

MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

*For Dungeon of the Mad Mage
Level 4: Twisted Caverns*

by Ruslan Kim



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About this Guide

Combat is one of three main pillars of the game, apart from exploration and interaction. And it takes a lot of time to prepare and run good combat encounter. The goal of this guide is to help DMs who are running Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage adventure to get better understanding how to run combat encounters, how to make them coherent, memorable and fun!

Preparation process divided into 3 steps:

1. Determining Encounter Difficulty.
2. Determining Surprise.
3. Determining Creatures' Tactics.

First step will give you general understanding about how difficult combat encounter could be for your player characters. Each level of WDMM is designed for PCs of particular level. I use a guideline from Encounter Building section in Xanathar's Guide to Everything (XGE, p. 88) to evaluate how many PCs of corresponding level should be in the party to overcome the encounter. Math is simple. If you have the same number of PCs – it is good fight. If you have more PCs (2/3 of number of PCs is needed) – they will pass it with ease, but it still be challenging. If you have less PCs (3/2 of number of PCs is needed) – encounter will be hard, but still winnable. Also, I put notes about combat difficulty, which I think is important. Depending on this information you can adjust the encounter for your group, skip it entirely or think about possible defeat consequences.

Second step is always up to DM, so you should be prepared in advance. General guidance is written in Player's Handbook (PHB, p. 189). Basically, you should determine who is surprised when the first round of combat begins. To do so, you should know answers for these questions:

Are creatures trying to hide? They roll Stealth.

Are they successful? Compare results to PC's Passive Perception score.

Are PCs trying to hide? They roll Stealth.

Are they successful? Compare results to creatures' Passive Perception score.

Based on the results you will understand who will take actions in the first round of combat and who will not. I also put my notes for the encounters when circumstances may differ from the standard procedure.

Third step will help you to understand how to use creatures in combat. Where should they stand? What course of action will be most efficient and logical depending on the lore? Who do they need to attack? Will they fight to the death? Will they flee or surrender? I also put more detailed explanation on how some creature's abilities and traits work.

Abbreviations and Font Styles

The following abbreviations are used throughout this guide:

PHB = Player's Handbook

MM = Monster Manual

DMG = Dungeon Master's Guide

SCAG = Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide

XGE = Xanathar's Guide to Everything

VGTM = Volo's Guide to Monsters

MTOF = Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes

WDMM = Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage

WDH = Waterdeep: Dragon Heist

PC(s) = Player Character(s)

AC = Armor Class

DC = Difficulty Class

CR = Challenge Rating

hp = hit points

gp = gold piece(s)

AoE = Area of Effect

RAW = Rules as Written

The following font styles are used throughout this guide:

Bold style is used for the creatures' names

Italic style is used for the Spells.

Bold Italic style is used for the Abilities and Traits.

Level 4: Twisted Caverns

This level is designed for four 8th level PCs. If you have more than 4 PCs, you can add more creatures to make combat encounters more challenging. If you have less PCs, then you can decrease the number of creatures in combat or use less optimal tactics. All creatures in Encounter Difficulty section are compared to 8th level PCs.

Area 2

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Ettin** (CR 4, MM, p. 132) = 2 PCs

Note. This is easy encounter, so you can skip it to save some time.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. Note that **Two Heads** trait gives +5 to the **Ettin's** Passive Perception score (see Passive Checks, PHB, p. 175).

Creatures' Tactics

According to MM, orcs transformed by magic of Demogorgon – twin-headed Prince of Demons – became the first ettins. Ettins are solitary creatures, because their heads constantly argue with each other and even more with other ettins. Ettins are able to negotiate, flee, surrender and take captives.

Ettins are simple monsters. Use **Multiattack** against nearest PC.

Area 3

Encounter Difficulty

8 **Piercers** (CR 1/2, MM, p. 252) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Thanks to **False Appearance** the **Piercers** can surprise PCs automatically, and PCs can't surprise them.

Creatures' Tactics

A piercer is a larval form of roper. Piercers can't communicate, surrender or take captives and they flee after unsuccessful attack.

The **Piercers** falling down on PCs directly underneath their hiding place. It is up to DM which PC is standing under each **Piercer**. You can roll a die to randomly determine the target. For example, if you have 4 PCs you can roll d6. If the result is 1-4 **Piercer** attacks one of the party member. On 5-6 it drops nearby.

Area 4

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Green Slaad** (CR 8, MM, p. 277) = 6 PCs

Note. This creature is not going to attack PCs without a reason.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Slaadi are the creatures of pure chaos native to Outer Plane, called Ever-Changing Chaos of Limbo (See The Planes of Existence, PHB, p. 300). According to MM, their goal is to sow discord on the Material Plane. Green slaadi are intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Fear is a good spell in one vs. the party situation. The less PCs will be able to attack the **Green Slaad**, the better. After that, make it use **Multiattack** against less armored PC. Always use **Staff** instead of **Claw**.

Use **Fireball**, if you can target 3 and more PCs. Use **Invisibility** spell, if you decide that it is time to flee.

Area 5

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Xorn** (CR 5, MM, p. 304) = 9 PCs

Note. This encounter can be very challenging, if the **Xorn** won't retreat.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. Note, that the **Xorn** has Advantage for Dexterity (Stealth) rolls made to hide in rocky terrain, thanks to **Stone Camouflage** trait.

Creatures' Tactics

Xorn are bizarre creatures native to Elemental Plane of Earth. They find precious metals and gems by scent and eat them. They are not inherently evil and can negotiate in Primordial (Terran), flee or surrender. Xorn are unable to consume organic material, so they don't have reasons to take captives or to finish off fallen PCs.

Treasure Sense allows the **Xorn** to pinpoint precious metals or gems. You can make them use **Multiattack** against PCs with largest amount of money.

According to WDM, the **Xorn** can use **Earth Glide** to escape after they lose half of their hit points. You can also use this trait in combat. Attack PC and hide underground. Emerge and attack again. Hit-and-run tactics works very well against weapon-dependent PCs, because they can't benefit from Extra Attack feature when they use Ready action, so the **Xorn** will take significantly less damage from them.

Area 6

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Ropers** (CR 5, MM, p. 261) = 6 PCs

Surprise

Thanks to **False Appearance** the **Ropers** can surprise PCs automatically, and PCs can't surprise them.

Creatures' Tactics

Ropers are voracious hunters of Underdark. They can't communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make it use **Multiattack** against as many PCs as possible. You can roll a die to choose random targets, if you have more than 4 PCs within reach. You can also use this method to decide which PC the **Roper** will **Bite**. Don't forget that Restrained condition grants Advantage to **Roper's** attacks.

Area 7

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Mage** (CR 6, MM, p. 347) = 3 PCs

1 **Quasit** (CR 1, MM, p. 63) = 1 PC

Note. These creatures are not going to attack PCs.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Darribeth's mind is unstable because of contact with demons, but she can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Quasits are lesser demons, who plot mischief and wickedness from the shadows, because they lack power to bring destruction. Demons can't be killed outside the Abyss, so they don't fear death and won't surrender. Quasits can communicate and flee, but they won't show mercy to fallen enemies taking them as captives.

Start the fight with **Greater Invisibility**. It will protect the **Mage** from lot of spells that require seeing, and all attacks against her become less effective because of Disadvantage.

Cone of Cold is the most damaging spell the **Mage** has, but you can also cast **Fireball** using 5th level spell slot, if its AoE will include more PCs.

Assume that *Mage Armor* was pre-casted before the encounter. Use **Mage's** reaction to cast *Shield* against attacks or *Counterspell* against harmful spells.

According to WDMM, the **Quasit** will flee if attacked or exposed.

Area 10

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Driders** (CR 6, MM, p. 120) = 6 PCs

5 **Giant Spiders** (CR 1, MM, p. 328) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

According to the lore, all driders once were promising drow summoned by Lolth to Demonweb Pits for the test of faith and strength. They failed it and were transformed by her to half-spider creatures. They were exiled from drow society to live lonely and miserable life in Underdark. Driders are intelligent and they can negotiate, surrender, flee or take captives.

Spiders are beasts, so they can communicate with PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell or similar ability. They won't surrender, but they can flee. They don't take captives, but they can preserve paralyzed PCs in web cocoons before they eat them.

Spider Climb trait allows the **Driders** to climb on the ceiling and attack with **Longbow** far from melee reach. They are intelligent enough to focus on less-armored or Restrained PCs with strong ranged attacks. Don't waste their actions on spells.

Make the **Spiders** use **Web** against PCs within 30 ft. range. Restrained condition (PHB, p. 292) grants Advantage to all attacks against affected PC. Use **Bite** only if all PCs are Restrained, or **Web** is not available.

Area 11a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Elite Warrior** (CR 5, MM, p. 128) = 3 PCs

2 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 128) = 1 PC

Note. These creatures are not going to attack PCs. Fight in this area alerts creatures in [Area 11b](#) and [Area 11c](#). This will be very tough fight.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

According to MM and MTOF, drow are selfish, cruel and treacherous creatures, who believe in their supremacy to all others. They especially hate surface elves, so you can focus on elf or half-elf PCs in combat. Drow are intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Drow Elite Warrior** is dangerous opponent. Don't waste her action of *Faerie Fire*, let regular **Drow** cast this spell. Use **Multiattack** against less-armored PC, or PC under the effect of *Faerie Fire*. All drow should be aware of dwarven resistance to poison and can avoid attacking them.

Make one or both **Drow** cast *Faerie Fire* on several PCs to grant Advantage to other allies. Use **Hand Crossbow** attacks, until PCs engage in melee.

Area 11b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Priestess of Lolth** (CR 8, MM, p. 129) = 6 PCs

1 **Drow Mage** (CR 7, MM, p. 129) = 4 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures in [Area 11a](#) and [Area 11c](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 11a](#) for the information about drow. Female drow always have higher position in drow society than men, and priestesses have the highest influential power.

Start the fight with this combo. Make the **Drow Priestess** cast *Insect Plague* targeting as many PCs as she can. Make the **Drow Mage** try to restrain PCs inside the spell's AoE casting *Evard's Black Tentacles*. If there are any **Drow**, make them try to poison PCs inside spells' AoE using **Hand Crossbow** attacks. If PC fails save against poison for 5 or more, he or she falls Unconscious. If there are any **Quaggoths**, make them Grapple (see Grappling, PHB, p. 195) PCs and drag them inside the AoE of *Insect Plague*.

On the next round, make **Drow Priestess** try to summon **Yochlol**. After that, use **Scourge** and heal allies casting *Mass Cure Wounds* or upcasted *Cure Wounds* if necessary.

The **Yochlol** is very dangerous creature. Don't waste its action on *Dominate Person*, because dominated 8th level PC is much weaker than CR 10 **Yochlol**. Use **Multiattack** against PCs who attack the **Priestess**. Once she is dead the **Yochlol** disappears.

Make the **Drow Mage** keep the distance and cast *Lightning Bolt* spell using highest level spell slots available. Use his Reaction for *Counterspell* or *Shield* spells depending on situation.

Area 11c

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Elite Warrior** (CR 5, MM, p. 128) = 3 PCs
2 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 128) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures in [Area 11a](#) and [Area 11b](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 11a](#).

Area 12a

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Drow Elite Warriors** (CR 5, MM, p. 128) = 6 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 11a](#).

Area 12b

Encounter Difficulty

8 **Quaggoths** (CR 2, MM, p. 256) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

According to MM, quaggoths are savage and brutal creatures. They often serve as slaves of the drow and historically hate surface elves. You can make quaggoths focus on elf or half-elf PCs. Quaggoths can communicate in Undercommon, flee, surrender or take captives.

Use **Multiattack** against less-armored PCs. Don't forget about **Wounded Fury**, it activates when the **Quaggoth** has 10 hp or fewer.

The **Quaggoths** have solid +5 bonus to Athletics. You can make them use Grapple and Shove (see Grappling, PHB, p. 195) effectively. Grappled and Prone PC can't stand up until escapes Grapple.

Area 13

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Carrion Crawler** (CR 2, MM, p. 37) = 1 PC

Note. This is easy encounter, so you can skip it.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Smell** trait grants +5 bonus to **Carrion Crawler's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

Carrion crawler are patient predators. They aggressively attack any creature that trespasses on their territory, or disturb its feasting. They can't communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Carrion Crawler** use **Multiattack** against nearest PC. Don't forget, that Paralyzed condition (PHB, p. 291) grants Advantage to all attacks against affected creature, and all hits from 5 ft. become Critical hits.

Area 13

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Awakened Trees** (CR 2, MM, p. 317, with changes) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Thanks to **False Appearance** the **Awakened Trees** can surprise PCs automatically, and PCs can't surprise them.

Creatures' Tactics

An awakened tree is an ordinary tree given sentience and mobility by magic. It can negotiate and flee, and it is up to DM, if it will surrender or take captives. These particular awakened trees can't speak. But **Speak with Plants** spell still works.

The **Awakened Trees** have vulnerability to fire damage and don't have resistance to slashing damage. You can make them focus on PCs dealing

fire or slashing damage. Note, that even magical bludgeoning and piercing weapons won't surpass their resistance.

Area 14

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Darkmantles** (CR 1/2, MM, p. 46) = 1 PC

Note. This is easy encounter, so you can skip it.

Surprise

Thanks to **False Appearance** the **Darkmantles** can surprise PCs automatically, and PCs can't surprise them.

Creatures' Tactics

At the beginning of the encounter make the **Darkmantles** use **Darkness Aura** and fly toward PCs. Make them use **Crush** with Advantage against nearest PCs next round. This attack can be very dangerous, if PC has low Constitution score (See Suffocating, PHB, p. 183).

Area 15

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Chuuls** (CR 4, MM, p. 40) = 6 PCs

18 **Troglodytes** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 290) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Chuuls are creations of aboleths. Their general goals are simple: kill explorers, take their gear and bury in secret places. They obey commands from any aboleth without questions. Chuuls can't speak, but since they understand Deep Speech it is possible for PCs to communicate with them via telepathy. Chuuls won't surrender or negotiate, but can flee or take captives, if aboleth commands them to do so.

Troglodytes are savage and degenerate creatures. They can communicate using their own language,

so PCs under effect of *Tongues* spell or some other magic can try to negotiate. Troglodytes adore manufactured weapons and armor. Normally, they can flee, surrender or take captives, but these particular troglodytes enslaved by aboleth and follow its commands.

Sense Magic trait allow the **Chuul** to sense magic items, so you can make them focus on PCs who have it.

The **Chuuls** have only one attack option, so make them use **Multiattack** against nearest less-armored PCs. Note, that they can use **Tentacles** only against Grappled PC. Paralyzed condition (PHB, p. 292) is very dangerous, because it converts **Chuul's** hits to Critical hits, and moreover allow them to drag PCs underwater and drown them (See Suffocating, PHB, p. 183).

Make the **Troglodytes** use **Multiattack** against less-armored PCs. When PCs start turn next to the **Troglodyte**, they must make Constitution save or become poisoned.

These particular **Troglodytes** are under effect of aboleth's **Enslave** trait. They can't use their Reaction and can make DC 14 Wisdom save against **Enslave** each time they take damage to end effect. According to the book, if **Troglodyte** breaks free out of aboleth's mind control it tries to flee.

Area 16a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Chuul** (CR 4, MM, p. 40) = 2 PCs

Note. This creature isn't present if it was killed in [Area 15](#). Otherwise, it should join the fight in [Area 16b](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 15](#).

Area 16b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Aboleth** (CR 10, MM, p. 13) = 4 PCs (if solo)

2 **Chuuls** (CR 4, MM, p. 40) = 4 PCs

Note. Take a look on Underwater Combat rules (PHB, p. 198) before running this encounter.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Aboleths are ancient creatures native to Elemental Plane of Water (PHB, p. 300). They ruled great empires of enslaved creatures, until gods appeared and crushed them. Aboleths has high intelligence and can negotiate, flee, surrender and take captives.

The **Aboleth** is legendary creature with Lair Actions. This means it can act not only on its own turn, but also up to 3 times after other creatures' turns using Legendary Actions. Lair actions come into play every round at initiative count 20.

Enslave is the most powerful attack the **Aboleth** has. Use it against PC with powerful ranged attacks and swim away to stay out of melee reach. Repeat until it is available. Use enslaved PCs actions to deal as much damage as possible to other party members with strong ranged attacks. Use **Multiattack** only if **Enslave** is not available.

Use **Psychic Drain** as Legendary Action to regain hp every time it's available, until all creatures enslaved by the **Aboleth** succeed on their save or die. Don't use **Psychic Drain** against PCs, because it grants saving throws against **Enslave**. The **Aboleth** can drain hp out of **Kua-Toa** from [Area 16c](#) or **Troglodytes** if they are still alive. Use **Tale Swipe** targeting less armored PC within range for last Legendary Action.

Phantasmal Force, which the **Aboleth** can cast using Lair Action, is very dependent on DM's interpretation. Illusion it creates can appear as a burning cage, and PC will think it is real and take

damage until he or she spends an Action to disbelieve. Or PC will simply move out of it, because nothing actually stops him or her. Check the forums and choose your side. Use second or third Lair Action options, depending on how many PCs you can target.

See [Area 15](#) for the information and tactics of the **Chuuls**.

Area 16c

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Kua-toa Whip** (CR 1, MM, p. 200) = 1 PC

2 **Kua-toa** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 199) = 1 PC

Note. If aboleth is dead, these creatures are no longer enslaved. Take a look on Underwater Combat rules (PHB, p. 198) before running this encounter.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Kua-toa are the race of mad humanoid, worshipping gods of their own insane creation. They can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

These creatures are under effect of aboleth's **Enslave** trait. They can't use their Reaction and can make DC 14 Wisdom save against **Enslave** each time they take damage to end effect. According to the book, if they break free out of aboleth's mind control they try to flee.

Make the **Kua-toa Whip** cast *Shield of Faith* and use **Multiattack** against less armored PC. Drag Grappled PC (PHB, p. 290) underwater (See Suffocating, PHB, p. 183), if there is a chance.

Make the **Kua-toa** use **Spear** against less armored PC. If PCs' weapon is stuck because of **Sticky Shield** drag Grappled PC (PHB, p. 290) underwater (See Suffocating, PHB, p. 183) if he or she won't let go the weapon.

Area 17

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Chuuls** (CR 4, MM, p. 40) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 15](#).

Area 20

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Kua-toa Whips** (CR 1, MM, p. 200) = 1 PC

20 **Kua-toa** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 199) = 2 PCs

Note. These creatures are Poisoned (PHB, p. 292) and fight only in self-defense. Fight in this area alerts creatures in [Area 21a](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 16c](#).

Area 21a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Kua-toa Archpriest** (CR 6, MM, p. 200) = 3 PCs

2 **Kua-toa Whips** (CR 1, MM, p. 200) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures in [Area 21b](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 16c for the information about **Kua-toa Whip**.

Make the **Archpriest** cast *Hold Person* using 5th level slot, so it can target 4 PCs within 60 ft. Paralyzed condition greatly increases effectiveness of melee attacks against PCs. If **Archpriest's** Concentration is broken, or all PCs succeeded on their saves, use this spell again until you burn all spell slots. Cast *Spiritual Weapon* using 4th level slot, if there is a chance. It doesn't require Concentration and increases **Kua-toa Archpriest's** damage output. Attack Paralyzed PCs using *Scepter* and don't forget about Critical hits.

Area 21b

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Kua-toa** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 199) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures in [Area 21a](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 16c](#).

Area 22

Encounter Difficulty

7 **Hook Horrors** (CR 3, MM, p. 189) = 7 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Hook Horror's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

Hook horrors are pack predators of the Underdark. They have their own language, so PCs under effect of *Tongues* spell or similar ability can communicate with them. Hook horrors can flee, but won't surrender or take captives.

Use **Multiattack** against nearest less-armored PCs. The **Hook Horrors** can work together, so

focus on one or two PCs. You can make the **Hook Horrors** flee using their Climb speed to move over the walls.

Area 23

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Hook Horror** (CR 3, MM, p. 189) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Hook Horror's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 22](#).

Area 24a

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Troglodytes** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 290) = 1 PC

Note. Very easy encounter, you can skip it. If aboleth is dead, these creatures are no longer enslaved.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 15](#).

Area 24c

Encounter Difficulty

12 **Troglodytes** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 290) = 1 PC

Note. Very easy encounter, you can skip it. If aboleth is dead, these creatures are no longer enslaved.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 15](#).

Area 24e

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Troglodytes** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 290) = 1 PC

Note. Very easy encounter, you can skip it. If aboleth is dead, these creatures are no longer enslaved.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 15](#).