

## Empire of Ashes Session Summary 03/29/2009

### Attendance

*Patrick* (Jarden) looks over at *Ernest* (Versane) and asks, “So, you got a bit of a horn problem going on there?” Ernest vehemently denies it – his horns are exactly the right size.

*Bruce* (Kalauben) groans, “That’s what you say, but you just hit me in the nose with one of those things.”

*Chris* (Garret Heftungen) can’t stop laughing as he watches Ernest and his freakishly oversized horns carefully navigating around the house.

*Paul* (Ardreth) yells out, “Look out! To the left!” Ernest wheels to the left, catches a horn on the moulding, and crashes to the ground. *Chuck* collapses in laughter.

*Ed* (Maurs the Enforcer) migrates in just in time to hear Paul complain, “Have you noticed that when we go to Firehouse Subs they wrap everyone else’s pickles but they don’t wrap mine!” Ed mourns the lost days when gaming was more family-oriented and wholesome, like Disney.

<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.

### Where Are We Now?

*Versane* offers a quick summary of the story so far for the benefit of *Maurs* and *Jarden*. The characters first killed *Valix Drogue* then headed out to his country house to find that the place is loaded with zombies. Once the group cleared the house, they met up

with an aemoni noble who turns out to be the husband of the *Baroness Shonta*, whom the characters rescued from Drogue's basements. They are a bit surprised to find that the noble more or less sold his old wife off to Drogue because he has taken up with a new, more succulent bit of fluff. At that point the assassin *Shika* hidden among the noble's entourage revealed herself and killed the noble. The characters helped out by killing off most of the noble's other servants and guards. The survivors quickly hired on with the winning team.

Jarden is amazed, "Wow! We did all that? That's really impressive."

Versane continues, "I didn't even mention that the King recently died and now the capital city is both riven by competing factions and partially overrun by zombies."

Maurs rumbles, "I see a bright future for ourselves as mercenaries for the Baroness."

Versane tells him, "All in good time. First step is for us to find the deed to this manor and get it written over to us. My recollection is that the former owner's last expressed wish was to sell it to me for the princely sum of 100 denarii. And I believe the Chamberlain here has the authority to sign over the documents and accept the payment."

The Chamberlain, still amazed to be alive, nods mutely and produces a quill pen.

### **We Need Some Rest**

The characters enjoy a long, restful evening recovering Power Points, healing their wounds and dividing up control over the various surviving retainers. *Ardreth* notes, "I now control six aemoni archers! My social life is looking up!"

Jarden ignores him. He's too busy guiding his new groarg footment around, burning bodies and looking for new-risen zombies.

Versane notes that the dead Baron has a chest containing 500 gold coins (worth a total of 50,000 denarii). He shares out 50 gold coins to each of the characters and reserves the remaining 200 gold as an operating fund for the manor and his new staff.

### **Defending the Manor House**

The manor house faces a couple of significant security issues. The whole compound is deep in zombie-infested lands. More problematic, the recent supernatural problems supernaturally rotted the wooden fittings of the house including the four doors

(counting the main door as two because it is a double door). The characters have all of the Baron's five carriages, plus their own, but have only four of his ten horses and one of their four.

A quick expedition to obtain lumber from the nearby copses of life-drained trees proves fruitless: the trees are rendered weak and friable, useless for anything other than low-grade firewood.

Aldreth sends his six aemoni scouts out to create a perimeter. Two of them encounter flocks of zombie crows. Both are wounded, so Aldreth has them kept under close observation. One of them turns into a zombie and is subsequently dealt with by the others.

Garret opines, "I think we need to explore the family graveyard in force to see if the zombies are digging up corpses as either food or reinforcements."

*Kalauben* shudders, "I think we should just stay here. I don't like graveyards."

Garret ignores the phobic coward. He continues, "We can just let those zombie crows take care of themselves. After all, they're rotting and how long can a rotting thing fly?"

*Kalauben* pipes up, "Yeah, that's right! They can take care of themselves! I like the way you think!"

Garret explains, "And once they're down we'll just have lots of hopping zombie crows."

*Kalauben* screams, just a little bit. He doesn't want to follow the others to the graveyard, but he doesn't want to be left alone either. As the others head out, he whines, "Can't we go visit the Hyena Petting Zoo instead? Guys? Guys?"

### *The Family Graveyard*

The characters approach the graveyard. Shika scouts and swiftly returns to report that there are at least a half-dozen ghouls lurking in the graveyard. *Kalauben* and Maurs open fire on the lead ghoul, downing her. An enraged ghoul rushes at Jarden, who answers with a calm sword-strike that cleaves the creature through.

Aldreth announces, "I fire my Cold Greasy Shadow Bolts at them!" His spells tear one ghoul into shattered bloody fragments and leave another horribly wounded.

Garret observes, "What are you trying to do? Sicken them to death? That spell sounds like it was drawn from the kitchen of a fast food restaurant."

Jarden moves forward to engage another ghoul, but the creature is too fast for him. It evades his strike then takes a big bite out of his arm. Jarden feels the burning sensation of infection course through his veins. He doesn't move, because he's also paralyzed.

Aldreth whispers to Garret, "Let's just leave for five minutes."

Garret responds, "He's done for, but we should check the crypt first. Do some more of those grease-bolts to clean up the battlefield." Aldreth incants, then screams as the power feeds back into his mind, leaving him shaken. Garret rolls his eyes and speculates upon exactly what he needs to do to get competent allies.

A few cuts and chops later the last of the ghouls is dealt with. Most of the characters examine the destroyed ghouls, concluding that they're low-grade undead that are plainly old enough that they migrated into the area rather than rose up as a result of the current plague.

### **The Old Mausoleum**

All of the characters except Kalauben turn to examine the old mausoleum. They find that the doors are chained closed. Versane examines the lock and comments, "You know, most crypts are locked from the inside because the dead value their privacy." Maurs and Garret look at him skeptically. Garret wonders what kind of relatives the aemoni noble might have. Maurs hears wheezing and scuttling noises inside.

While the others speculate on what can possibly be done about the lock, Maurs simply unlocks it. Garret pulls the chain off the door. Kalauben cowers in the background and lights up a fire.

Jarden peers into the mausoleum. It is very dark inside. He calls back, "Can someone bring up a torch?"

Garret comments, "Kalauben's starting a fire. Maybe he can."

Kalauben answers, "You come back here and pick one up!" Garret shrugs and picks out a nice torch. Then he heads into the mausoleum. Jarden and Maurs both hang back, paying attention to the voices in their heads that tell them it would be a bad idea to

go inside. Versane just hums the Ming the Merciless Mental Compulsion Theme from *Flash Gordon*.

From inside the mausoleum, Garret yells out, “It’s okay guys! There’s nothing dangerous in here! Just a big column covered with faces! It’s decorated with cotton candy and gold!”

The assassin Shika, perched up on top of the mausoleum, senses that something is wrong with Garret. She gestures to the others as they approach confidently, eager to enjoy some cotton candy.

Jarden makes it into the mausoleum. He notes that the crypt darkness is mystical: it suppresses the light of his torch. He finds Garret standing insensible just inside, but is unable to pull him clear. Shika joins him and helps pull. She manages to break him out of his stupor. It is at this moment that everyone becomes aware of a horrific undead skull-mass lurking and whispering in the corner of the crypt.

Versane notices that Kalauben is squirming towards the back of the group. He orders the aemoni, “Bring up a torch, varlet!” Kalauben obeys. Then the entire area around them erupts into grasping worms. They clutch at Kalauben, Ardreth and Maurs. Ardreth flings himself clear.

The creature whispers at Shika, converting her into its will-less puppet. Versane cries out a word of warning, then shoots the creature with his bow, hoping to disrupt its control. It groans in inhuman agony. Then Shika throws off the creature’s control and turns on it viciously with her daggers, cutting it to gibbets and foul-smelling shreds. As it perishes, the carcass evaporates into mists.

### **Inside the Crypt**

Garret looks around. He concludes that the creature used the bodies stored in the crypt to form up its own body. Versane makes helpful comments like, “Clear out any remaining bodies, I need to have room in here for my own family!”

There are four sarcophagi inside. Three are opened, while the fourth remains closed. The three opened sarcophagi contain rotting clothes and some money:

- 300 denarii
- 500 denarii

- 3000 denarii

Versane distributes 600 denarii to each character and 200 denarii to Shika.

### **The Sarcophagi**

The characters (except for Kalauben) debate strategy on opening the one sealed sarcophagus. Kalauben is unambiguous in his position that the thing should be left closed. The others ignore him and cooperate to push the cover off to reveal the remains of some long-dead Drogue Family matriarch. The body is adorned with:

- Tattered ancient finery
- A hefty ring worth 6000 denarii
- A set of bracers worth 70 denarii
- A heavy chain necklace with an empty setting for a large gem (perhaps for the black pearl).

Jarden notices that the necklace setting looks like it was made for the black pearl he carries. He proposes putting the pearl into the necklace. Garret whispers to Ardreth, “Do you think you should disintegrate him?”

Ardreth responds, “I’m curious to see what happens.”

Jarden reunites the stone and the setting to no visible ill effects.

### **Containing the Zombie Threat**

The characters dig up the remaining graves to extract the corpses to be burned. Kalauben gathers the firewood for the pyre. While they work, Jarden searches the area. He uncovers an old leather-bound book hidden in one of the graves. Ardreth intones, “I *must* have it...” Nobody objects.

Ardreth reads and learns that it is the journal of Velix Drogue’s great-great grandfather, who apparently was a much better warlock than his descendents. He also learns that the black pearl imprisons one of the Forgotten Ones, and has a variety of powers that it can use on its bearer.

### *The Hunters' Cabins*

Versane and Garret propose investigating the various hunters' cabins scattered across the manor territory. Kalauben points out, "It's almost one in the afternoon so it will be dark soon, shouldn't we just go back to the house where it's safe?"

Aldreth whispers ominously, "If he continues to whine, we should lock him in the crypt."

Garret points out, "We could leash him, but I don't think that would be good therapy for him."

Aldreth continues, "Behind fear, there is a certain clarity of mind."

Garret observes, "Says someone who is not being locked in a crypt. He comes with us."

The characters examine the exterior of the nearest hunters' cabin. There are no signs of life, nor are there signs of unlife. The characters enter and find the place more or less deserted. It is at this point that the zombie mob comes into view, trudging up the hillside directly towards the cabin. The characters take defensive positions, with Versane, Maurs, Aldreth and Shika all move to the roof.

The characters pick off a couple of zombies as they advance. Then several of them break from an aimless shuffle into a dead run. Even worse, two of them open up wings and take to the air. Aldreth responds by shooting both of them down with Greasy Shadow Bolts.

The zombies storm the cabin. Kalauben panics and hides in the back of the cabin. The other characters pin their courage to the sticking place and fight back. Aldreth summons up a firing line of clones and orders them to volley at the zombie pack. Zombies fall before their eldritch blasts, but one of the clones suffers feedback and staggers back.

Jarden stands strong at the window Kalauben left uncovered, pushing back the attacks of two zombies. Garret braces the door, listening to the hammering of a zombie just outside. Then Aldreth and his clone artillery support unleash another barrage. Garret hears a wet splash as the zombie outside the door is blasted into a foul stew of body parts. He moves over to Jarden's window and cuts down the last two zombies there.

The characters search the place and find nothing more valuable than eight sestertii and a rusted cooking pot. Sundown is approaching, so the characters return to the main house to find that their retinue has seen little excitement. One of the servants has built up a respectable replacement door.

Versane pays each other character 1000 denarii (except for Maurs, to whom he pays 10 auri) to allow him to claim the hefty ring worth 6000 denarii. Garret comments, “He looks like a swell now, but he’s still going to be knocked down and robbed in an alley.”

### *Now We Visit the Village of the Damned*

The next morning the characters go to visit one of the villages in the manor. It is quickly obvious that the whole place is overrun with zombies. Kalauben responds by sneaking off to the side, hoping to find a safe refuge. Much to his surprise, most of the other characters also slip off to the side.

The zombies make notice of the intruders and move to engage. Three of them shamle up to Ardreth, leading him to squeal for help to the dark powers.

Flying safely above the battlefield, Versane comments, “Goodness those zombies are fast. I guess this whole village is full of cheetah zombies.”

Aldreth points out, “I think I’m about to leave you guys, perhaps for a better place. Perhaps to a worse one.” The others note that a half-dozen zombies now besiege him. Maurs comes to the rescue, hauling Ardreth up into the air and away from danger.

Before the characters understand what’s happening they are swarmed by zombies. Garret is struck by three of them and avoids serious injury only through dramatic evasion skills.

Versane announces, “I’m going to use a Smarts trick on a zombie!”

Garret shoots back, “Are you kidding? Does this look like a smarts kind of operation so far?”

Versane ignores him as he holds one arm out invitingly, then slashes at the zombie’s head when it tries to take a bite.

Kalauben screams in panic and slashes madly at two zombies, felling one. Jarden calls upon his evil Black Pearl patron to unleash a blast of incinerating energy at a pack of zombies, plus Garret and Shika. Garret and Shika are not impressed.



Aldreth decides that the only way to counter an army of zombies is to summon an equal-sized army of clones. He brings them up in two waves and sets them to blasting zombies en masse. One of the zombies gestures and sends a shadow bolt back in response, leading Aldreth to squeak in alarm. “Hey! They’re not supposed to have the same tricks that I do! Unfair!” In his rage, he orders his minions to obliterate all the zombies. They comply.

Versane and Garret move down the street to engage the lead undead. The villainous creature gestures with its corroding fingers and engulfs both of them in a burst of green crackling flames, leaving them with awful scorching wounds. The creature cackles at them, then draws back behind the corner of a sturdy stone-walled stable.

Aldreth sends his clones down into the street to pepper the undead boss with shadow bolts. Their attacks leave him wounded, but not incapacitated. Shika clambers up the far stable wall and makes towards the undead leader across the roof. Kalauben sneaks around the back of the building to provide a flanker. As they move into position, Aldreth steps up and unleashes his full fury at the creature, blasting it into hissing bone fragments.

Aldreth steps away, arrogantly commenting, “I could have done that at any time.”

The characters look around, happy to be the new owners of the Village of the Damned. But they do not let their success distract them from important priorities: they spend some time binding each others’ wounds.

### *The End of the Session*

Each character gains five experience points and another raise.