

Empire of Ashes Session Summary 04/26/2009

Attendance

Bruce (Kalauben) staggers in, admitting that he knows nothing about what is happening in the game anymore. *Paul* (Ardreth) points out, “That’s okay, none of us know what’s going on either!”

Ernest (Versane) points out, “Hey, I’ve been spending quality time watching *Napoleon Dynamite*.”

Chuck chirps up, “Did you know that *Napoleon Dynamite* breaks the Netflix recommendations engine? Apparently, people respond so randomly to it that the software can’t understand what to do.”

Chris (Garret Heftungen) offers, “Yeah, and the one on Amazon is pretty screwed up too. I bought some home and garden stuff, and suddenly its recommending all kinds of... adult-oriented... things.”

Patrick (Jarden) shudders, “I can see that as being... helpful...”

Ernest looks over at Patrick and asks, “What’s with all the shuddering? For some reason you always seem to be the one whose fragile sensibilities are most-affected by our collective depravity, yet you continue to show up? It’s almost as if your responses were being stage-managed by an entity over which you have no control...”

<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.

Roles for Alternity

Bruce is offered the incredible opportunity to select two roles for the upcoming *Alternity* game. He chooses the Chief Engineer and the Rignunmor Trader. Profit uber alles! Now, if only he could manage to attend a few of the games...

What Happened Just Now?

Garret Heftungen explains to the others that there is a part of the forest that nobody goes into because folks who do that either don't come back, or come back changed. He and some of his companions went in anyway, because that's just the way they roll. They found a pack of undeads digging away at the ruins of a huge cathedral, rather like termites looking for something toothsome. It was at that point that he decided to go back to the manor house and recruit the rest of his comrades because more firepower is always good.

Ardreth offers, "I've been losing one or two soldiers per session."

Garret points out, "Yes, but some of them got up again."

Lord Versane asks, "You say you found some kind of huge barrow?"

Jarden answers, "Yes, with scads of undeads working as a digging crew and one big golem in charge plus a couple of lich-type spellcasters hiding in the back.

Jarden Has a Breakthrough

It is at this point that *Jarden*, holder of the Cursed Black Pearl, starts to speak in tongues. The characters barely notice until his voice changes ("Our little *Jarden* is now a man!") and he announces himself as the Voice of the Pearl. The characters have an involved conversation with the pearl on the subject of the Master and his demesne.

The Pearl (speaking through *Jarden*) explains that the Master lived in a great city that was destroyed as part of the Great Catechism ("Doesn't he mean 'cataclysm'?"), an event that he helped to bring about. The others mostly think that it's a very clumsy apocalypse you're bringing if it destroys your own real estate in the process, but they keep their thoughts to themselves. They sense that the Pearl has a Republican's sense of message discipline.

The Pearl ends up in an argument with *Versane* when the nobleman asks about how the Pearl's mother feels about his current occupation. The Pearl is incensed, "I have

no mother! I have no father! I am an arcane construct embodied into a form of physical perfection?”

Garret asks, “So, your idea of perfection involves being the spew of a sea-vagina?”

The Pearl snarls at them. Versane tells Garret, “Good work! You get a raise!”

Thereupon Jarden attempts to persuade the Pearl that he is in fact a representative of a superior thought-form, with the goal of gaining more control over it. He isn't having too much success until *Kalauben* suddenly pops up and blurts out, “Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny!” The Pearl is convinced.

Versane is amazed, “I never thought autism-boy had it in him. I guess he gets a raise too.”

While the other characters walk off to celebrate amongst the scullery maids, Versane calls aside his personal Girl Friday assassin *Shika*. “Sooner or later, that magical item is going to go all out of control and try to roast us. I want you to be standing around behind Jarden with a couple of toxic daggers ready, just so we have a useful response when the day comes.” Shika grins the way a scullery maid does when Versane gives her a glittery bauble. Versane shudders.

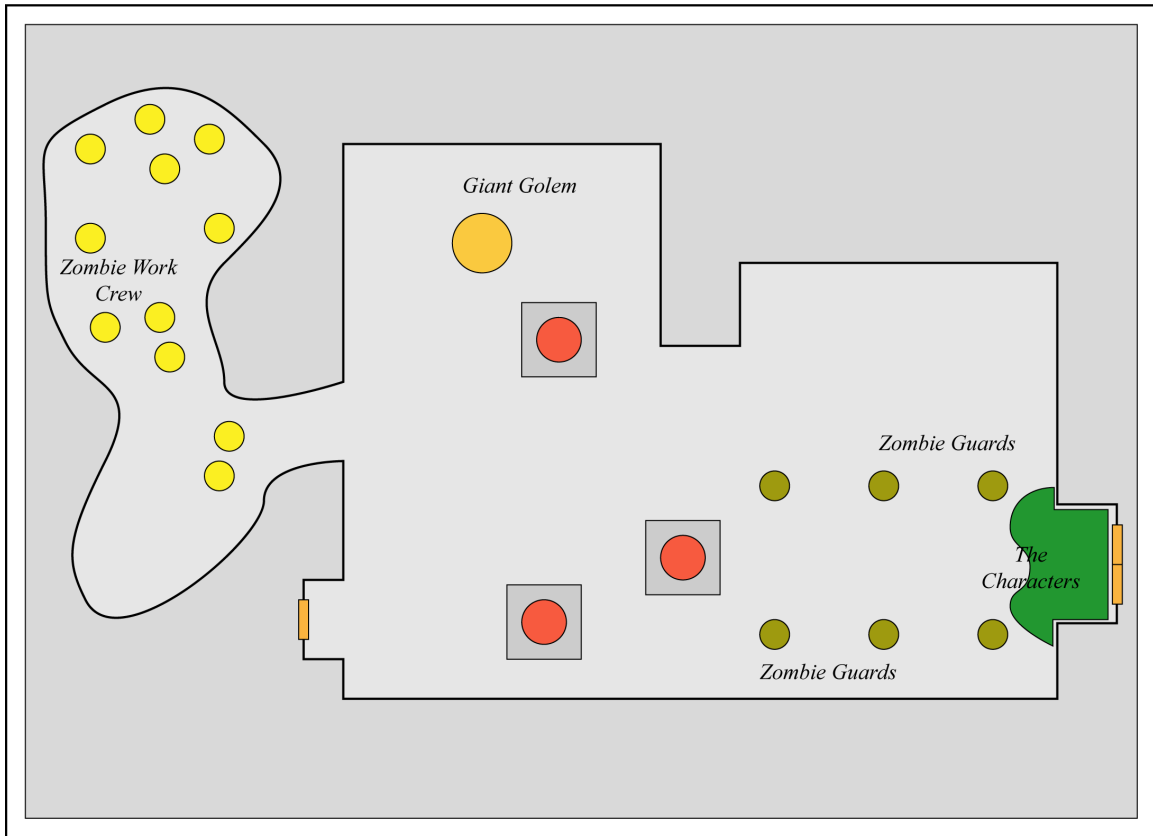
Back to the Ancient Warlock Plantation Home

The characters end the random conversations and head forthwith to the Ancient Warlock's Plantation Home. The characters observe that the place has been repopulated, suggesting that the previous expedition only took out the first work shift. The six zombies in the anteroom are all better equipped than the last pack of guards. It is clear that someone in charge is capable of learning from experience.

The characters plow into the guards, sending bits and pieces of undead minion flying. The big zombie recognizes that bad things are happening and lumbers forward into the action. Ardreth orders his minions to open fire. The huge zombie barely notices their arrows.

Garret screams at the giant zombie, “Die! Die you monster!” He charges in, slashing wildly. The zombie makes a horrific gurgling noise and falls. Garret explains, “I hit him in his brain-gonad! Now maybe I'll be able to impress my best girl, Whompers McGee!”

Anteroom of the Old Warlock's Lair



Kalauben steps in and executes two zombies. He howls with animalistic delight, “Aroogh! I no longer have fear of these things! I no longer fear anything!”

Jarden muses, “Great, so now you’re still broken, you’re just broken in a different way.” He runs up to a cluster of raging worker zombies and squeals out, “Burst them all, my parasitic arcane construct! Burst them!”

Garret rolls his eyes. He still hasn’t gotten used to the descriptions of spells in this game. Meanwhile, several zombies very obligingly burst.

Shika realizes that Two-Fisted won’t do at all, so she uses her mouth as well, a comment that makes some folks at the table shudder. Shika doesn’t care – she’s too busy wiping zombie leavings off her argentium blades.

Versane looks over the battlefield and comments, “Good job, men! And chick, too. Scary, scary chick.”

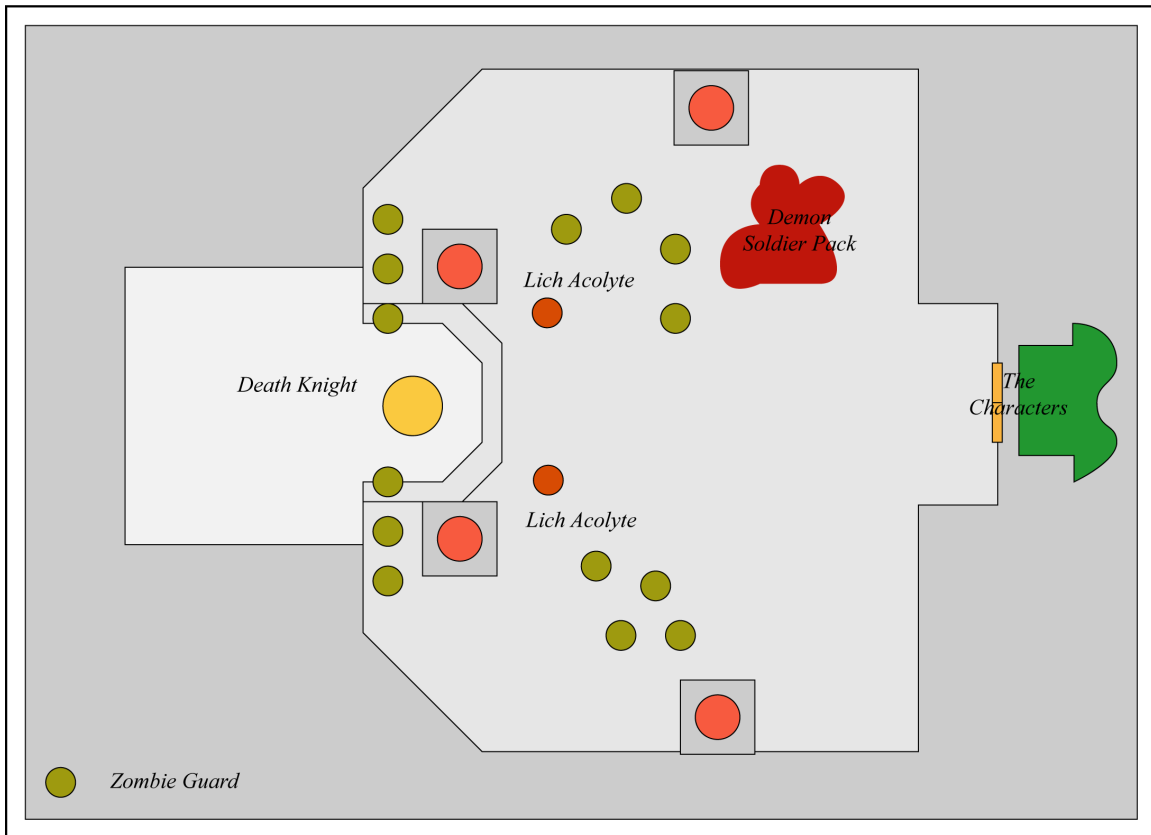
The Sacrificial Chamber

Ardreth instructs Jarden, “Open the door with your stone!” Jarden opens the door. With his stone. The others prefer to not watch the process.

Versane comments, “He’s guilty of high-sticking and he got put into the penalty box, too bad he doesn’t know the rubber hat trick. And besides, she was obsessed with his Zamboni.” Nobody else understands precisely *what* he is talking about, but they do understand what he means.

The characters look beyond the door to see huge ceremonial room decorated with glowing circles in the floor and a raised altar flanked by a pair of braziers. Ardreth offers, “I don’t like this floor plan, it just doesn’t seem homey to me.”

The Warlock's Old Ritual Chamber



Garret points out, “You know that décor in fantasy games really has nothing to do with the way people furnish their homes in real life. If they did, we’d see a whole lot more floor-level lighting, raised daises and braziers around.”

Versane answers, “Yeah, what’s up with that. I went to Home Depot and asked for some elephant-skull altars and inlaid ritual floor tiles and they had nothing! Those guys aren’t going to stay in business if they don’t start stocking stuff their customers want.”

Jarden takes stock of what is inside the room. He peers through the door and reports one giant death-knight type in dripping, demonic armor, flanked by a couple of lich acolytes and a platoon of zombie guards. As he watches, the death knight summons up a pack of horribly twisted demonic warriors.

Realizing that there's only room enough in the door to let one character through at a time, the characters pull back to wait for the undeads. The death knight responds by launching a Hypnotic Orb through the door, mesmerizing almost all of the characters.

Ardreth announces, "I am more of a warlock than he ever was!" He intones terrible words of power and dispels the orb, freeing his comrades' minds.

The zombies charge, opening up the door the rest of the way. Versane is ready and waiting, and executes the first zombie through. Jarden evades a zombie's wild slash, then responds by cutting the creature in half. Foul entrails dangle from the end of his blade.

Demon soldiers storm in on Versane and the assassin Shika. The creatures look like corrupted savage monkeys with no necks and twisted arms. Shika tries to trick the creatures but fails, then inflicts an entirely forgettable wound upon the leader. Ardreth cries out, "These are frolic demons, named for the way they attack! They used to use them as party favors in Ancient Mius! You'll need firesteel weapons to hurt them!"

Garret decides that the high-value option for him is to panic, "They're immune to argentium weapons!"

Jarden slashes down one demon soldier and fences with a second.

Versane urges him (in singsong), "You shoulda done the peanut-butter-blart-n-jelly! You know, the peanut-butter-blart-n-jelly! Woohoo! Woohoo!"

Jarden begins to suspect that he is working for a man with deep, deep issues.

Garret ignores both of them. He's up to his elbows in zombie innards as he mutters, "We went to the movies but all she wanted was *brains!*"

The death knight howls, "No more clever banter! No more inappropriate jokes! No more discussion of sake bombs and drinking bourbon through socks!" He launches a Fiery Blast of Hellfire at the characters, leaving Kalauben, Shika and Jarden all scorched and shaken.

Versane draws a bead on a zombie acolyte and drops it with a well-aimed arrow.

Garret sends an arrow at the death knight. He is pleased to see the arrow fly true, and dismayed to see the creature ignore the attack. The death knight stomps up to engage Jarden, Garret and Kalauben directly.

Ardreth watches as everyone else's strikes have no visible effect upon the death knight. He invokes Mirror Image and brings up a half-dozen clones. Versane flings himself to the ground as the clones launch eighteen screaming shadow bolts at the death knight.

Ardreth explains to the others, "You launch a big enough volley of darkness bolts at something, one of them is sure to have an effect." His words are proven true: one of his blasts takes the death knight's head clean off.

The remaining zombies and frolic demons don't last long.

The characters celebrate because Versane Manor is now safe!

And Then There Was the Looting

Jarden decides that his life is not complete without the death knight's plate armor. He is horrified to find that the lead undead is no longer wearing plate mail, only a plain black robe. He puts it on and finds that it is terribly big for him. He resolves to visit a tailor when he gets back to town.

There is also a huge greatsword (d12 damage) that requires more Strength to use than any of the characters actually possess.

Ardreth goes and picks over the books and scrolls on a side table. He strongly suspects that he might be able to find quite a bit of dark, forbidden knowledge. And the glowing circle on the floor might be a portal to a Hell Dimension, should he want to visit.

Tying Up that Last Loose End

As the characters are preparing to depart, Ardreth tries casting Puppet on Jarden to get him to fling the Black Pearl into the Hell Dimension. Thanks to the strength given him by the Pearl, he casts off the effect. And then, a second later, Jarden evades Shika's strike.

Ardreth recasts the spell, successfully controls Jarden, and orders him to fling the Black Pearl into the Ritual Chamber. Garret closes the door. Jarden stands quietly, listening to the howling of the Black Pearl in his head.

The End of the Session

The characters return to Versane Manor, set down by the fire, and call upon the servants to bring them some of Versane's best brandy. They debate the relative merits of heading into the civil-war and zombie-plagued capitol in the morning to join in the battle to select the next Emperor. By the end of the debate, they have firmly concluded that they've already done enough for the Empire and the next Emperor can bloody well select himself.

Lord Versane proclaims, "All's well that ends well! Now, where have those naughty scullery maids run off to?" The others laugh uproariously. And in the darkness, the zombies scratch against the windows and lurk among the blighted trees.