

The Willowbrook Incident

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

Adventure Background

The small farming community of Willowbrook has always been the kind of place where everyone knows everyone else's business, where children play safely in the streets, and where the biggest excitement is the annual harvest festival. But beneath this veneer of rural tranquility, something ancient and malevolent has been stirring—something that feeds on innocence, grows stronger with each generation, and has finally decided that it's time to collect what it's owed.

It started with the children's drawings. Simple crayon sketches of stick figures, but all depicting the same scene: people walking into the old grain silo at the edge of town, and never walking out. Then came the sleepwalking—dozens of residents found wandering the streets at night, all heading in the same direction, all claiming no memory of leaving their beds. Finally, the disappearances began.

The party arrives as outsiders in a community that's slowly being consumed from within, where neighbors eye each other with suspicion, where the local authorities seem strangely reluctant to investigate, and where something in the shadows whispers promises of power to those willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

The Central Horror: An ancient entity known as the Hunger has been bound beneath Willowbrook for over a century, kept dormant by regular offerings. The current town leadership has maintained this dark covenant, but the entity has grown stronger and more demanding. Now it seeks to break free entirely, and it needs the life force of the entire town to do so.

Adventure Hooks

- **Missing Persons:** The party is hired to find several missing travelers who disappeared near Willowbrook
- **Family Connections:** A party member receives a desperate letter from a relative in the town begging for help
- **Official Investigation:** Regional authorities recruit the party to investigate reports of strange occurrences
- **Accidental Discovery:** The party's travel route takes them through Willowbrook just as the horror begins to escalate

Chapter 1: Welcome to Willowbrook

The Town That Time Forgot

Approaching Willowbrook: *The road to Willowbrook winds through rolling farmland dotted with weathered barns and silos. At first glance, it seems like any other rural community—neat rows of corn stretch to the horizon, cattle graze in verdant pastures, and the church spire rises above modest homes and shops. But something feels off. The fields are too perfect, the animals too still, and an unnatural quiet hangs over everything like a held breath.*

Town Layout and Atmosphere: Willowbrook consists of about 800 residents spread across a main street with essential businesses, several residential streets, surrounding farms, and the omnipresent grain silo that dominates the eastern horizon. The architecture is uniformly well-maintained but decades out of date, as if the town exists in a bubble separate from the outside world.

Immediate Impressions:

- **Silence:** No children playing, no dogs barking, minimal conversation
- **Watchful Eyes:** Curtains twitch as strangers pass, faces quickly disappear from windows
- **Perfect Maintenance:** Everything is clean and well-kept, almost obsessively so
- **The Silo:** A massive concrete structure that seems to draw the eye unnaturally
- **Missing Elements:** No teenagers visible anywhere, very few young adults

Key Locations and Initial Encounters

The Willowbrook Inn (Lodging and Information Hub) *A two-story building with a wraparound porch and rocking chairs that creak in the wind. The lobby smells of pine cleaner and something else—something sweet and cloying that seems to cling to the back of your throat.*

Martha Henley (Innkeeper)

- AC 10, HP 9, Speed 30 ft.
- **Appearance:** Pleasant woman in her fifties, graying hair in a tight bun, apron that's spotless despite constant use
- **Manner:** Overly helpful but evasive about certain topics, nervous laugh when questioned about local issues

- **Secret:** One of the town's "keepers" who help maintain the covenant with the Hunger

Initial Conversation: *"Welcome to Willowbrook! We don't get many visitors these days—folks tend to stick to the main highways. Room and board are reasonable, and I make the best apple pie in three counties. Just... well, I'd suggest staying close to the inn after dark. We've had some issues with... wild animals... lately."*

When Pressed About the Town: *"Oh, it's a wonderful place to live. Safe, quiet, everyone looks out for each other. Course, we've had a few folks move away recently—young people, you know how they are, always wanting to see the big city. The disappearances? Oh my, I don't know anything about that. Probably just travelers who took a wrong turn."*

The General Store (Town Gossip Central) *Shelves stocked with necessities but nothing modern, as if the inventory hasn't changed in decades. The cash register is mechanical, the scales are brass, and price tags are handwritten in faded ink.*

Old Pete Crenshaw (Store Owner)

- AC 11, HP 22, Speed 25 ft.
- **Appearance:** Elderly man with rheumy eyes, suspenders, and hands that shake slightly
- **Manner:** Friendly but fearful, speaks in whispers when discussing sensitive topics
- **Secret:** Has been trying to warn outsiders subtly for years but is terrified of the consequences

Pete's Warnings (if approached carefully): *"Been running this store for forty-three years, and I've seen things... things that ain't natural. That silo's been here longer than anyone remembers, and there's stories... old stories about what's underneath it. People who ask too many questions tend to... well, they tend to leave town real sudden-like."*

Information Pete Provides:

- The silo was built in 1923, but something was already there before
- Every few years, people disappear, usually outsiders or troublemakers
- The town council meets in secret and makes decisions nobody talks about
- Children are kept inside after dark, and no one seems to think this is unusual
- Strange sounds come from the silo at night, like machinery or... breathing

Willowbrook Community Church (Facade of Normalcy) *A white clapboard church with a bell tower, surrounded by a cemetery where the headstones seem unusually old for such a small community.*

Reverend Samuel Blackwood (Town Spiritual Leader)

- AC 12, HP 32, Speed 30 ft.
- **Appearance:** Tall, gaunt man in his sixties, intense dark eyes, speaks with practiced calm
- **Manner:** Charismatic but cold, quotes scripture while making veiled threats
- **Secret:** The true leader of the covenant with the Hunger, believes he's saving the town

Reverend's Philosophy: *"Willowbrook is blessed with peace because we understand the nature of sacrifice. The Lord sometimes asks difficult things of his flock, but those who are faithful are rewarded with safety and prosperity. Outsiders often fail to appreciate the... delicate balance... that maintains our community's wellbeing."*

Church Investigation Opportunities:

- **Cemetery Records** (Investigation DC 15): Far more deaths than births over the past century
- **Church Basement** (Stealth DC 16): Secret meeting room with occult symbols
- **Bible Study Materials** (Religion DC 14): Texts have been altered to justify human sacrifice
- **Bell Tower** (Perception DC 18): View of the silo reveals unnatural movement around it at night

Chapter 2: Uncovering the Town's Secrets

The Pattern of Disappearances

Recent Missing Persons: Through careful investigation and conversation, the party can uncover a pattern of disappearances that spans decades:

The Traveling Merchant (2 weeks ago): Henry Goldsmith was passing through with a wagon full of goods when his horse threw a shoe. He stayed overnight at the inn and was never seen again. His wagon and horse were found on the road outside town, but Henry had vanished.

The Miller Family (1 month ago): A family of four who had been considering moving to Willowbrook suddenly left town in the middle of the night, according to neighbors. However, investigation reveals their belongings are still in their rented house, and their wagon never made it to the next town.

The Census Taker (3 months ago): A government official conducting a regional census disappeared after asking detailed questions about population figures. His papers were found scattered near the silo, but he was never located.

The Pattern:

- Disappearances occur roughly every 2-4 weeks
- Victims are usually outsiders or residents who ask too many questions
- The town always has explanations that discourage further investigation
- Physical evidence often points toward the grain silo

The Children's Secret

Talking to the Children: The few children visible in Willowbrook seem strangely mature and careful in their speech. However, with patience and the right approach, they can provide crucial information.

Little Sarah Henley (Martha's Granddaughter)

- **Appearance:** Eight-year-old girl with serious eyes and old-fashioned dress
- **Manner:** Speaks like a miniature adult, rarely smiles, constantly looks around nervously

Sarah's Information (if befriended with successful Persuasion DC 14): *"The grown-ups think we don't understand, but we do. The thing under the silo gets hungry, and when it's hungry, people have to go feed it. Mama says it keeps us safe from the bad things outside, but I think... I think maybe it IS the bad thing."*

The Children's Drawings: Several children have been drawing similar pictures:

- Stick figures walking toward a large rectangle (the silo)
- Dark shapes reaching up from underground
- Adults with no faces standing in circles
- A large eye beneath the town, watching everything

What the Children Know:

- Adults meet in secret when someone new comes to town
- The "feeding times" are announced by sounds from the silo
- Children are kept inside during these times "for their safety"
- Some children have nightmares about being chosen next
- The thing underground can hear thoughts and see through people's eyes

The Town Council's Covenant

The Secret Leadership: Willowbrook is controlled by a small group of residents who maintain the ancient pact with the entity beneath the silo:

Council Members:

- **Reverend Samuel Blackwood:** Spiritual justification and ritual leadership
- **Mayor Dorothy Ashfield:** Political authority and public relations
- **Sheriff Tom Bradley:** Law enforcement and cleanup
- **Dr. Helen Morrison:** Medical examiner and cover-up specialist
- **Martha Henley:** Information gathering and stranger monitoring

The Covenant's History: In 1923, the town faced complete economic collapse during a severe drought. Desperate residents attempted to summon supernatural aid, accidentally awakening an ancient entity that had been slumbering beneath the earth. The creature offered a bargain: regular sacrifices in exchange for prosperity and protection. The town has honored this pact ever since.

How the System Works:

1. **Selection:** Council members identify suitable "offerings"—usually outsiders or problematic residents
2. **Preparation:** Targets are isolated and monitored until the optimal time
3. **Collection:** Victims are brought to the silo during nighttime rituals
4. **Feeding:** The entity consumes the life force, granting the town continued prosperity
5. **Cover-up:** Evidence is disposed of and explanations are provided to discourage investigation

Chapter 3: The Grain Silo Investigation

Approaching the Silo

Daytime Reconnaissance: *The grain silo looms against the sky like a concrete monument to agricultural prosperity, but closer inspection reveals disturbing details. The structure is larger than necessary for a town this size, with no visible grain processing equipment. Strange symbols are carved into the concrete near the base, worn smooth by decades of weather but still visible to those who look carefully.*

Investigation Opportunities (Daytime):

- **Architecture** (Investigation DC 16): The silo was built around something that was already there
- **Symbols** (Arcana DC 15): Ancient binding runes designed to contain rather than summon
- **Soil Analysis** (Nature DC 14): The ground around the silo is unnaturally fertile
- **Sound** (Perception DC 18): Faint breathing or heartbeat sounds from below
- **Recent Activity** (Survival DC 13): Multiple sets of footprints leading to and from the building

Nighttime Observation: *After sunset, the true nature of the silo becomes apparent. A faint, pulsing glow emanates from within, visible through cracks in the concrete. Shadows move around the building—human figures walking in ritualistic patterns. The air itself seems to thicken, and sensitive characters may hear whispers in languages that predate human civilization.*

Nighttime Phenomena:

- **The Glow:** Dim red light that pulses like a heartbeat
- **The Procession:** Town council members performing regular maintenance rituals
- **The Whispers:** Ancient voices speaking in primordial tongues
- **Compulsion Effects:** DC 15 Wisdom saves or feel drawn toward the building
- **Reality Distortion:** Space seems larger inside than outside, time flows differently

Inside the Silo

The Upper Level (Ground Floor): *What should be a storage area for grain is instead a ceremonial chamber. The concrete floor is carved with intricate symbols that seem to*

move when viewed peripherally. Candles burned down to stubs indicate frequent use, and dark stains on the floor suggest the nature of the ceremonies conducted here.

Features:

- **Ritual Circle:** Carved symbols that focus supernatural energy
- **Sacrificial Altar:** Stained stone table with restraining mechanisms
- **Storage Areas:** Containing ceremonial robes, ritual implements, and detailed records
- **The Descent:** A spiral staircase leading down into absolute darkness

The Records (if found): Detailed logs spanning nearly a century, documenting:

- Names and descriptions of all sacrificial victims
- Dates and methods of each offering
- The entity's growing hunger and increasing demands
- Failed attempts to break the covenant and their consequences
- Population records showing the town's unnatural demographic stability

The Lower Level (The Feeding Chamber): *The staircase descends far deeper than the silo's exterior would suggest, opening into a natural cavern that predates human settlement. Ancient stone walls bear carvings that hurt to look at directly, and the air thrums with malevolent energy. At the chamber's center, a pit descends into darkness so complete it seems to swallow light itself.*

The Pit: This is where the Hunger dwells—a shaft that extends deep into the earth, lined with organic material that pulses like the inside of a living creature. The entity itself is never fully visible, manifesting as writhing shadows, grasping tendrils, and a presence that fills the mind with dread.

Chamber Features:

- **The Feeding Pit:** Direct connection to the entity's lair
- **Bone Collections:** Remains of centuries of sacrificial victims
- **Energy Conduits:** Carved channels that distribute the entity's influence throughout the town

- **Control Mechanisms:** Ancient binding circles that theoretically contain the creature
- **Recent Preparations:** Evidence that a mass feeding is being prepared

Chapter 4: The Hunger Revealed

The Entity's Nature

The Hunger is an ancient aberration that feeds on life force, fear, and the willing corruption of communities. It doesn't simply consume its victims—it transforms them into extensions of itself, gradually replacing a town's population with hollow shells that serve its will.

The Hunger's Abilities:

- **Life Drain:** Absorbs vitality from sacrificial victims
- **Mind Control:** Influences thoughts and dreams of nearby residents
- **Flesh Shaping:** Creates duplicate bodies to replace consumed victims
- **Reality Distortion:** Warps space and time in its immediate vicinity
- **Collective Consciousness:** Sees through the eyes of all its servants

Signs of the Entity's Influence:

- Residents display unnaturally similar mannerisms and speech patterns
- Perfect coordination in group activities without visible communication
- Knowledge of information they shouldn't possess
- Lack of genuine emotion or individual personality
- Physical characteristics that subtly shift when not directly observed

The Town's True Condition

The Horrible Truth: Investigation reveals that most of Willowbrook's long-term residents are no longer entirely human. The Hunger has been gradually replacing them with duplicates that serve its will while maintaining the appearance of normal community life.

Identifying the Replaced:

- **Behavioral Patterns:** Too-perfect coordination, identical responses to questions
- **Physical Signs:** Slight temperature differences, no pulse in certain lighting

- **Knowledge Tests:** Know things they shouldn't, don't know things they should
- **Emotional Responses:** Lack genuine fear, surprise, or spontaneous emotion
- **Magical Detection:** Show as aberrations rather than humanoids under magical scrutiny

The Children's Role: The few remaining genuine humans are mostly children, kept alive because their innocence and terror provide the purest form of sustenance for the entity. They're being slowly conditioned to accept the covenant and eventually become willing sacrifices.

The Mass Feeding Plan: The Hunger has grown strong enough to attempt breaking free of its ancient bindings. It plans to consume the remaining genuine humans in Willowbrook simultaneously, using their combined life force to achieve physical manifestation in the material plane.

Chapter 5: Confronting the Horror

The Town Turns

When Suspicions Mount: As the party investigates, the replaced residents begin coordinating against them. This doesn't happen all at once—it starts subtly and escalates to open hostility.

Escalation Stages:

Stage 1 - Subtle Intimidation:

- Shopkeepers refuse to serve the party
- Rooms at the inn develop "problems" requiring relocation
- Mysterious accidents and equipment malfunctions
- Constant feeling of being watched

Stage 2 - Social Isolation:

- No one will speak to the party or provide information
- Services become unavailable or prohibitively expensive
- Anonymous warnings to leave town immediately
- Children are kept away from the strangers

Stage 3 - Direct Threats:

- Sheriff attempts to arrest party on fabricated charges
- Replaced residents make veiled threats about "accidents"
- Party's belongings are searched or go missing
- Escape routes from town are blocked or monitored

Stage 4 - Open Hostility:

- Mob of townspeople attempts to capture the party
- Replaced residents reveal inhuman abilities
- The Hunger directly manifests to defend its servants
- Final confrontation becomes unavoidable

The Confrontation Options

Option 1: Destroy the Binding Circles The ancient symbols that contain the Hunger can be disrupted, but this risks releasing it entirely. However, without the binding energy, the entity might lose its hold over the town.

Requirements:

- Locate all seven binding circles throughout the town
- Understand the relationship between symbols and containment
- Risk releasing the entity in uncontrolled form
- Prepare for direct confrontation with freed Hunger

Option 2: Complete the Ancient Ritual The original binding can be strengthened rather than destroyed, but this requires a willing sacrifice—possibly one of the party members.

Requirements:

- Discover the original binding ritual in hidden records
- Gather rare components from around the town
- Find someone willing to make the ultimate sacrifice
- Accept that the town's corruption might continue

Option 3: Evacuate and Contain The party can focus on saving the remaining genuine humans while finding a way to permanently seal the Hunger.

Requirements:

- Identify and gather all non-replaced residents
- Create a path of escape from the town
- Establish external containment to prevent the entity's spread
- Accept that some innocents might not be saveable

Option 4: Direct Confrontation Face the Hunger in its lair and attempt to destroy it through force, magic, or clever tactics.

Requirements:

- Penetrate the heavily defended silo complex
- Survive the entity's reality-warping abilities
- Deal with waves of replaced townspeople defending their master
- Find the creature's vulnerability before being overwhelmed

Chapter 6: The Final Horror**Battle in the Feeding Chamber**

The Hunger Manifestation When directly confronted, the entity takes on a more physical form:

The Hunger (Ancient Aberration)

- AC 17 (Natural Armor), HP 200, Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.
- **Legendary Actions:** 3 per turn
- **Damage Resistances:** Necrotic, Psychic
- **Condition Immunities:** Charmed, Frightened
- **Senses:** Truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Special Abilities:

- **Life Drain Aura:** All creatures within 30 feet take 1d6 necrotic damage at start of their turn
- **Reality Distortion:** Can alter the battlefield as a legendary action
- **Puppet Master:** Controls all replaced townspeople within 1 mile

- **Regeneration:** Regains 10 HP at start of turn unless damaged by radiant energy
- **Fear Incarnate:** Creatures that start their turn within 60 feet must make DC 16 Wisdom saves or be frightened

Combat Tactics:

- Uses replaced townspeople as shields and distractions
- Warps the chamber to create difficult terrain and obstacles
- Targets spellcasters and healers first
- Attempts to separate party members through reality manipulation
- Grows stronger as it consumes fallen enemies

Environmental Factors:

- **Unstable Architecture:** Attacks can cause cave-ins and structural collapse
- **Energy Conduits:** Destroying these weakens the entity but causes explosive backlash
- **Binding Circles:** Can be activated to temporarily restrain the Hunger
- **Pit of Bones:** Difficult terrain that may contain useful items from previous victims

The Replaced Townspeople

Hollow Shells (Aberrant Humanoids)

- Use **Commoner** stats with the following modifications:
- **Type:** Aberration instead of Humanoid
- **Damage Resistances:** Psychic
- **Condition Immunities:** Charmed, Frightened
- **Hive Mind:** Share knowledge and coordinate perfectly
- **Inhuman Strength:** +2 to Strength score when defending the Hunger

Combat Behavior:

- Fight with perfect coordination and no fear
- Sacrifice themselves to protect the entity
- Use knowledge of the town's layout to create ambushes

- Show no mercy but also no creativity or individual tactics

Chapter 7: Resolution and Aftermath

Possible Endings

Ending 1: The Binding Restored The party successfully strengthens the ancient containment, trapping the Hunger for another century. The replaced townspeople return to normal, but have no memory of their possession.

Consequences:

- The immediate threat is ended, but the underlying problem remains
- Future generations may face the same crisis
- Some party members might volunteer to stay as guardians
- The town must decide whether to reveal the truth or maintain the secret

Ending 2: The Entity Destroyed Through great sacrifice and heroic effort, the Hunger is permanently destroyed. The town is free but devastated by the revelation of its dark history.

Consequences:

- True freedom for the survivors, but psychological trauma remains
- The town might be abandoned as residents seek fresh starts elsewhere
- Regional authorities become involved in the cleanup
- The party gains a reputation for dealing with supernatural threats

Ending 3: Evacuation and Containment The party saves the genuine humans but cannot destroy the entity. External authorities establish a quarantine around Willowbrook.

Consequences:

- Survivors must rebuild their lives elsewhere
- The threat is contained but not eliminated
- Government agencies become interested in the party's knowledge
- Sets up potential future adventures involving supernatural containment

Ending 4: The Horror Spreads If the party fails, the Hunger breaks free and begins expanding its influence to neighboring communities.

Consequences:

- The party becomes part of a larger resistance movement
- Regional campaign focused on stopping the spreading corruption
- Moral questions about sacrificing some communities to save others
- Epic storyline involving ancient evils and modern responses

Rewards and Recognition**Experience and Treasure:**

- Standard XP for encounters and successful resolution
- Monetary rewards from grateful survivors or government authorities
- Magical items recovered from the entity's collection of victim possessions
- Knowledge and contacts that could prove valuable in future supernatural investigations

Long-term Benefits:

- Reputation as specialists in supernatural threats
- Connections with regional authorities and occult researchers
- Access to information about similar entities in other locations
- Potential recruitment by organizations dedicated to protecting humanity from aberrant threats

Psychological Impact: Characters who survive the Willowbrook incident carry the mental scars of what they've witnessed. This could manifest as:

- Increased resistance to fear effects from experience with true horror
- Tendency to see supernatural threats where none exist
- Difficulty trusting small communities or overly friendly strangers
- Compulsive need to investigate reports of strange occurrences

Appendix A: Running Horror in D&D**Creating Atmospheric Tension****Pacing Guidelines:**

- Start with subtle wrongness that gradually escalates
- Use periods of calm to build tension before reveals
- Allow players to uncover information at their own pace
- Save direct supernatural encounters for maximum impact

Descriptive Techniques:

- Focus on unsettling details rather than gore
- Use all five senses to create uncomfortable atmosphere
- Describe characters' emotional reactions to help players feel them
- Leave some things unexplained to maintain mystery

Player Agency:

- Provide multiple investigation paths and solution options
- Allow clever planning to mitigate some horror elements
- Reward creative thinking and character-appropriate responses
- Don't force specific emotional reactions, but describe the situations that might cause them

Adapting for Different Groups

For Groups That Enjoy Horror:

- Emphasize psychological terror and moral ambiguity
- Include more disturbing details and implications
- Allow consequences for poor choices to be genuinely frightening
- Use extended investigation to build dread

For Groups Less Comfortable with Horror:

- Focus more on mystery and adventure elements
- Reduce graphic descriptions while maintaining plot points
- Provide clearer paths to heroic solutions
- Allow more humor and camaraderie to balance dark elements

Safety Tools and Considerations

Content Warnings: This adventure includes themes of:

- Community corruption and loss of trust
- Sacrifice and murder
- Body horror and identity loss
- Psychological manipulation
- Child endangerment (though children are not harmed on-screen)

Session Safety:

- Discuss comfort levels with horror content before beginning
 - Establish signals for when players need breaks or content adjustments
 - Check in with players during intense scenes
 - Have lighter backup activities available if needed
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Adventure Credits

- **Design:** Small-town horror adventure inspired by psychological terror traditions
- **Estimated Play Time:** 8-10 hours across multiple sessions
- **Recommended Party Size:** 4-6 characters
- **Level Range:** 4-6

DM's Notes: This adventure works best when the horror emerges gradually from apparently normal situations. The key is building a sense of wrongness that escalates to supernatural terror. Focus on the human elements—how ordinary people can become complicit in horror, how communities can hide terrible secrets, and how the familiar can become alien. The supernatural entity is the source of the horror, but the real fear should come from the realization of how thoroughly it has corrupted everything the party initially trusted.