

STRONGHOLDS & SENTINELS

Strongholds & Sentinels is a system designed to be used in D&D 5e campaigns that wish to include a more dramatic emphasis and narrative importance on stealth, espionage, and subterfuge in their games. The system is designed to provide a comprehensive system for stealth that is simple enough to fit D&D 5e's design but move beyond the pass / fail binary system that ability checks typically operate under and function more like combat where a series of successes and failures tie together into a story.

THE BASICS

Any location that can be entered stealthily is called a **stronghold**. A stronghold could be anything from an army encampment in tents to a fortress to a goblin village.

Each stronghold is broken up into one or more **points of interest**. A point of interest is anything particularly noteworthy that the characters would like to avoid or get access to. In a fortress points of interest might include the wall surrounding the fortress, the courtyard that is constantly patrolled, the evil captain's quarters, the armory, and the cell where the prince is being held for ransom.

Any attempt to infiltrate a stronghold is measured on a zero to ten scale in units of **bells**. The more bells, the higher risk the characters are of having to fight their way back out again. When a stronghold has 10 bells it is on high alert and everyone in the stronghold has been made aware the stronghold has been infiltrated.

When a character is **discovered** only that character is found. If other characters in the same point of interest choose to reveal themselves they may. Characters who are not at that point of interest may or may not be aware that their allies have been discovered depending on the size of the stronghold and how the creatures who discovered the allies react.

PLAYER'S GUIDE TO

STRONGHOLDS & SENTINELS

The role of the players in the Strongholds & Sentinels system is to navigate fortified encampments under heavy watch, accomplish their goals without being caught, and slip away again. In order to do all this, players will use the following rules in place of the traditional skill checks detailed in the PHB and DMG.

ACTIONS & CONSEQUENCES

When your campaign uses Strongholds & Sentinels you can use the following actions. These actions replace any redundant actions or ability checks that might otherwise be called for. This list is not exhaustive and creative players will easily come up with different actions not accounted for here - and that's great! Dungeon Master's should decide what consequences a new action should have and add it to this list.

SNEAK ABOUT

You can stealthily creep from outside the stronghold into an outermost point of interest or from any point of interest in a stronghold to an adjacent point of interest in the same stronghold by making a Dexterity (Stealth) ability check with a DC determined by the inhabitants of the stronghold.

If you succeed, you move into the point of interest without being seen or heard. If you fail, the stronghold gains a bell. If you fail by 5 or more, the stronghold gains 2 bells instead.

THE LOOKOUT

You can help another creature sneak into the same point of interest you are currently in. When you do, that creature gains advantage on its next Dexterity (Stealth) roll as part of using the Sneak About action. If that creature causes the stronghold to reach 10 bells when it uses the Sneak About action you are also discovered.

DRESS THE PART

When you attempt to disguise yourself as another creature make an Intelligence (disguise kit) ability check and note the result. While in this disguise, you may use the Play the Part action using Charisma (Deception) instead of Charisma (Persuasion). When you encounter a creature in the stronghold who has a higher Passive Insight than your disguise result, you have disadvantage on Charisma (Deception) ability checks made as part of the Play the Part action. Each creature you encounter whose Passive Insight is 5 or more than your disguise result, the stronghold gains a bell.

PLAY THE PART

When you attempt to openly enter a stronghold or a point of interest where you could reasonably pass yourself off as someone with legit business, roll a Charisma (Persuasion) check with a DC of the highest Passive Insight score amongst the creatures you are encountering. On a success, they allow you to pass through the point of interest or remain in it for an appropriate amount of time. On a failure, they deny you entrance to the point of interest. If you fail by 5 or more, the stronghold also gains 1 bell.

CAUSE A DISTRACTION

When you attempt to cause a distraction to take the heat off of your companions or draw the attention of the creatures of the point of interest, roll a Charisma (Persuasion) ability check with a DC of the highest Passive Insight score amongst the enemy creatures in that point of interest. If you did not enter this point of interest using the Play the Part action you are immediately discovered when you use this action.

On a success, all creatures taking a Strongholds & Sentinels action in this point of interest have advantage on their rolls until you end this action. On a failure, all creatures taking a Strongholds & Sentinels action in this point of interest have advantage on their rolls until you end this action and the stronghold gains a bell. If you fail by 5 or more, creatures taking a Strongholds & Sentinels action in this point of interest do not have advantage on their rolls.

BREAKING AND ENTERING

When you first attempt to unlock a door, disarm an alarm or trap, or get into a locked container, make a Dexterity (thieves tools) ability check with a DC determined by the quality of the lock, alarm, or trap. If you succeed, the lock is unlocked or the alarm or trap is disarmed silently. If you fail, the stronghold gains 1 bell and you can choose to give the stronghold another bell to take this action again. If you fail by 5 or more, you cannot choose to give the stronghold another bell to take this action again.



TAKE WHAT YOU WANT

When you attempt to steal something in the same point of interest as you, roll a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) ability check with a DC of the highest Passive Perception score amongst the enemy creatures in that point of interest. If you are trying to steal an object that a creature is currently wearing or hold you have disadvantage on your ability check.

If you succeed, you get the item and if you stole it off of a creature who was wearing or holding it the stronghold gains 1 bell. If you fail, the stronghold gains 1 bell and you are discovered. If you fail by 5 or more, the stronghold gains 2 bells instead of 1.

CASE THE JOINT

When you have the opportunity to observe a stronghold, it's layout, or a blueprint or map of the stronghold, make an Intelligence (Investigation) ability check with a DC of 14. On a success, you gain your Intelligence modifier in case points. If you attempt to sneak into the stronghold before significant changes have been made to its security you can spend case points after you or an ally make a roll called for by a Strongholds & Sentinels action to reroll that ability check. On a failure, you did not glean anything useful from your efforts and cannot use this action again until the stronghold has made significant changes to its security. If you fail by 5 or more, the guardians of the stronghold take note of your interest and the stronghold gains 1 minimum bell until it makes significant changes to its security.

LAY LOW

When you attempt to lay low and wait for the stronghold to be on less heightened alert, roll a Dexterity (Stealth) ability check with a DC of the highest Passive Perception score amongst the enemy creatures in that point of interest. On a success, your DM will tell you how much time you have to wait for the stronghold to lose a bell and then you decide if you want to wait that long. If you fail, the stronghold does not lose any bells. If you fail by 5 or more, the stronghold gains a bell.

What the Bell?

Bells represent how alert the stronghold is and how close a stronghold is to discovering any intruders that might be there. When you take an action that causes a stronghold gains a bell it could be that you have left physical evidence of your passing, that you have made a loud or obvious sound, or that your attempts to trick guards into letting you pass left them feeling uneasy and on guard.

THE ALARM IS RAISED

When a stronghold reaches 10 bells, the creature who added the last bell is discovered. When a creature would add one or more bells to the stronghold when it is already at 10 bells, the creature is immediately discovered instead.

DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE TO STRONGHOLDS & SENTINELS

In the Strongholds & Sentinels system, the Dungeon Master's role is to craft challenging environments for the player characters to sneak through and populate it with guards and creatures wary of intruders.

STRONGHOLDS

A stronghold can be everything from a monster filled series of caverns to a tent city of orcs to an elven military outpost. Regardless of the exact nature of the stronghold, all strongholds are divided into points of interest and measure their level of awareness of intruders in bells.

POINTS OF INTEREST

Strongholds are always divided up into points of interest. Each point of interest represents a unique location in the stronghold that has a noteworthy object or person, whose presence poses a challenge or opportunity to intruders, or is particularly well or poorly guarded.

When the player characters enter a stronghold the Dungeon Master should draw a map of the stronghold and identify all the points of interest. Using that map, the Dungeon Master can see which points of interest are adjacent to one another, which are far apart, and which points of interest contain which features of the stronghold that the player characters may want to interact with.

BELLS

The level of alertness and awareness of interlopers a stronghold currently has is rated in an abstract system of bells. Normally rated on a scale of 0 through 10, certain features of a stronghold could raise the minimum number of bells a stronghold can have. A stronghold can also temporarily increase in bells by way of the player character's actions. The Lay Low action cannot reduce a stronghold below its current minimum number of bells.

When the player character's enter a stronghold using the Strongholds & Sentinels system, decide which of the following features a stronghold currently has and use the following chart to determine the stronghold's current minimum number of bells.

BELLS

Feature	Minimum Bells
Broad Daylight	+1
Motivated Guards	+1
Mostly Open Air Stronghold	+1
Intruder was discovered in stronghold within the last month	+2
Intruder was discovered in stronghold within the last season	+1
Elite Guards	+2

FOR WHOM THE BELLS TOLL

At a low number of bells, the sentinels protecting a stronghold are lax and easy to sneak past and deceive. As the number of bells increase, the sentinels become more alert to their surroundings and suspicious of those passing through the stronghold. These changes are reflected by modifications to the passive perception and passive insight scores of the sentinels in the stronghold.

FOR WHOM THE BELLS TOLL

Bells	Effect
0	-5 to Passive Perception, -5 to Passive Insight
1	-5 to Passive Perception, -2 to Passive Insight
2	-2 to Passive Perception, -2 to Passive Insight
3	-2 to Passive Perception
4 - 6	No effect
7	+2 to Passive Perception
8	+2 to Passive Perception, +2 to Passive Insight
9	+5 to Passive Perception, +2 to Passive Insight
10	+5 to Passive Perception, +5 to Passive Insight

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REDUX

For Dungeon Masters and players looking for something between the rules presented in the Player's Handbook and the rules presented in Strongholds & Sentinels, we offer the following rules as an alternative.

Whenever the player characters decide they are going to try to be sneaky about something decide how well guarded an area is on a scale of 1 through 5 with 1 being the absolute best security and 5 being pretty lackluster. When the player characters fail a number of ability checks that they made to be stealthy or take an action while remaining stealthy each failed ability check after that results in them being discovered by the guards, scouts, or whoever or whatever else is appropriate.

Strongholds & Sentinels by

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