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Nolan '15

Poltergeist Panic

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Poltergeist Panic

Encounter Level 7 (Scales 5 to 11)

SUMMARY

Poltergeists are frequently considered to be mischievous spirits, more prankster than genuine threat. But when a wraith learns how to twist the spirits of the deceased into these telekinetic terrors, that reputation will change. This encounter pits your players against a group of undead foes surrounded by visible and easily avoided traps, with a group of poltergeists constantly attempting to shove the heroes and their equipment around. Unless the party can figure out how to track down and destroy these meddling undead, they're going to have a very difficult time getting out of the crypt alive. And unless they can kill the wraith at the crypt's center, they won't have solved the real problem.

ENCOUNTER STATISTICS

Terrain Tags: Interior, dungeon

Favors: Barbarians, clerics, paladins

Foils: Low-strength characters

Encounter Weight: Heavy

Creatures: 3 Vicious Poltergeists, 5 Crypt Walker
Zombies, 1 Wraith (Terrion)

XP: 14,000 experience points (7,400 XP from creatures,
6,600 XP from traps and terrain)

ENCOUNTER WEIGHT

This encounter is built to challenge a fully-rested party. It encourages them to scout the crypt, make a plan, and prepare before delving in. A party that rushes in unprepared may be able to triumph if they're skilled at destroying the undead, but is likely in for a rough time.

CRYPT OF TERRION

The following can be used to set the scene, describing the crypt's entrance.

Above the door to this crypt is inscribed, in Common, "Terrion of the Van Grall Clan - Father, Lover, and Friend to his people." The door is slightly open, and faint sounds of movement can be heard within, periodically punctuated by a loud clang, like a metal object being dropped or thrown. There is no light in the crypt. The corridor ahead of you is 10 feet wide, giving you plenty of room, and the walls are fairly plain. Ancient murals are eroded and hard to discern, and whatever cloth finery was here has rotted away.

The crypt is haunted by the Wraith of Terrion, who conjures poltergeists from deceased explorers and adventurers who have fallen prey to the traps and zombies within his tomb. Not truly aware of the nature of his undead existence, he seeks to marshal a following and retake his hold, believing himself to be a noble in exile.

TERRAIN

The crypt is very simple, with all of its traps easy to spot and avoid, but nonetheless it has a few secrets. There is an attic of sorts above the crypt, a hollowed-out section of stone that is 3 ft. tall and mirrors the layout of the corridors and turns of the crypt itself. The only way to access the attic is by a ladder inside a small room on the crypt's western side, which is concealed by a secret door. The door can be found with a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, or by any character walking by with a sufficiently high passive Perception. The secret door is not locked or trapped, though it is quite loud when opened, and doing so will immediately attract the wraith's attention. Inside the attic is most of the treasure Terrion has hoarded, carried up there telekinetically by his poltergeists. See the "Treasure" section for specifics.

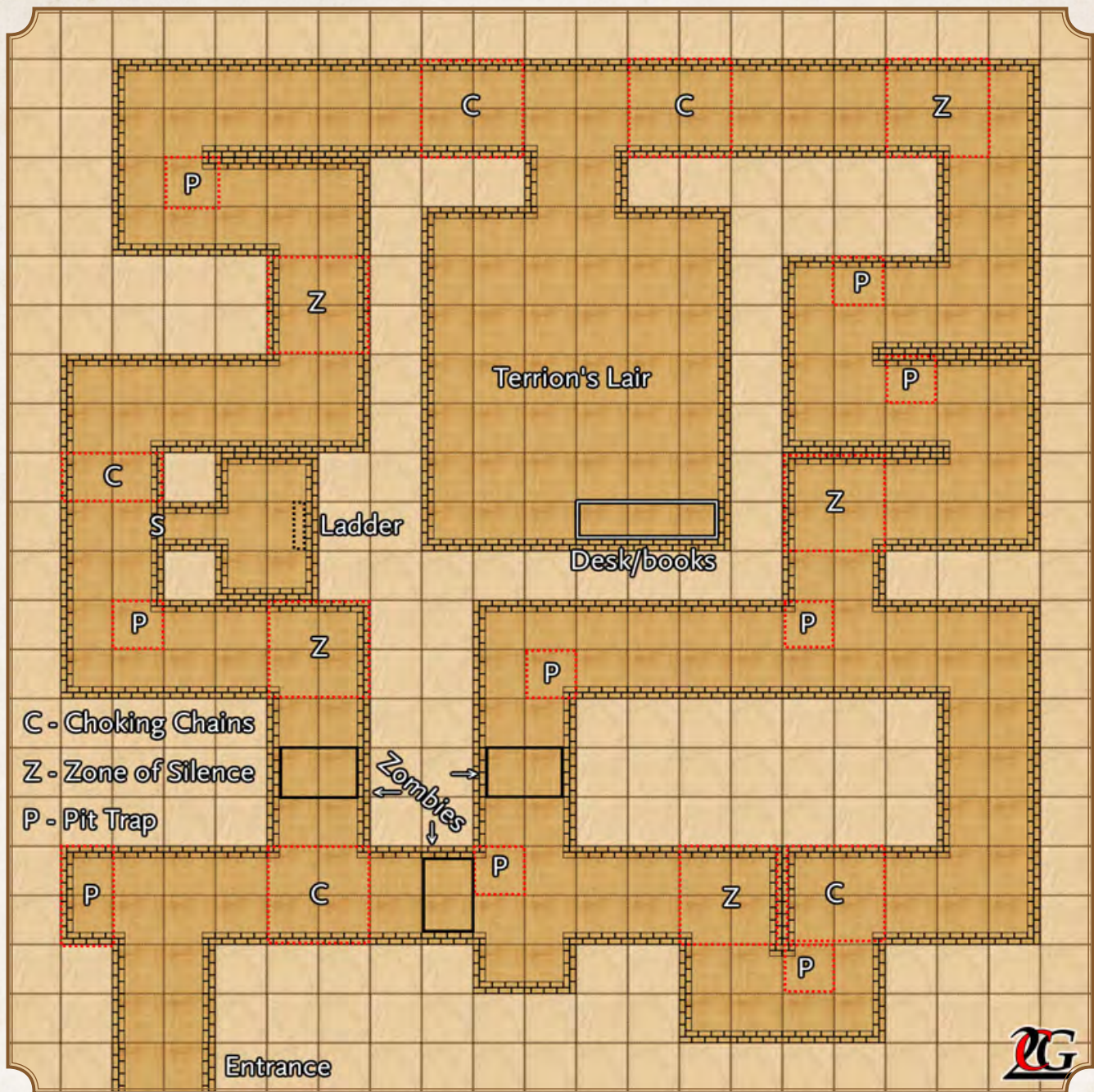
The traps here don't rearm or repair themselves, as the zombies are too clumsy and dim-witted to do so, and Terrion is limited by his incorporeal nature. A group that makes periodic forays can disarm and disable all the traps before making a full delve, though this is likely to prompt an ambush by Terrion and his poltergeists.

In the center of the crypt is Terrion's lair. He has stashed all the corpses of his poltergeists in this room, and has a dark and mysterious journal. The full details of the journal can be found in the "Treasure" section.

TACTICS

The zombies are mindless and will attack the closest creature they can perceive. They will not leave the crypt under any circumstances, and will return to their starting positions if attacked by a creature hiding outside the crypt. They have enough sense to avoid the traps, though the magic of the Choking Chains doesn't target undead, allowing them to walk through such areas unhindered. They fight until destroyed.

The poltergeists hide in the attic area as soon as they sense living creatures enter the crypt. They have 50 ft. of movement each round, enabling them to easily emerge from the attic, use Telekinetic Thrust, and retreat. They should prioritize pushing characters into traps or toward zombies, and each one should attack a different character, when possible. If an adventurer



drops their weapon because of the zombie's Disarming Bite, a poltergeist should shove it away, ideally into a pit. They only use their Slam attacks if they become cornered in the attic, which they will defend until they are destroyed. If attacked while outside the attic, they will retreat.

Terrion, the wraith, will remain in his lair unless one of the poltergeists is slain, two zombies are destroyed, or the players open the secret door. If any of these things happen, he will immediately move through the walls toward the players and begin attacking them without hesitation. This also motivates

his minions to engage more aggressively. If severely wounded, he will retreat to the attic and guard his treasure to the death. Surrender is not an option for Terrion.

TREASURE

In the attic, players will find 7,000 silver coins and 2,100 gold coins. There are also an assortment of five art objects worth 250 gold coins each: a small ring set with blood red gems, a bronze crown, a silk robe, a box of turquoise animal figures, and a brass mug with jade inlay. This brings the worth of the total treasure haul to 3,800 gold coins. At your discretion, they may find some

magic items in the hoard as well. Terrion would be unable to use weapons, wands, or armor, and would never trust his zombies to handle them. You might have a +1 weapon or armor in here, a few potions and scrolls, or some minor wondrous items like a *driftglobe* or spell scrolls. Magic Item Table A is a good choice.

Trap: Zone of Silence

Perception DC: None - This trap is marked by a visibly shimmering zone of magic. A DC 16 Intelligence check (Arcana or Insight) will reveal the zone's effect below.

Effect: No sound can be emitted from or through a Zone of Silence. Creatures within the zone can't cast spells that require verbal components, are immune to thunder damage, and are deafened while in the zone.

Disarm DC: While Thieves' Tools are useless against the Zone of Silence, spending an action to make an Intelligence (Arcana) check against DC 16 disables it. Alternately, a *dispel magic* spell cast on the zone ends its effects immediately.

Trap: Pit

Perception DC: None - All of the pits in this dungeon are open and visible. Unless something covers the pit (magical darkness, fog, etc.), all creatures are aware of the pit.

Effect: A creature that is pushed into a pit unwillingly can make a Dexterity saving throw against DC 15 to grab the pit's ledge, dangling there instead of falling in. Creatures are considered prone while hanging, and must spend half their movement to climb up. Creatures that fall into a pit drop 30 ft., taking 3d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and an additional 3d6 piercing damage from the spikes at the bottom. Climbing out of a pit requires 60 ft. of movement, unless the creature doing so has a climb speed.

Disarm DC: There is an inactive mechanism to seal the pit's trap door, which can be reactivated with Thieves' Tools. A DC 16 check is sufficient to close the pit once again. If the total for the check exceeds 20, the pit is also locked, preventing it from being reopened. Unless so locked, a poltergeist can use its Telekinetic Thrust ability to force a pit open again as an action.

TERRION'S JOURNAL

The players find this small, leather-bound book in the lair in the center of the crypt. It is a minor wondrous item that requires attunement. While attuned to the item, a character can record their thoughts in the journal just by desiring to do so. The journal opens itself, magically generates ink, flips its pages, and the words appear on the page. Its ink is a deep obsidian black, and its handwriting is ever so slightly messy and inconsistent. If used as a spellbook, it reduces both the amount of time needed and the cost in gold pieces by half when scribing a new spell into it. Anything written in the journal remains until the journal's owner wills it to be erased. At your discretion, enchantment magic such as *suggestion* or *dominate person* could be used to convince the journal to restore pages it has erased.

PLOT HOOKS

Who is Terrion? Does the Van Grall clan still exist? These are questions that are not fully answered in this encounter, and can be tied into your campaign. Perhaps the players find a magic sword marked with the clan's symbol, and whether they decide to keep it or return it will determine if they make new friends or new enemies when they return to town. Or you might want to have Terrion be part of a larger collective of nobles-turned-wraiths, and the party hears reports of poltergeists and zombies attacking other settlements in the area. Perhaps Terrion was justified in his desire to reclaim his home, even if his methods were evil, and the players will find the Van Grall clan deposed and destitute. They may want to help them to gain the favor of nobles, or because they feel it's the right thing to do.

Additionally, if you want to drop something that ties in this encounter to a villain of your own design, you can include notes in Terrion's journal to that effect. Whether Terrion was acting in accordance with the villain's wishes or was simply aware of the villain as another powerful figure is up to you.

Either can be compelling. You can also tie the journal in by giving it some extra quirks, such as manipulating the personality of whoever is attuned to it to make them greedy or more inclined to seek power and control over lands. It may have vestiges of Terrion's personality in it (or even other previous owners who have died) and the players can ask it questions. It may or may not be truthful with them, of course.



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CHANGING THE FLAVOR

Because this encounter centers around the undead, it can be placed anywhere they are common. It can be easily adapted to an outdoor graveyard (so long as it takes place at night), an underground cavern, or even an abandoned house in the middle of town. It primarily needs darkness and traps to make the location work.

Changing the theme away from undead is difficult, as the encounter depends on the ability of poltergeists and wraiths to move through solid objects. You could add non-undead minions, such as cultists, to the encounter if you really want something living to spice it up.

SCALING BY LEVEL

EL 5 (-1,400 XP) Remove 1 poltergeist, remove 1 zombie. Only a minor tweak is needed to scale back the encounter, as 5th level is a big milestone for every class. With two attacks and 3rd level spells, they'll still be able to hold their own against Terrion and his minions.

EL 9 (+2,500 XP) Add 2 zombies, add 1 banshee. Increase the poltergeist's Charisma to 18, giving them a +4 bonus to their Telekinetic Thrust check. 9th level brings 5th level spells and an ability score increase for all classes. This makes them quite a bit more dangerous, and they can stand up to the additional threat posed by a banshee and more zombies.

EL 11 (+5,000 XP) Make the same changes as EL 9, and add a second wraith with the same statistics as Terrion. Zombies now reanimate 1 turn after they are destroyed unless their bodies are burned with fire or radiant energy. When they reanimate, they have half their maximum hit points. At 11th level, the party is on the cusp of real power, and even with all these changes, they aren't likely to struggle much in this fight. Consider pairing this with the Harder tactics below.

SCALING BY TACTICS

Easier: The poltergeists should spend more time taunting the players and less time attacking them directly. Have them slide the players into disadvantageous but not necessarily dangerous locations, such as back toward the entrance. Terrion should wait even longer before attacking, and if you really want to scale things down, give the zombies a small chance (such as if they roll a 1 on a 1d6) of walking into a pit instead of around it. They will take quite some time to climb out if they fall in, making this a massive reduction in difficulty.

Harder: The poltergeists are masters of splitting the party. The more they target low-Strength characters, the worse off the players will be. You can start to exploit the initiative order a bit here; sliding a character next to a pair of zombies right before those zombies take their turns, for example, is a nasty trick. Sliding spellcasters into the Zones of Silence before mobbing them with zombies can be even more devastating. Avoid targeting very strong characters with the poltergeists, especially raging barbarians. It's better to make the strong characters play catch up to the rest of the group.

Lethal: To wipe out a group, you must do it one character at a time. Have the three poltergeists ready actions to use Telekinetic Thrust in sequence, one after another, on the weakest character to enter the crypt. This is probably the rogue who is scouting ahead. This should give them enough movement to really push him far ahead into a waiting cluster of zombies, or better yet, right into Terrion's clutches. Make sure you move the zombies between this first victim and the rest of the group. Terrion should try to finish off a wounded character as quickly as possible and order his zombies to do the same, because as soon as they die, he can raise another poltergeist, and that's really bad news for the party.

Trap: Choking Chains

Perception DC: None - There are a half-dozen chains hanging from the ceiling here, all of them visible. The players may interpret these as noisemakers, as they are not obviously enchanted. A successful Intelligence (Arcana) check against DC 16 can determine the chain's specific function, but this check can only be made if the character in question knows the chains are magical, such as from casting detect magic.

Effect: All spaces with Choking Chains are difficult terrain. A non-undead creature that enters a space containing Choking Chains or ends their turn in it must make a Wisdom saving throw against DC 15 to avoid being compelled to stand still as the chains snake around them. A creature only has to make this check once per area of Choking Chains, so if they move through a 10 ft. by 10 ft. square of Choking Chains, they only need to make the saving throw once. Success prevents the effect, and the chains don't move, offering no clue as to the trap's intention, though the target is aware that some magic tried to influence it. On a failed saving throw, the creature stops its movement and becomes restrained as the chains wrap around it. That creature or another within 5 ft. of it can use their action to make a Strength ability check against DC 15 to pull the restrained creature free.

Disarm DC: Dealing 30 points of damage to the Chains will destroy a 5-ft. square of them. The chains are immune to poison and psychic damage. *Dispel magic* will end the enchantment on a single area of Choking Chains, rendering them harmless.

Crypt Walker Zombie

Medium Undead, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 12 (Natural Armor)

Hit Points 51 (6d10 + 18)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	1 (-5)

Speed 20 ft.

Skills Perception +3

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 13

Languages Understands Common, but can't speak

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

TRAITS

Undead Fortitude: If damage reduces the zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Shambling: The zombie can't take the Dash action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The zombie makes one Slam attack and one Disarming Bite attack.

Slam: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Disarming Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage and the target must make a Constitution saving throw against DC 13 or take 10 (3d6) necrotic damage and drop one item it is holding (creature's choice). The item lands at the creature's feet.

Vicious Poltergeist

Medium Undead, Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 12**Hit Points** 36 (8d8)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Speed 0 ft., fly 50 ft. (hover)**Skills** Perception +4**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks**Senses** passive Perception 14**Languages** Understands Common but can only laugh, not speak**Challenge** 3 (700 xp)**TRAITS****Incorporeal Movement:** The poltergeist can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.**Invisibility:** The poltergeist is invisible.**ACTIONS****Slam:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) force damage.**Telekinetic Thrust:** The poltergeist targets a creature or unattended object that it can see within 30 ft. of it. A creature must be Medium or smaller to be affected, and an object can weigh up to 250 pounds. If the target is a creature, the poltergeist makes a Charisma check contested by the target's Strength check. If the poltergeist wins the contest, it pushes the target up to 30 ft. in any direction, including upward. If the target hits a hard surface or heavy object at any point during this movement, it takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is an object that is not worn or carried, the poltergeist pushes it up to 30 ft. in any direction. This movement must always be in a straight line, but it can move the object or creature out of the poltergeist's line of sight. The poltergeist can always push an object or creature less than 30 ft. if it wishes.**Wraith (Terrion)**

Medium Undead, Neutral Evil

Armor Class 13**Hit Points** 67 (9d8 + 27)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)**Damage Resistances** acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered**Damage Immunities** necrotic, poison**Condition Immunities** charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained**Senses** darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12**Languages** Common**Challenge** 5 (1,800 xp)**TRAITS****Incorporeal Movement:** Terrion can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.**ACTIONS****Life Drain:** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. If the target's hit point maximum is reduced to 0 in this fashion, it dies.**Create Poltergeist:** Terrion targets a humanoid within 10 ft. of it that has been dead for no longer than 1 minute and died violently. The target's spirit rises as a vicious poltergeist in the space of its corpse or in the nearest unoccupied space. The newly-created poltergeist is under the wraith's control. Terrion can have no more than seven poltergeists under its control at one time.