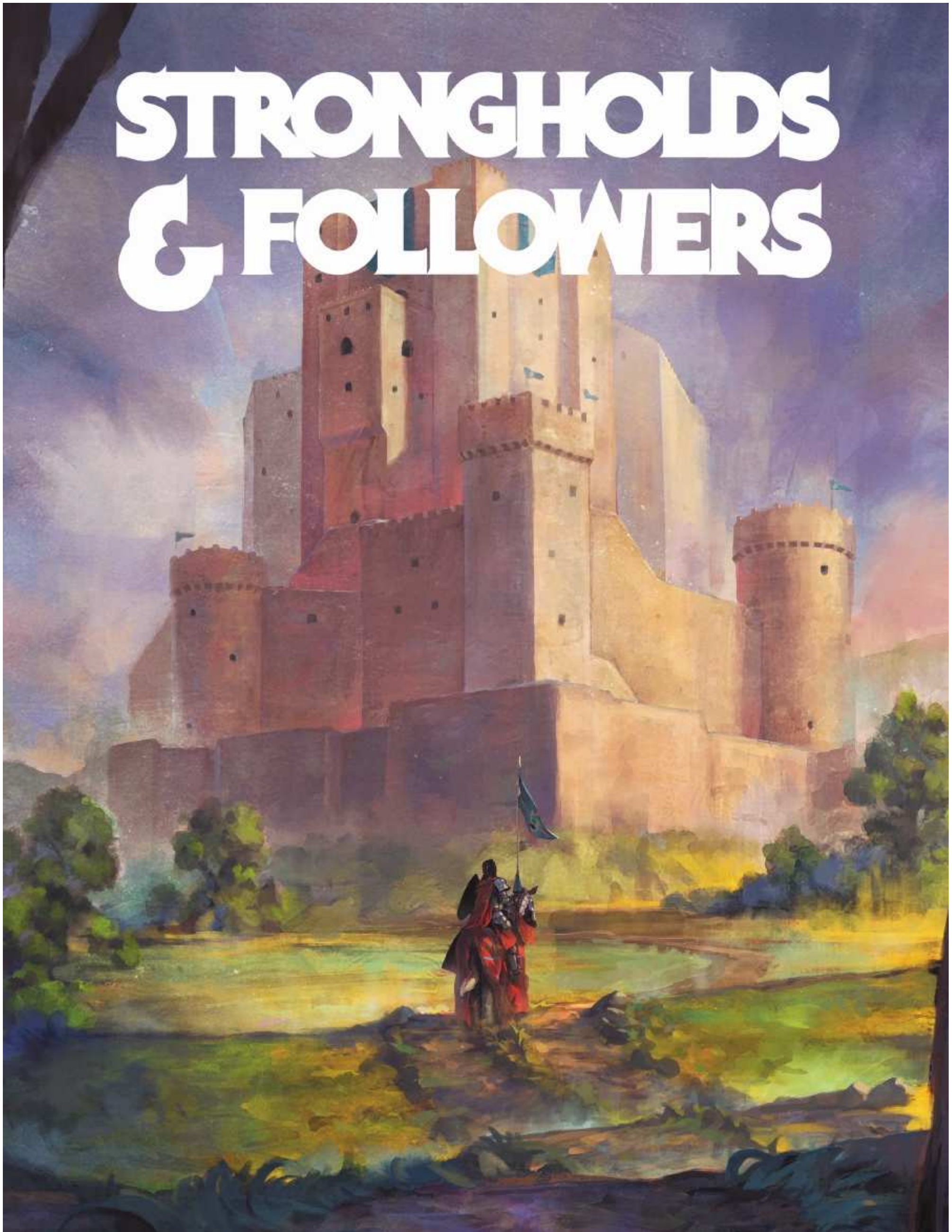


# STRONGHOLDS & FOLLOWERS





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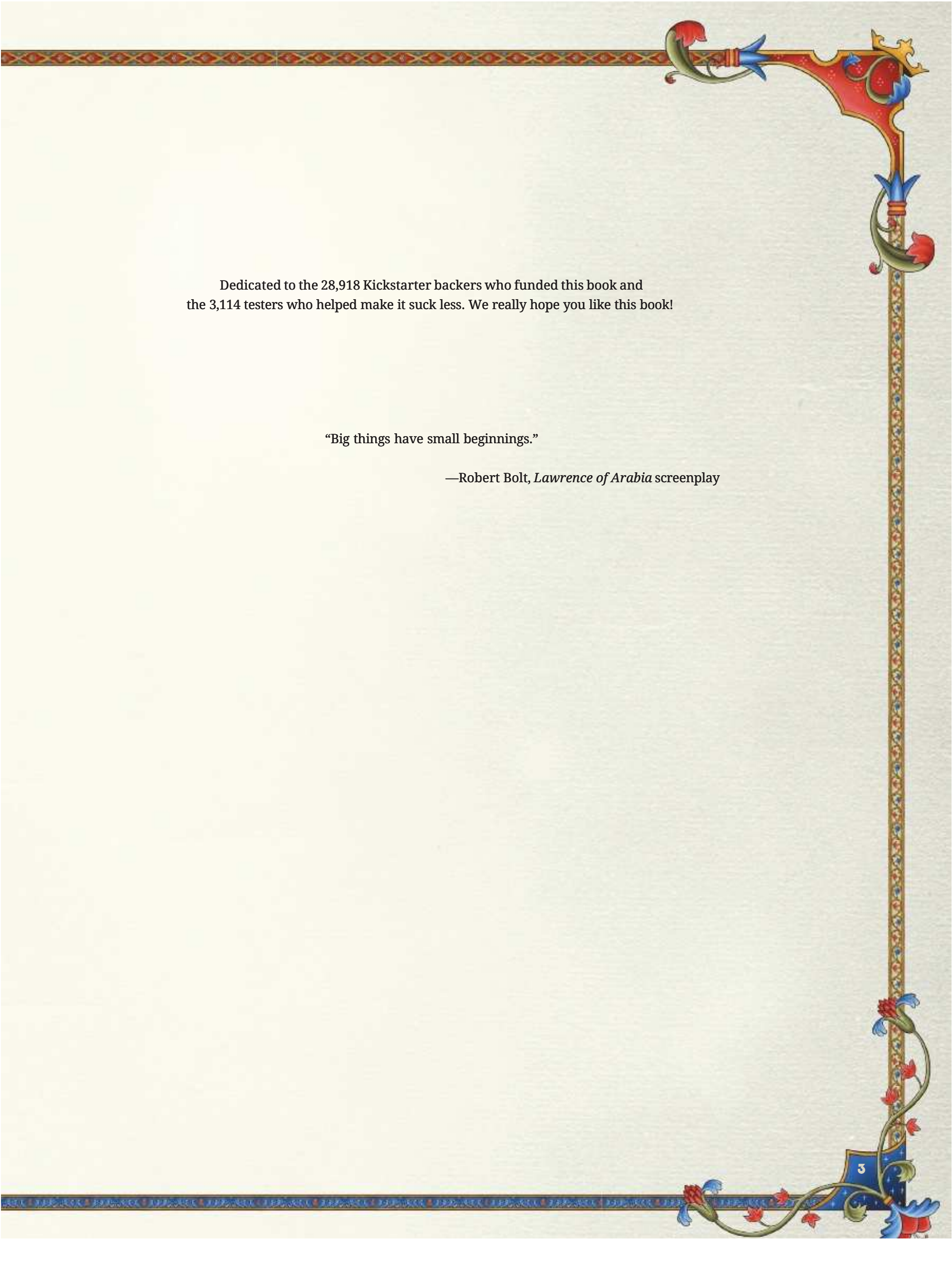
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Dedicated to the 28,918 Kickstarter backers who funded this book and  
the 3,114 testers who helped make it suck less. We really hope you like this book!

“Big things have small beginnings.”

—Robert Bolt, *Lawrence of Arabia* screenplay





## FOREWORD

In 1985 I was fifteen and a sophomore at Cypress High School, and I spent the year in my computer science class with Brad Thomas and Chris Steele talking about Elric and the Black Company and the Incarnations of Immortality. They were friends outside of school, part of a larger group, but I was still hanging out with the kids I grew up with in my apartment complex. I knew Chris and Brad played board games and roleplaying games, and I wanted in.

At the end of the school year I signed their yearbooks: “If you guys get together to play games, give me a call.” They did. About thirty seconds later, they were my best friends. It changed my life.

We spent that summer playing board games and RPGs and going to the mall, and the arcade, and hanging out at the pool. It’s a time and place that has now been immortalized and paid homage to in popular fiction. When I want to connect with my mother’s formative years, I watch *American Graffiti*, filmed one town over from where she grew up. Folks looking for that same experience for my generation’s formative years watch *Stranger Things*.

It was easy for an adult back then watching us sitting around Dave Miles’ pool table rolling strange dice, listening to Rush, and pretending to be elves to imagine we were wasting our time. And not just adults, a lot of our peers felt the same way. But I never did. I knew something worthwhile and remarkable would come out of the hobby: a lifetime of creativity and memories and shared experiences doing something amazing with my friends whom I loved. You don’t need YouTube or Kickstarter, it’s reward enough just ending up at the end of your life being able to look back on the worlds you created and shared with your friends and the heroic adventures you undertook. The hobby isn’t a means to an end, it is an end unto itself. And while the places and events and people and things we create and meet in our secondary worlds are not real, one thing is.

Dreams are not real. Nothing that happens in a dream is real. With one exception. Chris Nolan wrote a whole movie about it.

*Inception* takes place in dreams but it’s about movies. It argues that while all these people and places and events are not real, something in film is. The emotions you feel watching a movie are real. That’s what gives them meaning and value. When I watch *Casablanca* I fall in love with Ilsa every time. Generations of kids watched *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and ran outside play-swordfighting. Because the emotions you feel at the movies are real. *Inception* is using dreams to make a point about movies. And, I argue, RPGs.

Don’t let anyone tell you the hobby is a waste of time. Tell your friends you’re going to get together and play tonight. Tell them you’re going to do something real.

## SINE QUA NON

Thanks to Chris Ashton and Phil Robb for running the best game development studio in the business. The work we did together was real and vital.

Thanks to Robert Djordjevich for giving me my first break in video games, and the rest of the Pandemic Group: Austin Baker, Wallace Huang, Chad Nicholas, Larra Paoilli, and Jeff Vaughn.

Thanks to Christian Moore and Owen Seyler for giving me my first job in games and for being great mentors. And thanks to everyone else at Last Unicorn: Ross Issacs, George Vasilakos, Jay Longino, Inman Young, Charles and Tammie Ryan, Jess Heinig, Jeff Tidball, Ken Hite, and Steve Long.

Thanks to Anna and Jerry and Lars for taking a crazy chance on MCDM.

Thanks to Mike Mearls, Chris Perkins, Jeremy Crawford, and the rest of the 5E DevTeam for synthesizing forty years of RPG design into something new and fresh and fun to play and fun to design for.

And, lastly, my original GMs: John Mara, Brad Thomas, and Matt Thomas. The lessons they taught me from ’85 to ’92 still pay off. And to the rest of The Group: Jim Murphy, Dave Miles, Mark Hobbs, Devlon and Geoff, Chris and Craig, Jeff Houston, Matt Clyker, Paul LaPorte, Robert Harris, Travis Vail.

—Matthew Colville  
Irvine, September 2018



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# INTRODUCTION





the player or their character might want to do such a thing.

For those original players, building a stronghold was a *self-evident good*. It was just neat, and they assumed it would be obvious why you would want to do such a thing. It meant your character was now interested in things besides killing orcs and acquiring gold. Treasure was a means to an end. As your character grew in power, they became more concerned with the state of the world. There were political conflicts and armies and incursions from other dimensions, and a single fighter with a sword, even a very nice sword with its own personality and special purpose, was not enough. You needed an army, or new spells, or extraplanar allies.

The game transitioned from local problems to national problems, to global problems. Eventually, your 7th-level character fought a few wars or invented a spell or two, and then retired. Typically around 13th level. And that was it. The game had an end.

This book seeks to recreate that style of play, but in a modern sense, by giving the players *reasons* to build strongholds. And we got a lotta reasons. ☺

In this book you will find rules for four types of strongholds: **keeps** help you raise armies and improve your fighting ability, **temples** help you summon extraplanar allies to aid you in battle, **towers** let you research new spells, and **establishments** let you collect secrets and generate cash.

Every stronghold also improves your signature class feature, powering up your Bardic Inspiration or your monk's Ki. Strongholds grant **improved class features** because they draw power from the land itself.

The local area around your stronghold is called your **demesne** (deh-MAIN). Within your demesne, your character is now, if not ruler, certainly a very important person, so the power of the land manifests itself in unusual ways in your favor.

Building a stronghold also inspires people, allowing you to **attract followers** by rolling on a chart specific to your class. These followers could be mercenary

nce upon a time in the dim days of the hobby known as the 1970s, the game assumed you played until you were about 7th level and then built a stronghold. There were no rules for this, nor was any reason given for why

legions or artisan peasants, foreign ambassadors or fellow adventuring heroes!

Large-scale actions taken by your new army, your stronghold, or your followers sometimes take **months or seasons**. Also, your new abilities eventually run out of juice, after which you must return to your demesne to refresh yourself. This is called an **extended rest**.

To support these new options, the book comes with many new systems, including rules for **warfare**, in which **units** of soldiers clash; rules for **concordance**, which allows any character to plead with their deity for aid; rules for **creating new magic items**; and rules for taking your **retainers** with you into combat without having to run an entire second character.

## GM-APPROVED?

Talk to your GM to make sure these new rules are allowed in their game. This book asks a lot of your GM, they are expected to:

- Run NPC followers, including complex and powerful special allies.
- Figure out which neighbors are happy or upset with your growing power in the local area.
- Make combat harder, to compensate for your new combat abilities.

That's a lot of work and your GM may have different plans for their game. They might be okay with some of these rules, but not others!

## ALIGNMENT

This book references alignment a lot—don't freak out. It's merely deployed as an organizational tool. A fun way of saying "allied" or "opposed." And a way to categorize allies and monsters dramatically. Paladins oppose chaos and evil, clerics embody good; these are just cool ways of referring to the forces opposing or allied with the heroes.

Feel free to recontextualize these references however you like. If you're playing a...lawful neutral paladin, perhaps opposing chaos is more important or useful to you than good or evil. Or maybe alignment isn't useful at all, in which case the player and the GM can agree to use "allied" or "opposed." Alignment was originally invented as an excuse to yell at players who were backstabbing other players by inventing "teams" and requiring them to pick "our team" if they were going to continue playing, so best not to take it too seriously.





# STRONGHOLDS





It's cool to have a place of your own. A headquarters, a base. A castle, a tower, a keep.

It would be even better if your headquarters *did* something cool for you. Gave you some useful ability, preferably in combat, since that's where a lot (not all!) of the game happens. It's certainly where the life and death stuff happens.

It's also nice to have a reason to hoard money. Delving deep into dark dungeons promises three rewards: experience, magic items, and *money*.

Experience is a self-evident good, as it makes your character level up and gain power.

Magic items, likewise. They let you do cool things your character would never normally be able to do.

Money, though? What are we supposed to do with it? At least one edition granted players easy access to creating magic items, a fine way to spend your money. A side effect of this is the assumed presence of shops in sufficiently large cities where you can *buy* magic items.

But the modern edition makes the opposite assumption. Players during the 5E playtest said they wanted magic to be rare, and the dev team listened. Magic is rare and "magic shoppes" are not assumed in the base game.

Strongholds and their upgrades, therefore, give you a good reason to save your money.

## TYPES OF STRONGHOLD

There are four types of basic stronghold, one complex stronghold, and many varieties. Any character can build or use any stronghold, although why a non-spellcasting character might build a tower is an exercise left to the reader. Maybe they have a spellcasting NPC ally!

A **keep** is a martial stronghold for characters interested in raising armies and defending the local townsfolk. Barbarian camps and pirate ships are variations on this.

A **tower** is an arcane stronghold for doing spell research and learning battle magic.

A **temple** is a divine stronghold for summoning extraplanar allies and learning battle magic. A druid's grove is a popular variation.

An **establishment** is an espionage stronghold for sabotaging your enemies and generating revenue.

A **castle** combines two or more of the above into a larger complex owned and run by multiple characters, each of whom can gain the mechanical benefits thereof.

Ultimately, the idea that there are four kinds of strongholds (and some variations of each) is completely

arbitrary. You could easily have six kinds, or one for each class. Or no "types," just different abilities to buy a la carte. But I find these four get us 90% of what we need, with their variations getting us another 9%. And for those players who want a stronghold not listed here, hopefully the variations are sufficient to help the GM come up with a unique variant without much work.

## ACQUIRING A STRONGHOLD

There are three basic ways for the party to acquire a stronghold: they are (in order of most expensive to least expensive) build a new one, renovate an old one, or receive one from a local noble.

### Building a Stronghold, Cost and Time

The cost (in gold) and time to build (in days) for each of the four strongholds are listed below. These are not based on any historical numbers mostly because humans were building castles for about 600 years until the invention of gunpowder made them obsolete and there's no reasonable way to translate those costs into a fantasy game. But even were we to pick a historical period as our baseline, there was no time in history that had bands of wizards and warlocks roaming the countryside pillaging dragon hordes and coming back to civilization with tens of thousands of gold pieces.

Therefore any costs we derive must first be based in the economies of a fantasy RPG. **And that means they must cost a lot, but not take too long.** If it takes 10 years to build your stronghold, no PC would ever do it. Keeps and towers, temples and establishments each have wildly different purposes with different costs and different times to build.

**Keeps** are larger and more fortified for defensive purposes and therefore take longer to build: 150 days.

**Temples** and **towers** are less fortified but still usually made of stone and take 120 days to complete at 1st level.

An **establishment** serves no defensive purpose, typically existing within a town or city with its own fortifications. But your establishment is still well-constructed with basements, multiple floors, and probably secret passages for you and your allies to escape out of...or in to! They take 90 days to complete.

### Strongholds as Fortifications

Keeps, towers, and temples also count as Fortifications in Warfare (see page 231 for the rules on Warfare). These fortifications grant Morale bonuses to the soldiers defending them in battle. They also have a Size representing the die used to track damage done to them, and a Toughness rating representing how hard they are to damage. Because they don't attack, they have no Attack, Defense, or Power ratings.



## STRONGHOLD CONSTRUCTION

STRONGHOLD	COST TO BUILD (GP)	TIME TO BUILD (DAYS)	FORTIFICATION BONUS
KEEP	10,000	150	+2 MORALE PER LEVEL
TOWER	8,000	120	+1 MORALE PER LEVEL
TEMPLE	8,000	120	+1 MORALE PER LEVEL
ESTABLISHMENT	6,000	90	—

## SIZE PER LEVEL

STRONGHOLD	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
KEEP	6	8	10	12	20
TOWER	4	6	8	10	12
TEMPLE	4	6	8	10	12
ESTABLISHMENT	—	—	—	—	—

## TOUGHNESS PER LEVEL

STRONGHOLD	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
KEEP	22	24	26	28	30
TOWER	18	20	22	24	26
TEMPLE	18	20	22	24	26
ESTABLISHMENT	—	—	—	—	—

## COST TO UPGRADE (GP)

STRONGHOLD	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
KEEP	5,000	10,000	15,000	20,000
TOWER	3,000	6,000	12,000	18,000
TEMPLE	3,000	6,000	12,000	18,000
ESTABLISHMENT	2,000	4,000	6,000	8,000

## TIME TO UPGRADE (DAYS)

STRONGHOLD	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
KEEP	50	100	150	200
TOWER	40	80	120	160
TEMPLE	40	80	120	160
ESTABLISHMENT	30	60	90	120



### Upgrading Your Stronghold

Once built, your stronghold can be upgraded by taking more time and spending more money, as shown on the charts on the previous page. You can spend more money to build a larger stronghold from the start, but there is no time or cost savings.

### Castles: Complex Strongholds

A stronghold belongs to whoever pays for it, and they are its master. If Cail the Wizard builds a tower, he gets to decide who gains its benefits. He may allow his sorcerer or warlock pals to do spell research there... until one or both betrays him! Or he, them! Only one character can gain the benefit of a given stronghold at a time, and each character can only benefit from one stronghold ability at a time.

If multiple characters chip in to pay for a stronghold—or one character just spends a *lot* of money—it is a castle and provides multiple benefits. Complex tasks take proportionally more time and money than simple ones, so a castle costs 10% more and takes 10% longer for every basic stronghold function it incorporates.

Jess, Anna, and Lars decide to pitch in together and buy a castle. It will contain a keep, a temple, and a tower. It will cost 33,800 gp and take 507 days. That's 10,000 gp for the keep and 8,000 gp each for the tower and temple, 150 days for the keep and 120 days each for the temple and tower. Then an extra 30% on top (multiply time and cost each by 1.3) to account for the extra work necessary to incorporate many functions in one structure.

A castle cannot contain multiple of the same type of stronghold. If you build a castle with two towers, for instance, only one of them grants the benefits of spell research. Also, a stronghold's benefit only applies to one character at a time. A character can switch between which stronghold benefits they receive by taking an extended rest (page 15).

The purpose of the design is, on the one hand, to somewhat model the real world where building a movie theater and automotive plant in the same building would (one assumes) take longer than the time to build each separately. For one thing the different kinds of strongholds have different requirements and therefore it takes more and different kinds of workers to complete them and the more workers you have the harder it is to coordinate them all.

But also, one goal of these rules is to give players things to do in their **downtime**, and this is a period for individual goals and initiative. Usually when one of my players builds a stronghold, everyone hangs out there.

## PAYING MORE TO GET IT DONE FASTER

Since building or repairing any stronghold requires a labor force, it's reasonable for players to conclude that hiring more artisans and laborers will speed up the process!

To a small degree this is true, but the rules assume your workers are working optimally, so adding more laborers will, paradoxically, cause it to take longer. This is a fact as well-documented as it is oft-ignored. The famous (real-world) book *The Mythical Man-Month* details exactly what happens: Beyond a certain point, the larger your network, the more management it requires, the more communication it takes for everyone involved, and the harder it becomes for any single worker to find the answer to their question, get a task approved, or get unblocked (or even know who's blocking them) on a process.

Therefore, we assume the times represent a group of workers getting the job done in a reasonably fast manner and that adding more people to the team would just complicate things.

All the Avengers hang out at Avenger's Mansion but at the end of the day, Tony Stark built that place and it and Jarvis answer to him and when things go wrong he's on the hook for it.


Finally, don't presume that just because *you* as a player think it would be a good idea for "all of us" to build a stronghold together, that everyone else at the table agrees. In my experience, one or two players may agree, one or two players won't care, but one or two players actually have their own ideas about what should be done with what they perceive as "their share of the treasure." Make sure you've polled the electorate and *listen* to what they say. Folks who disagree often keep their mouths shut just to avoid conflict, and this is a great recipe for breeding unhappy players.

### Narrative Reasons for Different Costs and Times

Of course, what seems reasonable to me may seem wildly *unreasonable* to you! Each GM's campaign is different, and different in ways that cannot be predicted or detected by any given designer.

Therefore, feel absolutely free to charge your players more or less, or speed up or slow down the time it takes to fit both your idea of what's reasonable, and the precedents you've established for your game. To make





these decisions seem less like GM fiat and ground them in the rules and your game, consider the following.

Strongholds take more or less time to construct based on the availability of local workers. Maybe recent events in your campaign have made laborers and artisans scarce or plentiful! Whatever local problem the players have recently dealt with, it may have scared many valuable workers away from the area (strongholds take more time). Or, with that problem solved, maybe more workers are available and willing to help our stalwart heroes (strongholds take less time)!

Strongholds may cost more if the local area turns out to be resource poor. It takes wood and stone to make a stronghold, and not just any wood or stone.

“Can’t build from this,” Arranel the Woodwright says, shaking her head. “Trees are all beech around here. Can’t make a proper truss or scaffold with beech. No block or tackle neither. Rope’ll chew right through it.”

“And the stone here’s all got lime running through it. Water table’s just a few feet down, I reckon,” Galder of Chalk, the stonemason observes. “Gonna have to send to Rest to get some proper granite. Cost a pretty penny, that.”

So the costs may be more exorbitant than the rules imply. The reverse is also true!

“No gold, sorry to break it to you. Know you ratcatchers love comin’ up gold. But plenty of iron,” Zoran Steeleye, foreman of the mine, says. “More’n enough to get you started on a proper keep.”

Circumstances both natural and political may conspire to make your campaign’s costs different from these. Indeed, in some campaign worlds metal is as rare as...a very rare thing! And we might imagine a stronghold would be a very expensive proposition on that dead world under a black star.

### *When Is It Done?*

Keep in mind that a 1st-level keep is a simple motte-and-bailey and would still appear to be “under construction” when it is actually done. It can act as a defensive stronghold well before it’s pretty and all the finishing touches are complete. It may be hard to imagine Camelot being built in a little more than a year, but that’s because the structure we imagine with pink walls and pennants flying is what you get long after the place was a functioning castle.

### *At What Level Should Characters Get a Stronghold?*

There’s no correct answer to this, it is entirely up to the GM. I’ve run games in which the PCs started at 1st level playing local nobles complete with strongholds and domains. I’ve run for groups who at 3rd level cleared out an overrun watchtower and claimed it as their base.

As the GM, you can simply decide it would be fun if the players started with or cleared out their own stronghold at low levels. One of the great moments in any campaign, for me, is just after the players de-orc a ruined keep and realize, “Hey! We could make this place our base!” This is the moment when the players start using the things they find in the world as their own resources. The world feels real to them. They are thinking about things besides killing monsters.

Maybe the question is “At what level can the PCs *afford* to build their own stronghold?” That’s easy to figure out. We start by imagining the players want to pool their money together to build a castle for 50,000 gold pieces.

So we scrubbed through the published adventures to figure out: when would the characters be able to afford a keep? Well if they go through the official 5E Big Giant Adventure...the answer is surprising. By 6th level in the Big Giant Adventure, the players **can** have accumulated enough gold to buy a keep. Assuming they find all the gold and roll average on random results.

In practice, however, it difficult to find **all** the gold in an adventure, especially adventures with sandbox elements, or branches. Different groups often come out with wildly different amounts of cash from the same adventure. 7th level, therefore, is a reasonable conclusion.

### *Do Not Assume the Adventure Will Suffice*

Different editions treat gold differently. Some classic 1st Edition adventures award many tens of thousands of gold at low levels (often in copper pieces, on purpose, to make the act of getting the gold back to civilization a challenge in itself). Some adventures have hardly any gold in them at all. Not only does this vary from edition to edition, it varies wildly from one adventure to another *within* an edition.

Therefore, Game Masters who think “my players will want a stronghold” should make sure they dump enough gold on the players to make it possible. The gold you award becomes a knob you turn to adjust when exactly the players can afford a stronghold of their own. Assuming they need to buy the thing at all! There are other options!





## Repairing a Ruin

As any druid worth their salt—or any other minerals—will tell you: nature is pretty aggressive. Without proper upkeep, roots and vines and weather will take their toll and in only a year a stronghold can require so much upkeep to get back in shape that it qualifies as a ruin. Practically, if the keep or tower or temple in your adventure has some crumbling walls and perhaps a few rooms or entire floor exposed to the elements, it is certainly a ruin.

**Repairing a ruin saves you half the time and cost of the final stronghold.** So repairing a ruined level 1 keep would only cost 5,000 gold and take 75 days.

It's up to the GM to decide whether the ruin is a single-player stronghold or a castle that can serve as a complex that contains some combination of basic strongholds within.

How badly ruined a stronghold is, is purely a judgment call by the GM, but here are some guidelines. If it has multiple levels with any intact rooms, **each level** saves another 500 gold in cost and 7 days off the total time. If it has any **wholly intact** levels, each level instead saves you 1,000 gp and 14 days.

If there are several (more than three, including a dungeon level) levels with intact rooms, then this is probably not a 1st-level stronghold. It could be a 2nd-level or 3rd-level stronghold! GMs, remember in your generosity that strongholds cap out at 5th level. Letting players repair a ruin so that they end up with a level 4 or 5 stronghold gives them immense power and little left to strive for.

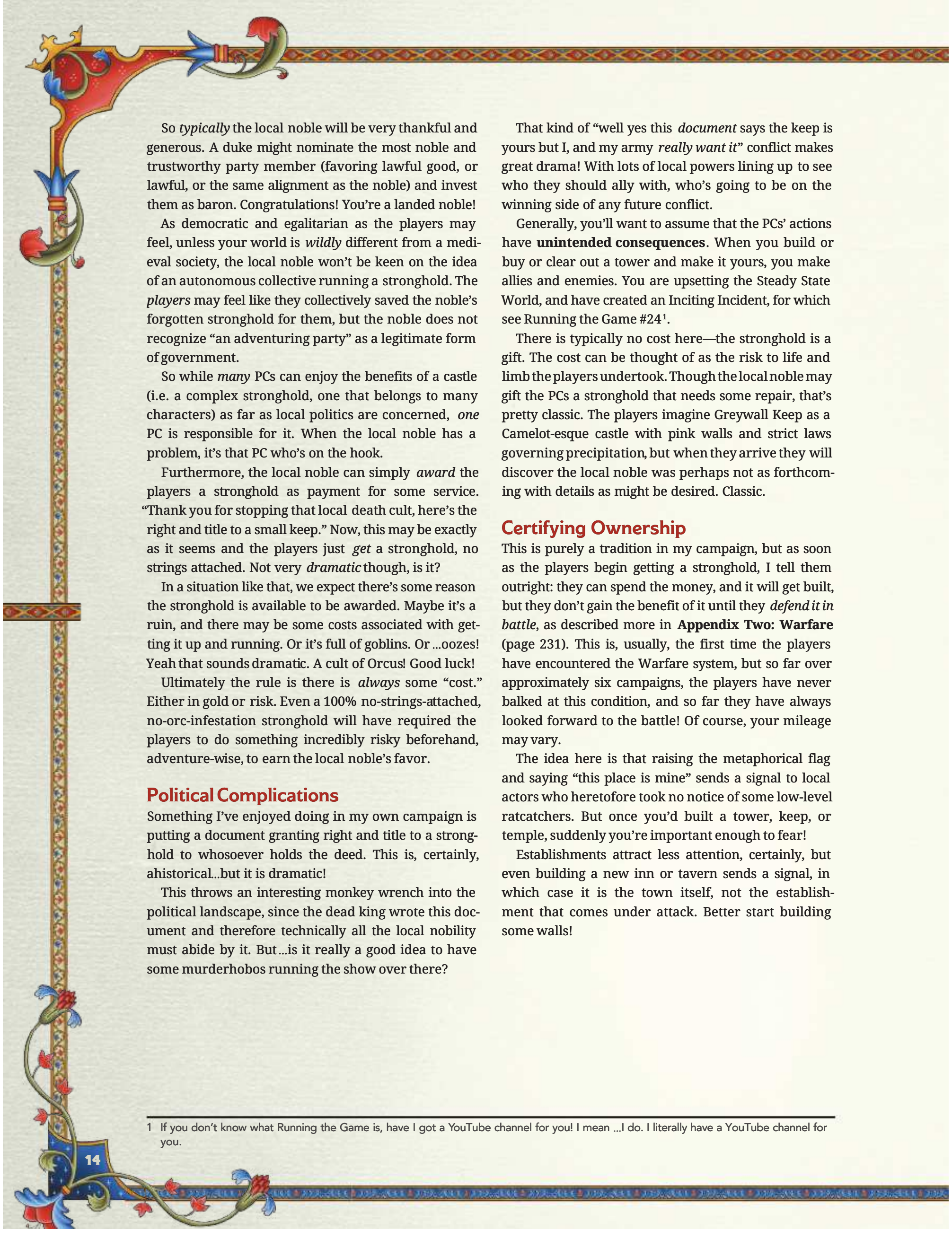
## Awarding a Stronghold

Any local stronghold in good enough shape not to need repair actually belongs to someone. Legally. Some local noble. It might be *currently* overrun by orcs, or even sitting surrounded by forest overgrowth, forgotten. But as soon as the party clears it out, it becomes *unforgotten* and the local duke or queen says, “Hey that’s mine.”

Nobles get really persnickety when a bunch of ratcatchers decide some stronghold in the noble’s territory is “theirs.” The local nobles start to feel like maybe these itinerant campaigners are trying to muscle in on their cushy gig.

At the same time, nobles are not stupid—though they may well be prideful, fearful, or full of hubris—so they might realize **any mercenary group powerful enough to clear out the orcs would serve better as subjects or allies than enemies.**





So *typically* the local noble will be very thankful and generous. A duke might nominate the most noble and trustworthy party member (favoring lawful good, or lawful, or the same alignment as the noble) and invest them as baron. Congratulations! You're a landed noble!

As democratic and egalitarian as the players may feel, unless your world is *wildly* different from a medieval society, the local noble won't be keen on the idea of an autonomous collective running a stronghold. The *players* may feel like they collectively saved the noble's forgotten stronghold for them, but the noble does not recognize "an adventuring party" as a legitimate form of government.

So while *many* PCs can enjoy the benefits of a castle (i.e. a complex stronghold, one that belongs to many characters) as far as local politics are concerned, *one* PC is responsible for it. When the local noble has a problem, it's that PC who's on the hook.

Furthermore, the local noble can simply *award* the players a stronghold as payment for some service. "Thank you for stopping that local death cult, here's the right and title to a small keep." Now, this may be exactly as it seems and the players just *get* a stronghold, no strings attached. Not very *dramatic* though, is it?

In a situation like that, we expect there's some reason the stronghold is available to be awarded. Maybe it's a ruin, and there may be some costs associated with getting it up and running. Or it's full of goblins. Or ...oozes! Yeah that sounds dramatic. A cult of Orcus! Good luck!

Ultimately the rule is there is *always* some "cost." Either in gold or risk. Even a 100% no-strings-attached, no-orc-infestation stronghold will have required the players to do something incredibly risky beforehand, adventure-wise, to earn the local noble's favor.

## Political Complications

Something I've enjoyed doing in my own campaign is putting a document granting right and title to a stronghold to whosoever holds the deed. This is, certainly, ahistorical...but it is dramatic!

This throws an interesting monkey wrench into the political landscape, since the dead king wrote this document and therefore technically all the local nobility must abide by it. But...is it really a good idea to have some murderhobos running the show over there?

That kind of "well yes this *document* says the keep is yours but I, and my army *really want it*" conflict makes great drama! With lots of local powers lining up to see who they should ally with, who's going to be on the winning side of any future conflict.

Generally, you'll want to assume that the PCs' actions have **unintended consequences**. When you build or buy or clear out a tower and make it yours, you make allies and enemies. You are upsetting the Steady State World, and have created an Inciting Incident, for which see Running the Game #24<sup>1</sup>.

There is typically no cost here—the stronghold is a gift. The cost can be thought of as the risk to life and limb the players undertook. Though the local noble may gift the PCs a stronghold that needs some repair, that's pretty classic. The players imagine Greywall Keep as a Camelot-esque castle with pink walls and strict laws governing precipitation, but when they arrive they will discover the local noble was perhaps not as forthcoming with details as might be desired. Classic.

## Certifying Ownership

This is purely a tradition in my campaign, but as soon as the players begin getting a stronghold, I tell them outright: they can spend the money, and it will get built, but they don't gain the benefit of it until they *defend it in battle*, as described more in **Appendix Two: Warfare** (page 231). This is, usually, the first time the players have encountered the Warfare system, but so far over approximately six campaigns, the players have never balked at this condition, and so far they have always looked forward to the battle! Of course, your mileage may vary.

The idea here is that raising the metaphorical flag and saying "this place is mine" sends a signal to local actors who heretofore took no notice of some low-level ratcatchers. But once you'd built a tower, keep, or temple, suddenly you're important enough to fear!

Establishments attract less attention, certainly, but even building a new inn or tavern sends a signal, in which case it is the town itself, not the establishment that comes under attack. Better start building some walls!

<sup>1</sup> If you don't know what Running the Game is, have I got a YouTube channel for you! I mean ...I do. I literally have a YouTube channel for you.



## EXTENDED REST

Strongholds grant special abilities, which quickly run out of uses and must be recharged by taking an **extended rest**. An extended rest requires spending a week at your stronghold, touching base with your subjects and followers, and attending to your affairs.

This rule exists for a couple of reasons. First, it reinforces verisimilitude. It's unreasonable to expect a stronghold to grant its benefits indefinitely. A fighter who hasn't visited their keep in years is indistinguishable from a fighter without a stronghold!

Second, they give players a good reason to return home and that grants you, the GM, the opportunity to advance the politics of your campaign. It's possible, via *sending* or a *diplomats pouch* or just mundane messengers on horseback, to advance your politics without visiting your stronghold and, indeed, some of this should be allowed, but major events and revelations are better handled in person and, should war break out, a lord cannot command their troops from the bottom of a dungeon.

## POWER!

**Strongholds unbalance the game.**<sup>2</sup> A paladin with a fully upgraded stronghold has access to many more abilities than a paladin without one. This is by design. It's fine to let your players get ahead of the power curve; you, the GM, have all the tools you need to challenge them. You have access to all the monsters, and you can make them nastier than usual.

To help rebalance things, we give villains and their minions their own stronghold abilities that are less complex—and therefore easier for an already overburdened GM to use—than the stronghold abilities of the PCs. See “Villain Strongholds” on page 66.

## STRONGHOLDS & POLITICS

Strongholds also represent a political framework. Many campaigns tick along nicely without anyone, including the GM, worrying about things like “who's in charge here?” Where “here” is “this area of the map” or “this town” or “the area around the dungeon.” This is perfectly fine; many successful campaigns have run for years without anyone needing to worry about this. These rules change those assumptions. Because a Stronghold is also a symbol of power, it threatens other local lords. Even if your players have no martial ambitions, if they attract a few units of light cavalry suddenly they will start wondering “hey what can I do with these?”

So your world, if you use this book, slowly transforms into one where there are local powers. These “powers” are usually nobility, but they can be any characters with power and an army. A wizard with a tower may only have a small hamlet outside, and that hamlet has its own town council and the wizard doesn't bother them. But if the local Baron needs arcane assistance, it's this wizard he turns to.

These nobles and powerful NPCs rule different areas, they have their own strongholds and armies and their own subjects who work for them and will fight with them.

## Local Powers

It's easy to go overboard when worldbuilding and assume you need to have every detail mapped out. Dozens of major and minor players, all the different barons and archmages and bishops and guildmasters can seem an insurmountable task.

So don't do that! You only really need three other local powers; an ally, an enemy, and someone who is neither. We can add more as we play, but we only need the three to get started.

**The enemy** lord serves an obvious purpose. They are a powerful threat by which the players can test themselves. They are opposed to the players' growing power for whatever reason.

**The ally**, probably not as powerful as the player, but older and more experienced, helps the player understand the nature of the political world they have found themselves in. And, should push come to shove, the allied lord can throw in with the player and contribute their meager army to the cause.

**The neutral lord** is someone with power, the power to determine who will win in the coming conflict between the player and the enemy lord, but currently on no one's side. Known not to be an ally of the evil lord, but also not on the players' side. It's going to take some negotiation, roleplaying, maybe some favors to sway them.

This small framework of three NPCs gives you everything you need to start a moderately robust political game. These characters do not appear by magic, they are NPCs that need to be introduced and developed like any other.

<sup>2</sup> I think 5E is the best-designed edition of the game, but I also think some players overfocus on “balance” because they feel the game is something to be “solved.” They expect a level of rigor more appropriate to a wargame or a card game. I don't have those expectations for an RPG.



# The Keep

The keep<sup>1</sup> sits on a hill. It may be tall or squat, but it projects power. It protects. It is a symbol. It says “I am here, and this place is mine. These people, this land, is under my protection.”

Unless you don’t want it to be, of course—it’s your keep, do what you want. Put your keep in a valley if you like, hide it in a forest. But notice that the above language makes no *moral* evaluation. A good ruler, an evil one, might each say the same thing but for different reasons.

## PEOPLE KNOW IT’S THERE

Let’s imagine you want to build a hidden keep—without using powerful magics. This is ahistorical, so if one of my players brought this up, I would explain to them something of the nature and purpose of keeps, and how hard (indeed, I think basically impossible) it is to build *anything* of this size and scale without everyone in the local area knowing.

It takes hundreds of workers months to build a keep, even if you’re only repairing an existing fortification. And those workers have homes and families, and while they may eventually move onto your land—perhaps because you are a good ruler, or just because it’s convenient to live near where they’re spending months working—those people are going to talk about what they’re building.

But if, after that, I saw the player still thought it would be cool to build a hidden keep, I would just ask, “Okay, cool, given that it’s going to take a lot of people to make it, how do you plan on keeping it secret?” I wouldn’t say no; I would just give the player a chance to think about it and be creative. Any answer they give will bring opportunities for drama!

So in general, building any kind of stronghold makes a statement. But a keep is a military fortification. It’s not used for researching the mysteries of the universe, or communing with the powers of creation, or raising money and learning secrets, it’s about **raising an army**. Giving your army somewhere to live. Protecting your people and enforcing your will abroad. Historically,

keeps were built as a defense *against* armies, a safe and easily defensible location. But in all instances the keep is related to war in a way the other strongholds are not.

So, you build a keep because you want to raise an army and give them a place to stay and train.

## RAISING UNITS

You can **attract** a unit by rolling on your class’s followers chart. Some classes are naturally more martial than others—the fighter and paladin attract units more easily than the Wizard and Sorcerer. But even a fell-countenanced warlock like Graves, the Empty One, from my Shield of Gravesford campaign *could* attract a unit with a good roll. That would be a very interesting army—come to pledge service to a warlock!

Furthermore, you can spend gold to just **buy** a unit. But units not only cost money to buy, they also cost money to maintain, called **upkeep**. Anyone with enough money can maintain an army without a stronghold, it just costs a lot of money. Napoleon did it quite well and would have gotten away with it if it weren’t for a plague of typhus.<sup>2</sup>

A keep reduces the cost to buy units by 10% per level, and it also reduces the upkeep of units by 10% per level. This means a 5th-level keep reduces both the cost to buy units and their upkeep cost by 50%.

**Upon finishing a keep, you gain units equal in number to 2 plus the keep level.** At the GM’s discretion, if you’re building a keep above 1st level, you could get your first unit when you begin construction, another unit halfway through, and the rest when it’s complete. There could be good, dramatic reasons for this, and also it gives you a unit early that you can go annoy your neighbors with. And it’s perfectly reasonable to presume the half-finished keep is complete *enough* to house *some* folks.

Which units arrive to pledge service is up to the GM, but there’s a handy chart on the next page should they want to leave the choice to fate.

Newly raised units start at Size 1d4. If you get the same result twice<sup>3</sup>, just increase the unit’s Size by one.

1 There’s a great, by which I mean deeply weird, movie from Michael Mann called *The Keep* about a bunch of Nazis accidentally letting a demon loose in Transylvania while an Eternal Man tries to stop them. This doesn’t have anything to do with these rules, but it’s my book, you get my weirdness.

2 That’s real, by the way. Popularly, Napoleon blundered into Russia and lost because he, an experienced soldier who’d built an army that kept mobile by foraging, somehow forgot about the phenomenon called “winter.” But in actuality Napoleon lost 80,000 men *in the first month of the campaign* to typhus spread by lice. I suspect many victorious generals would have had a bad time if they lost 80,000 men to disease in one month.

3 Actually very likely, as some units are simply much more common than others



All units raised are of the same ancestry as the owner of the keep.

Use the rules in **Creating Your Own Units** (page 235) to build the unit cards once you know which unit you’ve attracted.

Jess’s elf cleric Lady Sariel builds a keep, attracts a unit of Regular Light Infantry, and then rolls again, getting another unit of Regular Light Infantry. She still only has one unit, but it’s now Size 1d6 instead of Size 1d4.

TRAINING

A keep means an army, and an army requires training! As you train your soldiers, you get better with your own gear, gaining the following bonuses based on the weapons or armor that you use. Choose one of the following training benefits.

You cannot gain the benefit of training from armor, shields, or weapons you are not proficient in. You can change which training you receive during an extended rest (page 15).

**Light Armor Training:** You have advantage on Dexterity checks while wearing light armor.

**Medium Armor Training:** You gain 5 feet of extra movement while wearing medium armor. This movement does not provoke attacks of opportunity.<sup>4</sup>

**Heavy Armor Training:** You learn to present your most heavily armored facing to your foes. Ranged attacks have disadvantage against you as crossbow bolts bounce and acid arrows splash harmlessly (sometimes) off your armor.

**Bludgeoning Training:** When you score a critical hit, the target has disadvantage on attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks until the start of your next turn.

**Finesse Training:** When an adjacent enemy damages you with a melee weapon, you may, as a reaction, make a melee attack against them with your wielded finesse weapon.

**Piercing Training:** You deal an extra 1d6 damage to creatures wearing heavy armor.

**Reach Training:** If you hit with a reach weapon, you can move the target 5 feet, but they must remain within your reach. This movement does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

**Shield Training:** If you succeed in a weapon attack while wielding a shield, you can push your target 5 feet away from you. This movement does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

**Slashing Training:** You deal an extra 1d6 damage to creatures wearing light, natural, or no armor.

UNITS RAISED BY KEEP

D100	UNIT TYPE
01-12	GREEN LIGHT INFANTRY
13-24	GREEN MEDIUM INFANTRY
25-34	REGULAR LIGHT INFANTRY
35-44	REGULAR MEDIUM INFANTRY
45-46	SEASONED MEDIUM INFANTRY
47-48	SEASONED HEAVY INFANTRY
49-57	GREEN LIGHT ARCHERS
58-66	GREEN MEDIUM ARCHERS
67-72	REGULAR LIGHT ARCHERS
73-78	REGULAR MEDIUM ARCHERS
79-86	REGULAR LIGHT CAVALRY
87-95	REGULAR MEDIUM CAVALRY
96-100	SEASONED LIGHT CAVALRY

**Versatile Training:** While wielding a versatile weapon in two hands, you gain +1 AC.

THE BARBARIAN CAMP

Barbarians are famous for keeps! In that under no circumstance would they ever build one. They are why other people build keeps! To a barbarian, the idea of putting all your men in an immobile walled jail seems ridiculous.

Of course, strictly speaking anyone can build any stronghold. And what counts as a “barbarian” has nothing to do with what’s on your character sheet. You can easily be a fighter or ranger who looks and behaves in a classical barbarian mode.

BARBARIAN UNITS

D12	BARBARIAN UNITS
1-3	GREEN LIGHT INFANTRY
4-6	REGULAR LIGHT INFANTRY
7-8	GREEN LIGHT ARCHERS
9-10	REGULAR LIGHT ARCHERS
11	REGULAR LIGHT CAVALRY
12	SEASONED LIGHT CAVALRY

<sup>4</sup> In other words, you can move one more square, and you can choose any one square in your movement that you can leave without provoking.



But if you want a rampaging horde, you want a barbarian camp. Accept no substitutes.

### Substitutes for a Barbarian Camp

These rules show how a mobile stronghold behaves based on certain assumptions about a Rampaging Horde. With a little imagination, we can easily picture any number of other strongholds that might use these rules.

A druid might decide to go on the warpath, Awaken the Trees, and lead them to war! Do the Awakened Trees have a permanent stronghold? They could, but they could just as easily have a mobile camp!

A monk might eschew a permanent stronghold and instead wander the land, inciting the peasantry to take up arms against their tyrannical lords and join her. Did Joan of Arc have a permanent fortification? Or was she basically leading a barbarian horde?

A barbarian camp functions as a keep with the following differences:

- It still costs gold, but half as much. Temporary wells must be dug, skins for tents must be constantly made and repaired. Weapons and armor still need repairs. Large tents require many wooden stakes. And foraging includes buying food off the locals as well as stealing it. When you're on the move, you basically have to do everything all the time to keep everyone

fed and housed. The Mongols had mobile smithies and carpenter shops!

- It raises units just like a keep, but using the Barbarian Units chart on the previous page.
- It grants no discount to upkeep.
- It can *move* a number of provinces<sup>5</sup> per season *inversely proportional* to its size. A 1st-level barbarian camp can move 5 provinces per season. A 5th-level camp, only one. As long as *all* their units are Light, they do not suffer movement penalties for moving in Wilderness. But they do suffer normal movement penalties based on terrain.
- If a Barbarian camp spends one season in a civilized province, the owner of that province must make an Unrest check against DC 13. If the Development Level of the Province is greater than the level of the Barbarian camp, the roll has advantage. If it is less, then the roll has disadvantage.

If the province fails its Unrest check, it loses one development level. If this reduces it to 0 it reverts to Wilderness and no longer produces resources for its owner.

Of course, spending a season there means withstanding the owner's own armies. We're basically talking about an invasion.



<sup>5</sup> Provinces, Unrest, Population Centers, and Development Levels are all in Kingdoms & Warfare. I know it's kinda bogus to put rules in here you can't use yet, but I didn't want the benefits of a Barbarian camp spread out over two books.





# EXAMPLE KEEP LARGE



1st Floor



2nd Floor



Cellar

