

MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

*For Dungeon of the Mad Mage
Level 8: Slitherswamp*

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.

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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 creature's names

Italic style is used for the Spells.

Bold Italic style is used for the Abilities and Traits.

Level 8: Slitherswamp

This level is designed for four 10th 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 10th level PCs.

Area 2

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Bullywugs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 35, with changes) = 1 PC

Note. These creatures are not going to attack PCs. They move to [Area 19a](#) to warn their allies. As a DM you can decide that fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 19a](#) or [Area 23](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Amphibious** trait allows the **Bullywug** to hide underwater and they have Advantage to Stealth rolls in swampy terrain because of **Swamp Camouflage**.

Creatures' Tactics

Bullywugs are evil but intelligent creatures. They can negotiate, flee or surrender and prefer to take captives.

All **Bullywugs** at this level coat their weapons with carrion crawler mucus, which makes them more powerful foes. If the **Bullywug** hit with **Spear** attack, PC must make DC 13 Constitution save or become Poisoned and Paralyzed (PHB, p. 292). Make the **Bullywug** use **Multiattack** against less-armored or Paralyzed PC. The **Bullywug** can use **Standing Leap** to jump over high AC front-line PCs and attack less protected target. If they fight alongside their **Giant Frogs**, they can also attack Restrained PCs (PHB, p. 292).

Area 8a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Flesh Golem** (CR 5, MM, p. 167) = 2 PCs

2 **Wights** (CR 3, MM, p. 300) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 8b](#).

Surprise

If the glyph in Area 7 triggers, these creatures can't be surprised. If not, follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Golems are elemental spirits bound into material form by powerful magic. They blindly obey any commands given them by their creators. They don't feel pain and don't afraid of death. When golem's body is heavily damaged the elemental spirit tries to break free causing golem to go berserk. Golems can't communicate or surrender but can flee or take captives if its master wish so.

Wights are intelligent undead creatures waging eternal war on the living. They can communicate and flee but probably won't surrender or take captives.

Fire damage decreases the **Golem's** combat effectiveness because of **Aversion of Fire** trait. Focus on PCs who deal fire damage. If the **Golem** goes **Berserk** and several creatures are at the same range, you could roll a die to determine random target.

Make the **Wight** use **Multiattack** against less-armored PC. Always use **Longsword** with two hands to deal maximum damage. Use **Life Drain** attack to finish off fallen PC if you want him or her rise as a zombie. Note that the only way to get back to life undead PC is **True Resurrection** and **Wish** spells.

Area 8b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Mage** (CR 6, MM, p. 347) = 2 PCs

4 **Minotaur Skeletons** (CR 2, MM, p. 272) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 8a](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Mage is intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Skeletons are driven by necromantic energy that compels them to kill living creatures. They won't negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives, but they obey their master's will.

Make the **Mage** cast *Greater Invisibility* in the first round of the combat. This will protect the **Mage** from lot of spells that require seeing, for example, *Counterspell*. Also, all attacks against him 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. Use *Misty Step* plus Dash if you decide that it's time to flee.

Make the **Minotaur Skeletons** move at least 10 ft. and use *Gore* against nearest PC with additional damage from *Charge* trait. If there is no chance to *Charge*, make it use *Greataxe*.

Area 9

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Ghost** (CR 4, MM, p. 147) = 1 PC

Note. This creature is not going to attack the party without reason.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Ghosts are the souls of once-living creatures who want to complete some important unresolved task even after their death. They are not inherently evil, so they can negotiate, flee or surrender.

Possession is the most powerful attack the **Ghosts** have, but 10th level PCs may have access to *Dispel Evil and Good* spell. If they don't and there is no Cleric or Paladin with Turn Undead in the party, the only way to end **Possession** is to beat possessed party member to 0 hp. The **Ghost** inside PC's body don't add Proficiency Bonus to attacks and can't use Class Features or cast spells, so it is better to possess weapon dependent PCs. You can make the **Ghost** use *Withering Touch* and *Incorporeal Movement* in conjunction. Let the **Ghost** attack PC and move underground right after that. PCs won't be able to attack the **Ghost** during their turn and it will take only 1d10 force damage. Use *Etherealness* if you decide that it is time to flee. At 10th level PCs can do nothing to the creatures in Ethereal Plane (DMG, p. 48). *Horrifying Visage* doesn't look like very effective attack, but it can bring some roleplay opportunities.

Area 11b

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Drow Elite Warriors** (CR 5, MM, p. 126) = 4 PCs

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. Most drow should be aware of dwarven resistance to poison and can avoid attacking them. Drow are intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make **Drow Elite Warriors** cast *Faerie Fire* spell from the distance. Use *Multiattack* against less-armored PC, or PC under effect of *Faerie Fire*. Use *Hand Crossbow* only if there is no chance to attack in melee. Cast *Darkness* if you decide that it's time to flee.

Area 15c

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Spirit Nagas** (CR 8, MM, p. 233) = 8 PCs

1 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 15f](#) and [Area 11b](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Spirit nagas are intelligent and almost immortal creatures who surround themselves with various kind of enslaved creatures. They can communicate, flee and take captives but it is up to DM if they will surrender.

Duergar are greedy race of Underdark slavers. They are intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives. They hate surface dwarves, so you can make them focus on such PCs. According to MTOF, duergar deity Laduguer pledged to archdevil Asmodeus alliance against drow goddess Lolth, so they can focus on drow PCs also.

Spirit Nagas have low AC and hp pool so consider using *Dimension Door* to teleport close to [Area 15f](#) to get support from the **Trolls** or to [Area 11b](#) to join forces with **Drow Elite Warriors**. *Dominant Person* is most powerful spell the **Spirit Naga** has but it's very unreliable. If PC fails saving throw, he or she not only loses turn but also attacks allies. But if PC succeeds on

Wisdom save this spell does nothing. You can deal reliable damage to PCs if you make the **Spirit Naga** cast 5th or 4th level *Lightning Bolt* targeting as many PCs as possible. Use *Bite* only if the **Spirit Nagas** don't have any 3rd level spell slots. If you decided to add **Trolls** or **Drow** to this fight you can make the **Spirit Nagas** cast *Hold Person* using higher level spell slots and make their thralls attack Paralyzed PC.

Make the **Duergar** use *Enlarge* at the beginning of the fight. After that use *Warpick* against less-armored or Paralyzed PCs. Use *Javelin* only if there is no chance to use *Warpick*. If you decide that it is time to flee, make the **Duergar** use *Invisibility* and run away.

Area 15f

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Trolls** (CR 5, MM, p. 291) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. The **Stone Giant** has to Stealth rolls in rocky terrain because of *Stone Camouflage* trait.

Creatures' Tactics

Trolls eat anything they can catch and devour. It is up to DM if troll will negotiate, flee or surrender.

While *Regeneration* trait is active, **Troll** have no reason to worry about damage taken. PCs will not be able to kill the **Troll** without fire or acid damage source. Make the **Troll** use *Multiattack* against any PCs dealing fire or acid damage.

Area 16

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Bone Naga** (CR 4, MM, p. 233) = 1 PC

Note. This is very easy encounter, but as a DM you can make **Trolls** from [Area 15f](#) join the fight.

Surprise

According to WDMM, creatures moving through this area must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or be surprised when the **Bone Naga** attacks.

Creatures' Tactics

Bone nagas are intelligent undead creatures. They can communicate and flee but it is up to DM if they will surrender or take captives.

Make the **Bone Naga** cast *Lightning Bolt* targeting as many PCs as possible. Use **Bite** after expending all 3rd level spell slots. If you decided to add **Trolls** to this fight you can make the **Bone Naga** cast *Hold Person* and make the **Trolls** attack Paralyzed PC.

Area 19a

Encounter Difficulty

8 **Bullywugs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 35, with changes) = 1 PC

3 **Giant Frogs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 325) = 1 PC

Note. As a DM you can decide that fight in this area alerts **Assassin** from [Area 19c](#). This will make combat a bit more challenging.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Amphibious** trait allows the **Bullywug** to hide underwater and they have Advantage to Stealth rolls in swampy terrain because of **Swamp Camouflage**.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2](#) for the information about the **Bullywugs**.

Giant frogs are beasts, so PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell can communicate with them. Giant frogs can flee but won't surrender or take captives.

Make the **Giant Frogs** use **Bite** against nearest PC. If PC is Small use **Swallow** attack next round.

Area 19c

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Assassin** (CR 8, MM, p. 343, with changes) = 4 PCs

Note. As a DM you can decide that fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 19a](#) if they are still alive.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Amphibious** trait allows the **Assassin** to hide underwater and he has Advantage to Stealth rolls in swampy terrain because of **Swamp Camouflage**.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2](#) for the information about the **Bullywugs**.

The **Assassin** isn't very effective as a solo combatant, so I'd suggest making him join the fight in [Area 19a](#). The only thing he can do alone is **Assassinate**, but it isn't very easy task. First, the **Assassin** must roll Stealth higher than PC's Passive Perception to make him or her Surprised. Second, he must win Initiative because Surprised condition ends right after PC's first turn. Third, he must hit with an attack. If the **Assassin** is lucky, his **Crossbow** attack will deal 40 (2d8+8d6+3) piercing damage plus 24 (7d6) poison damage or half if PC succeeds on DC 15 Constitution save. And all this damage probably won't kill 10th level PC. After that the **Assassin** can only use **Multiattack** and without allies and reliable source of Advantage he won't be able to deal additional damage from **Sneak Attack** trait. He will be focused and killed very fast. Joining forces with **Bullywugs** who can inflict Paralyzed condition (PHB, p. 292) and **Giant Frogs** who can inflict Restrained condition (PHB, p. 292) makes the **Assassin** much more dangerous foe. He can also use **Standing Leap** to jump over high AC front-line PCs and attack less protected target.

Area 19d

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Yuan-ti Abominations** (CR 7, MM, p. 307) = 6 PCs

Surprise

As a DM you can decide that appearing **Yuan-ti Abominations** make PCs surprised.

Creatures' Tactics

These yuan-ti are guardians of the temple and attack any creature that is not a yuan-ti. They won't negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make both **Yuan-ti Abominations** cast *Fear* targeting as many PCs as possible. It is good spell to disable PCs with weak Wisdom saves and it can affect more targets than *Suggestion*. After that make the **Yuan-ti Abomination** use *Multiattack* against less-armored PC. Attack with *Constrict* first, because it inflicts Restrained condition which grants Advantage to attack rolls and continue *Bite* and *Scimitar* thereafter. Two *Longbow* attacks can potentially deal more damage, but chances to hit PC are lower. You can make one **Yuan-ti Abomination** *Constrict* PC and make second **Abomination** attack Restrained PC with *Longbow*. Their Intelligence score is very high so they should know about teamwork benefits.

Area 20

Encounter Difficulty

25 **Bullywugs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 35, with changes) = 3 PCs

6 **Giant Frogs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 325) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts the **Hydra** from [Area 21a](#) and the **Death Slaad** from [Area 21b](#). Make the **Death Slaad** ride the **Hydra**. They can reach this area in 2 rounds.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. *Amphibious* trait allows the **Bullywug** to hide underwater and they have Advantage to

Stealth rolls in swampy terrain because of *Swamp Camouflage*.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 19a](#).

Area 21a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Hydra** (CR 8, MM, p. 190) = 4 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts the **Death Slaad** from [Area 21b](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Hydra is monster driven by ever-lasting hunger. It won't communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Hydra** use *Multiattack* against nearest PC. You can roll a die to determine random target if several PCs are within the same range. The **Hydra** is very tough because of its *Multiple Heads* trait. If it takes 25 or more damage during PCs turn it loses one head. So, if four PCs during their four turns will kill four heads but the **Hydra** is still above 0 hp it will magically grow eight new heads, regain 80 hp and will have nine attacks on its turn. The only thing that can prevent this trait to function is fire damage, so the **Hydra** can focus on PCs who deals such type of damage.

Area 21b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Death Slaad** (CR 10, MM, p. 274) = 6 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts the **Hydra** from [Area 21a](#).

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 (PHB, p. 300). According to MM, their goal is to sow discord on the Material Plane. Death slaadi are intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

It is better to make the **Death Slaad** ride the **Hydra** and join the fight in [Area 20](#). In this case you can make it use **Multiattack** against Paralyzed or Restrained PCs. If you decide that the **Death Slaad** and the **Hydra** will wait for the party, fight will be easier but still very challenging. *Fear* is a good spell to start the fight. The less PCs will be able to attack the **Death Slaad**, the better. Make the **Death Slaad** use **Multiattack** against less-armored PC. Always use **Greatsword** instead of **Claw**. Use *Fireball*, if you can target 4 and more PCs. If Concentration on *Fear* is broken or all PCs succeeded on their saves you can make the **Death Slaad** cast *Cloudkill*. This spell deals decent damage and blocks vision which helps against ranged PCs and casters. Use *Invisibility* or *Fly* spells if you decide that it's time to flee. At the beginning of each turn the **Death Slaad** regains 10 hp if nothing like *Chill Touch* cantrip prevents its **Regeneration**.

Area 22a

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Bullywugs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 35, with changes) = 1 PC

6 **Giant Frogs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 325) = 1 PC

Note. The **Bullywugs** can release the **Carrion Crawlers** from [Area 22b](#) and call for help from [Area 23](#) and [Area 19a](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Amphibious** trait allows the **Bullywug** to hide underwater and they have Advantage to

Stealth rolls in swampy terrain because of **Swamp Camouflage**.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 19a](#).

Area 22b

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Carrion Crawlers** (CR 2, MM, p. 37) = 2 PCs

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 23

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Bullywugs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 35, with changes) = 1 PC

2 **Giant Frogs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 325) = 1 PC

Note. The **Bullywugs** can call for help from [Area 22a](#) and [Area 24](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Amphibious** trait allows the **Bullywug** to hide underwater and they have Advantage to Stealth rolls in swampy terrain because of **Swamp Camouflage**.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 19a](#).

Area 24

Encounter Difficulty

5 **Bullywugs** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 35, with changes) =
1 PC

1 **Giant Frog** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 325) = 1 PC

Note. The **Bullywugs** can call for help from
[Area 2](#) and [Area 23](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Amphibious** trait allows the **Bullywug** to hide underwater and they have Advantage to Stealth rolls in swampy terrain because of **Swamp Camouflage**.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 19a](#).