bowl on a pedestal. Written on the pedastel is the phrase "Fill the Bowl". Inside the bowl the players see it is stained with blood. Resting in the bowl is a blood stained knife.

The solution to this puzzle is incredibly straight forward. As the instructions say all that needs to be done is the bowl needs to be filled and the door will open. They can be filled with anything. The bloodstains are simply to fill players heads with assumptions. It is entirely possible they will bleed themselves into the bowl, you can handle this in any way that you see fit.

Hopefully these have proven to be valuable for your table. Remember that you can use each of these elements in parallel with other traps, triggers, and puzzles that I have covered with this series.

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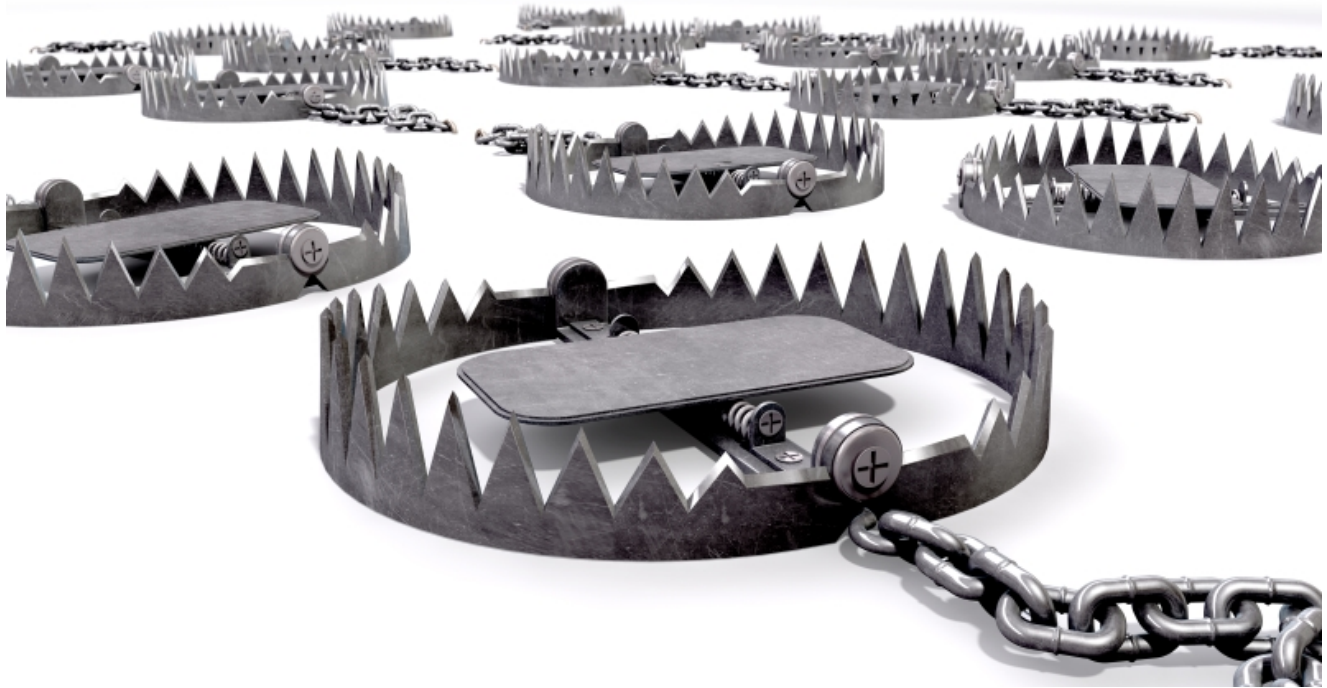
Jacob Waterman

Traps, Triggers, and Puzzles 3

nerdolopedia.com/articles/2017/5/4/traps-triggers-and-puzzles-3

May 4, 2017

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Trap: Collapsing Ceilings

Rocks fall, everyone dies. This may be one of the most common phrases players and GMs remember about tabletop games. At its simpliest this trap is the contents of the ceiling falling onto the victum. This can vary in severity from huge boulders falling from a cavern

ceiling or tiling from a broken roof.

This can also be seen as the ceiling lowering on the characters. This can be combined with other traps like spikes. Enjoy the horror of your players faces as the world literally collapses around them.

Trap: False Objective

This is one of my personal favorites,primarily because I love messing with players heads. A false objective is something that simply makes the players believe they achieved their objective before its too late. This can be an enemy who the players might think is the big bad, or a mimic of an item they are going after. This trap is the most vague trap I've covered but that is because it has to be tailored to the quest the players are on.

This could be the spark of an entire quest, having retrieved a cursed artifact instead of the actual artifact or finding an NPC who claims to be the one they are going to save while the real one rots in a dungeon somewhere. This trap requires a ton of thought but can be incredibly satisfying to see pulled off.

Trigger: Valve

No not the company that you give your money to in the summer. It would be under traps if thats what I was covering. I'm talking about the mechanical device that is used control the flow of fluids. What is great about this trigger is that you can vary what it triggers based on spectrum. Most often this is controlled by a type of rotating object, like the handle on your sink's faucet.

This can be a great trigger if you want to play with fluid puzzles. If you want a frustrating but fun example, go look up the water temple from the Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. However you can use the valve in more complex ways, like controlling the pressure of another mechanic. As soon as you bring water into traps and puzzles you can get really complex.

Trigger: Key

It surprises me this wasn't one of the first I covered. We deal with keys all the time in a society obsessed with security. Even our computers have keys. No not keyboard keys, I'm talking about security keys (look up SSL if you want an example of a computer key you use ALL THE TIME). In its simplest form a key is something used to open a lock or verify permission. Opening locks may not be the best thing to do. Opening a lock may release some trap or creature.

Keys can also be used to bypass traps. It could be a way for owners of a dungeon to make their way in without fear of the traps. I feel this idea is not well explored outside of heist quests. How many times do players find an item to make a dungeon easier?

Puzzle: Pillar of Burning Light

Sitting in the middle of the room is a pedestal illuminated by a blinding light. On the pedestal sits whatever item or trigger that the party needs to progress. Written in the room (maybe on the pedestal) is the phrase "The light of [insert name of diety or great being] burns in the eyes of the visitor". Characters who inspect closely will see that on the floor surrounding the pillar of light are ashes not distributed evenly. If the character puts a body part in the light, it is incinerated off.

The only way to reach the item they need is to close their eyes and reach towards the object. If they open their eyes as they are reaching, the light burns them again.

Puzzle: Truths and Lies

For many this is a classic puzzle and it may not stump some of your players. Before the characters are two doors with talking faces (or guardians) on them. In unison they say, "Behind one of us lies your destination, the other leads to certain death. One of us tells nothing but the truth, the other tells nothing but lies. You may ask us only one question." Feel free to make what they say fit more to the style of your world. For players who have never encountered this, this can be really frustrating.

The answer to this riddle is to ask the doors what the other door would say is the correct path. The truth telling door would say (or point depending on how your doors are designed) to the deadly door because the lying door would point to the deadly path. The lying door would also point to the deadly door, because the truth telling door would point to the correct path. Since it tells only lies it would say the truth telling door would point to the deadly door. This makes the opposite door the correct door. You can also reverse this and ask for which door is the deadly door, the only difference is that you take the door the doors/guardians point to.

If you do have experienced players you can mix this up a bit. I ran this where both of doors were actually not consistent and enjoyed messing with the party. You could also play it off where both doors tell the truth, or both tell lies. These do not have feasible solutions, so its recommended the that result of their decisions are not punishing. Doing so could result in upset players.

Hopefully these items help improve your game and give your players some challenges to overcome. Traps and puzzles should keep your players second guessing everything you throw at them, thats how you know you are doing it right!

You can find me on twitter @your1_nightmare. If you enjoy the material on this site please consider supporting us! If you think I missed something or you would like me to cover something specific make sure to leave a comment.

Jacob Waterman

Traps, Triggers, and Puzzles 4

nerdolopedia.com/articles/2017/6/1/traps-triggers-and-puzzles-4

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Trap: Mimic

This trap is a staple of Dungeons and Dragons. It comes up in nearly every fantasy game and they seem to terrify everyone. Mimics, in their simplest form it is a creature that takes on the form of an object to surprise its prey. When we think of Mimics usually it is in the form

of a chest that we assume it to be as its a common form for them to take. Adventurers LOVE chests and whats inside them. Sometimes they are too hasty to open them resulting in being eaten.

What may be unknown to some newer players is that mimics can take the form of ANY object. To give an example from one of my own games, I had tasked my players with going to a wizards tower and retrieving "The Wizards Staff". Once they had made it through the trials of the wizards tower they found his room with all of his stuff, including a staff that lied at the foot of his bed on a type of wooden footlocker. The ranger assuming everything safe went up and grabbed the staff only to find out that the staff and the footlocker together were a mimic. What they were really after was a book with the title "The Wizard's Staff".

Trap: Spells

A traditional trap is a very simple one, pick a spell from the Player's Handbook and cast it at the player. The key to this trap is the delivery method. For instance, once a player steps on a tile it applies shocking grasp to the one who stepped on it.

Sometimes this will effect everyone in the party (i.e. fireball). You should also note what else the spell effects in the room. Is there another element to the puzzle that feels the effect of this spell? If so what kind of cascading effect will it have?

Trigger: Spells

Yeah I know, I just covered spells in the traps. How could I talk about using spells for these things without also talking about how they can be used for triggers? Using a spell as a trigger does require a bit more creativity as there are only a handful of spells in the Players Handbook (at least in 5th Edition) that could really be used as a trigger.

The one that immediately comes to mind is the alarm spell. An area of effect that more or less alarms the person who cast it, or everyone in the area. However you can invent your own spells that act as triggers and leave your players puzzled. After all in a world with wizards there are always those wizards who are experimenting and coming up with new things.

An example could be a spell that triggers a trap to activate when two objects touch. This could lead to a reverse Indiana Jones scenario where players place an object on a pedestal and watch as a boulder comes at them.

Trigger: Words

"Open Sesame" is a phrase that nearly everyone in my generation seems to know even though probably the closest they've come to reading "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" is through Disney's Aladdin. Yet everyone associates it with some magic words that open

doors. That should illuminate the possibilities of what speaking magic words can do.

For instance you could have a question/riddle on the wall and the answer be the solution to progress, or it be a red herring and activate a trap. It also does not simply have to be a specific phrase. You could have it so it triggers whenever you speak, causing a cascading effect as your players keep shouting in character because horrible things are happening around them. Or it only activates when there is silence for a certain amount of time.

Puzzle: They All Fall Down

The room locks behind the players as skeletons wake from their eternal rest. Words border the door forward: The way forward is open when all lie low. The party kills the skeletons but find that the doors do not open. After a few moments of rest the skeletons put themselves back together looking for another fight.

This scenario could go on for hours if your players fail to realize that they themselves must also lay on the ground once they defeat the skeletons. It should be important to note that to an inexperienced group the skeletons will probably get more swings in making the encounter that much more dangerous depending on the level of the group.

Puzzle: Ordered Books

Many of my favorite puzzles start with a single question. In this puzzle what that question is can be up to you depending on the context in which you use this puzzle. In its simplest form the players must order a number of books in a specific way in order to progress. The way they obtain this is up to you as the dungeon master.

When I ran this puzzle for my players they found a series of books in a library that took the idea of "books take you to new worlds" almost too seriously. At the end of each adventure book they found another book that transported them back to the plane they were on. In this campaign they needed three.

I also had the question line the ceiling on each floor of the library having the players find that ad the place where some book shaped holes were. On the spines of these books were their organizational code. I went with the one we use in the Unites States for fictional books, which is to take the first three letters of the authors name. From there the players had to place the books such that those organizational codes spelled out "KNOWLEDGE" which when looked at carefully was perfectly nine letters.

While this is how I ran the puzzle you can come up with your own variations by changing the question and answer. You can also change the organizational code of your libraries to make for more interesting challenges.

Hopefully these traps, triggers, and puzzles help to improve your game, make your players paranoid, and bring fun to your table.

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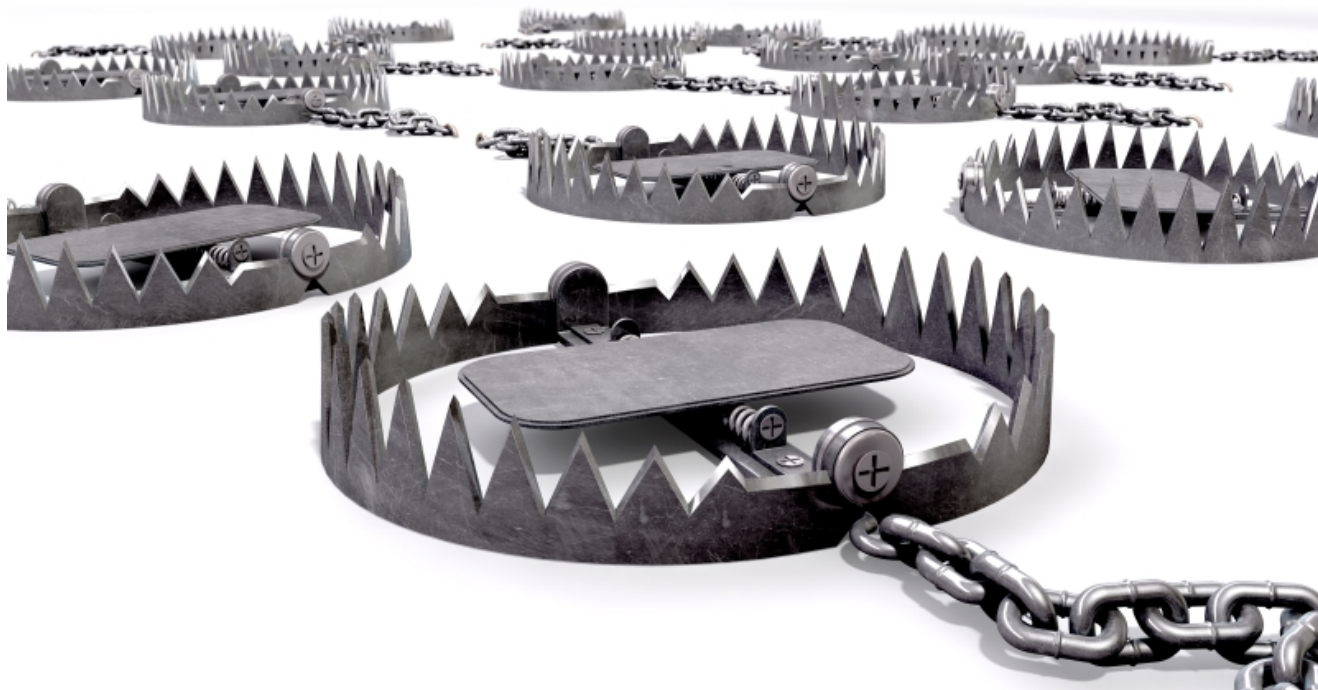
Jacob Waterman

Traps, Triggers, and Puzzles 5

nerdolopedia.com/articles/2018/2/22/traps-triggers-and-puzzles-5

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Trap: Sand

Anyone who has seen an action adventure movie in the desert has probably seen the trap of a room filling up with sand. You also probably think of quicksand in the jungle. The sad part about these are how horribly inaccurate their dangers are. Here is the best part, who cares? If the dangers in the movies seem hazardous then it is good enough for your game. I'm not

here to tell you how you are using sand wrong. If your players argue about how it works, just say it works that way because of magic. You are building tension and danger, realism be damned.

Sand is notoriously hard to climb, a slope of sand is harder to climb than dirt. The sand shifts making movement hard. Even if the trap isn't the sand room or quicksand, then its possible this trap could impose difficult terrain. Being submerged in sand can also risk suffocation. Remember the Disney movie Aladdin? There is a scene where Princess Jasmine was trapped in an hourglass and she begins to be submerged in sand. Can you imagine a sand elemental that suffocates people sneaking up on the players? Sand is fluid enough to be used in all sorts of interesting ways.

Trap: Poisonous Gas

I think we all know the dangers of poisonous gas. It is featured in so many movies that one example isn't good enough to cover what can be done with poisonous gas. The best part about it is that there are as many varieties of poisonous gas as there are poisons (go figure). They can come in the form of sleep gas to fear gas like Scarecrow's from Batman, to just a gas that kills people.

To keep in mind, poisonous gas can be used to mess with the players head, it doesn't have to do damage. Maybe it makes the characters see all creatures nearby as shadow creatures or monsters. Perhaps they see things that are not there. It can debilitate a character and cause chaos.

Trigger: Motion

As a trigger this is a fairly modern one. Home security lights use motion detection to activate. It is surprising how little this type of detection occurs in our fantasy tabletop games, or maybe I haven't simply noticed it. In a world with magic, why wouldn't we have this option? The idea is pretty simple and you don't have to explain how the magic works, just that it does.

You can also choose for the effect to trigger with a lack of motion. The trap or object in the room isn't triggered so long as you keep moving. This would be effective when chained with another trigger. This could form a gauntlet where the players want to keep moving in fear of activating the traps but want to stop to overcome other obstacles.

This can be used with great effect if you change the amount of time that the trigger is active. For example you might have a magical eye symbol that when it appears open detects any and all movement. When closed creatures are free to move about the space without triggering it.

The degree of motion can also be changed. It could range from any minute movement, possibly requiring a save to remain motionless, to as long as the players move at least one square on each turn. The possibilities are up to you.

Trigger: Heat

This is another trigger that I have gained inspiration from the modern age. In many homes your furnace or air conditioner go through cycles of activity and inactivity depending on the temperature of the room it is set to. This same principal could very much be applied to a room. In order to activate the trigger one would have to increase or decrease the temperature in a space. Players could do this by using torches or putting out flames.

This idea could be used at the core of a dungeon (a fire and ice themed one is springing to my mind). The heat of one area could affect another area, creating different zones of temperature control. This trigger has the advantage of being on a scale as well, where it's not either on or off. This means you could potentially have multiple triggers in one space. This could create a gauntlet of challenges the players must face as they work to change the temperature in a room. The challenges might even try to reverse the change in temperature.

Puzzle: Chess of Minimum Pieces

This puzzle, as the name implies, would require some knowledge of how chess works. To start the players enter an area where the width of the room is filled with a massive empty chess board. The goal is that the players want to cross the chess board, but the area is enchanted that the players must play the game by the rules. If a player deviates from the rules, an electric shock is delivered by a spell. When a player steps into one of the squares on the chess board (or attempts to fly over it), they are restricted to that square until a piece appears on the other side of the board opposite of the square the player stood. Once the piece appears, the player may only move in the way that piece that appeared would move. Their goal is to make it to the opposite side of the board. Each side takes its turn and only one piece can move. If a player's movement would normally remove the piece in chess, then the piece is destroyed (either literally by the player, or by magic). If an opponent piece would take out a player, they take a large amount of damage before they are teleported off the board.

The key to the challenge of this puzzle is to not reveal the rules up front. The rules reveal the simplest answer: choose the Queen square, or one of the Rook Squares. This ensures that your next move lets you take out the other piece and gets you across the board without harm. This challenge also increases if several players enter the board at the same time, as now only one player can move per "turn". It also becomes more challenging if players are taken out by the opponent pieces. The simplest form of this requires only one person to cross the board to succeed at the challenge.

A variation of this puzzle is to randomize the piece that appears in front of them when they step on the board. My recommendation is to not allow players to become a pawn, as the movements of the pawns is boring, and results in a stalemate without other players to take out a pawn. The randomization of pieces is a way to add an additional challenge to a puzzle the group may have already encountered in the past.

You can introduce this randomization at any point as long as you do not reveal the rules. If a player suddenly discovers the answer but you don't want your players to just repeat his steps exactly, then introduce the randomization to make sure there is still some challenge.

Puzzle: Deceiver

Blocking a path forward is a massive stone golem who seems to fit the door frame perfectly. It is made out of incredibly durable material and not easily destroyed. However, the golem is not hostile to the party and in fact is quite unintelligent and forgetful. The only thing the golem remembers is the appearance of its master, and its master and guests are the only ones who are permitted to pass. On top of that the master must be present to proceed. Upon meeting the golem it says the words "You are not master. Only master and his guests may pass."

The solution to this puzzle can vary on the scenario in which it is placed. While the golem is unintelligent it would not just spout off a description of its master, trivializing the puzzle entirely for anyone with a disguise self or alter self spell. Instead the players need to coax certain information about who their master is or what they look like. If the players lack a real way of disguising themselves on their own person, you can introduce items into the dungeon that would be sufficient to have the golem let the party pass. It is entirely possible that you could get the owner of the golem to let you through as well. The attention to detail of the golem is entirely up to the DM for how they want to integrate it into their dungeon for their players.

I hope these traps, triggers, and puzzles give you the inspiration you need for your games. If you take any of these ideas and use them in your games, please let me know! I am always curious to find out how players overcome the challenges presented to them.

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Jacob Waterman

Traps, Triggers, and Puzzles 6

nerdolopedia.com/articles/2019/9/20/traps-triggers-and-puzzles-6

September 19, 2019

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Puzzle – An obstacle that requires a series of actions to complete, usually involving a level of intellectual challenge.

Trap: Barrel of Ooze

At one point I decided to run a group through "The Tomb of Horrors" as it was fabled to be absolutely brutal. Turns out we never finished because it wasn't fun for us. However, the module did a wonderful job of showing me some incredible traps. The barrel of Ooze is one

such trap. In its simplest form, the trap is a barrel that has an ooze in it that looks like a normal fluid. As soon as an adventurer puts their arm in to grab a key or coin from the bottom of the barrel, the Ooze begins to eat at their flesh.

You can extend this to be any container with a fluid (like a bathtub, a bucket, a swimming pool, etc). It could become even worse if you have another mechanism dumping the barrel and the ooze. Donkey Kong just got a lot more dangerous.

Trap: Spears

One of the most iconic dungeons in cinema history is the dungeon at the start of *Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark*. One of the traps in that dungeon were a series of spears that shot out from the wall with a skeleton attached to them. This trap of weapons coming out of walls is a simple trap to flavor. Unlike arrows, this trap can retract and re-arm with not much hassle.

The simplicity of this trap makes them incredibly universal. Stick them at the bottom of a pitfall, have them shoot out from behind a false door, stick them at the bottom of a chest so when it opens it spears whoever opens it. They have a reach that is limited only by how long the shaft of the spear is.

A diabolical use is in combination with other traps. For instance, there are jets of fire that spew out from the walls. What the players might not notice is on the other side of the jets of fire is a line of spears that extend at the same time as the fire jets. When they roll to make it past the fire jets, they get surprised by the spears that are coming at them from the other side.

Trigger: Sight

While this trigger is far more common with Sci-fi settings, it is completely possible in fantasy settings as well. A disembodied eye or a magical sigil that looks over an area is a perfect sensor for a trap. You can hide these in plain sight. Statues are a fantastic source of fake eyes and alluding to the statue's watch over the party may give them a hint that steers them in the wrong direction.

This sight can also be different kinds of sight. It could be a magical sight, where a magic item or aura sets off the trigger. Darkvision is another where the party may need to mask it in magical darkness to proceed (possibly hiding another trap/trigger from them). The most painful sight for players would be a Truesight vision. This kind is when the trigger should be unavoidable, but not always have a negative consequence. Incorporating this type of vision into a puzzle may reduce some headache from the players.

Trigger: Smell

The sense of smell seems so underused in tabletop games besides describing a scene. Well, this can be used as a trigger for a trap or puzzle as well. Just like we have detectors for natural gases, we can have sensors for different smells.

The best way to implement this into a trap or puzzle is in tandem with another element that emits or stops emitting a smell on a different trigger. For example, the party could be fighting a flesh golem. On its death it explodes in a cloud of stink, which could trigger another element of the puzzle. You could include various valves that release certain gases and in a certain combination they could open a door or create a spark. There is a lot of potential when you start to dig into what smells.

Puzzle: The Countdown

Possibly my second favorite of classical puzzles, is the Countdown. This puzzle is incredibly simple in its design and is purely a psychological puzzle. There are 3 elements to this puzzle: a button, something locked, and a massive display of some kind for the numbers 0-10. There are two aspects to this puzzle to get it working well.

First is the give focus where it is needed. Don't distract the players in the room with anything else other than a potential danger. For example, here is a way you might describe the room:

"You enter a tall room with a dias in the center. On the dias is a large button. On the opposite is a large stone door with no handle. [Have the players roll perception] You notice near the top of the room there are holes coming out of the walls. At their base they appear worn, as if erosion from use ate at the stone. [After several moments of them looking about the room] The door entering this room slams shut. A large number 10 appears above the opposite door in magic runes."

This gives focus to the danger, the button, and the countdown timer. The second part of this puzzle requires you to apply pressure to the players. In game, start counting down. Do it slowly, giving maybe a good 5 seconds between the countdowns.

Hopefully your players are freaking out. The hope is that they believe when the countdown timer hits 0 that the room may be flooded. In desperation they will hit the button eventually. They always press the button. When this happens, have there be a dramatic pause. Then reset the timer, continuing to count down. This will either give the players more of a panic or they will have figured out the solution.

The actual solution is to let the countdown hit 0. At that point the door or locked thing will open. It's a fun little puzzle that poses no real danger and makes players think twice about hitting future buttons.

Puzzle: The Password

One of the very first puzzles I ever ran for a homebrewed game was this interesting communication puzzle. The main elements are a sentient talking door, and the password to enter written above the door. When the players speak the password, nothing happens. The one who needs to speak the password is the door.

The challenge for the players comes down to whether or not you have the door be aware what the password is and have an aversion to speaking the password or whether it is completely unaware. The players must convince the door to speak the password in a clever way. This could be through creating a riddle competition where the answer to one of the riddles is the password, or a quiz where an answer is the password. This entirely depends on the personality of the door, but I suggest making it where there is some aspect of its character that allows it to completely forget that the password is something it is trying to keep from saying. My favorite is the obsession with riddling (because there are so few places to put riddles in games naturally).

Hopefully these have proven to be valuable for your table. Remember that you can use each of these elements in parallel with other traps, triggers, and puzzles that I have covered with this series.

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