

Council of Thieves



Epic Win

It's been noted more than once that, when given a public forum like a *Pathfinder* editorial, I have a tendency to treat it like a diary or a confessional—a podium from which to publicly air my dirty gaming laundry. Seeing no reason to break with tradition, I figured I might as well bring up another one:

My name is James Sutter, and I have never played in an epic-level game.

In fact, I've never even played in a *high*-level game. My knowledge of prestige classes is strictly academic. As far as I can recall at the moment, the highest-level character I've ever played only made it to 7th level before the GM, Jason Bulmahn, took him out in a blaze of glory. Actually, since I needed to drop out of the game for scheduling reasons, Jason and I secretly arranged in advance for that session's villain to be especially deadly and focus his attacks on me, the better to give me a worthy death scene. The unfeigned howls of despair from the other party members as I

sacrificed myself to save the rest of them made it one of the most fun sessions I've ever played, and is one of the reasons I remain a fan of character death.

As a GM, I've had a bit more experience with the upper end of things, with my highest-level game taking a party of seven characters (down from the original nine) up through 15th level in the *Savage Tide* Adventure Path, finishing up with an epic firefight featuring an aspect of Demogorgon and numerous broadside laser barrages from a squadron of lantern archons.

All of which is to say that my personal experience with high- and epic-level play is nil, nada, and squat. Sure, I've developed and edited high-level adventures—dozens of them. I've built prestige classes and high-level monsters, and helped ensure they were balanced. But somehow I've never dived in and tried playing with the big toys myself. As I suspect is the case with many folks hiding such holes in their experience, the reasons for this are many and varied.

Foreword

First and foremost, I *like* low-level games. There's an element of danger that's only found at the lowest levels that I feel adds to the game's realism. The knowledge that Farmer Dan's cow could stomp me flat if it wanted to makes it all the more astounding when I slay the vicious beasts plaguing the city. Adventure types that are invalidated by magic or require a lot more GM footwork at high level—the cyptic puzzle, the murder mystery, the overland journey—are still totally viable when all your character has is a rusty sword and a prayer. And my favorite adventure type growing up, the gang-driven turf war not unlike the Council of Thieves Adventure Path, always lent itself well to parties starting out on the ground floor.

Of course, there's a simpler, more logistical reason why the vast majority of my games have been low level. For the first seven or so years of my gaming life, roleplaying was something that happened exclusively during summer vacation. Once June hit, everyone in my social group rolled up characters (mine usually a bit eccentric, such as the urban ranger detective or the teetotaler dwarf) and hit the tables. We would game every day we could assemble—a formidable challenge in my suburb, and one that regularly forced me to hitch a ride on a shuttle bus for disabled senior citizens. Once there, we would play with single-minded fervor until we lapsed into junk food comas or went heat-crazy and ran screaming for the pool. Yet despite our dedication, characters somehow never seemed to hit double digits before school resumed and crushed our aspiring heroes.

These days, school isn't so much of an impediment, and I no longer have to beg for a ride to the gaming space. But that love of low-level play is still deeply entrenched, and it remains to be seen what it'll take to bring me into the high-level sandbox with the rest of the big kids. Will it be Jason's revisions to the high-level rules in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, which everyone (meaning Jason) keeps telling me make them more fun, balanced, and easy to run? Will it be James Jacobs's Sandpoint campaign, in which the mysterious minions of Pazuzu continually make my character question his sanity, pointing toward an eventual meeting with the King of the Wind Demons himself? Or will it be a public shaming by Publisher Erik Mona when he realizes I've merely been smiling and nodding during discussions of high-level rules issues? Only time will tell.

Go To Hell

If you don't share my irrational fear of the big leagues, however, then this volume of *Pathfinder* has you covered. Sure, "The Twice-Damned Prince" wraps up the Council of Thieves Adventure Path—but that's only if you want it to. If you're instead looking to keep going, there are a number of options. The portal to Hell, for instance—does it get closed down at the end of this adventure? Or does it remain open, imperiling the entire city and forcing

the PCs to take the battle for Westcrown to the Pit itself, exploring its twisted and landscapes and even more twisted residents? And even if the party doesn't decide to visit the realm of eternal damnation, Hell might still come to them. Remember, Ecarrdian is still Mammon's son, in a manner of speaking, and the Lord of the Third is not known for his forgetfulness. From here on out, the eye of one of the most nefarious beings on the planes will be squarely on the PCs, and who knows when the Grasping One might decide to add them to his hoard?

Fortunately for you, the Mammon article on page 64 outlines everything you need to know about the master of Erebus and his cultists, and this month's Bestiary offers new fiends straight from the Pit, as well as other high-level heavies ready to take your players to task. It's a party in Westcrown, and all the hordes of Hell are invited.

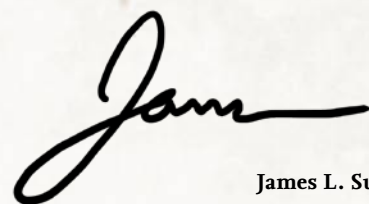
Advanced Classes

But now that I've laid out some of the ways you can continue the adventure, maybe you *are* ready to start over, to bust yourself back to first level and start fresh with a brand-new character. If so, it's my great pleasure to inform you that your options have just expanded.

Releasing next August at Gen Con Indy, the Pathfinder RPG's *Advanced Player's Guide* presents you with no less than six new base classes: the cavalier, witch, summoner, oracle, inquisitor, and alchemist. Will you hunt monsters as an inquisitor, or build your own monstrous companion from scratch with the summoner? Will you glimpse the future with the oracle, or shoot yourself full of strange potions and unleash your inner beast as a twitchy, strung-out alchemist? With the *Advanced Player's Guide*, you can create unique characters never before possible.

So why am I telling you about the new classes now, when there are still months left before the book's release? Because thanks to the wonders of playtesting, you don't have to wait! As I write this, all six classes in their first-draft playtest forms are available on paizo.com as free PDF downloads, allowing you to preview the classes and try them out in your own game months before their official release.

Maybe I'll even try out one of the new classes myself, in Jacobs's Sandpoint game. After all, my current character, Kirin the Heretic, just hit 4th level. He must be pretty close to retirement...



James L. Sutter
Fiction Editor
james.sutter@paizo.com