

MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

*For Dungeon of the Mad Mage
Level 16: Crystal Labyrinth*

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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.

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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 creatures' names

Italic style is used for the Spells.

Bold Italic style is used for the Abilities and Traits.

Level 16: Crystal Labyrinth

This level is designed for four 14th 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 14th level PCs.

Area 1

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Crystal Golem** (CR 10, MM, p. 167, with changes) = 3 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 2a](#).

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.

Any PC starting turn within 10 ft. of the **Crystal Golem** must make Wisdom save or be Blinded. Note, that PC entering **Light Intensity** area shouldn't make this save. At the first round make the **Crystal Golem** use **Slow** targeting as many PCs as possible. Next round make it use **Multiattack** against nearest PC. You can roll a die if several PCs are within reach to determine random target or you can make the **Crystal Golem** focus on Blinded PC. **Crystal Golem's** Intelligence is very low so normally it shouldn't choose most vulnerable targets, but you can assume that attacking Blinded creatures is the part of the orders it follows.

Area 2a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 3 PCs

4 **Githyanki Warriors** (CR 3, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Githyanki are a psionically gifted race of conquerors and raiders living in timeless Astral Sea (PHB, p. 300). They are intelligent creatures, so they can communicate in Gith language, flee, surrender or take captives. They hate mind flayers, so you can make them focus on them if any are with the party.

The **Githyanki Gish** has *Message* cantrip, so once it knows about intruders you can make it cast this spell to warn any other creature within 120 ft. which is not behind one foot of stone. While encased inside crystal stalactite the **Githyanki Gish** is relatively safe and you can make it can cast *Telekinesis* to grant Advantage to its allies' attacks against less armored PC or to throw it to Astral Sea pit. Gith racial spells don't require any components which makes them impossible to *Counterspell*. Restrained condition (PHB, p. 190) imposes Disadvantage on PC's Dexterity saving throws, so this spell combines with *Fireball* very well. Once *Telekinesis* is ended or not needed, make the **Githyanki Gish** cast 3rd and 4th level *Fireball* targeting as many PCs as possible. The **Githyanki Gish** can leave the stalactite using *Dimension Door* or *Misty Step* spells. If it falls into Astral Sea pit you can make the **Githyanki Gish** cast *Plane Shift* to teleport to Stardock. If the **Githyanki Gish** is fighting outside the stalactite, make it use **War Magic** trait casting *Fireball* and attacking with its **Longsword**. If the **Githyanki Gish** is out of spell slots or it can't target two or more PCs with *Fireball*, you can make it combine *Misty Step* and **Multiattack** focusing on less armored PC. Make the **Githyanki Gish** keep no more than 60 ft. distance to spellcasting PCs in order to cast *Counterspell* when needed.

Make the **Githyanki Warriors** use *Multiattack* against less armored or Restrained PC. You can make them cast *Misty Step* as Bonus action to reach the target or avoid opportunity attacks. You can also make the **Githyanki Warriors** try to use Grapple and Shove (PHB, p. 195) to throw PCs into Astral Sea pit but prepare in advance what will you do with the party there.

Area 3a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 3 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 3b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Young Red Dragon** (CR 10, MM, p.86) = 3 PCs

1 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 3 PCs

1 **Githyanki Knight** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Note. The **Githyanki Gish** can reach creatures in [Area 6a](#) casting *Message* if needed.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Red dragons are strongest and most covetous of the dragonkind. They are smart enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Young Red Dragons** can fly, so make it stay in the air and use *Fire Breath* targeting as many PCs as possible. If *Fire Breath* is unavailable, make the **Dragon** use *Multiattack* against less armored PC. If Astral Sea pit is nearby you can make the **Dragon** try to use Grapple or Shove (PHB, p. 195) to throw PCs into it.

See [Area 2a](#) for the tactics of **Githyanki Gish**.

If the **Githyanki Knight** riding its **Red Dragon**, it should stay out of melee reach. Make the **Githyanki Knight** cast *Telekinesis* targeting less armored PC to grant Advantage to its allies' attacks against him or her or to throw PC into Astral Sea pit. Gith racial spells don't require any components which makes them impossible to *Counterspell*. Restrained condition (PHB, p. 190) imposes Disadvantage on PC's Dexterity saving throws, so this spell combines with *Fireball* of **Dragon's Fire Breath** very well. Once *Telekinesis* is ended or not needed, make the **Githyanki Knight** use *Multiattack* against less armored or Restrained PC casting *Misty Step* if needed before or after. Outside the dungeon the **Githyanki Knight** can also use *Plane Shift* to flee or try to banish PC to another plane, but think in advance where you'll send PC and how it can escape.

Area 4

Encounter Difficulty

10 **Githyanki Warriors** (CR 3, MM, p.158)= 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 5

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Mind Flayer** (CR 7, MM, p. 221) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Mind flayers are psionic tyrants and slavers who devour brains of intelligent creatures. They can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Mind Flayer** is under effect of *Levitate*, so make stay out of melee reach if combat occurs. **Mind Blast** is a good start, because it damages and disables PCs within good AoE. Next round make the **Mind Flayer** cast *Dominate Monster*, but don't forget that this will break Concentration on *Levitate*. The **Mind Flayer** is smart enough to use this spell against martial PC, rather than spellcaster. If **Mind Blast** is not available, the **Mind Flayer** can attack in melee focusing on less armored or Stunned PC. **Tentacles** and **Extract Brain** attacks work in conjunction. Successful **Tentacles** attack inflicts Grappled condition automatically and if PC fails saving throw it also inflicts Stunned condition. Stunned condition includes Incapacitated condition which allows the **Mind Flayer** use **Extract Brain** on the next round. If you decided that it's time to flee, the **Mind Flayer** can try to reach Astral Sea pit in Area 3b, jump into it and cast *Plane Shift* to come back to Material Plane from there.

Area 6a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 3 PCs
6 **Githyanki Warriors** (CR 3, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 3b](#) and [Area 7](#). If you decided that doors are less than 1 ft. thick, the **Githyanki Gish** can reach creatures in [Area 8](#) and [Area 10](#) casting *Message*.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 7

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Crystal Golems** (CR 10, MM, p. 167, with changes) = 6 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 6a](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 1](#).

Area 8

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 3 PCs
1 **Githyanki Knight** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Note. If door to this is area is open or you decided that it's less than 1 ft. thick, the **Githyanki Gish** can reach creatures in [Area 6a](#) casting *Message*.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#) for the tactics of the **Githyanki Gish**.

See [Area 3b](#) for the tactics of the **Githyanki Knight**.

Area 10

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Crystal Golem** (CR 10, MM, p. 167, with changes) = 3 PCs
1 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 3 PCs

Note. If door to this is area is open or it's less than 1 ft. thick, the **Githyanki Gish** can reach creatures in [Area 6a](#) casting *Message*.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 1](#) for the tactics of the **Crystal Golem**.

See [Area 2a](#) for the tactics of the **Githyanki Gish**.

Area 11

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Crystal Golem** (CR 10, MM, p. 167, with changes) = 3 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 1](#).

Area 12f

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Young Red Dragons** (CR 10, MM, p.86) = 6 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creature from [Area 13](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#).

Area 13

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Knight** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 12f](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#).

Area 14

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Young Red Dragon** (CR 10, MM, p.86) = 3 PCs

Note. This creature won't attack the party without reason.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#).

Area 15b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Knight** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#).

Area 16a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Adult Red Dragon** (CR 17, MM, p. 86, with changes) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

The **Adult Red Dragon** can fly, so make it stay in the air out of melee reach between its turns.

Make the **Dragon** use **Legendary Resistance** to succeed on saves against *Hold Monster*, *Web* and other movement restricting spells or abilities.

The **Dragon** has Legendary Actions so even if it loses Initiative it can act using them after first

PC's turn. If any PC is within 10 ft. reach, make the **Dragon** use *Tail*. If the **Dragon** is surrounded by two or more PCs make it use *Wing Attack* and fly into more advantageous position. Once the **Dragon's** turn starts make it use *Multiattack* against PC with strong ranged attacks. Successful *Frightful Presence* gives Disadvantage on attacks against the **Dragon**, so you can focus on spellcasters until Frightened condition remains. You can make the **Dragon** cast *Misty Step* as Bonus action to reach the target or to avoid opportunity attacks. Next turn make the **Dragon** use *Fire Breath* targeting as many PCs as possible and keep using it every round it's available, otherwise use *Multiattack*. If you decide that it's time to flee make the **Dragon** cast *Gaseous Form* to escape the room through the holes or windows or *Misty Step* to teleport outside the room.

Area 16b

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Githyanki Knights** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#).

Area 17a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 3 PCs

Note. This creature tries to join forces with creatures from [Area 17b](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 17b

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 6 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 19a

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Githyanki Warriors** (CR 3, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 21a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Young Red Dragon** (CR 10, MM, p.86) = 3 PCs

1 **Githyanki Knight** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#).

Area 21b

Encounter Difficulty

10 **Githyanki Warriors** (CR 3, MM, p.158) = 4 PCs

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 22

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Young Red Dragon** (CR 10, MM, p.86) = 3 PCs

1 **Githyanki Knight** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#).

Area 24

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Githyanki Knights** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#).

Area 26

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Githyanki Warriors** (CR 3, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 27](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 27

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 3 PCs

5 **Githyanki Warriors** (CR 3, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 26](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 28b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Warrior** (CR 3, MM, p. 158) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 29b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githzerai Zerth** (CR 6, MM, p. 158) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Githzerai are a race of ascetic philosophers from Outer Plane called Ever-Changing Chaos of Limbo (PHB, p. 300). They can negotiate, flee, surrender and take captives.

This area is filled with *Antimagic Field*, which means that the **Githzerai Zerth** can't cast its spells. Best option for it is to leave the room and cast *Plane Shift* to escape asteroid. If you want the **Githzerai Zerth** fight the party or help them to deal with githyanki or mind flayers here is its general tactics. Make the **Githzerai Zerths** cast *Phantasmal Killer* on martial PCs at the beginning of the fight. On the next rounds make them use *Multiattack* against less armored PC. Don't forget to cast *Shield* as a Reaction to avoid hits.

Area 29c

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Mind Flayers** (CR 7, MM, p. 221) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

This area is filled with *Antimagic Field*, which means that the **Mind Flayers** can't cast their spells and use *Psychic Blast*. Best option for them is to leave the room and cast *Plane Shift*. If you want them fight the party or help them to deal with githyanki, see [Area 5](#).

Area 29d

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Githyanki Gish** (CR 10, MM, p. 158) = 6 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 30](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2a](#).

Area 30

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Githyanki Knight** (CR 8, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

6 **Githyanki Warriors** (CR 3, MM, p. 158) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 29d](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 3b](#) for the tactics of the **Githyanki Knight**.

See [Area 2a](#) for the tactics of the **Githyanki Warriors**.