

## Empire of Ashes Session Summary 03/08/2009

### Attendance

*Chris* (Garret Heftungen) emerges from *Watchmen* sprouting Rorschach quotes. *Bruce* (Kalauben) follows, also quoting Rorschach. *Paul* (Ardreth) mourns, “That was a really good movie, but they should have had a lot more Rorschach quotes. I can’t believe how many Rorschach quotes they cut out!” *Chuck* just looks at them with disgust – he knows that the real heart of *Watchmen* is the kid with the pirate comics.

Everyone offers their good hopes for *Ed’s* speedy and complete recovery. *Chris* suggests that various of *Ed’s* removed body parts might sell for large sums upon eBay, particularly given that the surgeon indicated that they were nearly record-breaking in scope and size.

*Tim* (Seth Avan) decides that he’s going to forget about Daylight Savings Time, because it’s a Communist plot. He crawls in an hour late. Actually, he shows up far more than an hour late because only Communists would even acknowledge DST. *Patrick* (Jarden) is just too busy paying attention to the idol he found in a big crater on Mars. Or on vacation. Or possibly attending a Communist Party rally. Whatever.

| <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               | One of the rulers of the Empire, and he’s not going to let you forget it. |

### The Baron Claims Versane Manor

The lights come up and the scenery flocking comes down, revealing the characters inspecting their new zombie-infested haunt. *Versane* ignores the fact that all

metal and wooden furnishings inside have been corroded or rotted away and proclaims, “This is now Versane Manor! Next step is to go to a RoomStore and buy ourselves some sofas and things!”

*Seth Avan* points out, “Not to whine, but you’ve got three wounds. Here, let me heal you.” Zzap! Versane finds himself only partially healed. Zzap! Zzap! Zzap! “There you go! No more organs popping out of your nose!” Versane makes a joke about his capacious private parts to celebrate.

*Kalauben* rather quietly perks up, “I’m wounded too!” Seth Avan heals him, but not that enthusiastically. After all, there’s only so much enthusiasm available when you’re healing one of the lesser classes.

*Garret Heftungen* mentions, “There’s a sort of caravan showing up in front of the house. I think this is the Church black ops group showing up with *Bishop Fang* to murder us all and take the trinket! Gear up, everyone! By the way, has anyone seen Jarden? He was the guy carrying the trinket.” It develops that nobody has seen him for some time. Ominous music plays in the background. To some, it seems to borrow motifs from *La Internationale*.

The characters carefully filter out of the manor to see the groarg *Garl*, backed by a dozen armored men. Versane welcomes them to his manor, a point that the groarg takes to task. He calls back to an elderly vashaen in a carriage. The vashaen complains, “This is my property! I have title to this land! What are you doing here?”

Versane asks, “Didn’t this place belong to Velix Drogue?”

“Once. I got the deed from him.” The vashaen introduces himself as the *Baron Shonta*.

This introduction fills Versane with hope. He exclaims, “Baron Shonta! How well met! We recently saved your wife from Velix Drogue’s dungeons!”

Baron Shonta is grim, “My dearest wife, you could not have possibly rescued her! She drowned in a terrible barge accident weeks ago!”

Garret replies, “No, that’s not right. We took her home more recently than that!”

“Then why have I not seen her there?”

Versane gets a clear sense that the Baron would really prefer to have a dead wife. The bouncy, perky *Lady Shila* emerges from the carriage to provide a tangible reason for why this might be the case.

Garret decides to go for a reasonable outcome, “If only you could show us the deed we could easily resolve this whole situation...” He refrains to add the implied second half of the sentence, “...by murdering you and signing our names to it.” He presumes that the other characters will simply take that as granted, even if the Baron does not.

Baron Shonta answers, “That is desirable, but it may need to wait for a while. The Emperor is dead and now all is chaos while various noble factions vie with each other for power and position. Besides, there are zombies infesting the outer districts of the city as well.” He indicates that his majordomo *Shau*, another elderly vashaen, has a map of the property and is in charge of the two dozen or so servants and whatnot he brought along to set up housekeeping in the (comparatively) non-zombie-infested countryside.

### **Factions in the Capital**

*Princess Azulia*, daughter of the old Emperor, heads the first of the factions. She has a reputation of being a competent swordswoman and sorcerer. Years ago, she manipulated her elder brother into taking an early shot at the throne. He was executed for his troubles, which suited Azulia just fine.

*Prince Kex* is her younger brother, long written off and sent away to the priesthood. He proved more politically apt than expected and now has his own power base in the Temple. He has advocated a crusade against the Janar Khan to the east and outlawing all warlocks. His stated beliefs are extremely doctrinaire and hard-line.

*General Mordox* is not of royal blood, though he is a hero of the Empire and of the people. Versane comments, “Sounds like an anarchist.” He is noted for constructing the fortifications along the northern coast of Hanara and maintaining the border with the Janar Khan. He has the support of elements of the military and among the frontier nobility, some of whom believe that he will be easy to manipulate.

### **The Important Members of the Baron's Household**

- *Garl*, droarg master of arms
- *Shau*, vashaen majordomo
- *Jethra*, thul-eth warlock and Baron Shonta's arcane advisor
- *Lady Shila*, young vashaen lady and the Baron's latest love interest
- *Hurch*, the Baron's personal drolar physician

### **The Baron's Commission**

Versane very subtly asks the Baron if there are any tasks he might need done, anything that would match up with the characters' unique skillset. They come to an agreement on the subject of making certain that the Baron is in fact a widower. This will involve a trip into the zombie-infested city. This does not upset the characters at all, though Kalauben's newfound fear of dead things does raise some hackles. The Baron indicates that he would be willing to offer 2000 silver for the deed. Versane talks him into offering the characters title to two of the hunters' cabins in the district in exchange for her head ("That's *cabin*, not *cabbage*!").

Garret takes a look at the map of the estate Shau is carrying. There are a couple of villages within the estate. Garl indicates that he intended to send scouting parties out to them tomorrow.

### ***A Civilized Dinner***

The Baron Shonta invites the characters to dinner at his table. They accept with gratitude, as the alternative is cold oat mash and questionable mushrooms. The Baron's table is a bit more improvisational than sumptuous, but quite acceptable even so. Unfortunately, midway through the first course the Baron's face adopts an unhealthful shade of green and he collapses.

The characters swiftly conclude that the Baron has been poisoned. They detain everyone who had opportunity and learn that the Baron's wine was the source of the toxin by feeding some to one of the serving girls. Kalauben does a terrifying job of interrogating the lad who served the wine, determining that the boy knows nothing useful.

Seth Avan heals the serving girl, but Hurch is first to the side of the Baron Shonta. Hurch's efforts are not just ineffective but actually deleterious. Seth Avan, appalled at the incompetence he is seeing, elbows Hurch aside and works upon the Baron's pain. Hurch grumbles and stomps, clearly no longer fond of Seth Avan.

### *The Poisoner Revealed!*

Garret elbows Shau to one side and announces, "An opportunity to investigate! That's where I'm a Viking! I get a +2 bonus to Investigate, but only when I am investigating!" He commences interrogating the servants until one vashaen serving-woman stammers a bit and drops a small vial with a few traces of incriminating white powder at the bottom.

Seth Avan grabs her by the shoulders and screams, "Confess! Confess! Confess, woman!" She slaps him across the face and indicates as to how that isn't her poison that just dropped out of her skirts.

The others make a lot more progress by speaking to her rationally and actually asking questions. She notes that she is a professional. Versane enters into negotiations with her, negotiations that don't go well. She pulls a pair of daggers.

Violence ensues, but a very confused violence that doesn't resolve anything. Kalauben does his best to incapacitate her as she moves to kill Lady Shila. Garret (who has decided that the woman assassin is backed by Baroness Shonta) stands in the way to stop him. Seth Avan and Ardreth stand around in confusion, unsure whom they should help.

Then someone darkens the room with an Obscuration effect. Seth Avan sees an opportunity to act and lays down a Stun into the darkness, catching (but not affecting) Kalauben and Versane.

By the time the darkness effect ends, Versane rounds a corner to find the assassin *Chika* standing with two bloody daggers over the prone body of Lady Shila. Several soldiers stand nearby. He moves up to make it look like he is engaging her, but really is just getting closer to whisper, "Okay, we helped the Baroness escape in town. The Baron is upstairs in his room, we'll help you whack him if you want."

To make things look good, Versane yells, "Soldiers! Get her!" One soldier rushes Chika and is gutted like a trout for his trouble. She heads upstairs to get at the

Baron. By this time, all of the characters are now on the assassin's side except for Kalauben, who is desperately trying to stop her.

Seth Avan finally draws Kalauben aside and persuades him, "You need to help the Baron! You need to go outside and kill all the guards! They're obviously in on the plot! Them and that healer, they all need to die!" Kalauben is completely convinced. He heads to the front door, but breaks down in panic when he sees the darkness outside. Seth Avan rolls his eyes and blasts the guards with a Stun. Ardreth follows up with a Panic attack that sends half of the remaining guards scattering into the zombie-infested forests.

Versane follows the assassin Chika up into the Baron's chambers and makes a concerted effort to kill him... will they succeed in their dastardly plan? We cannot know, for it is at this moment that Bruce announces that he must depart! Oh, the tension is so thick you could ladle it with a spork! Will our heroes live or die? Will Kalauben overcome his various phobias sufficiently to become a useful adventurer again? Will Versane finally murder Ardreth in its sleep? It will fall to other fingers to write out those stories...