DARNITT'S STRAW TOWER

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There's a story—a story so old it's hard to know whether it's true or a fable—about three brothers who each built very different houses to keep enemies out. It boils down to a moral lesson about building with bricks, I suppose, but I've long had a soft spot for the brother who made his house from straw. It may not have looked like much, and that brother may have come to an exceptionally untimely end, but there's a pure and humble belief in thinking you can build a house from straw and find your refuge there.

I'm Abel Halthus Darnitt, once a sorcerer for hire, but I long ago made enough to retire comfortably. And retire safely, too, I might add, as I've invested in the best magical defenses for my tower. I've got a tower made of straw, just like the brother in the story. But I don't intend to expire on the claws or teeth of a monster, so I put a lot of energy into designing my defenses. I'm here to share these defenses with you, to use them in whatever edifice you design.

The Tower

The first thing to keep in mind is your home's appearance and construction. My tower is almost 100 feet high, with living quarters throughout and a single entry at the bottom. But I don't want to get too far ahead of myself. First, I want to talk about the tower. It looks like it's made of straw—a faded yellow, with prickly bits sticking out of it. It looks badly frayed and feels coarse. The tower even leans a little bit to the side, as though it's not held up very well.

This is all a ruse. It's not actually straw, but the hide of a saffron-colored, porcupine-like monstrosity that I found in a particularly distant plane. The creature was enormous and extremely aggressive; I simply couldn't get through its hide of straw-like quills with my magic. I'd just about given up hope, but once the creature swallowed me, I realized its interior was significantly less durable than its exterior. A few destructive spells later, I was free and the monster was dead. Looking at its hide is what put me in mind of the story about the house made of straw. At great personal difficulty, I hauled the creature's carcass to the site of my future tower.

Did you think I'd make my tower out of actual straw? I know what happened to that brother, just like anyone else! Yet there's a significant tactical advantage to inhabiting a frail-looking building. Enemies make assumptions about how easy it is to breach the my home, and this is to their detriment. The hide wrapping my tower is as durable as a *wall of force*. You might not be able to find the same sort of creature for your tower (for all I know, it is unique), but your drab-seeming exterior can harbor intruder-repellent magic.

Hazard: Subtle concentrations of magic cause some straws to launch with vigorous violence at anyone with the audacity to assault what appears to be an ordinary straw façade. Here are four examples, based on the level of threat you anticipate. You might cover every single 5-foot-square section of your tower with countermeasures like this, but if you find it cost prohibitive, you might instead simply ring the ground level with the traps instead. That's usually enough to let potential intruders know that your straw tower isn't to be trifled with!

Straw Needles Trap   Hazard 2

Evocation, Force, Magical, Trap

Stealth DC 20 (trained)

Description A section of the wall bears an invisible rune beneath the shaggy, durable material that resembles straw. When this straw-like material is attacked, it shoots a few pieces of the straw at the attacker.

Disable Thievery DC 20 (trained) to obliterate the triggering rune without activating the trap, or *dispel magic* (2nd level; counteract DC 18) to counteract the rune

Shooting Straw ↻ (arcane, evocation, force) **Trigger** A creature within 60 feet of the rune makes an attack against the *wall of force*; **Effect** The trap makes a straw Strike against the triggering creature.

Ranged ❖ straw +14; **Damage** 4d4+4 piercing damage plus 1d10 persistent force

Reset The trap resets immediately.

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Straw Darts Trap — Hazard 6

Evocation, Force, Magical, Trap

Stealth DC 27 (expert)

Description A section of the wall bears an invisible rune beneath the shaggy, durable material that resembles straw. When this straw-like material is attacked, it shoots a few pieces of the straw at the attacker.

Disable Thievery DC 27 (expert) to obliterate the triggering rune without activating the trap, or *dispel magic* (3rd level; counteract DC 25) to counteract the rune

Shooting Straw ↻ (arcane, evocation, force) **Trigger** A creature within 60 feet of the rune makes an attack against the *wall of force*; **Effect** The trap makes a straw Strike against the triggering creature.

Ranged ❖ straw +20; **Damage** 8d4+6 piercing damage plus 2d10 persistent force

Reset The trap resets immediately.

Straw Arrows Trap — Hazard 10

Evocation, Force, Magical, Trap

Stealth DC 34 (master)

Description A section of the wall bears an invisible rune beneath the shaggy, durable material that resembles straw. When this straw-like material is attacked, it shoots a few large pieces of the straw at the attacker.

Disable Thievery DC 34 (master) to obliterate the triggering rune without activating the trap, or *dispel magic* (5th level; counteract DC 32) to counteract the rune

Shooting Straw ↻ (arcane, evocation, force) **Trigger** A creature within 60 feet of the rune makes an attack against the *wall of force*; **Effect** The trap makes a straw Strike against the triggering creature.

Ranged ❖ straw +26; **Damage** 10d6+6 piercing damage plus 2d10 persistent force

Reset The trap resets immediately.

Straw Spears Trap — Hazard 14

Evocation, Force, Magical, Trap

Stealth DC 40 (master)

Description A section of the wall bears an invisible rune beneath the shaggy, durable material that resembles straw. When this straw-like material is attacked, it shoots several large pieces of the straw at the attacker.

Disable Thievery DC 40 (master) to obliterate the triggering rune without activating the trap, or *dispel magic* (7th level; counteract DC 38) to counteract the rune

Shooting Straw ↻ (arcane, evocation, force) **Trigger** A creature within 60 feet of the rune makes an attack against the *wall of force*; **Effect** The trap makes a straw Strike against the triggering creature.

Ranged ❖ straw +32; **Damage** 10d8+8 piercing damage plus 3d10 persistent force

Reset The trap resets immediately.

The Stoop

I have only one entrance into my tower. Just one. You might fancy a high balcony to complement your personal rooms at the top for some air, but this is dangerous folly! A high doorway—or even a window—simply encourages a flying wizard or griffon-mounted fool to bother you while you're relaxing. My tower's only entrance is at ground level, with a door made of stout wood banded in iron. It's locked, of course, with whatever mechanical lock you can arrange; not every defense needs to be magical. If you can invest in a simple illusory aura to make the non-magical lock appear magical, you might be tempted, but self-congratulatory looters are always dispelling it, so I don't bother any longer. The goal is to get an intruder to stop on my stoop, if only for a moment.

Hazard: The stone stoop in front of my door contains a pit perfectly positioned so that anyone fiddling with my lock falls into it. You might scoff at the basic pit trap for being too commonplace for a sorcerer of my caliber, and you'd be correct. I supplement the common pit trap with hives of aggressive bees to bedevil the trespassers, stinging them to death while distracting them so much they can't climb out. You can build hives into the walls of your pit to ensure a vigorous swarming, or you can prepare an enchantment to magically summon tenacious bees of an extraplanar origin.

Pit Trap with Bees — Hazard 1

Mechanical, Trap

Stealth DC 20, or DC 0 if the trap door is disabled or broken

Description The stone stoop covers a pit that's 10 feet square, 20 feet deep, and full of swarming bees.

Disable Thievery DC 15 to remove the trapdoor

AC 14; **Fort** +10, **Ref** +4

Trapdoor Hardness 6; **Trapdoor HP** 24 (BT 12); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Pitfall ⤺ **Trigger** A creature walks onto the trapdoor; **Effect** The triggering creature falls in and takes falling damage (typically 10 bludgeoning damage). That creature can use the Grab an Edge reaction (DC 17) to avoid falling. The Athletics DC to Climb out of the pit is 17. A creature that starts its turn in the pit takes 1d4 persistent piercing damage from bee stings and is clumsy 1 for as long as it is taking piercing damage. The bees remain until dispersed by a moderate wind or until they're dealt at least 6 area damage or splash damage.

Reset Creatures can still fall into the trap, but the trapdoor must be reset manually for the trap to become hidden again and new bees must be provided if they've been dispersed.

PIT TRAP WITH YELLOWJACKETS HAZARD 5

Mechanical, Trap

Stealth DC 26 (expert), or DC 0 if the trap door is disabled or broken

Description The stone stoop covers a pit that's 10 feet square, 40 feet deep, and full of swarming yellowjackets.

Disable Thievery DC 21 (trained) to remove the trapdoor

AC 20; **Fort** +15, **Ref** +9

Trapdoor Hardness 12; **Trapdoor HP** 52 (BT 26); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Pitfall ⤺ **Trigger** A creature walks onto the trapdoor; **Effect** The triggering creature falls in and takes falling damage (typically 20 bludgeoning damage). That creature can use the Grab an Edge reaction (DC 23) to avoid falling. The Athletics DC to Climb out of the pit is 23. A creature that starts its turn in the pit takes 5d4 persistent piercing damage from yellowjacket stings and is enfeebled 1 for as long as it is taking piercing damage. The yellowjackets remain until dispersed by a moderate wind or until they're dealt at least 12 area damage or splash damage.

Reset Creatures can still fall into the trap, but the trapdoor must be reset manually for the trap to become hidden again and new yellowjackets must be provided if they've been dispersed.

PIT TRAP WITH MURDER HORNETS HAZARD 9

Mechanical, Trap

Stealth DC 33 (master), or DC 0 if the trap door is disabled or broken

Description The stone stoop covers a pit that's 10 feet square, 60 feet deep, and full of swarming murder hornets.

Disable Thievery DC 27 (expert) to remove the trapdoor

AC 26; **Fort** +21, **Ref** +15

Trapdoor Hardness 16; **Trapdoor HP** 68 (BT 34); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Pitfall ⤺ **Trigger** A creature walks onto the trapdoor; **Effect** The triggering creature falls in and takes falling damage (typically 30 bludgeoning damage). That creature can use the Grab an Edge reaction (DC 30) to avoid falling. The Athletics DC to Climb out of the pit is 30. A creature that starts its turn in the pit takes 8d4 persistent piercing damage from murder hornet stings and is clumsy 2 and enfeebled 2 for as long as it is taking piercing damage. The murder hornets remain until dispersed by a moderate wind or until they're dealt at least 16 area damage or splash damage.

Reset Creatures can still fall into the trap, but the trapdoor must be reset manually for the trap to become hidden again and new murder hornets must be provided—often at great difficulty—if they've been dispersed.

PIT TRAP WITH HELLWASPS HAZARD 13

Mechanical, Trap

Stealth DC 40 (master), or DC 0 if the trap door is disabled or broken

Description The stone stoop covers a pit that's 10 feet square, 80 feet deep, and full of swarming hellwasps.

Disable Thievery DC 33 (expert) to remove the trapdoor

AC 32; **Fort** +26, **Ref** +20

Trapdoor Hardness 22; **Trapdoor HP** 88 (BT 44); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Pitfall ⤺ **Trigger** A creature walks onto the trapdoor; **Effect** The triggering creature falls in and takes falling damage (typically 40 bludgeoning damage). That creature can use the Grab an Edge reaction (DC 37) to avoid falling. The Athletics DC to Climb out of the

pit is 37. A creature that starts its turn in the pit takes 10d4 persistent piercing damage from hellwasp stings and is enfeebled 2 and slowed 1 for as long as it is taking piercing damage. The hellwasps remain until dispersed by a moderate wind or until they're dealt at least 22 area damage or splash damage (although hellwasps are immune to fire and poison damage).

Reset Creatures can still fall into the trap, but the trapdoor must be reset manually for the trap to become hidden again and new hellwasps must be provided if they've been dispersed.

The Foyer

Anyone breaching my front door finds a simple coatrack, a battered umbrella stand, and an entirely extraordinary sideboard. Some might expect a heavy piece of furniture like this to be a monster in disguise, and they'd be correct! An ordinary mimic might suffice, but a mimic's presence presumes you'll have intruders regularly enough to keep it fed—I don't prefer to think in such pessimistic terms.

I instead enchanted a wood-and-metal construct six feet wide and ten feet tall to batter trespassers into paste. When at rest, the construct folds up and becomes a perfectly pedestrian sideboard. Apart from masquerading as an innocuous-looking piece of furniture, it's perfect for holding a welcome-home snack of cheeses and crudites.

Of course, any intruder with experience at housebreaking will be suspicious of all furnishings in the foyer. As a bit of misdirection, I prefer to always keep a thick, black cloak with two patches like slitted eyes hanging from my coatrack. That's sufficiently ominous to deflect attention—even momentarily—from the sideboard.

Creature: The sideboard unfolds to its full height and attacks intruders in the foyer, fighting until destroyed.

Animated Sideboard   Creature 3

N, Large, Construct, Mindless

Perception +9; darkvision

Skills Athletics +11, Stealth +10

Str +4, **Dex** +1, **Con** +4, **Int** –5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –5

AC 19 (15 when broken), construct armor; **Fort** +11, **Ref** +8, **Will** +7

HP 40; **Hardness** 5; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, necromancy, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious

Construct Armor Like normal objects, an animated sideboard has Hardness. This Hardness reduces any damage it takes by an amount equal to the Hardness. Once an animated sideboard is reduced to less than half its Hit Points, or immediately upon being damaged by a critical hit, its construct armor breaks and its Armor Class is reduced to 15 (it retains its Hardness, however, even after its construct armor breaks).

Unfold ⟳ **Trigger** A creature moves into an adjacent square while the animated sideboard is using sideboard guise; **Effect** The animated sideboard resumes its normal form and makes a fist Strike against the triggering creature. If the triggering creature was unaware that the sideboard is a creature, the triggering creature is flat-footed against this attack.

Speed 20 feet

Melee ❖ fist +11 (forceful, magical, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 1d10+6 bludgeoning

Ranged ❖ drawer +8 (range increment 30 feet), **Damage** 1d6+6 bludgeoning

Limited Drawers The animated sideboard can only make up to three drawer attacks before it must collect and replace its drawers (replacing a drawer is a single Interact action).

Sideboard Guise ❖ Until the next time it acts, the animated sideboard appears to be an ordinary piece of furniture. It has an automatic result of 30 on Deception checks and DCs to pass as a sideboard. It can use this action again to resume its normal form.

Sturdy Animated Sideboard   Creature 7

N, Large, Construct, Mindless

Perception +15; darkvision

Skills Athletics +17, Stealth +15

Str +6, **Dex** +2, **Con** +4, **Int** –5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –5

AC 25 (21 when broken), construct armor; **Fort** +17, **Ref** +15, **Will** +11

HP 105; **Hardness** 8; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, necromancy, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious

Construct Armor As animated sideboard, except its Armor Class is reduced to 21 when broken.

Unfold ⟳ As animated sideboard.

Speed 20 feet

Melee ❖ fist +17 (forceful, magical, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 2d10+8 bludgeoning

Ranged ❖ drawer +14 (range increment 30 feet), **Damage** 2d6+8 bludgeoning

Limited Drawers As animated sideboard.

Sideboard Guise ❖ As animated sideboard, except it has an automatic result of 35 on Deception checks and DCs to pass as an ordinary sideboard.

Reinforced Animated Sideboard Creature 11

N, Large, Construct, Mindless

Perception +21; darkvision

Skills Athletics +24, Stealth +21

Str +7, **Dex** +2, **Con** +6, **Int** –5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –5

AC 31 (27 when broken), construct armor; **Fort** +23, **Ref** +21, **Will** +17

HP 180; **Hardness** 10; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, necromancy, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious

Construct Armor As animated sideboard, except its Armor Class is reduced to 27 when broken.

Unfold ⟳ As animated sideboard.

Speed 20 feet

Melee ❖ fist +26 (forceful, magical, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 3d10+11 bludgeoning

Ranged ❖ drawer +21 (range increment 30 feet), **Damage** 3d6+11 bludgeoning

Limited Drawers As animated sideboard.

Sideboard Guise ❖ As animated sideboard, except it has an automatic result of 41 on Deception checks and DCs to pass as an ordinary sideboard.

Superlative Animated Sideboard Creature 15

N, Large, Construct, Mindless

Perception +26; darkvision

Skills Athletics +31, Stealth +27

Str +8, **Dex** +4, **Con** +6, **Int** –5, **Wis** +0, **Cha** –5

AC 37 (33 when broken), construct armor; **Fort** +29, **Ref** +25, **Will** +23

HP 255; **Hardness** 15; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, mental, necromancy, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious

Construct Armor As animated sideboard, except its Armor Class is reduced to 33 when broken.

Unfold ⟳ As animated sideboard.

Speed 20 feet

Melee ❖ fist +31 (forceful, magical, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 4d10+16 bludgeoning

Ranged ❖ drawer +27 (range increment 30 feet), **Damage** 4d6+16 bludgeoning

Limited Drawers As animated sideboard.

Sideboard Guise ❖ As animated sideboard, except it has an automatic result of 47 on Deception checks and DCs to pass as an ordinary sideboard.

Living Quarters

It doesn't make an awful lot of sense to have a lot of traps, monsters, or other defenses in my living quarters—after all, I spend all my time there, now that I'm retired. That's not to say I don't have some unpleasant surprises for intruders, but it doesn't behoove me to go into a lot of detail about those here. Keep your straw tower exterior secure, with a dedicated guardian just inside, and relish your safety!

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Scott Greene, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax.

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