

Keeps

Keeps are to the military what manor houses are to the rest of the fantasy setting. They are the most widely used and versatile hardened stronghold available short of a castle. A keep is not only a hardened structure, it also holds the most ground for the least amount of money. This economic aspect is what makes a keep so common. A small keep can be constructed in less time than a castle and requires less space dedicated to administration.

Because of these practical merits, keeps are generally given over completely to military functions. Keeps increase efficiency and reduce civilian bureaucracy. The keep is the one stronghold that is nearly the exclusive providence of soldiers. No matter who manages the keep, there will be a strong military force present. If not, the trappings of war will be. This makes the stronghold unable to escape its basic premise. Training grounds, an armory, and the staff needed to maintain equipment stored in the stronghold serve as constant reminders of why the keep exists.

The size of the keep determines who is licensed by the state to own or run the stronghold. Generally, a noble residing in a keep will be of a rank between those of count and duke. Exceedingly small keeps may also be granted to non-landowning, non-hereditary nobles such as knights.

Historically speaking, keeps were not separate structures. They were the military attachments of castles. Their primary purpose was to serve as the bastion of last resort in case of an assault. The use of keeps in this work as a separate structure is intended to hold to the original purpose as the center of military affairs in a castle as a step between the fortified manor house and the castle in all of its myriad forms that later volumes cover (motte-and-bailey, certain lithic strongholds, and the castle itself). Keeps thus serve as a way to spread the military about in a fantasy kingdom that takes into account the advanced knowledge of military power that modernity has come to embrace. Where keeps differ from their modern counterpart is that they are firmly rooted in their medieval trappings of power needed to maintain political control. They are not distributed for rapid response as much as they are for the issue of centralized power of the throne.

Keeps can be found on a nation's borders, along trade routes and well-traveled roads, near mines, and many others place. Any location considered strategically important is a good location for a keep. These strongholds usually occupy the high ground or chokepoints in a region. This allows their size to remain compact without compromising offensive or defensive abilities. Think of it this way: if it looks important to a government, and there is no reason for a large administrative body to be there, then a keep belongs somewhere in the neighborhood. This rule of thumb also applies to placing keeps at staging points a nation may traditionally use, such as is the case with an empire that has



spent years trying to defeat a troublesome rival.

Many keeps begin their existence on the outskirts of towns or in the middle of the wilderness. Over time, settlements may build up within their vicinity. There are many reasons for this: soldiers who have been stationed at the keep settle down nearby after leaving the service, merchants set up shop to cater to the needs of soldiers, and many people feel safe living close to a stronghold. After all, if the keep is there to protect a valuable resource, then it is likely this charge will extend to the people who produce or refine the item.

To fill their many roles, keeps come in numerous shapes and sizes. Each must be specifically designed to fit the needs of their nation's military. This may lead to a "cookie-cutter" feel to multiple keeps within the same country, because they