

BRUTE FORCES MEPITHEOS MONASTERY

THE FOLLOWING IS THE second part of *Brute Forces*, a series focusing on warrior guilds that can be dropped into a campaign with minimal preparation. Much like its sister series *Collegia Magia*, each article in the series offers benefits to member PCs, and tools for the GM to incorporate the faction into the campaign. This installment features the Epitheos Monastery, where contemplators seek truth in body and mind!



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INTRODUCTION

On a remote mountainside, a marble-walled monastery offers travelers sanctuary—and a place to grow. The monks of Epitheos Monastery promote a unique theological position—a belief in beings beyond the gods. To commune with these Beyond-Gods, their ascetic practice draws them to meditation, physical training, and charity. The fruit of this tradition is power that borders on the psionic; approaching unity with the Beyond-Gods, seekers merge imagination with martial prowess to reshape reality.

CLASS RELATIONSHIPS

- ▶ **Barbarian.** Most barbarians scoff at the concept of meditation. However, those who embrace the practice find their rage infused with greater clarity... even psionic might.
- ▶ **Fighter.** Regular sparring practice at the Monastery can produce mighty warriors, regardless of psionic aptitude. A soldier who is kind, disciplined, and happy has succeeded in the Monastery's eyes.
- ▶ **Monk.** Monks are the most common class at the Monastery. Many will achieve visions of the Beyond-Gods, and unlock hidden world-shaping powers by the Way of the Arcane Fist.¹ Others embrace peace as their prerogative and follow the Ways of the Shifting Flow and Watchful Gate.²

1 Josh Gentry, "Speaking With Fists," EN World EN5ider <https://www.patreon.com/posts/speaking-with-4383094>

2 Josh Gentry, "The Art of Peace," EN World EN5ider <https://www.patreon.com/posts/art-of-peace-2752485>

3 A. Nova, "Chessmasters and Commanders: The Noble Class," A Touch of Class, EN World EN5ider <https://www.patreon.com/posts/touch-of-class-11594111>

Rumors

1. The Epitheos monks are heretics who say the gods aren't real! (False; no formal position)
 2. The Monastery wants nothing more than to control the masses! (In the ancient past, true)
 3. We do not actively evangelize... but neither do we keep epitheistic teachings a secret. (True)
 4. The Monastery forbids pipes and liquor, so as to keep body and mind clear for training. (True)
 5. To get on Seylah's good side, get her some nice tea. (True)
 6. I've heard the dragonborn harvest a flower that produces a most singular tea. (True)
 7. The corrupt monks of the old order kept a record of addictive intoxicants they could sell in lieu of enlightenment. Dreamdrop burned these scrolls. (False; they are sealed in the basement)
 8. They say Dreamdrop is the reincarnation of our founder, Meldahr the Mystic. (True)
- ▶ **Noble.**³ The rare noble at the Monastery has come to eschew their worldly station, and to enrich their spirit. Although the more martial nobles will find ample training, the temple especially cherishes those who follow the Path of the Heart.
 - ▶ **Paladin.** While most paladins find the Monastery's philosophy stuffy and inaccessible, they easily embrace the call to wisdom and compassion. Few paladins are more dedicated than those who receive visions of the Beyond-Gods.
 - ▶ **Ranger.** Rangers at the Monastery practice hospitality by guiding travelers safely through the mountains. Some have penned concerns that natural history and diversity call into question epitheistic doctrine. It is said that rangers who see the Monastery's truth learn to walk the planes.

Open Game Content

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BACKGROUND EXPANSION

Members of Epitheos Monastery can take the following trait options, replacing the normal trait from your background. Additionally, you can replace one your background's proficiencies with an optional proficiency below. With the GM's permission, characters can also add a "mystical experience" to their information.

Optional Proficiencies: Insight, Perception, Religion, Wisdom saving throws

OPTIONAL BONDS

d6 Bond

- 1 When I care about someone, I invite them to meditate, exercise, or drink tea.
- 2 I believe in the doctrine of Epitheos Monastery, but their practices conflict with those of my homeland.
- 3 My connection to my Beyond-God is strong... But I dare not explain so to others for fear they may think me insane.
- 4 To procure other mystical experiences, I've obtained contacts who deal in rare poisons and decadent intoxicants.
- 5 Instructor Seylah took me under-wing from our first meeting. I idolize her sense of perfection.
- 6 As a child, Dreamdrop visited me in a vision and safely guided me to the Monastery.

Practitioners' time at the Monastery lets them touch the beyond. With the GM's permission, roll for or choose a mystical experience from the Mystical Experiences table. The GM may also permit you to add one of your own creation.

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES

d6 Mystical Experience

- 1 I realize now that I am but a lens through which the Beyond-Gods see.
- 2 I see now that nobody is truly unique; everyone is made up of the parts that make me, just in a different order.
- 3 I've seen the fabled Words of Creation, a vision of three great tomes beyond the heavens.
- 4 During meditation, danger, or a drug-induced hallucination, time slowed to a standstill and I could hear the Beyond-Gods playing dice with my life.
- 5 I looked up and saw a giant—a Beyond-God!—guiding me, like a great angel playing chess.
- 6 In dreams, I've walked with the gods among the planes and futures-past. Turns out, the gods are also but characters in a greater story.

NEW FEATS

Metaknowledge

Prerequisite: Proficiency with the Perception skill

Your limited but real connection to the Beyond-Gods grants you certain insights that are difficult to communicate to others. You gain the following benefits:

- **Sense Lifeforce.** As a bonus action, you can attempt to discern the vitality of a creature you can see within 60 feet. You make a Wisdom (Perception) check, with a DC equal to 10 + the target's CR (rounded down). If you succeed, you learn the target's hit point maximum and its total remaining hit points. You can do so once between short or long rests.
- **Resist Probability.** You know that the Beyond-Gods gamble with your life. When you fail an ability check or saving throw, you can record the result. As a bonus action, you can apply this number as a bonus on the next such roll you make to overcome the same obstacle. You can apply this bonus once between long rests.
- **All a Dream.** You have advantage on ability checks and saving throws made to resist being frightened and to see through illusions.

Swordsaint

Prerequisite: Wisdom 13, character level 4th

Your martial and meditative discipline allow you to bend reality. You gain the following benefits. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for these powers.

- ▶ You learn the *thaumaturgy* cantrip and can cast it as a psionic power, requiring no spell components and even when in a state where you could not normally cast spells, such as during a barbarian's Rage.
- ▶ Whenever you take the Attack action, you can psionically cast *thaumaturgy* as a part of that action. Once between short or long rests, when you do so, you can add your Wisdom modifier to melee weapon damage rolls you make that turn, and change the damage type to your choice of force or psychic.
- ▶ You know the spells *dispel magic* and *remove curse*, and between long rests you can cast either once without expending a spell slot. When you hit a creature with a weapon attack on your turn, you can cast either spell psionically on the same target as a bonus action, if one is available.

SIGNIFICANT NPCs

Dreamdrop, Ancient Ascetic (Lawful Good)

A gnome so venerable that her skin looks almost petrified. In close-eyed and smiling meditation, she sits at the centermost shrine of the Monastery. She rarely moves or speaks, except to say "Welcome!" to newcomers.

- ▶ **Trait:** Ascension. Her stone-like dedication to meditation fuels a hidden, vivid life-force.
- ▶ **Ideal:** Compassion. Looking upon Dreamdrop instills an inner feeling of understanding and acceptance.
- ▶ **Bond:** Some ascetics report lengthy technical conversations with her in their dreams.
- ▶ **Flaw:** Dreamdrop is easily mistaken for a statue or mummy. Skeptics are unlikely to cling to her as evidence of her faith. ("I know a *magic mouth* spell when I see it!")

Seylah, Stern Instructor (Lawful Neutral)

A human in her early twenties, with fair skin, dark brown hair and eyes, and straight shoulder-length hair. She teaches fighting arts and meditation to newcomers and young learners. Seylah pays close attention to strangers and is a shrewd judge of character.

- ▶ **Trait:** Caution. She calmly but thoroughly examines strangers from arm's length away, and in conversation always waits a beat before replying.
- ▶ **Ideal:** Dedication. "You want to be strong? Submit every impulse of body and mind to your training."
- ▶ **Bond:** After sparring with young pupils, she gives them in-depth lectures on weapons they may like.
- ▶ **Flaw:** She is rigidly formal, and issues only one warning to rulebreakers before disciplining them.

QUEST HOOKS

The Monastery is a great place to begin a campaign and to get players acquainted with their characters. Conversely, it can also serve as a refuge during an otherwise treacherous mountain excursion. If these mountains are especially cavernous—such that the PCs survived encounters with vile aberrations—perhaps the PCs may be especially inclined to entertain the Monastery's far-fetched teachings. In any case, GMs can also use the following prompts to connect the party, the Monastery, and the larger campaign world.

LOW-LEVEL: THE TOWER OF SUPPORT

Whether the PCs are a batch of initiates or travelers from afar, the monks of the Monastery invite them to participate in a traditional trial: the tower of support. The PCs have one chance to climb up and sit on each other's shoulders, so that they unite to form a pillar several people high. Characters resistant to epitheistic teachings have disadvantage on related checks. If the characters

fail in this task, the monks direct them to converse with each other and discern why they failed. The monks conclude that physical or mental difficulties during the trial arose from one or more characters' difficult pasts. Once revealed, the monks instruct the characters to investigate and alleviate this trauma, and to return only afterward.

MID-LEVEL: THE PROPHECY OF MELDAHR

A monk or one of the PCs has a vision revealing the location of the long-lost Scroll of Meldahr. Meldahr the Mystic hid the Scroll at the shrine deep within Brightquartz Cavern, which is mystically tied to both the Feywild and the Plane of Dreams. The Scroll is the first recorded version of epitheistic teachings, and is also said to contain prophetic warnings and guidance related to the Monastery.

The PCs can retrieve the Scroll for the Monastery... or deliver it to a zealous religious order as proof of heresy. The organization with the Scroll of Meldahr can use its omens to help divert or ensure the Monastery's certain doom, and perhaps even shape world events.

ANY LEVEL: THE RITE OF REBIRTH

If one of the players wants to "re-build" their character, Epitheos Monastery is a great way to simultaneously test the PC's commitment and tie the change back to the story. Up to once per year, a PC in good standing with Monastery can participate in the Rite of Rebirth, which allows them to change their class, ability scores, and any other aspect the GM approves.

To inform the Beyond-Gods that one wishes to transform, the celebrant must first obtain a symbol of their new form (such as a staff to become a druid, or a greataxe for a barbarian). The celebrant must then enact a service for the Monastery, using the symbol at some point on the quest. Upon completion, the celebrant must then meditate silently at the Monastery from sunrise to sunset. The successful celebrant greets the next day rewritten by the Beyond-Gods.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Meldahr the Mystic first became aware of the Beyond-Gods when, after years of meditation, he opened his eyes to find himself sitting at their table, where from beyond the heavens they rule. Struck by the power of this vision, he spent years unsure of how to explain what he now clearly understood was the grander truth of the multiverse. Over the next decade Meldahr carefully selected perceptive, open-minded students and disciples, and they reclaimed a long-abandoned monastery as their home.

Epitheos Monastery grew in reputation with the nearby lands, and the Monastery enjoyed several decades of consistent growth. However, rumor of the "grander truth of the multiverse" was too tempting, and a conspiracy formed to remake epitheistic teachings into an exploitative religion. The conspirators were unafraid to use violence, so they blackmailed and overpowered anybody in their way as they rose to infamy. Meldahr recorded his true teachings and prophecies on the now-fabled Scroll of Meldahr, and hid it in a place where he hoped only a true student would find it.

Over a generation-long power grab, the corrupt monks banished the young Dreamdrop for voicing her dissent. After years of traveling and training, she returned to the Monastery and defeated its corrupt leaders in a legendary sequence of martial arts duels. She re-affirmed the Monastery's commitment to humility and compassion, and declared fighting arts to be a mandatory part of their practice. Today, the Monastery is not as prominent as it was during its corrupt era, but the monks reflect on the fact with a wise smile. 