

MONSTERS' GUIDE TO COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

*For Dungeon of the Mad Mage
Level 7: Maddgoth's Castle*

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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.

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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 creature's names

Italic style is used for the Spells.

Bold Italic style is used for the Abilities and Traits.

Level 7: Maddgoth's Castle

This level is designed for four 9th 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 9th level PCs.

Area 6a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Stone Giant** (CR 7, MM, p. 149) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. The **Stone Giant** has Advantage to Stealth rolls in rocky terrain because of **Stone Camouflage** trait.

Creatures' Tactics

Stone giants are reclusive, quiet, and peaceful as long as they are left alone. They can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Stone Giant** use **Multiattack** against less-armored PC. Use **Rock** only if there is no chance to attack in melee. The **Stone Giant** has very high bonus to Athletic skill, so it can Grapple and Shove effectively.

Area 10

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Stone Giant** (CR 7, MM, p. 149) = 4 PCs

10 **Giant Bats** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 323) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. The **Stone Giant** has Advantage to Stealth rolls in rocky terrain because of **Stone Camouflage** trait.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 6a](#) for the tactics of **Stone Giant**.

Giant bats are beasts, so PC under effect of *Speak with Animals* spell can communicate with them. Giant 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 13a

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Stone Giants** (CR 7, MM, p. 149) = 8 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts the **Stone Giant** from [Area 13b](#). It can reach the entrance to this area in 1 round and will be able to take Action.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. The **Stone Giant** has Advantage to Stealth rolls in rocky terrain because of **Stone Camouflage** trait.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 6a](#).

Area 13b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Stone Giant** (CR 7, MM, p. 149) = 4 PCs

Note. Fight in this area alerts the **Stone Giants** from [Area 13a](#). They can reach the entrance to this area in 1 round.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. The **Stone Giant** has Advantage to Stealth rolls in rocky terrain because of **Stone Camouflage** trait.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 6a](#).

Area 14a

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Cave Bears** (CR 2, MM, p. 334) = 1 PC

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Smell** trait grants +5 bonus to **Cave Bear's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

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

Make the **Cave Bears** use **Multiattack** against nearest PC.

Area 14b

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Black Bears** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 318) = 1 PC

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. **Keen Smell** trait grants +5 bonus to **Black Bear's** Passive Perception.

Creatures' Tactics

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

Make the **Black Bears** use **Multiattack** against nearest PC.

Area 16b

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Stone Giant** (CR 7, MM, p. 149) = 4 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. The **Stone Giant** has Advantage to Stealth rolls in rocky terrain because of **Stone Camouflage** trait.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 6a](#).

Area 17

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Living Unseen Servants** (CR 0, WDMM, p. 313) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Living unseen servants are spells that for some reason became permanent. They understand one language, which means that PC can communicate with them via Telepathy or similar ability. They don't have fear of death, so they won't flee or surrender.

Living Unseen Servants aren't a big threat for 9th level party. They attack with Advantage because of **Invisibility** trait. Note, that Invisible condition (PHB, p. 291) doesn't make the **Unseen Servants** unnoticeable.

Area 25a

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Homunculus** (CR 2, MM, p. 188, with changes) = 1 PC

Note. This creature is not going to attack PCs.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Maddgoth's homunculus is a construct created by ritual magic. It can't speak but can communicate using gestures. It won't flee or surrender, because it can't die until its master dies.

The **Homunculus** can fly so make it use hit and run tactics, staying in the air out of melee reach between its turns. Make it use **Bite** against less-armored PC and fly away after the attack.

Area 27

Encounter Difficulty

6 **Living Unseen Servants** (CR 0, WDMM, p. 313) = 1 PC

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

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 17](#).

Area 28

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Faerie Dragon** (CR 3, MM, p. 133, with changes) = 1 PC

Note. This creature is not going to attack PCs.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

Faerie dragons age good-aligned creatures that like pranks. They can negotiate, flee, surrender or take captives.

The **Faerie Dragon** isn't strong enough to fight 9th level party. The only thing it can do is to try to flee alive. Make it use **Superior Invisibility** and fly away using Dash. If Invisible condition (PHB,

p. 291) is countered by *Faerie Fire* or *See Invisibility* spells, make it cast *Mirror Image*. The **Faerie Dragon** can use **Euphoria Breath** or *Polymorph* spell to disable PCs if its other actions don't help. *Color Spray* probably won't affect 9th level PC.

Area 33

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Gray Slaad** (CR 9, MM, p. 274) = 6 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 is a good spell in one vs. the party situation. The less PCs will be able to attack the **Gray Slaad**, 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**.

Area 34a

Encounter Difficulty

6 **Flying Wands** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 19, with changes) = 1 PC

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. As a DM you can decide that PCs became surprised when the wands spring from their paintings.

Creatures' Tactics

Flying wands are animated objects. They won't communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Flying Wands** use *Magic Missile* against nearest PC. You can roll a die to determine random target if several PCs are within the same range.

Area 38

Encounter Difficulty

4 **Living Unseen Servants** (CR 0, WDMM, p. 313)
= 1 PC

Note. These creatures fight only in self-defense.

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise.

Creatures' Tactics

See [Area 17](#).

Area 41

Encounter Difficulty

1 **Roper** (CR 5, MM, p. 261) = 2 PCs
4 **Flying Tridents** (CR 1/4, MM, p. 19, with changes) = 1 PC

Note. The **Flying Tridents** attack only if they are distracted or after the **Roper** is destroyed.

Surprise

Thanks to *False Appearance* the **Roper** can surprise PCs automatically, and PCs can't surprise it.

Creatures' Tactics

Ropers are voracious hunters of Underdark. They can't communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Flying tridents are animated objects. They won't communicate, flee, surrender or take captives.

Make the **Roper** use *Multiattack* against as many PCs as possible. You can roll a die to choose random targets, if you have more than 4 PCs within reach. You can also use this method to decide which PC the **Roper** will *Bite*. Alternatively, you can make it *Bite* less-armored PC. Don't forget that Restrained condition grants Advantage to **Roper's** attacks.

Make the **Flying Tridents** attack nearest PC. You can roll a die to determine random target if several PCs are within the same range.

Area 44

Encounter Difficulty

2 **Nycaloths** (CR 9, MM, p. 311) = 12 PCs

Surprise

Follow the standard procedure to determine surprise. As a DM you can decide that PCs became surprised when the **Nycaloths** transform to their true form.

Creatures' Tactics

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 communicate using *Telepathy*.

The **Nycaloths** can fly, so make them use hit and run tactics, staying in the air out of melee reach between their turns. Cast *Mirror Image* at the start of the combat, it is a very good defensive spell. After that, make them use *Multiattack* against less armored PC. Always use *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* to reach fleeing PCs.