

MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

*For Dungeon of the Mad Mage
Level 12: Maze Level*

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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 on 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 might 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 12: Maze Level

This level is designed for four 12th 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 12th level PCs.

Area 7a

Encounter Difficulty

7 **Minotaurs** (CR 3, MM, p. 223) = 4 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 7b](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

According to MM, minotaurs are savage hunters. They can communicate only in Abyssal language and they won't flee, surrender or take captives because of their bloodlust.

Since the **Minotaurs** don't use any kind of tactics, make them attack nearest PC. Moving 10 ft. before using **Gore** attack with **Reckless** trait gives to the **Minotaur** highest potential damage output because of additional damage from **Charge** trait. You can make them repeat this attacks every round, even if it takes moving back and getting opportunity attacks from PCs, or you can make them use **Greataxe** with Advantage from their **Reckless** trait.

Area 7b

Encounter Difficulty

5 **Minotaurs** (CR 3, MM, p. 223) = 3 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 7a](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 7a](#).

Area 8a

Encounter Difficulty

11 **Minotaurs** (CR 3, MM, p. 223) = 6 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 7a](#). The **Minotaur** leader carries Horn of the Endless Maze (DMG, p. 175). You can make the **Minotaur** use the horn in the beginning of the combat.

Area 9a

Encounter Difficulty

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

2 **Incubi** (CR 4, MM, p. 285) = 2 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 over all other. They especially hate surface elves, so you can make them focus on elf or half-elf PCs in combat. Drow can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Incubi are fiends, but since they aren't demons or devils, they don't reform in their home plan once killed outside it. They are intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Drow Elite Warrior** use *Multiattack* against less-armored PC. All drow should be aware of dwarven resistance to poison and can avoid attacking them. You can make one or both **Drow Elite Warriors** cast *Faerie Fire* targeting as many PCs as possible before engaging in melee. If you decide that it's time to flee, make the **Drow Elite Warrior** cast *Darkness* to cover its retreat.

Make the **Incubi** use *Charm* against martial PCs. It is up to DM what kind of command is suicidal, but you can ask Charmed PCs to give up their weapons, run from the fight or do nothing. You can also use *Draining Kiss* against Charmed PC but remember that it triggers save against *Charm*. If you decide that it's time to flee, make the **Incubi** use *Etherealness*.

Area 12a

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Drow Elite Warriors** (CR 5, MM, p.126) = 4 PCs
7 **Minotaur Skeletons** (CR 2, MM, p. 272) = 3 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 12b](#), who have signal horns. The sound of the horns is audible in all areas from Area 10 through Area 19.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 9a](#) for **Drow Elite Warriors'** tactics.

Skeletons are driven by necromantic energy that compels them to kill living creatures. They won't negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Minotaur Skeletons** attack nearest PC using *Gore* and moving at least 10 ft. before that to activate *Charge* trait. After use *Greataxe* against nearest PCs. You can make them repeat this attacks every round, even if it takes moving back and getting opportunity attacks from PCs, or you can make them use *Greataxe*.

Area 12b

Encounter Difficulty

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

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 12a](#), [Area 12c](#) and [Area 12d](#). The sound of their horns is audible in all areas from Area 10 through Area 19.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 9a](#) for general description of drow.

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 12c

Encounter Difficulty

9 **Quaggoths** (CR 2, MM, p. 256) = 3 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 12b](#), who have signal horns. The sound of the horns is audible in all areas from Area 10 through Area 19.

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.

Make the **Quaggoth** use *Multiattack* against less-armored PCs. The **Quaggoths** have +5 bonus to Athletics, so they can use Shove or Grapple.

Area 12d

Encounter Difficulty

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

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

Note. Fight in this area might alert creatures from [Area 12c](#) and [Area 12b](#), who have signal horns. The sound of the horns is audible in all areas from Area 10 through Area 19.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12b](#) for **Drow** tactics.

Giant lizards 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.

If 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 13

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Bore Worm** (CR 16, MM, p. 255, with changes) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Bore worm is construct. It won't communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Bore Worm** use **Multiattack** against nearest PC.

Area 17a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Vrock** (CR 6, MM, p. 50) = 2 PCs

Note. The vroock emits a loud screech audible in all areas from Area 10 through Area 19.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

According to the lore, demons are the embodiment of chaos and evil existing only to destroy. They can't truly die on the Material Plane, so they don't surrender or flee. They can communicate via **Telepathy** or in Abyssal language. They don't take captives and show no mercy to fallen enemies.

The **Vrock** can fly so make it use hit and run tactics and stay in the air out of melee reach. In the first round make it use **Stunning Screech** targeting as many PCs as possible. After that make it use **Multiattack** against Stunned PCs (PHB, p. 292), preferably with strong ranged attacks. You can make the **Vrock** use **Spores** to decrease combat effectiveness of martial PCs.

Area 17b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Vrock** (CR 6, MM, p. 50) = 2 PCs

Note. The vroock emits a loud screech audible in all areas from Area 10 through Area 19.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 17a](#).

Area 17c

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Vrock** (CR 6, MM, p. 50) = 2 PCs

Note. The vrock emits a loud screech audible in all areas from Area 10 through Area 19.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 17a](#).

Area 17d

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Vrock** (CR 6, MM, p. 50) = 2 PCs

Note. The vrock emits a loud screech audible in all areas from Area 10 through Area 19.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 17a](#).

Area 17e

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Vrock** (CR 6, MM, p. 50) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 17a](#).

Area 18a

Encounter Difficulty

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

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

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

The **Drow** use *Light Crossbow* through the arrow slits, which gives them three-quarters Cover (+5 bonus to AC and Dexterity saving throws, PHB, p. 196). You can also make them cast *Faerie Fire* targeting as many PCs as possible within the range of the spell.

Area 18b

Encounter Difficulty

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

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 18a](#).

Area 18c

Encounter Difficulty

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

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 18a](#).

Area 18d

Encounter Difficulty

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

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 18a](#).

Area 18e

Encounter Difficulty

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

Note. These creatures try to join their forces with creatures from [Area 19a](#) and [Area 19c](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12b](#).

Area 18f

Encounter Difficulty

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

Note. These creatures try to join their forces with creatures from [Area 19a](#) and [Area 19c](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12b](#).

Area 18g

Encounter Difficulty

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

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.

Make the **Spider** use **Web** against PCs within reach. Restrained condition (PHB, p. 292) grants Advantage to **Bite** attacks.

Area 18i

Encounter Difficulty

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12b](#).

Area 19a

Encounter Difficulty

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

Note. These creatures try to join their forces with creatures from [Area 18e](#), [Area 18f](#) and [Area 19c](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 9a](#).

Area 19c

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Elite Warrior** (CR 5, MM, p. 126) = 1 PC

Note. This creature tries to join forces with creatures from [Area 18e](#), [Area 18f](#) and [Area 19a](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 9a](#).

Area 19f

Encounter Difficulty

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

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

Note. These creatures are not going to attack the party without reason.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

As intelligent creatures Maleen and Tendra Shadowdusk can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The most powerful trait the **Assassin** has is **Assassinate**. It works like this. First, the **Assassin** must surprise the target. In combat situation it's usually Dexterity (Stealth) roll against PCs' Passive Perception. During social interaction as a DM you can make it use Charisma (Deception) against PCs' Passive Insight. Second, the **Assassin** must win Initiative because surprise ends right after PC's first turn. Third, it must hit with an attack. If the **Assassin** is lucky, its **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. Its **Multiattack** will deal even more damage but remember that poison damage doesn't double because it deals damage on save and **Sneak Attack** works only once per turn. After that the **Assassin** can only use **Multiattack**, but it needs allies near targeted PC or reliable source of Advantage to deal additional damage from **Sneak Attack** trait.

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. You can make the **Mage** stay near PC which is targeted by the **Assassin** to activate its **Sneak Attack**, but it's a bit risky. *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. The **Assassin** has **Evasion** trait, so you can target it also if this will give an opportunity to damage 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. You can also cast 4th level *Fly* on both the **Mage** and the **Assassin** to get higher speed and leave melee reach.

Area 19k

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Drow Archmage** (CR 12, MM, p. 342, with changes) = 6 PCs

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

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

Note. I'd recommend taking off PCs' weapons, armor and spellcasting foci if they want to meet drow priestess peacefully.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 9a](#) for general description of drow.

The **Drow Archmage** and the **Drow Priestess of Lolth** have a good synergy. If combat erupts and you decided that the **Archmage** doesn't want to flee casting *Teleport* on itself and the **Priestess**, you can try out following combo. Make the **Drow Priestess of Lolth** cast *Insect plague* targeting as many PCs as possible and make the **Archmage** trap them under 10 ft. radius hemisphere casting *Wall of Force*. If the party doesn't have proper countermeasures such as *Misty Step* or *Dimension Door* to leave the dome, *Dispel Magic* to end *Insect Plague* or *Disintegrate* to break *Wall of Force*, this can be deadly situation, especially if full party is trapped. The regular **Drow** can cast *Darkness* around the *Wall of Force* to prevent escape via *Misty Step* because this spell requires seeing the destination area. The **Drow Archmage** can also summon **Barlgura** or **Vrock** inside the dome and the **Drow Priestess of Lolth** can summon **Yochlol**.