

MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

*For Dungeon of the Mad Mage
Level 5: Wyllowwood*

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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 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 could 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 creature's names

Italic style is used for the Spells.

Bold Italic style is used for the Abilities and Traits.

Level 5: Willowwood

This level is designed for four 8th level PCs. If you have more than 4 PCs, you can add more creatures 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 8th level PCs.

Area 2b

Encounter Difficulty

5 **Ettercaps** (CR 2, MM, p. 131) = 3 PCs

10 **Giant Spiders** (CR 1, MM, p. 328) = 3 PCs

Surprise

Web Sense trait allows these creatures to know exact location of any creature who touches their webs, so most probably they won't be surprised and will have enough time to hide.

Creatures' Tactics

Ettercaps are spider-like humanoids. They can't communicate and won't surrender, but can flee and take captives to eat them later.

Giant spiders are beasts, so PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell can communicate with them. They can flee, but won't surrender. Giant spiders don't take captives, but they can preserve paralyzed PCs in web cocoons before they eat them.

Make the **Ettercaps** use **Multiattack** against less-armored or Restrained PCs (PHB, p. 292). Don't waste the **Ettercap's** Action on **Web**, because **Giant Spider's Web** is more effective.

Make the **Giant Spiders** try to restrain as much PCs as possible using **Web** from the distance. Poisoned PCs (PHB, p. 292) make Strength checks to escape **Web** with Disadvantage. Make the **Giant Spiders** use **Bite** only if all PCs are Restrained or **Web** didn't recharge yet.

Area 2d

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Will-o-Wisp** (CR 2, MM, p. 301) = 1 PC

Note. This is easy encounter, so you can skip it.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Will-o'-wisps are the souls of evil creatures. They feed on despair and fear. According to MM, they rarely speak, and they are intelligent enough to flee. They won't take captives or surrender.

Use **Shock** as an Action, and if PC is down, use **Consume Life** as a Bonus Action. You can make **Will-o'-Wisps** use **Incorporeal Movement** to hide underground and avoid PCs' attacks getting only 1d10 damage.

Area 2e

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Basilisk** (CR 3, MM, p. 24) = 1 PC

Note. This is easy encounter, so you can skip it.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Basilisks are predatory monsters with deadly gaze. They won't communicate, surrender or take captives, but they can flee.

Petrifying Gaze works like this. PC that starts turn within 30 ft. of the **Basilisk** must avert his or her eyes, which effectively inflicts Blinded condition (PHB, p. 290), or make Constitution saving throw. Surprised PCs can't avert their eyes. On failed save PC becomes Restrained (PHB, p. 292) and must make another Constitution saving throw at the end of the next turn. On failed save PC becomes Petrified (PHB, p. 292). *Greater*

Restoration spell removes this condition. Make the **Basilisk** use **Bite** against Restrained PC with Advantage on attack rolls and don't waste its attacks against Petrified PCs.

Area 4b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Cloaker** (CR 8, MM, p. 41) = 6 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts the **Cloaker** from [Area 4c](#). It can reach this area in 1 round and will be able to take Action.

Surprise

Thanks to **False Appearance** trait the **Cloaker** can surprise the party automatically. It is up to DM if PCs can surprise it.

Creatures' Tactics

Cloakers are stealthy and patient underground predators. They can communicate and flee but won't surrender or take captives.

The **Cloaker** has above-average Intelligence score and can use advanced tactics. It can easily surprise the party because of **False Appearance** trait. While the party is surprised it can use **Phantasms**. It is very good defensive ability. Each time PC attacks the **Cloaker** or uses harmful spell against it, roll a die to determine the target. If it has 3 duplicates roll d4, if 2 - roll d6 and divide result by 2, if one - any die will work, you should only assign even or odd number for the real **Cloaker**. Note, that duplicate disappears only if it failed save against damaging spell, not when it takes damage. After using **Phantasms** make the **Cloaker** use **Multiattack** against less-armored PC. With first successful **Bite** attack the **Cloaker** attaches to the PC which activate **Damage Transfer** trait and grants Advantage for subsequent **Bite** attacks. Successful **Bite** attack with Advantage inflicts Blinded condition (PHB, p. 292) and PC can't breathe (PHB, p. 183). According to Jeremy Crawford's Twitter, PC can hold breath when affected by such kind of abilities, which makes them less dangerous. **Moan** doesn't look like effective attack, so it isn't recommended to use it.

Area 4c

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Cloaker** (CR 8, MM, p. 41) = 6 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts the **Cloaker** from [Area 4b](#). It can reach this area in 1 round and will be able to take Action.

Surprise

Thanks to **False Appearance** trait the **Cloaker** can surprise the party automatically. It is up to DM if PCs can surprise it.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 4b](#).

Area 4e

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Cloaker** (CR 8, MM, p. 41) = 6 PCs

Surprise

Thanks to **False Appearance** trait the **Cloaker** can surprise the party automatically. It is up to DM if PCs can surprise it.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 4b](#).

Area 6

Encounter Difficulty

13 **Giant Bats** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 323) = 2 PCs

Note. These creatures aren't going to attack PCs without reason.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Giant Bat's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

Giant bats are beasts, so PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell can communicate with them.

Bats can flee, but won't surrender or take captives.

Giant Bat has 60 ft. fly speed, so it is optimal to use hit-and-run tactics. Make it approach to the nearest PC, use **Bite** attack and fly away from melee reach.

Area 6a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Archdruid** (CR 12, MM, p. 128) = 6 PCs (if solo)

1 **Displacer Beast** (CR 3, MM, p. 81) = 1 PC

1 **Awakened Tree** (CR 2, MM, p. 317) = 1 PC

Note. These creatures are not going to attack PCs without reason. The **Archdruid** can call for the help of the creatures from [Area 6](#) and [Area 9](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Willow the archdruid is intelligent NPC and her goals and motivations described in the book. She can negotiate, flee, surrender and take captives.

Displacer beasts are monstrous predators originating from the Feywild (PHB, p. 300). They love to hunt and kill even they are not hungry. They can't negotiate and won't surrender or take captives, but can flee.

An awakened tree is an ordinary tree given sentience and mobility by magic. It can negotiate and flee, and it is up to DM, if it will surrender or take captives.

Assume that the **Archdruid** pre-casted *Foresight* once she knows that PCs entered her forest. At the first round make the **Archdruid** use **Change Shape** to transform to **Invisible Stalker** (CR 6 elemental). This form gives her combined benefits of *Improved Invisibility* and *Fly* spells without Concentration, a lot of condition immunities, better Strength and Dexterity saves, additional hp pool and she still can cast spells with V and S components. The **Archdruid** can use

this trait 2 times per day. Fly outside the room and call for 13 **Giant Bats** from Area 6. Next round use *Animal Shapes* on all allied creatures within 30 ft. and transform all of them to any Large or smaller beast with CR 4 or less. **Cave Bear** or **Giant Scorpion** is a good choices and **Giant Eagle** or **Giant Vulture** can attack flying PCs. Fly away and call for help of **Young Green Dragon** from [Area 9](#). Every turn, while the **Archdruid** maintains Concentration, she can change forms of all transformed creatures using her Action. New forms get full hp and she can do it until transformed creature is alive. Her Constitution save isn't very good even with Advantage from *Foresight* spell, so try to keep distance. If the **Archdruid** loses Concentration on *Animal Shapes* make her use *Sunbeam* from the distance or try to disable the party casting *Hold Person* with higher level spell slot. You can also make her use non-concentration spells such as *Firestorm* to deal damage or *Heal* and *Mass Cure Wounds* to heal allies.

The **Displacer Beast** will mostly use forms given by *Animal Shapes* spell. If this spell is ended use **Multiattack** against less-armored PC. **Avoidance** works like Evasion but with all kind of saves, not only Dexterity. **Displacement** trait grants Disadvantage to all attacks against the **Displacer Beast** until it gets hit or its speed becomes 0.

The **Awakened Tree** will also use forms given by *Animal Shapes* until the spell ends. After that use **Slam** against less-armored PC.

Area 6k

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Giant Toads** (CR 1, MM, p. 329) = 1 PC

Note. This is easy encounter, so you can skip it.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Giant toads are beasts, so PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell can communicate with them.

Toads can flee, but won't surrender or take captives.

In the first round make the **Giant Toad** use **Bite** attack against nearest PC. You can roll a die to determine random target if several PCs are within same range. **Bite** inflicts Grappled condition (PHB, p. 290) and allows the **Giant Toad** to use **Swallow** next round if PC didn't break free. If the **Giant Toad** successfully swallowed PC, continue to use **Bite** against other PCs.

Area 9

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Young Green Dragon** (CR 8, MM, p. 94, with changes) = 6 PCs

Note. This creature is not going to attack PCs until it parted with the sword in its head. Fight in this area alerts **Archdruid** from [Area 6a](#). She can reach this area in 1 round using *Tree Stride* spell, but it is up to DM if there are two trees of the same kind near [Area 6](#) and [Area 9](#).

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Green dragons are the most cunning and treacherous of true dragons. They can negotiate, flee, surrender and take captives. They enjoy killing elves so you can make it focus on elf or half-elf PCs.

The **Young Green Dragon** has 80 ft. fly speed, so it is optimal to use hit-and-run tactics. If **Poison Breath** is available, use it targeting as much PCs as possible and fly away to stay out of melee reach. After you use it first time, roll d6 at the beginning of each **Young Green Dragon's** turn. On 5 or 6 it is available again. Make it approach to less-armored PC with strong ranged attacks or spells, use **Multiattack** and fly away again. The **Dragon** should be aware of dwarven resistance to poison and can avoid attacking them.

Area 11a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Large Mimic** (CR 2, MM, p. 220, with changes) = 1 PC

Note. This creature is not going to attack PCs.

Surprise

Thanks to **False Appearance** trait the **Mimic** can easily surprise the party. It is up to DM, if the party have a chance to surprise it.

Creatures' Tactics

According to MM, usually mimics have only predatory intelligence and won't negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Wait for a curious PC to touch the **Mimic** and activate **Adhesive** trait. Roll Initiative. Use **Bite** against Grappled PC (PHB, p. 290) while swimming away from the party. Thanks to **Grappler** trait the **Mimic** has advantage on attack rolls.

Area 12a

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Werebats** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 12b](#) and [Area 12c](#). The **Werebats** in bat form from [Area 12c](#) can reach this area in 1 round but won't be able to take any actions. The **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 12b](#) can reach this area in 2 rounds and will have Action.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Werebat's** Passive Perception. Note that at the first round of the combat encounter surprised **Werebats** could still be asleep (at least until their first turn starts or first PC attacks, but it is up to DM) which means that they are Unconscious (PHB, p. 272). All attacks against them have Advantage and all hits from 5 ft. become Critical hits. Also, they fail all Strength and Dexterity saves automatically.

Creatures' Tactics

According to WDMM, werebats are humanoids, in most cases goblins, cursed by rare type of lycanthropy. This curse force them to drink fresh blood every day to survive. Werebats can communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Best tactics for the **Werebats** is to stay in the air in hybrid form out of melee reach and use **Multiattack** with **Shortbow** against less-armored PCs. It is better to focus on ranged PCs with magical or silvered weapons and spellcasters. **Bite** attack have a chance to curse PC with lycanthropy (MM, p. 206) which opens some role-playing and mechanical opportunities for DM and players.

Area 12b

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Werebats** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 12a](#) and [Area 12c](#). The **Werebats** in bat form from both areas can reach entrance to this area in 1 round and will be able to take Action.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Werebat's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12a](#).

Area 12c

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Werebats** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 12a](#) and [Area 12b](#). It will take 2 rounds for the **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 12b](#) to reach this area and they will have Action to use. The **Werebats** in bat form from [Area 12a](#) can reach this area in 1 round but won't be able to take any actions.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Werebat's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12a](#).

Area 14

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Werebat** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 16a](#), [Area 16b](#), [Area 16c](#) and [Area 16d](#). Three **Werebats** in bat form from [Area 16a](#) can reach this area in 1 round and won't be able to take any actions. Sixteen **Werebats** in humanoid form from areas 16b, 16c and 16d can reach this area in 2 rounds and won't be able to take any actions.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Werebat's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12a](#). It is practical for the **Werebat** to fly in east direction to meet its tribe members faster.

Area 16a

Encounter Difficulty

3 **Werebats** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 2 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 14](#), [Area 16b](#), [Area 16c](#) and [Area 16d](#). One **Werebat** in hybrid form from [Area 14](#) and twelve **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 16b](#) can reach this area in 1 round and won't be able to take any actions. Two **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 16c](#) and two **Werebats** from [Area 16d](#) in bat form can reach this area in 2 rounds.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to

Werebat's Passive Perception. Note that at the first round of the combat encounter surprised **Werebats** could still be asleep (at least until their first turn starts or first PC attacks, but it is up to DM) which means that they are Unconscious (PHB, p. 272). All attacks against them have Advantage and all hits from 5 ft. become Critical hits. Also, they fail all Strength and Dexterity saves automatically.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12a](#).

Area 16b

Encounter Difficulty

12 **Werebats** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 6 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 14](#), [Area 16a](#), [Area 16c](#) and [Area 16d](#). Three **Werebats** in bat form from [Area 16a](#) can reach this area in 1 round and will have Action. One **Werebat** in hybrid form from [Area 14](#) and two **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 16b](#) can reach this area in 1 round and won't be able to take any actions. Two **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 16d](#) can reach this area in 2 rounds and will have Action.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Werebat's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12a](#).

Area 16c

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Werebats** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 14](#), [Area 16a](#), [Area 16b](#) and [Area 16d](#). One **Werebat** in hybrid form from [Area 14](#), three **Werebats** in bat form from [Area 16a](#), twelve **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 16b](#) and

two **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 16d](#) can reach this area in 1 round using Dash.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Werebat's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12a](#).

Area 16d

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Werebats** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 1 PC

Note. Fight in this area alerts creatures from [Area 14](#), [Area 16a](#), [Area 16b](#) and [Area 16c](#). One **Werebat** in hybrid form from [Area 14](#), three **Werebats** in bat form from [Area 16a](#) and two **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 16c](#) can reach this area in 1 round using Dash. Twelve **Werebats** in humanoid form from [Area 16b](#) can reach this area in 2 rounds and will have Action.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Werebat's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12a](#).

Area 17

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Werebat** (CR 2, WDMM, p. 317) = 1 PC

Note. This creature is not going to attack PCs.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Hearing** trait grants +5 bonus to **Werebat's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 12a](#).

Area 20

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Chimera** (CR 6, MM, p. 39) = 3 PCs

Surprise

As a DM you can decide that appearing **Chimera** makes PCs surprised. There is no way for PCs to surprise the **Chimera**.

Creatures' Tactics

First chimeras were created by Prince of Demons named Demogorgon. According to MM, chimera can be placated with food and treasure, but it can't speak, and goat stubbornness compels it to fight to the death. This particular chimera serving as an opponent for test of faith, so it won't negotiate, flee or surrender. It is immune to Charmed and Frightened conditions. and will fight to the death.

Ceiling is 30 ft. high and the **Chimera** has 60 ft. fly speed, so it is optimal to use hit-and-run tactics. Make it approach to PC, use **Multiattack** and fly away from melee reach. Focus on PCs with strong ranged attacks or spellcasters. If **Fire Breath** is available, always replace **Horns** attack with it and try to target as much PCs as possible. After you use it first time, roll d6 at the beginning of each **Chimera's** turn. On 5 or 6 it is available again.

Make the **Boar** use **Tusk** attack in conjunction with **Charge** trait to maximize damage against nearest PC. You can roll a die to determine random target if several PCs are within same range.

Area 23a

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Boars** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 319) = 1 PC

Note. This is easy encounter, so you can skip it.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Boars are beasts, so PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell can communicate with them. Boars can flee, but won't surrender or take captives.