MONSTERS' GUIDE
TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

For Dungeon of the Mad Mage
Level 21: Terminus 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 21: Terminus Level

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 4a

Encounter Difficulty
3 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC
   Note. These creatures won't fight the party without reason.

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 or even before if it's possible. On the next turns make them use *Warpick* targeting less armored PC. Make the **Duergar** use *Javelin* only if there is no chance to use *Warpick*. If you decide that it's time to flee, make the **Duergar** use *Invisibility* if it's available and run away.

Area 4b

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Fomorians** (CR 8, MM, p. 136) = 4 PCs

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
Fomorians are cursed evil giants dwelling in the Underdark. They are intelligent, so they can communicate, flee, surrender or take captives. Fomorians hate fey creatures, so you can make them focus on elf and especially eladrin PCs.

Make the **Fomorians** use *Curse of the Evil Eye* targeting martial PCs. Failed save would greatly decrease their combat effectiveness until they make successful save after long rest or receive *Remove Curse* or *Greater Restoration*. On the next turns make the **Fomorians** use *Multiattack* targeting less armored PC within reach with both *Greatclub* and *Evil Eye* to maximize damage.

Area 6a

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC
   Note. These creatures won't fight the party without reason. Fight in this area might alert creatures from Area 6b and Area 6c.

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See Area 4a.

Area 6b

Encounter Difficulty
4 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See Area 4a.

Area 6c

Encounter Difficulty
3 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See Area 4a.

Area 10b

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See Area 4a.

Area 13

Encounter Difficulty
13 **Champions** (CR 9, WDMM, p. 312) = 26 PCs
   Note. This is very tough encounter, but these creatures can't leave this area.

Surprise
As a DM you can make the party surprised when the **Champions** appear.

Creatures' Tactics
These spirits of dwarven warriors can't speak, but they understand Dwarvish, so they can communicate with creatures who can use *Telepathy* or similar ability. They won't flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Champion** use *Multiattack* with *Greataxe* against less armored PC. Use *Shortbow* only if there is no chance to attack in melee. The **Champion** has very high bonus to Athletic skill, so it can Grapple and Shove effectively. Make the **Champion** use *Second Wind* as Bonus Action once it loses more than 20 hp and use *Indomitable* when it fails saving throw.

Area 14

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Arcanaloths** (CR 12, MM, p. 311) = 8 PCs
   Note. These creatures won't fight the party without reason.

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
Arcanaloths are yugoloth – neutral evil fiends from Outer plane called Gehenna (PHB, p. 300) who often serve as mercenaries. Arcanaloth is very intelligent, so it can flee, surrender or take captives. It can communicate in all languages or using *Telepathy*.

The **Arcanaloth** has decent AC and hp and it can cast *Shield* or *Counterspell* as a Reaction to improve its defenses even further. If it has some time before the combat, you can make it cast *Mirror Image*. The **Arcanaloth** is immune to Charmed condition (PHB, p. 290) so it doesn't need to pre-cast *Mind Blank* that much. It's better to save this spell slot for something else. *Fear* is a good AoE disable, so make the **Arcanaloth** use this spell targeting as many PCs as possible at the beginning of the fight. As an alternative, you can make it cast 8th level *Hold Monster* targeting 4 PCs. Note, that the **Arcanaloth** is under effect of *Alter Self* and once it casts other Concentration spell its disguise ends. On the next rounds make the **Arcanaloth** cast 6th and 7th level *Chain Lightning* spell targeting as many PCs as possible. Note, that Paralyzed PCs fail Dexterity saves automatically, so you can make one **Arcanaloth** cast *Hold Monster* on several PCs and second cast *Chain Lightning*. If you decide that it's time to flee make the **Arcanaloth** cast *Dimension Door*.

Area 15

Encounter Difficulty
1 **Iron Golem** (CR 16, MM, p. 167) = 6 PCs
1 **Archmage** (CR 12, MM, p. 342) = 4 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 **Iron Golem** use *Poison Breath* targeting as many PCs as possible when it's available. Otherwise, make it use *Multiattack* with *Sword* targeting nearest PC.

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

According to the book, if the **Archmage** is attacked it casts *Teleport* to Area 18d leaving the **Iron Golem** to fight the party.

Area 16a

Encounter Difficulty
1 **Fire Elemental** (CR 5, MM, p. 123) = 1 PC
2 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
A fire elemental is a force of capricious devastation. It can communicate in Primordial (Ignan) but won't flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Fire Elemental** move through as many PCs' spaces as possible. Thanks to *Fire Form* trait it will damage PCs and set them ablaze. After that make the **Fire Elemental** use *Multiattack* targeting less armored PC.

See Area 4a for the tactics of the **Duergar**.

Area 16b

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See Area 4a.

Area 16d

Encounter Difficulty
10 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See [Area 4a](#).

Area 17a

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See [Area 4a](#).

Area 17b

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See [Area 4a](#).

Area 17c

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See [Area 4a](#).

Area 17d

Encounter Difficulty
2 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See [Area 4a](#).

Area 18b

Encounter Difficulty
7 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See [Area 4a](#).

Area 18c

Encounter Difficulty
11 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See .

Area 18d

Encounter Difficulty
1 **Adult Steel Dragon** (CR 16, MM, p. 86, with changes) = 6 PCs
1 **Archmage** (CR 12, MM, p. 342) = 4 PCs
3 **Xorn** (CR 5, MM, p. 304) = 3 PCs
1 **Gorgon** (CR 5, MM, p. 171) = 1 PC
    Note. Fight in this area might alert creatures from and .

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
Dragons are intelligent enough to negotiate, flee, surrender and take captives.

The **Adult Steel Dragon** can fly so make it stay in the air out of melee reach between its turns. Make it 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 away. Once the **Dragon's** first turn is started make it use ***Paralyzing Breath*** targeting as many PCs as possible. On the next round make it use

Multiattack targeting less armored Paralyzed PC within 5 ft., so all hits will become Critical hits. Successful ***Frightful Presence*** inflicts Disadvantage on PCs' attacks while the **Dragon** is within line of sight, so you can focus on spellcasters until Frightened condition remains. Make the **Dragon** use ***Paralyzing Breath*** every time it is available and follow up using ***Multiattack***.

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

Assume that the **Archmage** pre-casted *Mage Armor* and *Mind Blank* before the combat. From the tactical standpoint it's better if the **Archmage** will ride flying **Dragon**. Start the fight with *Time Stop*. It will give the **Archmage** an opportunity to take minimum 2 turns without interruption. During the first turn make it cast *Mirror Image*. On the next turn make it cast *Wall of Force* trapping inside the dome one or two martial PCs, preferably together with the **Xorn**. If the **Archmage** has one more turn, use it to cast 6th level *Cone of Cold* or *Lightning Bolt* if there are any Paralyzed PCs, which will end *Time Stop*. If it has more free turns you can make it cast *Fire Shield* before *Cone of Cold*. The **Archmage** has resistance to damage from spells already, but additional damage to melee attackers might be helpful. Continue casting 5th level and lower *Lightning Bolt* spells targeting as many Paralyzed PCs as possible, because they will fail Dexterity saves automatically. Don't forget to make the **Archmage** cast *Counterspell* against harmful spells. If you decide that it's time to flee, make it cast *Teleport*.

Xorn are bizarre creatures native to Elemental Plane of Earth. They find precious metals and gems by scent and eat it. They are not inherently evil and can negotiate in Primordial (Terran), flee or surrender. Xorn are unable to consume organic material so they don't have reasons to take captives or finish off fallen PCs.

The **Xorn** have ***Earth Glide*** trait which allows them to move through unworked earth, so make the **Xorn** hide underground between their turns, avoiding attacks from PCs. ***Treasure Sense*** trait

allows the **Xorn** to pinpoint precious metals or gems, so you can make them use *Multiattack* targeting PC with the largest amount of money. As a DM you can decide that the **Xorn** are smart enough to target Restrained, Prone or Paralyzed PCs if the **Dragon** will command them to do so in Terran.

Gorgons are monstrous predators. They won't negotiate, surrender or take captives, but they can flee.

Make the **Gorgon** use *Petrifying Breath* targeting as many PCs as possible at the start of the combat and every time it's available after that. When it's not available make the **Gorgon** move at least 20 ft. to trigger *Trampling Charge* and use *Gore* targeting nearest PC and then attack with *Hooves* as Bonus action if the target failed its save.

Area 19a

Encounter Difficulty
1 **Ultroloth** (CR 13, MM, p. 311) = 4 PCs

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
Ultroloths are yugoloth – neutral evil mercenary fiends from Outer plane called Gehenna (PHB, p. 300). They won't flee, surrender or take captives but can negotiate using *Telepathy*.

The **Ultroloth** can fly, so make it stay in the air out of melee reach and use hit and run tactics when attack in melee range. Make the **Ultroloth** use *Variant: Yugoloth Summoning* trait (MM, p. 310) to summon 1d4 **Nycaloths** in the first round of the combat. Next round make the **Ultroloth** cast *Fear* targeting as many PCs as possible to decrease their combat effectiveness. Next round make the **Ultroloth** cast *Fire Storm* targeting as

many PCs as possible and don't afraid to target the **Nycaloths** because they have *Magic Resistance* and resistance to fire damage. After that make the **Ultroloth** use *Multiattack* targeting less armored martial PC, because spellcasters isn't very dangerous for the **Ultroloth** thanks to *Magic Resistance* trait and resistance to cold, fire and lightning damage.

Nycaloths are yugoloth – neutral evil mercenary fiends from Outer plane called Gehenna (PHB, p. 300). They won't flee, surrender or take captives but can negotiate using *Telepathy*.

Make the **Nycaloth** cast *Mirror Image* at the start of the combat, it's very good defensive spell which doesn't require Concentration. After that, make the **Nycaloth** use *Multiattack* against less armored martial PC, because spellcasters aren't very dangerous for the **Nycaloth** thanks to *Magic Resistance* trait and resistance to cold, fire and lightning damage. The **Nycaloth** can fly, so make it use hit and run tactics, staying in the air out of melee reach between its turns. Always choose *Greataxe* instead of *Claw* because the latter requires a lot of rolls which will slow down the pace of combat and deals less damage until fourth hit. It is also easily countered with magical healing. Use *Teleport* as part of *Multiattack* to reach and attack fleeing PCs.

Area 20b

Encounter Difficulty
3 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See .

Area 20c

Encounter Difficulty
8 **Duergar** (CR 1, MM, p. 122) = 1 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
See .

Area 23b

Encounter Difficulty
1 **Planetar** (CR 16, MM, p. 15) = 6 PCs
2 **Mariliths** (CR 16, MM, p. 50) = 12 PCs
1 **Nycaloth** (CR 9, MM, p. 311) = 2 PC

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
Evil planetar is intelligent enough to negotiate, flee or surrender, but it won't take captives. According to the book it will prioritize demons.

The **Planetar** can fly, so make it use hit and run tactics and stay in the air between its turns. It can use Lair action on Initiative count 20. Best option is to inflict Disadvantage on PCs' saving throws and the **Planetar** can use it every round. At the first round of the combat make the **Planetar** cast *Blade Barrier* targeting as many PCs as possible. It's almost guaranteed way to deal some damage to PCs and Disadvantage on saves will help. The **Planetar** can cast *Blade Barrier* 3 times. If the **Planetar** can't target 2 or more PCs with spell's AoE, make it use *Multiattack* targeting less armored PC.

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. According to the book they will prioritize planetar.

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.

See for the **Nycaloth's** tactics.

Area 23c

Encounter Difficulty
3 **Otyughs** (CR 5, MM, p. 248) = 3 PCs

Surprise
Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics
Otyugh eats and devours everything it can catch. Sometimes it works as garbage disposals for sentient creatures. Otyugh has its own language, so PC can communicate with it under effect of *Tongues* spell or similar magic. It won't surrender or take captives but it can flee.

The **Otyugh** has *Multiattack* which includes one *Bite* attack and two *Tentacle* attacks. *Tentacle* inflicts Grappled and Restrained conditions on hit, so it is better to use it first and then use *Bite* with Advantage. *Tentacle Slam* is interesting to describe but not very effective. Stunned condition (PHB, p. 292) grants Advantage to **Otyugh's** attacks and it already have it against Restrained PCs. Cancelling PCs' actions makes encounter longer and it deals less damage than *Multiattack*.