

# MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

*For Dungeon of the Mad Mage  
Level 19: Caverns of Ooze*

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## About this Guide

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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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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 19: Caverns of Ooze

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This level is designed for four 15<sup>th</sup> 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, you can decrease the number of creatures in combat or use less optimal tactics. All creatures in Encounter Difficulty section are compared to 15<sup>th</sup> level PCs.

### Area 1c

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#### Encounter Difficulty

1 **Marid** (CR 11, MM, p. 141) = 3 PCs

1 **Swarms of Quippers** (CR 1, MM, p. 338) = 1 PC

#### Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

#### Creatures' Tactics

Marids are proud genies native to Elemental Plane of Water (PHB, p. 300). They can negotiate, flee, surrender and take captives.

The **Marid** can fly and also has swim speed so make it stay out of melee reach or under the water between its turns. Fighting underwater without swim speed or appropriate weapons is harder for PCs (See PHB, p. 198) and water also gives Resistance to fire damage. At the first round of the combat make the **Marid** cast *Fog Cloud* around itself. It has **Blindsight** and good Constitution saves, so making PCs inside spell's AoE effectively Blinded (PHB, p. 290) is good defensive tactics. On the next turns make the **Marid** use **Water Jet** if it can target at least 2 PCs, otherwise make it use **Multiattack** against less armored PC.

Quippers are beasts, so they can't surrender, take captives or communicate without *Speak with Animals* spell or similar abilities, but they can flee.

Make the **Swarm of Quippers** use **Bite** against nearest PC.

## Area 2

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#### Encounter Difficulty

12 **Orogs** (CR 2, MM, p. 244) = 3 PCs

#### Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

#### Creatures' Tactics

Orogs are orcs blessed with a surprisingly keen intellect that ordinary orcs believe is a gift from the orc goddess Luthic. They can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Orogs** use **Multiattack** against less armored or Stunned PC. The **Orog** can use **Aggressive** trait as Bonus Action to reach its target when needed. Make the **Orog** use **Javelin** only if there is no chance to attack in melee.

### Area 5a

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#### Encounter Difficulty

3 **Intelligent Black Puddings** (CR 4, MM, p. 240, with changes) = 2 PCs

#### Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

#### Creatures' Tactics

These creatures are followers of Ghaunadaur, formless mad god of ooze, member of Dark Seldarine pantheon (MTOF, p. 53), transformed into oozes by Halaster. They understand languages, which means they can communicate with creatures that have Telepathy. They won't flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Intelligent Black Pudding** cast *Darkness* on itself, so PCs will have Disadvantage on attacks against it and the **Intelligent Black Pudding** will have Advantage against PCs inside spell's AoE because it has **Blindsight**. Make it also

cast *Shield* as Reaction to avoid some hits during PCs' turns. On the next turn make the **Intelligent Black Pudding** cast *Melf's Acid Arrow* against less armored PC. After that make the **Intelligent Black Pudding** use *Pseudopod* against less armored PC within reach. Successful *Pseudopod* attack makes any non-magical armor less effective. After PC makes successful attack with slashing weapon or with the spell dealing lightning damage, the **Pudding** won't lose hp. Instead, it can use its Reaction to *Split*. If it does so, two new Medium **Puddings** appears and since they are new combatants, they also have Reactions available and also can use *Split*. Small **Black Puddings** are not able to use *Split* ability, but they are still immune to slashing and lightning damage.

## Area 7

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### Encounter Difficulty

2 **Nalfeshnees** (CR 13, MM, p. 50) = 10 PCs

### Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

### Creatures' Tactics

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 **Nalfeshnee** can fly so make it use hit and run tactics and stay in the air out of melee reach between its turns. Demons have very good protection from magic thanks to resistance from cold, fire and lightning and Advantage on saves from *Magic Resistance* trait, so make the **Nalfeshnee** use *Multiattack* against PC with strong ranged attacks who isn't Frightened (PHB, p. 290) by *Horror Nimbus*.

## Area 9

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### Encounter Difficulty

5 **Gargoyles** (CR 2, MM, p. 140) = 1 PC

### Surprise

The **Gargoyles** can surprise PCs automatically thanks to *False Appearance* trait.

### Creatures' Tactics

Gargoyles are cruel elemental creatures. They are following simple orders given them by their master. They can negotiate in Terran (Primordial), flee, surrender or take captives depending on the orders given.

The **Gargoyles** can fly so make them use hit and run tactics and stay in the air out of melee reach between their turns. Make them focus on less armored PC with their *Multiattack*.

## Area 11a

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### Encounter Difficulty

6 **Galeb Duhr** (CR 6, MM, p. 139) = 6 PCs

*Note.* Fight in this area might alert creatures from [Area 11b](#).

### Surprise

The **Galeb Duhr** can surprise PCs automatically thanks to *False Appearance*. Their *Tremorsense* automatically detects non-flying PCs.

### Creatures' Tactics

Galeb duhr are among the most intelligent elemental creatures. They can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Galeb Duhr** use *Animate Boulders* in the first round of combat. As a DM you can roll separate Initiative for new combatants or make them take their turns right after the **Galeb Duhr**. On the next turn make all **Galeb Duhr** use *Rolling Charge* and *Slam* focusing on less armored or Prone PCs.

## Area 11b

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### Encounter Difficulty

1 **Dao** (CR 11, MM, p. 141) = 3 PCs

2 **Medusas** (CR 6, MM, p. 214) = 2 PCs

**Note.** Fight in this area might alert creatures from [Area 11a](#).

### Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

### Creatures' Tactics

Dao are greedy, malicious genies from the Elemental Plane of Earth (PHB, p. 300). They can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Dao** has **Earth Glide** trait so make it hide underground between its turns so PCs will be forced to use Ready action. Make the **Dao** cast *Phantasmal Killer* targeting martial PC at the first round of the combat. On the next turns make the **Dao** use **Multiattack** targeting less armored PC. Always use **Maul** instead of **Fist**.

A victim of a terrible curse, the serpent-haired medusa petrifies all those who gaze upon it, turning creatures into stone monuments to its corruption. Medusas are smart enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

**Petrifying Gaze** works this way. Each PC starting turn within 30 ft. of the **Medusa** must avert his or her eyes, which effectively inflicts Blinded condition (PHB, p. 290), or make DC 14 Constitution saving throw. Surprised PCs can't avert their eyes. If PC's save total is 9 or less, he or she becomes Petrified. If PC's save total is between 10 and 13, he or she becomes Restrained and must roll save again at the end of next turn. Make the Medusa use **Multiattack** against less-armored or Blinded PC. Use **Longbow** only if there is no chance to attack in melee.

## Area 12

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### Encounter Difficulty

3 **Intelligent Black Puddings** (CR 4, MM, p. 240, with changes) = 2 PCs

### Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

### Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 5a](#).

## Area 13a

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### Encounter Difficulty

4 **Gray Slaadi** (CR 9, MM, p. 274) = 8 PCs

### 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. Gray slaadi are intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

**Fear** spell is a good AoE disable, so make the **Gray Slaad** cast it targeting as many PCs as possible. The less PCs will be able to attack the **Gray Slaadi** the better. After that, make it use **Multiattack** against less armored PC. Always use **Greatsword** instead of **Claw**. Use **Fireball**, if you can target 3 and more PCs. Use **Invisibility** or **Fly** spells, if you decide that it is time to flee. At the beginning of each turn the **Gray Slaad** regains 10 hp, if nothing like **Chill Touch** cantrip prevents its **Regeneration** trait from function.

## Area 13g

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### Encounter Difficulty

1 **Mind Flayer Arcanist** (CR 8, MM, p. 221, with changes) = 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 Arcanist** can use Lair action to create duplicate with statistics of normal **Mind Flayer** before beginning of the combat. You can also make the **Mind Flayer Arcanist** cast *Wall of Force* around itself before the combat in order to prevent alpha strike from the party. **Mind Flayer Arcanist** can stay inside *Wall of Force* sphere using Dodge action, making duplicate **Mind Flayer** fight outside and recreate it using Lair action on Initiative count 20 if needed. Some PCs' spells might be cast or created inside *Wall of Force* to break **Mind Flayer Arcanist's** Concentration or PCs can destroy it casting *Disintegrate*, so using this tactic is far from being invulnerable. Once the **Mind Flayer Arcanist** expends all 5<sup>th</sup> level slots on *Wall of Force* it must use different tactics. **Mind Blast** is the most powerful ability the **Mind Flayer Arcanist** and its duplicates have, because it deals damage and disables PCs within good AoE, so make them use it every time it's available. The **Mind Flayer Arcanist** can use its Reaction to cast *Shield* for additional protection. If **Mind Blast** is not available, make the **Mind Flayers** cast *Dominant Monster*, but don't forget that this will break Concentration on *Wall of Force* if it's still active. The **Mind Flayers** are smart enough to use this spell against martial PCs, rather than spellcasters. Next time **Mind Blast** is not available make the **Mind Flayer Arcanist** cast *Lightning Bolt* targeting as many PCs as possible. Don't forget that Stunned PCs automatically fail Dexterity saves. The duplicate can attack in melee focusing

on less armored 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** next round. According to WDM, the **Mind Flayer Arcanist** surrenders if reduced to 55 hp.

## Area 14

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### Encounter Difficulty

1 **Huge Gray Ooze** (CR 8, MM, p. 240, with changes) = 2 PCs

### Surprise

The **Gray Ooze** can surprise PCs automatically thanks to **False Appearance** trait.

### Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 5a](#) for general description of this creature.

Make the **Huge Gray Ooze** use **Enlarge** and **Invisibility** before the start of the combat and stay motionless until PC approaches to melee reach. **False Appearance** makes the **Ooze** unnoticeable by general means, so it can easily surprise the party. Make the **Ooze** use **Pseudopod** against less armored PC within reach. Don't forget, that **Pseudopod** damages non-magical armor and **Corrode Metal** damages non-magical weapons made of metal.