MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

For Dungeon of the Mad Mage Level 10: Muiral's Gauntlet

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 creature's names

Italic style is used for the Spells.

Bold Italic style is used for the Abilities and Traits.

Level 10: Muiral's Gauntlet

This level is designed for four 11th level PCs. If you have more than 4 PCs, you can add more creatures or maximize their hp 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 11th level PCs.

Area 3a, Area 7b or Area 11b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Muiral** (CR 13, WDMM, p. 314) = 4 PCs (if solo)

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

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

Make Muiral cast Greater Invisibility at the beginning of the fight. This spell will protect him against spells that require seeing the target, give Disadvantage to attack rolls against him and Advantage to his attack rolls. Make **Muiral** stay more than 60 ft. away from the party before he cast this spell, so PCs won't be able to cast Counterspell. Muiral has +8 bonus to Constitution save and *Legendary Resistance*, so it is very hard to break his Concentration on this spell by dealing damage. Make **Muiral** cast *Counterspell* against Dispel Magic and use Legendary **Resistance** against Faerie Fire, Hold Monster, Stunning Strike and other spells and abilities which can break Concentration and allow save. Muiral also can cast Shield to avoid attacks. After PC ends turn, **Muiral** can take **Legendary Action**. **Cast Cantrip** option is most optimal damagewise. Make **Muiral** cast *Shocking Grasp* or *Ray of* Frost cantrips depending on the distance to targeted PC. On the next turns make Muiral cast 7th and 6th level *Lightning Bolt* targeting as many PCs as possible. Damage-wise it is better than

casting Finger of Death or using Multiattack against single PC. As an alternative you can make Muiral cast Wall of Force hemisphere around himself and one PC and kill it using Multiattack and Legendary Actions. If the party doesn't have countermeasures such as Misty Step or Dimension Door to enter or leave the dome, Disintegrate to break it or Otiluke's Resilient Sphere or another Wall of Force to protect trapped PC, he or she most probably will lose in the duel.

Area 3b

Encounter Difficulty

3 Banshees (CR 4, MM, p. 23) = 3 PCs

Surprise

Detect Life trait allows the **Banshee** to sense PCs, so it's impossible to surprise them. **Banshees** are not going to hide and surprise the party. As a DM you must decide if the party interrupts their prayers or not.

Creatures' Tactics

Banshees are intelligent undead creatures. They are able to communicate, and it is up to DM is they will flee, surrender or take captives. They can't venture more than 5 miles from the place of their demise.

Wail is the most powerful ability the Banshee has. WDMM has suggestion on when to use it, but if you want to make fight more challenging, you can make all **Banshees** use *Wail* in the first round of the combat targeting as many PCs as possible. *Incorporeal Movement* trait allows the Banshee to hide inside the columns, walls and under the floor between turns taking 1d10 force damage. This tactic forces the party to use Ready action and lose benefits of Extra Attack or keep Concentration on readied spells. On the second round make one of the Banshees use Horrifying Visage targeting as many PCs as possible and make the rest use *Corrupting Touch* against lessarmored PC. Since drow hate surface elves you can make Banshees focus on elf or half-elf PC.

Area 4b

Encounter Difficulty

8 **Ghouls** (CR 1, MM, p. 148) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Ghouls are undead creatures driven by insatiable hunger. They won't negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Ghouls** are intelligent enough to focus on less-armored non-elf PC. Always use *Claws* instead of *Bite*, even despite damage difference, because *Claws* have a higher bonus to attack rolls. *Claws* also have a chance to inflict Paralyzed condition (PHB, p. 291) which grants Advantage to all attacks, and all hits from 5 ft. become Critical hits.

Area 11a

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Undead Shambling Mounds** (CR 5, MM, p. 270, with changes) = 4 PCs

Surprise

As a DM you can decide that coalescing mounds surprise the party.

Creatures' Tactics

Undead shambling mounds won't negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Undead Shambling Mound** use *Multiattack* against nearest PC. If it hits with both *Slam* attacks it can use *Engulf* which can deal damage on the next turns, inflicts Restrained and Blinded conditions (PHB, p. 292) and PC can't breathe (PHB, p. 183). According to Jeremy Crawford's Twitter, PC can hold breath when affected by such kind of abilities, which makes them less dangerous.

Area 11b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Stone Golem** (CR 11, MM, p. 167, with changes) = 6 PCs

Surprise

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, don't feel pain and don't afraid of death. They won't communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Stone Golem** use *Slow* targeting as many PCs as possible. Next round make it use *Multiattack* against less-armored PC.

Area 12

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Mutated Drow** (CR 9, MM, p. 149, with changes) = 8 PCs

Surprise

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

Creatures' Tactics

According to MM and MTOF, drow are selfish, cruel and treacherous creatures, who believe in their supremacy to all other. They especially hate surface elves, so you can focus on elf or half-elf PCs in combat. It is up to DM if mutated drow will negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Mutated Drow** use **Multiattack** against less-armored PC. Use **Rock** only if there is no chance to attack in melee. Make the **Mutated Drow** cast *Faerie Fire* if PCs using *Invisibility*.

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Phase Spiders** (CR 3, MM, p. 334) = 2 PCs

4 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 126) = 1 PC

Note. According to WDMM, one of the **Drow** is traitor and will help the party.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Phase spiders have pretty high Intelligence score comparing to regular spiders, but they are still monsters. They can't negotiate or surrender but can flee. They don't take captives, but they can preserve paralyzed PCs in web cocoons before they eat them. It is up to DM how precisely they follow drow's commands.

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

Make the **Phase Spiders** emerge from Ethereal Plane next to PC using **Ethereal Jaunt** as Bonus Action. Use **Bite** to attack. Next round use **Bite** once again and then **Ethereal Jaunt** to avoid PCs attacks. It is up to DM if the **Phase Spiders** can focus on less armored PCs or avoid attacking dwarves, who are resistant to poison.

Make one or two **Drow** cast *Faerie Fire* on several PCs to grant Advantage to other allies. Use *Hand Crossbow* attacks until PCs engage in melee. Switch to *Shortsword* to fight in melee or attack Unconscious PC to Crit him or her (PHB, p. 291).

Area 17a

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Psychic Gray Oozes** (CR 1/2, MM, p. 240, with changes) = 1 PC

Surprise

The **Gray Ooze** is unnoticeable thanks to its *False Appearance* trait. This means that the **Ooze** can surprise PCs automatically and PCs don't have such opportunity.

Creatures' Tactics

According to the lore, oozes are unintelligent spawns of Demon Lord Juiblex. They don't use any tactics, they don't surrender or flee, they just attack everything they can eat.

If you decide that the Gray Ooze can use Psychic Crush ability being motionless, then it will be unnoticeable thanks to *False Appearance*. In this case, it will be difficult for the party to understand what's going on and how to react accordingly, but they can use Detect Magic to notice the **Oozes**. If you decide that the **Gray** Ooze can't benefit from False Appearance trait while it uses *Psychic Crush*, then PCs will be able to notice it, break the glass and attack the **Oozes**. According to WDMM, the **Gray Oozes** have total cover and can't attack with **Pseudopod** until altar is broken. You can roll a die to determine random PC and make the **Grav Ooze** use **Psychic Crush** against him or her. Once altar is broken, you can make the **Gray Oozes** attack nearest PC wearing metal armor with Pseudopod. Gray Oozes probably won't be able to kill 11th level PC, but they can make his or her armor less useful. Don't forget that Corrode Metal trait can damage weapons.

Area 17b

Encounter Difficulty

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

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

Surprise

As a DM you can decide that materializing **Ghost** makes the party surprised. PCs can't surprise this creature.

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. 11th level PCs might have access to Dispel Evil and Good spell but without it, and if 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 use *Withering Touch* and *Incorporeal Movement* in conjunction. Make 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. *Horrifying Visage* doesn't look like very effective attack, but it can bring some roleplay opportunities.

Area 17d

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Assassin** (CR 8, MM, p. 343, with changes) = 3 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 13 for general description of drow.

The **Assassin** isn't very effective as a solo combatant. 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. As a DM you can also roll Deception vs. Insight. 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 11th level PC. After that the **Assassin** can only use *Multiattack*. If the **Drow** from Area 13 came with the party, add him to this encounter and make it cast Faerie Fire, so the Assassin will be able to deal additional damage from Sneak Attack trait.

Area 18b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Elite Warrior** (CR 5, MM, p. 126) = 2 PCs 14 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 126) = 2 PCs *Note.* According to WDMM the **Drow** are wounded.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 13 for general description of drow.

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 effect of *Faerie Fire*. All drow should be aware of dwarven resistance to poison and can avoid attacking them. If there is a chance, attack Unconscious PC to Crit him or her (PHB, p. 291).

See Area 13 for the **Drow's** tactics in combat.

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Mage** (CR 7, MM, p. 126) = 2 PCs

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

1 **Quasit** (CR 1, MM, p. 50) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 13 for general description of drow.

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.

Assume that the **Drow Mage** pre-casted *Mage Armor*. At the beginning of the fight make the **Drow Mage** to cast *Greater Invisibility*. It is very good defensive spell, but it requires keeping concentration which means **Drow** won't be able to use *Cloudkill* or *Evard's Black Tentacles*. On the next turns make it cast *Lightning Bolts* using 5th and 4th level spell slots targeting as many PCs as possible. Don't forget to use *Shield* against attacks.

See <u>Area 18b</u> for the **Drow Elite Warrior's** tactics in combat. There is no ordinary **Drow** to cast *Faerie Fire*, so one of the **Drow Elite Warriors** can cast it if it can target several PCs at once.

Make the **Quasit** use *Invisibility* at the first round of combat. After that you can make it use Help action (PHB, p. 192) against PC fighting the **Drow Elite Warriors**. This action will grant Advantage to the first attack roll against PC and don't break *Invisibility*.

Area 21

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Giant Spiders** (CR 1, MM, p. 328) = 1 PC **Note.** This is easy encounter, so you can skip it.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Spiders are beasts, so they can communicate with PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell or similar ability. They won't surrender or take captives, but they can flee.

The **Giant Spiders** probably won't be able to harm 11th level PCs. Use *Web* against PCs within reach. Restrained condition (PHB, p. 292) grants Advantage to *Bite* attacks.

Area 24a

Encounter Difficulty

6 **Troglodytes** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 290, with changes) = 1 PC

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Troglodytes are savage and degenerate creatures. They can communicate in their own language, so PCs under effect of *Tongues* spell or some other magic can try to negotiate. Troglodytes can flee, surrender or take captives.

When PC starts turn next to the **Troglodyte**, he or she must make Constitution save or become poisoned. Make the **Troglodytes** use *Multiattack* against less-armored PCs. *Longsword* option deals more damage in total, but *Claws* and *Bite* have more chances to hit high AC.

Area 24c

Encounter Difficulty

7 **Ghouls** (CR 1, MM, p. 148) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 4b.

Area 25a

Encounter Difficulty

15 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 126) = 2 PCs 2 **Giant Lizards** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 326, with changes) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from Area 25b and Area 25c.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 13 for general description of drow.

Giant lizards are used as mounts and pack animals by drow. They are beasts, so they can communicate with PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell or similar ability. They won't surrender or take captives, but they can flee.

See <u>Area 13</u> for the **Drow's** tactics in combat. At 11th level PCs probably have access to nasty AoE spells, like *Fireball* and *Cone of Cold*, so spread the **Drow** throughout the room.

If you decide that the **Giant Lizards** must fight, for example in self-defense, make them use **Bite** against nearest PC. If you are going to use them as mounts for the **Drow**, take a look to Mounted Combat rules (PHB, p. 198). **Spider Climb** trait allows the **Giant Lizards** to flee climbing on the wall or ceiling.

Area 25b, Area 26 or Area 27a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Yochlol** (CR 10, MM, p. 50) = 5 PCs

1 **Drow House Captain** (CR 9, MTOF, p. 184, with changes) = 4 PCs

1 **Drow Priestess of Lolth** (CR 8, MM, p. 126) = 3 PCs

2 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 126) = 1 PC *Note.* Fight in this area alerts creatures from Area 25a and Area 25c.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

The yochlols are the Handmaidens of Lolth — extensions of the Spider Queen's will dedicated to acting as her agents of villainy. Sometimes Lolth dispatches yochlols to the Material Plane to guard her temples and to aid her most devout priestesses. Being demons, they can't truly die on the Material Plane, so they don't surrender or flee. They can communicate in Elvish, Undercommon and Abyssal languages and they can take captives if needed.

See Area 13 for general description of drow.

Make the **Yochlol** cast *Dominate Monster* on martial PC and order him or her attack other PCs. On the following rounds, don't waste **Yochlol's** Action on precise control of Charmed PC. It's better to make it use *Multiattack* against less armored PC.

Make the **Drow House Captain** use *Multiattack* against less armored PC. Make it use *Battle Command* as Bonus Action to allow the **Yochlol** make *Slam* attack as Reaction.

Make the **Drow Priestess** cast *Insect Plague* targeting as many PCs as possible. After that, use *Scourge* and heal allies casting *Mass Cure Wounds* or *Cure Wounds* if necessary.

See Area 13 for the **Drow's** tactics.

Area 25c

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Stone Golem** (CR 11, MM, p. 167) = 6 PCs

2 **Drow Mages** (CR 7, MM, p. 126) = 4 PCs *Note.* Fight in this area alerts creatures from

Area 25a, Area 25b and Area 30a.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 11b for the **Stone Golem's** tactics.

See Area 19 for the **Drow Mages'** tactics.

Area 26

Encounter Difficulty

7 **Giant Spiders** (CR 1, MM, p. 328) = 2 PCs 7 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 126) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See <u>Area 21</u> for the **Giant Spiders'** tactics and <u>Area 13</u> for the **Drow's** tactics. If Vlonwelv and her allies are here, see also <u>Area 25b</u>.

Area 27a

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 126) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 13. If Vlonwelv and her allies are here, see also Area 25b.

Area 27c

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Giant Spiders** (CR 1, MM, p. 328) = 1 PC *Note.* Fight in this area might alert creatures from Area 27a.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 21.

Area 28a

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Priests** (CR 2, MM, p. 348, with changes) = 1 PC 6 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 126) = 1 PC

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

According to the book, the **Priests** have only two 1_{st} level spell slots remaining. Make them cast *Sacred Flame* against heavily armored PC and after that *Sanctuary* as Bonus Action.

See Area 13 for the **Drow's** tactics.

Area 29b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Wraith** (CR 5, MM, p. 302) = 2 PCs

3 **Specters** (CR 1, MM, p. 279) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise

Creatures' Tactics

Wraiths and their specter servants hate all the living and won't negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Both the **Wraith** and the **Specters** can fly and have *Incorporeal Movement* trait, so make them use hit and run tactics. Use *Life Drain* against less armored PC and then hide inside the wall or under the floor. This tactic forces the party to use Ready action and lose benefits of Extra Attack or keep Concentration on readied spells in exchange of 1d10 force damage. Don't forget, that maximum hit points reduction lasts until long rest is finished. Make the **Wraith** use *Create Specter* if there is a chance.

Area 30a

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Drow Elite Warriors** (CR 5, MM, p. 126) = 8 PCs

8 **Troglodytes** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 290, with changes) = 1 PC

5 **Giant Spiders** (CR 1, MM, p. 328, with changes) = 1 PC

4 **Giant Lizards** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 326, with changes) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from Area 30b and Area 25c.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See <u>Area 18b</u> for the **Drow Elite Warriors'** tactics.

See Area 24a a for the **Troglodytes'** tactics.

See Area 21 for the **Giant Spiders'** tactics.

See Area 25a for the Giant Lizards' tactics.

Area 30b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Mage** (CR 7, MM, p. 126) = 2 PCs

7 **Drow** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 126) = 1 PC

6 **Troglodytes** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 290, with changes) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from Area 30a.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See Area 19 for the **Drow Mage's** tactics.

See Area 13 for the **Drow's** tactics.

See Area 24a a for the Troglodytes' tactics.