

Empire of Ashes Session Summary 02/22/2009

Attendance

Ernest (Versane) notices that *Bruce* (Kalauben) is bringing out a laptop. He exclaims, "Sweet! No session summary writing for me! You're on! Just make sure that you remember to include all of the questionable stuff, like my stories about an old friend from Tennessee who can get anyone to look at his junk within 30 minutes. This game is like that." Bruce looks mildly disaffected.

Brandie looks disgusted. She thinks, "Why must every one of these get-togethers include put-downs of my home state? Seriously, it isn't as if I come from a state with real, serious problems. You know, like Massachusetts or those other twisted little New England states. I'm not sure how I'd deal with constantly having to explain that there are a bunch of suboceanic fish-things in my family tree. And the eyes! They're just... creepy, cold and alien like an octopus' eyes."

Chris (Garret Heftungen) looks over at *Patrick* (Jarden) and points out, "Could you move to a different chair? Someplace far away from me?" Patrick understands when he has been rejected. He slinks off to the other side of the table. Brandie swiftly takes the chair Patrick was forced to abandon. She knows why he had to go. But she doesn't make any other comments, as she's still far too traumatized by her experience with a website pictorial of the Filthiest Apartment in Houston. She admits, "You know, I've actually watched the end of the *Fat Albert* movie and paid attention to it. I guess my expectations have just hit rock bottom..."

Paul (Ardreth) just feels really grateful that he's being given a chance to sit quietly, avoiding all suggestion of personal deviancy. Until *Chuck* points out, "Actually, Paul is the most deviant of us all!"

Tim (Seth Avan) evades the whole situation by taking the day to grade papers. Lucky bastard.

Ed (Maurs) crawls in late, explaining, "I forgot I had to be an adult this morning. But then I remembered. And then I decided that adulthood was overrated anyway, which explains why I've decided to show up here."

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Ardreth the Arrogant	Paul	Thul-eth	Warlock	Vengeful, bald, green freak
Seth Avan	Tim	Thul-eth	Defrocked Priest	Had some problems with authority in his past
Garret Heftungen	Chris	Drolar	Investigator	“Extra-dirty”
Kalauben	Bruce	Vashaen	Wandering Swordsman	He carries two blades and wants to right wrongs.
Maurs the Enforcer	Ed	Aemoni	Enforcer	Underworld guy, complete with leather trenchcoat
Jarden	Patrick	Human	One-Eyed Assassin	He insists that he’s not called “One Eye” because he wears an eye patch.
Versane the Arrogant	Ernest	Aemoni	Noble	Part of the rulers of the Empire

Welcome to the Creepy Cottage in the Woods

Garret exclaims, “We’re headed towards a building with lights! A pretty, pretty building with lights!”

Ardreth offers, “I hope there’s a party there! A party with singing!”

Everyone is distracted by this fun-loving banter and doesn’t notice when *Kalauben the Swordsman* crawls out of a drunken stupor in the back of the carriage. Garret suggests, “The zombies didn’t take him because he smells as bad as they do.”

Versane screams, “Schnell!” at the groarg carriage driver. The poor creature mercilessly thrashes the horses. And then Chris says some things about Spanish teachers and “contractions” that Bruce isn’t about to put into a session summary. Ernest continues along with a story about his own Spanish teacher and her attempts to write translations of Sheena Easton song lyrics that Bruce *also* isn’t about to put into a session summary, especially because it makes Bruce’s ears turn red. And then Paul chirps up with a story about his students having a personal conversation in class that is *absolutely* not going to end up in a session summary. Ernest is very disappointed. He reflects upon the way his own session summaries aren’t subjected to this level of merciless censorship.

Kalauben complains, “My only complaint is that you guys left me with all the cheap booze!”

Garret comments, “That’s not booze, that’s wood alcohol.”

Kalauben asks, “Who said that? Who turned out the lights?” He doesn’t realize that there are shambling figures visible in the fog around the cottage. The others debate whether or not to tell him: it might be more merciful if he just doesn’t know.

Garret reminds *Jarden* and *Maurs*, “I think there are undeads in the woods, so if you see anything come shambling out towards the cottage, shoot them!” The two gunsels nod. “Especially if they’ve got chainsaw hands and sawed-off shotguns.” The gunsels nod again. “And *most* especially if they’re wearing the skins of their victims as masks!” The gunsels seem confused.

A Charming Local Girl

Jarden hammers on the cottage door, “Let us in! There are things out here!” Ardreth and Versane sit calmly inside the carriage, sipping their brandy.

Garret and Kalauben see a concerned, beautiful young aemoni lady answer the door. She begs them, “Please don’t judge me by what you see! I have been cursed!” Jarden sees a horrific, rotting monstrosity. He stabs her. Well, almost.

She goes on to explain, “An evil wizard has taken over the Lord’s manor! He has cursed everyone!”

Aldreth, his hand languidly draped out of the carriage window, drawls, “Zounds! He didn’t seem that powerful when we killed him!”

The young woman isn’t finished with her hand-wringing tale of woe. She continues, “I avoided the curse by hiding indoors! But it is as if he is tormenting me by forcing me to watch my relatives shamble around outside. This was my father’s house! He was the local gamewarden! We are a simple, hardworking people with unpretentious, homespun ways! We did nothing to bring this doom upon ourselves!”

The driver attempts to bring the horses in to keep them away from the zombies. They promptly break and run into the (zombie-infested) forest. Garret tells the driver, “Just let them go, there are zombies out there.”

Aldreth reminds the others, “We’ll just have to face them later, you know.”

The driver starts to suspect that if he really *does* let the horses go the two nobles will dock his pay for their replacement cost. He sits quietly, making up plans to retrieve two panicked horses from a wilderness infested with undeads.

Versane asks, "So, when did everything go all zombie?"

She answers, "Things started to change two or three weeks ago, but it has only gotten this bad in the last two days."

Ardreth Sees Things from the Zombie's Point of View

It is at this point that Ardreth decides to leave the carriage and examine the girl. Meanwhile, everyone who doesn't understand they're in the middle of a zombie-infested wasteland gravitates over to the stewpot. Garret invites himself to have some stew. Kalauben has some too. It isn't very good: Garret comments, "It tastes like feet, wrapped in bacon. Rancid bacon."

Ardreth finishes examining the girl. He proclaims, "She's cursed! She's totally, totally cursed! I just know how to blast things, so I can't help her at all."

She whispers to Ardreth, "Who's the most dangerous of your friends?"

Ardreth whispers back, "I am!"

She points towards Versane, "Is he actually in charge?"

Ardreth is indignant, "Not a bit! I am!"

She begs, "Would you kill him for me?"

Ardreth finds that he would be more than happy to. He leads with a volley of Power Bolts. Versane gasps as the bolts rip through him, but remains standing.

Jarden yells, "Finally you show your true colors, hag!" He slashes at her, but his blade fails to bite. She is protected by some kind of defensive shield. Kalauben rushes up to help out, but he panics instead.

Versane howls out, "Katana!" He slashes, but his blade fails to connect as well.

Maurs looks up from the stew, confused at all the excitement. He nocks an arrow and sends it winging towards Ardreth. It is only later that he realizes that there was no head on his arrow. Ardreth complains, "Quit shooting at me!" as he rubs his bruised noggin.

The girl speaks some ancient words. Strange shadows expand and dart around her, making her much tougher to hit. The characters flail at her to no effect. Ardreth continues blasting Versane, leaving him shuddery and pale.

The young girl pleads at Kalauben, "Please protect me!"

Kalauben advances upon Garret, who pleads, “Don’t listen to the plague witch! I’ve never done anything to you!” Kalauben cannot be restrained, but he can be shaken, which Maurs arranges by shooting him in the head with an arrow.

Ardreth takes aim at Versane and blows a hole clean through him. He sags to the ground, alive but out. He gasps, “At least I can void my bowels before I die!”

Garret screams at Ardreth, “You killed him, you fool!” He punctuates his statement by stabbing the sorceress. Then he leers over at Maurs, “Do you gurgle, or do you spurt?” Maurs shudders.

Garret steps forward and stabs the plague witch clean through. She snarls at him through a mouth suddenly three sizes too large. He takes satisfaction that her spells all get disrupted. Weakened, she is totally unready for Kalauben, who stabs her twice and kills her.

Amateur Surgeons Are Very Inexpensive

The characters are faced with the problem that there’s nobody immediately available who can heal Versane. Garret and Ardreth do their best, which is enough to bring Versane back around. Versane wakes up howling, “No! No! You won’t drag me along to your plague-sex party!” Ardreth ignores him and continues working on Versane’s intestines.

Once he has finished with treating the aemoni, Ardreth proclaims, “That was a terrible power she had! She was able to bend my mind against my own companions! I must learn it by eating her brain!” The others step out of his way as he commences eating lunch. Jarden simply searches the place, coming up with \$750 in assorted jewelry. Kalauben searches the plague-witch, finding:

- A firesteel dagger;
- A nice magical amulet.

Jarden claims the dagger. He knows that it has the ability to hit incorporeal creatures and get raises against them. Ardreth wraps his cloak tightly around his face to conceal the horrible marks that are developing there. He muses upon the price that must be paid for knowledge and beautiful, beautiful power. Maurs tries putting on the amulet, convincing

half of the party that he is adorably beautiful and the other half that he is unutterably hideous. Maurs files the amulet away under the heading “Party games”.

It is late, and the characters conclude that they have found the only useful safe shelter in the district, so they make camp over the sorceress’ dead body. Garret reminds the others, “If you happen to find any ancient Indian burial grounds in the night, remember to exhume and rebury all the corpses upside-down. And don’t forget to relieve yourself upon them first!”

They Just Don’t Give Up

Later that night, Jarden realizes that a swarm of zombies is approaching the cottage. Ardreth rather lazily tells the others, “Watch the new, incredibly abusive power I just learned.” He summons two mirror image duplicates of himself. He explains, “They’re completely under my control and they each have their own power point reserve!” He sends them out to start blasting zombies. Two zombies fall immediately.

Versane comments, “That’s pretty good. Can you create duplicates of any of the others? Or summon up some courtesans?”

From the front room, Jarden screams out, “Take that, zombie Flanders!” and eliminates another zombie.

Garret runs up to a window and skewers a zombie. The zombie’s friend flails at him in return, to no avail.

Versane listens to the sounds of conflict in the front room and takes another pull on his blunt. He waves indolently and comments, “If I thought you needed my help I’d have you fired.”

Garret doesn’t quite hear Versane correctly. Distracted, he leaves an opening for a zombie to clout him in the head. Garret spins, disoriented, then slashes a zombie without even realizing it. Jarden simply executes yet another zombie.

Aldreth realizes that he accidentally ran one of his clones out of power points. The other one vaporizes the last zombie. Then they both vanish.

The characters go back to sleep, at least until about three in the morning when Versane wakes up screaming something about “Bats! Bats! Get rid of the bats!”

What Do You Mean, Only One Horse?

Early the next morning the characters find that their groarg driver only managed to retrieve one of the horses from the zombie-infested woods. Versane is disappointed in the driver's performance, because this means that they'll have to leave their hookah-pipe behind. He makes sure to fill it with weed first, and leaves a calligraphed note saying, "Smoke Me".

Velix Drogue's Manor House

The characters approach the late Velix Drogue's manor house later in the morning. The place is nice, with a separate building for the servants and a stable with an enclosed yard.

The characters approach from around the orchard, moving to investigate the stables first. As expected, the place is overrun with a Whitman Sampler of zombies, ghouls and undead horses. Versane suggests, "We should use a missile weapon to attract them one at a time. That one with the half-attached jaw looks like it's got good separation, go for it first."

The undeads do not seem to be operating from the same playbook: they charge en masse. The characters meet them with drawn blades and cut them down in detail, except for Versane and Maurs who display their aemoni heritage by taking to wing as quickly as possible.

Versane flies over towards the hayloft, seeking out nubile farm girls hiding out from the undead threat. He is disappointed to not find any, though he does encounter something that chirps out, "Come on in and take off your armor!" He rather predictably refrains from following these instructions.

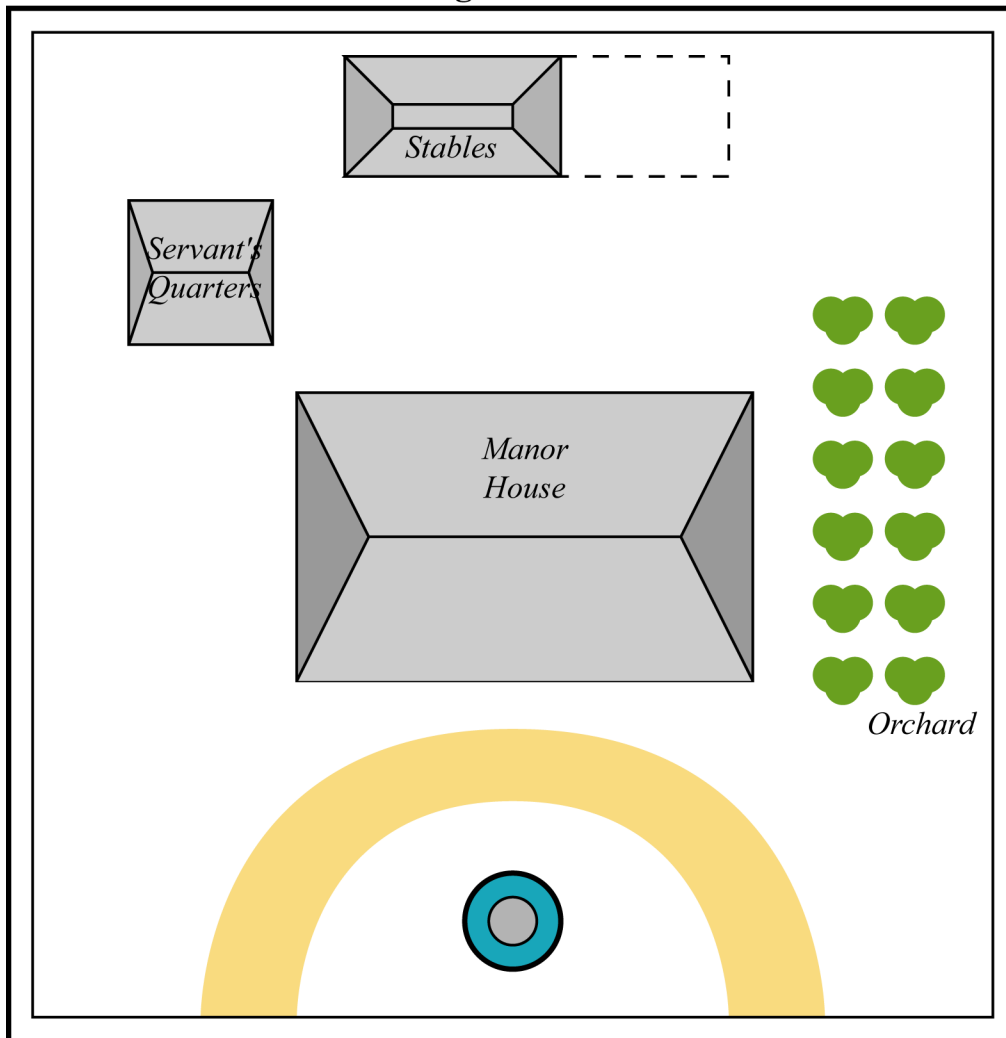
Jarden exclaims, "Okay, let's set the stables on fire and move on to the servant's quarters!"

Versane stops him, "Hey! This is going to be my new manor house! I'm going to hire you to fix it up and wait on me later on. Now, would you care to clear the servant's quarters?"

Jarden rather sullenly agrees, "Okay, since apparently I'm going to be living in them soon." He quickly discovers that the servant's quarters is very much like the barn,

only smaller. It is clear that Velix Drouge felt that it was important to treat his horseflesh properly.

Velix Drouge's Manor House



The characters examine the manor house proper next. It is two stories high with an attic and walls made of stucco. Ardreth examines the workmanship and proclaims, “This is ancient stucco, drawn up from the forbidden knowledge of Lost Aztlan! It is a mystical thing!”

Versane offers, “Really? I’d always thought that stucco was extruded by Mexican laborers, or maybe from their Hive Mothers.”

Garret thinks about it, “You know, that makes the movie *Mimic* make so much more sense. Those things were just Mexican workers trying to sneak across the border in search of work.”

Versane points out, “It’s very hard for me to keep myself from leaping up and singing a James Bond theme song while writhing and twisting. Probably *Goldeneye*.”

Garret answers, “Just as long as you don’t finish the song by asking us, ‘Would you like to see my Golden Eye?’ I’m not sure I could stand that.”

Into the Manor House

The characters pick their way in through the back door of the manor house. As they take up position, Versane is explaining something about transsexual cows to Ardreth, who keeps on saying things like, “I like being close to you when you say those things.”

In a twinkling, ghostly, smoky forms come swirling out of the floor. Knowing that their weapons are worthless against the immaterial, both Kalauben and Maurs move to the defensive. Versane flings his spare firesteel broadsword to Kalauben. For his trouble, one of the ghosts savages him. He takes to wing to escape.

Recognizing that the situation is desperate, Ardreth calls upon the powers of hell to stun himself. Blood weeps from his eyes as he contemplates the inner mysteries.

The ghosts use their powers to fling various pots, pans, knives and whatnot at the characters. Ardreth takes a sauce-pan in the face and suffers a wound.

Garret slashes through one ghost with his firesteel dagger. The ghost howls as it dissipates, it howls, “Oh, I had so much to live fooooooor...!”

Aldreth decides that he’s had enough of this. He flings some eldritch bolts at the remaining spooks, destroying them all. Then he asks, “Could someone help me out for ten minutes while I heal?” Maurs agrees to help.

The Rest of the First Floor

Ten minutes later, the characters move on into a large dining hall. Versane tells Kalauben, “Don’t you be getting far from me!” Kalauben presumes that the aemoni is making a pass at him. There’s nothing of interest in the dining hall, or in the pantry beyond, which gives Versane all sorts of opportunity to loudly cry out, “Goldfinger!” at even the most paltry of excuses.

Near the back of the first floor, the characters find the Head Servant's quarters. Garret exclaims, "The Head Servant! If we can kill him, then all the other Servants will die!"

Jarden points out, "While you were making useless comments, I found a ledger book and a purse with fifteen silver pieces. See? The Head Servant was running a loanshark operation with the other servants."

Upstairs! Downstairs!

The characters head upstairs, chanting "Sweep and clear! Sweep and clear!" as if this will make everything better. Nothing bothers them at all, except the understanding that all of the wood and fabric in the house seems to be rotting.

Through the Hatch

The characters find a hatch leading up to the attic. Garret looks at the situation and observes, "I've seen this movie before. Who wants to go first?"

Jarden pipes up, "I'll go! I don't need a head!"

Versane whispers, "That's why we have a human around. They're just so delightfully expendable."

Maybe There's a Basement!

Jarden points out, "This guy is an evil wizard, right? Don't evil wizards all have basements?" The others agree and commence searching for a basement door. They eventually find one underneath a pile of rotting sacks of flour in the pantry.

Ardreth offers, "That's why he died! He went downstairs and then he was trapped beneath of all those heavy sacks!" Versane and Garret are not convinced.

The cellar appears to be evenly divided between wine (ruined) and roots (also ruined). Versane samples the wine and confirms that it has all been converted into sour vinegar. There is also a rough hole broken out of the wall, with a staircase leading down.

The characters tromp down the stairs. Soon enough, another pack of zombies and ghouls shows up. The characters prepare to execute them in detail. This plan is going well until more poltergeist spirits show up and commence flinging things. Ardreth collapses, incapacitated. Versane takes a broken bottle in the forehead and a wound.

Things look better when Garret brandishes firesteel and sends one ghost back to hell. The other has a moment to look horrified before Garret's backswing erases it too.

The remaining zombies do not last long against the meatgrinder Kalauben, Jarden and Garret set up. There is a bit of a complication when one zombie claws Garret apart. The others are very glad to see Garret stay on his feet, apparently unconcerned by the sheer volume of bodily organs currently visible through his exposed ribs. Versane expresses his true feelings about the situation by howling out, "Buttocks buttocks loneliness servant Chihuahua!"

Healing Now!

With all the zombies dead, the characters realize that Ardreth is bleeding to death. Jarden, Garret and Versane leap to action, each of them working to out-do the others in their mastery of amateur medicine. "That organ's not really necessary, you can just pull it right out!" cries Garret. "I need more wax! You can use that to stop up just about anything!" howls Jarden. "Pass me another tampon for the blood!" screams Versane. Kalauben does his best to avoid looking, or even listening, to the things that are going on.

After an hour, Ardreth is back on his feet, though he is slowed somewhat by his new lung-splint.

The Evil Wizard's Ritual Chamber

The characters finally make it to the bottom of the stairs, where their way is blocked by a huge double door. Only Garret notices that two more of the very irritating poltergeists are sneaking up on the characters from behind. He whirls on one with his firesteel blade and ends it. "Take that!" The other one drifts past the characters and through the doors to warn his hellish master.\

Kalauben exclaims, "I break open the doors! And I ululate as I do! Aiaiaiaiaia!"

Garret offers, "I think you have that wrong, the correct word is 'ovulate.' And if you're going to do that, don't tell us!"

Kalauben ignores him as he storms the door, straight into the sights of a cadaverous mage. Unnatural energy works its murderous havoc upon him, but he stays standing.

The others are able to see a large ritual chamber. Bone piles in the corners set a cold, deathly mood. Four shafts of blazing light rise from the floor around the sorcerer's magic circle.

Then the bone piles erupt into unnatural constructs that shamle forward to menace the characters. Kalauben is so amazed by this sight that a poltergeist is easily able to brain him with a hurled stone.

Ardreth cries out, "Clones! I must have clones!" He summons up two of them. They promptly start launching arcane attacks at the evil wizard. The fact that two of the pillars of light turn into ghost pillars and attack the clones doesn't even shake them, though it does confuse everyone.

Maurs whines, "The columns fell on the clones? I don't understand!"

Garret warns everyone, "The pillars can fall on you! After they turn into ghosts! Stay away from the falling ghost pillars! Whatever that means!"

Versane is just confused, "Something fell over? Where did the gemstones come from?"

Kalauben, only barely conscious, moans, "Gemstones? I like gemstones? Can I have some of them?"

Jarden screams, "It doesn't matter about the gemstones! We need to kill them all right now! Before they turn into lighted ghost pillars!"

Ardreth ignores them all. He is too busy watching his clones burn eldritch holes through the evil sorcerer. The remains of the sorcerer collapse into dust.

The others turn their attention to the four animated bone-piles. While Garret, Maurs and Jarden desperately fight against two of them Versane gazes deep into Kalauben's eyes and sings, "For Your Eyes Only!" Kalauben cannot shake the feeling that the aemoni noble is hitting on him, in part because Versane's singing style includes a disturbing "googly eyes" technique.

Maurs takes a strike at a bone-pile's vital glowing light-spot but misses. He weeps, "You guys pressured me! I shouldn't have listened to you!"

Garret remonstrates, "Drink more paint thinner!"

Maurs puts a can labeled "Sherwin Williams" to his lips and starts swallowing. The others hope that this will improve his ferocity in battle, at least in the short term. It

certainly helps Garret: his next attack destroys one of the bone-piles. Versane takes careful aim at another and strikes clean through its glowing core (its “glow-nads”), destroying it as well.

Across the battlefield, a bone-pile tears into Ardreth’s two clones, shaking one up and leaving the other undamaged. Noticing that the fight is mostly in control, Garret steps through the dead sorcerer’s magic circle. He unleashes a terror effect that leaves Kalauben and Maurs with a Minor Phobia of darkness and dead things.

Aldreth decides that having minions with psychological problems just isn’t going to do, so he orders his clones to destroy the bone-pile. They oblige, leaving the characters in control of the battlefield.

Setting off all the Traps

Versane notes that there is a very nice brazier in the center of the magic circle, a brazier that might be encrusted with lots of gems and things. He ties a rope to an arrow and shoots it into the circle, wrapping around the brazier. He is more than a little surprised when it erupts into black flames that leave Versane scorched practically to death and Maurs barely singed.

Garret is deeply concerned, “Is the rope okay?” Versane’s plight really doesn’t even enter into his mind. He’s quite happy to see that the rope is undamaged.

Aldreth announces, “I’m going to summon a bodyguard to pull the rope.” Then he lets the spell get away from him and roasts his mind. His second attempt works much better. The bodyguard pulls the brazier out of the circle with no obvious additional bad effects. Later on the characters are able to pull a fist-sized magical black pearl out of the ashes that had been in the brazier. And they’re able to pry the five magical light-pillar gemstones out of the floor as well; they can be turned into Entangle traps if the user knows the Entangle spell and is willing to perform the sacrifice of a sentient creature.

The dead sorcerer is carrying:

- A magical ring that gives a +2 bonus to recover from being shaken.
- An argentium saber
- Shadowsilk robes, enchanted to provide +3 Armor, +2 Arcane Resistance, -2 Charisma due to the creepy undead aura and -2 Spellcasting.

- 8 black gems each worth 200 silver pieces

Kalauben takes the argentium saber, in spite of the fact that he is now deeply uncomfortable about being in a dark chamber underground, surrounded by dead things. Ardreth puts on the robes, hoping that wearing them might turn him into a lich. The others note that he starts looking much worse when he puts them on. He keeps the ring. Jarden keeps the magical pearl.

Worst Aid

The unwounded characters turn towards healing their injured compatriots. Treating Kalauben goes without complications. Then Jarden and Garret start on Versane.

Moments later, Versane screams “No more maggots! No more maggots!” The characters decide to leave well enough alone. Besides, when he’s nearly dead Versane seems to lunge around shouting, “Thunderball!” at Kalauben rather less.

The Grounds, After the Lich

The characters quickly determine that the building is now clear, but that there are still zombies shambling around on the ground. Versane announces, “Welcome to Versane Manor, everyone! Pick out your rooms!”

The End of the Session

The characters end up as de facto owners of a zombie-infested manor. Each character gains five experience points and one advancement.