



UNEARTHED ARCANA

# Strongholds

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The DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® *Fantasy Roleplaying Game* provides numerous ways to part heroes from their hard-earned coin. The components that power rituals can drain the heroes' coffers, as can purchasing a magic item that sparkles on an artificer's shelf. Adventurers might invest in galleons, mounts, wagons, and, at higher levels, planar vehicles such as *spelljammers* and *planar dromonds*. One investment absent from the game is the stronghold, a retreat where adventurers can withdraw between expeditions, recover from their injuries, and conduct research before embarking on their next quest.

Most of the treasure and other rewards gathered over the course of adventures have obvious, tangible benefits. The benefit of a stronghold tends to be intangible. Adventurers can't bring a stronghold along during an adventurer or attack an enemy with it. It doesn't affect success or failure in most quests. A fighter doesn't become more lethal by owning a castle.

Instead, a stronghold is a story device. It is used or ignored as the plot demands.

With this fact in mind, an exhaustive treatment of building and maintaining strongholds is largely wasted effort for most players. (Some enjoy that sort of minutia, of course; this article is for everyone else.) When adventurers leave behind the heroic tier, they travel farther away and farther from their roots to deal with bigger and nastier threats. There are fewer opportunities to return to the stronghold when heroes are walking Sigil's streets or exploring dominions in the Astral Sea, but nothing says they can't build or take control of another stronghold in those more far-flung realms.

Strongholds have a rich tradition in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game and are ripe with story opportunities. This article presents a simplified system for building and maintaining strongholds in your campaigns. The options offered here should help you construct a base quickly and easily and give you a benefit commensurate with your investment.

## STRONGHOLD BASICS

A stronghold is a base of operations, a headquarters, and a safe retreat for your adventurers. It is the place where heroes go between expeditions and therefore isn't likely to figure prominently in any particular adventure (though it can if the DM creates the right conditions). Furthermore, paragon and epic tier characters spend more time far afield and might find themselves advancing several levels before getting a chance to kick up their feet in front of the hearth at home.

For these reasons, this article lets players or the Dungeon Master build a stronghold using a system that abstracts many of the details while leaving plenty of room for imagination in defining the stronghold's appearance, location, and composition.

**One Price for All:** A basic stronghold costs 25,000 gp. Thus, a stronghold is equivalent to a level 15 magic item. It is more expensive than a greatship and about the same price as purchasing a nightmare to serve as your steed.

If you purchase a second stronghold, you might use it as a second base of operations or as an expansion of the first stronghold. You can also improve your stronghold by purchasing new stronghold components as described below.

### FOR THE DM: BE FAIR!

This one's for Dungeon Masters: If building a stronghold is important to a player, don't take it away without a good reason. Sinking 25,000 gp into a structure is a considerable investment when you consider that the same player could be riding in style on a nightmare or wearing a slick new suit of +3 *holy radiance chainmail*.

Such items can be lost over the course of a campaign. The party's greatship might end up at the bottom of Woolly Bay after tangling with an angry water elemental, and an angel with a grudge might skewer the nightmare, sending Smoky to an early grave. In the same vein, putting the adventurers' stronghold in jeopardy can be a good plot hook and create interesting tension. The trick is not to do it often. And if the outcome results in taking the stronghold away, be a mensch and give the party something of equal value to replace it a bit later on.

**One Size Fits All:** A stronghold is a castle, but it can also be a cathedral, a monastery, an academy, a wizard's tower, an estate, a cave complex, an island, or anything else you can imagine and justify to the DM.

A stronghold is not a country. It's not a city, a room above an inn, a pocket dimension, or a closet in Grandma Adventure's country house. It's generally not mobile; that would be a ship, a flying citadel, or a colossus machine. (But those are great ideas. DMs should always give due consideration to player requests and remain flexible. If you want both a ship and a stronghold, then you might purchase both separately—a ship and an island fortress, for example—or you could ask the DM to let you combine the costs



and buy a greatship that doubles as a stronghold. It's all about options.) A stronghold is large enough to accommodate an entire adventuring party plus the support staff (if any is needed) to maintain the facility.

A basic stronghold comprises 300 squares of floor space (7,500 square feet). You are encouraged to draw the floor plan of your stronghold. It's a fun and creative way to spend some time, and it might prove useful—if a floor plan exists, the DM probably will find a use for it. Use the squares to construct rooms, passages, and whatever other interior spaces you want. You can build a one-story stronghold, stack floors on top of each other to create multistory buildings or towers, or excavate dungeon levels. It's entirely up to you, as long as you stick to your 300-square limit.

**A Secure Site:** Every stronghold is basically safe and secure. Outside of extraordinary circumstances, you shouldn't need to worry about being robbed or invaded while tucked in bed at night, or about coming home to find that your castle has been looted, occupied, or whisked away in your absence.

Don't be cavalier about security, though. Make the wrong enemies, and the DM might send the villain and his cronies to call on you the next time you're recuperating between adventures.

## GAINING A STRONGHOLD

Your character can gain a stronghold in three ways: you can buy it, take it, or build it.

### Purchase

The easiest way to gain a stronghold is to buy it. The difficulty is that the good ones are already owned by someone else, and that person might not be in the market to sell. Tracking down a seller could require a skill challenge involving interaction (Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate) and information-gathering skills (Streetwise). You need to find a redoubt with a suitable location and architecture. Certain rituals might relocate the stronghold or transform it into something more pleasing to the eye, but resorting to rituals adds to the total investment.

**For the DM:** Characters can purchase a stronghold only if you provide them with a suitable property. If they make the investment, work with the players to devise a stronghold that best fits the game.

### Conquest

You can also pick up a stronghold as a reward. You might claim a wizard's tower after expelling its previous occupants, or set up shop in a crumbling castle once you dispatch the vampire hiding in the cellar. Taking a stronghold by force has some of the same limitations as purchasing one outright (location and architecture) with the added complication of the previous occupant's tastes and nature. One can never completely eliminate the smell from a necromancer's tower, for example. On the other hand, if you find the perfect structure but its evil

occupant turns down your reasonable offer to buy, then kicking him out can get you the stronghold you want and improve the neighborhood at the same time.

**For the DM:** If players seize a stronghold by main force, then count the stronghold as 25,000 gp worth of treasure for the adventure. The stronghold might already be mapped, especially if the characters explored it as a dungeon in the process of capturing it. You are likely to find these structures are a bit larger than a stronghold normally allows. This is OK within reason, because the characters have paid for the overage with blood. If the stronghold is significantly too large, then just deduct more treasure from the reward.

### Construction

If buying or seizing a stronghold doesn't fit with your plans, you can build one from scratch. Doing so doesn't cost any more than buying one. It does take time, though. Considering that a community might spend decades building a cathedral or a castle, don't expect to move in right away. Even in a perfect scenario, you need to rely on the availability of local materials and labor. This situation gets worse if you make an artful decision and place the stronghold in a ridiculous spot, such as clinging to the side of a mountain or on a remote and barren island. Depending on what you want, it could take 1d10 + 5 months to build an impressive wooden structure such as the longhouse illustrated in this article, to 1d10 + 5 years to build a stone castle or cathedral from scratch. Extra time can be tacked on for extremely difficult projects.

## CONSTRUCTION RITUALS

The following rituals can reduce the time it takes to construct a stronghold by a number of years (or months) equal to the higher of your Intelligence or Wisdom modifier. Multiple uses of the same ritual do not reduce the time any further, though different rituals will. Suitable rituals include *Commune with Nature* (*Player's Handbook*®), *Ironwood* (*Player's Handbook 2*), *Trailblaze* (*FORGOTTEN REALMS*® *Player's Guide*), and *Earthen Ramparts*, *Excavation*, and *Tenser's Lift* (all *Dragon* 366).

Luckily, rituals can shave years from your building project. When using a ritual to speed or complete construction, deduct the ritual's component price from the stronghold's price. See the "Construction Rituals" sidebar for discounts on time.

Better still, you might create a stronghold using a powerful ritual such as Bigby's Construction Crew.

### New Ritual:

#### Bigby's Construction Crew

**Level:** 15      **Component Cost:** 5,000 gp  
**Category:** Creation      **Market Price:** 20,000 gp  
**Time:** 24 hours      **Key Skill:** Arcana (no check)  
**Duration:** Permanent

A veritable army of magical hands appears in the air around you, each armed with tools appropriate to the task to which you set them, from carpentry to masonry. When you perform the ritual, you describe the desired construction in great detail. The hands

start working as soon as they appear, assembling the structure from available material. They will quarry stone and cut it to shape, fell trees and saw them into lumber, gather reeds for thatch, and so on, but their range is limited to only a mile or so; they can't erect a stone cathedral in a sandy desert. They can also repair a ruined structure or use the material of a ruined structure to build something new. The hands cannot make attacks or deal damage, and they are impervious to damage.

You can use this ritual to build a stronghold whose constructed space does not exceed 300 squares. That space can be divided and arranged any way you please but must be contiguous.

With the DM's permission, you can use this ritual for other construction purposes such as building a bridge, carving stairs up the side of a mountain, and similar tasks.

## CREATING THE STRONGHOLD

Few adventuring groups have more than one stronghold at a time; thus, the process for creating the stronghold is best when it's a collaborative one. Work with your fellow players and the Dungeon Master to decide the stronghold's features.

### Look and Feel

You decide the stronghold's look and feel. It can be a medieval castle, a mystical lodge formed from living trees, an enormous wizard's tower, or a mighty cathedral built to honor your god. The cosmetic elements do not alter the stronghold's base price.

## Location

When creating a stronghold, first consider where you intend to place it. For acquired strongholds, you don't have a lot of choice; the stronghold is where you find it. If you're building a stronghold, you can construct it wherever you like. Remote locations make it harder to construct a stronghold if you're relying on local labor. A really remote location such as a mountaintop or deep wilderness doubles the price to 50,000 gp. A fantastical location such as underwater, on another plane, or floating in the clouds can be achieved only by ritual and costs 125,000 gp. Don't feel limited by these guidelines. Work with your DM to create something you're both happy with.

## Construction Squares

You have 300 construction squares with which to build your stronghold. Use these squares to create rooms and corridors. You need concern yourself with floor space only; room heights don't count toward the total unless they become unreasonable. What's reasonable is up to the DM to determine. In the worlds of *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* fantasy, 25-foot ceilings are relatively common.

**Rooms:** A "room" might be a bedroom or a dining hall, but it can also be a barbican (made by creating two towers), a courtyard, or a dock. A room can be any size you like. You could, for example, create one large room 15 squares wide by 20 squares long or, for the same amount of floor space, you could have four 5-by-5 rooms and two 8-by-10 rooms linked by 100 feet of 10-foot-wide corridor.

**Corridors:** Corridors connect the rooms you create. Be sure to reserve construction squares to create these passages. A corridor must be at least 1 square wide.

**Walls:** Walls frame every room you create. An interior wall is wooden, is 6 inches thick, and includes as many wooden doors as you wish. An exterior wall usually is masonry (unless that is not a realistic option for the location or isn't what you want), 1 foot thick, and can have as many wooden doors and windows as you like.

**Ceilings and Floors:** Floors and ceilings throughout are made from the same materials as the walls. Ceilings are 10 feet high unless specified otherwise. You can create levels above the ground floor by allocating construction squares for higher floors. If your

## MAPPING THE STRONGHOLD

Whether you create a floor plan for your stronghold is up to you. Since you're not likely to undertake adventures here, you can roughly sketch out the rooms and their relative locations, connecting them with hallways and stairs as needed. Or, if you have a hankering to create a detailed map, go for it. The more detail you supply, the more alive the stronghold becomes.

Every stronghold needs a few minimum elements. You should have at least one bedroom plus a number of guest rooms. You can also have a common room or barracks. There should also be a kitchen and a workshop or armory. You can add as many extra rooms as you like, within the limits of your construction squares.

stronghold has multiple levels, they're connected by a stone or wooden staircase.

## Stocking the Rooms

You decide the purpose of any room you create. You can stock that room with basic furniture and decorations appropriate for the room's function; such furnishings are included in the stronghold's cost. A bedroom has a bed, dresser, table, and so on, and a dining hall has a table and chairs. You can go into as much or as little detail as you like.

## Special Rooms

You can designate rooms to serve special functions. You might make a dungeon, a throne room, or a magical laboratory. Such rooms require a minimum size and also incur greater expense. In exchange, you gain an additional benefit for having that room. Some common special rooms are described below.

Unless otherwise specified, each of these must be their own room in the stronghold; special functions aren't combined under normal circumstances.

### Auditorium Level 2 Common

*Acoustics in this room are ideal for addressing a large audience.*

**Stronghold Component** 520 gp

**Requirement:** This room must contain 24 or more squares.

**Property:** You gain a +1 item bonus to Bluff and Diplomacy checks made in this room.

### Armory Level 7 Common

*This room holds an assortment of weapons and armor.*

**Stronghold Component** 2,600 gp

**Requirement:** This room must contain 24 or more squares.

**Property:** This room holds up to fifty mundane weapons and suits of armor, of which you can't have more than five of one type. You can substitute one weapon for thirty arrows, twenty bolts, or six shuriken.

### Chapel Level 5+ Common

*Holy ground helps focus your thoughts toward religious matters.*

Lvl 5 1,000 gp

Lvl 25 625,000 gp

Lvl 15 25,000 gp

**Stronghold Component**

**Requirement:** This room must contain 9 or more squares.

**Property:** You gain a +1 item bonus to Religion checks made in this room.

Level 15: +2 item bonus.

Level 25: +3 item bonus.

### Magical Laboratory Level 5+ Common

*A laboratory equipped with all the equipment you need to conduct magical research.*

Lvl 5 1,000 gp

Lvl 25 625,000 gp

Lvl 15 25,000 gp

**Stronghold Component**

**Requirement:** This room must contain 4 or more squares.

**Property:** You gain a +1 item bonus to Arcana checks made in this room.

Level 15: +2 item bonus.

Level 25: +3 item bonus.

### Library Level 8+ Common

*Books and scrolls stacked on shelves and tables are instrumental for your research.*

Lvl 8 3,400 gp

Lvl 28 2,125,000 gp

Lvl 18 85,000 gp

**Stronghold Component**

**Requirement:** This room must contain 16 or more squares.

**Property:** Choose one of the following skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering, History, Nature, or Religion. You gain a +1 item bonus to knowledge checks and monster knowledge checks related to that skill when the check is made in this room.

Level 18: +2 item bonus.

Level 28: +3 item bonus.

**Special:** You can purchase this component several times for the same room. Choose a different skill each time the component is purchased.



## Prison Level 4+ Common

Manacles and heavy iron bars ensure that your prisoners stay where you put them.

Lvl 4 840 gp Lvl 24 525,000 gp  
Lvl 14 21,000 gp

### Stronghold Component

**Requirement:** This room must contain 16 or more squares.

**Property:** Creatures placed inside this room cannot exit this room by nonmagical means until you release them or until they succeed on a DC 21 Acrobatics or Athletics check.  
Level 14: DC 29.  
Level 24: DC 37.



## Throne Room Level 6 Common

This chamber holds an impressive seat and trophies won from your successful expeditions.

**Stronghold Component** 1,800 gp

**Requirement:** This room must contain 16 or more squares.

**Property:** You gain a +1 item bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight, and Intimidate checks made in this room.

## Torture Chamber Level 3+ Common

Sinister implements and devices reveal this room's terrible purpose.

Lvl 3 680 gp Lvl 23 425,000 gp

Lvl 13 17,000 gp

### Stronghold Component

**Requirement:** This room must contain 16 or more squares.

**Property:** You gain a +1 item bonus to Intimidate checks made in this room.

Level 13: +2 item bonus.

Level 23: +3 item bonus.

## Defenses

You can add defenses to your stronghold by investing additional gold into its construction.

## Arrow Slits Level 4 Common

Narrow windows allow archers to fire from protected positions.

**Stronghold Component** 840 gp

**Property:** Windows in your structure are arrow slits. Creatures fighting from an arrow slit have at least superior cover against attacks made by enemies outside the stronghold.

## Defensive Walls Level 10 Common

You surround your stronghold with a thick, outer wall.

**Stronghold Component** 5,000 gp

**Property:** Defensive walls are stone, 10 feet high, and 10 feet thick. A creature must succeed on an Athletics check against a moderate DC of the creature's level to climb the wall. The wall can have as many gates as you like. Creatures on top of the wall have at least partial cover against attacks made by creatures on the ground.

**Special:** You can purchase this component multiple times.

Each time you purchase a defensive wall, you can add an extra wall or fortify an existing wall. When you fortify an existing wall, the wall's height and width increase by 5 feet.

## Guards Level 1+ Common

You employ a squad of guards and sentries to keep your stronghold safe while you're away.

**Stronghold Component** Special

**Property:** You employ a troop of guards to protect your stronghold. When you purchase this stronghold component, you choose the level for your guards. The price is equal to a magic item of that level. The guards make your stronghold immune to attacks from any creature of their level or lower.

## Iron Doors Level 3 Common

Replacing interior doors with iron doors provides an additional level of protection.

**Stronghold Component** 680 gp

**Property:** Doors in the stronghold are made of iron.

## Moat Level 8

A wide trench filled with water and stakes greatly impedes attackers.

**Stronghold Component** 3,400 gp

**Property:** A moat surrounds your stronghold. It is 15 feet deep and 30 feet wide. The moat includes a drawbridge.

## Superior Locks Level 3 Common

These masterwork locks foil intruders from reaching your protected rooms.

**Stronghold Component** 680 gp

**Property:** Doors in the stronghold are equipped with superior locks. To unlock a locked door without a key requires a Thievery check against a hard DC of the level of the creature picking the lock.

## WARDED STRONGHOLDS

Ritual casters can attune themselves to places where they are comfortable. When they perform rituals in these locations, their wards cover a larger area. When you use a warding ritual such as *Guards and Wards*, *Forbiddance*, or *Arcane Lock* in a stronghold owned by you or an ally, the ritual's effect applies to the entire stronghold.

## Staff

Maintaining a stronghold takes a lot of work. If you kept the stronghold in good repair yourself, you wouldn't have time for much else. When you gain a stronghold, you also gain sufficient staff to keep the place in good shape. Your staff includes necessary servants, cooks, butlers, artisans, farmers, and so on. "Necessary" is a key word; you don't automatically get more staff than you really need.

Your staff keeps the stronghold in good repair, clean, and well provisioned. The initial investment into the stronghold covers expenses for feeding, clothing, and housing your employees. Staff members are noncombatants and do not accompany you on your adventures.

## Traps

Adding traps can provide even greater protection against unwanted intruders. You can use any existing trap or work with your DM to construct one that best fits your idea. A trap has a price equal to a magic item

of the same level. For an elite trap, double the price. For a solo trap, quintuple the price.

## Magical Upgrades

Wondrous lair items introduced in *Adventurer's Vault*™ 2 are handy upgrades for improving your stronghold's defenses and benefits. These items are inexpensive and extremely useful. A *teleportation disk* lets you teleport to any location in your stronghold, while a *watchful eye* alerts you when someone enters its line of sight. You might install a *holy shrine* in your temple to increase your prayer flexibility or bring in a *diplomat's table* to gain an edge in every negotiation.

## TELEPORTATION CIRCLES

One of the first investments you should make in your stronghold is inscribing a permanent teleportation circle. A stronghold the adventurers find or acquire might already have a teleportation circle. If so, this is both good and bad. It's good because you won't be out 10,000 gp to perform the ritual. It's bad because someone out there probably knows the sigil sequence and can drop in for a visit whenever they like.

To inscribe a teleportation circle, you need access to the *Create Teleportation Circle* ritual (*Manual of the Planes*™). You need to perform the ritual and then sustain it for a year and a day to make it permanent. If you don't have the time or means to sustain it this long, you can probably find someone to do it for you in exchange for a moderate fee or for free room and board in your secure stronghold.

## Mobile Strongholds

The biggest challenge with any stronghold is using it when you're away for long periods. Installing a permanent teleportation circle lets you come and go as you please, but you still must burn through components and then figure out a way to return to the action. The following rituals help you get the most out of your stronghold by bringing it with you.

### Call Stronghold

<b>Level:</b> 20	<b>Component Cost:</b> 5,000 gp
<b>Category:</b> Creation	<b>Market Price:</b> 25,000 gp
<b>Time:</b> 1 hour	<b>Key Skill:</b> Arcana (no check)
<b>Duration:</b> Permanent	

You warp reality to draw a specially prepared stronghold from one location to another. You must prepare a clear area of the stronghold's size or larger. If not, the ritual fails and the components are wasted. This ritual is not limited by planar boundaries, thus allowing you to transfer the stronghold from the natural world to the Feywild or another plane.

## RAISE LAND VS. FLYING FORTRESS

Flying Fortress is similar to the Raise Land ritual from *FORGOTTEN REALMS® Player's Guide*. Admittedly, they achieve similar effects. Raise Land is awesome for folks wanting to tear two-square-mile chunks of land and send them upward like balloons at a festival, but until you hit 30th level, it leaves your stronghold as landlocked as a row-boat in a desert. Flying Fortress is an abbreviated and mobile version of the higher-level ritual to let you have fun with your awesome investment for a few levels before you make your exit.

### Flying Fortress

**Level:** 23      **Component Cost:** 13,000 gp  
**Category:** Travel      **Market Price:** 65,000 gp  
**Time:** 1 hour      **Key Skill:** Arcana (no check)  
**Duration:** Permanent

Your stronghold and a quantity of earth beneath it rise 100 feet into the air and remain there. The fortress gains a fly speed of 6 (hover). When you are in the stronghold, you can spend a move action to let the fortress fly up to its speed in any direction you choose. If the flying fortress impacts any object, it comes to a stop.

## Final Considerations

Strongholds are an interesting option for characters who have gold to burn, but it's not an option with equal appeal for every player. Creating a stronghold takes time and planning, even using a simplified system such as this one. It also brings added responsibility. Having a big castle means that locals look to you for protection, whether or not you're a legitimate lord. When you gain levels, your interest in the natural world undoubtedly wanes as your gaze is drawn to new foes in distant lands and planes.

With that in mind, is building a stronghold a worthwhile enterprise?

Absolutely! Strongholds give you control over a small part of the world. They let you add something to the world and shape how it looks. A large, permanent structure creates new opportunities for adventure and roleplaying through the new challenges of protecting the site and those who live in its environs. Your characters can push back the savage darkness and expand the light of civilization in a tangible, long-lasting way. They become grounded in the campaign setting in a way unlike any other, so that your adventurer is not fighting just for a brief respite from evil but to establish a permanent haven.

Finally, when characters outgrow a stronghold and decide to move on, it's up to them to pass that mantle of leadership to a capable nonplayer character who has grown in their presence and learned from their example, and who will carry on with the noble work they set in motion.

### About the Author

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