

MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

*For Dungeon of the Mad Mage
Level 20: Runestone Caverns*

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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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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 20: Runestone Caverns

This level is designed for four 16th 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 16th level PCs.

Area 2

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Stone Golem** (CR 12, MM, p. 167, with changes)
= 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Golems are elemental spirits bound into material form by powerful magic. They obey any commands given them by their creators, don't feel pain and don't afraid of death, so they won't flee, surrender or take captives. Stonecloaks are much smarter than normal golems and can make such simple tactical decisions. They understand languages, so creatures with Telepathy can communicate with them.

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

Area 6b

Encounter Difficulty

8 **Mummies** (CR 3, MM, p. 227) = 3 PCs
Note. Fight in this area alerts creature from [Area 6c](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Mummies are intelligent undead creatures made by dark rituals for the special purpose. They can communicate but won't flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Mummy** use *Multiattack* against less armored or Paralyzed PC (PHB, p. 290). Don't use *Dreadful Glare* on PC who is already under effect of this trait or has immunity against it. The more PC the **Mummies** disable at their first turn the better.

Area 6c

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Mummy Lord** (CR 16, MM, p. 227, with changes) = 6 PCs

Note. Fight in this area might alert creatures from [Area 6b](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

If the **Mummy Lord** was awakened when the party is in [Area 6b](#), make it use *Enlarge* and cast *Spiritual Weapon* using 4th level spell slot before it joins the fight. The **Mummy Lord** can move using normal movement and cover additional distance using *Whirlwind of Sand* as Legendary action right after the next combatant's turn, so it can reach [Area 6b](#) in 1 round. If the **Mummy Lord** is awakened in [Area 6c](#), it can still use *Enlarge* and summon *Spiritual Weapon* before it leaves its sarcophagus. *Enlarge* doubles the damage of *Rotting Fist*, so the **Mummy Lord** can deal 67 (18d6+4) damage with one blow and 130 (36d6+4) damage if it hits Paralyzed PC (PHB, p. 290). As a DM you can double only 3d6

bludgeoning damage and keep 6d6 necrotic damage separately if you think it is too much. The **Mummy Lord** can use its Lair action at Initiative count 20. Third option is very useful and second is ok. First option is very situational, so the **Mummy Lord** shouldn't use it without reason. Tactics of the **Mummy Lord** is pretty simple. On its own turn make it use Action to cast *Hold Person* using higher level spell slots and target as many PCs as possible. Make it attack with *Spiritual Weapon* as Bonus action. Make the **Mummy Lord** continue attacking less armored Paralyzed PC using *Attack* as Legendary Action or shorten the distance using *Whirlwind of Sand*. Once the **Mummy Lord** expends all high-level spell slots on *Hold Person* it can use *Blasphemous Word* as Legendary Action to continue disabling PCs and use *Multiattack* as Action to deal damage. Make the **Mummy Lord** cast *Dispel Magic* if it needs to end powerful PCs' spells.

Area 7

Encounter Difficulty

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

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.

Make the **Duergar** use *Enlarge* at the beginning of the fight. After that use *Warpick* against less armored PC. Make the **Duergar** use *Javelin* only if there is no chance to use *Warpick*. According to WDMM these **Duergar's Invisibility** trait is already expended, so they can't use it.

Area 8a

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Stone Golems** (CR 10, MM, p. 167, with changes) = 4 PCs

6 **Gargoyles** (CR 2, MM, p. 140) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2](#) for the tactics of the **Stone Golems**.

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*. PCs under effect of the **Stone Golem's Slow** can't use their Reactions, so the **Gargoyles** can attack them and fly away without getting hit by Opportunity attacks.

Area 9a

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Stone Golems** (CR 10, MM, p. 167, with changes) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2](#).

Area 9b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Beholder** (CR 13, MM, p. 26) = 4 PCs

Note. Fight in this area might alert creatures from [Area 9a](#) if they still alive.

Surprise

As a DM you can make the party surprised when the **Beholder** appears.

Creatures' Tactics

This beholder is magically summoned creature, so it won't negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Beholder** can fly so make it appear and stay in the air out of melee reach. The **Beholder** has very high Intelligence score, so it can make smart solutions regarding choosing targets for its **Eye Rays**. As a DM you can simply target weak saves of PCs you know about or you can use general approach like this. For **Eye Rays** requiring Strength saves target lightly armored or Paralyzed PCs, for Dexterity saves target heavily armored, Paralyzed or Restrained PCs, for Wisdom saves target martial PCs and for Constitution saves target spellcasters. Make the **Beholder** ignore Petrified, Unconscious and Charmed PCs. All these things like armor type and fighting styles are obvious most of the time, so it won't be metagaming. Between the **Beholder's** turns make it use **Eye Rays** as Legendary actions following the same tactics. **Antimagic Cone** won't cover very big area because the height of the ceiling is 50 ft. and only 30 ft. near the gates, which makes it less effective. You can make the **Beholder** put **Antimagic Cone** on dying PC to prevent magical healing or on spellcasters.

Area 11a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Stone Golem** (CR 10, MM, p. 167, with changes) = 2 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 2](#).

Area 13b

Encounter Difficulty

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

Surprise

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

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 8a](#).

Area 15

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Vampires** (CR 13, MM, p. 295) = 8 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Vampires are intelligent undead, so they are able to negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Vampires** have Legendary Actions so even if they lose Initiative they can act right after first PCs turn. The **Vampire** can't use **Bite** until it grapples or charms the target, but it can use **Move** to shorten the distance or **Unarmed Strike** if PC is within 5 ft. **Charm** is the most powerful ability the **Vampires** have, so make them use it targeting martial PCs, because spellcasters tend to have higher Wisdom saves. **Charm** isn't a spell, so **Dispel Magic** can't end it, but **Dispel Evil** and

Good or *Greater Restoration* will work. Charmed PC isn't dominated, so don't force him or her to attack other party members. Charmed PC (PHB, p. 290) can't attack the **Vampire** and the **Vampire** can use **Bite** against PC without need of grapple. Best course of actions for the **Vampires** is to **Charm** all PCs, convince them to give up their weapons and armor and deal with them one after another. Don't forget that every time the **Vampire** deals damage to Charmed PC, he or she makes new saving throw, so it's not auto-win. If this tactic doesn't work, because of high Wisdom saves, spells or class features such as monk's Stillness of Mind, you can make the **Vampires** fight. Make them focus on less armored PC using **Multiattack** as Action, grappling with **Unarmed Strike** and using **Bite** afterwards, and continue with **Bite** and **Unarmed Strike** using Legendary actions. If you decide that it's time to flee make the **Vampires** use Dodge and run away using their regular movement and **Move** Legendary action after each PC's turn.

Area 16

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Animated Staff** (CR 4, WDMM, p. 262) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Animated staff is a sentient construct. It can communicate, but won't flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Animated Staff** can fly, so make it stay out of melee reach. The **Animated Staff** has **Blindsight**, so make it cast *Fog Cloud* at the first round of the combat to inflict Blinded condition (PHB, p. 290) on the party. On the next turn, make it cast *Cone of Cold* targeting as many PCs as possible. If the **Animated Staff** is still alive after second round, which is very unlikely, make it cast *Wall of Ice* targeting as many PCs as possible.

Area 17

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Lich** (CR 22, MM, p. 202, with changes) = 7 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Liches are the remains of great wizards who embrace undeath as a means of preserving themselves. They have very high Intelligence score so they can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

If the **Lich** is aware about invasion of the party to its lair, make it cast several defensive spells in advance. *Mirror Image* is good defensive spell which doesn't require Concentration and *Invisibility* has long duration and provides decent protection against alpha-strike. Don't forget making the **Lich** cast *Shield* as Reaction to boost its AC. It can also cast *Counterspell* using its Reaction, but raising AC for a round is generally better than cancelling one PC's spell. The **Lich** has Legendary actions, so even if it loses Initiative it can act after first PCs turn. Make the **Lich** use **Frightening Gaze** if any PC is within 5 ft. If there is no adjacent PCs, make the **Lich** cast *Ray of Frost* targeting less armored PC. The **Lich** can also use Lair actions on Initiative count 20. Make it use second option preferably targeting spellcaster PC. This Lair action is the most critical boost of survivability, so make the **Lich** use it every second round. If there is no visible PCs within 30 ft., which is unlikely, considering size of the area, or if the **Lich** already used second option last turn, make it use third option. If the **Lich** lost more than 1/2 of its hp before the start of its first turn, make it cast *Dimension Door* to [Area 23](#) and take its last stand there. As a DM you can even make the **Lich** take its phylactery, cast *Dimension Door* to reach level's exit and leave the Undermountain. If the party wasn't been able to alpha strike the **Lich**, make it cast *Forcecage* with 20 ft. cage option trapping as many PCs as possible, prioritizing martial PCs. If some PCs are

still outside AoE of the *Forcecage*, make the **Lich** cast this spell again on its next turn using 8th level spell slot. Make the **Lich** cast *Counterspell* to prevent PCs teleporting outside or destroying *Forcecage* with *Disintegrate*. After all PCs are trapped, make the **Lich** cast *Cloudkill* over the *Forcecage* area. This spell deals damage every turn and also blocks vision, so PCs won't be able to escape casting *Misty Step* and target the **Lich** with spells and abilities requiring seeing the target. If PCs wasn't been able to leave *Forcecage*, make the **Lich** continue with *Fireballs* and cast *Cloudkill* every time it is dispelled. This is brutal tactics, so consider negotiations if you see that battle is 100% lost by PCs. Don't overrate *Power Word Kill* because it is easily countered by 3rd level *Revivify* or 4th level *Death Ward*, so it's better to save 9th level slot for one more *Forcecage*.

Area 23

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Marilith** (CR 16, MM, p. 50) = 6 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.

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 **Marilith** use **Multiattack** against less armored martial PC. Make it use **Tail** first, so the **Marilith** will have a chance to inflict Restrained condition (PHB, p. 290) on the target and get Advantage on its **Longsword** attacks. **Reactive** trait allows the **Marilith** use **Parry** once on every PC's turn.