

Aestercote

(*Tom Clare*)

Campfire

As the dusk darkens, the party sees the welcoming glow of a fire off to the south. If they follow it, they find an old man in peasant clothes sitting in the lee of an old standing stone. A meagre stack of firewood lies beside him. If asked, he will gesture a welcome. He will speak only if addressed, but will say that he is called Cobb and is from the village of Aestercote, a day's travel to the east. He is on his way to the Abbey to ask for help – a nasty illness has broken out in his village, with several of his folk close to death. He is obviously exhausted, and unless someone speaks to him, he will spend his time staring into the fire.

Those who sleep will wake up in the night to find him still staring into the flames. Oddly, the stack of firewood never runs out.

In the morning, Cobb will be gone. As will any trace of a fire, though the sticks are still there. Anyone digging into the leaf mould around the stone will discover an old skeleton.

Plague Village

The following afternoon, the party will come across a deserted village. The overgrowth isn't too bad – it was only abandoned a few years ago. It is of a slightly better standard than any previous hovels they may have seen on the moor, with a stone common house. Though they may never be sure, this was the village of Aestercote.

Inside, ordinary items are scattered around as if the people left in a hurry, but nothing of value remains. Two corpses lie in a fallen-in cottage. A Mystic examining the distorted, discoloured bones will deduce they died of St Athy's Fire.

A well sits in the middle of the village. Drinking the well water exposes the drinker to St Athy's Fire¹⁾.

At the end of the village is a rough burial ground. A pathetic heap of bones, enough for five or six people, lies here beside what might have been a half-completed grave. It will take an hour for altruistic PCs to bury the remains of the villagers, during which time anything following the party – such as the [Ragger Men](#), perhaps – might catch up with them.

The road out of the village passes by a section of the graveyard bank that has given way and slid onto the path. Something here gleams in the afternoon sun. It is a gold ring. A search amongst the fallen clay will also discover some old bones.

If anyone takes the ring, a skeleton will come for them the next night as they sleep, no matter where that may be. It will creep up on the one who has taken its ring and attempt to strangle them as they sleep²⁾. Even if it is destroyed, it will appear at the character's bedside the next time they rest.

If the thief offers the ring back, the creature will take it and stalk back into the night.

St Athy's Fire

This is a miserable disease that causes the sufferer's skin to redden and blister, as if he had been burnt in a fire. The pain is such that wearing clothes becomes unbearable, and it takes considerable resolve to even move. Each day, the invalid loses 1 Health Point and 1 point of Looks. Even if cured, the disease has a 1-in-6 chance of leaving permanent scars on the sufferer's body, making any loss of Looks likewise permanent.

This article first appeared in [Casket of Fays Issue 8](#).

1)

Save against contracting by rolling under or equal to Strength.

2)

The skeleton is cunning and will wait until the character slumbers, taking advantage of the PERCEPTION modifier of -9. Should the character work out that the skeleton only appears when they sleep, perhaps they will try to resolve the situation by only slumbering in daylight hours. That isn't suspicious at all.

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