

Island of the Dead

A 13th Age Introductory Adventure

by Kathy Ice

This introductory adventure is designed for a party of new first-level characters. It will work with just about any combination of icon relationships.

Adventure summary: The PCs are tasked with clearing a small private island of undead and any other monsters they may come across.

Lipalla

Lipalla is a very small island (about 4 square miles) in the Midland Sea. It is privately owned. About 200 years ago Lipalla's then-owner, a noble in the Dragon Empire, built a summer home there. The home and island were passed down through the generations. But the family's fortunes waned, as family fortunes are wont to do, and they could no longer afford the upkeep. The house was neglected and fell into disrepair.

Lipalla's present owner is Lord Elstone, a younger son who inherited the island from his mother's family. He has decided to restore the place, to the best of his ability, and turn it into a permanent home for himself. However, he's pretty sure there's going to be a problem with undead on the island.

Nobody is sure where the undead come from; there are no bodies buried on the island that anyone knows about. Certainly the (relative) proximity of the Necropolis may have something to do with it. Whatever the reason, undead have been an occasional, but recurring, nuisance ever since the villa was built. Lord Elstone has not been to the island since he visited as a child 20 years ago, but he has no doubt that the dead walk among the ruins.

Lipalla is located a half-day's sail from one of the major ports on the Midland Sea. Which port? That is going to depend on which icon is "sponsoring" this quest. For example, if the icon for the "center stage" PC (see below) is the Priestess, then Lipalla is near Santa Cora. If the icon is the Dwarf King, then perhaps Lipalla is instead located near whichever icon is supplying the ship and crew (see below).

Adventure Hook

This adventure works for just about any combination of icon relationships, because the main opponents are related to the Lich King, and everybody hates that guy. Seriously, check out his "enemies" profile (page 22): "the Priestess, the Orc Lord, the Elf Queen, the Dwarf King, the Three, the Great Gold Wyrms, and everyone else." Of particular interest is the Emperor; since Lord Elstone is a noble (albeit a minor one), the Emperor is most likely to want to help him with his quest. Of course, this by no means precludes other icons from being interested in scoring off the Lich King; this quest could come from literally anybody. Well, anybody except the Lich King.

Boons

Okay, true confession time: I'm still getting the hang of icon relationships and how to manage them as a DM. Writing this module is actually part of what I'm doing to try to work through it. (It makes sense if you know me; I'm a writer; this is what I do.) Anyway, the term "boon" doesn't have a specific, official meaning in 13th Age that I'm aware of. I'm using it to mean "thing the DM does for a player when the player's PC has a positive relationship with an icon and rolls a 5 or 6 on the relationship die." That seemed like a description in search of a term, so I'm using "boon." Of course, it can also work for negative relationships; it's just that the boon comes from a different icon, one that's opposed to the player's negative icon.

Anyway, here are some possible boons for this adventure:

Center Stage: The PC is the one specifically asked, by a representative of the icon, to undertake this quest. The other PCs are referred to as the "companions" of the center-stage PC. You know, at least for a while. **If it's a 5:** The representative tells the PC that, when the adventure is done, s/he should bring "your companions" to speak to the icon in person.

Ship and Crew: A representative of the icon offers to place a small ship and crew at the PCs' disposal for the quest. The crew will take the PCs to Lipalla, and tie up at the dock during the day. At night, they will cast off and move out into the harbor, and anchor there until daybreak. They will not remain tied to the dock after dark for fear of the walking dead. If the PCs get caught on the island when night falls, they'll need to survive until morning. This boon can be a separate one, or it can be combined with the "center stage" boon above. (Be sure to give the ship an appropriate name!) **If it's a 5:** The representative tells the PC that, when the adventure is done, s/he should bring "your companions" to Axis/Horizon/Drakenhall/etc.; that is, to the city associated with the icon (or a nearby city, if the icon doesn't have a city of their own). They are not (necessarily) asked to visit the icon in person, but they are asked to bring the party to where the icon has greater influence.

Have Some Stuff: A representative of the icon gives the PC +1 runes (page 284), one for each member of the party. **If it's a 5:** The representative tells the PC that, when the adventure is done, s/he should bring "your companions" to Glitterhagen/Santa Cora/Concord/etc.; that is, to the city associated with the icon (or a nearby city, if the icon doesn't have a city of their own). They are not (necessarily) asked to visit the icon in person, but they are asked to bring the party to where the icon has greater influence.

Lord Elstone's Background: If you want to set up a situation where the PC will be able to obtain some knowledge or insight during the adventure, feel free to set up Lord Elstone's background to support information from the icon. Perhaps Lord Elstone got caught up with ruffians and thieves in his mis-spent youth, or perhaps he traveled extensively in the Queen's Wood, or perhaps he studied magic in Horizon. **If it's a 5:** Lord Elstone shares with the PC "a very strong feeling" that, when the adventure is done, s/he should bring "your companions" to Axis/Horizon/Drakenhall/etc.; that is, to the city associated with the icon (or a nearby city, if the icon doesn't have a city of their own). Not (necessarily) to visit the icon in person, but just to bring the party to where the icon has greater influence.

A cryptic clue (6 only): The PC finds a small, mysterious package—maybe tucked into their gear, or perhaps waiting for them in their cabin on the ship. Inside the package is a cutting tool, and a note along the lines “The undead are not the only ones to inhabit the island. Check the north side of the island.” The note is signed with the icon's sigil. This is a reference to Encounter 2; you should set up the smugglers to be enemies of the icon if possible, or at least non-allies.

Magic item (5 only): Set up the smugglers in Encounter 2 to be enemies of the icon. Add a magic item to the encounter.

Fleshing Out Lord Elstone

Lord Elstone is an important NPC in this adventure, and he kind of needs a personality. What kind of personality is going to depend on the role you need him to play, what the PCs are like, and what your personal preferences are as a DM. The main thing is that Lord Elstone should be a non-combatant, and, like any NPC, he should not be allowed to overshadow the PCs.

That said, feel free to give Lord Elstone any skills or background that is conspicuously missing from the PCs. For example, if they're a little light on healing, Lord Elstone may know basic first aid. He may also be given any background needed to dispense useful information (see Boons above). Beyond that, craft a personality that makes sense for your DM style and this adventure. For example:

- perhaps he is a conceited, arrogant nobleman who refers to the PCs as “you people” and never bothers to learn anybody's name
- perhaps he is a cringing coward with (real or imagined) health issues
- perhaps he is a “ladies' man” or hopeless flirt
- perhaps he is socially awkward, prone to saying the wrong thing at the wrong time
- perhaps he's a cheerful idiot

Of course, you can combine a couple of these, or come up with your own. The main thing is, once you know who your players are, who their icons are, and what kinds of skills Lord Elstone will need, spend a moment or two making a quick character sketch of him so he won't be just another generic NPC.

The Setup

The PCs do need to start in the same city—which city will depend on which character is “Center Stage.” If for some reason no PC quite fits the bill, begin the adventure in Axis. Allow the PCs to meet, introduce them to Lord Elstone, and work out which icon(s) will be sponsoring which parts of the journey. Decide which icon will be associated with the smugglers in Encounter 2. If it wasn't determined by the relationship dice, choose any icon that makes sense. As a default, they are associated with the Prince of Shadows.

Lord Elstone explains that he is mostly concerned with clearing the grounds of undead, and anything else that may pose a potential threat. He believes the main house itself is probably still okay, though

he doesn't actually forbid the PCs from examining it.

Arriving on Lipalla

Once the PCs depart, read or paraphrase the following text:

After a half-day's uneventful sail, you arrive at the Island of Lipalla. From your vantage point on deck, you can see a stone dock jutting into the Midland Sea. Next to the dock are wide, shallow stone stairs leading directly into the water. Beyond the dock and the stairs, overgrown trees and bushes block the rest of the island from view. You can make out what you think is a path, but you can see nothing of a house or outbuildings from here.

The island doesn't have anything like a beach; its shores are steep and fairly rocky. In most places, the vegetation comes right up to the waterline. Lord Elstone, if asked, recalls that the docks and stairs were the site of many a swim-party in years past, with most people wading on or near the stairs, and a few daring souls jumping off the dock. The dock, of course, also served as a place to tie off the pleasure-yachts of those visiting the island. Now it is all deserted, although the dock is still sturdy, and still a good place to tie up the ship. There are no undead in sight.

If a significant amount of real-world time has elapsed (or if your players don't pay attention to things), have the ship captain or Lord Elstone remind them that the ship will tie up to the dock, but will cast off and move away when night falls. It is now early afternoon, so the PCs have five or six hours to explore the island.

Encounter 1: Skeleton Patrol

The PCs disembark. There is a road (well, a track, really) leading from the end of the dock up to the house (the house is not visible from the dock). At one point, the road was used to bring people and provisions up to the house, so it was in pretty good shape. Now, it's overgrown and difficult to see. The PCs need to go to the end of the dock before they can even see the road in all the overgrowth. Read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the end of the dock, you see a large shape looming among the trees. For a moment, your heart is in your throat and your hand is on your weapon. Then you realize it is only a wagon, long disused, sitting at the end of the dock.

The wagon marks the start of the road and nothing more, but by all means allow the PCs to get carried away with their own paranoia and imagine all kinds of deadly ambushes awaiting them in or near the wagon. When you are ready to continue:

Now that you are standing right next to it, you realize that the wagon marks the beginning of a road or track leading away from the dock. No doubt the wagon was used to haul goods up to the house. Now, the wagon is in disrepair and the track is very overgrown. Stepping onto it is almost like going into a tunnel as the treetops meet over your head.

If the PCs choose to make the appropriate checks, they can see some odd tracks, and possibly identify them as skeletal. If the PCs don't make the checks on their own, there's no need to ask for them; they'll find out soon enough. When you are ready to continue:

The track climbs through overgrown forest that may have been park-like at one time. You hear birds in the treetops, and at one point you see a squirrel. For an island of the dead, it all seems pretty...normal.

After a few hundred feet, the track levels out, and the forest thins considerably. Ahead, you can see what must have been a green lawn at one point. Now, the grasses are waist-high, and several seedlings have taken root. Beyond the grasses, you can see the villa. From this distance, it seems mostly intact, whitewash still clinging to the stone walls in most places.

Out of the corner of your eye, you can see the grasses begin to ripple, as wind moves across....no. It's not that windy. You turn, and see several walking skeletons advancing on your position.

For this encounter, begin with 3 decrepit skeletons, 2 skeleton archers, and 1 skeletal hound for 4 PCs. For each additional PC, add a skeleton archer or skeletal hound.

If you use a map, it should be a pretty open area. The grasses aren't much of a barrier, and the trees here are small and don't provide much cover. If you like, you can have some random pieces of gardening or farming equipment laying around.

The road splits here, with what looks like the main road continuing to the house, and a branching road heading off to the left. After the fight, if the PCs decide to continue exploring the grounds, proceed to Encounter 2. If the PCs decide to explore the house, skip to Encounter 5.

Encounter 2: Smugglers' Lair

Read or paraphrase the following:

The track winds through the island's grounds, which were probably lovely and well-kept at one time. Now, everything is overgrown, and most of the (doubtless expensive) flowers and ornamental shrubs have been choked out by hardier weeds. And yet, it remains a pleasant place, especially for those who prefer a bit of wilderness.

Enterprising PCs who want to look for tracks can find plenty of animal tracks here: rabbit, fox, weasel, raccoon, squirrel, etc. All are smaller animals; deer were never imported to the island, and apparently all the horses left with the previous owners. Unless their tracking roll is something amazing, they see no signs of undead. Continue with the following:

You soon realize that this track skirts the manor at a distance. You are circling around toward the north side of the island, opposite from where you landed. To your right, you can see the manor, with some outbuildings scattered behind it.

Give the PCs a Spot or Perception-type roll (DC 15) to notice something odd along the north shore. A PC who got the Cryptic Note automatically succeeds. Using the Fail Forward rule, the PCs do

eventually notice the smugglers' barrier, even if they fail this check. If they fail, however, the smugglers are ready for them and get a surprise round when the PCs reach them.

The undead do not have the island all to themselves. A group of smugglers has a small hideaway on the rocky northern shore opposite the dock. The smugglers camp here from time to time, avoiding the authorities, and they also stash things here for later retrieval. They don't really like being attacked by undead, so they have erected a makeshift barrier between their rocky hideaway and the rest of the island. Read or paraphrase the following:

Strung along the edge of a rocky cove is a barricade of sorts. You see fallen logs, broken boards, sharp spines of metal, rusted grating, and more. It's a hodgepodge, but it looks like an effective hodgepodge. You aren't sure how a person could get through.

Treat this as a Hard obstacle (DC 20). If a PC has received the cutting tool, the obstacle becomes Normal (DC 15). Once the PCs have cut through the barrier, continue with the following:

You scramble down the rocky embankment to the cove. Immediately you can see signs of habitation. Two tents are pitched in the lee of a large boulder, and boxes are stacked nearby. A skiff has been drawn up close to shore, partially concealed by an outcropping. And the occupants of the camp don't look very happy to see you.

Build this encounter to suit the icon associated with the smugglers. The basic theme of the encounter is "bad guys and their scary pet(s)." Some examples:

For the Prince of Shadows, three Human Thugs and two attack dogs (use the Wolf statistics)

For the Diablist, three human cultists (use the Human Thug statistics) and a Dretch

For the Three, two Kobold Archers, a Kobold Warrior, and a Medium White Dragon

Examples listed are intended for 4 PCs—and yes, this fight is a bit tougher than average. For more PCs, add bad guys (but don't add pets).

This map can be as interesting as you like, with large rocks, tide pools, crates, camping gear, and so on. Just remember that the more stuff you put in, the more you have to keep track of.

If the relationship dice determined it, there is a magic item here. Otherwise, there is just money and contraband (amounting to 100 gold per PC) The nature of the contraband depends on the icon: weird culty stuff for the Diablist; miscellaneous treasure and incriminating tools for the Prince of Shadows; jewelry and art for the Three, and so on.

Give the PCs time to investigate and figure out that this was a smuggling operation, and that the barrier was to keep out the undead. This may provide a hook for future adventures.

Encounter 3: Zombies!

This encounter can be reached from Encounter 2, or Encounter 4. Adjust the description as needed.

The track runs along the north side of the island for a ways, then turns back toward the villa. You are approaching from the rear of the house, and now you can see all the outbuildings ranged in front of you. There is an obvious stable, with what is probably a carriage-house next to it. There are a couple of sheds, no doubt for gardening tools. And there is a building that seems to have collapsed—or at least, it's not in very good shape. And, now that you look closer, you can see something moving among the ruins.

The opponents in this fight are two human zombies for the first two PCs, and three zombie shufflers for each additional PC beyond the first two. The effect should be a pretty good-sized horde of zombies, only two of which are really dangerous.

For a map, the zombies are prowling around the damaged outbuilding, which used to be an outdoor kitchen (it isn't as damaged as it may have first appeared, because it was an open-air building to begin with). You can include scattered equipment if you like, and other buildings on the perimeter.

Encounter 4: The Villa

The basic description of the main house is about the same whether the PCs are approaching from the front (after Encounter 1) or the back (after Encounter 4):

The villa is a handsome, well-proportioned building with whitewashed walls, a red tile roof, and large windows—which are shuttered at the moment. There are two stories, plus an attic. The door on this side appears solid.

PCs approaching from the front notice that the track splits again as it nears the house, with one track heading around toward the back (and, presumably, the service entrance), and the other turning into a sweeping drive in front of the house.

Both front and back door are shut and locked; both appear solid and undisturbed. PCs circling the house discover one shutter on the ground floor that has been damaged, and is now hanging crookedly, exposing a small part of the window. They can see very little looking through the window; just some furniture in a darkened room. Other than the damaged shutter, the house is in excellent repair, and there are no signs that anything has broken in. Especially undead, who tend to leave a mess.

PCs may take the hint and leave the villa alone. Or, they may decide to try to get inside. Getting in requires Hard checks (DC 20) to either pick the lock of either door, or to remove a shutter and get the window open. (The shutters are heavy and well-made; intended to protect the windows for an entire winter's worth of storms. Getting them down takes some muscle.) Alternatively, they can smash their way in, although you should point out that this probably goes beyond their mandate from Lord Elstone.

There is no map for the interior of the villa, but you can create one if need be: kitchen and public rooms on the ground floor; bedrooms upstairs; servants' quarters and storage space in the attic. All of the rooms were "put away" before the inhabitants left for the last time, meaning furniture is covered with sheets, small items are packed away in boxes, and all foodstuffs have been removed.

If the PCs seem inclined to rifle possessions and take things, remind them that there's a difference between adventuring and burglary, and that the guy who owns this house is sitting on a boat less than two miles away.

Allow the PCs to explore the house if that is what they want to do. You can take as much or as little time as you like; there's nothing in here. Well, there are bats living in the attic, and mice in the walls, but other than that, there's nothing here. If you have the time, you can do a very atmospheric, room-by-room search where they hear small scuttlings and rustlings that they can't pinpoint, and all they can see is looming furniture under sheets. Which they're pretty sure didn't move just now. It was just a trick of the light. No, really. Or, if you're pressed for time, you can compact things down quite a bit.

PCs who look out the back door

One thing to keep in mind, even if you're fast-forwarding through most of the searches, is that the PCs do not have unlimited time on the island. The boat will not wait for them after nightfall. If the PCs insist on continuing to explore the house, mention every once in a while that it is getting later and later in the day.

Encounter 5: Ghoulish

This should be the last encounter, regardless of what order the other encounters came in. Ghouls aren't terribly bright, but they do have a certain cunning, and they have learned to hide themselves during the day. The PCs did not encounter the ghouls in their exploration of the island, even if they left the track to thrash around in the bushes. (You may decide to make an exception if the PCs were especially clever and/or methodical in their searching. Just keep in mind that this encounter is here to avoid an anticlimax; you don't want for the very last thing to be the exploration of the house.) Instead, the ghouls attack the PCs as they head back to the docks to report to Lord Elstone and leave the island. This is especially inconvenient if the PCs have dawdled and it's getting late.

The shadows are stretching long as you approach the dock, but you're pretty sure you'll be in time to get aboard the ship before sundown. And then several fleshy undead step into the path ahead of you. It seems you're going to be delayed.

This encounter consists of one newly-risen ghoul for each PC, plus one full ghoul as a boss creature. If the PCs have handled the encounters up to this point pretty readily, add a few more ghouls to make this a tougher fight.

Conclusion

Provided they didn't do a lot of property damage, Lord Elstone is happy with the PCs' report. He presents them with a magic item: a leather jerkin (+1 AC). It's quirk is that it believes strongly in the healing power of sleep; the wearer will frequently feel the urge to lie down and have a nice nap.

If the PCs smashed and/or took significant items at the house, Lord Elstone offers stiff thanks, but no magic item.

Once back on the boat, the PCs get a full heal-up, and an incremental advancement (at the DM's discretion).

General Notes

Having run this adventure a couple of times, I can stress a couple of things for DM reference:

- The island is only 4 square miles, with a large house in the center. It is surrounded by water. It is impossible to get lost for any significant period of time, even if the PCs go “off road.” Also, there is not enough area to support a large predator.
- The shutters on the outside of the house are not the adorable, lightweight, movable shutters we have in the present day. They are large, heavy, immovable chunks of wood. Putting them up is really more akin to boarding up windows before a hurricane. They aren't going to come down easily.
- Although I was deliberately vague on the origin of the undead, I have this idea that they're kind of a by-product of the Necropolis—the necromantic equivalent of acid rain. They arrived at the island by walking across the bottom of the sea. They don't arrive often—the dozen or so undead the PCs faced accumulated over 20 years. When people are in residence, a gamekeeper or two with stout cudgels can easily deal with any more undead that come ashore.

What Comes Next

With any luck, you'll end up with more than one PC who has been asked to visit a city near their icon. And with a little more luck, they are different cities. So, what's intended to come next is a heated discussion about where to go, and which icon they party wants to risk offending. Based on their decision, you can begin formulating their next adventure.

Failing that, you could design an adventure around a further investigation of the smugglers from Encounter 2.