

The Beholders

faction
Blurb Seekers of knowledge.

The Beholders present themselves as Aestilon's most trusted custodians of dangerous magic. They are antiquarians, archivists, researchers, and containment specialists charged with identifying, securing, and understanding the artifacts, spells, anomalies, and magical practices that others are too reckless to handle safely. In the public imagination, they are the wise tower-mages: those with the knowledge to understand danger, the power to contain it, and the wisdom to decide what must never be allowed into the wrong hands.

That image is not false. It is simply incomplete. The Beholders' entire philosophy is built on the idea that what is unknown is dangerous, and what is dangerous must be known. From that logic, their reach expands almost without limit. To contain dangerous magic, they must study it. To study it, they must wield it. To prevent others from gathering too much power, they must gather more power than anyone else. Over time, custody becomes jurisdiction, research becomes surveillance, and the faction trusted to prevent magical overreach becomes one of the most powerful arcane institutions in Aestilon.

Base of power: The Beholders' influence is centered in their towers, with one major tower in each of the seven Great Cities. Additional wilderness towers stand at especially important magical sites, research points, or places of containment.

Beliefs

- One can never have too much information.
- Power leads to corruption.
- The Beholders are everywhere. You watch out for it, and it watches out for you.

Goals

Openly: To gather, classify, and contain dangerous magic throughout Aestilon; to advise rulers and communities on arcane threats; and to ensure that unstable power does not fall into reckless hands.

Privately: To know as much as possible about magic, magical practitioners, political dynamics, and hidden sources of power across Aestilon — and to keep enough artifacts, influence, and arcane leverage in Beholder hands that no outside force can grow beyond their reach.

History

The Beholders emerged from the simple truth that dangerous magic does not stay politely where it is found. Artifacts circulate. Forbidden texts are copied. Ambitious mages test limits they do not understand. Early custodians, antiquarians, and containment mages gradually became something more organized as city rulers and powerful practitioners alike realized that magical danger required dedicated institutions, not isolated wise individuals.

Over generations, that responsibility crystallized into the tower system. The towers became places of

storage, research, prestige, training, judgment, and political influence. Each one promised the same thing: that magic too dangerous for ordinary hands would be kept in the custody of those disciplined enough to bear it. The promise largely held — which is exactly why the Beholders were trusted long enough to become indispensable.

Structure

The Beholders have no formal internal branches. Every member is expected to be broadly capable of handling dangerous magical work, even if they specialize deeply in one field. In practice, members cluster by magical discipline, research interest, or favored forms of containment. Fire mages tend to gather around fire mages, diviners around diviners, artifact specialists around artifact specialists, and so on. These circles cooperate, compete, teach, withhold, and quietly steal from one another in equal measure.

Each major tower is led by a **Tower Master**. The Tower Masters of the major towers form the faction's **Council**, which gives the Beholders a coherent political body without fully centralizing the entire institution. Tower Masters are extraordinarily powerful individuals, but they are not necessarily the strongest mages in the faction. They are, more often, the strongest mages willing to accept a role that consumes time, attention, and energy in governance.

That distinction matters. Some of the faction's most powerful high-floor mages sit above, behind, or outside formal office. They may respect the Council, ignore it, manipulate it, or place themselves quietly beyond its supervision. The faction tolerates this more than it admits. Such figures are too useful, too prestigious, or too dangerous to confront directly, and many present themselves as calm, wise, and benevolent whether or not that image reflects the whole truth.

Towers, Floors, and Renown

The Beholders' towers are not merely places of work. They are physical symbols of prestige. The higher one's access within a tower, the greater one's status as a mage. Upper-floor mages are assumed to be wise, disciplined, and powerful enough to be trusted with the most dangerous mysteries in Aestilon.

Advancement within the faction operates on two overlapping tracks:

- **Renown** represents institutional standing: trust, access, privilege, recognized service, and faction authority.
- **Floors** represent arcane ascent: the level of the tower a mage is permitted to inhabit, study within, or access in meaningful ways.

As members grow in strength, they naturally become candidates for higher floors. But power alone is not enough. Higher access also requires the faction's approval. In this way, the Beholders are built on a constant tension between real magical might and licensed magical legitimacy.

Each tower also holds a mystical **orb** used in evaluating members. The orb is treated as a formal assessment device, especially at lower levels, and is understood to read raw magical power above all else — though many believe it also hints at aptitude, risk, disposition, or hidden instability. The exact meaning of its readouts is never entirely transparent. At the lower levels, the orb's authority carries great weight. At the higher levels, advancement becomes more dependent on interviews, judgment

by senior mages, patronage, reputation, and political favor. This means that the closer one gets to true power, the less advancement is governed by objective ritual and the more it is shaped by human ambition.

Public Role and Daily Function

The Beholders are researchers first. Their towers function as centers of study, classification, preservation, magical testing, and containment doctrine. Beyond that, they serve as the primary arcane advisors of Aestilon's political elite. Most Sages rely heavily on Beholder mages for magical counsel, and many nobles employ lower-ranking Beholders as private advisors, troubleshooters, or prestige appointments.

Many younger Beholders also spend time in the field as adventurers, seekers, and recoverers of magical items. Bringing a powerful artifact, dangerous text, or unusual magical phenomenon back to a tower is both a contribution to the faction's mission and a major mark of personal prestige. A Beholder who returns with something significant has not only proven competence, but has materially increased their standing in future advancement.

Reputation

Among the public, the Beholders are respected more than feared. Their towers, their discipline, and their visible association with controlled magical power create an image of earned authority. Senior tower mages are treated with deference across almost every layer of society. The fact that a high-floor mage could, in some cases, level a city is accepted not as proof of danger but as proof of how much trust they have earned.

Among mages, the Beholders are aspirational. Most younger mages hope to join them, rise through the floors, and one day be counted among the great tower authorities. Tower Masters are widely regarded as the pinnacle of arcane achievement — at least by those who have not yet learned how much power may exist beyond formal office. Mages raised in more villainous traditions, or those formed by Tractas, are often more skeptical and less eager to submit themselves to tower judgment.

Power and Politics

The Beholders occupy a peculiar role in Aestilon's political order. They are not rulers, but few rulers are willing to ignore their judgment where magic is concerned. Their authority is strongest where dangerous artifacts, magical anomalies, arcane research, and high-level containment are involved. The right to advise often becomes the right to intervene.

- **Order of the Sages** — An uneasy relationship between formal civic authority and arcane oversight. The Order needs the Beholders' expertise, but both factions gather leverage through information, containment, and quiet intervention. They are natural rivals in any domain where knowledge becomes power.
- **The Triumvirate** — Faith and arcane custody meet awkwardly. The Beholders respect divine magic when it is disciplined, but distrust any institution that can justify dangerous power through revelation rather than analysis.
- **The Gilded Hand** — Wealth moves artifacts, sponsors research, and influences access. The

Beholders have reason to work with the Hand when rare items surface, but know better than to trust merchants who can turn containment into transaction.

- **The Explorer's Guild** — Useful suppliers of discoveries, anomalies, ruins, and magical salvage. Explorers bring back the kinds of things the Beholders most want to study and least want left unattended.
- **Treant's Roots** — A source of strange natural magics, old living systems, and powers not easily reduced to tower logic. The Beholders are fascinated by them, but their instinct to classify and contain often sits poorly beside Treant autonomy.
- **Lanista Gladiatoria** — A faction built around spectacle, enhancement, and public violence makes the Beholders uncomfortable, especially where magical augmentations and performative power are involved.
- **Grandmaster Artisans** — A natural point of overlap. The Artisans create, adapt, and distribute magical objects; the Beholders study, contain, and sometimes seize them. Cooperation and distrust exist in equal measure.
- **Shadows of Spefur** — The Beholders loathe the idea of dangerous knowledge circulating through criminal and covert networks, but the two factions inevitably collide in the same markets of secrets, leverage, and hidden power.
- **The Windriders** — Hard to oversee, hard to track, and structurally resistant to central control. The Windriders embody too much freedom for the Beholders' comfort.

Tractas remains a special problem for the Beholders. As the traveling eighth Great City, it is broad, decentralized, and not led by a mage. Its social order is built more on mutual respect than on central hierarchy or tower logic, which makes clean oversight difficult. The respected **Elders** of Tractas are not formal rulers, but some rival the highest-floor mages in power, and some maintain personal ties with the Beholders' strongest figures above the Tower Masters. As a result, Tractas is not outside the Beholders' awareness — only outside their preferred grammar of control.

Advancement & Perks

Rank	Perk	Renown Requirement
[TO DESIGN]	[TO DESIGN]	3
[TO DESIGN]	[TO DESIGN]	10
[TO DESIGN]	[TO DESIGN]	25
[TO DESIGN]	[TO DESIGN]	50

Renown perks still need a dedicated design pass. Floors are an additional progression track within the faction and should be reflected mechanically later.

Hooks

- **The Confiscation.** A dangerous item in the party's possession draws Beholder attention. The question is not only whether it is dangerous, but whether the faction is right to decide that at all.
- **The Tower Climb.** A young mage seeks the party's help securing the prestige, patronage, or field accomplishments needed to rise higher within a tower.
- **The Quiet Exception.** The Beholders move aggressively against one wielder of forbidden magic while ignoring another with stronger political protection. Someone wants the hypocrisy exposed.
- **The Orb's Judgment.** A tower orb produces a reading that threatens a mage's future or marks

them as a potential risk. Was the orb correct, manipulated, or misunderstood?

- **The High-Floor Problem.** A revered upper-floor Beholder stands partly beyond Council supervision, and everyone involved is too frightened or too politically entangled to confront the problem openly.

Notable Members

To be developed collaboratively. Tower Masters, a high-floor mage beyond the Council's clean control, and at least one Tractas-linked arcane elder connection should all appear here in a later pass.

Nothing found

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Last update: **2026/03/23 16:47**

