

Introduction

A while back, while brainstorming about creative traps, I came up with the idea of a boulder trap wherein the PCs would actually roll initiative and run to stay ahead of an oncoming boulder, which would steadily get closer. This seemed far more exciting and dramatic than a one-round, one-shot trap. The immediate problem, of course, was that players' movement rates were static, and success or failure would become immediately obvious when they counted squares. So, to add a random element, I sprinkled random hazards in characters' paths as they fled the oncoming boulder. Many of these hazards did nothing but slow characters down, but given the oncoming boulder, that in itself was enough of a danger. About four months ago, I played out a version of this trap, and it went incredibly well. Thanks to scrupulous play-testing, two of the five PCs were hit by the boulder when they were each within a few squares of safety.

This trap assumes that PCs in your party have movement rates of either 5 or 6 and that characters have a light source with which they can see their surroundings. It should go without saying that characters sprinting into the pitch darkness will have problems beyond what is presented here. When looking at the rates at which characters move, keep in mind that most everyone in this situation will choose to run, and that running adds two to your movement rate, and causes you to grant combat advantage. A character that normally has a movement rate of 6 will likely be moving 16 squares per turn during this encounter, as he'll take a double run action.

The corridor that houses the rolling boulder gauntlet is 10 feet wide, and 350 feet (70 squares) from end to end. The trigger is on square 10, and at the 70th square there is a side passage that allows characters to escape to safety, leaving the path of the boulder. Since many of the traps only affect the first character to hit them, they have a sort of rubber band effect, slowing down the fastest characters and not affecting the slower characters who are already struggling to outrun the boulder.

Skill check difficulties and attack/damage values for the boulder gauntlet are given as low/med/high values to allow the trap to be easily scalable for parties of any level. You can consult Sly Flourish's excellent [Ultimate DM Chart](#) to assign appropriate difficulties based on the party's level.

Trap Summary

When the first party member steps on the trigger, there is an audible click and a portcullis drops into place on square zero, possibly injuring any party members in that square and making retreat unlikely. At the same time, a deep rumbling sound begins, and party members roll initiative. On the boulder's first action, it drops down from a large hole above the portcullis and appears in square 1, rolling very quickly towards party members. As the rounds progress, the boulder slowly accelerates, and party members may fall prey to traps that knock them prone or otherwise impede their progress.

The Corridor

Since this is a very long straight corridor, no map is provided. Traps and triggers are positioned based on the square number in which they reside. The portcullis is on square 0, the trap trigger is on square 10, the boulder enters at square 1, and the exit is at square 70.

The Trigger

You should make sure that you know the positions of everyone in the party by the time someone has stepped on the trigger. Asking for a marching order should do. When the first person in line steps on the pressure plate, take note of the positions of everyone in the party. If anyone is standing on the squares of the portcullis, run the effects of the portcullis trap. Then have everyone roll initiative. Roll initiative for the boulder as well. The boulder's initiative bonus should be equal to the level of the trap.

Falling Iron Portcullis	Minion Obstacle
Trap: A portcullis drops into the two entrance squares.	
Perception	
Medium DC: Seams inside the top of the doorway seem to indicate a moving piece.	
Trigger	
The primary pressure plate trigger for the boulder trap also triggers the portcullis.	
Attack	
Immediate Reaction	
Target: Any creature(s) in the 2 affected squares	
Attack: ___ vs Reflex (Use <i>Atk vs Def value</i>)	
Hit: ___ damage, and is restrained and knocked prone. (Use <i>High Dmg value</i>)	
Miss: Target is pushed 1 square back, out of the trap area.	

Rolling Boulder	Elite Blaster
Trap: A massive nine foot wide boulder rolls swiftly towards the party	
Perception	
Medium DC: A character looks up and backward into the darkness and notices the odd large hole from which the boulder will emerge.	
Hard DC: A character notices the large and very well concealed pressure plate.	
Trigger	
Stepping on the large pressure plate triggers the boulder and the portcullis.	
Attack	
Standard Action	Initiative Equal to level
Each turn, the boulder rolls forward to the position indicated. Any creature in a space entered by the boulder is subject to a trample attack. Whether the boulder hits or misses, it does not slow.	
Trample: ___ vs Reflex (Use <i>Atk vs Def value</i>)	
Special: Roll twice when attacking and take the better of the two rolls. In addition, this is a high crit attack. A roll of 19 or 20 scores a critical hit.	
Hit: ___ damage, and is restrained and knocked prone. (Use <i>High Ltd Dmg value</i>)	
Miss: Half damage, and the target is knocked prone.	
Countermeasures	
A character who detects the pressure plate can delay its activation with a medium DC Thievery check.	
A character who locates the boulder's opening can climb up and disable the boulder with a hard DC Thievery check.	

The below chart shows how far the boulder moves each round. It's been adjusted to be challenging for a party with movement rates of 5 and 6, and it takes into account the fact that many PCs will start their turns in spaces behind the trigger. Still, a slow-moving character who loses initiative and starts very close to the portcullis will have a difficult time escaping. Note that the boulder's movement is not static; it accelerates slightly as it rolls.

Boulder movement chart	
Round 1:	The boulder drops into square 1
Round 2:	The boulder rolls forward to square 14
Round 3:	The boulder rolls forward to square 29
Round 4:	The boulder rolls forward to square 45
Round 5:	The boulder rolls forward to square 62
Round 6:	The boulder rolls to the end of the corridor, smashing into the wall

The Component Traps

During the first round, PCs should simply run, and none of them should reach any of the other traps. Light sources become important at this point, since if the torch-bearers are at the rear of the line, those running first will have virtually no chance to spot a trap. If a trap is in complete darkness, characters have no chance to spot it. If it is in a dimly lit area, it is concealed and perception checks have a -2 penalty. And unless characters take a minor action between movements to make a perception check, only passive perception should be checked.

Trap #1: Iron Beam (Square 27)

This is simply a thin iron beam running across the corridor at about the five-foot level. Size small creatures may run underneath it and never know it was there. It's certainly not much of a trap by normal standards, but when you're sprinting in fear into the pitch darkness, it becomes something of a hazard. Since this is the first trap, PCs are unlikely to be making active perception checks at this point.

Iron Beam	Minion Obstacle
Trap: An iron beam stretches across the dark corridor.	
Perception	
Easy DC: You can see an iron beam stretching across the hallway. It is a simple matter to duck beneath it as you run. You can alert other party members if you like.	
Trigger	
The iron beam targets only those who are running, and only those who do not state that they duck beneath it.	
Attack	
Immediate Reaction	
Target: Any creature who runs into the iron beam	
Attack: ___ vs Reflex (Use <i>Atk vs Def</i> value)	
Hit: ___ damage, and target is knocked prone. (Use <i>Minion Dmg</i> value)	

Trap #2: Tripwire (Square 39)

The tripwire is very similar to the iron beam, but is more difficult to spot.

Tripwire	Minion Obstacle
Trap: A wire stretches across the hallway at ankle level.	
Perception	
Medium DC: You can see a wire stretching across the hallway. Jumping over it should not be difficult. You can alert other party members if you like.	
Trigger	
The tripwire targets only those who run through its square.	
Attack	
Immediate Reaction	
Target: Any creature who runs through the tripwire's square	
Attack: ___ vs Reflex (Use <i>Atk vs Def value</i>)	
Hit: ___ damage, and target is knocked prone. (Use <i>Minion Dmg value</i>)	
Countermeasures	
A character who detects the tripwire can jump over it with an easy DC Acrobatics check.	

Trap #3: Grease Patch (Squares 48,49,50)

A patch of grease is a nasty obstacle when there's a giant boulder bearing down on you. For heroic tier campaigns, it occupies three squares as stated. In paragon tier campaigns, there are four squares of grease, and in epic tier there are five squares.

Grease patch	Obstacle
Trap: A broad patch of slick grease coats the floor ahead.	
Perception	
The white grease stands out. Unless there is complete darkness, characters notice it immediately.	
Trigger	
A character runs through a square of grease. If the character passes through multiple squares, make one attack for each grease square.	
Attack	
Immediate Reaction	
Target: Any creature who runs through a square of grease	
Attack: ___ vs Reflex (Use <i>Atk vs Def value minus 4</i>)	
Hit: Target is knocked prone. If the character was running, he slides 1 square forward.	
Countermeasures	
When passing through the grease, if characters choose a regular move action instead of a run, they can avoid attack by succeeding in one Easy DC Acrobatics check per grease square	
Characters can jump over the entire grease patch by making an Athletics check. For a running character, the difficulty for 3 squares of grease is 15, the DC for four squares of grease is 20, and the DC for five squares of grease is 25. If the character fails the check, he lands short and is subject to an attack by the square of grease where he lands, but for this attack he suffers a penalty of 4 to Reflex.	

Trap #4: Spring-loaded iron rods (Square 55)

There are two rods; one springs from the left wall and one from the right wall. In this 2-square wide corridor, the lane in which characters pass makes a difference. After the traps are sprung, they behave as the *Iron Beam* detailed above.

Iron Rod	Minion Blaster
Trap: A spring-loaded iron rod swings out from the wall towards your head.	
Perception	
Hard DC: You notice odd raised ground ahead that looks like a pressure plate.	
Attack	
Immediate Reaction	
Target: The creature who stepped on the pressure plate	
Attack: ___ vs Reflex (Use <i>Atk vs Def value</i>)	
Hit: ___ damage, and if the target was running, he is knocked prone. (Use <i>Minion Dmg value</i>)	
Countermeasures	
A characters who sees the pressure plate can disable the trap as a standard action by making a hard DC Thievery check.	
A characters who sees the pressure plate can leap over it with a DC 10 Athletics check, or a DC 5 athletics check if he is running.	

Trap #5: Field of Caltrops (Square 63)

Towards the end of the hallway, someone has scattered a number of sharp caltrops.

Caltrop Field	Obstacle
Trap: A field of sharp caltrops lies strewn about the floor here.	
Perception	
Easy DC: A character can spot the caltrops	
Trigger	
A character runs through the caltrop field.	
Attack	
Immediate Reaction	
Target: Any creature who runs through the caltrops	
Attack: ___ vs Reflex (Use <i>Atk vs Def value</i>)	
Hit: ___ damage and target is slowed (save ends) (Use <i>low dmg value</i>)	
Countermeasures	
When passing through the caltrops, if characters choose a regular move action instead of a run, the caltrops attack with a -4 penalty	
A character who sees the caltrops can leap over them with a DC 10 Athletics check, or a DC 5 athletics check if he is running.	

Your mileage may vary with this trap, and I'll be the first to admit that it works best with a heroic-tier party. My group was a low-magic party, so there were no teleport abilities or Transmute Rock to Mud spells.

If you want to adjust the trap's difficulty, the easiest way is to adjust the boulder movement chart. For an easier version, change the movement to *1/14/29/44/60/end*, and for an extremely easy version in which no one is ever likely to be crushed by the boulder, change the boulder's movement to *1/14/28/42/56/end*. If your players have high movement rates or if you just really hate them, change the boulder's movement to *1/15/31/47/64/end* and watch them all be squashed.

An Example of the Trap being Sprung

If you're interested in seeing an example of how this trap might be run, you can read how it went down in our play-test session, with round-by-round notes

For this test run, I've named the characters very silly names borrowing from previous and current editions of D&D. Bear with me. The boulder moves according to the chart in the main description rather than having a set movement speed. I made all the rolls for this test run using a level 5 party for an example, but I try not to get too stuck on the math during my description of this test run, so exact numbers and rolls are often not mentioned.

TEST PARTY

- Mr. Boulder (Init 22)
- Mr. Dwarf (Mv 5, init 23, begins at square 9)
- Ms. Illusionist (Mv 6, init 21, begins at square 8)
- Ms. Thief (Mv 6, init 18, begins at square 10, carrying a lantern)
- Mr. Knight (Mv 5, init 16, begins at square 5)
- Mr. Magic-User (Mv 6, init 12, begins at square 6, carrying a lantern)

ROUND 1: TRIGGERATION

1. Mr. Dwarf freezes at the sound of the boulder. The DM grants him a free Insight check to determine that a boulder is coming and Mr. Dwarf fails the check. He delays his turn.
2. Mr. Boulder drops into square 1 and the DM provides a daunting description of the juggernaut boulder. Players poop themselves.
3. Mr. Dwarf turns and double runs 14 squares, ending in square 23. (dimly lit from Ms. Thief's lantern)
4. Ms. Illusionist double runs 16 squares, ending in square 24. (dimly lit from Ms. Thief's lantern)
5. Ms. Thief double runs 16 squares, ending in square 26. Since she is carrying a lantern, the iron beam in square 27 is brightly lit, and her passive perception is more than enough to spot it. She calls out to the rest of the party, notifying them about the iron beam.
6. Mr. Knight double runs 14 squares, ending in square 19.
7. Mr. Magic-User double runs 16 squares, ending in square 22.

ROUND 2: ENTER THE TRAPS

1. Mr. Boulder rolls forward into square 14, just five squares behind Mr. Knight.
2. Mr. Dwarf double runs 14 squares, running beneath the iron beam and ending in square 37.
3. Ms. Illusionist double runs 16 squares, ducking beneath the iron beam and running into the tripwire in square 39. The nearest lantern is held by Ms. Thief in square 26, who is now 13 squares away from the tripwire, leaving it dimly lit. If it weren't for the penalty for the obscurement provided by the dim lighting, Ms. Illusionist would have seen the tripwire. The tripwire's attack hits Ms. Illusionist's poor reflex score and Ms. Illusionist lands on her head in square 39.
4. Ms. Thief double runs 16 squares, ducking beneath the iron beam and hopping over the tripwire (and Ms. Illusionist) with an easy acrobatics check, ending in square 42.
5. Mr. Knight double runs 14 squares, ducking beneath the iron beam and ending in square 33.
6. Mr. Magic-User double runs 16 squares, ending in square 38.

ROUND 3: THE DESPERATE RUN

1. Mr. Boulder rolls forward into square 29, just four squares behind Mr. Knight.
2. Mr. Dwarf double runs 14 squares. He can see the grease patch, which is visible from Ms. Thief's lantern light. He grunts and leaps, flying over the grease and landing in square 51.
3. Ms. Illusionist takes a single move action standing up and then runs to square 47, adjacent to the grease patch.
4. Ms. Thief double runs and leaps over the grease, running into the right-hand square containing the spring-loaded iron rod trap. She'd normally have a good chance to spot this trap, but she didn't take a minor action to actually make a roll, and her passive perception by itself isn't enough to spot it. She steps on the pressure plate and the trap's roll is high enough. An iron rod swings outward from the wall like a baseball bat and catches her square in the face. She goes down in square 55, right-hand side.
5. Mr. Knight double runs 14 squares, making his acrobatics roll to jump the tripwire and ending in square 47 alongside Ms. Illusionist.
6. Mr. Magic-User double runs 16 squares, leaping over the tripwire and then trying to jump the grease patch. He rolls poorly and lands in the middle grease square. With his 4-point penalty, the grease's attack roll easily succeeds, and Mr. Magic user falls prone and slides to square 50, just behind Mr. Dwarf.

ROUND 4: THE FIRST ESCAPE

1. Mr. Boulder rolls forward into square 45, only two squares behind Ms. Illusionist and Mr. Knight.
2. Mr. Dwarf double runs past the prone Ms. Thief. The caltrops at 63 are clearly lit in the light from Ms. Thief's lantern, and Mr. Dwarf's passive perception is high enough to spot them. He easily leaps over the caltrops and ends his movement in square 65.
3. Ms. Illusionist sees how poorly Mr. Magic-User fared at leaping the grease, but given the fact that the boulder is only two squares behind, she has little choice. She continues her run, rolling very well on her Athletics check, and leaping over the grease patch and the prone Mr. Magic-User. She runs past Ms. Thief, staying in the right-hand column. She has enough movement to end her move in square 63, but since the caltrops are in that square, she ends her movement in square 62.
4. Ms. Thief stands up in square 55, rubbing the giant welt left by the iron rod. She double runs forward, making the athletics check to jump the caltrops, and dashes out the side passage to safety, taking her lantern with her.
5. Mr. Knight runs as hard as he can, easily leaping the grease patch and staying to the right, ducking beneath the iron rod. He ends his movement in square 61, just behind Ms. Illusionist.
6. Mr. Magic-User stands up in square 50 and runs forward to square 58, ducking the iron rod, knowing that his fall might result in him being squashed.

ROUND 5: THE SQUISHENING

1. Mr. Boulder rolls forward into square 62, rolling over Mr. Magic-User, Mr. Knight, and Ms. Illusionist. The boulder's attack hits all three and bloodies Mr. Magic-User. If Ms. Illusionist had taken her chances with the caltrops, she would have stood a good chance to be not squashed.
2. Mr. Dwarf manages to escape through the exit, joining Ms. Thief.

So in this example, two of the five party members escaped the boulder. Ms. Thief escaped despite being hit in the face by an iron rod and knocked prone, and Mr. Dwarf escaped despite his slow movement rate. It's no coincidence that they were the two first people in line. Still, Ms. Illusionist could easily have escaped if she hadn't tripped on the tripwire and then stopped short of the caltrops, and Mr. Magic-User could have escaped if not for his mishap with the grease. The only real lost cause here was Mr. Knight. Between his poor starting position and low movement rate, he never stood much of a chance. Still, if he had rolled a high enough initiative, he could have gotten away. Luckily, those with lower movement rates are generally those with an armor class high enough to withstand the boulder's damage.