

The Whitmore Estate Murders

A D&D 5th Edition Adventure for Characters Level 4-6

Adventure Background

The fog-shrouded estate of Lord Reginald Whitmore has become the scene of a most perplexing mystery. Three guests have been found dead under impossible circumstances during what was meant to be a peaceful weekend gathering. The local constabulary stands baffled, and whispers of supernatural involvement grow louder with each passing hour.

The party arrives as consulting investigators, summoned by Lady Margaret Whitmore, who refuses to believe her husband capable of murder—yet all evidence points inexorably toward him.

Timeline of Events:

- **Friday Evening:** All guests arrive for Lord Whitmore's "scholarly gathering"
- **Saturday Morning:** Dr. Blackwood found dead in the locked library
- **Saturday Evening:** Miss Ashworth discovered poisoned in her locked bedroom
- **Sunday Dawn:** Captain Price found with broken neck at bottom of tower stairs
- **Sunday Afternoon:** Party arrives to investigate

Adventure Hooks

- **The Desperate Plea:** Lady Whitmore seeks renowned investigators to clear her husband's name
- **Professional Interest:** The party's reputation as problem-solvers has reached the ears of the local magistrate
- **Personal Connection:** One character has ties to the Whitmore family or one of the victims

Chapter 1: Arrival at Whitmore Estate

The imposing Gothic manor sits atop a hill overlooking the mist-shrouded moors. Gargoyles peer down from shadowed corners, and ancient oak trees creak ominously in the wind. The estate's wrought-iron gates stand open, flanked by stone pillars topped with weathered lions. A gravel drive winds through overgrown gardens toward the main entrance, where twin oak doors bear the Whitmore family crest—a raven perched upon a book.

The estate's staff moves about with hushed urgency, their faces etched with worry and suspicion. Servants peek from windows and quickly duck away when noticed. The very air seems heavy with secrets and unspoken fears.

Key NPCs and Dialogue

Lady Margaret Whitmore (Noble)

- AC 12, HP 9, Speed 30 ft.
- **Appearance:** Elegant woman in her forties, prematurely gray hair, wearing black mourning dress. Hands shake slightly when speaking of her husband.
- **Manner:** Desperate but trying to maintain dignity. Speaks in clipped, proper tones.

Initial Greeting: *"Thank the heavens you've come! I fear time grows short. My husband... they say he's done these terrible things, but I know Reginald. Thirty years of marriage—he couldn't harm a soul!"*

Common Questions & Responses:

Q: "Tell us about your husband's recent behavior." A: "He's been... distant since our son Edward died at Waterdeep. Spending hours in his study, barely eating. But grief isn't murder!"

Q: "What was the purpose of this gathering?" A: "Reginald called it a scholarly discussion. Dr. Blackwood, Miss Ashworth, and Captain Price were all researchers in their own right. They came to discuss... historical matters."

Q: "Where were you during the murders?" A: "Saturday morning I was in the garden with Mrs. Pemberton. Saturday evening, I retired early with a headache. Sunday dawn, I was awakened by the screaming when they found the Captain."

Q: "Has your husband been involved in anything unusual?" A: (Hesitates, Insight DC 15 reveals she's hiding something) "He's been reading extensively. Ancient texts. I... I don't understand his research, but it consumes him."

Lord Reginald Whitmore (Noble)

- AC 11, HP 9, Speed 30 ft.
- **Appearance:** Gaunt man in his fifties, unkempt gray beard, wild eyes. Clothes wrinkled, hands stained with ink and strange ash.
- **Manner:** Alternates between lucid desperation and manic rambling about "crossing the veil."

Initial Encounter: *"You don't understand! None of you understand! They were going to stop me—stop me from bringing Edward home! My boy... my poor boy, taken before his time!"*

Common Questions & Responses:

Q: "Did you kill these people?" A: "Kill them? I... I don't remember. There are gaps. Dark moments where I lose myself. But Edward... Edward is so close now!"

Q: "What research were you conducting?" A: "The boundary between life and death is thinner than most believe. With the right knowledge, the right rituals... a father can call his son home!"

Q: "Where were you during each murder?" A: "Time... time moves strangely when you're touching the beyond. I was in my study, yes, but I felt... disconnected. As if watching from a great distance."

Q: "What happened to your hands?" (If they noticed the ash) A: (Looks at his hands in confusion) "Ash? I... the incense for the rituals. Graveyard dirt and bone dust. Necessary components for... for speaking with the departed."

Inspector Cromwell (Guard)

- AC 16, HP 11, Speed 30 ft.
- **Appearance:** Stocky man in his forties, weathered face, practical constable's uniform. Constantly taking notes in a small leather journal.
- **Manner:** Professional but overwhelmed. Eager for help but protective of his authority.

Initial Meeting: *"Three murders in two days, each more impossible than the last. Lord Whitmore had means and opportunity for all three, but the methods... they don't make sense!"*

Information Cromwell Shares:

- *"The library door was bolted from inside. No other way in or out. Blackwood was alone when he died."*
- *"Miss Ashworth's room was locked, key under her pillow. Window's a forty-foot drop to stone courtyard."*
- *"Captain Price... his neck was snapped like a twig. Would take inhuman strength."*
- *"Lord Whitmore has no solid alibi for any of the times. Claims he was 'researching' in his study."*

Mrs. Pemberton (Commoner)

- AC 10, HP 4, Speed 30 ft.
- **Appearance:** Stern woman in her sixties, gray hair in tight bun, crisp housekeeper's uniform. Carries large ring of keys.
- **Manner:** Protective of the family but increasingly worried. Speaks in clipped, efficient sentences.

Initial Attitude: Suspicious of outsiders but will warm up if treated respectfully.

Q: "How long have you worked here?" A: "Thirty years come Christmas. Watched Master Edward grow from a babe. This house... it's changed since we lost him."

Q: "Have you noticed anything strange about Lord Whitmore?" A: (Persuasion DC 12) "Strange lights from his study at all hours. Deliveries of... unusual books. And the smell... like a graveyard after rain."

Q: "Do you know about any secret passages?" A: (Persuasion DC 15) "Old house like this has its secrets. Servant passages, priest holes from the old days. I could show you... if it would help clear his lordship's name."

Q: "What did you think of the guests?" A: "Dr. Blackwood was polite enough, though he asked too many questions about the master's books. Miss Ashworth seemed frightened—kept looking over her shoulder. Captain Price... he was investigating something, asking about missing folk from the village."

Chapter 2: The Crime Scenes

The Library - Dr. Blackwood's Murder Scene

Room Description: A magnificent two-story library with floor-to-ceiling mahogany bookshelves connected by a wrought-iron spiral staircase. Persian rugs cover dark hardwood floors, and a massive stone fireplace dominates one wall. Tall windows offer views of the fog-covered moors, their heavy curtains partially drawn. A large oak desk sits in the center, scattered with open books and research notes. The air smells of old parchment, leather bindings, and something else—something cold and metallic.

The Crime Scene: Dr. Blackwood's body lies beside the desk, a ornate letter opener buried to the hilt in his chest. His face is frozen in an expression of surprise and terror. Blood has pooled beneath him, staining the Persian rug. His right hand clutches a torn piece of paper with partial words visible: "...the ritual must not be..." Books lie scattered around him as if there was a struggle.

Investigation Results:

Investigation DC 10:

- The door was bolted from the inside using a heavy iron bar
- No other apparent entrances to the room
- Dr. Blackwood's research notes are scattered but incomplete

Investigation DC 15:

- Faint scorch marks on the floor form part of an arcane pattern
- The letter opener belongs to Lord Whitmore's desk set
- A thin layer of ash covers several books near the body

Investigation DC 18:

- The scorch marks form three-quarters of a summoning circle
- Some books show signs of supernatural cold damage (pages brittle, bindings cracked)
- Traces of graveyard dirt in the floorboard gaps

Medicine DC 15:

- The wound angle suggests the killer was significantly shorter than Dr. Blackwood (who was 6'2")
- Time of death: approximately 8 AM Saturday
- No defensive wounds—he was taken by surprise

Arcana DC 16:

- The scorch pattern is from a summoning ritual, hastily interrupted
- The ash is a mixture of bone dust and rare herbs used in necromancy
- Residual magical energy suggests conjuration magic was recently used

Hidden Elements:

- *Investigation DC 18:* A loose floorboard near the fireplace conceals Dr. Blackwood's personal journal
- *Perception DC 20:* Faint claw marks on the wooden desk, too deep for human nails

Miss Ashworth's Bedroom - The Poisoning

Room Description: A tastefully appointed guest bedroom on the second floor, decorated in soft blues and whites. A four-poster bed with silk curtains occupies the center, flanked by matching nightstands. A writing desk sits beneath tall windows overlooking the garden, and a wardrobe stands against the far wall. A small fireplace provides warmth, though it remains unlit. The room smells faintly of lavender and roses, with an underlying bitter almond scent.

The Crime Scene: Miss Ashworth lies peacefully in bed, as if she simply fell asleep. Her face is pale but serene, with no signs of distress. A teacup and saucer sit on the nightstand beside a small plate of biscuits. Her traveling trunk remains neatly packed by the wardrobe. A book of poetry lies open on her lap—"Verses for the Departed" by Lord Tennyson.

Investigation Results:

Investigation DC 10:

- Door was locked from inside, key found under her pillow
- Window is forty feet above stone courtyard, no climbing marks
- Tea service appears to be from the estate's finest china

Investigation DC 14:

- Teacup contains residue of crushed nightshade berries
- Several pages torn from a journal hidden under the mattress
- Bitter almond smell comes from the tea, not natural room scents

Investigation DC 17:

- The door key shows scratches suggesting it was manipulated from the outside
- A hairpin on the floor doesn't match Miss Ashworth's hair accessories
- Dust patterns on the windowsill suggest someone opened it recently

Medicine DC 12:

- Cause of death: poisoning by nightshade (belladonna)
- Time of death: approximately 10 PM Saturday
- She would have fallen unconscious within minutes

Sleight of Hand DC 16:

- Hidden compartment in her jewelry box contains threatening letters
- Secret pocket in her traveling dress holds a small vial of holy water
- Hollow heel of her boot conceals a silver cross

The Threatening Letters: *"Miss Ashworth, Your interference with Lord Whitmore's work must cease immediately. Some doors, once opened, should never be closed. The ritual will be completed."*

"You cannot stop what has already begun. Edward Whitmore will return, and those who stand in the way will join him in the realm beyond."

The Tower Stairs - Captain Price's Death

Room Description: A narrow, spiral stone staircase winds up the interior of the estate's tower, lit by arrow-slit windows every few turns. The stairs are worn smooth by centuries of use, and the air is cold and damp. At the bottom, heavy oak doors lead to the tower's base chamber, which contains old military equipment and hunting gear. The top of the tower offers commanding views of the surrounding countryside. The stone walls bear carved family crests and faded tapestries depicting hunting scenes.

The Crime Scene: Captain Price lies crumpled at the bottom of the stairs, his neck bent at an unnatural angle. His military uniform is disheveled but not torn. A broken lantern lies nearby, oil pooled around the shattered glass. His notebook has fallen open beside him, revealing sketches of the surrounding area with marked locations. His sword remains sheathed at his side.

Investigation Results:

Investigation DC 12:

- Tower door was locked from the outside, key still in Inspector Cromwell's possession
- No impact marks on the stairs consistent with falling
- Captain Price's boots show no scuff marks from slipping

Investigation DC 17:

- Strange claw marks on the interior walls, too high for any normal creature
- Traces of supernatural cold—frost in corners despite the season
- His notebook contains a map marking locations of missing villagers

Medicine DC 15:

- Neck broken by tremendous force applied from above
- No bruising or injuries consistent with falling down stairs
- Time of death: approximately 5 AM Sunday

Perception DC 18:

- Faint scratches on the door lock suggest it was forced from the inside
- Drops of an unknown black substance on the stairs
- Cold spots that make breath visible in certain areas

Investigation DC 20:

- The claw marks form a pattern suggesting something was climbing the walls
- Captain Price's weapon was never drawn—he was surprised
- A few strands of ethereal, translucent material cling to the stone

Captain Price's Notebook: Contains detailed maps showing:

- Three locations where villagers disappeared, all within 2 miles of the estate
- Notes about "unnatural cold spots" and "strange lights at night"
- Interviews with villagers mentioning "the walking shadows"
- A rough sketch of what appears to be a wraith-like figure

Chapter 3: Room-by-Room Estate Description

Ground Floor

Great Hall A grand entrance hall with a soaring ceiling supported by dark oak beams. Family portraits line the walls, their subjects seeming to watch visitors with painted eyes. A massive chandelier hangs from heavy chains, casting dancing shadows. Twin staircases curve upward to the second floor, their banisters carved with intricate ravens and thorny vines. The Whitmore family motto is inscribed above the fireplace: "Memoria Aeterna" (Memory Eternal).

Key Features:

- Family portrait of Lord Whitmore, Lady Margaret, and young Edward (painted five years ago)
- Guest registry on a pedestal near the entrance (shows the three victims signed in Friday evening)
- Hidden panel behind the portrait leads to servant passages (Perception DC 18)

Dining Room An elegant room with a long mahogany table that seats twelve. Silver candelabras and fine china suggest wealth and refinement. The walls display paintings of hunting scenes and landscapes. A sideboard holds decanters of wine and spirits. This was where all the guests had their final meal together on Friday night.

Key Features:

- Place settings still show where each victim sat
- Wine stains on the tablecloth from Friday's dinner
- Servant's bell system connects to the kitchen (still functional)

Mrs. Pemberton's Account of Friday Dinner: "They seemed cordial enough at first. Dr. Blackwood and Miss Ashworth knew each other from before—some sort of scholarly society. Captain Price was asking lots of questions about the local area. But as the evening wore on... the conversation grew heated. Something about 'research ethics' and 'dangerous pursuits.' Lord Whitmore retired early, claiming a headache."

Kitchen A large, efficient kitchen with hanging copper pots, a massive stone hearth, and preparation tables scarred from years of use. Dried herbs hang from the rafters, and the pantry is well-stocked. A servant's staircase leads to the upper floors, and a door opens to the wine cellar. The kitchen staff consists of Mrs. Pemberton and two day maids who live in the village.

Key Features:

- Nightshade berries found growing in the herb garden (visible through kitchen window)
- Servant passages connect to dining room and study
- Tea service matching Miss Ashworth's poisoned cup

Lord's Study Lord Whitmore's private domain, cluttered with books, papers, and research materials. The walls are lined with journals and tomes on history, archaeology, and increasingly esoteric subjects. A large desk dominates the center, covered in maps, correspondence, and arcane diagrams. The air smells of ink, parchment, and something else—something unsettling.

Key Features:

- Recent correspondence with antiquarian book dealers
- Maps of local burial grounds and ancient sites
- A locked drawer (Thieves' Tools DC 15) containing more disturbing research
- Window overlooks the family cemetery

What's in the Locked Drawer:

- Letters from Dr. Blackwood warning against "dangerous research"
- Receipts for grave dirt, bone dust, and rare herbs
- A partially completed letter to Edward: "My dearest son, I have found a way..."
- Sketches of arcane symbols and ritual circles

Wine Cellar A cool, dark space beneath the kitchen, lined with wine racks and storage. Deeper sections contain older vintages and forgotten storage rooms. The cellar extends further than most realize, with passages connecting to the hidden laboratory.

Key Features:

- Recent disturbances in the dust suggest frequent visits
- Hidden door behind wine racks (Investigation DC 20) leads to laboratory tunnel
- Strange cold spots that make breath visible

Second Floor

Master Bedroom Lord and Lady Whitmore's private chamber, elegantly furnished but showing signs of recent neglect. The bed is unmade, clothes scattered about. Lady Whitmore's side remains neat, but Lord Whitmore's area is chaotic with books and papers.

Key Features:

- Lord Whitmore hasn't been sleeping in the bed (Lady Margaret confirms this)
- Hidden compartment in the wardrobe contains Edward's military effects
- Window provides view of the family cemetery

Guest Bedrooms Three additional bedrooms housed the victims. Dr. Blackwood's and Captain Price's rooms remain largely undisturbed, containing their personal effects and research materials.

Dr. Blackwood's Room:

- Medical bag containing various instruments and remedies
- Correspondence with colleagues warning about Lord Whitmore's "obsession"
- A journal detailing his growing concern about the research

Captain Price's Room:

- Military maps and surveying equipment
- Reports on missing persons cases in the region
- A loaded pistol (unused during his death)

Tower Access A heavy door leads to the tower stairs where Captain Price died. The door shows scratches around the lock mechanism.

Hidden Areas

Secret Laboratory Hidden behind a concealed door in the library (Investigation DC 18 to find), accessed by manipulating a specific sequence of books. The laboratory is where Lord Whitmore conducted his necromantic research.

Room Description: A stone chamber lit by flickering candles and strange phosphorescent minerals. Arcane apparatus covers every surface—alchemical equipment, preserved specimens in jars, and ritual implements. The centerpiece is a complex summoning circle carved into the floor and inlaid with silver. The air is thick with incense and the smell of decay. Strange shadows seem to move independently of their sources.

Key Features:

- Three preserved hearts in labeled jars (from the victims)
- Lord Whitmore's complete research journal detailing his descent into necromancy
- The binding circle that controls the wraith (partially damaged)
- Edward's military sword, prepared as a focus for the resurrection ritual

Lord Whitmore's Journal Entries: "Day 47: The texts speak of a ritual to breach the veil between worlds. If I can gather the right components, focus the right energies..."

"Day 52: The first summoning was successful! A lesser spirit, but it obeyed my commands. Edward... I'm coming for you, my boy."

"Day 58: Something went wrong. The spirit I summoned... it's not under my control anymore. It whispers of hunger, of the need to feed..."

"Day 61: Three hearts, freely given or forcibly taken. The ritual demands sacrifice. Forgive me, Edward. Forgive me for what I must do."

Chapter 4: NPC Reactions and Advanced Dialogue

Confronting Lord Whitmore with Evidence

Showing him the victims' hearts: *"You... you found them. Yes, I took them. The ritual requires the heart of the willing—but they weren't willing! They wanted to stop me, stop me from bringing Edward home!"*

Asking about the wraith: *"It was supposed to be Edward! I called across the veil, but something else answered. Something hungry and cold. I thought I could control it, bind it to my will, but it... it has its own desires now."*

Demanding he stop the ritual: *"Stop? STOP?! Do you know what it's like to lose a child? To know he's trapped somewhere beyond, calling for his father? I won't stop—I can't stop! Not when I'm so close!"*

Mrs. Pemberton's Growing Revelations

If treated with respect and kindness: *"I've served this family for thirty years. I watched Master Edward take his first steps in this very hall. When the news came from Waterdeep... it broke Lord Whitmore. He was never the same."*

If asked about strange occurrences: *"There have been... incidents. Servants quit without notice. Strange sounds in the night. The temperature drops in certain rooms for no reason. And the master... sometimes I hear him talking to someone in his study, but when I check, he's alone."*

If asked to help stop Lord Whitmore: *"If you truly believe he's done these terrible things... then yes, I'll help. But please, remember he's not evil—he's a broken man who's lost his way. Perhaps... perhaps there's still hope for redemption?"*

Inspector Cromwell's Desperation

If the party makes progress: *"Thank the gods someone with sense has arrived! I've been investigating crimes for twenty years, but nothing like this. Locked rooms, impossible murders... it's beyond my experience."*

If asked about the supernatural elements: *"Supernatural? I'm a practical man, but I can't explain what I've seen. Cold spots that freeze your breath, shadows that move wrong, sounds that shouldn't exist. If you're saying Lord Whitmore is dabbling in... in dark magic... it would explain everything."*

If the party wants official support: *"I'll back whatever you need to do. My authority, my men, whatever resources we have. Just... just make this madness stop."*

Chapter 5: The Wraith Encounters

First Manifestation

The wraith appears when the party gets close to the truth, typically when they discover the laboratory or confront Lord Whitmore with evidence.

Description: The temperature drops dramatically as shadows coalesce into a humanoid form—tall, gaunt, wrapped in tattered burial shrouds. Where its face should be, only hollow sockets glow with cold blue light. Its presence fills the room with the stench of grave earth and the sound of distant sobbing.

The Wraith's Tactics:

- Uses *Life Drain* on the most vulnerable target first
- Moves through walls to attack from unexpected angles
- Retreats when reduced to half hit points, returning later
- Speaks in a hollow voice: "*The master promised us rest... but we hunger still...*"

Second Encounter - The Binding Circle

If the party finds the laboratory, they can attempt to destroy the binding circle that gives Lord Whitmore partial control over the wraith.

Destroying the Circle:

- Requires dealing 25 radiant damage to the silver inlay
- *Dispel Magic* (DC 16) can disrupt it temporarily
- Physical destruction with magical weapons deals double damage

Consequences of Destroying the Circle:

- The wraith becomes fully autonomous but also more vulnerable
- Lord Whitmore loses his connection to the creature
- Additional undead (2d4 skeletons) emerge from hidden burial sites

Chapter 6: Multiple Endings and Resolutions

Ending 1: Redemption and Peace

Requirements: Party convinces Lord Whitmore to stop the ritual voluntarily, destroys the binding circle peacefully, and helps put the wraith to rest.

Resolution: Lord Whitmore tearfully destroys his research and helps the party banish the wraith. He turns himself in to Inspector Cromwell but receives leniency due to his cooperation. The victims' families find closure, and the estate becomes peaceful again.

Rewards: 500 gp each, Lady Whitmore's eternal gratitude, and reputation as both investigators and healers.

Ending 2: Tragic Justice

Requirements: Lord Whitmore must be stopped by force, but the party shows mercy in their methods.

Resolution: The wraith is destroyed, Lord Whitmore is captured alive, and justice is served. However, the cost in lives and suffering weighs heavily on everyone involved.

Rewards: 400 gp each, Inspector Cromwell's recommendation, but some NPCs harbor mixed feelings about the outcome.

Ending 3: Horror Unleashed

Requirements: The party fails to stop the ritual in time, or Lord Whitmore escapes.

Resolution: The wraith breaks free entirely, Lord Whitmore completes his ritual but summons something far worse than Edward's spirit, and the horror spreads beyond the estate.

Consequences: Sets up future adventures dealing with the undead plague, but immediate rewards are minimal—survival is its own reward.

Appendix: Quick Reference for Game Masters

Key DCs and Difficulty Levels

- **Easy Information:** DC 10-12 (Finding obvious clues, basic social interactions)
- **Moderate Challenges:** DC 13-15 (Important discoveries, persuading reluctant NPCs)
- **Hard Discoveries:** DC 16-18 (Hidden secrets, complex deductions)
- **Expert Level:** DC 19-20 (Masterful investigation, crucial hidden elements)

NPC Attitude Tracker

Use this to track how NPCs respond to party actions:

Lady Whitmore:

- Helpful if party shows respect for her husband's condition
- Becomes defensive if party assumes Lord Whitmore's guilt too quickly
- Provides additional information if treated with genuine compassion

Mrs. Pemberton:

- Starts neutral, becomes helpful if treated respectfully
- Reveals servant passages at helpful attitude
- Provides personal insights about the family at friendly attitude

Inspector Cromwell:

- Starts helpful but overwhelmed
- Becomes very cooperative if party shares information
- May become competitive if party tries to exclude him

Combat Encounter Scaling

For 3rd Level Characters:

- Replace Wraith with Specter (CR 1)

- Lord Whitmore uses Cultist stats (CR 1/8)
- Reduce summoned undead to 1d4 Zombies

For 5th Level Characters:

- Use standard Wraith (CR 5)
- Lord Whitmore uses Cult Fanatic stats (CR 2)
- Add 1d4 Skeletons to final encounter

For 6th Level Characters:

- Add second Wraith in final battle
- Lord Whitmore uses Mage stats (CR 6)
- Include a Wight (CR 3) as failed resurrection attempt

Time Management

- **Investigation Phase:** 2-3 hours of real time
- **Exploration Phase:** 1-2 hours examining rooms and finding secrets
- **Confrontation Phase:** 1-2 hours for final encounters and resolution
- **Total Adventure Time:** 4-7 hours depending on party thoroughness

Troubleshooting Common Issues

If players get stuck:

- Have Mrs. Pemberton offer to show them servant passages
- Inspector Cromwell can share overlooked evidence
- Lady Whitmore might remember something her husband said

If players rush toward combat:

- Emphasize the investigation aspects through NPC reactions
- Reward clever deduction with better combat positioning or advantages
- Make the mystery personally relevant to character backgrounds

If players avoid the supernatural elements:

- Have the wraith manifest during a quiet investigation scene
- Use environmental effects (cold spots, moving shadows) to build atmosphere
- Let NPCs express their own supernatural concerns

This expanded version provides everything a GM needs to run the adventure smoothly, with detailed descriptions, extensive dialogue options, and clear guidance for handling various player approaches.

